

## Sermon for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

6/21/20

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### Do You Ever Deny Jesus?

Matthew 10:33 Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

In light of our text, please put your hand up if you keep God's commandments perfectly and never deny Jesus by sinning. And no hands go up. But the Bible is clear that if you love Jesus, then you should be keeping His commandments. Immediately we run into a problem with this passage because Lutheranism teaches that it is impossible to keep God's commandments until you have been fully saved. As Jesus says in John 15,

I am the vine; you are the branches...apart from me you can do nothing. (Joh 15:5 ESV)

Have you ever considered how many times the Bible appears to contradict the Lutheran faith? Now the Bible never does contradict Lutheranism but a casual superficial reading of it seems to go against Lutheran doctrine.

For example, Lutherans teach that you can't buy your way into heaven but Jesus says to the rich man in Mark 10 to sell all that he has, give to the poor and he will have treasure in heaven. Lutheranism teaches that on Judgment Day you will not be judged by whether your works were good or evil but then Paul reveals in 2 Cor. 10 that Christ will judge you as to what you have done in the body, whether good or evil.

And then there is that Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew in which Jesus has a laundry list of what we are to do to become more righteous than the Pharisees ending chapter 5 with, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." Yet Lutheranism does not even pretend that by our works we can be as perfect as God.

I can continue here for an hour giving Bible verse after Bible verse that appears to contradict the Lutheran faith. During my Monday broadcasts of Law and Gospel on KFUO I examine one of the three readings for the following Sunday. Almost every time, there is a verse that appears to contradict Lutheran teaching. And the verse in today's Gospel from Matthew 10:33 is like that when it reveals that whoever denies Jesus before men, Jesus also will deny before His Father who is in heaven.

Are you beginning to understand why so many people these days are not desiring to attend church services? One survey found that in many churches God is not spoken of as much as are subjects about the environment, about tolerance to everyone regardless of their immoral lifestyle. During Lent one Saint Louis pastor spent the entire season teaching congregational members how to use a checkbook while another pastor used Lent to argue for evolution rather than creation.

You can be thankful for your previous pastoral leadership that focused every sermon on Jesus and Him alone. If you don't think that Immanuel is unique in doing that, simply turn on most evangelical radio stations that talk about how to be a good parent or good employee or run a good business on Christian principles.

In fact, if you would run a business according to the spiritual principles in the Bible, you will be arrested. Let me give you an example. Say I own a McDonalds and I hire a woman at 6 am and then other women at 9 am, noon and 3 pm. Then I hire a man at 5 pm. When their quitting time at 6 pm comes around, I pay them all the same wage. You may think that you are following one of the parables of Jesus but I guarantee the government will be knocking on your door the next day.

The primary reason that many passages appear to contradict the Lutheran faith is that they are not properly interpreted. Every passage in the Bible that appears to go against the Lutheran faith can be properly understood if one uses the proper distinctions between Law and Gospel. Apart from these distinctions, the Bible remains a closed book.

One purpose in coming to worship services and Bible classes is to learn how to think like God. Why? Because by nature we do not think like God. We are fallen human beings whose old Adam normally does the thinking for us. We recently spoke about why Americans are joining the Muslim religion. The reason is that there is no need to repent of sins nor seek salvation. Instead, you can join Islam simply by saying a few sentences about Allah and then seeking to obey Allah's commandments as best as you can. So rather than 16 weeks of Adult Instruction in a Lutheran confirmation class, you can become a Muslim in 16 minutes.

But why this insistence of Lutheranism to preach the Law to the point where you actually become terrified of God? There are those who wish the pastor wouldn't preach so much Law because they want to hear only comfort and tolerance. Yet these same people will go and see their physician when they are not feeling well. The doctor may inform them of a serious disease. I don't hear them saying, "No, doctor, just give me the good news. I don't want to hear why I am ill."

No patient says that because they realize that until they know the reason for the illness, they won't understand why they need to take the treatment. The more you and I realize how sinful we are, the more precious becomes the cross of Christ. For in confessing that we are poor, miserable sinners deserving nothing but temporal and eternal punishment, we are comforted to hear that our treatment took place by God Himself becoming a human being so that He might take upon Himself the punishment of our sins we deserved. Forgiveness is God's declaration that He will no longer hold you accountable for your sins through faith in Jesus Christ.

So how do we resolve this apparent contradiction that some passages say God loves us because we keep the commandments and other passages appear to say that God loves us unconditionally?

You can be thankful that your pastor has been trained in the original Biblical languages of the Hebrew and Greek. For the English language is often inadequate in getting across the nuances of the Hebrew or Greek term. It is both the King James and New King James versions that read, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." In English that sounds like an imperative verb that you better be keeping His commandments or else Jesus does not think you love Him.

It's the difference between Law and Gospel. It is the difference between a command and a promise. The command is that you better keep them or else. The promise from God Himself is that those who love Him do keep His commandments. But do you keep His commandments? Remember, don't answer that question from your point of view; answer it from God's point of view.

In chapter 25 of Matthew when the sheep are told that they have kept God's commandments verse 37 is their response:

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?' (Mat 25:37 ESV)

You see, the Bible distinguishes between a good work and a fruit of the Holy Spirit. A good work anyone can do outwardly including atheists as they keep the speed limit and pay their taxes. But a fruit of the Holy Spirit only takes place when our motivation in doing a good work is love for Jesus Christ.

If I were to ask you to write down the last three fruits of the Holy Spirit you did, your paper should remain blank. As Martin Luther wrote in the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, "If you ever do a good work and do not think it is mortal sin, then it is mortal sin."

What does that mean? Luther is saying if you think that you have done a good work without Old Adam evil motivation, then you imagine that good work can merit your way to heaven and therefore it becomes mortal sin. For you can do nothing to earn heaven because Jesus is your Savior. You do not save yourself.

From God's perspective, the heart of every Christian often brings forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit even though such fruit is often unknown by us. As Christians filled with the Holy Spirit we spontaneously are obedient to God's commandments. Which now makes perfect sense of our text for this sermon that from God's point of view. He promises that we will spontaneously keep His commandments out of love for Him by the power of the Holy Spirit because we believe that by His death and His resurrection He truly demonstrated His love toward you. Amen.

. <sup>6</sup> Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; <sup>7</sup> and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

**Let us pray:****On this Father's Day we thank Jesus for faithful fathers:**

Heavenly Father,  
you entrusted your Son Jesus,  
the child of Mary,  
to the care of Joseph, an earthly father.  
Bless all fathers  
as they care for their families.  
Give them strength and wisdom,  
tenderness and patience;  
support them in the work they have to do,  
protecting those who look to them,  
as we look to you for love and salvation,  
through Jesus Christ our rock and defender.

**We also remember the soul of our faithful departed from this world:**

While we mourn the departure of Cathy from this vale of tears, we do not mourn  
as those who have no hope. For we have God's assurance that she now is at rest  
in the arms of Jesus. Comfort her husband Bob, family and all of us that we will meet again  
to live an eternity of bliss and joy with angels, archangels and all the company of  
believers in the new Garden of Eden together with the Father, Holy Spirit and our  
blessed LORD and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.