

“God Only Remembers the Good”

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Last week’s Epistle Lesson and this week’s overlap. Last week, we heard a portion of Paul’s words which we read this evening/morning from 2nd Corinthians. Our bodies are an earthly tent, a temporary dwelling place. Remember, you are God’s tabernacle where the Holy Spirit dwells. And we long for the heavenly dwelling.

Over the past few weeks, I have also referenced Paul’s comparison of our bodies being “jars of clay” — feeble, temporary, very breakable containers, yet in us is contained the most valuable treasure: the Gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. You carry that with you wherever you go.

Today we also hear Paul say something very interesting to our Lutheran ears. He says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

This verse is a great example why the common practice of “proof texting” is inherently flawed. A “proof text” will often be used by those who are trying to make a point or prove a certain teaching that is not historically

held by the church because it is a teaching which is not consistent with the rest of God's Word. They take one text, take it out of its greater context and say "Aha!"

Look at the damage you could do with Paul's words from 2 Cor. 5:10 if you do not understand these words in the light of the rest of God's Word. When you stand before the judgment seat of Christ, you will receive your reward based on what you have done – whether good or evil. That doesn't sound very Lutheran. Are we in agreement with Paul? Yes we are.

Paul also says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" [Eph. 2:8-9]. That is on the back of my business card.

So which is it? Is our reward based on what we have done – whether good or evil, or is it a gracious gift from God, not a result of works? To understand how these verses fit together, you have to understand the full context.

Before I explain what I mean, I will add to the confusion and then, hopefully, end the confusion. A few weeks ago, on Trinity Sunday, as we do each year on that day, we confessed the Athanasian Creed. The final verses of that confession of faith use some of the same language as 2 Cor. 5:10. We joined together with Christ's Church throughout the ages and confessed, "At His coming all people will rise again with their bodies and give an account concerning their own deeds. And those who have done good will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil into eternal fire."

Again, that really doesn't clear things up. It does add to the

confusion. So here is the lesson to be learned: When you are faced with an unclear or confusing passage from God's Word, you must interpret it according to the more clear statements from God's Word. Let Scripture interpret Scripture.

You do not get into heaven by doing good. Paul says that all of us have sinned and have fallen short of what God demands? John says in his first epistle, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So we have all sinned. We have all done evil while in our bodies. Paul says, those who have done evil will go into eternal fire. Yet, Paul says that none of this is a result of our works. To ask a very Lutheran question, "What does this mean?"

It really all does fit together. Last week, we talked a lot about Baptism because we had just finished Vacation Bible School: Splash Canyon – with our focus on Baptism. In Baptism, you are born again. Because of your Baptism, you are now clothed in the righteousness of Christ. When God looks upon His baptized faithful children, like yourselves, He only sees Christ who has covered your sin. As I like to say, this is your permanent baptismal garment that God has given to you. It is the only appropriate clothing to wear in the presence of God.

When you appear before the judgment seat of Christ, you will receive what is due for what you have done while in the body, whether good or evil. But your evil, your sin, all that you have ever done against God's will; all thoughts, words, and deeds for which you should be held accountable – these are all covered by Christ and are remembered no more.

So when you appear before the judgment seat, only the good that you have done will be remembered. You are saved by grace, through faith. It is not of your own doing; it is a gift from God, not a result of your works. But you will receive your reward based on what you have done. We thank God that He only remembers the good of His baptized faithful children.

Tomorrow/Today we celebrate Father's Day. There is no better gift that you can give to your children than to raise them in a home where God's Word is active, taught, and lived – to provide a home where grace and forgiveness abound. Especially for you fathers here today, I encourage you to keep in mind, as God's Word clearly and repeatedly points out, you are the ones who are ultimately held accountable and are responsible for teaching God's Word to your children. God has specifically given you this "burden," but I hope that you see it as a privilege.

Teaching your children and raising them to appreciate what God has done for you and for them is the one gift you give them that will never wear out, fade, break down, rust, corrode, or go out of fashion. Everything else that you have to offer is only a part of this temporary earthly tent.

As we heard last week and this week, we long to put on our heavenly dwelling. He has already prepared a place for you in His eternal kingdom. You are already clothed in the righteousness of Christ. He has already covered your sin, and He remembers it no more. You will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and you will receive what is due for what you have done while in the body, whether good or evil. On this Father's Day, give thanks to God that your Father in heaven only remembers the good. Amen.