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Homiletics: Outlines on the Standard Epistle Lessons

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Homiletics

Outlines on the Standard Epistle Lessons

CANTATE

JAMES 1:16-21

Much time and effort is consumed by men to learn the source of evil. Physicians seek to ascertain the causes of disease; students of history strive to know the factors that lead to war; psychiatrists attempt to uncover the beginnings of mental abnormality; educators discuss the causes of juvenile delinquency. If we are so deeply interested in the source of evil, how much more willing should we be to learn

THE SOURCE OF GOOD

- I. *Good comes from God*
- II. *Good comes from Christians*

I

Every good gift comes from God (v. 16), and He is called the "Father of lights." Light is the source of many of the good things we have: plant life, grain, fruit. Without light most growing things would die. Light is also a therapeutic agent, and physicians use it for the cure of disease. Light is the source of good, and God is the Father of lights. He created light. He is the ultimate source of good. That is very evident when we think of our life in this world. Rain and sunshine are from God (Matt. 5:45). All receive their needs from Him (Ps. 145:15, 16). God is Lord over the universe and governs the world. God is always the source of good. The created lights are subject to variableness and shadow, eclipses and phases, but God is always the same. Men change, too, in their willingness to be helpful and weary of being kind, but God never changes.

One of the greatest gifts of God is regeneration, v. 18. We do not make ourselves Christians; God does it through the means of grace, Holy Baptism and the "Word of Truth," the Gospel (Titus 3:5; 2 Tim. 1:9). The change that is wrought in a man by God is so great that it is like being born all over again, being born a different person. The Christian

becomes a kind of first fruits of God's creatures, dedicated to God and belonging to Him. All the spiritual good that we have, our faith, the forgiveness of our sin, our hope of heaven, is all a gift of God. He is the source of all good.

II

Good also comes from Christians. Natural man cannot produce anything that is good in God's sight (Gen. 8:1; Rom. 7:18; John 3:6). But a *regenerate person* brings forth much good. The Father of lights has shined into the Christian's heart with the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:6), giving him knowledge of Christ and saving faith. And then the Christian begins to give forth light, too. He is like the phosphorescent cross that is seen on the walls of Christian homes. When the room becomes dark, the cross glows with the light that it has received. The Christian gives forth the light of love and good deeds (John 15:5). He battles against sin (Rom. 7:22); he grows constantly in virtue (2 Pet. 1:5); he becomes zealous to do good (Titus 2:14).

The text points out some of the good that comes from Christians (v. 19-20). We hear a great deal, and much of it is evil. But we should not spread the evil that we hear (James 4:11; Matt. 18:15). Instead, we should be the source of good, defending our neighbor (Prov. 31:8-9); speaking well of him (1 Sam. 19:4); and putting the best construction on everything. How much good could be done in the world if all Christians would observe these simple directions of the Eighth Commandment!

The Christian will be the source of good if he curbs his wrath and guards his temper. Much harm comes from wrath (v. 20). Harsh words, spoken in anger, cause enmity to arise in families, among friends, between employer and employee, and sometimes even in Christian churches. There ensue bitter accusations, burning hatreds, and often harmful violence. The Christian strives hard to subdue anger and wrath when it arises in his heart, for he knows what is written (Matt. 5:22; 1 John 3:15). He remembers the story of Cain. Instead, the Christian strives to be gentle and kind, forgiving and generous in all his contacts with others. What a different world it would be — a better world to live in — if all Christians would constantly strive in this way to be the source of good!

HOMILETICS

358

Verse 21 points to the filthiness, lewdness, vice and shame that is prevalent in the world and that produces so much harm and sorrow, broken homes, destitute families, diseased bodies and abject misery and poverty. The Christian will not aid in causing all this evil, but will instead be decent and clean and pure for his own sake and as an example to others. He will thus be the source of good.

To effect all this, to continue to be a source of good, the Christian will receive and heed the Word of God that has been implanted into his heart. The Gospel will strengthen his faith, help him to be a source of good, and save his soul.

FREDERIC NIEDNER

ROGATE

JAMES 1:22-27

Rogate — Prayer Sunday. The Bible often warns against prayer which is insincere and a mere prattle of the lips.

This epistle warns against another type of insincerity: hearing without doing.

"BE YE DOERS OF THE WORD AND NOT HEARERS ONLY"

Let us consider

- I. *The hearer who is a hearer only*
- II. *The hearer who is also a doer*

I

A. The text does not deal with the heathen who have never heard of God's Word, nor with the so-called unchurched who regularly refuse to attend the preaching of the Word; it deals with those who hear, people of the visible Church.

B. Among the hearers there are those who are hearers only. Their characteristics:

a. They are like a man who looks at himself in a looking glass (vv. 23-24). In a looking glass we see only our *outward* appearance; internal conditions are not revealed. It is a superficial self-examination — "straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."

So a mere hearer — his hearing and reading of the Word is merely superficial. At best he has an intellectual interest

in a sermon or in the study of the Bible. He merely performs the outward duty of sitting in church during the service. "Hearing they hear not," (Matt. 13:13, 19).

b. Such hearers "seem to be religious" (v. 26), *i. e.*, they "consider themselves religious" but do not realize what implications this has for life. *Ex.*: They seem religious but bridle not the tongue (v. 26). Their lives belie their profession of faith. They are only Sunday Christians, church members who in their occupation, their business, their amusements are children of this world.

c. Such hearers "deceive their own selves" (v. 22). They may indeed deceive also their fellow men, but first of all they deceive themselves. While they consider themselves good Christians, God would say of them: "I never knew you." The sham church member, the forgetful hearer, the work-for-appearance-only Christians — all deceive themselves worst of all.

II

A. Who is such a "doer of the Word"?

Not one who rejects hearing the Word and tries to compensate therefor by "good deeds."

But "whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein" (v. 25). The perfect law of liberty is the Gospel (v. 21: "able to save your souls"), the "truth which makes us free" (John 8:32). The "doer" is first of all a believer in the Gospel. Without such faith and trust no man's deeds are acceptable to God.

B. The doer "looketh into" the perfect law of liberty, *i. e.*, he "stoops to look at it carefully." His is not a superficial consideration of God's Word, but a searching and diligent application to himself.

C. Such doing of the Word includes deeds of love (v. 27). Faith and good deeds always go hand in hand.

Such deeds may be directed to *others*: care of the unfortunate, the suffering, the needy; such deeds apply also to *our own selves*: "to keep himself unspotted from the world."

This text is an urge to diligent self-examination by church members.

H. O. A. KEINATH

ASCENSION DAY

Acts 1:1-11

During these days the children, wives, and parents of veterans are anxiously awaiting the homecoming of their loved ones. When the veterans get back home, what joys are theirs—the joys of reunion, of homecoming.

On Ascension Day we speak of one homecoming and look at the preparations for another.

I

A. The Savior had finished His work of living and dying in our stead (active and passive obedience). He had left His Father's home to go out and accomplish this. The Father had placed His approval on the work of His Son—the resurrection on Easter Day.

B. Before He returned home, Jesus showed Himself to His disciples repeatedly over a period of 40 days. Eating with them—not because He needed food to keep from starving—but to convince the disciples that He who had been dead was now alive. No ghost or phantom. The Apostles had to know the crucified and risen Lord—the theme and content of their message.

C. On the 40th day on the Mount of Olives He was calmly and grandly lifted up. They saw Him go up. A visible departure.

D. Picture entrance into throne room of heaven. Innumerable hosts of angels welcome the God-Man. The Father says, "Sit Thou at My right hand" (Ps. 110:1), the place of honor, the place of power. He had done His work well, and He must be honored for it.

E. Even though we no longer have His visible presence, He says, "Lo, I am with you alway" (Matt. 28:20).

F. He will come again; all mankind shall see Him. But before that final day, Judgment or Resurrection Day, He is preparing for another homecoming.

II

A. The disciples were to remain in Jerusalem until the Baptism in the Holy Ghost. Ten days later this promise of the Father came true. The disciples were given power ($\delta\upsilon\lambda\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$).

They were to preach the Gospel, which St. Paul calls the power of God (δύναμις θεοῦ). That Gospel was to be the dynamics the world needed. It was to turn the world upside down; really, right side up.

B. With this power of God, the Gospel, the disciples (1 Pet. 2:9) were to bring others into the Kingdom of God, which consists of disciples of Jesus, the world's Sin-Bearer.

C. Jesus turns away from the fleshly, nationalistic idea of an earthly kingdom and gives the disciples the program "Ye shall be testifiers of Me." They should tell the world who He is and what He has done in place of man.

D. Ever-broadening sphere of influence: home missions to foreign missions — universal teaching.

E. Jesus, the great Director of Missions, would be with them invisibly (Matt. 28) and would bless the Cross-centered teaching (Is. 55). They are assured of success.

F. This will continue until He comes again. The first homecoming was a joy to Christ Jesus and His Father. The next homecoming, when Jesus comes to take us to Himself, will be a joy for us, for we shall then be with Christ forever.

G. The first homecoming and the preparations for another illustrated in a *legend*: "When the Lord returned triumphantly to heaven on Ascension Day, He was asked by an angel what plans He had made for the future of His kingdom. 'I am leaving it to Peter and Paul and John, to Mary and Martha.' 'But what if they fail you — if Peter goes back to his fishing and Paul to his tentmaking and Mary and Martha to their housekeeping?' He was asked. He answered, 'I have made no other provision. I am counting on them!'" (Martin Ise, 3d Medit., Stud. Pastors' Conference, 1946.)

H. The glory which is ours. The great God, our Savior and Redeemer, has called me into His service. He has given me a commission, me, formerly a rebel, but now His adopted child. I am to be His co-worker, His representative, the ambassador of the King of Kings, to be His witness that through this testifying others may join me in His kingdom of forgiveness so that when He comes again, others and I may enter into the homecoming festivities with joy. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

F. L. NEEBE

HOMILETICS

357

EXAUDI

1 PET. 4:7-11

The First Epistle of Peter contains chiefly a series of exhortations unto a Christian life based on the fact that Christians are regenerated children of God and have a sure hope of eternal life (c. 1:3-12). But it also deals with the fact that Christians as strangers and pilgrims in a wicked world must suffer much at the hands of this world and that in view of their hope they are able to undergo such suffering with courage (3:13—4:6, 12-19). Since their cross does not exempt the Christians from continuing in sanctification, the exhorting paragraph of our text is inserted in the midst of statements that Christians have and must expect much suffering. — This suffering is evidence that the wicked world is hastening to its end, its doom. God will be moved *soon* to avenge and rescue His saints by coming to judgment (v. 7 a). So the time when Christians can work is short, and that is an incentive (frequent in Scripture; cp. James 5:8; Heb. 10:25; Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7) for greater efforts toward sanctification.

A THREEFOLD ADMONITION IN VIEW OF THE NEARNESS
OF THE END OF ALL THINGS

I

To Pray Diligently (v. 7 b c). — The Greek has the plural "prayers." Much and regular praying is called for, since even in good days we can do nothing without God, much less in evil days (cp. Luke 21:36; Matt. 26:41); especially should Christians pray for the coming of the Lord (Rev. 22:20). But to pray in the right spirit soberness and watchfulness are required, a well-balanced mind, self-mastery, moderation. The second verb is synonymous: withdrawal of the thoughts from earthly things, sorrows, joys, and delectations. To pray properly a Christian must not be excited by passions and desires. The first verb emphasizes in particular mental sobriety, the second one, bodily.

II

To be Persevering in Brotherly Love (vv. 8-9). — Peter now takes up the right behavior toward men: fervent, that is, unceasing, constant love. That must be as persistent as prayer (Acts 12:5; Luke 18:1). This is the Apostle's third

reminder of brotherly love (cp. ch. 1:22; 3:8). Christians evidently need such admonition. This love is apt to grow weary, since it must put up with much sin in the brethren. Yet it alone can do what is required: cover up a multitude of sins by not imputing them to the brother (Matt. 18:21 f.), and by not divulging them to others. In case of unrepented sins of the brother, love cannot stop with covering up; it will be constrained to admonish (Matt. 18:15 ff.). This action of love makes for peace among brethren in the Church, but "hatred stirreth up strife" (see Prov. 10:12). — Another much needed action of love is "hospitality without grudging," which is litotes for hospitality with joy and alacrity. It was especially necessary in the case of the persecuted Christians. Cp. Rom. 12:13; 2 Cor. 9:7.

III

To be Faithful in Administering the Manifold Gifts of God (vv. 10-11). — These verses refer in particular to congregational life, whereas the previous admonition had reference to the behavior of individual Christians. V. 10 speaks of all spiritual gifts, not only the extraordinary ones of the early Church, but also the ordinary ones found among Christians in general. No Christian is without one or the other or several of these gifts. God is the originator of these gifts; we are only stewards. We must employ, according to the Giver's will, only what was given, but all of that, and give God the credit. Cp. 1 Cor. 4:7; Luke 12:42; 16:1 ff.; 1 Cor. 4:1 ff. — V. 11 adds two examples of such charismatic gifts. 11a: "Oracles," God's own pronouncements; cp. Acts 7:38; Rom. 3:2; Heb. 5:12. Christians are to speak God's words given to them freely as God's gifts (1 Thess. 2:13). These words are found in the Bible. The reference is not only to preachers and teachers, but also to lay Christians. It is taken for granted that Christians preach and teach this Word, but they should do it with the consciousness that it is God's Word and insist on its importance, power, and acceptability. — The other example (v. 11 b) is ministration, both official and lay services to the poor, sick, and stranger. But again Christians are told that this, too, is a *gift* of God; the strength and ability is not theirs, but God's. To Him they must look for it all, and to Him they must give the credit. They will also have to give account for their stewardship to Him when the end of

HOMILETICS

359

all things comes. — Finally (v. 11 c), the purpose of all speaking and serving in the Kingdom is God's glory, through Christ reflected in the believers (Rom. 8:30 b). Christ is the source of power in the Christians which glorifies God. — The doxology refers to Christ and proves His true deity.

When the end of all things comes, the Christians will be enabled to live a life of perfect sanctification to the glory of God through Christ.

F. S. WENGER

PENTECOST

ACTS 2:1-13

All Christendom rejoices at Christmas over the birth of the Christ Child and at Easter over the resurrection of Christ from the dead. At Pentecost we rejoice particularly over the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter, sent by the Father in the Son's name (John 14:26). Let us

REJOICE IN THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- I. *He comes to lead you to Jesus, your Savior*
- II. *He comes to keep you in the communion of saints*

I

After Jesus' ascension into heaven the disciples waited in Jerusalem according to the word of their Lord. On the tenth day, as they were assembled in a certain house, the Pentecost miracle took place. Their hearts, minds, and lips having been touched by the Holy Spirit, they were able to preach the wonderful works of God in the tongues of many people gathered in Jerusalem from many countries far and near.

The Holy Spirit, who gave these men utterance to speak with other tongues, is not an influence or a power of God, but Very God Himself. Scripture speaks of Him as a person, for He teaches (John 14:26), testifies (John 15:26), reproves (John 16:8), shows, glorifies (John 16:13-14), leads (Rom. 8:14), knows the things of God (1 Cor. 2:11), speaks (Acts 13:2), forbids (Acts 16:6), can be resisted (Acts 7:51), despised (Heb. 10:29), blasphemed (Mark 3:29). Scripture, furthermore, calls Him God (Luke 1:35; Acts 5:4; 1 Cor. 3:16; 12:4-6) and ascribes the properties of God to Him: eternity

(Heb. 9:14), omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-10), omnipotence (Luke 1:35), omniscience (1 Cor. 2:10; John 14:29; 16:12-13).

Of this Holy Spirit St. Paul says, "No man can say," etc. (1 Cor. 12:3). Witness the preaching of the Apostles on the first Pentecost day, especially that of St. Peter (vv. 6, 11, 41).

In the explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed we confess, "I believe . . . in the true faith." Every one of us who bears the name Christian and clings to Jesus as his Savior has been brought to the foot of the Cross by the Holy Spirit. He enables us to follow the word "Repent" (Mark 1:15; Matt. 4:17). He gives us the strength to say, "I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). He assures us of forgiveness of sin, peace with God (Rom. 5:1), everlasting life (John 3:36).

Oh, rejoice in the Holy Spirit, who leads you to Jesus, your Savior!

II

Again I say, Rejoice in the Holy Spirit because He keeps you in the communion of saints! On the first Pentecost day thousands of people from many surrounding countries (vv. 9-11) heard the wonderful works of God in their own tongues, and many of them believed. The seed of faith, which the Holy Spirit planted in their hearts, flourished in their home areas. There, too, the Holy Spirit exercised His power through the Gospel and called, enlightened, gathered, sanctified others in the true faith and added them to the communion of saints. Thus He works from generation to generation.

The dangers that confronted the communion of saints in the past were just as great as those which confront the followers of Jesus today. But the Holy Spirit has always strengthened and preserved the Christian (1 Pet. 1:5; Phil. 1:6; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; Rom. 8:31-39). He builds up our faith on the Bread of Life in the Gospel (John 6:33-71) so that we can resist temptation (1 Pet. 5:8-9), so that we are not overcome by the cares of this world (Luke 8:4-15). He teaches us how to use the shield of faith and how to wield the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:16-17). He leads us in the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12). He gives us the willingness to endure to the end (Matt. 10:22; Rev. 2:10).

But the Holy Spirit not only keeps you in the communion of saints, He wants to use you to bring others into the same

communion with you. He opens your ears to hear the great command (Matt. 28:19-20). He lifts up your eyes to see the great harvest (Matt. 9:37-38). He loosens your tongue to say, "Here am I; send me" (Is. 6:8). He will give you the joy of the severity in your work under His guidance (Luke 10:17). Oh, be eager to enter the open doors in this postwar world!

Rejoice in the Holy Spirit, who keeps you and others in the communion of saints now and forever (1 Pet. 1:3-5; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Tim. 4:18)!

ALEX WM. C. GUEBERT

PENTECOST MONDAY

Acts 10:42-48 a

Christians are temples of God, in whom the Spirit of God dwells (1 Cor. 3:16). Without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit a person cannot be a member of Christ's body (Rom. 8:9). The presence of the Holy Spirit in a believer is unto him a seal that he is a son of God (Rom. 8:14). In the text before us we read of the coming of the Holy Ghost into the hearts of men. Since it is of the utmost importance that we have the Holy Ghost, let us consider

THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY GHOST

We learn

- I. *What is meant by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost*
- II. *How the Holy Ghost is poured out on mankind*
- III. *Who can receive the Holy Ghost*

I

A. "The Holy Ghost fell upon them" (v. 44). This cannot mean that previous to this time the Holy Ghost had not been with these people. He is omnipresent (Jer. 23:23, 24; Ps. 139:7-10). Cornelius was a devout man (Acts 10:2). The statement "the Holy Ghost fell upon them" must signify that He was present in a different manner and made His presence felt in various ways.

B. The new presence of the Holy Ghost was evidenced by "speaking with tongues" (v. 46). Peter recognized the same gift which he and others had received on Pentecost. The charismatic gifts served a wholesome purpose in the early

history of the Church, but they were not an essential feature in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. Contrary to the teachings of the Pentecostals and similar sects we learn from 1 Cor. 12:28-30 that not all believers, although they did have the Holy Ghost, had these extraordinary gifts.

C. "They magnified God" (v. 46). This is essential in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. To magnify means to glorify, to praise. There must be a reason for praising God. Cornelius and his household were assured by the Holy Ghost that they had remission of sins. Such assurance is the work of the Holy Ghost (Rom. 8:14, 17).

D. "Magnified God" means also that these people glorified God by a sanctified life, cf. Phil. 1:20. This, too, the result of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost (Gal. 5:22-26).

Thus the outpouring of the Holy Ghost consists in this, that the Holy Ghost gives us the assurance that we are children of God and the ability to lead a Christian life. Have you received the Holy Ghost?

II

A. "The gift of the Holy Ghost was poured out on the Gentiles" (v. 45). In Acts 11:17 Peter calls God the Giver of this gift. The Holy Ghost, accordingly, does not come to us through man-devised means (enthusiasts), but by the means ordained by God.

B. "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the Word" (v. 44). Through the preaching of the Word of God the Holy Ghost was poured out on Cornelius and his household. The Word of God is the means, the only means, through which the Holy Ghost comes to man. The Sacraments are efficacious because the Word of God is connected with the visible elements.

C. Peter preached the Law (v. 42), but the Holy Ghost did not come during the preaching of the Law. The Law reveals sin, guilt, and judgment. It terrifies and kills (2 Cor. 3:6), but it does not give the Holy Ghost (Gal. 3:2). Still the preaching of the Law is necessary.

D. While Peter was preaching the Gospel, the Holy Ghost fell on them which heard the Word (vv. 43-44). V. 43 summarizes the Gospel. The Gospel not only reveals what God has done for mankind; it is the power of God through which

HOMILETICS

363

the Holy Ghost convinces sinners that God is reconciled (2 Cor. 5:19, 20) and enables the believers in Christ to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God (Rom. 12:1; 1 John 4:11, 19).

Do we give the Holy Ghost an opportunity to come to us by the diligent use of the means of grace?

III

A. Cornelius was a Gentile. When he and his household received the gift of the Holy Ghost, they of the circumcision were astonished (v. 45). Cf. also Acts 11:1-18. The visible demonstration of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on Gentiles proved to them that He and His gifts were not to be confined to a certain race or group of people. Peter could not refuse Baptism to Cornelius and his household as a seal of their faith (vv. 47-48 a), engendered by the Gospel of Christ crucified.

B. The Gospel is intended for all. Wherever the Gospel is preached, the Holy Ghost is poured out. Whosoever accepts the Gospel and believes in Christ for the remission of sins receives the Holy Ghost (Col. 3:11).

Let us, therefore, be diligent in the use of the means of grace, so that we receive a full measure of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Let us be zealous to carry out the command of our Savior to preach the Gospel to every creature.

WALTER A. BAEPLER

TRINITY SUNDAY

Rom. 11:33-36

As the Apostle, in concluding the doctrinal section of his great Epistle to the Romans, lifts up his heart and voice in a beautiful and powerful doxology, so we Christians of these latter days may well summarize the facts brought home to us during the festival season of the church year in this beautiful hymn of praise, which presents to us

**THE UNSEARCHABLE GOD IN HIS RELATION TO
THE BELIEVERS**

- I. In His essence and attributes*
- II. In His works*

I

A. We are reminded of the depth of His riches. There are treasures hidden in God which are unplumbed depths, which no man's reason can sound. This is true of every quality, of every attribute of the God of the Bible. Here we are constrained to praise the riches of His *wisdom*, of the essential fund of truth contained in Him, who was thereby enabled to find a way of bringing salvation to fallen mankind in and through His Son, the God-Man. (V. 33 a.) And with this wisdom is associated His *knowledge* or understanding, by which He was fully acquainted with the needs of mankind in the depths of their foolish enmity against Him.—These two attributes of God are so far above and beyond human comprehension that the Apostle, employing the contents of several Old Testament passages, is constrained to cry out: V. 34. As God lives in a light into which no man can enter, so His mind is beyond human conception and comprehension. Cp. Is. 40:13; Job 41:3. It is presumption for any human being even to think that he could serve as a counselor to the all-wise God in His dealings with the children of men.

B. This fact is brought out by the unsearchable quality and character of God's ways and judgments. Past finding out are the ways of His grace which brought us to faith, preserves us in this faith, although we are not one whit better by nature than those who are lost. Unsearchable are His judgments, His sentences of hardening and condemnation, as in the case of Pharaoh and that of the children of Israel during the centuries of testing, until, finally, the judgment of Is. 6 came upon them, significantly referred to in all four Gospels as well as in the last chapter of Acts. It is the mystery of the "same guilt" and of God's dealing with self-hardening. The very fact that God permits obstinate sinners to be caught in the meshes of their own opposition and enmity against Him and then turns their rejection by Him in favor of the vessels of His mercy exceeds our power of comprehension and leaves us in helpless bewilderment (v. 33 b).

II

A. Also in His works God is the Absolute One, whose sovereignty is one of justice as well as of grace and mercy (v. 35). No human being is in a position to boast of having

given anything to God, so that he may rightly expect something in return. Every notion held by men as though their goodness, their willingness to listen to the words of truth in the Word, or any other condition in themselves may cause God to regard them as worthy of His bounty is foolish from the outset. We have no right to demand anything from Him.

B. He has sovereign power with regard to His works (v. 36). He is the Creator of all things, for He brought forth the entire creation by the word of His divine power. He is the Preserver of all things (Acts 17:28). And according to His divine plan He is Himself the final goal of mankind, for He wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. His just judgments do no militate against the exercise of His loving-kindness and tender mercy upon His children. Augustine: "Thou hast created us unto Thee, and restless is our heart until it rests in Thee." Believers look forward to their final redemption with a heart that appreciates the promises of grace and is moved to accept them by the power of the Spirit through the Word. But with the fulfillment of our hopes in heaven will come the glorious eternal doxology (v. 36).

P. E. KRETZMANN

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 JOHN 4:16-21

The Gospel for this Sunday pictures to us a man who lost the everlasting life which God meant also for him. He is not described as a criminal as was the impenitent thief on Calvary. Yet he was a great sinner, for in his life he showed love neither to God nor to his neighbor. The Gospel presents to us an earnest warning, for according to our corrupt nature we, too, are inclined to lead loveless lives. The Epistle exhorts us to

CHRISTIAN LOVE

I. Its source II. Its blessing III. Its manifestation

I

A. In the text St. John glorifies *Christian* love. 1) There is a natural love, often valuable and impressive, such as the heathen have (Rom. 2:14-15). Illustrate. Such love is worked by God through the Law written in man's heart, serves the

welfare of human society, and has the promise of this life (Fourth Commandment). 2) Christian love, however, is essentially different from natural love. a) It is found only in true believers in Christ (v. 16 a). Explain meaning of text. Examples: John the Evangelist, St. Paul, etc. b) It flows from God's own love toward us, experienced by us through faith in Christ (v. 19; John 15:19; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:2; 2 Tim. 1:7). The source of Christian love is God's own love manifested in our redemption (John 3:16; v. 16: "God is Love").

B. Have we that Christian love which should be ours as children of God in Christ Jesus? Where there is true faith, there also is true Christian love. Again, where there is no manifestation of Christian love, there is no true faith (Gal. 5:6; James 2:17 ff.). Remember, God demands love (Matt. 22:39; 1 Tim. 1:5; James 2:18; 1 Cor. 12:31; Col. 3:14; 1 Cor. 13:13; 16:14).

II

A. Blessed are all true Christians who live in Christian love. 1) They dwell in God, and God dwells in them (v. 16). Love of course is not a meritorious act, causing God to dwell in us, but God, being Love, cannot dwell in anyone who does not by faith manifest the fruit of faith — love (John 14:23 f.; 1 John 2:5). 2) They are without fear, for they shall not be judged. V. 17: True Christian love manifests its perfection in the boldness, the fearlessness, the true joy which believers have even when God's judgment comes upon the world, either now or at the end of the world (John 3:18; 1 Pet. 4:17; Acts 17:31; 24:15-16). Reason: As God is Love, so they walk in love (vv. 17 b-18). — True believers, living in love, do not fear, but eagerly await Christ's second coming (1 Cor. 1:7).

Have you the blessed assurance of God's indwelling in your soul? Do you live in loving communion with God? Have you the fearlessness, the boldness, the joy making you happy to receive the Lord whenever He should come? We of course cannot gain perfection in this life (Phil. 3:12). Nevertheless, that fearlessness is ours if by faith in Christ we walk in love. What an important point: if you are afraid of God, if you do not live in communion with God, beware! (2 Cor. 13:5).

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867

III

A. But true love must manifest itself. 1) Toward God (v. 19; the first table of the Decalog), in keeping His commandments (John 14:23). Stress this point in view of the gross neglect of this duty by so many Christians. 2) True Christian love manifests itself toward the neighbor (v. 20 f.; 1 John 3:16 ff.; John 13:34; Matt. 24: 12; John 13:35; Rom. 13:10; 1 Cor. 8:1 ff.; 1 Cor. 13:1 ff.; 2 Cor. 6:6; Eph. 4:2; 4:15; Eph. 5:2; Phil. 2:2; Col. 2:2; 1 Thess. 3:12; 2 Thess. 1:3; Heb. 10:24; Rev. 2:4; etc.). These passages show how serious God is in demanding of us true Christian love.

B. Have we such true love as manifests itself toward God and the neighbor? How greatly love is needed in the world and the Church! It is well that this Epistle should be considered at the very beginning of the Trinity Sunday series (Rom. 13:10 b).

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