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Homiletics: Outlines on the Standard Epistle Lessons

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Homiletics

Outlines on the Standard Epistle Lessons

SEPTUAGESIMA

1 COR. 9:24—10:5

In this text St. Paul encourages us to be victorious Christians. Is that a Christian admonition? Are Christians not already completely victorious? Have they not through the redemption of Jesus Christ triumphed over the kingdom of Satan and become heirs of God? The text does not try to make us unsure of being saved; in fact, it speaks to people who believe surely that through Jesus Christ they are at peace with God (cf. also 10:12). Nevertheless, Paul exhorts,

BE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIANS!

I. Christians still have a battle to fight

II. It is important that Christians fight it victoriously

I

A. Who is our opponent in this battle?

1. St. Paul calls it "the body" (9:27). Every man has this enemy, also every Christian; it is associated with his physical nature.—2. This does not mean that the physical body is in itself evil and to be despised. (Heb. 13:3-4; 1 Tim. 4:1-5; Gen. 1:31).—3. But it means that because of innate sin, the drives and cravings of the body go beyond their purpose and are sinful lusts (cf. 10:6-10; 1 John 2:15-17; Rom. 6, *passim.*); they have become masters of man and his spiritual life.

B. Our conflict with this opponent means a real battle.

1. St. Paul uses pictures of intense exertion: "run a race" (v. 24); "strive for mastery" (v. 25, of the wrestling games). The battle takes energy and conscious effort. It is not hard to fall (cf. 10:12; Rom. 7:18-24).—2. Hence the fighter needs a will to win; he must realize that he has a fight on his hands and that victory is all-important—much more important than in the case of the earthly conflicts which St. Paul uses as illustrations (9:24).

C. For the victory over this opponent we must use the proper strategy.

1. It is disastrous to exert energy on a false issue, "beat the air" (v. 26), or to fall prey to apathy (10:5-6, 12). Hence the importance of being temperate (9:25); guarding against any indulgence of sense or appetite that weakens the hold on the true power (10:14).—2. That power is God Himself, through the Gospel of Christ and the power of the Spirit. Christ's redemption and faith in it fostered by Word and Sacrament are our powers (cf. Rom. 7:25; 1 Cor. 11:28, 30; John 15:5-7).

II

A. This striving for victory is important for every Christian.

1. The Christian may fancy that his contact with other Christians and with the practices of his group may be a safeguard. Yet that alone may leave him impotent before the trials of faith (10:1-12).—2. Hence we may expect God to allow tests and trials of our faith, "temptations for good," which will drive us to a new hold on His supply of power and new faith in Christ as our Savior (10:13).—3. Hence the place in every Christian's life of the struggle between the flesh and the spirit, the need of "keeping under the body." It is a reminder of his need for the One Thing Needful, a barometer for the pressure of faith within him (cf. Small Catechism: Second Petition and Explanation, Sixth Petition and Explanation).

B. This striving for victory is particularly important for the Christian witness.

1. Paul speaks of the folly that would be his if he who preached to others should himself come short in this struggle. He would then be like the broken-down stumblebum lounging around the boxing arena, unable to fight a victorious match, ludicrous to others, and useless in his profession (9:26-27).—2. Not only the Apostle, but every Christian is in the business of bearing witness to the life of God in him through Christ Jesus. For that witness the purity, radiance, victory wrought by the Spirit, is essential (Phil. 2:13-16; 2 Cor. 3:2-3; 1 Pet. 2:11 ff.). Especially our time with its mountainous temptations of lust and materialism for young and old offers this challenge.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

SEXAGESIMA

2 Cor. 11:19—12:9

Untrue as well as absurd is the unbelievers' contention: "Since no one has ever returned from heaven to confirm its existence, we cannot be sure of it."

Not only is God's Word surer than the testimony of a million resurrected men, but some have returned to confirm it: Moses, Elijah, and, according to text, Paul, whose ecstatic experience is here described as nothing less than

A VISIT IN HEAVEN

I. How delightful it was II. How certain it was

III. How encouraging it was

I

Text.—Into the third heaven, Paradise (12:2-4), was Paul translated. Whether his soul alone, without body, was "caught up," he could not say. But this itself indicates that there he was free of all bodily ills. The unalloyed happiness of heaven was he experiencing; "unspeakable words" was he hearing. Things so sublime, revelations so transcendent that upon his return to earth he could not and dared not express them! He could only say: "I reckon . . ." (Rom. 8:18).

Application.—Paul's visit thus confirms how delightful is the place Christ has prepared for His own. It transcends all joys He has given them here (Is. 35:10). It is a heaven so sin-free, so perfect, that words cannot describe it (1 Cor. 13:10, 12). Earth's fairest scenes, man's greatest palaces, etc., are but faint shadows.

Illustration.—When shown a millionaire's mansion, a poor woman said: "It is splendid; I thank you for showing it to me; but it is not nearly so beautiful as the house into which I am soon moving." And then she quoted a few verses of 2 Cor. 5. Yes,

Dreams cannot picture a world so fair;
Sorrow and death may not enter there.
Time doth not breathe on its fadeless bloom
Far beyond the clouds and beyond the tomb.

II

Text. — Even critics admit that this account was written by Paul. Nor can they deny that it bears all marks of truthfulness — written by a sane, sober man, himself once an unbeliever converted only by God's intervention, never neurotic or superstitious, but hating delusions of dreamers (2 Thess. 2: 11), always ready to suffer for the truth (11: 23 ff.). And to certify his experience, he calls on God (12: 2; 11: 31: "God knoweth, I lie not"). He even mentions the exact time (12: 2). And remembering that he wrote by inspiration, must we not admit that his heavenly visit was not imaginary, but real, certain?

Application. — How false to say: we have no proof of heaven! How foolish to doubt its reality! No spirit, vision, angel, could certify it so conclusively as by this inspired testimony does faithful Paul, who during his lifetime visited heaven and returned to tell; "I have been there; I have seen Paradise."

Illustration. — Luther, on his deathbed (Feb. 18, 400 years ago): "O heavenly Father, I *know assuredly* that, although I must give up this body and be removed from this life, I shall still abide with Thee eternally."

Bless God, our triumph's sure,
Though long we did endure (444:3).

III

Text. — With this visit, God meant: "Well do I know your sufferings (11: 24 ff.) are enough to dismay the best missionary. But look, Paul, at this Paradise! This is the heaven to which souls are being led by your Gospel ministry. This is yours; therefore persevere!" An unforgettable encouragement! Was not this the honey with which Paul ate the bread of sorrows? the sugar for his cup of suffering? the stimulant to overcome all weariness, and exult (2 Tim. 4: 7-8) ?

Application. — Though our labors, trials, sorrows, temptations, are much smaller than Paul's, is this not written also for our encouragement? What a spur to faithfulness to be assured of that glorious heaven our Savior has graciously bought for us with His blood! (2 Peter 3: 13 ff.)

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Illustration. — Caesar (advancing on Rome, seeing the Senate flee): "They that will not fight for this city, what city will they fight for?" But not to strive, not to persevere for the Heavenly City, how much more reprehensible!

Then shame, thou weary soul
Look forward to the goal (444:2).

ALVIN E. WAGNER

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

1 COR. 13

The congregation at Corinth was very highly gifted (1 Cor. 1:4-7). Yet lack of love, or, as our Bible translates, charity, manifesting itself in clannishness, petty jealousies, bickerings, disregard and deliberate slights of the poorer brethren, in overstressing certain gifts in their preachers and in striving unduly for spectacular gifts, such as speaking in tongues (ch. 14), threatened to disrupt the congregation. In language rivaling in beauty the choicest products of human pen, the Apostle points out the folly and sinfulness of their behavior and shows them a more excellent way (12:31).

FOLLOW AFTER CHARITY

- I. *Lack of love vitiates all other gifts*
- II. *Love is the fountainhead of Christian virtue*
- III. *Love is the greatest of all divine gifts*

I

Vv. 1-3 emphasize the vital importance of charity, of true Christian love, toward the fellow believers. Lack of love takes the very heart and life out of all other gifts and acts a Christian may boast. Where there is no love toward the brethren, the very first requirement of God's Law is lacking, there remains only an empty shell. Cp. Rom. 13:8-10; 1 John 3:11-19; 4:7-12, 20-21. No matter how gifted, how wise, how wealthy, how influential we may be, what sacrifices we may bring, lacking love, we are nothing! Let us follow after love!

II

Vv. 4-7 picture the glory of Christian love: It is the fountainhead of all Christian virtues. Charity suffereth long, exercises patience as God has patience with us. "Is kind,"

renders friendly, gracious service to all. "Envieth not," without a trace of jealousy it acknowledges, and rejoices in, the accomplishments of others. "Vaunteth not itself," is not a braggart "puffed up" with his own importance. "Doth not behave itself unseemly," does not overstep the limits of gentlemanly, Christian behavior. "Seeketh not her own" (Phil. 2:4-12). "Is not easily provoked," not so intent on its own advantage as to be irritated at any opposition or failure. "Thinketh no evil," does not charge to the neighbor's account the evil done to it by the neighbor. It is grieved when iniquity, or sin, is committed by the fellow Christian and rejoices whenever truth makes progress in the hearts of men, lends a helping hand to such progress. It bears quietly injuries inflicted, has faith in the brethren, hopes for the best, endures willingly all things. Love, indeed, is the fountain-head of Christian virtue. Let us follow after charity.

III

Vv. 8-13. While many valuable gifts cease, love is eternal, outlasting many gifts essential for this life. Love, like Christian faith and hope, "abideth." In this respect love is the equal of that grand trio of indispensable, eternal gifts. And it is the greatest of this trio. Christian faith and hope came into existence only after man had fallen into sin and the Savior from sin had been promised. In the history of man, love antedates Christian faith and hope. Neither is Christian faith and hope an attribute of God, while love is; and the image of God is not restored in the Christian's faith and hope, but in the Christian's love, the fruit and product of faith and hope. It is Christian love that makes the Christian God-like, Christlike. Therefore love is the greatest of these three. Let us strive after this noble gift!

THEO. LAETSCH

INVOCAVIT

2 COR. 6:1-10

Another Lenten Season! What shall we preach? In our text we have

A FITTING EXHORTATION FOR LENT

I. Its Content

A. In the previous chapter (2 Cor. 5) the Apostle reminds us of the grace of God, telling us how it was attained for the whole world in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:19). There he appeals to all, "Be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). In a similar way we have in previous services told you of this wonderful grace of God. In every sermon we have called on you to accept this wonderful message of mercy, saying, Acts 16:31; Mark 1:15; etc.

B. To those who accept this Gospel invitation the Apostle now directs a special word of exhortation, saying in our text, verse 1.

a. Many do receive God's grace in vain, *e. g.*, those who "for a while believe" (Luke 8:13; Heb. 4:1, 11); those who permit Satan to repossess their souls (Luke 11:24-26); and those who "become entangled with the pollutions of the world" (2 Pet. 2:30). Particularly at this time we think of former confirmands, many of them no longer with us; of "Lenten Christians," who came only for a time, never to return; of those who have endured the trials of this life (war, sickness, poverty, accidents) and under these trials have learned to accept Christ, but who, now that the dangers are over, have lapsed into their old ways of indifference and neglect. Hence, we, too, have reason to exhort all our people, and particularly also our catechumens, in this present season of Lent, saying, verse 1.

b. In the context, and in other Scriptures as well, the Lord tells us how we may give heed to this exhortation, namely, by avoiding evil fellowship (2 Cor. 6:13-18), by fighting sin and fleeing from it (2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 3:12-13; 1 Cor. 10:1-13), by abiding in Christ and in His Word (John 15:4-8; 8:31-32) and so bringing forth much fruit. Let us follow the advice of our Lord and so give heed to our text (v. 1).

II. Its Characteristics

A. It is urgent. The Apostle uses a strong term (v.1). We do not merely "pray you" (2 Cor. 5:20), he says, but, as co-workers with God, we, like God, "beseech you," lit., "exhort you" (cp. 2 Cor. 5:20; 6:1). We, therefore, as your pastors and as "co-workers with God," just as urgently exhort you in this present Lenten season (v.1).

B. It is timely (v.2). The point of the parenthetical phrase is this: God had promised to hear Messiah's prayer on our behalf and for our salvation (Is. 49:8); and since, in Christ, the Messiah has come and through His substitutionary work has made (John 17; Luke 23:23) and still continues to make intercession in our behalf (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 4:14-15; 7:24-25), it follows that we ought to accept Him and to heed the exhortation of our text now (v.2 b).

C. It is offered with evident sincerity. If ever there is proof of sincerity in the exhortation of men, it is manifest here. The Apostle admonishes as one who is as he describes himself in vv. 3-4 and supports his claim by "much patience" in hardships, v. 4 b (Acts 9:16; 2 Cor. 1:6; 4:7; 7:7; 2 Tim. 4:10), v. 5 a (Acts 11:23; 13:50; 14:5, 19; 16:22; 17:5; 18:12; 19:29; 21:30; 22:24; 2 Cor. 11:16-33), v. 5 b (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:11; Acts 20:31; 14:25; cp. Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:12); by exhibiting the Christian graces of vv. 6-7; and by bearing both good and evil in a manner befitting his calling, vv. 8-10 (Acts 17:18; 24:14; 27:21; 28:22; 2 Cor. 1:8; 3:22; 12:7; Phil. 3:4-10; 4:4). Surely, in the face of such evidence one cannot question the sincerity of St. Paul's appeal! But should not our exhortations be equally sincere, attested to by similar evidence in our lives?

Conclusion: If through the temptation of Satan and in the weakness of our flesh we have at times sinned against the admonition of v. 1, let us find our comfort in Christ Jesus, who as our Messiah and Substitute perfectly overcame the Tempter for us (Matt. 4:1-11; Heb. 4:14-16), so that we were made "the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:20). And may this merciful kindness of our Savior, granted to us by faith, cause us to extend this exhortation of our text with the same urgency, timeliness, and sincerity as did Paul, not only during this season of Lent, but always. Amen.

THEODORE F. NICKEL