

"Blameless for the Coming"
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

November 29, 2015

1st Sunday of Advent

We live in a culture where it seems as if no one is responsible for anything, yet, when someone does wrong, we enjoy playing the "blame game" to determine culpability. We blame a person's genetic make up (God made me this way.) We blame a person's environment (I lived in a bad part of town and was raised badly.). We even blame other people. (She MADE me do it.) We blame anything we can in order to appear blameless ourselves.

We like to try the same thing before God – appear blameless – by blaming something else. The devil made me do it so it's not my fault. I didn't know that was wrong so it's not my fault. I didn't mean to do it so it's not my fault. Times have changed and so has our interpretation of the Bible so it's not my fault. The list could go on and on. We hope to become blameless by pushing the blame away from us.

But we can't do it. Our relationship with God has been shattered. The Word of God puts the blame for that solely on us. The Bible says, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51) It is our nature to sin. We are born that way. It is who we are.

Because of who we are, we choose to act on our sinful nature and commit sinful actions. It doesn't matter who you are – life long Lutheran, new convert, blatant unbeliever. All are the same. The Bible says, "For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (Rom. 3:22-23)

Our holy God has set a standard of holiness for all of His creatures, including you and me, for which He holds us accountable. He holds us accountable for each thought, word, and deed which violate His (and not the world's) standard for what is wrong and what is right. We are certainly not blameless. Because of who we are and what we have done, we have fallen short of the glory of God. We can blame no one or nothing for our sin. We have the blame for our sin and with the blame come the consequences – death now here on earth and death eternally in hell.

Advent is the time when we focus on Christ's coming. To most people, that means Christmas. People like to dwell on Christ's first coming as a Baby in Bethlehem because it seems cuter and more peaceful. But Jesus came that first time for a reason. It was not to blame us for our sin, although He certainly could have. We richly deserved the blame. He did not come that first time to punish us for our sin, although He certainly could have, too. Rather, the Scriptures say, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Jesus saved the world by taking the world's sin upon Himself on the cross and dying as the perfect once and for all sacrifice for sin. He has removed your sin from you so that God no longer blames you for it. You could say that God "blamed" Jesus for your sin while He hung upon the cross and His Father unleashed His wrath and anger upon His only Son.

Because of what Jesus did on the cross, you are blameless before God. Jesus' resurrection from the dead is proof of that. His resurrection is the receipt for the payment of sin. That status of being blameless before God is something each of us has received as a gift by faith. What a joy to know that God no longer blames us for our sins! What a relief to know that the punishment for sin has been given to another for us.

How do we lead blameless lives now until the time when Christ comes again? In our text, Paul is writing to the church in Thessalonica. The people there were very concerned about the end times. Paul loves them dearly, prays for them constantly, and hopes to see them again. Until that time, Paul says, "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness."

It is interesting to note that Paul links hearts established blameless in holiness with increasing and abounding in love, rather than faith. Is Paul saying that love is more important than faith in establishing our hearts blameless in holiness? Some would say that. Some would say that showing love is more important than what you believe.

But Paul isn't saying that hear. Paul has already mentioned the faith of the Thessalonians prior to our text. Faith comes first and then love. But love will indeed come as a result of faith. In fact, love can only increase and abound as faith increases and abounds. So, when love appears to be lacking among us, as it will among sinful people, we should not seek to have greater love, but greater faith, in order to have blameless hearts.

Jesus comes to us, right now in this place, in order to establish our hearts blameless in holiness by increasing and strengthening our faith. He who made our hearts blameless by taking the blame Himself keeps our hearts blameless in holiness through His Word and His Sacraments. We hear His voice through the pastor speak words of forgiveness and encouragement in the Absolution and, in the Scripture readings and sermon, give us faith-strengthening words of support. We receive Him, our Lord Jesus Himself, in Holy Communion. He gives us His body and blood with the bread and wine that we might have pardon and peace through the renewing and strengthening of our faith.

A strong faith will show itself in increased and abounding love for one another and for all people. Faith connects us to Christ and His love. And His love flows to us, through us, and out to others. That love will show itself in actions and not mere words.

Our text concludes by speaking of our hearts being established "blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." This coming may frighten us. We enjoy the humble coming of the Lord Jesus as a baby in a manger on Christmas to save us. We appreciate the hidden coming of the Lord Jesus in His Word and Sacraments to forgive us and strengthen our faith. But the powerful coming of the Lord Jesus on the Last Day as the Judge of all people may make us uneasy or even scared.

But it shouldn't. Our Lord and Savior is merely completing His process of saving us which He started long ago and finishes on the Last Day. He came a first time to make us blameless and holy by taking the blame on Himself and becoming sin for us. He continually comes to us now to keep us blameless and holy by giving us His Word and Sacraments to forgive our sins and renew our faith.

Our hearts WILL, therefore, be “blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.” He has made them so. On the Last Day, He will come again to claim us as His own and present us to His Father as His blameless and holy people.

The thought of the Last Day should never cause us fear or dread, but only hope and anticipation. We should look forward to it more than we do Christmas. We should celebrate it with greater joy than we do Christmas. This is why the Scriptures so often compare it with a wedding. It will be a time of unmitigated and inexhaustible joy as the Christ, the Bridegroom, comes for His Bride, the Church to begin an eternal celebration. The Word of God describes it this way: “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” (Eph. 5:25-27)

The ancient Advent prayer (which still is ours today) is short, sweet, and to the point: Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.