

The Gospel Counsel of the Spirit

Romans 1:16-18, Advent Sunday I

November 29, 2009

As a rule in our country, lawyers are not the most loved of people. Some are slick, sweet-talking, mindbending, salesman, who often work to help criminals go free. However, not all lawyers are bad. Indeed there constitutional lawyers as well as many others who truly seek to uphold the law and there is indeed a time when lawyers are a great blessing. It might surprise us, but that word for lawyer or advocate, is used often in the New Testament in a very wonderful sense. Jesus promises His disciples, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things". In 14 Jesus calls the Holy Ghost the Comforter, which comes from the Greek word "Paraclete". A "Paraclete is an Advocate, Intercessor, or LAWYER.

But why do we need a lawyer to teach us all things? Why is the Holy Ghost called an Advocate or Lawyer? Today as we begin yet another church year by God's grace, let us learn how the Holy Ghost is our Advocate who by the power of the Gospel prepares us for the coming of Christ.

I. Guilty criminals must first confess their guilt.

When we speak of lawyers, advocates, etc, we are speaking of justice, crime and punishment. Years ago I remember visiting a young man in jail. He had committed a crime and was rightly in jail for it. It was just like the movies. I spoke to him on a phone seeing him through the glass on the other side. While he did indeed express sorrow about his crime, to my great dismay his "sorrow" was not godly sorrow, but worldly sorrow. He was sorry he was caught and sorry he now had to suffer but he was not sorry that he had sinned against the Lord. There was no true or genuine repentance toward God concerning his sin.

We all have a tendency to look down upon criminals for their crimes against innocent people and such, but the Bible teaches us that we too are criminals in God's sight and that Judge, God, is angry. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." What is the unrighteousness of men? It

is those men who commit unrighteousness sin. Unrighteous men are thieves at heart, who sinfully long within for their neighbor's possessions. Unrighteous men are those who would rather see their neighbor suffer, than suffer all things for their neighbor. Unrighteous men are adulterers at heart, whose mind utters unclean thoughts of forbidden deeds. But here many stop and ask, aren't the deeds worse than the thoughts? Many think so. But here's the real question: when God's all-seeing eye pierces every secret thought of the heart, aren't such thoughts outward and open crimes committed before the Judge who sees all? Hence God's wrath is against ALL ungodliness of heart. Remember the devil once was a good angel, but his spirit turned to complete darkness the moment he within decided to rebel. Our heart dear sinner, your's and mine, is just as black and dark as the devil's by nature and all the evil that you see in the world is the fruit of original sin, the original thought in the heart of Adam and Eve who rebelled against their own loving Creator. This is why Jesus, whose heart was always pure, spoke of man's heart saying, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications,.....These are *the things* which defile a man." Sin does not make the sinner, but the sinner makes the sin. Thus regarding our crimes of the heart and God's law, the Bible says, "What things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." We then as criminals in the courtroom before the Judge must plead "guilty" and not deny our sin.

Today then, even though we are gathered here together as a congregation of saints, we are at the same time a congregation of criminals awaiting the great trial of Judgment Day. On that day all criminals will stand before the Judge and "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Thanks be to God that we as criminals know the Gospel. II Corinthians 5:19 says, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." In the Gospel God through the holy blood of Christ declares all criminals forgiven and set free.

Thus through much of life we are like that

young man I visited in jail. When we hear God's law, what can we do but confess we are guilty criminals worthy of that eternal prison of hell. Nevertheless God in His goodness sends a lawyer to our jail-cell. He is a good lawyer, a true Advocate for our cause, the Holy Ghost. Jesus said, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of Me." Jn 15:26 As we sit then in our jail cell, the Holy Ghost, our Advocate, first explains to us where He is from and who sent Him. He tells us that both the Father and the Son are so concerned with our salvation that they together have sent this Spirit of Truth. The Holy Ghost "proceeds" from the Father and the Son. This is why we confess in the Nicene Creed "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the prophets."

But why does the Father and the Son send us the Spirit? The primary work of the Holy Ghost is to console and comfort us. Just as a lawyer counsels and consoles the criminal, telling him everything will be alright, so the Holy Spirit consoles and comforts, telling us the good news of Jesus. The Spirit of Truth simply gives the Truth to us, telling us "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Thus as criminals, though our conscience smites us with guilt, it is the Holy Ghost which says "There is forgiveness of sins." When Satan like a bad lawyer testifies loudly to our crimes, our Advocate, the Holy Spirit whispers in our ear "But Christ died for all" and "It is God that justifieth." When we feel lonely and depressed in our sin and shame, the Spirit of Truth reminds our hearts that Jesus said, "Lo I am with thee always" and "I will never leave nor forsake thee." Truly every time He speaks, our Advocate brings our guilty conscience peace. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

II. There is no shame in the Gospel, but only glory
We should never resist this good Gospel counsel of the Holy Spirit, but readily receive all His offers of forgiveness by faith. We need not struggle and

strive to earn God's favor. We need not work hard to "feel" His presence or choose to follow Him. The Holy Spirit does all the work. It is He that turns us by the efficacious power of His Gospel Word. This is why in our text today the Bible says of the Gospel Word, "it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." God's power is best known, when He through the Gospel convinces our hearts of the love Jesus had for all sinners. It is then His love, His mercy, which turns, converts, and quickens this loveless heart to love him in return. "We love Him because He first loved us!" "...and O how strong His love truly is! This is why we are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, "for it is the power of God unto salvation!"

"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." Again and again our Advocate the Holy Spirit reminds us through the Gospel Word the chief and central article of our defense, "The just shall live by faith." Our spiritual life and health are not derived from justification by works, for works cannot save us, but we are indeed just and righteous in the sight of God by faith alone - namely faith in Christ, faith in His merits, faith in His blood! Before the Judge, God's Spirit then does not plea-bargain for our soul declaring that we've been better criminals than others! Instead He boldly tells the Judge "My client, your Honor is absolutely righteous through his Mediator, Jesus Christ." With such words the Judge then declares, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Beloved of the Lord, knowing from our Advocate that "the just shall live by faith", let us not only be fruitful in good works, but suffer all things for His holy name. For "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Christ alone is our glory. Amen.