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- ⁵ I Corinthians 5:1.
⁶ I Corinthians 5:9-10.
⁷ I Corinthians 5:11.
⁸ I Corinthians 5:11 (RSV).
⁹ I Corinthians 6:9-10 (RSV).
¹⁰ Cf. I Corinthians 7:2.
¹¹ I Corinthians 5:5.
¹² Cf. II Corinthians 13:1.
¹³ St. Matthew 7:3 (RSV); St. Luke 6:41 (RSV).
¹⁴ Cf. Romans 14:13.
¹⁵ St. Matthew 18:15-17 (RSV).
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SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the third Chapter of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis.²

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly

shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them. And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the sixth Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.³

“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels?

Conclusion:

Our Lord has warned us that we are not to look at the speck that is in our brother's eye while ignoring the log that is in our own.¹³ This should be more than enough to remind us how very touchy a thing it is for Christians to be put in the position of having to make judgements about others' conduct – notice that I do not say “to judge others”, for that is something completely different;¹⁴ I say only “having to make judgements about others' conduct”, not about the state or prospects of their immortal souls.

Our Lord set forth the Christian approach to known sinners in these words:

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”¹⁵

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister¹⁶
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¹ *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 34 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxvi (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (CIPBC 1963).

² Genesis 3:1-end (KJV).

³ I Corinthians 6:1-end (KJV).

⁴ I Corinthians 6:9-10 (RSV).

gaging in homosexual or lesbian conduct, but may only feel drawn to others of their own sexes, is both wrong and unfair.

To use these labels for tendencies, for temptations, for inclinations, rather than to restrict them to actions, is just like labeling all people of heterosexual inclinations as “adulterers” or “fornicators”. After all, there is no sexually normal person alive who has not felt at least once an urge, an inclination, a temptation, to stray from the path of strict chastity.¹⁰

And that is the Christian rule: we are to live in chastity, all of us, regardless of which particular form of unchastity it may be that we are most tempted by. And the law of chastity is itself quite simple: overt sexual conduct is to take place only between one man and one woman who are each united to the other by the Sacrament of Matrimony. Those two are to observe fidelity and everyone else is to observe abstinence.

That rule is very easy to understand, however difficult it may prove to be to abide by it. If anyone doubts that it is a high and stringent rule, he or she need only pay attention to the covers of the tabloid publications that infest the supermarket checkout lines.

So when St. Paul denounces the immoral, adulterers, sexual perverts, the greedy, the idolatrous, the revilers, the drunken, and the robbers, he is not directing us to sever our fellowship with those who are merely *suspected* of these transgressions. We are to reserve the ultimate sanction of breaking communion¹¹ for those who are *known* to be living sinful lives¹² and who, after we remonstrate with them about their errors, continue obstinately to disregard their Christian obligations.

how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith [SETH] he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

Today’s Lesson is taken from St. Paul’s sixth Chapter of his First Letter to the Corinthians. That comes, of course, immediately after his fifth Chapter, which is where we find his famous rebuke to that community for its tolerating the continued presence within it of a man who was living in open concubinage with his stepmother, that is, in incest.

So we really must look first to Chapter 5 in order to find how Paul has set the stage for Chapter 6. There, Paul takes to task the Corinthian Christians for keeping church fellowship with one guilty of incest and points out that not even the pagans would be found guilty of doing any such thing.⁵

Because Christians live in the midst of the world, they will encounter many immoral people,⁶ but they are not to take such people into fellowship with them as integral members of the Christian community.⁷ And in making this distinction, Paul gives list of examples of conduct that cannot be tolerated among Christian brothers and sisters, that is, in fact, so grossly immoral that Christians should not even sit down to the table to eat in the company of such people: those who are guilty of immorality, greed, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness, or robbery.⁸

It is interesting to compare Chapter 5’s list of communion-breaking actions with its near repetition in Chapter 6: the immoral, adulterers, sexual perverts, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, and robbers.⁹ The only difference is that in Chapter 5 Paul denounces idolaters, while in Chapter 6 he omits specific mention of idolaters and adds to his denunciation of the immoral specific denigrations of adulterers and sexual perverts.

Now here we must be sure about one thing. Clearly, in taking the Corinthians to task for the irregular domestic situation that Paul described in Chapter 5, he and they must have had good reason for believing that the relationship between the stepson and the stepmother was an intimate one and not a matter of a man’s merely showing filial piety by continuing to provide a home for his father’s widow. That is, the situation must have been clear and must have become a matter of open scandal.

In the same way, each of the sins that Paul denounced either in Chapter 5 or in Chapter 6 is a matter of outward conduct which can be verified *objectively*. We are talking here about what people *actually* do, not what they may be *tempted* to do. This is particularly easy to get confused about in our world. For example, when people casually throw around certain labels for sexual perversions, those labels are sometimes taken to apply to those who may feel temptations to commit unnatural acts but who struggle against those temptations and try sincerely to live by the Christian law of chastity.

It is not a *subjective* test. We do not properly concern ourselves with the sins from which others are refraining, only with those which others are committing in such open and notorious fashion that we have actual knowledge of them. So, for example, to use terms such as “gay” or “lesbian”, when the objects of those terms are not actually en-