

SERMON PREACHED at the SUNDAY SERVICE
of the
Forth-eighth Annual Convention

of
CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

delivered by

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Text: **I Corinthians 13:6**

My dearly beloved fellow believers:

How is a man saved? Not by his works but by the grace of God through faith in Jesus. *“For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9). Our Lutheran Confessions bear witness to this blessed truth when it declares in Article IV of the Augsburg Confession of 1530, “It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for His sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.” This blessed Scriptural teaching was brazenly condemned by the Romanists at the Council of Trent in Session VI, Canon 11,12 and by all the work-mongers of today. But this is the teaching of Scripture, the only teaching which brings certain and lasting comfort to our sin-burdened souls. And, by God’s grace, it is the teaching of the true orthodox Lutheran Church. We teach this truth in our Lutheran Catechism, (pages 140,141), and unashamedly confess it before men. One of the chief criticisms of this Scriptural teaching is that this teaching fosters the idea that man can now live as he pleases without any restraints upon his behavior. But such forget that where the Holy Spirit has truly regenerated the heart through the sweet Gospel message then the fruits of faith automatically follow. *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature”* (II Corinthians 5:17); *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10). It cannot be otherwise, *“Faith without works is dead”* (James 2:26). While we Christians know these truths so well, because of our sinful flesh and the constant temptations of the devil and the unbelieving world which give us, as Luther so aptly writes, no peace or rest day or night, we must constantly be reminded of these truths lest we succumb to the false ideas which so many people harbor within their minds and which flow from their lips. Let us at this convention then beseech the Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts and minds concerning the queen, as Luther calls it, of all our Christian virtues and consider that:

God-pleasing Love

I. rejoices not in iniquity, but **II.** rejoices in the truth

I.

Love has been, is, and will continue to be shamefully abused by ever so many people. Love is used to excuse practically every kind of sin such as: false doctrine, living together without the benefit of marriage, perversion, gossip, stealing, and even murder. Look, for example, at the sin of abortion. “Did you know that every year between 45 and 60 million abortions are performed? That is 4 times as many people as in New York ...Every year as many unborn are aborted as were killed in the entire Second World War. And not to be forgotten is the fact that the Second World War lasted some six years while we are speaking about the number of abortions for ONE year” (Adapted from “Kinder: Sachen zum Wegwerfen?”). Recently we read about a father

whose 26-year-old son was a pervert. Instead of telling his son that if he did not repent of this abomination he would be cast into hell, he stated publicly, “I must love —and I’m proud of— my gay son” (*Detroit Free Press*, November 20, 1998). He even went so far as to add another item — a license plate that reads “GAY SON.” It is almost unbelievable that there are those who seek to excuse such flagrant transgressions of God’s Word in the name of love!

Dr. Joseph F. Fletcher, professor of ethics at Cambridge Episcopal Theological School, became very famous with the publication in 1966 of his book *Situation Ethics*. In it he set forth “that any acts, even lying, premarital sex, abortion, adultery and murder could be right — depending on the situation. Because whatever is the most loving thing in the situation is the right and good thing. It is not excusably evil, it is positively good.” All this under the guise of love! This is the insidious teaching which has spread throughout Christendom like a malignant cancer. We are reminded of the Jesuits founded by Ignatius Loyola who held to the principle that “the end justifies the means.” Carried out consistently under the banner of love, the consequences would be horrendous! Then in the final analysis all manner of iniquity could then be justified!

Let us look carefully at this chapter from which our text has been selected. When we go back to verse one we note that the word “*charity*” is used in our Bible. In fact, it is used nine times in the thirteen verses comprising this chapter. In each case the same Greek word is used — *agape*, which means “love.” This Greek word stands for what is generally considered to be the highest form of love. It is most often used to describe God’s love for us. In Romans chapter 5, verse 8 we read, “*But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” And in that verse which we commonly refer to as the Gospel in a nutshell, John 3:16, we observe that a verb form of this word is used when it tells us that “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...*” (John 3:16). This word is used also to denote the love with which we should love God but also one another. “*We love Him, because He first loved us*” (I John 4:19). And the Lord Jesus declares “*This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you*” (John 15:12). Such a love does not rejoice in that which is displeasing to Him who loved us beyond measure in redeeming us from sin, death and hell by His substitutionary sacrifice upon the cross.

Whoever loves to rejoice in iniquity does not possess a God-pleasing love, yea, such a one is not even a Christian. There is no middle ground, no fence straddling as it were, for “*no man can serve two masters: for he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*” (Matthew 6:24). Look at the vast host of believers throughout the Old and New Testaments who did not rejoice in iniquity! We think of such notable examples as the Prophet Elijah, who denounced King Ahab’s wickedness (I Kings 18), and John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17; Matthew 17:1-13), telling King Herod that it was not lawful for him to have his brother’s wife (Matthew 14:3). And what about the Apostle Paul who did not rejoice in iniquity but rebuked the members of the Corinthian congregation because their toleration of various sins (e.g. I Corinthians 5). So also we Christians. Not rejoicing in iniquity does not simply refer to a conviction of the mind but it also includes speaking out against iniquity! “*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*” (Matthew 12:34).

Are these words of our text applicable to us? Indeed they are! After all, the Apostle Paul penned this epistle to the “*church of God which is at Corinth, them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...*” (I Corinthians 1:2). Here was a Christian congregation established as a result of the preaching of the Gospel by the Apostle Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-11). And the Apostle knew only too well that they still possessed their sinful flesh

which manifested itself in various sins for which the Apostle had to rebuke them. We, my dear fellow-believers, are no exception! And if any one of us thinks that he is, then let him take note of Luther's words given to those who feel no hunger and thirst for the Lord's Supper. Let him "put his hand into his bosom, and feel whether he still have flesh and blood, and that he by all means believe what the Scriptures say of it in Galatians 5 and Romans 7;" let him "look around to see whether he is still in the world and keep in mind that there will be no lack of sin and trouble, as the Scriptures say in John 15 and 16; I John 2 and 5;" let him remind himself that "he will certainly have the devil also about him, who with his lying and murdering, day and night, will let him have no peace within or without, as the Scriptures picture him in John 8 and 16; I Peter 5; Ephesians 6; II Timothy 2" (Christian Questions and Answers). There is not one of us who could skip the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "*Forgive us our trespasses.*" No, "*there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not*" (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Particularly in these last evil days of the world in which the devil has been loosed (Revelation 20:3) the temptations are intensified as we observe in the words of the Lord Jesus, "*For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened*" (Matthew 24:21-22). And the Savior reminds us that "*the love of many shall wax cold*" (Matthew 24:12). And have we not experienced that in our congregations? Many who at one time appeared to oppose all manner of iniquity gradually succumbed to the desires of their flesh and, like Demas (II Timothy 4:10), lost their love for the Word and ran with the world. Hence we Christians must constantly "*watch and pray, lest [we] enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (Matthew 26:41).

II.

God-pleasing love "rejoices in the truth." Many sneeringly remark with Pontius Pilate, "*What is truth?*" (John 18:38). We surely can not depend upon men for the truth. The Psalmist laments, "*I said in my haste, all men are liars*" (116:11). Look at the reputation of the Cretians concerning whom one of their own prophets declared, "*The Cretians are always liars;*" and the apostle acknowledges, "*This witness is true*" (Titus 1:12,13). No matter how honorable and upright a Christian may be, the believer still has his sinful flesh and must confess with the Apostle, "*The good that I would I do not, and the evil which I would not, that I do*" (Romans 7). No wonder, then, that, in writing to the Christian congregation at Ephesus, we observe how the Apostle admonishes them, "*Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another*" (Ephesians 4:25). And the Lord condemns the sin of lying. In the last book of the Bible He declares that "*all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death*" (Revelation 21:8).

In view of this we ask: Where then is the **absolute** truth to be found if we can not find it with men? For us Christians the answer is so plain. The **absolute** truth is found in the Holy Scriptures! The Lord Jesus says in His high-priestly prayer, "*Thy Word is truth*" (John 17:17). And why is that Word the absolute truth? Because "*all Scripture is given by inspiration of God*" (II Timothy 3:16) and "*holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*" (II Peter 1:21). The words which these holy men of God spake were not "*the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth*" (I Corinthians 2:13). "*It [is] impossible for God to lie!*" (Hebrews 6:18). "*Every word of God is pure*" (Proverbs 30:5).

O what comfort for us Christians to know that the Bible is the verbally inspired oracle of God and not a collection of the writings of man's wisdom! Our Christian faith rests upon a solid foundation

and is *“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone”* (Ephesians 2:20). And we Christians rejoice in that Word and cheerfully confess with our Lutheran forefathers, *“We receive and embrace with our whole heart the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear foundation of Israel, which is the only standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged”* (*Formula of Concord, Through Declaration, Compr. Sum., 3.9 Ap., IV, 107; III, 268*). This is the Word which tells us that although we have rightly deserved to be cast into the eternal fires of hell because of our sins, for *“the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23), *“but God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8); yea, *“God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2:4-6).

Now I ask you: How could we possibly rejoice and take comfort in this message unless the Scriptures were indeed the infallible truth of God? Only then can we confidently confess with the disciples concerning the Lord Jesus, *“We believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God”* (John 6:69).

Since we Christians have found our joy and peace in the absolute truth of Holy Writ which assures us that we have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the marvelous light of Christ’s glorious kingdom, we are now to *“show forth the praises of Him who hath called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light”* (I Peter 2:9). For if we truly love the Savior who gave Himself for us, then we shall also strive with the aid of the Holy Spirit to amend our sinful lives and sincerely seek to follow the absolute Word of Truth. Jesus says, *“If a man love Me, he will keep My words”* (John 14:23). And where are the Savior’s words? In the absolute Word of Truth — the Holy Scriptures! Rejoicing in that Word, we Christians then rejoice in following that Word in our relationship with the children of the world and with our fellow-believers. The Savior commands us, *“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16). The unbelievers can not see the faith which dwells within our hearts, for *“the Lord knoweth them that are His”* (II Timothy 2:19). They observe only what we say and do. How quick they are to note discrepancies. Hence we hear the Apostle Peter warn us, *“Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters”* (I Peter 4:15).

And what about our relationship with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ? If we truly rejoice in the absolute truth, then we shall love to practice truthfulness and uprightness with one another. O how we must pray in this respect with the Psalmist, *“Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips”* (Psalm 141:3). Why? Because, writes the Apostle James, *“the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity...and unruly, evil, full of deadly poison”* (3:6,8). Many a congregation has been literally torn asunder by tongues wagging with malicious gossip and lies!

Such sins are totally incompatible with our high and noble calling as the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Not only are we commanded to *“speak not evil one of another, brethren”* (James 4:11), but also *“let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor”* (Zechariah 8:17).

Well, you ask: What am I to do if I know that my Christian brother or sister is guilty of a sin plainly contrary to the Word of God? Love rejoices in the truth and we know what God’s Word of Truth tells us to do. *“If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone”* (Matthew 18:15). And the manner in which this is to be done, is

also told us in Holy Writ. *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted”* (Galatians 6:1). God-pleasing love will reveal itself not clothed in pharisaical self-righteousness but rather in humility, ever being cognizant of *“the beam that is in thine own eye”* (Matthew 7:4). God-pleasing love always stands ready not only to rebuke but also to forgive the repentant brother or sister. *“And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day,”* Jesus says, *“and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent: thou shalt forgive him”* (Luke 17:3,4). Rejoicing in the truth, we shall also strive to defend those who are falsely accused, ever seeking to place the best construction on the words and actions of one another, but only *“so far as it can be done in keeping with the truth.”*

May our dear heavenly Father grant us His Holy Spirit that all of us may more earnestly strive to increase in such God-pleasing love, a love which rejoices not in iniquity but in truth! Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!