

Division Because of the Gospel
Luke 12:49-53, Trinity Sunday XXVI
November 16, 2008

Beloved of the Lord.....In a word, the Gospel divides. While it unites and binds believers together in the common faith, and "blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love", in this world of sin the Gospel divides. The devil hates the Gospel because it frees men from their sins and makes them willing servants of Christ. Since the God of all unbelievers is the devil, he uses them to persecute the believers with all violence and force. Naturally our flesh chaffs and rebels against the thought of persecution. By nature we love our bodies more than the Lord. Our unwillingness to suffer is a sin which we should repent of. But it only takes a brief look at the Scriptures to see that believers have often suffered horrible persecutions at the hands of religious zealots, or governments. Believers have been mocked, enslaved, imprisoned, stoned, tormented, sawn asunder, beheaded and slain by the sword. Yet out of love for Christ, believers have endured it all and now they are in heaven. Well, our day may soon come when our own government persecutes us too. Wherever the Gospel is taught, there is "fire on earth" as Jesus said. This fire will be something we must endure, but not rebel against, because God is the judge. Even when Jesus was persecuted, abused, stricken, smitten, and afflicted, He did not send an army of angels to punish the ungodly, but instead He committed them to God's judgment. Jesus endured persecution, for our sake, for our salvation. We must do likewise because Jesus is our strength. Psalm 118 says, "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" They can hurt our body, but they cannot take our soul. We belong to Christ and heaven is our true home.

I. With the Gospel there is always division. In our lesson today Jesus says, "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?" This fire which comes to this earth is the persecution of believers in the Gospel by the unbelievers opposed to the Gospel. Unbelievers hate the Gospel, the Word, for two reasons: first - God's law brings to light their hidden works of darkness, second - the devil moves unbelievers to persecute God's children. Satan cannot tolerate the preaching of the Gospel, because it brings to men the free grace of God in Jesus Christ. It frees men from the bondage of Satan. Satan has no power over those who believe the Gospel. Moreover Satan himself will be judged by both Christ and all believers on the day of Judgment. He then shall be cast into the lake of fire, and there he "shall be tormented day and night forever and ever." His time is running out. This is why he rages and rails against all believers of the Gospel with all violence

and force. Yet when he threatens us with death by violence and force, we should never give in and deny our Savior, for that will cost us our soul. Instead we should freely confess Christ as our Savior from sin, for God says, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown on life." Likewise "Fear not, only believe." Likewise we should never be seduced into using violence and force ourselves when it comes to battling evil. The heart of unbelief can only be conquered by the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit. The Gospel does not force anyone to faith, but gently urges and compels men to believe on the Lord Jesus. In the Gospel Jesus says, "Come unto Me, ye weary, and I will give you rest."

This rest, this peace is spiritual peace within the heart by faith. God through Christ is at peace with us, and we are at peace with Him. Jesus brings spiritual peace, not peace on earth in any outward sense. Though we can thank God our own nation was founded upon Christian principles and laws, it is only the Gospel message of peace through Christ which makes one a Christian, and this happens spiritually within. We therefore can never expect an outward earthly peace in the United States resulting from Christian laws or commandments. The law does not create obedience hearts, but only exposes sin. Jesus taught His own disciples this truth saying, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay: but rather division." This division comes from the preaching and faith of the Gospel. The Gospel divides believers from unbelievers. Such division often occurs in our own families. Jesus said, "A man's foes shall be they of His own household." Fathers will be divided against sons and sons against fathers. Mothers will be divided against daughters and daughters against mothers.

Consider the first family, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel. Cain thought his sacrifice was good enough, though he did not give God his first-fruits. God did not accept Cain's sacrifice because it was not offered in faith. Cain fell away from the Gospel faith because he thought his good works were good enough. As soon as he did not believe the Gospel, he rose up and slew his brother who believed the Gospel. Abel, a child of God by faith in the Seed of the Woman, was the first to perish from the fire of unbelief. Abel believed the Gospel, and Cain did not. Jesus said, "what will I, if it be already kindled?" It was kindled, the fire was started long ago. Should the Lord's disciples then be surprised if this fire still rages today? If we as Christians of the United States are soon persecuted, should we lose faith when suddenly we discover many hate us and want us dead? Jesus said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Jesus said, "Marvel not, if the world hate you", don't be surprised. If you marvel and are surprised your faith might be overthrown. When

threatened with violence you might deny Him and lose life everlasting. But if you "marvel not" and expect the fire to come, trusting alone in God's grace, by faith you will endure and reap everlasting life. Heaven awaits all who trust in the blood of Jesus Christ, God's only-begotten Son. "He that endures to the end shall be saved."

II. Strength to endure persecution. But how do we endure? If you want to have strength to endure persecution, look by faith to Jesus. First and foremost, He is your Savior from all sin. Even if they persecute you to the point of death, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Granted they can imprison, torment, and kill your body, but Christ is the possessor of your soul. You will never die in that you will never be damned for your sins. Christ took your sins into His own body, and paid the price with His holy blood. To die in the Lord is to live forever in paradise. Jesus has promised it so. But another way we endure persecution, is by remembering He suffered first for us. Jesus was persecuted too. Jesus said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" His baptism wherein He was baptized was His Passion, His great suffering at the hands of unbelieving men. In the court of the Sanhedrin, the Son of God was surrounded by the wolves and jackals of the world. He was blindfolded, slapped and beaten by cruel and evil men. He was viciously whipped and bloodied to the point of death. A crown of thorns was placed upon His head. He was hurt so badly, physically He could not carry His own cross. Yet He carried a far greater cross which could not be seen - the sins of the whole world. He suffered, died, and was buried. He rose again the third day.

Why did He do it? Jesus answers, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Jesus was straitened which means He was compelled and distressed. Long before His crucifixion Jesus' entire body and soul was preoccupied with the purpose of His coming, to suffer all things that we might have life everlasting. Jesus was the Lamb of God, "slain from the foundation of the world." You could say during His earthly life His soul was in continual distress. He would not rest, nor be satisfied until He had redeemed all mankind from sin. Like a mother whose child is grievously sick, her soul is in continual anguish until her child is healed, so our Lord Jesus had great anguish of heart and soul, and He would have no rest nor release until all the children of men were healed and made whole. His entire life, His entire purpose was to suffer on the cross for the sins of the world. Jesus said, "I lay down my life for the sheep."

Through His baptism of fire, there is perfect healing for every wounded soul. Isaiah writes, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." If you have come to know your sins of fear rather than faith, your sins of doubt rather than confidence, your sins of selfishness rather than charity, your sins of anger rather than peace, repent of them all and confess your sins to Jesus. Jesus does not turn away the heart that is sorry for its sins. In His wounds, in His blood, forgiveness is free. God through Isaiah says to a world of sinners "Every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price". This is God's invitation to every sinner. Here God is not smiting the sinner on the head, nor is He forcing anyone into heaven. But Jesus is standing before you with open arms telling all that heaven is free - it doesn't cost you a dime. In the Gospel God is saying, "Buy your bread for free, because Jesus is the Bread of Life.....Come to His living waters, and you will find forgiveness for your thirsty soul. Buy your wine and your milk, 'without money and without price.'" In a word, salvation from God to man is free!WITHOUT MONEY.....WITHOUT PRICE..... "for the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." And His blood comes to us and heals us, without money and without price.

Here then is the strength to endure persecution. Here then is the strength not to resist with violence and force, but to fight the good fight of faith, with the Word of God alone. The Gospel alone has the power to conquer the hateful hearts of unbelief and turn them from evil to good. And Jesus is the only "good" we know. Christ has left us an example, "that we should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." Though they threatened, persecuted and killed the Prince of Life, Jesus overcame their evil with good. The very ones who smote, whipped and crucified Him, were the very ones He came to save. We too have smitten and crucified our Lord by every sinful thought, word, and deed. But thanks be to God, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you." Amen.

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