

Trinity XIX

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[0 : 0 0] We prayed in our collect this morning that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts.

Our epistle text here in Ephesians chapter 4 verses 17 through 32 provides us with a blueprint for how the Holy Spirit directs and rules our hearts as baptized Christians.

St. Paul exhorts the church in Ephesus to no longer walk as the Gentiles. This language as the Gentiles has two meanings here.

First, it means that we should not live like pagans. There should be a distinction between Christians and the world. In other words, Gentiles here is code for paganism.

Second, it means that Christians are no longer Gentiles because we have now been brought into covenant with God by being engrafted into Christ by way of our baptism.

[1 : 1 2] All who are in Christ are now a new creation in Christ. We are the new Israel of God and therefore we are to walk in faithfulness to the covenant we now share through Christ Jesus.

St. Paul goes on to say that we should not walk in the futility of our own minds, meaning having our minds catechized and indoctrinated by the world.

Such people, according to verse 18, are those having their understanding darkened. Meaning their God-given conscience is now becoming null and void.

Such people are becoming alienated from their creator. The world, according to St. Paul, is in the process of having their hearts blinded.

Like Pharaoh of old, the world is becoming hardened to the truth. Which leads to a hatred for all that is good, all that is just, and all that is holy.

[2 : 2 6] Sound familiar? St. Paul goes on to say that such searing of the conscience and the blindness of heart leads to what we read about here in verse 19.

Such people, St. Paul says, have given themselves over to lewdness to work all uncleanness with greediness. Now, a very graphic example of this is in the so-called sex trafficking industry in this country.

It is reported that here in America, some 18,000 to 20,000 women and children are kidnapped, bought, or sold into the wickedness of sex slavery each year here in the United States.

And that estimate, by the way, can go as high as 50,000. Politicians often talk about economic and environmental issues, but few talk about this heinous crime and this wickedness.

Why? Well, quite frankly, lewdness and perversion has become a socially acceptable norm. We have become a culture of perverts.

[3 : 5 3] Pornography, which is often girls, by the way, that have been trafficked, is not only acceptable, it has become a joke in sitcoms and movies.

And quite frankly, it has become a pandemic. We are living in a world that is becoming darker and darker.

A world where the conscience is becoming obsolete. So what are we to do to combat this behavior? Well, we have been taught, we have learned, as Christians, a new standard, a new way.

And that's what St. Paul is saying. He's given us the bad news. He's describing of what happens when people just become followers blindly of the world and are controlled by their passions.

But now he tells us this is how we combat such evil. And this standard tells us to put off. Paul says put off lewdness and such perversion.

[5 : 05] As baptized Christians, we have now put on Christ. And we are called to continue every day to put on Christ. Conversion is not just a one-time thing happening in your past.

It is a daily thing where you now die to yourself so that now Christ, who you now have been baptized into, can now live in you and through you.

And that's the key. St. Paul says we are to put on Christ, which means we are to be governed by the Holy Spirit, who is conforming us more and more to Christ.

The Word of God, which is to be our nourishment. The Word of God is our food. Teaches us, it transforms us to a new and a better way.

We are not to be controlled by the passions, by our own selfish desires and our own lusts. Instead, St. Paul says we are to be governed and led by the Spirit.

[6 : 13] St. Paul says in verse 22 that we are not to be controlled by deceitful lusts, but we are to be renewed by the Spirit of our minds. We are to be controlled by the Spirit of our minds. We are to be controlled by the Spirit of our minds. We are to be controlled by the Spirit of our minds.

We are to put on Christ where righteousness, where his holiness now takes over our thoughts and our behaviors. So that his light now lives in us and his light now shines through us to the world.

Now, St. Paul loves lists. So let's look briefly at his list that he gives us here in verses 25 through 32.

He says we are to put away lying so that we can now start speaking the truth. In other words, we are not to use our tongues for our own gain.

We are to use our tongues to now speak the truth. And oftentimes, this truth will contradict the false catechesis and the demonic counsel of this world.

[7 : 16] St. Paul says that we are not to steal any longer, but instead we are to work, to work diligently. Why? So that we can gain wealth and then brag about how we are a self-made person?

No. We are to work diligently to give to others. That's what he says. We are not to be greedy, he says, like the world.

We are not to use our mouths for corruption, but for what is good, for what is edifying to others. We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit by living in contradiction to our baptismal grace.

Instead, we are to live in this seal and this promise of our baptism until our Lord comes back and our redemption is fulfilled. We are not to allow bitterness, wrath and malice to govern our lives.

Instead, we are called to be kind people. To be gracious people. And we are called to forgive one another just as Christ has forgiven us.

[8 : 25] St. Paul has given us quite a litany of do's and don'ts this morning. But this is not a mere message of moralisms for us to follow.

It's not. All of these are virtues that flow from being in Christ, participating in him. As baptized Christians, our life is to be the manifestation of Christ to the world by the work and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the point is simply this. To live in our baptismal grace is to be formed. It is to be shaped by the word of God, which continually is transforming our hearts, our minds.

It's conforming us more and more to Jesus and less and less to the things and the passions and the desires and the lusts of this world.

Friends, if we are not conforming ourselves to God, we are conforming ourselves to Satan and his demonic rule. If we are not giving ourselves over to the lordship of Christ, we are now giving ourselves over to the lordship of Satan.

[9 : 44] There is no neutrality in this fight. You can't straddle the fence. As Jesus told his disciples in Matthew chapter 12, verse 30 and Mark chapter 9, verse 40 and Luke chapter 11, verse 23.

Whoever is not with me is what? Against me. All who claim Jesus as lord and have been baptized are now called to walk as he walked.

Delighting in the word of God. Seeking to live in the joy of eternal life. How? By being directed and ruled by the Holy Spirit.

And those who do not care about God, who do not give a flip about his word, are those who are walking according to their own passions.

And what they are doing is they are alienating themselves more and more from their creator. And in doing so, they start acting more like the beasts rather than the humans that God created them to be.

[10 : 57] These are the people who have hardened their hearts to God and are spiraling down into greater bondage to sin and slavery that leads to ultimate death.

Eternal death. Eternal death. So the message is very clear. We are called to take heed to the words of St. Paul this morning.

To pray the words of our collect. And may that be our prayer as we say, Merciful Lord grant that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.