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Homiletics: Outlines on the Standard Epistle Lessons

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on His choosing not to use any of His divine attributes rather than on any alleged inability to do so. The *Logos*, the eternal Son of God, became flesh, a true human being. But while He was endowed with a true humanity, the disciples nevertheless saw and gave testimony of His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten Son of the Father, full of grace *and truth*.

Homiletics

Outlines on the Standard Epistle Lessons

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Rom. 12:1-5

Jesus is the Savior not only of the Jews (shepherds—Christmas), but also of the Gentiles (wise men—Epiphany). Jesus is *our* Savior, and we have learned to know Him as such and believe in Him. Now we should also *serve* Him. To do this, the Apostle encourages us in today's Epistle lesson. He admonishes us to lead a holy life. The language he uses is somewhat unusual, yet very significant. He says,

**BRETHREN, PRESENT YOUR BODIES A SACRIFICE
UNTO THE LORD**

Let us learn

I

What kind of sacrifice we should bring unto God.

a. "Brethren, present *your bodies* a sacrifice unto God" (v. 1). To the Gentiles in the congregation at Rome this was perhaps unusual language even as it is to us, but not so to the Jews in that congregation. The Jews in the Old Testament were accustomed to bring sacrifices and to offer them in the Temple. The sacrifice which we are to bring unto the Lord is not a sacrifice to atone for our sins; that sacrifice was brought and offered by Jesus our Savior. The sacrifice which we should now bring unto Him is our very body (that, of course, includes the soul, of which the body is the agent of action); that is, we should give our whole selves in service unto the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5).

b. This sacrifice of our body should be "living, holy, acceptable" (v. 1).

1. A *living sacrifice* (v. 1). Not a dead brute animal should we bring, but a living body. Christ, the Lamb of God, sacrificed Himself for our sin and thereby did away with the sacrifice of dead bodies on the altar of God, so that we, His redeemed people, can now offer ourselves to Him. We "should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15).

2. A *holy sacrifice* (v. 1). The animals which were offered as sacrifices in the Old Testament had to be without blemish (Lev. 9:2-3). Cleansed by the blood of Christ, we can now yield ourselves unto God as those who are alive from the dead and who can offer their members as instruments of righteousness unto God (Rom. 6:8-14). We are to shun sin and to lead a *holy* life.

3. An *acceptable sacrifice*, well-pleasing, acceptable unto God (v. 1). Though our life is imperfect, though we still have within us our sinful flesh and blood, though our good works are imperfect, yet what we do is acceptable to God because through Christ we have been cleansed from all our sins. God delights in the good works of the Christian and graciously rewards them.

c. This is our *reasonable service* (v. 1). Not as irrational animals that were offered under the Levitical Law, but as God's rational creatures we should worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24), "offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

II

Why we should bring this sacrifice.

a. The word *therefore* answers the question. In the first part of his Epistle (ch. 1:-11), Paul had spoken of our redemption in Christ Jesus (e. g., 3:19-28; 4:16-25; 5:1-21; 2:28-39). Having attained full and free salvation in Christ our Savior, by whom we have been redeemed from the guilt, dominion, and punishment of sin and made heirs unto eternal life, and being continually under God's gracious protection and guidance (Rom. 8:28), therefore these very "mercies of God" (v. 1) should persuade us to present our bodies a sacrifice unto God (v. 1).

b. Not by any command of the Law are we to be forced to present our bodies a sacrifice to God, or to lead a godly life, but "by the mercies of God" (v. 1). God's great love to us should persuade us to love Him in return and therefore live a life that is pleasing and acceptable to Him. Cheerfully and gladly should we put ourselves, body and soul and all that we have, into the service of God our Savior.

III

How we should show that we are bringing this sacrifice.

a. *By our attitude towards the ungodly world.* "Be not conformed to this world" (v. 2). We should no longer live as worldlings live, in sin and unbelief; but by a renewed heart and mind, as the result of our conversion, we should live a godly life, proving, or discerning, "what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (This encouragement to lead a godly life, avoiding the sinful ways of the world, is much needed and should be greatly stressed in an evangelical way.)

b. *By our attitude toward our brethren* (v. 3). The Apostle warns against self-exaltation and encourages deep humility. We all by nature are inclined to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, and we are inclined to look down upon others. If we are better than others, if we have more gifts and greater abilities, we should remember that that is no reason for self-exaltation, but rather for giving thanks to God, who has thus blessed us (1 Cor. 4:6-7). As members of the body of Christ we should serve one another "as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith," according to each one's capacity of service, even as in the human body every member has "not the same office," yet each serves for the benefit of the whole body (vv. 4-5; 1 Cor. 12:7).

This Epistle stresses the fact that a Christian must lead a holy life. He has been made a recipient of God's love in Christ Jesus; that in turn should persuade the Christian to love God and his fellow men ("faith worketh by love," Gal. 5:6); therefore a Christian should not conform his life to that of the ungodly world, but rather in all humility put himself into the service of his fellow men, and especially his fellow Christians, and thus present his body as a sacrifice unto God, Matt. 25:40.

J. H. C. FRITZ

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Rom. 12:6-16

We are saved by grace to serve in gratitude. This important truth so emphatically taught in Holy Scripture (Gal. 2:20; Heb. 12:28; Luke 1:74; Ps. 100) is, alas, often forgotten (cf. the Epistle of St. James). Hence the many admonitions of Scripture that we should serve God and our neighbor gratefully and gladly (Rom. 12:1-5).

THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSECRATED SERVICE

I. In the field of Christian witnessing

II. In the field of Christian helpfulness

I

A. The season of Epiphany reminds us of God's great mercy in making known His saving grace in Christ Jesus also to us whose forefathers were heathen (Luke 2:32; Matt. 2:1-12). We who by grace have received the Gospel should gratefully serve God and our neighbor by witnessing the glad tidings of salvation to others. Christ indeed has instituted the holy ministry by which duly called servants of the Word should publish the blessed news of salvation in the name of the Christians by whom they have been called (pastors, missionaries, teachers, etc., Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5). Yet all Christians in their proper sphere are to show forth the praises of Christ (1 Pet. 2:9). So our text is addressed to all Christians, in whatever capacity they may witness the Gospel (teach, v. 7 b; exhort, v. 8 a).

B. The emphasis in our text rests, in the first place, upon cheerful, zealous, consecrated witnessing of the Word. We should declare the Word according to the measure of faith given us (v. 6), using every talent and opportunity the Lord gives us. Likewise we should exhort, and do that not in a spirit of self-exaltation, but in a humble and affectionate spirit (vv. 9-10), doing our work with singleness of aim, purity of motive, without selfish ends.

C. What a blessed mission is ours, no matter whether we are called servants of the Word or laymen. There are circles in which we all can prophesy (declare God's Word), teach, exhort, (cf. the family, our circle of acquaintances and

friends, voters' meetings, church societies, Sunday school work, etc.). In all these things let us as true Christians give grateful, eager, consecrated, wholehearted service to make known the glad tidings of salvation. The world needs the Word; let us proclaim it from the housetops.

II

A. We should, however, render consecrated service also in the field of Christian helpfulness. All admonitions from v. 9 to v. 16 apply to the area of practical service from day to day by which we, through the application of our Christian faith to life, assist our brethren to remain true to Christ and thus by grace to inherit eternal life. It pictures to us Christianity in its daily application to the needs of our brethren, which, of course, includes also in a larger way the service of all men with whom we come into contact, helping them and befriending them in body and soul.

B. This presupposes certain fruits of faith: 1) sincere love (v. 9 a); 2) avoidance of evil and doing of good (v. 9 b); 3) kindness and brotherly affection (v. 10 a); 4) humility and civility (v. 10 b); 5) zeal, fervency, and willingness to serve God by such service (v. 11); 6) a joyous hopefulness, patience in tribulation, persistence in prayer (v. 12); 7) liberality and hospitality (v. 13); 8) love for our enemies (v. 14); 9) sympathy with those who suffer (v. 15); 10) true unity of mind and sincere Christian humbleness. To what degree are these wonderful Christian virtues found in us? Let us examine ourselves on these points in the presence of God.

C. By placing before us this lofty goal of service by consecrated witnessing of the Word and helpfulness to our neighbor God reveals to us our Epiphany obligation. The wise men witnessed to Christ and they gave to Christ. Simeon believed with his heart and confessed with his mouth. True Christianity always manifests itself in faithful service of God and of the neighbor. We find the dynamic of such consecrated witnessing and helpfulness not in any goodness of ours or any natural sympathy of ours, but only in "the mercies of God" (v. 1). Christ who saved us by grace will also supply us by grace with power to do such glorious Christian service (Gal. 2: 20).

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

ROM. 12:16-21

While the Gospel lessons of the Epiphany season manifest forth the glory of the Savior, the Epistle lessons show how the Christians can manifest forth the glory of the Lord in their daily lives. Jesus wants his followers to let their lights shine before men (cp. 2 Cor. 3:2). Our text contains a series of His directives for us Christians.

TO WALK IN WISDOM TOWARD THEM THAT ARE WITHOUT

I. By avoiding being wise in our own estimation

II. By setting our hearts on things right in the sight of all men

I

In walking circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, the Christians are to avoid being wise in their own estimation (Prov. 3:7; 26:12; Is. 5:21). They are not forbidden to be wise, for the Lord praises the faithful and wise servant (Matt. 24:25); but they should not be wise in their own eyes. Christians have been taught of God (Ps. 71:17; John 6:45). Thus they possess the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (John 17:3). But this knowledge should not cause them to be puffed up, proud and haughty. By nature they also were spiritually blind (1 Cor. 2:14). If by the grace of God they have become spiritually wise, they must confess that their sufficiency is of God (2 Cor. 3:5-6). People who are wise in their own estimation often consider their fellow men as being unwise, fools. They are opinionated, contentious, self-willed, boastful (Dan. 4:27). It is hard to get along with them. Such conceited persons are a troublesome lot. They have caused much harm in the world, also in the Church. They reject the words and wisdom of others and push forward their own. They do not set their minds on things excellent in the sight of all men (v. 17). It is usually not their endeavor to be peaceable if possible (v. 18). Any little thing provokes them to anger. They seek to avenge themselves (v. 19). Their attitude toward the enemy is not conciliatory (vv. 20-21). This perverse condition of mind has also produced the many false doctrines that have plagued the Church (Rom. 1:22) and caused division and offenses contrary to the doctrine (Rom. 16:

17). Being wise in one's own estimation has resulted in temporal calamities (Prov. 16:18) and eternal destruction (Num. 16:31-33; 1 Pet. 5:5).

If by the grace of God we have become wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus, let us thank God for this wisdom. Let the possession of this unmerited wisdom make us very humble (James 3:13,17; 1 Cor. 4:7). May therefore our attitude toward them that are without, who are lacking in spiritual knowledge, be characterized by the spirit of Christian love and humility. May the Lord preserve us from this repugnant attitude of being wise in our own estimation and grant us grace to set our hearts on things right in the sight of all men.

II

The Apostle shows in what instances we should provide things honest in the sight of all men (v. 17 b). Even under the severest provocation Christians should never give offense, but adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things (Titus 2:10) by constantly planning those things that are morally excellent according to the standards of the Word of God.

Therefore they "recompense to no man evil for evil" (17 a). Christians will not be spared the experience of evil in this world—hate, persecutions, fiery trials. How shall the Christians meet these evils? Pay back in kind? The flesh says: "Yes." But the Spirit says: "See that none render evil for evil unto any man, but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men" (1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9).

Another excellent quality in Christians is mentioned v. 18. This peacefulness is not always possible. In an age of unionism and religious indifference Christians may be forced "earnestly to contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). However Christians should never become guilty of unduly provoking strife and enmity. They will seek peace and pursue it (Ps. 34:14; Rom. 14:19).

Enlarging upon the virtues of Christian peacefulness, the Apostle adds (v. 19), Christians should not take the exacting of justice into their own hands. This is God's prerogative (Deut. 32:35). Suffering Christians need not act in their own cases. God will protect their interests (Zech. 2:8).

A real test for Christian wisdom and love is the occasion

when he faces his hungry and thirsty enemy (v. 20). At the present time millions of our former enemies in Europe and Asia are in dire need of food and shelter. Almost daily reports are coming in, that these millions are facing starvation. What opportunities to fulfill the injunction of our text. The peaceful attitude of the Christian's heart will be revealed when he deals his bread to the hungry (Prov.25:21-22). Such undeserved kindness will cause the enemy to be stirred to shame and contrition, as was the case of King Saul over against David (1 Sam. 24:17).

Finally the Apostle appends a concluding, summarizing admonition (v. 21). It will require an effort, yea, a battle, to walk in wisdom toward them that are without, to avoid being wise in our own estimation, to set our hearts on things right in the sight of all men. Therefore the Apostle admonishes: "Be not overcome of evil (conquered by evil), but overcome (conquer) evil with good (by doing good)." Of and by ourselves we are unable to win this battle. We need help. The same Apostle wrote to Timothy: "Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1; Hymn 395:5-6).

H. C. HARTING

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

ROM. 13:8-10

Epiphany — the revelation of the person and work of the Son of God. It emphasizes the free gift of salvation as does every other cycle of the church year.

Nor does the text conflict with this truth. These matchless words on Christian love are addressed to Christians (Rom. 1:7). Jesus has been revealed to them through the light of the Word. They and all other children of God are to reflect the divine love that has saved them. This is indeed a solemn responsibility, resented by the Old Adam and welcomed by the new man. Therefore, for the crucifixion of the former and the encouragement of the latter, God focuses our attention upon

THE DEBT OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

- I. *It is a continuous debt*
- II. *It is a debt owed to all by all*
- III. *It is a practical debt*

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I

a. "Owe no man anything" (v. 8). It is wicked to borrow and not to pay again (Ps. 37:21). Such a debt is to be paid as soon as possible and in full. Not so with the debt of Christian love. This debt cannot be ever fully paid. Emphatically our text states: "Owe no man anything but to love one another" (v. 8 a). There is never to be a time in the Christian's life when he is without obligation on this point.

b. Is this true today in a world still smoldering with hate, international hate, political hate, private hate? It was the same then. If anything, the lovelessness and hatred of that day struck closer to home, e. g., persecutions. Against this dark background of hate and lovelessness—"Love one another" (cp. John 13:34). It is truly a continuous debt; not an intermittent shower, but a continuous rain, since Christ's love to His followers is constant.

The old Adam in the child of God needs this Law of Christian love as a continuous denouncing of its inborn lovelessness, that it might be held in check. Fatal results if this is not done, e. g., Judas—covetousness; Ananias and Sapphira— theft. The new man needs it merely as a directive, since the motivation can be provided solely by Christ's love to us as revealed in the Gospel.

II

It is a debt owed to all by all. In this respect also it is different from all other debts. The debt of loyalty to one's country is confined to a certain area. The debt to a merchant is confined to one or more in the same class. This, however, is a debt owed to all.

In ch. 12 the Apostle has listed individuals and groups to whom the Christian owes the debt of Christian love; e. g., the pastor owes this love to his congregation; the teacher to his pupils (Rom. 12:7). The Christian owes it to his fellow Christian (v. 10); owes it to the poor and the needy (v. 13). But not only to these, but also to those farthest removed from him (v. 14). Then in vv. 8 a and 9 b *all* are included.

Furthermore each and *every* child of God owes this debt of love. "He that loveth another" (v. 8 b). The personal, direct pronoun *thou* repeated again and again in v. 9. No Christian is exempted from this debt of love. A powerful refutation of the many excuses that our sinful flesh presents.

But the will and the power to pay this debt of love comes from God alone (Phil. 2:13). In Christ the Christian is the "beloved of God, called to be a saint." In God's love for each individual (John 3:16), commended to us by the Gospel, offered and given to us individually in Baptism and Holy Communion, we are assured of personal pardon and power from on high to "will and to do according to His good pleasure."

III

It is a practical debt or a debt to be paid in daily life; not a mere ideal, but an ideal put into action.

a. In general: V. 10 a. This God-given love in Christ hates evil (Prov. 8:13) and so shuns that which harms fellow men. On the positive side: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." V. 9 b. This general statement has been best explained by Christ Himself (Matt. 7:12).

b. In particular this repayment of the debt of Christian love is exemplified by the mentioning of the last six Commandments of the Decalog (v. 9). "In the enumeration of these Commandments the Apostle mentions this first, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery'; for though this commonly goes under the name of love (pity it is that so good a word should be so abused), yet it is really as great a violation of it as killing and stealing is, which shows that true brotherly love is love to the souls of our brethren in the first place. He that tempts others to sin and defiles their minds and consciences, though he may pretend the most passionate love (Prov. 7:15, 18), does really hate them, just as the devil does, who wars against the soul" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*). In v. 9, then, the Apostle sets forth how the debt of Christian love is paid in and out of marriage, in work, business, and professions, in court, in daily conversation, and, last but not least, also in the Christian's thinking and desiring. Use modern examples of uncleanness, dishonesty, gossip, and contorted thinking, and compare them with God's will of sanctification in the child of God in his daily life.

So we have taken inventory on the debt of Christian love. Surely it has caused us to blush with shame at our spiritual dishonesty and lassitude in paying what we owe. May we daily find cancellation of our debts in Christ and new willingness and power in Him to be more prompt in the payment of love's debt.

EDWIN H. PFLUG

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

COL. 3:12-17

We are still in the season of Epiphany. The Epiphany season is that season of the church year which is to manifest Christ, present Him as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Jesus did not only manifest Himself by His word and miracles, He also manifests Himself in the life of His followers, 2 Cor. 3:3. As epistles of Jesus Christ we certainly are to manifest His glory.

Let us consider

HOW THE CHRISTIAN GLORIFIES CHRIST

I. In his relationship to others

II. In his relationship to God

I

A. Unbelieving people of the world can do many things, care for the sick and needy, build hospitals and orphanages; but they do not do them as fruits of faith, and hence do not do them to glorify Christ, in whom they do not believe.

B. Our text is addressed to Christian people, believers in Christ; for the text addresses them, v. 12 a, as the elect of God (Eph. 1:4), holy, beloved. Show how these terms describe the Christian in a most wonderful way. They are terms of honor. Cp. Col. 1:2.

C. Christians of today also are to show their Christianity and thus glorify Christ through their Christian virtues (12 b), which they are to "put on" like a garment, not to be taken off at any time but to be worn, shown, and practiced constantly. Briefly describe the individual virtues and their meaning. Show what it means for the Christians of today to be filled with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and long-suffering. Opportunity at home. Opportunity abroad. Terrible suffering in devastated countries of world, Matt. 5:44. Certainly the man and the woman who practices these Christian virtues, following in the footsteps of Jesus, will glorify the Savior.

D. Christians are also to glorify Christ by their deeds, their attitudes towards others. V. 13. Show that this spirit of forbearance, of readiness to forgive, is the real spirit of

Christ (Luke 23:34), of men like Stephen (Acts 7:59, 60), and Paul, and other saints of old. This is the spirit that should be manifested by the Christians of 1946. By this spirit Christ is glorified.

E. How often do not Christian people fall short of the mark in Christian virtues and attitudes presented in v. 12? Give examples. There is much strife even in the Christian Church. There is much quarreling and backbiting in the homes of today. The relationship of thousands of husbands and wives is not a relationship of forbearance and ready forgiveness. New divorce courts must be created for quarreling husbands and wives. Certainly this situation is not to the glory of Christ.

F. Let us particularly see whether we have that bond of perfectness which is love, v. 14. Do we show these fine Christian virtues, or are they hidden under many sinful faults? Are we filled with forgiveness like Christ, or are we hateful like the devil? Keep in mind, as Christians you are the elect of God, holy and beloved. Do you show this in your lives? Do you really glorify Christ?

II

A. Our text also indicates that we should glorify Christ in our attitude towards God. V. 15 tells us to let the peace of God rule in our hearts. It is the peace referred to in Col. 1:2 b. On what is this peace based? How will it affect our lives? How can we in this manner glorify Jesus? The peace of Christ comes through no regulations about material things, but through the redemption. Col. 1:14; 1:22.

B. Verse 16. We are to let the Word of God dwell in us richly in all wisdom. The Word of God is to be a part of our daily living. This means that we ought to be eager to read our Bible personally, to take part in our family devotions; but it also means that we are to be eager for corporate worship in the congregation. When in the services of the church we use the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, we teach and admonish others, and we teach and admonish ourselves. In many of the passages of the Bible we encourage ourselves; e. g., we say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul." The hymns which we sing in church are sung to the glory of God, and of Christ; but they are also sung in order that we might teach ourselves

and others. Just in the proper attitude towards the Word of God at home and at church we indeed may glorify Christ and manifest Him unto men.

C. V. 17 urges upon us a proper attitude to Christ in all our words and in all our deeds. We are to do "all in the name of the Lord Jesus," which really means that all is to be done in accordance with God's Word, through which the name of God and the name of the Lord Jesus is manifested, in the true spirit of gratitude. V. 15 c; v. 17 c. Also herein is Christ glorified.

Surely this is a wonderful picture of the Christian glorifying Christ in his Christian virtues, in his Christian deeds, in his attitude toward his fellow men and his attitude towards God. Do we fit into this wonderful picture? We all fail. Rom. 7: 18, 19. Some of us fail miserably, but we ought to, as Christians, as the elect of God, strive toward the mark of our calling in Christ Jesus. Phil. 3: 12, 14. E. L. ROSCHKE

