

# "Guilt by Association"

Text: 2 Corinthians 11:12-15

God the Holy Spirit clear from your thoughts all that detracts from his Word; and from your lives all that draws your hearts from that one thing needful. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

As you have no doubt noticed, the theme this morning is "Guilt by Association." What exactly comes to mind? My guess is your initial thoughts would range from your teenager and the company he or she is keeping to the President of the United States. Though the United States Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled that guilt by association has no place in any legal proceeding, you and I feel no such constraints. At times our assumptions are justified; at times they are not.

If, for example, you see a young man loitering on a street corner in the company of gang members, most rational people would assume that he had been drawn into that perverse mentality and way of life. If you were to see a young woman in garish clothing, late at night, calling out to passing cars on a street corner with known prostitutes, most would again assume that she too was caught up in that sin.

So what would you think of a man who routinely shunned the higher, more honorable classes of society and hung around instead with known criminal elements – like prostitutes and thieves? It would certainly tell you something about that person, wouldn't it? Except, of course, that that was also a description of Jesus, which probably explains, at least in part, why guilt by association is routinely barred from our courtrooms, and should be used only with great care by Christians.

This morning then we are going to examine the topic of "guilt by association" from a little different angle. The text that will guide us this morning is found in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, the 11<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

**2 Corinthians 11:12-15** *But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.* <sup>13</sup> *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.* <sup>14</sup> *And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.* <sup>15</sup> *Therefore it is no great*

*thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*

So far the very words of God. What a blessing to have and study the precious words of Almighty God. May we all honor them as such and learn from them accordingly. To this end we pray, **"Sanctify us through the truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

Clearly we need to be very careful when it comes to guilt by association. The Jews used it to condemn Jesus: (Luke 15:2) **"And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.'"** Again in Matthew 11:19 we read Jesus' words: **"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'"**

To Christians, this sort of thing ought to be self-evident. The Eighth Commandment reminds us of God's will that we *"put the best construction on everything."* "Association" gives us a right to gently question, but not to assume guilt.

Yet there is a far more diabolical and clever means by which Satan is employing "guilt by association" against God's children, and it is on that use that we focus our attention this morning.

I wonder if any of you can relate to what I have been experiencing lately. Not long ago my wife and I were watching a documentary on the Mormons. The two-part series was both kind and candid. The spokesmen for the Mormon Church were, as you would expect, polite, gentle, and articulate. They stated their case as unobnoxiously and as matter-of-factly as I would consider humanly possible (considering what they were actually promoting as true).

These dignified, well-dressed men and women were defending a religious organization that claims its members will one day be gods, creating with their celestial wife or wives the spirits that would go down and populate their own personal planet somewhere in the galaxy. With pleasantly smiling faces they spoke glowingly of Joseph Smith (the writer of the Book of Mormon), baptisms for the dead, and secret, creepy temple rituals. All were devout adherents of a religion that claims to be Christian, but is thoroughly work-righteous and therefore damning.

So where does “guilt by association” come in? It occurred to me, as I watched these kind, misguided souls with a mixture of sadness and revulsion, that that is *exactly* how the godless in our society see you and me and our religion. To the unconverted, there is probably little difference between a man who believes that the golden plates of the Book of Mormon ascended into heaven after their translation by Joseph Smith and the ascension into heaven of a crucified Jewish man named Jesus of Nazareth; little difference between the Mormon’s eternal marriage and the Christian’s eternal life.

Now change the channel and watch the aftermath of yet another religious act in the Middle East where a devout young follower of the Prophet Mohammed strapped about 50 pounds of high explosives, ball bearing, and nails to his chest and blew up women and children in the name of Allah. See hundreds or even thousands as they bow in unison to the god and his prophet who supposedly condone such actions.

Just another religion – and they are all pretty much alike.

Change the channel again and you find yourself in Tibet, watching a Buddhist monk who believes that he, through meditation, is very close to being “assumed into the deity.”

Just another religion – and they are all pretty much alike.

This, again, is how Satan is employing his “guilt by association” against the Christian Church today. No one wants to be seen by society as a demented nut-ball. No one wants to be regarded as lesser or delusional. Nor are Satan’s attacks an on-again, off-again proposition. The attacks are cumulative and relentless. It’s like he straps a pack on your back and continually adds one rock after another. Christians who imagine that they are immune do so at their own peril.

Our text for this morning describes this very thing when it speaks of Satan **“transforming himself into an angel of light.”** There is no doubt in my mind that those souls who have been caught up in these pagan religions are absolutely convinced of their “rightness.” They speak of supernatural, religious experiences that transcend both human description and understanding. They speak of blissful assurance and of the unimaginable joys that await them, though what they are experiencing are demonic forces aping the truth.

Satan knows the truth. He knows the one true God and he knows that the one path to heaven is through faith alone in Jesus Christ. What better

plan to discredit God’s salvation plan than by erecting crude caricatures of the original? What better way to discredit Christianity than to lump it together with a whole raft of nonsense that he himself devised?

While the effect of the devil’s mimicry on unbelievers is bad enough, the effect on Christians is no less dangerous. The message he wants to drill down into our sub-conscience is not so much *“I want to become a Mormon”* as it is *“Is my religion as nutty as those?”* and *“Am I as foolish as those poor misguided goofballs on television?”*

Paul recognized the same forces at work already in his day. Again his words from our text: **“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”**

Note well the ominous declaration pronounced here by the Holy Spirit through Paul over against all of the false religions that the devil has manufactured: **“...whose end will be according to their works.”** Their end is destruction, which serves as our reminder that the stakes here could not be more serious or more consequential. All other paths lead always and only to eternal destruction in hell. No matter how peaceful or how convinced its proponents might appear, they and those that follow share a common, terrible destination.

Paul’s solution? Again from our text: **“But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.”** Paul, in other words, recognized that the solution was not to radically alter his message and his methods. The solution was to redouble his efforts and to keep doing exactly what he was doing – preach the pure, sweet, life-saving Word of God.

Nothing but light can dispel darkness. When Jesus was condemned by the self-righteous skeptics of his day for associating with sinners, his solution wasn’t to abandon those sinners but to continue sharing with them his message of truth and life. What is more, this is not just the right course of action in reaching out to others; it is the right course of actions for our own personal preservation. Again, the fact that only light dispels darkness is true not only in the hearts of others; it is true also in our own hearts. God’s Word, when it is read and

studied, has the marvelous power to cleanse the human heart of the doubts and uncertainties that Satan relentlessly and cleverly tries to sow there. God's Word is more than just information. It is power – pure, raw, divine power, for in and through his Word God has promised to dispel the gloom and uncertainty of all that is false and impure. It is through exposure to that Word that God the Holy Spirit enables us to rightly judge between true and false, wise and foolish, saving truth and damning lie.

All, again, comes back to the simple, central truth of Jesus Christ and him crucified. This is the truth that saves – that by his life and death, Jesus has supplied the goodness that makes up for our sin. No man – no matter how deeply he meditates or in what rituals he participates or how much he denies himself – no man can satisfy God's demand for perfection. Jesus alone could do that. Jesus alone *has done that*. That perfection is not paid to us as our due; it is given to us as a gift. The only way any human being can forfeit that full, complete payment is to reject or deny that Jesus did what he said he did. Believing, that payment is yours. You are forgiven, and since you are forgiven, nothing and no one can prevent you from inheriting heaven and existing for all eternity in the presence of your holy God.

When he stood before the doubting King Agrippa, Paul recounted the event where he was given to know the difference between God's truth and Satan's lies. To Agrippa Paul relayed Jesus' words of life and light: **“And Jesus said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>16</sup> 'But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. <sup>17</sup> 'I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, <sup>18</sup> 'to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’”** (Acts 26:15-18)

You and I have been given this same priceless information, this same priceless gift. Guilt by association? More like salvation by association - with Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

NKJ **Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23** And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup> Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: <sup>13</sup> three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. <sup>14</sup> Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb... <sup>22</sup> ¶ But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup> The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light.

NKJ **Acts 14:8-18** And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. <sup>9</sup> *This* man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, <sup>10</sup> said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked. <sup>11</sup> Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian *language*, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" <sup>12</sup> And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup> Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes. <sup>14</sup> But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out <sup>15</sup> and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, <sup>16</sup> "who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. <sup>17</sup> "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." <sup>18</sup> And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.

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**The Fifth Sunday after Easter – May 9, 2010**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn -#7- (Red Hymnal)

"As We Begin Another Week"

## The Order of Morning Service – Red Hymnal page 15.

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back of the bulletin)

**The New Testament Lesson:** (Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23) Heaven is again the subject of our reading from the Book of Revelation. Remember that this is John's description of the vision he saw. We want to focus not so much on the literal pictures he saw, but on the fact that heaven will be glorious beyond our wildest dreams – beyond man's ability to imagine. All is a gift from our Savior.

**The Epistle Lesson:** (Acts 14:8-18) Note in this reading that man has a natural need to worship something or someone. Mankind is no different today. Our mission, our calling, is therefore to direct that natural need to worship toward the only divine being who is worthy of our worship – our Triune God.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed (Red Hymnal page 22)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#336- (Red Hymnal)

"My God, Accept My Heart This Day"

## The Sermon - Text: 2 Corinthians 11:12-15 (Printed on the back page)

**"Guilt by Association"**

## "Create In Me" (The Offertory) – Red Hymnal page 22

## The Offering, followed by the Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn -#312- (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Living Bread"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24)

## The Distribution -#306- (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Hast Prepared"

## The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 29)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn -#616- (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Forever with the Lord"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!

**To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

## Attendance - Last Sunday (48) 2010 Average (52)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/ Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Ascension Observance
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-8:45 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
	<b>-11:30 a.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting

**CLC News** – Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer has returned the calls to Valentine, Mission, and White River. Pastor David Naumann is considering the calls to Clarkston and Orofino. Richard Kanzenbach has accepted the call to Fairchild, WI.

**Ascension Commemoration** – Our Wednesday Bible Study this week will be dedicated to a commemoration and study of our Lord's Ascension. The date of the actual event is Thursday of this coming week (40 days after Easter).

**Synod-Wide Anniversary Service** – Next Sunday (May 16<sup>th</sup>) has been designated as the Sunday on which the CLC will celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a special liturgy, service, and Bible Class. The Bible Class will include a PowerPoint presentation on the history of the CLC. Please join us to thank our God for 50 years of grace and blessing..

**Voters' Notes and Church Council Meeting** – A copy of the minutes from last Sunday's Voters' Meeting is available upon request. Council members please note the meeting scheduled for next Sunday. As always, please bring any items for discussion to the attention of Mike McEnroe as soon as possible.