

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

Last week's sermon theme was: "the Gospel of Christ." We carefully considered what the Gospel of Christ is, what it does, and why it is vital. We noted in accord with Romans 1:16 that the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, for it is the means by which God transforms sinners into saints as He gifts folks with faith in Jesus Christ the only Savior, since Romans 10:17 plainly reports: "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Now, some folks make the mistake of thinking that once they have faith they can live as they please in satisfying their sinful flesh to the max, for they hold to the mistaken notion that once one is in faith one can never fall from faith. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ in the parable of the sower teaches: "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away." (Luke 8:11, 13) Accordingly, there are some whose genuine God-given faith in Jesus Christ is short-lived. Hence, we Christians must never become complacent about our faith and the things of God.

Therefore, our Scripture selection can be of great help to us as it in effect urges:

"CONTINUE TO HIGHLY VALUE THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST"

With that as our theme may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) How to continue to highly value the Gospel of Christ
- 2) Why to continue to highly value the Gospel of Christ

Our text is taken from the Apostle Paul's epistle to the Hebrews, the words given by inspiration of God being first addressed to Jewish Christians, for Paul opens the epistle with the following words: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." (Hebrews 1:1-3) Thus, Paul refers to the fact that the Jewish forefathers had the words of God spoken to them by the prophets, and that now in the last days – the New Testament era – God has spoken by His Son, Jesus Christ.

And what are the most important words Jesus ever spoke? The Gospel— the glad tidings that He is the promised Messiah, the Christ, for Jesus said: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 12:46-48; 14:6)

Accordingly, in the first verse of Hebrews chapter two the Apostle Paul exhorts fellow Christians with the following words: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." And, in Hebrews 12:14, just prior to our text, we are exhorted: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." But, take it to heart we have NO holiness without Jesus Christ's perfect righteousness being imputed to us, "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon

all them that believe,” as Romans 3:22 informs us. So, it is vital for us Christians to continue to have a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, for Ephesians 2:8-10 states: “by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Our Scripture selection for today emphasizes the necessity of continuing to highly value the Gospel of Christ, as we shall plainly see as we proceed.

Verses 15 & 16, ----- (Hebrews 12:15-16)

Note well that we Christians are to be *Looking diligently lest any one of us fail of the grace of God.* Yes, we Christians need to look diligently to our spiritual health so that we do not fall from God’s grace. And how is it that we can avoid failing of the grace of God? Only by continuing in the means of grace that the Lord has given to us by which He keeps us in the faith— namely, the Gospel of Christ when preached, read, or attached to visible elements in the sacraments instituted and commanded by Christ. Our Lord Jesus says to us as He once said to the believing Jews during His visible sojourn on earth: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32) Additionally, in regards to the Lord’s Supper as instituted by Christ, we read in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, “That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.”

Furthermore, to look diligently to our spiritual health we Christians need to daily and sincerely repent of our sins, for 1 John 1:8-10 declares: “If

we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” Thus, we will continue to highly value the Gospel of Christ only while we continue in God’s Word and sacrament while persisting in daily sincere repentance.

We Christians need to beware of becoming filled with self-pride, elevating our own works, and letting down our guard against temptation, *lest any one of us fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble us, and thereby many be defiled.*

The expression “root of bitterness” refers to poison; therefore, we are warned against spiritual poisoning which occurs when folks embrace any false doctrines or practices, for such bitter roots rob us of the genuine Gospel of Christ and leave us defiled since it is only “the blood of Jesus Christ” God’s “Son” that “cleanseth us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

One example of a “root of bitterness” that has sprung up, troubled, and defiled many Christians, is the horrible teaching that one’s own works of penance are necessary in addition to faith in Jesus Christ if one would have the full forgiveness of all sins. There are so-called priests who tell people to repeat the Lord’s Prayer a certain number of times in order to earn forgiveness for this or that sin! Such a bitter-root contradicts Holy Scripture and defames Christ and His Gospel by holding Jesus’ supreme sacrifice of Himself with the shedding of His own holy blood was not sufficient to pay for all the sins of all people! Additionally, such a practice makes a mockery of the Lord’s Prayer as it’s used as a punishment for sin.

My friends, if we would continue to highly value the Gospel of Christ we must constantly be aware that we dwell in sinful flesh, and are regularly tempted by it and the devil and the wicked world. So, we need to be *Looking diligently lest any one of*

us fail of the grace of God... Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

Fornication is any kind of sexual relations outside of holy wedlock. Sexual temptations are many, and our text makes it clear that we must be on guard against those temptations since if we fall into such sin we can also fall from God's grace by losing our faith in Jesus Christ. Indeed, for Hebrews 13:4 clearly states: "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." Thus, we can continue to highly value the Gospel of Christ by being actively on guard against the temptations of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh.

Being a profane-person means being wicked and heathenish, as was Esau who considered a little physical food more important than his birthright—his privileges as Isaac's firstborn. Esau valued earthly things more than heavenly things— a problem among many Christians to this very day. We read in Genesis 25:27-34, "Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob. And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright." Esau's priorities were wrong.

Verse 17, ----- (Hebrews 12:17)

Esau was foolish to have sold his birthright for a little food and drink, *For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of*

repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

It's as we read in Genesis 27:37-40, "Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him [i.e. Jacob] thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son? And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept. And Isaac his father answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck." All the tears that Esau shed could not make his father Isaac repent and change his promises given to Jacob. Jacob would be and was the person from whom the greatest blessing – the promised Messiah, the Christ – would come, according to the flesh. So it happened, for both Jesus' mother Mary and His foster-father Joseph were descended from Jacob, not Esau.

Let us therefore remember the importance of highly valuing the Gospel of Christ. Let us truly highly value the Gospel of Christ by looking diligently to our spiritual health, valuing and continuing in God's Word and sacrament, and being on guard against the temptations of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh.

-2-

As we ponder our text to its conclusion, let us see why to continue to highly value the Gospel of Christ.

Verses 18-24, ----- (Hebrews 12:18-24)

We Christians should continue to highly value the Gospel of Christ because it is far superior to God's Law, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen

God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 1:17-18) Yes, *we are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake).* Yeah, even the mighty prophet Moses was fearful at the sights and sounds of Mount Sinai; so, it’s no wonder that Exodus 20:18-19 reports: “And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

Take it to heart that when God is viewed by His holy Law, we all have reason to be fearful, for Romans 3:19-20 plainly states: “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” But thankfully, we Christians, *are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

And how is it that we Christians are come to spiritual mount Zion, Christ’s Church? By God’s grace and power working in and through the Gospel of Christ, which we should then certainly continue to highly value, since “it is the power of

God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:16-17)

Think of it. Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant, for He has kept God’s Law perfectly for us and has paid for our lack of keeping it, for Holy Writ reports: “what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (Romans 8:3-4; John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:5-6)

When Cain murdered his brother Abel, “the voice of” Cain’s “brother’s blood” cried unto the Lord “from the ground,” relates Genesis 4:10. On the other hand, Jesus’ holy shed red blood did not cry from the ground for vengeance since Jesus’ blood in fact fully satisfied God’s justice because Jesus’ infinitely precious blood paid for ALL the sins of ALL people, for Jesus “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” (Romans 4:25) And, 1 John 2:2 informs us concerning Jesus Christ: “he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Accordingly, we should certainly continue to highly value the Gospel of Christ, for, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) Let us never forget that there is NO salvation personally had without a God-given, God-sustained, living faith in Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior and Lord.

Verses 25-29, ----- (Hebrews 12:25-29)

The closing verses of our text further urge us to continue to highly value the Gospel of Christ as the power of God unto salvation which it most certainly is, for we are given warnings regarding casting it aside, for we just read: *See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.*

It is despicable when we see the glorious Gospel of Christ mocked and ridiculed. It angers those of us who love the Lord and His Word when we behold the Holy Bible treated with contempt, changed, contradicted, or cast aside. And yet, we ourselves must remember to continue to highly value the Gospel of Christ since our sinful flesh, the devil, and the world tempt us to turn from it.

Let us never forget that 2 Peter 2:20-22 states concerning Christians: "if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Let us by God's grace, mercy, and power persevere in the TRUTH OF JESUS CHRIST, THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL OF CHRIST, *For our God is a consuming fire.*

Indeed, there is NO escape from divine vengeance

and justice when one departs this life without a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, for the great Day of Judgment awaits all people, and Mark 16:16 clearly declares: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Therefore, let each and every one of us continue to highly value the Gospel of Christ. God grant it for Jesus sake. Amen.

m.e.l.