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Outlines on the Eisenach Epistle Selections

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Outlines on the Eisenach Epistle Selections

Fifth Sunday after Easter, Rogate

1 TIM. 2, 1-6

We are living in an era of political unrest, in times fraught with danger to our nation. National and international relations are often strained to the breaking point. Those in authority are slandered, etc. Paul lived in times perhaps worse than ours. In order to make them bearable, he urges Timothy to exhort the congregations under his supervision that they make diligent use of congregational prayer for the welfare of the state. A very timely lesson.

An Apostolic Lesson on Congregational Prayer for Our Country

1. *Such prayer is in keeping with God's will and command*
2. *Such prayer is acceptable in God's sight*

1

Vv. 1. 2. Congregational prayer for our country is to include all inhabitants and rulers. "For all men" in this immediate context refers chiefly to our fellow-citizens, be they of the same political party, race, etc., or not. "For kings and for all that are in authority," Federal, State, and local government, from President down to policeman. Prayer is in order, not rebellion, not disobedience, not mud-slinging, etc., even if authorities abuse their rights. We may seek to prevent this by lawful procedure or by efforts to establish such laws; but at the same time we should pray for our political opponents.

Such prayer to take the form of supplication, etc., v. 1. "Supplications," while employing all means within their power, political sagacity, statesmanship, etc., yet they should realize that all their efforts are in vain unless God blesses them. Therefore come as beggars, supplicants, to His throne of grace. "Prayers," acts of worship, acknowledging the majesty of God, not in a spirit of rebellion, criticism, dissatisfaction with His rule, but in a truly humble spirit, 1 Pet. 5, 6. "Intercession" here means a familiar, confidential intercourse. By His grace we are children of the Most High, and with all due reverence, yet in childlike trust and confidence we are to ask Him, committing all our cares to His providence. "Giving of thanks," gratefully acknowledging His blessings, the precious political and religious advantages we are enjoying as American citizens, that we are still blessed with an orderly form of government in spite of the wickedness of our country, etc.

Such prayer should ask for political and religious welfare, v. 2b. "Quiet and peaceable," undisturbed by enemies of political and religious freedom, in a well-ordered commonwealth, so that

business, trades, commerce, may flourish and prosperity rule, at least poverty be kept from our doors, Prov. 30, 7—9. The purpose must not be to abuse these gifts in service of self, sin, Satan, but to live in all godliness, piety toward God, based on faith in Christ Jesus, 1 Tim. 3, 16; 6, 3; and to practise honesty in our relation to our neighbor, Rom. 14, 18; Acts 24, 16. Such godliness and honesty are rendered difficult, often eradicated, in times of unrest, war, rebellion, which invariably breed class or national hatred, contempt for God's will, crimes of every sort.

Such prayer is to be congregational prayer. Not merely in the privacy of our homes, in family worship, are we to pray for our country, but in this context the apostle speaks of prayers in public worship; cp. v. 8. 11 ff.; chap. 3, 14. 15.

Since, then, it is the will of God, let us in our public worship not neglect to pray for our country.

2

V. 3. "Acceptable," will be heard. He is God, omnipotent; He can hear; He is our Savior, willing to do all for the well-being of mankind, hence will gladly hear our prayer for our country. He will grant peace and quiet, godliness and honesty, in response to our prayers, since it is His will, vv. 4—6. In times of peace His Gospel will flourish and be more successful than in times of war, revolution, Ps. 85, 9—14. He has given His own Son to be the Mediator between God and men; it is His will that this ransom, this atonement, be preached to all men; there is no salvation except through this Gospel. Hence God is only too willing to hear our prayer for peace, etc., since this prayer fits in so exactly with His own holy and gracious will.

Surely, knowing Jas. 5, 16—18; Matt. 7, 7—11; knowing that in praying for the welfare of our country, we are only proving that we are the children of our Father in heaven, we will continue instant also in our congregational prayer for the welfare of our beloved country.

TH. LAETSCH

Ascension Day

COL. 3, 1—4

The ascension of Christ into heaven is to many Christians an anticlimax to the great festival of Easter because they do not understand the importance of this event. The meaning of Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter is easily grasped; not so that of Ascension Day. Yet God sent angels for this occasion as well as for the others; and three times He had it recorded in His Holy Book. In the Old Testament the prophets speak of it as an occasion of great

joy, Ps. 47, 5 ff.; 68, 18, 19; Christ repeatedly refers to it as the glorious completion of His work, John 16, 28; 20, 17.

At the same time the ascension of Christ has its meaning for us. This the apostle presents to his Christian readers in this text. He repeats at greater length what he had written to the Ephesians, chap. 3, 20: "Our conversation is in heaven."—Let us consider

The Christian's Heavenly Life

1. *Its beginning*
2. *Its evidence*
3. *Its destiny*

1

St. Paul refers to the three great events in the life of Christ as the basis of the heavenly life of Christians: His death, His resurrection, and His ascension to the right hand of God above. All this Christ did for us, for our salvation. And now, through faith, we have come into the closest communion with Christ; all that He has done for us is ours. He died; and so are we dead, dead to all the former life; most of all to sins of the old life; we are free from the guilt, the punishment, and the dominion of sin. But more than that; the dead are altogether through with this life, their eyes are blind to its charm, their ears deaf to its siren voice; thus the Christian is so totally through with the old life as though he were enclosed in his coffin. But we have not only died with Christ; we are risen with Christ to a new life, a life in God; a holy life, free from the former faults; an immortal life; a life already in heaven with Christ.

That is the basis of this holy life, our intimate fellowship with Christ through faith; we died to the world, we entered into this communion of Christ's wonderful life in heaven with God. This life is hidden; and the children of this world cannot see it; it is foolishness to them when we speak of it. It is an inward experience, known only to us. But it is known to us. Whoever has not that life is no Christian.

2

Though hidden, there are evidences of this life. "Seek those things which are above." "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." After Christ had risen, He did not stay on earth, but ascended into heaven; so we, being raised with Christ, have entered into a new sphere of life. We no longer live for this world, its pursuits, its enjoyments, its rewards. We live for that which is above. And that not as a matter of duty, not merely to obtain a reward; no, our heart is so inclined that we love heaven, we think heaven, we seek heaven.

Does that mean that we no longer use the things of the world,

no longer work with our hands, doing what our calling demands of us, but idly sit and dream of heaven? No; Christians are the most diligent, faithful, conscientious people on earth. Compare this entire chapter. But our life has for its object not any prize which the world holds out. The things of the world are to us only a means to an end; we use them to sustain this life, and, again, we use this life, while the Lord gives it, to do His work here on earth, to build His kingdom. So even in the use of earthly things we seek that which is above.

3

This life is now hidden. It is hidden from the world; it is beyond the comprehension of the children of the world because they have no experience of it. They see the manifestations of the Christian life; but though they sometimes get a glimpse of its beauty and worth, yet they cannot appreciate the motives which actuate, and the principles which guide, Christians in their life. It is in part hidden even from us; its beginning and its perpetuation through the means of grace are divine and mysterious.

But the time is coming when the hidden life will be revealed, v.4. Jesus died, rose again, ascended into heaven, so that His entire activity, His presence, His very existence, is invisible. But He will appear in His glory when He comes in the clouds of heaven to judge the quick and the dead. And as we in faith have part in His death, His resurrection, and His ascension, so we shall have part in His glory. Then it will become manifest to all that we are in Christ and Christ is in us. We shall appear with Him; we shall be like Him and see Him as He is, 1 John 3, 2.

Luther says: "Here is comfort for Christians in this earthly life, where, though they receive the doctrine of Christ and apprehend Him by faith, their resurrection seems to the world and to their own perceptions untrue, where they must contend with sin and infirmities and moreover are subject to much affliction and adversity, and where consequently they are extremely sensible of death and terror when they would experience joy and life. In this verse Paul comforts them, showing them where to seek and surely apprehend their life. Be of good cheer, he would say, for you are dead to the worldly life. This life you must renounce; but in so doing you make a precious exchange. Dying unto the world is a blessed experience, for which you will obtain a life far more glorious. You are now, through Christ's death, redeemed from sin and from eternal death and are made imperishable. Upon you is conferred everlasting glory. But this risen life you cannot yet perceive in yourselves; you have it in Christ, through faith." (XII, 523.)

T. HOYER

Sixth Sunday after Easter, Exaudi

Eph. 1, 15—23

Christ for us is the principal topic of the festival part of the church-year. At Christmas and during Lent we heard of the great humiliation which our Savior took upon Himself for our salvation. But also the exalted Christ is the Christ for us. He was raised again for our justification, Rom. 4, 25. Of this fact we are also reminded by the festival celebrated last Thursday, when we commemorated the ascension of our Lord. The Savior, John 16, 7, proclaims the truth that also His ascension was for our benefit.

The fact of Christ's ascension is referred to frequently in the New Testament and was considered of sufficient importance by the early Christians to be included in the Apostles' Creed. The Creed connects the sitting at the right hand of God the Father with the ascension. This, too, is in accord with the Scriptures. The second part of our epistle for today dwells on this stage of the exaltation of our blessed Savior. Let us prayerfully meditate on—

Christ at the Right Hand of God

1. *He is Lord over all* 2. *He is the Head of the Church*

1

Just what do the Scriptures mean when they speak of Christ sitting at the right hand of God, v. 20; Ps. 110, 1; Mark 16, 19; Luke 22, 69; Heb. 1, 3, 13? God is a spirit and, strictly speaking, has no right hand. To enable us, however, to understand divine matters, the Scriptures use terms applicable to human beings. Among men the right hand is usually the stronger and is a symbol of strength and power. Therefore the Savior speaks of the right hand of the power of God, Luke 22, 69; cp. Heb. 1, 3.

Heb. 12, 2 we read that Christ is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. "Kings place at their right hand those whom they design to honor or whom they associate with themselves in dominion. No creature can be thus associated in honor and authority with God, and therefore to none of the angels hath He ever said: Sit thou at My right hand, Heb. 1, 3." (Hodge, *Ephesians*, p. 82.) "Christ's sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty is the full and constant participation . . . in the exercise of the universal dominion, rule, and government over heaven and earth and all creatures." (Graebner, *Doctrinal Theology*, p. 151 f.)

This power and government the Son of God possessed from eternity, and when He became incarnate, He communicated it to His human nature, Col. 2, 9. In order to save us, however, He humbled Himself and voluntarily abstained from the full and continuous use of this majesty according to His human nature. But

now God has exalted Him, Phil. 2, 9, and also according to His human nature He participates fully in the universal rule over the entire creation.

This is further emphasized by our text, vv. 21, 22a. See also 1 Pet. 3, 22; Heb. 2, 8; Phil. 2, 9—11. He is truly King of Kings and Lord of Lords, 1 Tim. 5, 15; Rev. 19, 6. He is the sovereign Ruler of all creation, governing everything according to His will.

True, this is an article of faith during the present era. The Savior does not yet rule with uncovered majesty. The prince of the power of the air "now worketh in the children of disobedience," Eph. 2, 2. Man frequently rebels against his Lord, Ps. 2, 1—3. Nevertheless the Lord does rule; all things are even now under His feet. As we look back on the history of the world, we can see the hand of our Lord directing the course of events. And on Judgment Day His rule will become manifest, and all creation, willingly or unwillingly, will acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, Phil. 2, 11.

This doctrine is of great practical value. What a wonderful Savior we have, mighty in power, great in majesty! Praise His great and glorious name. Praise Him also because He is Head of the Church.

2

Christ sitting at the right hand in the heavenly places is given "to be the Head over all things to the Church," v. 22; Col. 1, 18. In one person He combines the rule of the Kingdom of Power and of the Kingdom of Grace. The King of Kings is in a very special sense the King of His believers, of His Church. He is the Head, we are His body. From Christ, the exalted Head, a constant stream of spiritual blessings is pouring down upon His Church, vv. 17—19, 3—14. Thus the Church becomes "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all," v. 23.

As the Lord of the Church He builds it, Acts 2, 23; 5, 30, 31; gives it the Spirit of wisdom and revelation for increase in spiritual knowledge, vv. 17—19; acts as the Advocate of His believers, 1 John 2, 1; and prepares a place for them, John 14, 2.

As the Lord over all He guards and protects His Church against all enemies, John 10, 28; Matt. 16, 18. How often did not the Church seem doomed! But He always sustained and preserved it. We can sing: "Fear not, O little flock, the Foe," etc. (Hymn 276.)

What applies to the Church as a whole applies also to every member. We are safe under the rule of Jesus Christ, the exalted Ruler.

What a comfort for every Christian, especially in these days of sore distress! Ps. 2, 4—6. He will keep us and finally make us joint heirs with Him in His everlasting kingdom. PAUL F. KOEHNKE

Pentecost**EPH. 2, 19—22**

The Church is celebrating the Pentecost Festival today. Pentecost is not a spectacular festival; the church is not decorated as at Christmas and Easter; there is no holiday spirit evident. But the message of Pentecost is one of supreme importance. It tells us of the gracious work of the Holy Ghost in converting sinners to Jesus, as the Pentecost-story reads in Acts 2, 41; of the wonderful gifts of the Holy Ghost to Christians, Acts 2, 4; and of the virtues of the Church, Acts 2, 42—47. Our text for today takes up the last point; and we shall consider —

The Glory and the Duty of Church-Membership**1**

The apostle addresses the Christians at Ephesus, v. 19. At one time they really were strangers and foreigners, v. 12. People who are not church-members are strangers to God. They usually do not think so. "I am not a church-member, and I never go to church; but I serve God in my own way, and I am a much better Christian than some of those who go to church every Sunday." One might as well say: I never eat, but I am stronger than the people who eat three meals a day; I have no fire in the house all winter, but I am warmer than the people who keep their fires burning. We cannot have saving faith without hearing the Word of God, Rom. 10, 17; we do not belong to God if we do not hear His Word, John 8, 47; Luke 10, 16. People who are not church-members are strangers to God.

But church-members who are really believers in Christ are not strangers and foreigners. They enjoy the glorious privilege of citizenship with the saints, with the people of God. How highly we esteem our citizenship in our country! How we prize our liberty, our opportunities, our cherished traditions! We are ready to defend the country of our citizenship with our blood. Then what a glorious thing is our church-membership! We are citizens with saints, people who are perfect in God's sight because their sins are forgiven; our ruler is God; we have constant access to the presence of our Ruler, a privilege denied to citizens of any nation on earth; we have unending peace; we receive gifts and blessings without number. What a glorious thing is church-membership!

Again, the apostle compares believing church-members with the stones in a temple, v. 22. Now, not every building-stone is of value. But if I could show you a stone that was in Solomon's Temple and could prove the origin of the stone, it would be considered very valuable. And now we read in our text that church-

members are the living stones in God's holy temple, where He dwells with His power and grace and dispenses forgiveness and salvation through Jesus. Do you not think it is glorious to be a part of this temple? And then, these living stones are built on the foundation of Christ, v. 20. Men make much of origins. Many people are proud because their ancestors fought in the Revolution or came over on the *Mayflower*. And here we are told that we are built on Jesus, the Redeemer; we can trace our faith to Him, we get our strength from Him.

Indeed, church-membership is glorious. We should feel fortunate that we are church-members; we should maintain our church-membership at all costs; nothing should be able to cause us to give it up.

2

But a privilege always entails a duty. It is not right to enjoy a glorious privilege and to fail or refuse to shoulder its responsibilities. The duty of church-membership is given in vv. 21. 22. The different parts of a building are not laid together loosely; they are "fitly framed together"; one part supports and holds the other; the stronger the beam, the greater the stress it sustains; each part has its function in the building, and all the parts holding together form the strength of the structure. Thus the members of the church all have their duty: pastors, teachers, Sunday-school teachers, elders and officers, and every other member. Each member must be active. Some will find more to do, some less, according to the strength of their faith. But every one has a duty. Sometimes members evade their duties; they do not interest themselves in the affairs of the congregation and of Synod, standing aloof; they do not contribute adequately. Then they are like loose boards in a building that do nothing to sustain and strengthen the building.

Let us be sure, as we celebrate Pentecost and count ourselves church-members, that we realize the glory and assume the duties of church-membership.

FREDERIC NIEDNER

Pentecost Monday

EPH. 4, 11—16

Where there is life, there is growth. Difference between post and tree, corpse and living body.

Yesterday (Pentecost) we commemorated the birth of the New Testament Church. (Review briefly.)

The Holy Spirit's work was not finished when the Church was born. He desired that the Church grow.

The text read to you deals with that phase of the Church—

growth. Before we bring to a close our observance of Pentecost, it is well that we devote prayerful thought and study to what the text has to say on the subject of—

Growth in the Church

1. We note that the Church is portrayed as Christ's body.

a) While the word "Church" does not occur in the text, it is plain that the people of whom the text speaks are the very people who are meant in the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed—"holy Christian Church, the communion of saints." Col. 1, 24; Eph. 1, 22, 23.

b) While elsewhere in the New Testament God's family of believers is pictured as so many building-stones fitted together so as to form a building, in our text, as also in other references, God's family is viewed as the body of Christ.

The purpose for which various offices in the Church have been created is expressed v. 12. The goal of ministrations in the Church is referred to v. 13. Visualizing the believers as composing the body of a man, we are told that Christ is the Head of that body, v. 15. Christ being the Head, the body which the believers form is the body of Christ. The family of believers is viewed as a human body, normally developed and well proportioned, v. 16.

This picture of the Church as the body of Christ is used also elsewhere in the New Testament, Rom. 12, 5; 1 Cor. 12, 26; Col. 2, 19.

c) The Holy Spirit is the soul of that vast body of Christ, the family of believers. By His activity through the means of grace the body lives—connection with the Head (Christ) is established and maintained (repentance, faith); the various members of the body are kept alive, nourished; the various members of the body are united with one another, Eph. 4, 4.

d) Let us, then, not think of ourselves as so many separate individuals tied to Jesus, so to speak, by separate strings, like apples hanging on a tree. No, we are also united with one another as are the members of a human body. We have duties not only over against Christ, but also over against other believers in Christ, even as the hand ministers not only to the head, but also to the foot. We receive aid not only from Christ directly, but also from Christ through fellow-believers, even as the foot is ministered to not only by the head, but also by the hand. What we do or refuse to do is a matter not only between us and Christ, but also between us and other believers; I dare not say to a fellow-Christian: "Whether I do what is right or wrong is none of your business." If the eyes refuse to see, we may stumble and fall, and thus also the other members of the body suffer.

2. We note further that in the body of Christ, the Church, as in the human body, there is to be growth.

a) When God's family is pictured as a Church, a building, it is thought of as in the process of construction, thus embodying the idea of growth, Eph. 2, 19—22; 1 Pet. 2, 5.

b) But when God's family is thought of as a human body, the idea of growth is especially prominent.

"For the perfecting of the saints," v. 12. Not perfect at once, but perfection is at once the objective. — "For the edifying of the body of Christ," v. 12. "Edifying," building. — "Till we all come . . . unto a perfect man . . . fulness of Christ," v. 13. Spiritual maturity the goal. — "That henceforth we be no more children, . . . but may grow up into Him . . . Christ," vv. 14, 15; develop spiritually, as children develop physically and mentally into adults. — In the Church there is to be growth in unity. "Till we all come," etc., v. 13. Diversity of gifts, but unity of spirit. Not union, but unity. Union on basis of Bible-truth. Union movements which disregard unity of faith divide rather than unite. Explains many sects. — In the Church there is to be growth in doctrinal *understanding* and *conviction*. Not "tossed to and fro," etc., v. 14. Is popular religious thought today in keeping with these words? — In the Church there is to be growth in *love*. "Speaking the truth in love," v. 15. "Maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love," v. 16. Love to God, 1 John 4, 19. Loving obedience and service naturally follow, John 14, 15. Love for one another, 1 John 4, 20, 21.

Are we *growing* spiritually? Are we contributing to the growth of others? Not be content to ask, "Will I be lost if I do so and so?" but also, "Will my spiritual growth and that of others be fostered best if I do so and so?" Being a Christian is much like an airplane flight — when we stop, we drop.

3. We note finally what provisions God has made to foster growth in the Church.

a) Vv. 11, 12. "He gave some, apostles," inspired and infallible teachers of Christendom. — "Prophets," persons to whom special revelations were made for special purposes. — "Evangelists," missionaries. — "Teachers," public proclaimers of God's Word. — "Pastors," general "overseers" of the flock, their duties including *Seelsorge*. — All servants of Church are gifts of God. Mere genius does not make a pastor.

b) That we might grow spiritually and foster the growth of others we should avail ourselves of the services of the servants of the Church — public worship, other facilities to grow in knowledge, private *Seelsorge*, etc. Not say, "I can get along without those services." Can you get *ahead*, *grow*, as you should?

Conclusion. — We all like to see our Church grow. But let us not be misled by mere outward growth. When a certain part of the body suddenly becomes enlarged, that may be a sign of danger — tumor, infection, etc. Growth must be healthy and uniform. Through the faithful use of the God-appointed means let us strive for healthy growth in the Church, inward growth in understanding, faith, unity, love; then God will take care of outward growth.

R. PRANGE

Trinity Sunday

EPH. 1, 3—14

Ephesus of Paul's day is recognized today only by the ruins of its former greatness; but Paul's Letter to the Ephesians remains as a reminder of this church, in the early days a great stronghold of Christianity. Formerly Ephesus had been Satan's very headquarters in Asia Minor. Acts 19, 13 ff. 23 ff. And there on the dunghill was this little garden of fragrant and flowering plants. The people to whom Paul wrote were "saints in Christ Jesus," v. 1.

It is certain that Paul wrote this letter while he was a prisoner at Rome. Although the particular reason which prompted him to pen this beautiful letter is not known, we can assume that, since he was a prisoner, there was a general need of assuring the distant churches that his captivity must not give offense to any believer, since God's ways with His children, our ultimate salvation in all its aspects, are founded upon the eternal decrees of God's election. Paul therefore breaks forth in a wonderful hymn of praise. Let us learn to sing with him —

The Doxology to the Holy Trinity

1. *The Father chose us to salvation.*

V. 3. It is characteristic of Paul's impetuous and abounding faith that he begin this letter with a doxology. Notice that joyous, emphatic reiteration "blessed," "blest," "blessings." We ever have reason, even today, to thank and praise God for the many bodily gifts we have. First Article. Luke 22, 35; Ps. 34, 2. Hymn 63. Paul, however, is here thinking of the "spiritual blessings" which God has prepared for us and which He so graciously gives us for our happiness in time and eternity. The nature of these blessings is heavenly; they lead to heaven.

Vv. 4. 5. Before this world was made, God chose us to be His children and to share His glory throughout all eternity. God saw perfectly all our sins, all our imperfections, misfortunes, burdens; and He determined to rescue and save us out of the mass of the condemned and helpless race of men. Remember, all this is fixed,

settled, in the mind and purpose of the Father. There can be no failure. There are many uncertainties connected with everything that has to do with this old world, but there are no uncertainties here. Eleven times in this letter Paul speaks of our divine election. And it is ours *now*. "Hath" blessed us, not "will" bless us.

What moved the Father to do this? V. 5b: "according to the good pleasure of His will." Also 6a. Without any merit in us. He did not choose us in view of our faith, because He foresaw our faith, or because He knew that we would behave better than other people. His "grace," His love toward us, prompted Him to choose us. All the graces in us come as a free gift of His grace.

What should this blessing move us to do? V. 4. We "should be holy . . . love," v. 5. "Foreordained us unto sonship . . . unto Himself" Sons of the holy God must be holy sons. Again v. 6. Since God chose us to praise His free grace and mercy toward us, we should not pride ourselves on any graces we find in ourselves, but: 1 Pet. 4, 6. 11; Micah 6, 8. Since the entire spiritual life of a Christian is the result of his election, he should now lead a holy and blameless life. When a millionaire resolves to make the child of a beggar the heir of all his possessions, he does this in the hope that this child will lead a life in which the grace of his benefactor is daily reflected. (Stock.) Thus we should: v. 4b.

2. *The Son earned free salvation for us.* (The doxology to the Son.)

All the riches which the Father planned have been prepared for us in and by Christ Jesus. Eight times, in the eleven verses of the text, we are told that. Even God cannot be God and say that sin is not sin or that sin shall not be punished to the utmost. But God has found a way to bless us sinners. The cause of our election must not be sought in us, but in Christ. Paul now enumerates some of the blessings that are ours in Christ.

V. 7. We have redemption "through His blood." Christ's teaching is good, but that alone is not enough; Christ's holy life is good, but that alone is not enough; Christ's death was necessary for our redemption, 1 John 1, 7, "the forgiveness of sins."

Vv. 8. 9. Through faith in the redeeming blood of Christ we now are God's children. As God's children we have received from Him a wise and prudent heart, an enlightened intelligence to know and do the will of God, to avoid sin and to abound in good works, 1 Cor. 2, 7—10.

V. 10. In times gone by "the mystery of His will" was unknown; but now God makes it known "according to His good pleasure," etc., unto a "dispensation of the fulness of times," the New Testament age. Unto us who are living in the time of the New Testament, God has revealed "the mystery of His will," i. e.,

His intention to gather from all the peoples of the earth a congregation of believers, united in Christ, who in eternity shall stand as a blessed multitude around the throne of God, unceasingly praising Him for their election in Christ, Rev. 7, 9. What an incentive to missionary and congregational activity!

Vv. 11. 12. In Christ we have obtained this inheritance, to which we are chosen according to the purpose, or previous determination, of God; and upon this purpose our salvation is so firmly founded that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. It is more certain than that the sun will rise tomorrow, Rom. 8, 38. 39. It is said of the Romans that they were at times worsted in battle, but never in war. So the elect experience temporary failures and confess them with sorrow and penitence, but they are humbly certain of the final and complete victory. (Hall.) — What Christ did was done for us. He made God's riches available; but before they do us any good, they must become our actual possession. Therefore Paul sings the *Doxology to the Holy Spirit*.

3. *The Spirit applies this salvation.*

V. 13. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to receive the riches which God has provided. By nature the human heart is so perverse that of itself it never could or would receive the promises of God, 1 Cor. 2, 14. The Holy Spirit is not given to make God's promises sure; these cannot be made more firm. No, He confirms these promises to the heart of man by creating trust in God's promises. — A seal is used to prove ownership. This seal is the Holy Ghost, v. 13b. With the Holy Ghost we are sealed, sealed as the property of God and sealed to preserve us for God, 1 Cor. 3, 16; 2 Tim. 2, 19.

Those whom God thus seals He seals to be and to remain His own. Man may break this seal, but God on His part does not give the Holy Spirit to withdraw Him again, v. 14. An "earnest" is a part payment to bind the bargain, given in assurance that the full payment or complete possession will follow, Gen. 38, 17. 18. 20. The seal of the Holy Ghost is a guarantee of the final redemption of God's own possession, His own people, 2 Tim. 1, 12. What a scope, what a meaning, this gives to life and its destiny!

Conclusion. — Surely God has done great things for us; therefore: v. 3. Let your entire life be dedicated to the praise of God the Father, who planned your eternal happiness; to Jesus Christ, who carried out this plan; and to the Holy Ghost, who applied Jesus and His work to your heart. Let the seal of the Holy Spirit within you move you to hold the faith and to press toward the mark for "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord." Hymn 268, 1.

F. WORTHEMANN

First Sunday after Trinity

ACTS 4, 32—35

The Pentecostal church at Jerusalem was as conspicuously the work of the Spirit of God as human design and effort were noticeably absent in its founding. Many of those attracted by the signs attending the outpouring of the Holy Ghost found their curiosity turned into amazement, 2, 6 ff., their amazement into anxiety, 2, 37, their anxiety into joyful faith, 2, 41. The conversion and the subsequent behavior of these first Christians was so evident a demonstration of divine power that even non-believers were impressed, 2, 43. Continued evidence of the Lord's presence and guidance, 3, 10; 4, 16. 31; 5, 32.

This church should very properly serve as a shining example for Christian congregations.

The Pentecostal Church an Example for Christian Congregations

1. In unity 2. In testimony 3. In charity

1

V. 32. Through the preaching of the apostles the church at Jerusalem had grown into a vast multitude, v. 4. Yet, although comprising men differing in race, language, and customs, this multitude was "of one heart and of one soul." It was the multitude "of them that believed." Their common faith in Christ, the gift of God's Spirit through the Gospel, was the bond uniting them as members of one body and making them like-minded, their thoughts and aspirations centering in Christ, the common Head. — This spiritual unity manifested itself outwardly: in an urgent desire for fellowship, 2, 2. 42. 44. 46; 4, 23. 31; in common prayer, 4, 42. 47; 3, 1; 4, 24 ff.; in readiness to adjust differences of opinion in matters of policy, 6, 1 ff.; and it was nurtured by a diligent use of the means of grace, 2, 42; 6, 4.

What a glorious example! Let us ever be mindful that the Christian Church at large, also every local Christian congregation, is a *communion* of saints, of believers. Unity of the Spirit must not be confused with modern unionism, which disregards confessional differences and merely agrees to disagree. Unionism is of the outward form; true Christian unity is of the essence, of the heart, and exists when outward forms differ, Gal. 3, 28; Eph. 4, 4—6. — But Christian unity may be neglected, disrupted, to the detriment of God's kingdom and the destruction of souls. Therefore we Christians are admonished: Eph. 4, 3; Gal. 5, 20—23. To promote Christian unity, let us seek Christian fellowship. Christian social gatherings, properly conducted, a praiseworthy means to this end. (Walther League Unite the Youth Movement.) Members of Chris-

tian congregations who withdraw from their brethren and seek companionship with the children of the world rather than with their fellows in the faith (lodge) are treading on dangerous ground. — When differences of opinion in temporal affairs, church administration, etc., arise, Christians should heed the divine injunction: Eph. 4, 2; Matt. 20, 26. — Above all, let us never forget that our Christian unity will always be in the measure of our faith. Therefore, emulating the early Christians, let us be diligent in our attendance at divine worship, Heb. 10, 25, and at the Lord's Table, 2, 42, that our faith may be strong.

2

The Pentecostal church also gave us the example of a *bold confession*, v. 33. The apostles preached the Word with great power, emphasizing the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as the keystone of the Christian religion, 1 Cor. 15, 17. Cp. Acts 2, 38; 6, 2—4. "And great grace was upon them *all*," 4, 33. Through the divine Word the hearers were confirmed in the faith, filled with joy and great courage, so that they also, the lay Christians, "spake the Word with great boldness," 4, 31. They, too, became missionaries of the Lord. Instances in the later Church: Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos. Publicly and privately the Word had free course, and the Church was extended.

Witness-bearing for Christ is the one great task of every Christian congregation. The Word *must* be preached, the true Word, the saving Gospel. It is Christ's charge to His Christians. We need it, the world needs it. We are surrounded by heathen on every hand, by churches nominally Christian, but preaching a false Christ, who cannot save. By God's grace we have the Gospel pure and unalloyed and have experienced its comforting, saving power. What a challenge to confess it boldly, 2 Cor. 4, 13! To that end let us support Synod's missionary program. Following the example of the early Christians, let us also individually engage in personal mission-work, inviting the unchurched to our services, improving every opportunity in our daily contact with men to speak to them of the one thing needful. What grace will then flow upon us, and what a blessing we shall be to others!

3

Lastly the Pentecostal church is an example for us in *charity*, vv. 32b. 34. 35. Truly a wonderful demonstration of the power of faith which worketh by love. With the bond of faith simultaneously the bond of love is woven. Being of one heart and of one soul also in love, they did not claim their possessions as their own, but "had all things common." This was not common ownership in the sense of the communistic theory, which denies the right of private pos-

session. On the contrary, "the things which he possessed," v. 32. (Cf. 10, 6; 12, 12, and other instances of recognized private ownership.) Nor was there a divine command that the Christians should dispose of their property and lay the proceeds down at the apostles' feet for general distribution. This was a voluntary act, prompted by unselfish love and the needs of the brethren, 5, 4. Among these thousands of Christians there were many that were poor and in dire distress. The extraordinary circumstances demanded extraordinary sacrifices, and these were made cheerfully, with the single desire of relieving distress, of serving one another in love.

What a splendid example in Christian charity! Thus should we love the brethren "not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth," 1 John 3, 18. Let us remember that we are not absolute owners, but, under God, stewards of our earthly possessions. We are to use them according to His will, so clearly expressed Heb. 13, 16; Gal. 6, 10. If the love of the brethren truly dwells in us, we shall render our charitable services ungrudgingly, without embarrassment to those whom we befriend, so that they, too, may "eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart," 2, 46. We shall cause them to feel that we really regard them as our brethren, that their needs are our needs, and that we possess the God-given grace to weep with them that weep and rejoice with them that do rejoice.

God grant us grace to follow the example of the Pentecostal church! Let us emulate it in true Christian unity, in boldness of confession, in charity unfeigned, to the praise of Him who has called us unto His eternal glory.

J. W. WERLING

