



*19 Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, **Peace be unto you.** 20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. 21 Then said Jesus to them again, **Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.** 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, **Receive ye the Holy Ghost:** 23 **Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.**" (John 20:19-23)*

Those wicked of this world seek to separate themselves from the reality of a Living God. But the day will come when that separation will become real and eternal. At that day they will run to the mountains and plead for the mountains to fall on them to relieve them of their misery of separation from God, for to be separated from God is no less than Hell itself. A kind and consoling word will never be uttered in Hell. Since there is a separation from God, there is no mercy. To the reprobate sinner, there remains only *a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?* (Heb 10:27-29) I speak often with men, women, and young people who argue for a different kind of mercy than God offers – a mercy that ignores the Law of God, and attempts to adjudicate intentional sin by false claims of love and mercy¹. Yes, God forgives, but He does not condone habitual and intentional sin that goes without repentance.

Willful sin is an affront to a Holy God. If God condemns adultery in the most explicit terms; it is an offense to the Holy Spirit for a professing Christian to indulge in that sin. If God condemns homosexuality in the most explicit terms; it is an affront to the Holy Spirit to persist in the sin after forgiveness of the same by God. *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.* (2 Peter 2:22) I do not say these warnings out of any malicious umbrage to the sinner, but out of warm affection and

¹ A word often used is *fairness* when one wishes to justify behavior in conflict with Scripture. Search the Bible cover to cover, you will never find this word *fairness*. There is right and there is wrong, *fairness* does not exist.

regard for their souls that may yet be saved by a solemn warning believed². The heart of man desires, continually, to sin; and he will invent many and varied justifications for his sin, but God will not honor those gossamer and flimsy veils for unmitigated sin at the Judgment Seat. It is God's Law, or Mercy, by which we shall be judged. If we choose Law, we perish. If we choose mercy, we will be changed into souls with a humble regard for God's Sovereignty, and a heart of contrition for all sin.

What has this to do with our Easter message today? It is germane in many points. We may presume, erroneously, that God is not privy to either our outward sins, or those of the thoughts of our hearts; but He has constant access to every single act and thought of every person born of woman.

As a prelude to today's text, two of the disciples were walking to a little village named Emmaus – about 8 miles from Jerusalem. *“And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.”* (Luke 24:13-15) We are told that these two men were lamenting the events of the crucifixion and debating how such things could have happened. They did not recognize Jesus who joined in their conversation. Even if we do not know Him, God is always near and aware of our words and deeds. In fact, these two disciples did not recognize Jesus until He broke bread and gave them. Then their eyes were opened to recollect that same moment of the Last Supper when Jesus broke bread and gave them. Communion with God opens the eyes of the disciple to Christ, but the lost remain blind to His mercy and grace. That leaves only the Law by which they must be judged. After this incident, the two disciples return to Jerusalem and report their experience to the others in the Upper Room. It is at this point that today's text comes into account.

*Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, **Peace be unto you.*** That same day at evening was still the first day of the week (Sunday): the day that Mary Magdalene and the others came to the tomb before daylight and found it empty. The same day the two men had an encounter with Christ on the Road to Emmaus. This represents a building block of evidence testifying to them of the reality of the resurrection. Men can witness amazing events, yet a moment later question if they were imagining or not. But a preponderance of evidence will remove such doubts. The events of the past hours had struck terror into the hearts of the disciples. Rumors were rampant, and they knew not what to believe. They closed the door and barred it out of fear in the room in which they were hiding. Suddenly, without so much as a squeak or breeze, Jesus was standing right in their midst. He is always in the midst of His people.

Peace be unto you. His salutation to us is always designed to instill confidence and comfort. *And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.* There may have been a roomful of 'doubting Thomases' there that day for it seems they were convinced by the wounds Jesus revealed to them. To suffer the pains of the cross were evidence enough that a man had died of the torture, but to see the gaping wound in His side made by the Roman spear removed all doubt – “He who was dead is now ALIVE!” Ghost spirits do not have bodies that can be touched, or wounds which can be seen to open up the vail of the heart itself.

² The only thing worse than turning your back on a one who sins, for we are all sinners, is to tell them their actions are justified and thus they may sin on with a clear conscience. For the one is merely damaging to the person who turns their back, the other condemns both.

Then said Jesus to them again, **Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.** God sent His only Begotten Son into the vineyard, but the workers of the vineyard (Jewish rulers) murdered Him outside the gates of the Vineyard (Jerusalem). He endured ridicule, torture, slander, and treason of his friends; yet, He never failed of love and will. He was rejected, but never discouraged. He wants us to be likewise the same teachers of truth that He taught. Are we able? If we stand up strongly on the clear Word of God, I can assure you that we will be denounced as “narrow-minded bigots,” “loveless,” and “incorrigible fanatics.” The world has no choice but to so label us, for, if we are right (and we are because God is right), they have no standing or justification for their pursuit of sin. The world has thrown quite a drunken party. It has become wild with decadent indulgences – but the building is aflame, and all in the world who remain at the party will perish. We sound the alarm – not out of pride or hate – but out of a deep and loving concern for their future souls. But most will never heed our warnings of “FIRE!” They will accuse us of being ‘alarmists.’ The party continues, but perhaps only a few souls will recover their balance and hear the warning. So we persevere.

And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, **Receive ye the Holy Ghost:** Life is imparted by that Breath of God. It was so for Adam in the Garden, and it is so for every mortal born into the world. But the greater gift of life of God is that eternal life imparted when the Holy Spirit has breathed on us and quickened our souls to life in Christ. (Ephesians 2:1-5). But the general benefits of the Holy Ghost, like unto all who come to Christ, is not intended here, I do not believe. I believe here is intended the gifts of the Holy Ghost that will enable the apostles to continue under austere and challenging circumstances in the early age of the Church. His following remark lends credence to that supposition:

Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. Jesus does not mean to grant a sacerdotal mystery in this last sentence. No man, or priest, can forgive sins – or even grant forgiveness of sins on behalf of God. We are to preach and teach the Gospel – precisely the same Gospel that we have heard and read in the Words of Christ. Those who hear, believe, and repent of sin, shall be saved by our preaching and teaching. Their sins have been remitted by our preaching of that sound doctrine and truth of the Gospel. Many will not receive the truth. In fact, their hearts may be hardened against that truth. What hardened their sinful hearts? Our preaching of truth hardened their hearts so that they will have no excuse at the Judgment. They will not be able to proclaim, “No one ever told us!” The Word of God is a two edged sword. *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.* (Heb 4:12-13) Being a discerner of the intents of the hearts and thoughts of men, it has a dual purpose – either to convict of sin, or to condemn in sin. It most often, unfortunately, condemns of sin since the greater numbers of mankind will always choose the broad road that leads down to destruction.

BEWARE that easy and downward sloping path.

CHOOSE the Narrow Way that leads up to God.