

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

“And when [the Helper] has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

Jesus is speaking of His death, resurrection, and ascension. He speaks to the 12, His chosen disciples, preparing them for the time when He would no longer be among them as He had been before.

Jesus is the Way, so goes on His way; He must go to the cross and grave first, for sins, then, into resurrection and rebirth. But then, Jesus continues on His way, for He ascends into heaven, and is no more seen as He was before. Now the Comforter, that is, the Holy Ghost, comes to His church. (Burnell F. Eckardt, Jr. in *Every Day Will I Bless Thee*)

There, in Jesus' Bride, the Church, the Holy Ghost does His work.

What is the work of the Holy Ghost? It is simply what you confess in the third article of the Creed, though the work isn't simple. The Holy Ghost contends against you—your sinful flesh—as He does His work, never calling attention to Himself, but bringing you to Jesus and Jesus to you.

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.

What does this mean?

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.

The Holy Ghost takes from what is Jesus and declares it to you—He gives it to you: forgiveness, life, and salvation. This He does through the means of grace, which He uses to give you Jesus where Jesus promises to be present for you—in His Church.

In today's Gospel, Jesus describes for His disciples how that looks:

- The Helper will convict the world of sin because they do not believe in Jesus.
- The Helper will convict the world of righteousness because Jesus goes to the Father and you see Him no more.
- The Helper will convict the world of judgment because the ruler of this world is judged.

You may have heard me say from time to time that all sin is unbelief. This is where that comes from. Unbelief is the root of all sin. When you transgress the Law of God, you are demonstrating that you do not believe in God. It was written by James, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” (James 2:10) Therefore, it follows, that if you break any of the commandments, then you have not kept the first. “You shall have no other gods before me.” “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.”

So, you may think...

2. ...that while you wish evil upon those who have wronged you,

3. ...that while you, just this once, miss church for the sake of catching up on some missed sleep,
4. ...that while you are disrespectful of your parents or other authorities,
5. ...that while you speak ill of your neighbors,
6. ...that while you enjoy telling or hearing obscene jokes,
7. ...that while you scheme or try to get your neighbor's possessions in ways that only seem right,
8. ...that while you listen to or spread gossip about your neighbors,
9. ...that while you are jealous or envious of what your neighbor has,
- 10....that while you grow bored with your family and friendships,

that you fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Notice, however, that in every one of those instances, running through Commandments 2 through 10, you are setting yourself up in the place of honor and reverence. While you do these things, your actions betray you; you demonstrate your unbelief, your mistrust of God. And, as James says, if you're guilty of one point of the Law, you are guilty of the whole thing.

Dear hearers, this is how the Helper uses the Law: He uses it to convict you of sin—to show you your sinfulness, your unbelief, and your need for a Savior. For, without the conviction of sin, the sinner has no use for Christ. St. Paul wrote,

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those 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 no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.  
(Romans 3:19-20)

The Helper will convict the world of sin because they do not believe in Jesus. So, by the proclamation of the Law, the Helper brings you to repentance, so that you may be turned from unbelief to faith in Christ—a faith which looks to Jesus and His merits, won on the cross, for the forgiveness of your sins, life, and salvation.

Therefore, the Helper will convict the world of righteousness, because Jesus goes to the Father and you see Him no more. Jesus has gone to the cross, and nailed to that awful tree, shed His blood and died in your place that He would give you His life. This is the Blessed Exchange, that Jesus the Christ died your death that you may live His life. Jesus set Himself up between you and the Father, that He would in your place suffer the full wrath of God, shielding you and all the world from it. And He died. And He rose again.

So, the Helper takes from what is of Jesus—takes His death and resurrection—and proclaims to you that they are yours. He convicts you of righteousness, because in Jesus Christ—for His sake—you are the righteousness of God.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.  
(Romans 3:21-26)

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Of course, we still run into a problem. You live in a world where you still struggle with those Ten Commandments—with the whole will and law of God. You still wish evil upon those who have wronged you. You still miss church from time to time to make up for lost sleep. You still are disrespectful of your parents and other authorities. You still speak ill of your neighbors. You still enjoy telling and hearing obscene jokes. You still scheme and try to get your neighbor's possessions, even in ways that only seem right. You still list to and spread gossip about your neighbors. You still are jealous

and envious of what your neighbor has. You still grow bored with your family and friends.

The Old Evil Foe means to work you woe; deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight. He will use the fact that you struggle with God's Law to convince you that God does not love you. The devil seeks to condemn you right along with himself. "Look at what you have done," he says. "You prove yourself to be in unbelief and an enemy of God. Christ's righteousness is not yours." Fiercely he scowls, but cannot harm you. The Helper has more in His arsenal to combat the Old Evil Foe.

The Helper will convict the world of judgment because the ruler of this world is judged. He's judged; the deed is done. One little word can fell him: τέτελεσται—it is finished! (cf. John 19:30) And if it is finished, then the Accuser is judged and condemned, and you are judged and not condemned. For the sake of Christ, the judgment against you is not guilty.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4)

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. (Romans 8:31-34)

There is judgment, but there is no condemnation. So, you can echo what Martin Luther said in his lectures on Galatians:

Let us remember this well in our personal temptations, when the devil accuses and terrifies our conscience to bring it to the point of despair. He is the father of lies and the enemy of Christian freedom. At every moment, therefore, he troubles us with false terrors, so that when this freedom has been lost, the conscience is in continual fear and feels guilt and anxiety. When that "great dragon, the ancient serpent, the devil, the deceiver of the whole world, who accuses our brethren day and night before God"—when, I say, he comes to you and accuses you not only of failing to do anything good but of transgressing against the Law of God, then you must say: "You are troubling me with the memory of past sins; in addition, you are telling me that I have not done anything good. This does not concern me. For if I either trusted in my performance of good works or lost my trust because I failed to perform them, in either case Christ would be of no avail to me. Therefore whether you base your objections to me on my sins or on my good works, I do not care; for I put both of them out of sight and depend only on the freedom for which Christ has set me free. Therefore I shall not render Him useless to me, which is what would happen if I either presumed that I shall attain grace and eternal life because of my good works or despaired of my salvation on account of my sins."<sup>1</sup>

In other words, you can say to the devil when he accuses you, "Yes, I am all of those things and more, but I am covered by the blood of Jesus, which covers a multitude of sins. You are judged and condemned, but I am forgiven for all of my sins for the sake of Jesus Christ."

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, American Edition, vol. 27