

Unite in the Light

- **Don't swim by the sewer.** (vv.17-19)

✠ **Wear a new attitude.** (vv.20-24)

In the name of Jesus, our perfectly clean and holy Savior, dear growing-glowing-going Christians:

If you took a look at today's worship folder, you may have noticed once of the most disgusting sermon parts I've ever had to list in the basic outline. You've heard parents tell their kids, "Don't play in the street!" Or, "Don't run with scissors!" But who ever heard, "**Don't swim by the sewer**"?

It started with the first paragraph of this text (vv.17-19). Usually I can read the New Testament Greek off the page then dig into the words in my sermon exegesis. But many of these words were unfamiliar to me. When I realized what they were saying, it reminded me of something in the news this week, something totally disgusting. We have to talk about this, but don't miss where the Holy Spirit is leading us. Our Synod Convention essayist, Pastor James Huebner, summarized Paul's unity letter to the Ephesians. With warnings here, God is leading us onward and upward to **Unite in the Light**. But first...

- **Don't swim by the sewer.** (vv.17-19)

Here's the problem, something I never expected. I hear about Rio de Janeiro for the 2016 Summer Olympics, and I picture sky blue water and pristine beaches – what you see in travel brochures. Wish you were here! Swim in the surf...sailing, rowing, canoeing – so much fun in the sun. But in the famous words of Jerry Seinfeld, "Wait a minute!"

In an article by NBCNewsWorld¹ they're using big words and concepts only you scientists, doctors and nurses would understand: "adenoviruses" 1.7 billion of them per liter, "1.7 million times the viral count considered hazardous at a Southern California beach." Words like "rowing and canoeing"... "diarrhea and vomiting" should not be seen together. The problem is that nearly 400 tons of garbage dump into the bay each day and raw sewage pours into waters where Olympic athletes will be swimming. Best plans: "Treat 80 percent of the sewage flowing into the bay by the start of the Olympics, but admits it's 'a complicated goal.'" Brazilians exposed to hepatitis A and Typhoid have built up their immunities. Many of the 1400 Olympic athletes are in qualification events, but just ignoring the problem. Paris Henken: "I haven't gotten sick. Helena hasn't gotten sick. No problems so far."

Most parents would be telling their kids, "**Don't swim by the sewer.**"

Sound like our society? Like Paul's? Remember how Church Father Augustine said things in the physical world help us understand the spiritual world? Here the Lord's God-inspired Apostle Paul raises himself up to full authority and says, "***So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.***" They think if no one gets hurt, it's okay. Like sheep drinking flukes and nematodes from mud puddles, they don't realize that sin is a parasite. It may refresh a little at first but sin always kills you in the end. Deep down in their souls they're darkened by guilt and unbelief. It alienates them from life with God because they are ignorant of God's Word. Such intelligent people, but their hearts are so hard, their consciences so calloused by repeated poking of red hot lust that there is no feeling left. Planned Parenthood sells baby body parts and some say, "At least someone will benefit." They cannot be satisfied as they exhaust themselves in this downward spiral of self indulgence. Don't go down the drain with them, dear children of God. **Don't swim by the sewer.**

¹ Aug 3 2015, 8:07 PM ET

✠ **Wear a new attitude. (vv.20-24)**

Here's Paul's advice: Compare where you are with the way you were. ***“You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.”*** ***“Christ”*** was foretold for centuries back to the very beginning at Creation in the ancient Jewish Scriptures of the Old Testament. No other religious texts have been so carefully written and preserved that one unbelieving Bible scholar admitted, “It’s a miracle.” Centuries of threats and promises have been kept by God – down to the last detail. Just Judgment Day remains.

The ***“truth”*** is what you were taught in the sphere of Christ. No Nietzsche here! That philosopher has polluted western thought with his insistence: “There are no facts, only interpretations.” But our Lord Jesus says, ***“If you continue in my Word, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*** As God’s own Son, Jesus claims: ***“I AM...the truth....”*** (John 8:31f; 14:6 TPA)

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.” My dear friends, you can’t help swimming in these polluted waters of human debris and sin. Your boots get muddy like the barnyard and stuck in the gumbo when it rains. But day by day we need to shed the dirty clothing of our old self the way you’d strip off your swimsuit if you were washed into raw sewage. When you learn of Jesus, you can’t stand the smell. Now you live in Him.

So Wear a new attitude. ***“Be made new in the attitude of your minds,”*** calling moral sewage what it is. Trust God’s Word to cleanse away the sickening parasites. This takes time and skill from the Holy Spirit. Sin is like Lyme disease that hides and mutates in the system. But the Holy Spirit sanctifies you through and through by His Word-powered water and the Christ-present bread and wine.

“You were taught...to put on the new self....” This is the image of God which some Christians insist was only marred in the Fall. But suppose you had a truck in your driveway one sunny morning. There’s your neighbor with a hammer, screwdriver and knife – smashing the windows, punching holes in hood and doors, slashing your tires. He starts the engine and pours in sugar water. Then to seal the deal he lights it all on fire. Is your car marred...or totaled? We need God’s image created new, restored.

Let’s get dressed each day with the new clothes of Christ’s righteousness. Your ***“new self [was] created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”*** This is a process called sanctification where God gradually restores His image as we mature by faith in Jesus. God already washed your sins away; you are completely forgiven. He clothed you in the white baptismal gown of His righteousness. Now ***“let us live up to what we have already attained.”*** (Philippians 3:16) Growing in Christ we think and feel like God. We want what God wants. He gives pastors and teachers to help us mature. (4:11-13)

Some Christians and congregations wander aimlessly. But listen to this: “If someone *has really been taught* in the sphere of Christ (ἐν αὐτῷ), his life is not *purposeless* (ματαιότητι – v. 17). He has a clear sense of direction – why he’s here, where he’s going, what to do with his life....Jesus said, ***“Follow me...to catch men.”*** (Luke 5:10) To plow a field straight one must pick out a goal at the far end of the field and keep his eyes glued on that point....(Luke 9:62; Genesis 19:26)....Looking back while planting, leaves crooked rows nearly impossible to cultivate....A congregation will hinder its harvest if members are forgetting our common goal in Christ. Why are we here? What are we trying to accomplish? How can we reach the goal once everyone knows what it is? Christian maturity is a means to that end. As we strive for maturity in God’s Word, we formulate strategies of ministry that bring the precious Gospel to the lost. [M.C. 8/04/1988]” That was twenty-seven years ago while we were still in Snail Lake School!

All these years the Holy Spirit has been focusing us on the Great Commission, keeping His purpose clear in our minds. Look what God has done. Numerically we’ve grow, but more importantly we have matured. Our budget reflects a passion for Christian education, strong Gospel ministries, WELS missions and training future pastors. Now the Lord is blessing us with a part-time associate pastor to reach out more effectively. This miracle of unity is done by the dear Holy Spirit in His chosen Means of Grace – the Gospel in Word and sacrament. SDG – *Soli Deo Gloria – to God alone the glory.* Amen.