

June 26, 2016

*Galatians 5:13-25: **“You Shall Love”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There is a hill in Lake District in England called *Rash Judgment Point*. It was given that name by the poet William Wordsworth. The story goes that while he and his sister were standing at the top of this hill one day during the harvest season looking down on the lake below, they saw a man in a boat fishing. Angered by this, because the community needed every able-bodied man to be involved in gathering in the harvest, Wordsworth decided to go down the hill and challenge the fisherman for indulging in a leisure activity when he should have been busy at work for the good of the local community.

Having called the man to the shore, Wordsworth noticed that as he got out of the boat he was old and bent over. Several fish lay in the boat. The man explained that having worked for years gathering in the crops from the fields he was now unable to do so because of his age and the pains that he suffered. Instead, in order to contribute to the life of the community at harvest time, he got up well before dawn and spent all day fishing the lake for fish to add to the communities resources. Wordsworth had passed judgement upon a man's actions without first giving the man an opportunity to explain his actions. Having listened to the man's explanation he felt so convicted about the hasty judgement he had made that he named the hill from which he had first seen the man fishing, *Rash Judgment Point*.

The Scriptures warn against making rash judgments. The eighth commandment addresses what happened at *Rash Judgment Point*, "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." What does this mean? "We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way."

In the Scripture, there is also what we might call *A Right Judgment*. Here the Christian is called upon to make the distinction between what is right and wrong, truth and error, good and evil. When there is manifest sin; that is, open sin or sin that is clear and obvious and known to be the case and confirmed as sin by the Bible itself, the Christian is first called upon to do what Paul says in Galatians 6:1-2, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness." Secondly, the Christian congregation must exclude openly unrepentant sinners who will not listen and struggle with and overcome sin, as Jesus instructs in Matthew 18. And, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 5:13, "God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you.'" The goal of such purging, on the authority of Jesus himself, is based on the hope that the evil person will be struck to repent, and be restored. And, it is never the job of the church to assert itself in the judgment of those outside of the church. That's the job of the governing authorities to protect the lawful from the lawless.

In this life, the Christian is bid to know the difference between truth and error. The Christian has no choice but to live and proclaim truth, and often pay a terrible price for holding to the truth. Furthermore, we are commissioned to proclaim truth to those outside the church whether they like us or not, for Jesus says, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16)." But it is not the duty of the church to make the final judgment or to wish hell on someone. As Paul writes, "Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now

hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God (1 Corinthians 4:5).”

Now, in our Gospel lesson for this morning, we see that James and John did not understand these distinctions very well at all. It says:

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village (Luke 9:51-56).

Sometimes, anger can really get the best of us, and we wish all kinds of evil things on people. James and John might have thought that they were being pious Christians when they said what they said, but they were not. Jesus rebuked them. The judgment of James and John was inspired by the devil. It was a loveless thing to say. This is especially notable when you know the rest of the story. It was the Samaritans that James and John wanted to destroy, and by doing so, send them to hell. Later on down the road, in the book of Acts, the good news of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins will reach Samaria, and many Samaritans will be saved! James and John were not seeing lost souls, but they were indignant that the people in Samaria had rejected Jesus and them.

So long as the world stands, there exists the call and opportunity to preach the Gospel to unbelievers in the hope that they will repent and be saved. Those who fail to preach the Gospel and instead utter harsh or damning curses are of a different spirit - not the Holy Spirit. And Jesus says, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:17).” The love of God is for those who recognize the depths of their sin. That love has touched our lives in the life, sufferings, and death of Jesus Christ that we might be forgiven for all of our sins and escape the everlasting damnation of God. This great love is supposed to change everything in us.

While we do not accept or promote sin, we expose it for what it is and hold out the hope of forgiveness and everlasting life. The love that we bring is not a permissive love that believes that it is okay to do whatever you want to do, but it is love that is defined by the cross. As John writes, “this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” And the new commandment that Jesus gives to us is that we are to “love one another.” It is distinguished from the fire called down in 2 Kings 1:10. The new commandment is exemplified by Jesus washing the dirt off the disciples feet which pictured the washing away of all their sins that they might be clean, and with clean feet, walk into the clean house of God. This is love in the purest sense and that opposite of what most people say is love. Most people believe that love is ignoring evil, what’s wrong, and the lie, but true love is pointing out the dirt and washing it away.

In our epistle lesson for this morning, the apostle Paul writes: "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Galatians 5:13-14).'" Having the dirt of our sins washed away, we cannot help but to see a difference in our lives. When we are touched by the love of God, we cannot help but to even love our enemies! Even when it comes to our enemies, we do not wish that fire would come down and consume them, but rather we would have them be saved from their sins and be with us in heaven in forever love. Corrie Ten Boom in her book, *Reflections of God's Glory*, wrote,

In Africa a man came to a meeting with bandaged hands. I asked him how he had been injured. He said, "My neighbor's straw roof was on fire; I helped him to put it out and that's how my hands were burned." Later I heard the whole story. The neighbor hated him and had set his roof on fire while his wife and children were asleep in the hut. They were in great danger. Fortunately, he was able to put out the fire in his house on time. But sparks flew over to the roof of the man who had set the house on fire and his house started to burn. There was no hate in the heart of this Christian; there was love for his enemy and he did everything he could to put out the fire in his neighbor's house. That is how his own hands were burned.

That is an amazing story don't you think? Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love, and that really puts things in perspective and may even cause us to be ashamed when it comes to our outbursts of anger and the feeling of satisfaction we might feel when we think that someone is getting what they deserve. But, the truth is that we all deserve to have fire fall down and consume us. But, for the sake of Christ, we are forgiven and the fires of God's wrath have been extinguished. Since God has so loved us, we love one another, we love our neighbor, and we even love our enemy. Why? Because we realize that the issue is heaven and hell.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott