

“Testing His Thankful People”

St. Matthew 7:15

August 2, 2020

SERMON 1927

by Michael David Henson

Our sermon text is from Matthew 7:15, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”

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

St. Paul says in today’s Epistle, “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13).

These words are clearly directed against those claiming to be Christian who would use the teaching that we are saved by Christ and apart from our own works, not for the forgiveness of sins, but as a permission to sin. It has been a common excuse of those who wish to live in their sin that they justify it by saying they are saved by grace through faith without works.

St. Paul corrects these Christian imposters and tells them that **“we (Christians) are debtors” to God.** Having been saved by God through faith, we have received the Holy Spirit so that we turn away from our former life of sin and embrace the new life of righteous living.

--Jesus Christ didn’t deliver you from your sin so that you could live in your sin.

--Jesus Christ didn’t free you from eternal death so that you could return to it.

--Jesus Christ didn’t give you new life, so that you could live in your old sinful life.

Our gracious heavenly Father saw our helpless condition and had mercy upon us. He sent His Son to provide the price of our salvation. Through His grace and without any merit from us, He proclaimed His Word of Law and Gospel. By the law, He created in us a sorrow over sin and godly repentance. Through the promise of the Gospel, He created in us true faith in our Savior. Along with the gift of faith in Christ, our heavenly Father gave to us His Holy Spirit to lead us. St. Paul says, **“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”**

There are some that think that those who have the Spirit of God are holy rollers. That is, they always do what is right. They think the believers live without sin and the desire to sin. That idea is simply NOT true. **Although all believers (sons of God) are led by the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Christian is not without sin.** Even after conversion, the sinful flesh remains and fights against the believer. Listen again to St. Paul describe the difference between the believer and the unbeliever. He says, “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13).

The unbeliever lives according to the flesh. The unbeliever continues in his sin. **Although St. Paul does say that the believer lives according to the Spirit, he doesn’t say the believer always does what is right.** No, St. Paul says that the Holy Spirit leads the Christian to **“put to death the deeds of the body.”** Ah ha, there ARE

sinful deeds which need to be put to death, even after conversion. The Holy Spirit leads us into a continual battle against our own sinfulness. **The words “put to death” mean that we are to confess our sins and run away from them.** The believer doesn't continue to embrace his own sin. The believer doesn't happily sin his life away. He has been given the Holy Spirit in order to fight against his sin and turn away from it.

Having been made sons of God through His grace and mercy, we are forever thankful, grateful and owe a debt of gratitude to our heavenly Father. St. Paul says, “We are debtors (to God).” We own the flesh nothing, it only enslaved us and harmed us. That bondage to sin brought us fear of punishment. As adopted sons of God, we are led by the Spirit to daily confess the sins of our body, and to daily cling to Christ our Savior from sin. The love of God in Jesus Christ drives out fear so that we desire to live as children of God.

In today's Holy Gospel, we see that our Lord is testing His children by means of the presence of false prophets who come to us.

Here is the situation: The Triune God provides the truth of His Holy Word through the mouth of His divinely-called prophets, apostles, and pastors. **Then God directs his called and ordained holy men to warn His people to hold to the true teaching and not to listen to false prophets.** Our God knows what will be coming against His beloved believers. After God spoke to Adam, the devil in the guise of a snake came to Eve with false teaching leading to death. After Moses led God's people to the truth, the prophet Balaam led them away from the truth. Soon after the Apostles spread the New Testament message, along came false teachers which led the people away. This is the way that it goes, after the true preachers come the false preachers.

Our God doesn't want us to hold to falsehood or to fall back into sin. Out of love, He warns us before it happens.

First, we must not receive the teaching of those whom God has not called or sent. We have a God that maintains good order. On that Easter Sunday after His resurrection from the dead, our risen Lord instituted the pastoral office saying,

“Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:21-23).

With those words Jesus instituted the pastoral office for His church in order that the congregation might be assured of whom is God's representative. In today's Old Testament reading from Jeremiah 23:21, God warns against those who are not in the pastoral office. He says, “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.” Pastors don't just decide to preach of themselves. They are called by God, through a divine call given by the congregation. Let those who wish to be used by God follow the order God has set up.

Second, after we determine whom God has sent, we are to judge their teaching by the Word of God. Those who allow you to live according to the flesh are false teachers. Those who do not teach you to live according to the Spirit and put to death the deeds of the body are false teachers.

Of course, these false prophets will continue to use the Word to one degree or another, but they will not properly distinguish law and gospel. False teachers will not continue in the Word, but they will modify the true teaching. They will substitute worldly

wisdom in place of God's true teaching. They will teach you outward prohibitions concerning food and clothing, instead of the repentance of the heart. False teachers tell each person will be told to walk according to the dictates of his own heart, rather than according to the counsel of the LORD. (v.18).

Like the Corinthian congregation, there will be those who speak of love, but they will live in their sin. St. Paul spoke of one situation, that was not being dealt with. 1 Corinthians 5:1-2, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! 2And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you."

After some words about the false immoral teaching which they had received, St. Paul makes it clear that those who live in their sin will not be saved. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 11And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

Second, I must warn you that other false teachers will bring you the law rather than the gospel. They will teach you trust in your works. Rather than teach that Christians are debtors to God, they will make God a debtor to us so that he must pay us salvation for our obedience. They will emphasize sacrifices and laws and commitments.

In order to identify false teachers, we must know the Word of God well. When we come to faith in Christ—so that we hold to the truth and the Holy Spirit leads us to put to death our sins and daily rise to live a new life with Christ—**there will be great opposition**. The world and the devil will join forces to send men whom God has not called to preach a gospel which is not the truth of God's Word.

Nevertheless, our Lord will use these attacks for our good. In 1 Corinthians 11:19, St. Paul says, "For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you." **First of all, God will use these attacks in order to begin to separate out those imposters from those who are the real believers**. When men are led astray to false teaching we know that they are not a part of Christ's church. When men no longer put to death the deeds of the body, but instead embrace sin as God-pleasing we know that they have ceased to be children of God.

Second, our God will use these tests to lead His believers to continue to steadfastly hold to His holy Word. 1 Corinthians 1:25 says, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Our God is strengthening His believers as they reject man's wisdom.

1 John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."