

Walking by the Spirit

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

June 30, 2013 – Sixth Sunday After Pentecost



In the name of the Father, and † of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In this morning's Epistle lesson our Lord has a number of really important things to teach us. The first is how the whole Law of God can be summed up and fulfilled with just one Word – or, more accurately, one expression, one statement, one sentence – “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The second is how the works of the flesh are evident, obvious, easily recognized, and just as plain as the nose on your face. And finally, at the end of this Epistle, our Lord spells out how He wants His children – you and me – to walk by the Spirit – whatever that means. So, is God here minimizing and downplaying the importance of the Ten Commandments? When He states how the whole Law is fulfilled in just one expression, that “you are Love your neighbor as yourself,” is He suggesting you no longer have need of a list of rules to live by? Is He telling you it's okay to simply to forget the rules He's already given us?

What else are you to conclude when God here tells you how you are to simply devote yourself to your neighbor's care and well-being and follow the Golden Rule? Whatever you wish others to do for you, you must also do for them, for this is nothing more than a summary of the Law and the Prophets. And when Paul says to you here in this letter that the works of the flesh are evident, is he saying you have no need to have a listing of your sins or a preacher to burn up a lot of pulpit time talking about how you ought to live your life? After all, if the precepts of the Law are already written on your heart, why do you have any need for anyone to point that out to you? Is that not why you oftentimes find yourself with a guilty conscience? Is that not why you routinely try to defend yourself and make your sins look like righteousness? The works of the flesh are so evident that even a child can spot them: idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. “I warn you,” says the Lord through St. Paul, “as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

So, should you simply discard the Ten Commandments and go with your gut? When God says to you

that the entire Law is fulfilled with one word, and that the works of the flesh are obvious to all, does this mean you are now free to cast aside the Law because you already know right and wrong because it's written on your heart? By no means! For when you throw away the Law and ignore God's Ten Commandments – when you daily live your life as if none of this matters a wit – then you show yourself to be a rebellious, self-centered, loveless child. When you throw God's will for your life to the wind, you are simply proving that you *are* in need of the very rebuke, discipline and supervision the Commandments provide. For God's Ten Commandments, you see, are really nothing more or less than God's Ten Words. And far be it for any of us to ignore or reject God's Words – even those Words God Himself seems to regard as little more than first lessons for schoolchildren, or child's play – as Paul calls them elsewhere.

In today's Epistle, God is simply speaking to you as if you have *already* grown in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God wants you to know that His Ten Commandments will teach you well, but that there is a shorthand way you can use for keeping the Commandments in mind. The whole Law, Paul tells us, is fulfilled in one sentence: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Here's an analogy that might help. A few weeks ago I was attempting to change the oil in my lawnmower. I hadn't changed the oil more than a few times before, so I had to look at the manual to remember how to do it. The job was cumbersome, messy, and took far longer than I would have liked. Of course, I could have taken the lawn mower to the dealer and they could have finished the job in no more than a few minutes. I'm quite sure they have the procedure down cold, and don't have to give it so much as a second thought. In fact, it's almost second nature to someone who's done it hundreds of times. But, of course, I don't have to pay myself to do the job, so I continue to do it no matter how long it takes.

In today's Epistle, God speaks about His Ten Commandments almost as if they are somewhat like those instructions I needed to change the oil in my lawnmower. The whole Law is fulfilled in just one Word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

You see, as you make your way through life, you don't have to have a listing of the Law there with you all the time. You have been adopted by God in Holy Baptism, and in that blessed flood God gave you His Holy Spirit. That's why God declares in the verses prior to this morning's Epistle, that when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your heart – for a reason.

Our Lord Christ was born to redeem you from the Law, forgiving you for every way you may have broken it throughout your entire life. But that's not all! God sent His Son, born of a woman, so that you might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your heart. And what does God's Spirit – the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of His Son – do for you? God's Holy Spirit does far more for you than you could ever ask or imagine. But most especially God's Holy Spirit makes it possible for you to love your neighbor from your heart. God's Holy Spirit makes it possible for you to get away from the instruction manual, so to speak, and to summarize all of the Commandments with just one Word: that "you Love your neighbor as yourself."

When it comes to your neighbor, you don't need to stand there with the Ten Commandments in one hand, a screwdriver in the other, and a puzzled look on your face. Why? Because "the works of the flesh are so evident that even a child can spot them: idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! For God has given you His Holy Spirit – the Spirit of His Son. Our Lord has only one desire for you, dear Christian, and that is that His Holy Spirit continually create and produce good things within you: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; for against such things there is no Law," because The whole Law is fulfilled in one Word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

God brings us to an amazing, blessed place by the time we reach the end of today's Epistle. There God says, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." But you don't have to ask what this means as I did when I began this sermon, for God has already

spelled out for us what it means to walk by the Spirit. It isn't a matter of supposing that you are to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit as He speaks directly into your head or your heart, as the Pentecostals love to claim He does. It's not a matter of working harder and harder to keep the Ten Commandments so you can prove to yourself and others what a good Christian you are. Nor is it a matter of setting the Ten Commandments aside, as so many in our day have done. They get Baptized, trained and confirmed in the faith. They claim they have Jesus living in their hearts, but they live their lives as if God doesn't matter, and as if they mattered most.

So, what does it mean to walk by the Spirit? St. Paul spells it out quite clearly in this Epistle, doesn't he? You walk by the Spirit when "you love your neighbor as yourself." You walk by the Spirit when you stop resisting God and His Word and allow Him to produce in you those things He desires to produce: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; for against such things there is no law. So, God is telling you here in this text that you walk by the Spirit when you keep His Ten Commandments in their proper perspective – not by abandoning them or by casting them aside, for that would be sheer folly – but also by not thinking God's Commandments are His best and greatest Word to you – though they are most certainly important.

What you need to know to walk in the Spirit, dear Christian, is that God's best and greatest Word to you is His Son Jesus, who has already crucified your sinful flesh with all its passions and desires. God's greatest and best Word to you is Jesus, whose Holy Spirit has come to you in order to be with you forever. God's greatest and best Word to you is Jesus, who has released you from the burden of the Law and the weight of sin through His perfect obedience to the Law in your place, and by bestowing on you the forgiveness of your sins through the simple, ordinary means of words, water, bread and wine. And when you have God's greatest and best Word – when you have Jesus as your Lord and Savior – that is when, by God's own definition, that is when you are truly walking by the Spirit. May it always be so for the sake of God's Son, who has given you all things to sustain you, body and soul unto eternal life. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.