

## TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

1 Corinthians 10:6-13; Luke 16:1-9

Here are some words from a blog:

Maybe soon, I will see God and Jesus. At least that is what I was told. Eternal life does NOT depend on works. If it did, we will all be in hell. Christ paid for EVERY sin, so how can I or you be judged BY GOD for a sin when the penalty was ALREADY paid. People judge but that does not matter. I was reading the Bible and The Integrity of God beginning yesterday, because soon I will see them. (<http://abcnews.go.com/US/Story?id=8258001&page=4>)

Can you guess what blog it's from? It's from the blog of the man who recently murdered several people at a gym in Pennsylvania. This was his understanding of the gospel. In essence, "I'm forgiven, so I can do whatever I want, and you can't judge me, because I'm forgiven, and like it or not, I'm going to heaven whatever I do, because, well, I'm forgiven." And he did do whatever he wanted, and he took the lives of several people, and he took his own. That was clearly wrong. I will be the first to judge his actions in that regard. I would hope you feel the same way. But was his religious view wrong? Did he understand the gospel? How do you understand the gospel? Is your view much different than his? Are you free to do whatever you want because, well, you're forgiven, because you're going to heaven no matter what you do? Is heaven not only God's free gift to you through Christ's death and resurrection, but a free pass to let love go by the wayside, to make yourself your own god and live and die for what you want and what you want alone? Hear his words again:

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Jesus today tells one of the most difficult parables in the entire Bible. It's a difficult parable because it seems to contradict what He says elsewhere and to commend dishonest dealings. So what's going on here?

The dishonest manager was about to lose his job, his livelihood. Why? Because of his works. He had done wickedly with what had been entrusted to him. He fully deserved to be dismissed from his position, to be thrown out into the streets if not into the jailhouse. That much is clear. So why does the master commend the dishonest manager, and notice Jesus calls him the dishonest manager even as he speaks of the master commending him? The master commended him for his shrewdness. That is the point of comparison. Jesus makes that clear with the explanation, "*For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.*" What then is the point of the parable? Jesus makes that clear as well, "*And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.*"

We are the dishonest manager whenever we use what God has given us, any of our personal abilities ("body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members, my mind and all my abilities," as the Catechism says), temporal blessings ("clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life," to quote the Catechism again), or yes, even our salvation, to a selfish, self-

serving, or self-righteous end, rather than to God's glory and the maintenance of our standing in Christ before Him. We have perhaps been shrewd in our dealings to a personal end, but have we truly been shrewd as Jesus commends here, laying up treasures in heaven, making friends of God and our fellow saints with that which has been entrusted to us?

Salvation is a free gift. The Bible is clear on that, again and again and indisputably. It is a gift received through God's gift of faith, given us on account of Christ's perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection. We are justified before God by grace through faith, but does that justify ungodly behavior, whatever foolish thing it is we get a whim to do? Are we now freely saved to freely cast aside God's law? St. Paul says it well to the Corinthians, who had taken just such an attitude, using the example of the great number of Israelites, the redeemed children of God, who had fallen back into their sins, shipwrecked their faith, and forfeited the heavenly Promised Land that awaited them. He urges these confused Corinthians, "*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*"

Are the blogger's words Christian words, are they Jesus' teaching?

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No, such words are not words of faith, words of the forgiven, words of those who have been made right with God and desire to remain as such. Such words are not sure of salvation in a godly way, but rather are sure of themselves, full of pride, self-righteousness, and the confidence not of the Spirit but the flesh. Such words are words of those who have stopped wrestling with temptation, and thus have lost the fight, have tapped out of the ring, have given up that which was freely given to them, not cheap grace but costly grace, won for them by God's Son's own tragic death.

St. Paul continues in our second lesson, "*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*" Christ has set us free from sin, not to sin. As the child forgiven by his or her father or mother rightly grows in love for that parent and seeks to act more faithfully toward him or her, so also we as Christians are driven to love our heavenly Father all the more whenever we are forgiven, to return to our Baptism and not like a dog to our vomit or like a sow to the mud.

God is good, and He has not only given you heaven but while on earth he has given you good gifts to use in the light of that light to come. Be shrewd with such, to bring God glory and to serve your neighbor, to store up not only treasure in heaven but friends. As a wife who has received a gift from her husband shows what it means to her by how she wears it and what she does with it, so also we as Christians show what all that which we have received from God means to us by how we wear it and what we do with it. Put on the righteousness of Christ, God's gift to you through faith, and act in it in accord with His gracious will for all those with whom you deal and for His great pleasure and glory as He sees you putting it to good use. Amen.