

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany (A)

Deuteronomy 30.15-20    Psalm 119.1-8    1 Corinthians 3.1-9    Matthew 5.21-37

**Deuteronomy 30.15-20**

1. This section concludes Moses' third address to the people of Israel, in which he summarizes the lessons to be learned from Israel's history, charges the community to keep the covenant with the LORD, reassures the people that God is with them in reversals of fortune, and (in these verses) sets forth the choice between life and death.
  - a. This address may be compared with that at Deut. 10-11, in which Moses instructs in the Law, using, at 11.26-28, the same language regarding choice.
2. The form of words used here was probably a part of covenant-making and covenant-renewing liturgies in Israel.
3. In v. 19 Moses calls "heaven and earth" as witnesses. Witnesses are an essential element in all covenant treaties. Cf. Deut. 4.26.

**Psalm 119.1-8**

1. In the Gregorian monastic rite these verses are used daily at prime (the "first hour," or about 6 a.m., *i.e.*, the fourth of nine hours of the daily office).
2. This psalm is the longest (at 176 verses). Each stanza (there are 22) is labeled with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each stanza consists of eight verses.
  - a. The first stanza recited here is an example of Wisdom literature, which recites that those who follow God's Law are blessed.

**1 Corinthians 3.1-9**

1. Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians can be summarized to this point to be:
  - a. Introduction, greeting and thanksgivings (1.1-9).
  - b. Description of reports of rival groups in the community (1.10-17)
  - c. God has different standards (1.18-31).
  - d. Paul describes preaching in power (2.1-5).
  - e. True wisdom and the language of love are described (2.6-3.4).
    - i. We now begin with this section of the argument, but proceed to the next (3.5-4.5) which describes the proper attitude toward pastors.
2. Paul now articulates his basic objections to the Corinthian's attitude.
  - a. They cannot be mature Christians to the extent that they have not grasped the nature of authentic community.
3. Paul emphasizes the instrumental nature of ministry by using the neuter term "what" instead of "who" (in referring to Paul or Apollos).

- a. That the pastor is an instrument and not a force unto himself/herself is reinforced through the use of instrumental language with the neuter (“... *through whom* you came to believe,” v. 7).
  - i. Chronologically, Paul was evangelist and Apollos was catechist in Corinth.
- b. Ministry is God’s. God uses human instruments.
- c. The reference to the people being God’s “building” in v. 9 is more accurately translated as God’s “wall”. When a field was cleared in stony Palestine of Greece, the result was the building of walls.

### **Matthew 5.21-37**

1. Jesus continues His teaching of a new ethic, continuing in the use of rhetorical hypertheses.
  - a. Jesus does not teach as would a rabbi or scribe. He contrasts His teaching to that of the scribes.
    - i. When He says, “You have heard it said ...,” He is referring to rabbinic teaching, which was always posed as a quotation of what a learned rabbi said.
    - ii. In contrast, Jesus says, “... but I say ...,” *i.e.*, He “taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes” (Mk. 1.22).
  - b. Jesus preaches by citing first an incorrect interpretation of Scripture, and then correcting this by giving the true interpretation.
2. Jesus speaks of interior motive as preceding activity (*e.g.*, murder). He teaches about moral responsibility as preceding action.
3. In referring to sacrifices to be offered at the altar, Jesus is referring to the Temple in Jerusalem (destroyed in *A.D.* 70).
  - a. Jesus thus offers approval of the sacrificial system to people for whom the Temple is still a focus.
4. Jesus also offers practical advice: settle out-of-court if you can.
5. Again, in the teaching on adultery, Jesus moves from action to intention.
6. The teaching on divorce and remarriage has caused much angst in the history of the Church, and remains the ground for the proscription of divorce and remarriage in some churches. (Recall that a divorced person who had remarried could not receive Eucharist in The Episcopal Church until after 1973.)
  - a. The fact that this section is abbreviated (two verses) may suggest a subordination to/dependence on the previous teaching on adultery.
  - b. When Jesus states an implicit allowance of divorce for “unchastity” this is in the context of Hebrew law in which an adulterous wife was to be punished with death. Jesus does not approve of the penalty, He merely notes the effect on remarriage.
    - i. The word used by Matthew does not really mean unchastity in the sense of adultery, but in the sense of indecency. The implication seems to be that (as in a finding of annulment) there has never been a valid covenant

of marriage.

7. In speaking of swearing and oaths, Jesus is reminding His listeners that God may be invoked only for a holy cause.
  - a. Swearing by “heaven” or “earth” or “Jerusalem” involves the subterfuge of seeking to avoid the prohibition against invoking God’s Name in vain (Exod. 20.7).