

"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 justification and reconciliation. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

The English language is full of nonsense phrases, known as idioms, that convey something other than a literal meaning. Face the music, kick the bucket, buy the ranch. 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 by 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 do whatever he wants, which to the Godless means the right to 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. Those are

the things that represent true liberty, and such things are the possession only of God's children - Christians.

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 as 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 has already been 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 new man is 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 longs to see in his children, 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 Christians (who knows that their sins are forgiven) from wanting to return to their 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 very concept 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 within the bonds of marriage – 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 only allow ourselves to be ***"led by the Spirit."*** What remains for us to answer or define then is just what it means to ***"led by the Spirit"*** or to ***"walk in the Spirit."***

To be ***"led by"*** or ***"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.

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. Live continuously 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

^{ESV}(**Galatians 6:1-10**) Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵ For each will have to bear his own load. ⁶ Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. ⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

^{ESV}(**Luke 10:1-11**) After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. ² And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.'

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – July 7, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 323 (Red Hymnal)

"With Broken Heart and Contrite Sigh"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

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

The First Lesson: (Galatians 6:1-10) Paul concludes his Epistle to the Galatians with counsel that is both precious and timely. Note how we are to bear each other's burdens in Christian love, but that each must stand before God all on his own. It is a grave mistake to imagine that we can fool God, or that anyone can be saved by the Christian faith of another. We must all stand before the God on his Day of Judgment. Only those with faith in Jesus Christ will be allowed to enter God's heaven.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 146 (Page 41)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 10:1-11) Our second reading is the account of Jesus sending out the 72 in pairs to prepare for his arrival. They were told to take nothing with them, not even money. The purpose was apparently two-fold. First, to teach those sent that the God that they served can and will provide for them. Second, to establish God's plan that those who dedicate themselves to such work should be supported by those who benefit from that work. Their message was simple: The kingdom of God is at hand. That same message is equally applicable today. The time of grace is short.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 437 (Red Hymnal)

"Who Trusts in God, a Strong Abode"

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

"Irreconcilable Differences"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post Sermon Hymn – 778 (Brown Hymnal)

"Grace Has a Thrilling Sound"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 53 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Abide, O Dearest Jesus"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (27) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Mr. Karl Olmanson is considering the call to Faith of Markesan. Leah Fossum is considering the call to Holy Trinity of West Columbia. Pastor Timothy Daub has returned the call to Bethel of Morris. There may be interest in starting a mission effort in the Brainerd/Crosby area. Please speak to Pastor Roehl if you know of anyone in that area that might be interested.

Black Hills Camping Trip – This summer's Black Hills Family Bible Camp has been scheduled for Friday evening, July 19th, through Tuesday morning, July 23rd. For more information please call Pastor Aaron Ude at (605) 393-1311 or email him at aaronude@gmail.com.

Looking Ahead – This year's **Vacation Bible School** has been scheduled for August 5-9. Sessions will run from 6:30-8:30 each day. Our **Annual Church Picnic** has been scheduled for the following Sunday, August 11th. The site is Hillside Lion's Park, Shelter #1.

Candidates for Immanuel Professor Call – Nominations are being solicited to fill the vacancy which will be created by the retirement of Professor Paul Sullivan at the end of the 2019-20 academic year. The position would require the ability to teach in a variety of areas, which may include high school and college courses in religion, social sciences, and church history. To fill a current need on campus, this individual would need to be able to provide spiritual counsel and encouragement to students in the Word of God, understanding and addressing the particular challenges that students often face today, and someone who is seminary trained. The position would begin with the 2020-21 academic year. The deadline for nominations is July 15. See Pastor Roehl for further details.