

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

dants, as is seen among the Jewish people [Exodus 20:5]. By these punishments, in some lands and persons, God shows His severity to those who are His in order to point out what we all would have well deserved and would be worthy and worth. For we act wickedly in opposition to God's Word. We often grieve the Holy Spirit terribly (Ephesians 4:30]. God shows His punishment in order that we may live in fear of Him and acknowledge and praise His goodness, to the exclusion of, and contrary to, our merit in and with us. He gives His Word to us and leaves it, and He does not harden and reject us.

Because our nature has been corrupted by sin, and is worthy of and subject to God's wrath and condemnation, God does not owe us the Word, the Spirit, or grace. When He graciously bestows these gifts, we often thrust them from us and make ourselves unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46). Therefore, He displays His righteous, well-deserved judgment in some countries, nations, and persons. And when we are placed alongside of them and compared with them, we may learn to recognize and praise God's pure, unmerited grace in the vessels of mercy [Romans 9:23] more diligently:

The article about Christian freedom is at stake here. The Holy Spirit, through the holy apostle's mouth, sincerely told His Church to preserve this article, as we have just heard. As soon as Christian freedom is weakened and human traditions are forced on the Church with coercion, as though it were wrong and a sin to omit them, the way is already prepared for idolatry. In this way, human traditions are multiplied and regarded as a divine worship, not only equal to God's ordinances, but even placed above them.

Furthermore, idolaters are confirmed in their idolatry by such yielding and conforming in outward things, where there has not previously been Christian unity in doctrine. On the other hand, true believers are grieved, offended, and weakened in their faith. Every Christian, for the sake of his soul's welfare and salvation, is bound to avoid both of these, as it is written:

Woe to the world for temptations to sin! (Matthew 18:7)

But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. (Matthew 18:6)

But what Christ says is to be especially remembered:

So everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32) ...

We see that God gives His Word at one place, but not at another. He removes it from one place and allows it to remain at another. Also, one person is hardened, blinded, given over to a depraved mind, while another, who is indeed in the same guilt, is converted again, and so on. In these and similar questions Paul [Romans 11:22-24] fixes a certain limit to show us how far we should go. In part, we should recognize God's judgment. They are well-deserved penalties for sins when God punishes a land or nation for despising His Word so that the punishment extends also to their descen-

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