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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 17A)

August 31, 2014

Text: Romans 12:9–21

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Hypocrisy is one of the criticisms unbelievers and enemies of Christ's Church constantly lay against Christians. Those Christians say one thing on Sunday mornings but live a different way the remaining part of the week. On the one hand, I understand their criticism. We do teach and confess, for example, that God is love on Sunday mornings and then we fail to live according to the love we just sang, preached, and prayed about. Hypocrisy is a legitimate criticism.

On the other hand, the charge of hypocrisy laid against the Christian Church is really a cheap shot for it doesn't take into account all that the Christian Church believes and teaches. It fails to hear that we begin our worship service with "I, a poor miserable sinner" who has "sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone..." Nor do these critics hear us confess that "we justly deserve God's present and eternal punishment" because of what we have done and left undone. We Christians take our hypocrisy seriously; meaning that we believe it to be a deadly, dreadful thing that can only find its solution in the love of God given through Christ's forgiveness won for us in His death and resurrection. And so we confess it seriously and sincerely asking God to not only forgive us for the sake of Jesus but to grant us the strength to not commit the same hypocritical sins.

At Immanuel/St. John's Lutheran Church we believe, teach, and confess that God loves sinners; the sins we sinners commit He deplores with righteous anger. And yet, God's love for sinners triumphs over His wrath against sin. For in the death of Jesus, we see God's love going to the extreme to save sinners of every sort, to save sinners from their in-born hypocrisy. This congregation is for sinners, red, yellow, black and white all sinners are precious in God's sight. If you don't want to associate with sinners, then Immanuel/St. John's is not the place for you. If you don't want to live with and love sinners, imperfect though we be, then Jesus is not the Savior for you, perfect and righteous though He be.

But we are saved sinners. Through baptism, we are connected to Jesus' death and resurrection so that we walk in His newness of life. We forgiven sinners are so thoroughly redeemed from the power of sin, death, and Satan that we now strive to live according to God's Word and will in body, soul, mind, and affections.

That all-pervasive salvation which we Christians receive changes us; it makes us a new creation that is being transformed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that extraordinary grace and divine love, we are called to live according to that love in every area of our lives. The Bible simply doesn't have any concept of people having personal, private beliefs and separate, different public lives. Our faith informs our conduct, our conduct reflects our faith. What we are in private is what we are in public because Jesus has redeemed our entire life, not just part of it. We are called to repent of every sort and form of sin and evil in thought, word, and deed. It's contrary to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus and violates His amazing love.

Because of that comprehensive love we Christians have received through Christ's Gospel, the apostle Paul encourages and instructs us, in Romans 12:9–21, how we are to live. It begins with love. Vs. 9, "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good" In Greek it's more forceful. Literally, Paul says, "The love unhyprocritical, abhorring the evil, being cemented to the good." True love which is unhyprocritical, unmixed, is described as constantly hating evil and continually being glued to the good. What is this but a perfect description of the Lord Jesus?

Real love, not that schmaltz, gobbledygook of emotion that flitters away at the least provocation, always seeks the good, not the easy, not the convenient, not the expedient, but the good. Love strives to think, feel, and work for the good of our family, friends, neighbors, country, church, and world. Love is cemented to good.

Conversely, love abhors the evil, even though evil may appear to be the more fulfilling, the more enjoyable, the more enriching, because evil always destroys. Without exception, without fail, evil always kills and destroys. What is this but a perfect description of the Devil who was a murderer from the beginning (Jn. 8:44).

Jesus is the pinnacle of true, unhyprocritical love which constantly seeks the good and always abhors the evil. Satan is the epitome of hate which constantly seeks evil and always abhors the good. But don't misunderstand this contrast. Jesus and Satan are not equal opposites as if divine love is counterbalanced by demonic hate. Paul makes this clear with his final admonition in vs. 21, "Do not be overcome by evil, but

overcome evil with good.” Good always overcomes evil. For good flows from love, from the God who is love.

Maybe, just maybe, you’re feeling a bit uncomfortable. Who among us loves unhypocritically, abhorring the evil, being cemented to the good? Certainly not me. I desire to love my wife and family this way. I will to love you with such unfeigned devotion. I long to bless even my opponents and those who hate and hurt God’s people around the world (vs. 14). I desire to never repay “evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all” (vs. 17); “to live peaceably with all” (vs. 18), to outdo “in showing honor” while never being slothful in zeal” but being “fervent in spirit” serving the Lord” (vs. 10–11) with constant prayer (vs. 12) and joyous hospitality for God’s saints (vs. 13).

But alas, I fail at such unhypocritical love. Maybe we should just conclude that the charge of hypocrisy is just and valid, and despair of living according to such a high standard. Maybe the apostle Paul was just way off base in his teaching. It would be so easy to beat ourselves and each other over the head with these verses of Scripture and despair of ever living a Biblical life of faith. Perish the thought.

Did we not hear just a few weeks ago these words from Romans 7: 18–19, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.” Paul knows exactly what we’re experiencing. In chapter 7 it almost sounds like he despairs when he writes (vs. 24), “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

But Paul doesn’t stop with despair for then evil would overcome good. The answer to his own question comes in the next sentence, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Evil is overcome by good, the good that is found in Jesus. The evil in my own life, in your life, is overcome by the perfect good revealed in Jesus. He doesn’t leave you subject to the whims of Satan, the power of death, or even you own sinful nature. To abandon you to such vulnerability would not be to “love unhypocritical, abhorring the evil, being cemented to the good.” Jesus saves and redeems and loves you to the uttermost. And this is what the critics of Christianity fail to see: the unhypocritical love of Jesus for all sinners.

The Lord’s love does its redemptive work in your lives. He forgives and cleanses. He disciplines and heals. He overcomes this evil of our sins and hypocrisies with the

good of His unhyprocritical love. His love abhors evil so fiercely that He sacrificed Himself in order to see its final destruction. His love is so cemented to the good that He rose from the dead in order to bring you into His eternal life. Because of Jesus, Paul writes triumphantly words that should be emblazoned on our hearts and minds, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."

Although we struggle daily with sin on this side of eternity, we live in the unhyprocritical love of Jesus. He has answered on your behalf. Let not any accuser, not even your own conscience, turn you aside from the genuine love of Jesus. Leave this place today in the freedom of Christ's Gospel and then live in the unhyprocritical love of Jesus.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.