

"Irreconcilable Differences"

Text Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Grace, mercy, and peace be multiplied to you in the name of Jesus Christ, who alone could offer to God the Father the payment demanded for our reconciliation. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

The English language is full of nonsense phrases that convey something other than a literal meaning. I've never seen anyone actually "bury a hatchet," "paint a town," or "hit the hay" – and yet those phrases all rather accurately communicate a thought or action.

There is also another more serious class of terms that we have come to use and accept as meaningful, when in fact they represent nonsense. So today our society talks about the "science of evolution," when by definition evolution is a non-testable, non-repeatable *theory*, and therefore by definition *not* science. Or we wish each other "good luck" (when none of us really believes in luck) or when the pro-abortion crowd uses the term "pro-choice" when in fact the act of abortion robs the very youngest and most helpless among us of any and all "choice."

This morning we look in greater detail at another one of those nonsense terms that we have come to use and accept: "*irreconcilable differences*." What is interesting here is that the way *mankind* uses the term, there is no such thing as an irreconcilable difference. We have simply adopted the term (and now accept it as representative of reality) in an effort to cater to sinful pride and stubbornness. Differences can indeed be reconciled, but that reconciliation is often only accomplished by the power and the authority of the Word of God. Therefore as *man* uses the term, there is no such thing as an irreconcilable difference. Things are different when it comes to the *Word of God*, since in God's reckoning there *is* such a thing as an irreconcilable difference - albeit much different than what our Godless society has come to accept as true. The section of God's Word that will make this plain to us is found in Paul's Letter to the churches in Galatia, the Fifth Chapter:

(Galatians 5:1, 13-25) Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ But if you bite

and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! ¹⁶ ¶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴ And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ ¶ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

So far the very words from our God - a rare and precious treasure indeed, for these words have come to us from God himself. Pray that that same God would grant us the devotion and love of these words that would lead us to rightly study and learn from them. To this end we pray, "**Sanctify us through Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!**" Amen.

Our text begins with a sentence that genuinely shocks the unbelieving world: "**Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free.**" Paul is obviously talking to Christians when he uses these words, and yet Christians are the last people on earth the world would consider *liberated*. "Liberated," to the world, means "free from all constraints." In other words, a liberated person is one who can sin at will. On the other hand, the world sees Christianity as a set of rules – a complex and massive collection of do's and don'ts. A Christian, to the world, is someone who *can't* – can't get drunk, can't fool around, can't join this or that organization, and so forth. Yet Christian liberty is better defined in terms of *can*. Only a Christian can know that whatever he says to God is heard by God. Only a Christian can do a good work in God's eyes. Only a Christian can know and enjoy the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Only a Christian can gain entrance to heaven. Only a Christian has been given freedom from abject slavery to sin. *Such things* represent true liberty, and such things are the possession of the child of God alone.

After explaining to us that we have been given the rare and precious gift of true liberty, Paul goes on to warn us about its misuse: **"Only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."** This is anything but an idle warning. Most of us are painfully aware of just what Paul is talking about here. Many of you, for example, remember the days when you were first let out on your own, perhaps in college or when you rented your first apartment. That first taste of freedom was heady, toxic stuff. Unfortunately, many use this freedom exactly as Paul warned against in our text - as an opportunity for the flesh or some sort of license to sin. In fact the problem is compounded by a general misunderstanding of the Christian faith and by what is often called "head faith." When a sinner first learns that all of his sins stand forgiven because of Jesus' perfect life and blameless death on the cross, the Old Adam would like nothing better than to run up the charges. The bill has been paid. Our sins are forgiven. What then is to stop Christians from indulging every sinful passion and lust, since the bill was paid in advance?

What monsters would be created by the gospel if Christianity were only of the head, and not also of the heart; if Christian liberty were not balanced by that new man that has been created in us – that part of every true Christian that loves God and neighbor perfectly. That new man in us asks not *"What can I get away with?"* but *"What does my Savior want?"* Part of what our Savior wants has been summed up for us in our text: **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."** That is what our Savior wants, and only the Child of God can even *want* to walk in harmony with such a goal. Saving faith therefore involves a profound change of the human heart. It is that change that prevents the Christian (who knows that his sins are forgiven) from wanting to return to the disgusting former lifestyle. The gospel creates the new man within us, and that new man longs to live in perfect harmony with the Word and will of God.

This brings us back once more to *irreconcilable differences*. Obviously the area of life where the term is most often used (and abused) is in the area of marriage and divorce. It has much wider application. The fact is if we could learn even to *begin* to love our neighbor as ourselves, not only would the term "irreconcilable differences" never be used in a divorce proceeding, the problem would cease to apply to any area of our lives. "Irreconcilable differences" is simply a polite and expeditious way to justify two stubborn and selfish people who want only – in the words of our text - to **"fulfill the lust of the flesh."** The world sees two people **"biting and devouring one another"** (again from our text) and they imagine that the only solution is separation (divorce if married) before both are **"consumed by one another."** There is another solution – a solution that pleases our Creator. Paul says simply, **"Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."**

Here is where we begin to see the correct use of the term *irreconcilable differences*. Our text puts it this way: **"For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."** Between the flesh and the Spirit we do indeed find irreconcilable differences. Our text says that they are **"contrary to one another."** The one is always diametrically opposed to what the other desires. Whenever therefore we live for self rather than for God and our neighbor, it is then that we carry out the works of the flesh. Just in case we need help in identifying which is which, our text offers a partial list of the works of the flesh: **"adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like."**

Take a good look at that list again. Isn't that exactly the sort of stuff that ruins relationships? In fact all human dissension – including marriage problems – is simply the natural product of one or two people walking not in the spirit, but in the lust of the flesh.

Now, could it really be that simple? Could our many problems (marriage and otherwise) really be solved by such an uncomplicated and unsophisticated proposition? Writing by inspiration Paul says, **"Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."**

These are plain words from the Holy Spirit, not difficult to understand. As a child of God, you have raging within you two powerful forces: the flesh and the spirit. Each moment of your life you are guided by one or the other. The two never find any sort of common ground to work together at the same time, for these two forces within you battle against each other over control of the same heart. Therefore you cannot walk in the spirit and still satisfy the lusts of the flesh, nor can you satisfy the lusts of the flesh and still walk in the spirit.

Which is in control then when we claim irreconcilable differences in, for example, a marriage relationship? Are we walking in the spirit or according to the flesh? The answer is obvious. Do our actions and feelings fit into Paul's description of the works of the flesh, listed in verses 19-21, or the fruits of the spirit in verses 22-23: **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"?**

Finally then the lesson of our text becomes rather clear to us. We have two guiding forces within us. To rescue or enhance our human

relationships, and to shun the sin that threatens to choke the saving faith from our hearts, we need but **"walk in the spirit."** What remains for us to answer or define then is just what it means to **"walk in the spirit."**

To **"walk in the spirit"** means to follow the direction of the new man that has been created in us. We are walking in the spirit, first of all, whenever we humbly approach the decisions of life with Jesus and his words as our undisputed guide. So much anger and rage is born when we fight against the direction of the Holy Spirit. So much bitter frustration is caused when man knows in his heart the Spirit's answer to a question, but refuses that answer. The problem is seldom on the outside, almost always on the inside, as the flesh battles against the new man and what we know to be right according to the Spirit. We walk *by the Spirit*, on the other hand, whenever we acknowledge that **"it is by God's undeserved love that we have been saved; a gift of God, not of works."** The point here is that it is simply not possible to **"walk in the spirit"** apart from faith in Jesus Christ, and complete trust in the fact that he alone has secured the forgiveness for every single one of my sins.

What happens when we no longer walk in the spirit? Our text holds out to each of us a most solemn warning from the law: **"I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."** Our text is careful not to say that whoever *falls into* such a sin will be damned eternally. It says **"those who practice such things..."** Those who practice such things are those who have given themselves over to them. There is no longer in them a battle, for within them there is now no resistance or shame in their sinful actions. All such have irreconcilable differences with their Creator, for if a man does not walk in saving faith with his God here in time, he will never walk with God in eternity. Each of us was born with irreconcilable differences with our Creator as a result of our sins. Our sinful lives only served to reinforce those differences. Jesus alone could bring about the reconciliation that we could not. This is what he accomplished on the cross, where he removed the sin that had previously spoiled our relationship with our God. That same reconciliation is available here and now between every single sinner and his God – a true gift of love from our merciful Savior. Believing in what Jesus has done, your great "irreconcilable difference" with your God is instantly solved.

Dear Christian, the Word of God holds out to *you* simple and effective solutions to *your* many problems. Do not dismiss them either on account of their simplicity or because of the stubborn rebellion of the sinful flesh that still battles for control of your heart. Remember that the very gospel itself – the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ – is itself the simplest of solutions to our most profound problem. Jesus died

for sin – all sin. God the Father has pronounced the whole world "not guilty." Salvation is absolutely that simple! Do not let man or devil or your own sinful flesh steal this truth from you. To this end we pray: *"Through your strength and power, dear Holy Spirit, help us to put on that new man day by day, moment by moment. We desire to be guided always and only by you - through the Holy Spirit living within us. Let all that we do, say, and think be done always and only to your glory, and with love toward our neighbor. In Jesus' name we trust, and in his Name we ask. Amen."*

Scripture Readings

NKJ **Isaiah 66:10-14** " Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her; ¹¹ that you may feed and be satisfied with the consolation of her bosom, that you may drink deeply and be delighted with the abundance of her glory." ¹² For thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream. Then you shall feed; on *her* sides shall you be carried, and be dandled on *her* knees. ¹³ As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." ¹⁴ When you see *this*, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like grass; the hand of the LORD shall be known to His servants, and *His* indignation to His enemies.

NKJ **Galatians 6:1-10, 14-16** Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. ⁵ For each one shall bear his own load. ⁶ ¶ Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. ⁷ ¶ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸ For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. ⁹ And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. ¹⁴ But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. ¹⁶ And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mr. Michael McEnroe, President (224-8335) Mrs. Eileen McEnroe, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor mjroehl@bis.midco.net Miss Suzannah Miller, Organist

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – June 27, 2010

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#390- (Red Hymnal)

"Drawn to the Cross"

The Order of Morning Service – Brown Hymnal page 12.

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

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 66:10-14) Once again if our Old Testament Lesson is not understood in light of Jesus Christ, it sounds as if it has not been fulfilled, and has little chance of actually being fulfilled in the future. The true meaning opens up to us when these words are read with Jesus Christ and the Christian Church in mind. The Christian Church is the New Jerusalem, and both Jew and Gentile have been blessed in the life and death of the Lord Jesus.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 51 (Page 28)

The Epistle Lesson: (Galatians 6:1-10, 14-16) There is a unique balance in the Christian faith. Though we are to bear the burdens of others, yet in this reading we are also reminded that we cannot be saved by the faith of another. There will be no hiding behind mother or father on Judgment Day, for then **"each shall bear his own load."** God grant each of us a strong personal faith.

The Confession of Faith – The Nicene Creed – Brown Hymnal page 5

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#354- (Red Hymnal)

"In the Cross of Christ I Glory"

The Sermon – Text: Galatians 5:1, 13-25 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Irreconcilable Differences"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) – Brown Hymnal page 16 insert

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -#323- (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"With Broken Heart and Contrite Sigh"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution -Hymn #305- (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -#655- (Red Hymnal)

"I Pray Thee Dear Lord Jesus"

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 (65) 2010 Average (55)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Worship Service
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Paul Nolting is considering the call to Fond du Lac. Pastor Todd Ohlmann is considering the call to Loveland. Pastor Joel Fleischer is considering the call to Red Wing. Pastor Matthew Hanel is considering the call to Dallas, TX. We rejoice that upon the recommendation of the Re-entry Committee, President John Schierenbeck has added Scott Schiermeister to the Clergy Roster of the CLC, declaring him eligible for a call into the public ministry.

VBS & Men's Retreat – Vacation Bible School for this summer has been scheduled for Thursday and Friday, July 22-23. Please see Sandy Roehl for further details, and consider whether you might be able to lend a hand. Men please take a look at the sign-up sheet on the entry table for this year's Men's Retreat. Please sign your name next to the weekend dates during which you would be able to attend. Men of the congregation high school age and above are encouraged to attend.

Looking Ahead – Missionary David Koenig is scheduled to deliver a sermon and Bible Class here in Bismarck on Sunday, July 18, as part of his furlough duties when he is here in the States. Please mark your calendars and make every effort to attend.

CLC Convention – A summary of the recent Convention in Eau Claire will be available in the coming days.