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Homiletics: Outlines on the Standard Epistle Lessons

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Homiletics

Outlines on the Standard Epistle Lessons

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 COR. 1:4-9

Paul will have many unpleasant things to say to the Corinthians, who had permitted many serious disorders to creep into their communion. But he wants to begin his letter with words of thanksgiving and encouragement. It were a sad situation indeed if hope were lost for a congregation or for individuals whenever sins and faults, even of a very serious nature, occur. Let us consider

PAUL'S DOXOLOGY A SOURCE OF STRENGTH IN SPIRITUAL WEAKNESS

He reminds us

- I. *That God alone could and did implant spiritual life in our hearts*
- II. *He alone can and intends to foster and revive that spiritual life unto its glorious consummation in heaven*

I

Vv. 4-7. The glorious things Paul thanks for may be summed up thus: He thanks for the good beginning which God has made among them, and for God's faithfulness, which gives him ground for the expectation that finally all things will turn out well for the spiritual welfare of the Corinthians. Paul thanks for God's gifts, not for personal achievements of the Corinthians. "God's grace"—all the gifts which flow from God's gracious disposition towards the sinner for Christ's sake: forgiveness of sins and all the graces that go with the new life of regeneration. Jesus Christ, the Mediator of this grace, is mentioned nine times in the first nine verses of this epistle.—This grace makes one "rich in everything." This grace has many phases. The Corinthians were endowed in a richer manner with special gifts of grace than other churches. "In all utterance." The Corinthians can speak of things spiritual in many ways, for their own comfort and strengthen-

ing as well as for the purpose of gaining others. The gift of tongues of chapter 14 is of course included, but "utterance" is much wider. "All knowledge," the believing knowledge of the Christian truths of the Gospel. "The testimony of Christ" (v. 6), the Gospel which was preached to them. "Confirmed," the preachers testified to things they themselves had experienced and knew to be the truth. "In you," among you. This confirming, therefore, is the effective, steadfast, faithful promulgation of the Gospel on the part of Paul and of the other preachers who were active in Corinth.

V. 7. They "come behind in no gift," they are richly endowed with all these gifts, ordinary and extraordinary, including love, ch. 13. There is only one thing lacking yet: they must yet wait "for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" on the Last Day.

It were sad, indeed, if after such a glorious beginning the Corinthians were not to attain that final goal after all. In view of their many frailties such a catastrophe seemed rather probable. But Paul's confidence that things will end as gloriously for the Corinthians as they began remains unshaken, because it is placed solely on God.

II

Satan was trying his best to wreck the beautiful work which God, through His Apostle and other Corinthian teachers, had wrought in Corinth. Yet Paul hopes and writes this epistle because of such hope.

V. 8. "Who" refers to God (v. 4). Paul is giving all glory to God. God will "confirm," keep steadfast, the Corinthians in the state He has begun. He will keep them "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul does not intend to say that the Corinthians were "blameless" at the time of his writing this letter. Yet God's purpose is to confirm them so that they will stand before Him unblamable in that great day. "Confirming" includes both justification and sanctification. To achieve this end, much labor of grace would still be required on the part of God.

Paul bases this assurance solely on the faithfulness of God. V. 9. Since God has at one time extended His call of grace to them, His faithfulness furnishes a guarantee that He will do all that is to be done on His part to bring everything to the proper ending. Cf. ch. 10: 13; 1 Thess. 5: 24; 2 Thess.

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3:3; Phil. 1:6. The "fellowship" is participation in the gifts of grace with all other Christians made possible by Christ, Himself being the greatest and best Gift. Now already Christ is "our Lord." When He will be fully revealed as Lord (ch. 15:25; Phil. 2:2), then also the glorification of the Christians will be perfected, 2 Thess. 1:12; 2:14; 1 Thess. 2:12.

Our case is much like that of the Corinthians: in the past, inestimable grace; then, our loving response soon cooled under the cares and joys and the enmities of the world. Our only hope, but a sure hope, is the faithfulness of our God in Christ Jesus. He will bring us to a glorious sharing with Himself in heaven. Let the grace which God has granted in the past and the assurance of His faithfulness for the future make us truly grateful (1 Cor. 15:58). F. WENGER

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Eph. 4:22-28

The divine image consisted in this, that man knew God (Col. 3:10); that his will coincided with the holy will of God (text, v. 24); in his rule over the earth (Gen. 1:28); in his happy abode (2:8, 9); in immortality (2:17); and in the absence of evil lusts (2:25). After the loss of the divine image God still concerns Himself with fallen man, because in His love He would in Christ restore the whole human race to the divine image.

THE RENEWAL OF THE DIVINE IMAGE IN BELIEVERS*I. Wherein it consists**II. How it manifests itself*

I

A. The image of God was lost by the Fall. God created man after His likeness (Gen. 1:26), but Adam after the Fall begat sons and daughters "in his own likeness, after his image" (Gen. 5:3); cp. Ps. 51:5; John 3:6. All children of men are born haters of God (Rom. 8:7); with dead souls (Eph. 2:1; Rom. 8:6); spiritually blind (Eph. 5:8); and with an enslaved will (Rom. 8:6).

B. Restored by satisfaction wrought by Christ and through the renewal of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 5:17; 3:18; Col. 3:10). Text, vv. 22-24. Negative: "Put off . . . the old man"; the daily

crucifying and drowning of the old Adam (Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9). "Concerning your former conversation": in respect to your former way of life as heathen (Eph. 5:8); fighting down the evil lusts and weakening the power of sin in the flesh. Positive: "Put on the new man" (Col. 3:10,12; Rom. 6:4); growing in knowledge of Christ (Eph. 4:12-14; 2 Pet. 3:18); the daily spiritual exercise of "growing into Him" (Eph. 4:15). The renewal of the divine image in believers consists in the continuation and growth of the gracious work which the Holy Spirit wrought in the Christian in regeneration. It is a process of growth (1 Thess. 4:1; 1 Cor. 15:58). "True Christians not only daily make ever new experiences of their sin, but also of the kindness of God and of the power of His grace. Daily they repent anew, believe anew, love anew, battle and conquer anew." Walther, *Ep. Postil*, p. 421.

II

Renewal of the divine image manifests itself. The renewed man conquers sin. Luther: "If all sins are added together, they divide themselves into two groups, which are the devil's own peculiar work: the lie and murder." XII, 917-918.

A. V. 25. The regenerated man is a lover of truth. The Holy Spirit has created in him a mind which abhors lying hypocrisy (Prov. 13:5; 30:8; Ps. 119:163). In a liar we see not God's but the devil's image (John 8:44). The Christian's word is more reliable than the oath of an infidel. His frequent prayer is: Ps. 139:23-24.

B. V. 26. The renewed believer suppresses sinful anger. Luther: "A strange sentence is concluded and established here, that he who will not subdue his wrath and continue in anger a day or night, is no Christian. Then, where will they be who always nurse anger and hatred, one, two, three, seven, ten years? That is no longer a human, but a satanic anger out of hell." XII, 921. The Christian who has given way to angry words will seek reconciliation before nightfall. The image of God is seen in meekness (Prov. 15:1) and self-control (ch. 16:32; 25:28).

C. V. 28. Walther: "A hard statement for our day. This statement leaves few Christians in Christendom." *Ep. Postil*, p. 423. The renewed man will renounce all dishonest practices in acquiring and retaining property. He will shun

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avarice, which is idolatry (Col. 3:5; Heb. 13:5), live in an honest calling and labor in order to be able to minister to the needy; especially at this time in Europe and Asia (Eccl. 11:1).

D. Where renewal in the divine image is not in evidence, there place is given to the devil, v. 26. When professed Christians offend by ungodly words and actions, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles (Rom. 2:24; Ez. 36:23).

The image of God will be restored in its fullness in heaven (Ps. 17:15; 1 Cor. 15:49). L. J. ROEHM

THE FESTIVAL OF THE REFORMATION

ROM. 10:5-11

It is Scriptural and salutary practice, not idolatrous hero worship, to honor the memory of secular and spiritual benefactors, so long as the glory is given to God (Heb. 1:32-34; 13:7).

The blessings wrought through Martin Luther for home, state, school, Church, and individual are many. The grandest and most soul-satisfying is that he recognized and cleared away the debris with which the self-seeking Church of his day had cluttered and obstructed the way to heaven and by divine grace and power rediscovered and reopened for the Church and the world

THE HIGH ROAD TO HAPPINESS AND GOD

- I. This road consists in the acceptance of the righteousness of faith*
- II. It is available to men in the Word of faith*
- III. It demands and deserves faithful adherence and testimony*

I

The search for happiness and God has gone on almost since the Fall. Man's imperfect knowledge of the Creator, coupled with fear engendered by an accusing conscience (Rom. 1:18-20) and premonition of the final judgment, impels men to make and continue the quest for this road.

The choice lies between two. The nearly 1,200 unchristian religions agree on the basic principle of salvation by good conduct and work, and leave adherents hopeless:

A. This is true of pagans, who have not the Bible (Eph. 2:12).

B. True of Israel, which received written record of divine grace and will. Zeal for God, but not according to knowledge (v. 2). Failed to understand that the Law is to be a sin-revealing schoolmaster (Gal. 3:24) to prepare the way for the Gospel of the righteousness of faith in Christ, the end of the Law (v. 4).

C. Hopelessness of righteousness of the Law is seen in Paul and Luther, who found no peace till they found Christ (Eph. 1:17; Rom. 5:1; Hymn 387:1-5). Why? Law does not say *try*, but *do* (v. 5). Only perfect obedience can bring happiness. Accepting Christ, we have perfection, namely His. His blood cleanses from all sin.

II

Where can we find the road to happiness and God? A clear answer is not always given, even by professing Christians. Jewish converts to the early Church kept insisting on observance of the Ceremonial Law (Acts 15:1 f.). Rome sent her children on crusades to Jerusalem and pilgrimages to Rome and even now decrees various holy exercises by which they should render themselves worthy of divine grace. Modernists hold Jesus up merely as teacher and model of good conduct. All mix works and grace, law and faith.

Vv. 6-8. The Apostle here personifies righteousness of faith, telling the seeker after happiness and God not to search far and wide, to bring Christ down from above or up from below. The road to happiness and God is right at hand in the Word of faith, the holy Gospel which he preached. Salvation is complete and offered to the sinner freely in the Gospel. This Word not only shows the way, but is the way, gives salvation (vv. 11, 17; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23). It is the *only* road (Mark 16:16). Therefore it demands and deserves faithful adherence and testimony.

III

Many people are willing to profess religion and hold church membership, but shun the cross (Matt. 13:21), encouraged by false Christians and prophets who assert that all religions are equally good.

God demands loyalty and bold confession. In today's

Gospel, Christ speaks of the kingdom of heaven suffering violence; "every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16). Warns against false doctrine, unbelief, unbecoming conduct. Hence we must fight, hold to the faith, boldly confess Him (Matt. 10:32, 33), like Paul, Luther, and others.

Have you found the high road to happiness and God? If not, hear and accept now the Word which is nigh thee, repent, believe. If so, battle on; confess and make known this road to others. Say with Luther: "This one article rules my heart, namely, faith in Christ, out of which by day and night all my theological thoughts flow, by which they move, to which they return." The Word is nigh thee; read it, accept it, believe it; stake your all on it, be faithful to it unto the end.

OTTO E. SOHN

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

EPH. 5:15-21

"I have no time." How often do we hear this! In reality we all have time to do a great many things. Moreover, we usually have time to do the things we really want to do. It just depends on what things we give priority.

A Christian aims to apply Christian principles also as he practices the stewardship of time. First things first! Matt. 6:33. Our love to God will determine the order of our personal priorities. The text stresses this important feature of the Christian life:

REDEEM THE TIME!

- I. What this means II. Why it is so important*
III. How we are to be ever ready for it

I

Throughout our Christian life we are to redeem the time, make a wise use of our time. We can lose time, waste time, kill time. A misspent, wasted life — what a tragedy! How painful to review unmet opportunities! We all must plead guilty to neglecting many opportunities in our personal life and our church work (Ps. 103:10).

By the grace of God each day brings new opportunities. Use them wisely! (Gal. 6:10). Redeem the time! Let well-doing be the purchase-price by which you make time your

own. Because Jesus died for us, the time allotted to us is a time of grace (Is. 55:6; 2 Cor. 6:1-2). There is a time for family worship; use it! A time for daily Bible reading; use it! Many read their New Testament daily on the street car. V. 18: "Be filled with the Spirit." (2 Pet. 1:5-7.) Grow in Christian knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18). Every day offers opportunities for doing good. Hymns 439 and 441.

Thy kingdom come! Practice personal evangelism. Let *all* your planning and working aim at the promotion of God's kingdom. Help also your congregation and your Church to redeem the time. Use radio time, wherever available, for the Gospel. Europe and Asia cry to our Church: "Now is the time!"

II

Redeeming the time is so important because the days are evil, v. 16. What makes them evil can be understood properly only in the light of God's Word (2 Tim. 3:1 ff.). Materialism. Pleasure madness. Popular demand for a this-world religion. Setting aside God's Word; adopting a shifting moral standard according to popular opinion. These evils reduce our opportunities and make the call to redeem the time the more urgent.

Time to be redeemed must be very precious. It is. Time frittered away can never be made up. Our yesterdays are beyond recall.—Time is rationed. Only one life to live, and it is very short. At best it is soon cut off. (Ps. 90:10). So much to do and so little time! Therefore: Eccl. 9:10. As many examples show, much can by God's grace be accomplished in the span of a lifetime, if the minutes and hours are employed wisely, to the glory of God.

III

How are we to be ever ready for redeeming the time?

A. Always make sure what the Lord's will is (v.17). Use God's Word so that when new situations arise you may know what God expects of you.

B. Avoid excess. "Be not drunk with wine." Intoxication unfits the body, numbs mental powers, chokes spiritual life. Movie-going and cardplaying are easily carried to excess. Relaxation and recreation, yes; but being a Christian I have no time for that which unfits me (Neh. 6:3). I must

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keep fit physically, mentally, spiritually, so as to be ready to recognize and seize my God-given opportunities.

C. V. 19. The ministry of music. Let psalms and hymns and spiritual songs help you maintain the spirit of cheerful Christian optimism.

D. V. 20. Be grateful for everything, also for every new opportunity to do good. The appropriate time for giving thanks is always.

E. V. 21. Co-operate with your fellow Christians (Phil. 2:3; Rom. 12:10). Two working together can accomplish more than twice as much as one can do alone.

Redeem the time, make the most of each day, for the sun of your life may be about to set (John 9:4). Live with eternity in view (1 Cor. 7:29-31). Lord Jesus, who hast redeemed me that I may be Thine own,

Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise. Amen.

V. L. MEYER

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

EPH. 6:10-17

"Every life is a tragedy!"

Is that true?

It is true of unbelievers. Of such David said: Ps. 39:6.

But there are people of whom it is not true that every life is a tragedy. There are people whose life is a glorious triumph. At their tomb we can truthfully say: 1 Cor. 15:55, 57.

How about you? Is your life to be a tragedy, or is it to be a victory?—However, remember, if your life is to be a victorious life, you must fight a victorious battle.

HOW MAY WE CHRISTIANS GAIN THE VICTORY OVER OUR FOES?

I. *We must know our foes and their methods*

A. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood." True, we may also have enemies among men. There is much envy, jealousy among men, at school, in business, in the professions. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, etc., had such enemies.

B. Our text is referring to far more dangerous enemies

than such men as Pharaoh, Ahithophel, Saul. It speaks of "principalities, powers," etc. All this refers to the devil and his legions. True, there are those who tell us there is no devil, but these people have never been able to tell us who is doing the devil's work, of which we hear and read so much in this world. God has told us, There is a devil and many evil spirits, and they have greater power than any human being. (Cp. 1 Pet. 5:8; 2 Cor. 2:11; etc.) The devil brought misfortune and misery upon poor Job; misled our first parents and robbed them and us of our precious image of God. The devil even tried to mislead Jesus. That is the first thing to which we must give attention if we would win the victory. Know your real foe, study his "wiles" as he tempted Adam and Eve, Saul, David, even the Lord Jesus.

II. There are weapons which we must learn to use.

But do not become so frightened that you are willing to surrender without a battle. "Put on the whole armor of God."

Our loins must be girded about with truth, *i. e.*, as a soldier must gird himself for the fight, so we Christians must be sincere, earnest, and truthful. Deceit, indecision, or hypocrisy will lose us the battle.

The "breastplate of righteousness" is to protect the vital parts of his body. The Christian breastplate must be righteousness. Here not Christ's righteousness, but our own upright life as a fruit of our faith.

"Having our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." The soldier must be sure-footed, and for that purpose must be properly shod. Just so we Christians must make sure that we are standing firm on the true Foundation, Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save sinners. There is no slipping there.

"Taking the shield of faith," etc. All these weapons of defense are laid hold of by faith, and this faith is generated and supported continually by God's Word. Let us make sure that this faith remains firm and sound, for this "faith is the victory that overcometh the world," it quenches every fiery dart of the Wicked One. If doubts assail, if accusations be hurled at us, our faith nullifies their effect. Read Heb. 11.

Therefore also we take the helmet of salvation. Just as the helmet protects the soldier's head, so our very head is

covered by our hope of eternal life. We dare never lose sight of our goal, namely, that though we suffer with Christ, we shall finally reign with Him (1 Pet. 1:3 and 4).

Our text adds a weapon of offense, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." See how Jesus conquered the assaults of the devil by again and again saying, "It is written" (Heb. 4:12). In addition to all this

III. The Christians must be "strong in the Lord."

He dare not give way to carnal security, but must remain conscious of his own weakness and look to God for strength. Remember you are God's soldiers. God has given you your armor. He has given you instructions concerning your foe, and He will answer your prayers by giving you His Holy Spirit. Therefore we are to say with Luther:

With might of ours can naught be done,
Soon were our loss effected, etc.

If your life is not to be a tragedy, but a triumph, then respond to the appeal of our text, and you will be one of that great multitude: Rev. 7:9; Ps. 91:7, 9, 15. **M. S. SOMMER**

