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Sermon Study on 1 Tim. 4, 4-11.

(Eisenach Epistle-lesson for the 23d Sunday after Trinity.)

In the opening verses of the fourth chapter the apostle had stated that in the latter times errorists would arise setting aside the norm of God's Word both as to doctrine and life. Over against these false teachers Timothy is to approve himself as a good minister of Christ by submitting completely to the Word of God both as a believer and as a teacher. The apostle had mentioned two of the Satanic errors promulgated by these false prophets, the prohibition of marriage and the abstaining from meats, v. 3, and now proceeds in vv. 4, 5 to lay down the principles governing the Christian's use of things created. "For every creature of God is good." *Καλός*, properly, beautiful, pleasing to the observer, hence choice, precious, useful, suitable, well adapted to its purpose. Every thing which God made, is good, Gen. 1, 31; not only man, not only the animal and vegetable creation, but also all ordinances instituted by the Lord for the welfare of His creatures. All are good, well adapted to the use for which they were created: meats for the preservation of life, Gen. 1, 29; 9, 3; marriage for its purpose, Gen. 1, 28; 2, 18; man's government of the earth, Gen. 1, 26; 2, 15, etc. Hence "nothing is to be refused," to be cast away, thrown aside as unfit for use, "that is received with thanksgiving." God created these things not in order that people should abstain from them, but rather in order that they be received with thanksgiving, as the apostle had stated v. 3. Of course, that restricts the permitted use of things created to such as may be received with thanksgiving, hence to such as are not prohibited by God Himself. So in the Old Testament certain animals were declared to be unclean, and no Israelite could possibly have received them with thanksgiving. Giving thanks to God as the Giver of all gifts is impossible if the object of thanksgiving is prohibited by God. Such thanksgiving would be either due to ignorance of the will of God or rankest hypocrisy, a blasphemous prayer. Imagine Adam and Eve thanking God while eating of the forbidden tree or a drunkard praising God for the liberty of intoxicating himself. Only then is a creature good and not to be rejected if there is no word of God preventing its reception with thanksgiving. (Cp. in this connection Rom. 14, 14-23; 1 Cor. 8, 8-13.) On the other hand, God would not give, permit to man, so that man could receive with thanksgiving, that which in the eyes of God were unfit for His service, whose use would render man unclean, unfit to appear before God, or less holy and pleasing to God than the man abstaining from it. To prohibit, to refuse, to cast away as unholy, unclean, that which God has created to be received with thanksgiving is wicked, satanic. What should we think of a child that threw to the ground good food given to it by loving

parents? Not a whit better are those teachers described so well Col. 2, 18—23; 1 Tim. 4, 1—3.

“For it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer,” v. 5. Far from being incompatible with the holiness of a child of God, any creature may be put into the service of God, become part of a Christian’s saintly life and deportment, be truly hallowed, by the Word of God and prayer. Human rules, ecclesiastical regulations, synodical decrees, etc., cannot render that profane which God has declared clean nor make that clean which God has declared unclean, Mark 7, 7. In these matters God, and God’s Word alone, rules and decides. A Christian knows that all creatures of God are good, not one to be rejected, if they be received with thanksgiving. Therefore a Christian bases his use of these creations of God on the Word of his God, accepts whatever God offers, thanks Him in heartfelt gratitude for His gracious gifts, implores His grace for the proper use of His creatures, beseeches Him for His divine blessing, and thus by praying in conformity with the Word of God, often using the very words of Scripture, he sanctifies all things by God’s Word and prayer. And God accepts our use of His gifts in this manner as part of our service rendered to Him, pleasing to Him, redounding to His glory, 1 Cor. 10, 31.

“If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained,” v. 6. To put in remembrance, *ὑποτίθημι*, literally, place under them, as a foundation on which one may build up, hence suggest, supply for the purpose of teaching. “The brethren.” A pastor must always bear in mind that his parishioners are “the brethren,” brethren of Jesus Christ, of each other; hence Matt. 23, 8; 1 Pet. 5, 3 apply. By reminding the brethren that God’s Word is the sole norm of doctrine and life, “thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ,” a servant adequate to his duty, approved and acknowledged by the Lord as one who has faithfully carried out His charge, Matt. 28, 20; Acts 20, 20. 23. 28; 26, 22. 23. Only then is a pastor a good minister of Christ, and only then is a pastor to be so esteemed by his congregation, if he continues in the Word of Christ, preaching in season and out of season what the Lord has committed to him to preach. “Nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine.” Scripture is called “the words of faith,” because the words of Scripture teach faith as the way to salvation, Rom. 3, 22—28; 10, 4—11; demand faith, Mark 1, 15; Acts 16, 31; engender faith, 1 Pet. 1, 23; Rom. 10, 14—17. These words are called a “good doctrine,” excellent as to its glorious contents, salvation through Christ Jesus, excellent as to its purpose, admirably suited to its high aim, Rom. 1, 16; 1 Cor. 1, 18. “Whereunto thou hast attained.” Already as a child Timothy had learned

the Holy Scripture, 2 Tim. 3, 15; as he grew up, he made it the norm of his life, Acts 16, 5; 2 Tim. 1, 5. He had followed the Word not as Peter followed the Savior, afar off, Luke 22, 54, always ready to run and deny at first sight of danger; but he had attained unto it, *παρηκολούθηκας*, followed side by side, in close communion, closely adhering to the Word. He was being "nourished" by this Word. As one must daily partake of food lest one starve and be unable to render efficient service, so the pastor must daily study the Scripture lest his own spiritual life deteriorate and he be no longer able to supply the proper food to his flock. 1 Tim. 4, 13—16.

"But refuse profane and old wives' fables," v. 7a. The apostle speaks of fables. Already chap. 1, 4 he had uttered a warning against these fables. He evidently refers to the legends and sayings handed down by word of mouth from one generation to another and later put into writing in the Talmud, those traditions of the elders which Jesus already had condemned on so many occasions and those legends which in the course of time had grown up around the men and women of Old Testament times. Both tradition and legends were held in high esteem by the Jewish teachers, regarded by them as of equal, or even greater, authority than God's Word, Mark 7, 9—13. Paul calls them fables, myths, falsehoods. They are, moreover, profane, *βέβηλος*, from *βαίνω*, literally, that which may be trodden, walked on. A place consecrated to God was not to be trodden on by man, Ex. 5, 3; 19, 12. 13. 21—25. Hence a place on which man might walk was regarded as not consecrated, was common ground, unhallowed, profane. The word is also used to denote objects or persons unfit for God's presence, unclean, ungodly, sinful; so Heb. 12, 16 and 1 Tim. 1, 9. 2 Tim. 2, 16 shows that such profane babblings will contaminate and defile others. These fables are finally "old wives' fables," on the order of stories retailed by idle, gossiping women, based merely on hearsay, often foolish and silly. To pay any attention to such fables would be folly. To study them in the hope of finding some hidden wisdom would be worse than useless, an unwarranted waste of time. Cp. "vain babblings," *κενοφωνία*, 1 Tim. 6, 20; 2 Tim. 2, 16. For that reason the apostle tells Timothy: "Refuse," avoid, shun, have nothing to do with them. No matter what their advocates and adherents say, these fables, because of their very nature, are of absolutely no value for spiritual growth, they are positively harmful.

Modernists tell us that, in order to understand the Christian doctrine correctly, one must study it in the light of contemporaneous Jewish and rabbinical literature or that only a knowledge of pagan religions, Babylonian and Egyptians cults, Asiatic and Greek mysticism, etc., can shed light on the original and true meaning of the Christian religion. Paul holds otherwise. We grant that an acquaintance with these literatures and cults may throw a helpful light

on some passage or incident of Scripture otherwise obscure, since thereby some historical or linguistic problem is solved. As far, however, as doctrine is concerned, they are absolutely valueless. The doctrines of Scripture are not a development, or evolution, of ancient religious opinions, of pagan customs and Talmudic traditions. To look to these myths and fables for light to understand the hidden wisdom of God as revealed in the Bible, 1 Cor. 2, 5—7, is an insult, an affront, to the Most High, a direct slap in the face of Him who through His apostles tells us to refuse profane and old wives' fables. Self-evidently this applies also to modern fables, such as evolutionism, Christian Science, Russellism, and to that repository of all manner of fables, myths, and legends vying with each other as to profaneness and silliness, the Church of Rome, in fact, to every error that poses as God's Word, as religious truth. Jer. 23, 13—40. What folly to leave the clear and infallible Word of God and follow the unreliable, lying, silly, and pernicious fables of man!—*Note*: Not meats and marriage, nor any creature of God, but error, falsehood, defiles. Cp. Mark 7, 14—23. Hence not meat nor marriage nor any ordinance of God is to be shunned, but false doctrine is to be avoided as defiling man.

"And exercise thyself rather unto godliness," v. 7b. Exercise, *γυμνάσιον*, the exercise of the athlete in the palaestrae, the gymnasiums of antiquity, where, stripped of all clothing, young and old eagerly exercised themselves for the purpose of strengthening and beautifying their bodies. The word therefore signifies vigorous, purposeful, continued daily exercise, always with the motto "*Excelsior!*" with the desire to obtain perfection. How strenuously do our modern athletes and stars in the various sports train. In like manner, just as purposeful, with like zeal to attain the highest degree of perfection, just as strenuously, a Christian should exercise himself unto godliness. *Ἐνσέβεια*, from *αἰβομαι*, to revere, worship, with added *εὖ*, to worship well, properly, to revere highly; hence it denotes that high, exalted reverence that man owes to his superiors, to his parents, 1 Tim. 5, 4, government, etc., and especially, in highest degree, to God, the German *Gottseligkeit*, finding one's greatest pleasure in God and in doing His Word and will. Godliness therefore describes that proper relation of man to God which makes God's Word and will the absolute norm of his entire life, that relation in which man was created, which was lost through the Fall, which is restored in every believer, but ever remains imperfect. Therefore we must exercise unto, *πρός*, toward, godliness, knowing that we have not yet reached the goal, yet with the firm intention to attain perfection. For that very reason we must strip ourselves like those ancient athletes of everything that might hinder us from attaining our high goal. Cp. Phil. 3, 13. 14. The prize is well worthy of our most serious efforts. This thought is brought out in the following verse.

"For bodily exercise profiteth little; but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come," v. 8. The apostle is not a fanatic. He does not mean to disparage athletic exercises, neither does he unduly exalt them. He emphasizes two truths: 1) that bodily exercise is profitable, emphatically placed at the end; 2) that it profiteth little. The first truth is directed against the ascetics of his day. Such matters as bodily exercise, athletic sports, were despised and rejected by them as entirely unsuited to a spiritual man, the man of God. Cp. Col. 2, 23. The apostle indicates that this attitude is altogether wrong; in fact, while their fables, their prohibition of marriage, their abstaining from food, was to be shunned as unprofitable, these physical exercises on which they frowned had at least some profit. Physical well-being was enhanced, the body strengthened, life lengthened and made more enjoyable through possession of health, etc. Physical exercise and training should not be neglected by Christians. Kept within proper limits, not permitted to interfere with the duty towards God and the neighbor, a reasonable training for the purpose of preserving and furthering physical health, strength, beauty, is perfectly in keeping with God's will and will be blessed by Him. The ascetic, the man or woman careless about physical well-being, is not in full accord with the will of God. Cp. Col. 2, 18-23; 1 Tim. 5, 23; Rom. 13, 14. Yet physical exercise is not to be overestimated nor, as was the case so often in ancient Greece and still is in our modern times, to be made the chief object of one's life. It is profitable for a little, for this life, for this time; in spite of careful exercise the strength will finally wane, health will give way, death will come. The joy and honor of victory lasts but a short time and is a very fickle matter, will not satisfy the soul. And still, though it profits little, the time spent in bodily exercise is better spent than that devoted to the study of falsehood and error. Bodily exercise is at least profitable, while the study of falsehood is a mere waste of time.

While bodily exercise profiteth little, "godliness," on the other hand, "is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." Godliness makes God's Word and will the norm of one's opinions and actions and for that very reason benefits man already in the life that now is, benefits him spiritually, mentally, physically, in all things. Godliness because of its proper relation to God has a good conscience, void of offense toward God and man, Acts 24, 16; 2 Cor. 1, 12, and on that very account enjoys that peace of mind which is possible only if one knows that he is at peace with God, that God's favor rests upon him, that God is well pleased in him. Godliness trusts in God at all times, in stormy days as firmly as in days of sunshine, and therefore is spared many a worry, remains calm and serene in situations which exasperate the

ungodly, finds comfort in sorrows which would drive the ungodly man into the slough of despair. Godliness can exclaim with David: Ps. 23; with the sons of Korah: Ps. 42, 11; with Asaph: Ps. 73, 23—26; with Paul: Rom. 8, 28. 35—39. Godliness recognizes that according to the Word of God one's body is a creature of God as well as the soul and that physical health and strength and beauty are gracious gifts of God, to be cherished and enjoyed and preserved and improved according to God's will. Cp. text, vv. 4. 5. Such proper care for one's physical health will prevent many an ailment, many a sickness. The very practising of godliness will benefit both body and mind. Every sin will disturb that peace of mind which is so potent a factor in the well-being of the body, Prov. 15, 13; 17, 22. Cp. Ps. 32, 1—6. In the form of surfeiting, adultery, worry, etc., sin will directly sap the strength and undermine the health. Godliness, in refraining from sin, will indirectly and directly benefit the physical and mental well-being of man. Who can enumerate the blessings which in fulfilment of His gracious promises the Lord grants to godliness already in this life! Nor do these promises fail, these benefits cease, if the life that now is shall come to its close. Godliness has promise also of the life that is to come. The strongest, healthiest body finally sinks into the grave. Long before death finally conquers man, his body may have been held a helpless victim in the grasp of some dread disease. Sickness, disease, coming to a person who has enjoyed health and strength all his lifetime, is just on that account the harder to bear. The very thought of sleepless nights and restless days, of pain and agony awaiting them, without hope of relief has driven many a one into suicide. Rather dead than a physical wreck, a living corpse.—The promises given to godliness are not affected by the prospect of death and the grave; its blessings cease not with the end of life. Godliness lifts up its eyes to the hills beyond the river of death, to the hills of eternity, to the abode where God dwells and where He has prepared eternal mansions for all His own. The life to come which is promised to godliness and unto which godliness is profitable is a life without end, a life of bliss supreme and unending joy, a life that is in deed and truth life in the fullest and richest sense of the word. Nor is this a myth, a fable, on the order of the Jewish fables.

"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance," v. 9. While no mere man has yet returned to tell us of that life to come, Jesus, the Son of the living God, assures us: John 11, 25. 26. He has granted to Paul, 2 Cor. 12, 1—4, and to John, Rev. 20, 21, visions of those eternal joys. In our own lives we have experienced the trustworthiness of God's promises to godliness. If He has filled our hearts with peace in the midst of life's sorrows, and our soul with joy even while tears were trickling down our cheeks, and our mouth

with songs of thanksgiving though we were walking in the dark valleys, will He not be able to fulfil His promises pertaining to the life that is to come? Though our heart cries out in agony: Ps. 73, 13, 14, though even friends and relatives mock: Job 2, 9, here are God's pledges, who is mightier than man, whose promises are faithful, trustworthy, and cannot fail, 2 Cor. 1, 20, and therefore are worthy of all acceptance, of every kind of acceptance, be it an acceptance that comes speedily, quickly, without much consideration, or one that comes only after one has been tossed about with many a doubt, fightings and fears within, without, — every acceptance, hence complete, whole-souled, unwavering, unshakable acceptance, since it is the trustworthy saying of the God of Life. Cp. v. 10. If the sometimes doubtful, at best, "little" profit attached to bodily exercise moves people to faithfulness in physical training, why are we Christians so slow, so sluggish, in exercising ourselves unto godliness, which is fraught with promises and benefits so great and so sure?

In order to encourage Timothy to proper zeal in exercising unto godliness, Paul furthermore calls attention to his own example: "For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach." Since the entire context speaks of exercising unto godliness, it is best to refer *εἰς τοῦτο* to godliness. Paul also strives for this very thing which he holds up before his pupil. Instead of using the word *exercising* he chooses two words indicating the intensity of his efforts. *Κοπιᾶσθε* means working to the point of exhaustion. He does not merely play at godliness, losing his interest in, wearying of, his efforts as soon as godliness demands a struggle, a sacrifice, a long, wearisome effort. Though flesh and blood soon tire, though they must be dragged into the arena day by day, though in spite of all strenuous efforts perfection is never reached in this life, the same struggle must be gone through every day; he perseveres. He knows the danger of tiring in this exercise. In athletic games and sports one unguarded moment may prove fatal to one's hopes. One slip, one error, one moment of negligence, and the championship, the pennant, may be irretrievably lost. So in this spiritual life a Christian dare not go to sleep, dare not become careless. To rest is to rust. Unless we exercise daily, train daily in the practise of every Christian virtue, in the battle against every sin, there is grave danger that the final outcome will be our defeat. Luke 9, 24—28.

Paul also "suffers reproach." If we accept with the King James and Luther's version the reading *ὀνειδίζομεθα*, then Paul means to say that in spite of all reproaches, revilings, persecutions, he persists in his struggle for godliness. Another reading, *ἀγωνίζομεθα*, includes reproach and every possible hardship; it denotes the painful, anguishing struggle of wrestlers. One need but observe the contortions undergone by wrestlers, the agony depicted on their faces, as they

are caught in a toehold or headlock by the opponent, to understand the meaning of this word. Paul had suffered untold hardships, 2 Cor. 11, 23—33; 6, 4. 5. 8—10, and was willing to suffer still more, 2 Tim. 1, 16 ff.; 2, 9; 3, 10—12; 4, 6. 10—16. The struggle for godliness is a painful struggle; a battle against powerful, cunning, cruel enemies, as intent as one's own self on gaining the victory; a fight to the finish, in which mercy is neither asked nor granted, 1 Cor. 9, 26. 27. Paul uses the present tense. He is still engaged in this wearisome, painful struggle. Though many years have passed by since first he submitted to the will of his Lord Jesus, since first he began to exercise unto true godliness, yet, battle-scarred veteran though he is, he has no thought of quitting. Still he labors, though the task be ever so difficult; still he struggles, though the battle be ever so severe; still he exercises himself unto godliness, though it takes the last ounce of his strength. And, lo, still he holds the field, still he stands unconquered, ready for every attack. How is this possible? The apostle reveals the secret of his strength. "Because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe." The apostle trusts, *ἠλπίζαμεν*, has set his hope throughout the years, and still does so (that is indicated by the perfect), on the living God. He does not rely on himself, on his own learning and wisdom and experience; no, his hope is founded on *Life itself*, on the living God, Deut. 32, 40; Ps. 36, 9; the Source of all life and all strength. This God is not an unreliable staff like a broken reed, Is. 38, 6, nor a treacherous resting-place, Amos 5, 19; no, from this unfailling Fount of Life, life and strength flow forth in inexhaustible supply to all that hope in Him, Is. 40, 28—31. For this God of Life is also the Savior of all men, the Triune God having conceived the plan for our salvation, the Father sending His Son, the Son by His holy life and innocent death working out our redemption and reconciliation, the Holy Spirit engendering faith and thus imparting to man the salvation procured by the Father's love and the Son's merits. God is the Savior of all men. His decree of redemption includes every one, John 3, 16; 1 John 2, 2; 2 Pet. 2, 1; His will to bring men to faith extends to all, Ez. 33, 11; 1 Tim. 2, 4. Yet, since only those who are brought to faith come into possession of salvation, He, the Savior of all men, willing to save all, is especially the Savior of them that believe, whom He by His grace through His holy Gospel has brought to actual acceptance of His gift of life. In this God, Paul trusts, and therefore in the strength of his God he is able to labor and to suffer, to exercise himself unto godliness. He knows that in Him he has righteousness and strength, righteousness through Christ, who clothed him in His garments of perfection; who daily washes Him, cleansing Him from every fault; who daily and abundantly supplies him with strength from the inexhaustible well-springs

of His grace and power.—If we would bring others to godliness, the only way is not the prohibition of meats and marriage, the preaching of asceticism, the promulgation of human wisdom and learning, but, now in the twentieth century as well as in the day of the apostle, the simple straightforward preaching of the Word of the living God, Law and Gospel. By these means alone will faith and hope and godliness be engendered. The ancient Gospel is all-sufficient; all substitutes, ancient or modern, are useless.

“These things command and teach,” v. 11. Command, charge, earnestly, without compromise, without hesitancy. It is the Word and will of the Most High. Teach thoroughly, diligently, patiently, until the lesson is well learned. 1 Tim. 6, 20. Only by continuing to preach the Word of God, can we hope for any success.

The apostle reminds Timothy, and impliedly every pastor, of his duty as a good minister of Christ. Hence congregations may learn from this text whom to regard as a good pastor. An outline covering the entire text: When is a pastor a good minister of Christ? When he 1) Preaches the Word of God. Twice we read this admonition, vv. 6. 11. Hence not fables, v. 7, but the sure Word, v. 9, which tells us of God, our Savior, v. 10, is the norm of doctrine, v. 6, and all questions of life, vv. 4. 5; and since it is the Word of the living God, it is effective, good doctrine, regenerating, sanctifying, man. Hence preach the Word! 2) Exercises himself unto godliness. For this has great promise, v. 8, this is a sure word, v. 9. The apostle's example, v. 10. In the strength of God he can exercise himself unto godliness.—Paul brings out the truth that we need only the Word of God. The Word of God is all-sufficient. Over against asceticism, vv. 4. 5; over against false doctrine, vv. 6. 7; over against sinful life, vv. 7—10.—The power of Gods' Word: 1) It regenerates, telling us of the God of our salvation, v. 10; it is the word of faith, adequate to work faith, v. 6. 2) It sanctifies, giving us strength to exercise ourselves unto godliness, vv. 7—11, sanctifies for us every creature, vv. 4. 5.—Exercise thyself unto godliness! This is a difficult, but blessed duty; this is possible in the strength of the living God. T. LAETSCH.

Entwürfe zu Beichtreden.

1.

Matth. 11, 28.

Jesus Christus, wahrhaftiger Gott und wahrhaftiger Mensch, steht da in der Sündertwelt und ruft diese wunderlieblichen Worte in die Welt hinein, Worte, die alle umfassen, alles versprechen. Und sie kamen auch damals: die Kranken, die Lahmen, die Blinden usw., die Elenden usw. Obwohl der Herr nicht mehr sichtbar ist, die Einladung gilt heute noch. Sie erschallt in der Predigt des Evangeliums usw.