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2 Corinthians 6,11-18

Lent 3 — 28 February 2016

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the first lesson from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, which was read earlier:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ Or what agreement has the Temple of God with idols? For we are the Temple of the living God.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: No one wants to be too different from whatever group to which one belongs. For example, people who work in the trades have clothing that is different from people who work in offices. Thus, more often than not, you wouldn't see a plumber coming to work in a shirt, coat, and tie and on the other hand you wouldn't see an office worker arriving wearing bib overalls – casual Fridays notwithstanding.

If you go to schools, you'll see groups of students who dress alike and perhaps differently from other students. Unfortunately in some schools, the schools have to ban wearing certain colors

because those reflect a gang affiliation and can be a cause for violence.

So, it is safe to say that people try to blend in – it is almost as if we have a chameleon instinct. For Christians who live in a largely non-Christian world that can pose a real challenge. As a matter of fact, that is the challenge that Paul presents to his readers as well as to us. Differences between Christians and non-Christians may have been more distinct in Paul's day than ours, but there still are differences. This brings me to my sermon theme for today, "**Christians Should Be Different.**" I'll develop this theme in two parts:

- 1) Paul Spells Out The Differences;** and
- 2) We Are To Show Our Differences**

1) Paul Spells Out The Differences. As we read our text for today, it seems that Paul spells out five areas to show how Christians are different.

First, Christians are different in regard to the concept of righteousness. Paul asks, "What partnership or fellowship have righteousness with lawlessness or unrighteousness?"

On the surface, there may be little outward differences because Christian moral standards still to a large degree permeate our society – however, it goes without saying that these standards in society are eroding and as the world's agenda presses the Church, it is eroding in some denominations as well.

When one looks at our standing with God, the division is striking. How is one made right with God? The world and our society say it is our good deeds and good efforts. God's Word,

however, says that “all our righteousness are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64,5). The world says our achievements count for something; God says that apart from Christ “all sin and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3,23).

There can be no fellowship or partnership with such divergent attitudes. The difference is between self-satisfied pride or meekness in Christ.

Second, there is a difference in regard to what we might call wisdom, or the difference between light and darkness.

On a fundamental level, human wisdom challenges the very foundations of Christianity. It believes that it has the answer, the light, for human problems. Its light is filtered through modern science and education. As far as spiritual things are concerned, society is determined that all other religions of man also possess light that can show us the divine and thus Christianity’s claims are dismissed as intolerant bigotry, if not hate speech.

But the difference again is decisive. Jesus says He is the Light of the World. God gives meaning to history by redeeming the time in Christ. Jesus says that we are to let our lights shine and reflect Jesus’ glory and not our own. All the light of the world and all its wisdom is on loan and will one day perish; Christ’s Light, and we who bear that light, shall not perish but last eternally. Needless to say, the world finds this kind of view intolerable.

I am reminded of Concordia University College in Edmonton, Alberta. A few months ago, the president of the College, a clergyman on the roster of Lutheran Church-Canada (that’s Missouri Synod North) stuck the name Lutheran and Christian from all of the college’s material – well, it was still there in the history of

the college but not in its reason for existence. His reason? Religious colleges cannot attract enough corporate donors. Furthermore, he shut down all the religious programs of the institution – those enrolled could finish but no new students would be admitted – thus, Religious Studies, Lutheran Teacher Training, Pre-Seminary, Youth Ministry Certificate – all gone! What he is really saying is Christ and Christian's have no place in the education of the so-called modern world. Indeed, what fellowship has light with darkness?

Third, there is a difference in the attitude toward sin, or, what harmony or concord or agreement is there between Christ and Belial?

A quick aside: what on earth is Belial, or Beliar? This is a title which is not found in the Old Testament. There is a Hebrew word which means “wickedness,” but this is not a title. As a title, however, it is found in intertestamental Jewish literature, where Belial is the ruler of wickedness, the ruler of this world, the head of demonic powers. His way is darkness as opposed to light, those who belong to him become “like an ox under the yoke,” and chief among his works is sexual promiscuity (see “Belial” in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* I:654-655). I'm sure you get the idea.

We might say that Belial is all that is ungodly and sinful in the world. But the world makes light of sin, even going so far as to define sin downwards. That is to say, what was considered to be sin 10 or 20 years ago, today is no longer sin. Truly, there is no harmony with such an attitude or behavior and Christ. Christ, at the cost of His life, forgave sin – but you know, He never made friends with sin.

Fourth, there is a difference in the whole idea of faith – or,

what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

Here Paul is not telling us that we cannot have anything to do with unbelievers – for example, we do not ask the religious affiliation of those whose services we engage for secular tasks such as a medicine, plumbing, accounting, carpentry, and so forth.

But for the world, religious belief is reduced to mere religious opinion and prejudice. That is to say, it labels Christianity as prejudiced because it knows quite well that Christians look at faith through the Cross of Christ, which is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (1 Corinthians 1,23), which is a convenient way of summarizing all of the views of the world regarding Christ.

Faith is not just a subjective opinion which makes everyone's faith equal on a level playing field. That kind of faith believes nothing and accepts everything. It is as Jesus says of Himself, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14,6). The only faith that is real faith in God's eyes is that saving faith which clings to Christ and what He did for each of us.

Fifth, there is a fundamental difference in the knowledge of God – "what agreement has the Temple of God with idols?"

The world's answer, as with so many of the things we have discussed, is that all religions are the same and all paths lead to God. As the First Commandment tells us, however, God says "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." And the only way to the One true God is through Christ, His beloved Son and our Lord and Savior.

In Christ, we are God's Temple, and His Holy Spirit dwells

within us to keep us in the one true faith. This then testifies to us that all the world's religions are not only false but in God's eyes their gods are no gods and are nonexistent – boy, talk about an unloving and intolerant statement! Here, as evidenced in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, there is no room for compromise.

Christians, then, are different, and

2) We Are To Show Our Differences. God asks us that we show the world how we are different. This is not only to be in matters of confession but also in practice – and to confess the faith aright and put it into practice in an indifferent or hostile world can be difficult and challenging.

Paul says we are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

This is based on the Old Testament concept that an ox and an ass were not to be yoked together to plow a field. What would happen is that the furrows would be crooked and the animals harmed. But that did not mean that one would not let an ox and an ass share the same pasture.

But in the same way we see that righteousness and lawlessness are not to be yoked, light and darkness are not to be yoked, Christ and Belial are not to be yoked, and the Temple of God is not to be yoked with idols.

When we put it like that, we see that the term “unbeliever” means a bit more than a mere pagan. The Early Church understood this term to include false teachers as well as those whom we would call pagans. This was also the understanding and application made in the Book of Concord as well as by Confessional Lutherans during

the age of orthodoxy. Luther says:

Paul also commanded that ungodly teachers should be shunned and execrated as accursed, and he wrote in 2 Corinthians 6,14: “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers, for what fellowship has light with darkness?”

(Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 41)

As I have said before, this does not mean that one is to flee the world as the Essenes of Jesus’ day did or as monks over the ages have done. It does not mean that one is to have nothing to do with business contacts of people of a different denomination or even an unbeliever.

It does mean that one is to testify with lips and actions to the truth that Christ died for us to win for us the forgiveness of sins and that He rose on the third day to make us right with God. Thus, having been baptized into Christ we have put on Christ and are God’s Temples.

We are to shun sin and reprove the moral laxity of the world. Our lives are to be examples of what it is like to walk uprightly in a fallen world.

We are to reprove false teachers and not join them in worship or listen to them, but mark and avoid them. We are to correct and confess the truth.

We are to be witnesses that Christ is the only Way to the Father and be ready to give evidence of the hope that lies within us.

Conclusion: Paul has challenged us not to be chameleons, but in a fallen and sinful world to be different.

To be different from the world by both confessing that Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that no one comes to the Father except through Him, and by living that Truth.

We are to walk in the righteousness that Christ gives us instead of the lawlessness of the devil.

We are to walk in the light of Christ instead of hiding in the darkness of the world, our flesh, and the devil.

We are to cling to Christ instead of the worthlessness of Belial.

We are to uphold and support our fellow believers in Christ instead of seeking agreement with an unbelieving world.

We are to live as Temples of the living God instead of sniffing about the temples of the idols of this world.

We are challenged each and every day to live for Christ, for He lived, died and rose for us. He forgives us so that we may be bold to live for Him – bold in our confessing and our living. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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