

“This I Do For The Gospel’s Sake”

I Corinthians 9:16-23, Advent Sunday III

December 13, 2009

Beloved of the Lord....As we approach the glorious Advent of Christ our King, as we draw near to the celebration of His birth, today’s lesson teaches us how to behave, how to conduct ourselves in these Last Days for the cause of the Gospel. What is the cause of the Gospel? It is the cause of Christ, namely since there are yet many souls who lie in the darkness and power of sin, we who have the light of Christ ought to bring this light to others, for “Christ died for all” and “The Lord is not willing that any perish but that all should come to repentance.” He is just as much the Savior of unbelievers as believers, and we used to be unbelievers but now by the power of the Gospel believe a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Just this morning in my basement study I happened to look at a picture on the wall of my former pastor and teacher, Pastor Sheldon Twenge. It made me think of how this man is now in heaven now by God’s grace, that City of God above us, because the Lord through the Gospel Word brought him to faith. We know many others like him in heaven, and we rejoice. But let us understand they are there in heaven now, because God brought them the Gospel, through the Word spoken by the saints. All Christians likewise are to teach the lost the saving Word. As Paul said “This I do for the Gospel’s sake.”

I. Paul’s Gospel ministry. Our text now begins, “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” While the gospel of Jesus Christ does indeed set us free from sin, death, and the power of the devil, the Gospel also comes with a great obligation “to preach the Gospel to every creature.” If we did not know the true meaning of Christmas, if we were yet in the darkness of sin, wouldn’t we want someone to bring us the Light? Paul therefore would not glory, would not brag about his high office, but he would put all his strength and might into the Gospel ministry even if he received no thanks in return.

It is sad but true, often ministers hurt the cause of the Gospel more than they help it. Some ministers want to be served rather than serve. Some ministers take from the people rather than give all for the

people. Some are lifted up with pride only to fall into the condemnation of the devil. Some do not visit but neglect the sheep. But truly the greatest offense any minister can give, is when he does not preach the Gospel for the comfort and strength of the sheep. Thus God in His Word charges all true ministers, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over *God’s* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

II. The willing spirit of those who treasure the Gospel. Continuing on Paul now says, “For if I do this thing willing, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the Gospel is committed unto me.” Here now is the willing spirit of the new man, and the unwilling spirit of the old. When we as Christians obey God’s law unwillingly, because we have to, we are not being Christian. Jesus does not desire we obey His Commandments begrudgingly or of necessity for faith works by love. For example, would you as a husband want your wife to love and obey you because she had to? Wouldn’t you want her to love and obey you because she truly loved you? Now consider our love for God and the willing spirit. Does God force us to love and obey Him or does His love for us through Christ draw our hearts to Him in love so that we are more than happy to obey? When the Gospel speaks then, it is our own Savior from sin who speaks from God’s heart to ours, and we hear nothing of forced love. Rather God’s Gospel declares unto us His gracious and immeasurable love TOWARD sinners which is free. Just listen now and hear the direction of God’s love on the night of Jesus’ birth. “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace good will TOWARD men.”

God’s grace, God’s love has a direction. It begins in His heart, but it proceeds toward sinners through Christ. The glorious birth of Jesus Christ, the Babe of Bethlehem, that was God’s love in action. The mercy Jesus’ had on earth toward sinners, the miracles of healing upon sinners, that was God’s love in action. When He, the King of king and Lord of lords knelt down on the ground to wash the dirty feet of His own disciples, that was God’s love in action. When He spread and opened wide His arms upon the cross before the world, Jesus’ love toward sinners was clear and evident in both word

and deed. “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do”. Though we can and should readily admit our unwilling spirit by word and deed in the cause of the Gospel, who could His willing spirit upon the cross? His joy was your salvation dear sinner. He did all this for you! It is God’s willing spirit then which converts and creates our own willing spirit. Hence Paul said, “I do this thing willingly” and “This I do for the Gospel’s sake.”

III. Christians are free servants. As for Paul’s reward? God’s rewards to believers are always His rewards of unmerited grace. Our blessings on earth and later heaven are also our reward in that it is our possession, but it is His reward in that Jesus is God’s gift to all, His reward to us, toward us. “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given!” Again, this grace, this reward then moves us to do all things for Him. Thus Paul writes, “For though I be free from all *men*, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.” This is truly a beautiful thing. As Christians we are free! No man is our lord but the Lord above! Yet for the sake of that Man, THE LORD ABOVE, we do all things here for His Gospel’s sake that we through Him “might save some!” Thus, though we are happily free from the curse and condemnation of the law, out of love for Christ and His Gospel we happily obey God’s law not because we have to, BUT BECAUSE WE WANT TO! How then are we to be and behave toward our fellow man for whom also Christ died? I will.....we will happily serve them in such a way that they will by our behavior see Christ is the Savior of all men, especially them that believe! How wonderful then it is to be free to serve the Lord in love by serving our fellow man! Thus Galatians 5:13 says, “by love serve one another” and I Peter 5:5 says, “Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” If you dear Christian humbly serve your neighbor in love, by the power of the Gospel God may use you to save your neighbor. As Paul said, “This I do for the Gospel’s sake.”

IV. What exactly we do for the Gospel’s sake! Hence Paul writes, “Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law.” Likewise to the Gentiles Paul became a Gentile and to the weak he became weak. What does this mean? It means Paul

for the sake of the Gospel served his fellow man according to their spiritual need. When among the Jews, Paul kept their laws concerning meats, Sabbath, etc., so they would not see him as a lawbreaker who cared nothing for what they yet thought to be God’s law. However, when among the Gentiles, Paul did not keep those Jewish laws from which Christ had made him free, that the Gentiles might know these laws did not profit faith, for we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

What does this mean for us today. When a Christian brother is weak, when they think something to be a sin which we know is not, we do not practice our liberty before them and lead them to do that which their weak conscience forbids. Romans 14:23 says, “He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because *he eateth* not of faith: for whatsoever *is* not of faith is sin.” In order to gain the weak, we recognize they are weak though they know the Gospel. We therefore do not despise them or look down upon them, but use our liberty to gain them more perfectly for the Lord. By the same token if an erring brother is loudly proclaiming to others that something is a sin when it isn’t, then must loudly for the sake of the Gospel rebuke, that the Gospel faith of others be not overthrown to the bondage of the law. “This I do for the Gospel’s sake.”

In closing dear fellow redeemed of the Lord, when you are in a challenging situation, not knowing what to do or say, consider what will be best for the sake of the Gospel. Do nothing to injure the weak faith of your brother, but by your every word and deed may the Gospel prevail. Do all things for the Gospel’s sake, that the lost might be found, that the weak might be strong, that the proud might be humbled. Do all things for the sake of Him who with His own blood set you free that you might be called sons of God. Amen.