

Sermon – 04/01/2009 am

Wrath on Disobedient

Study Text: Ephesians 5:5-6

Walk in love. This is how Paul began this chapter. As beloved children of God, walk in love. He went on to say that it is not fitting for children of God to be covetous or sexually immoral. It is not fitting for them to be associated with such sin, to condone such sin, or even to joke about such sin. When we believe in Jesus Christ we are adopted into the family of God and must live in obedience to Christ and his commands. We must put off the old man who walked in the flesh and put on the new man who walks in Christ.

All this is very positive. But what if we do not do this? Are there not consequences for disobedience, for those who say ‘I can do what I like as a child of God’? Paul is addressing believers and not talking about justification at this point. We are saved by grace through faith (2:8) and that truth remains. We are not saved by good works.

But how shall we live as children of God? While some, like the thief on the cross, enter heaven shortly after they believe in Jesus, most believers go on living in this world. As we live we grow and mature in Christ, or should do. This is what is called sanctification, a word that means ‘make holy’.

Saints – holy ones – are adopted children of God. Think of a helpless baby that is adopted by loving parents. It is one thing to adopt a baby but another to raise that child to adulthood. God our Father is doing that with us. A father’s love will necessitate discipline from time to time. A loving father will discipline his child when they disobey. There must be consequences for disobedience or sin – sin is breaking God’s commands.

Paul does not neglect to tell the saints the consequences of disobeying God’s commands, his commands about covetousness and sexual immorality in particular. He gives the positive reason why we are to live in righteousness and holiness but also tells of the negative, of *the wrath of God that comes upon the sons of disobedience* (5:6).

No Inheritance

The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15). This is what Jesus of Nazareth preached. The kingdom of God has come in him. Those whom the Father gives him; those who repent and believe in Jesus, enter the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is essentially the same as the family of God. The children are heirs. They are promised an inheritance and the Holy Spirit is given as a guarantee of this inheritance (1:14).

But there is no place in God’s kingdom for people who are not holy. There is no place for idolaters who worship other gods. God is holy and his kingdom is a holy kingdom. It is a kingdom where God’s holy law prevails. We are reminded of this every time we pray the Lord’s prayer – Our Father in heaven holy is your name, your kingdom come, your will be done.

Outside are dogs, sorcerers, sexually immoral, murders, idolaters and whoever loves and practices a lie (Revelation 22:15). There is no place for darkness in the glorious light of God's kingdom. There is no place for impurity within the purity and holiness of his kingdom.

The kingdom of Christ and God (5:5). It is interesting that Paul includes Christ as the king of this kingdom. Is he simply saying here that Christ is God? That is true but he is probably making sure that no one thinks of the kingdom of Christ as different from the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God might be thought of in Old Testament terms. Some might say that the kingdom of Christ is new, it a post-resurrection kingdom, a kingdom ruled by love and not law. Some even think that the way of entry is different – by some I mean some Christians.

There is one kingdom and one king – God the Father and God the Son. Moreover, the law by which this kingdom is governed has not changed. Jesus came to fulfil the law, not to abolish it. Jesus reinforced the commands of God in the Sermon on the Mount, and Paul does the same in this letter. Paul has the Ten Commandments in mind as he teaches the Ephesians how to live as the children of God. They did not enter the kingdom by obeying the commands but they must obey the commands now that they are children of God.

For this you know (5:5). One who believes must know that God is holy and just, and that God hates sin. Why did God send his only begotten Son into this world to die if sin does not matter to him? You know this, that no unclean person, no one who is covetous or sexually immoral has a place, *has an inheritance in kingdom of Christ and God* (5:5). God made man to have fellowship with himself and with his Son, Jesus Christ. He made man to love and obey him. Those who walk in sin and worship other gods cannot have fellowship with God nor expect to inherit anything in his kingdom.

You know can also be understood at a purely human level. A child who continually disobeys his human father, a child who deliberately does what his father hates cannot expect any inheritance from the father. Rather they can expect to be excluded from their fathers will.

Wrath

Much evangelical preaching avoids mention of this word 'wrath'. These verses we are looking at today will be overlooked by many preachers, and thus their listeners. The other day I heard a preacher condemning old 'fire and brimstone' preachers. 'Walk in love as Christ also loved us' is what he preached. What he said was true, but it was incomplete. It was only half the truth. God is a God of love. But he is also a God who punishes the wicked.

The whole truth is that God's wrath remains upon those who refuse to believe in Jesus. His wrath remains upon those who practice evil, and hate the light (John 3:36, 20). This is what Jesus said. Jesus spoke more about the wrath of God than any other preacher or prophet in the Bible. *God's wrath comes upon the sons of disobedience* (5:6). Paul does not say bad things will happen to the disobedient, or that they will meet with some accident, but that God actively punishes them.

Whilst believers may not deliberately set out to disobey God they can be deceived by empty words (5:6). As we just noted there is a false or at least faulty teaching about the love of God. Such teaching can lead to laxity with regard to sin. God is love but he is also holy. God does forgive us our sin but he also punishes us for sin. God is love but he is also a jealous God who

will not give his glory to another – which is what happens when we covet things in this world, be it money, sex, fame or anything else.

Beware of the popular teaching which says ‘God hates sin but loves the sinner’. Such teaching is deceptive. It is akin to Gnosticism that entered the early church – and may even have started when Paul wrote this letter. It creates a false dichotomy. It makes the physical independent of the spiritual. It says that what I do is not related to who I am. It says I can sin but God still loves me because it is the sin not me the sinner that he hates.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). God’s wrath is not upon unrighteousness in some abstract way. He is not condemning a philosophy but men and women who suppress the truth and walk in sin. God’s wrath comes upon the sons of disobedience not the sins of disobedience.

Deception is the great tool of the devil. He casts doubt upon the truth of God. ‘Did God really say’ are the first words of Satan in the Bible; He deceived a child of God called Eve with such words. He continues to deceive with empty words, tempting words, half-truths and outright lies. Satan is the father of lies and he has many who diligently promote his cause.

One lie that Satan has successfully promoted is that he does not exist. Another is that God’s wrath no longer exists. ‘God accepts us just as we are’ the preacher says – and that is true. But he fails to go on and say that having been accepted by grace we are now a new person in Christ Jesus and must live as a new person in Christ. We must put off the old man and put on the new man of righteous and holiness (4:24).

Do not be like Eve and listen to Satan whispering in your ear. Block your ears and your eyes to his temptations, the temptations of the flesh. Remember, all Satan’s suggestions, all his excuses, all his accusations, all his rationalisations are empty words. To do this you must open your ears to the word of God; you must open your eyes to things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Will you seek first the kingdom of God in this New Year? Will you listen to the Lord Jesus and not to Satan? Will you walk in the light or will you walk in darkness. Remember the wrath of God remains upon the ungodly and the wicked, upon the covetous and the sexually immoral, and they have no inheritance in his glorious kingdom.

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