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Miscellanea

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Miscellanea

Notes on 1 Cor. 14:40

There are Scripture passages which often are strangely misused just because they are applied without any regard to their real scope and import. Since they are in themselves lucid, pointed, and comprehensive, they are made to do service in all manner of cases in which Scripture proof is required, but for which no specific Scripture passage can be found. Such abuse of God's Word does not help the cause of theology and may lead to a legalism which is contrary to the very spirit of the Bible.

One of these frequently misused passages is St. Paul's admonition with which in First Corinthians he concludes his instruction on disorder at public worship: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40).

This exhortation inculcates upon the reader two important duties: 1) Everything should be done *decently*; 2) Everything should be done *in order*. Wherever the passage is applied, conditions must be such as render applicable to them the Apostle's twofold admonition. In other words, it should be used to correct both indecency and confusion.

The adverb *decently* in this connection is perhaps not readily understood by the ordinary reader today, who is apt to associate it with the idea of sexual becomingness. In that sense it means *modestly* or *chastely*, whereas in its etymological meaning it means *becomingly* or *characterized by propriety*, the adverb being derived from the Latin *decet*, i. e., *it becomes*. That agrees fully with the meaning of the Greek adverb *euschemonos*, which in the text refers to proper Christian conduct at worship, but which may be applied to proper conduct in a Christian's entire life.

But just as the word *decently* (which, by the way, the Revised Standard Version has retained) may not be readily understood by the average reader, so also the expression *in order* may give him trouble. The Greek expression is *kata taxin*, *according to order*. The term *taxis* means an *arranging* or an *arrangement*, then *order*, and more specifically *due* or *right order* (Thayer). The adverbial modifier *kata taxin* means in its military sense, *in an orderly array*, and in its more general use, *in an orderly manner*.

Weymouth translates the sentence thus: "Let everything be done in a becoming and orderly way," which is much clearer than is the King James Version. Similarly the Interlinear Literal Translation of the Greek New Testament puts it: "Let all things be done becomingly and with order," which also is very good. Both translations are much better than Luther's somewhat vague: "Lasset alles ehrlich und ordentlich zugehen," which may mean a great number of things.

What the admonition was to tell the Corinthians in particular, must be gathered from the context. The Corinthians at public

worship conducted themselves in a most improper, indecorous manner. The chief offenders were perhaps the "tongue speakers," who evidently desired to do all the talking, to the exclusion of other classes of speakers, and who all wished to speak at the same time, so that there was hopeless confusion in public worship (1 Cor. 14:27). St. Paul commanded them to speak *by two* or at the most, *by three*, and that *by course*, that is, in *succession*, and that one of them should interpret the tongue, which the congregation as such could not understand. In case there was no one to interpret, the tongue speaker was to keep silence at the service (v. 28). But also the "prophets" at Corinth rendered themselves guilty of improper conduct so that the Apostle had to admonish them also (v. 29). Finally, there were persons who received from God sudden revelations as they sat by, listening to what was said. They, too, had to be reprimanded to hold their peace until it was their turn to talk (v. 30). In short, the Corinthian church permitted endless confusion to prevail at its services, so that it was impossible for the ordinary hearers to receive instruction and comfort (v. 31). Nor were these Corinthian troublemakers easily convinced by the Apostle, for he was obliged to tell them very sharply that the spirits of the prophets could be controlled by the prophets and that God desires not confusion, but peace in His Church (v. 32 f.). We may add that the confusion at Corinth was further increased by bold women who spoke at church assemblies contrary to the rule which St. Paul enforced in all Christian churches under his care (vv. 33-38).

The Corinthians, then, were guilty of two very grave faults: 1) They violated the principle of Christian propriety; 2) They ignored the law of order, allowing confusion to hinder or even destroy the good effects of the proclamation of the divine Word. Hence the twofold command of the Apostle: "Do what is *becoming*; and do what is becoming, *in the proper order*, or, *at the right time*."

These two things must be kept in mind whenever the passage is applied to present-day situations. The words of the Apostle certainly are not intended to cover all evils which otherwise cannot be brought under the condemnation of a special Scripture injunction. The passage manifestly has its limitations so far as its application is concerned. It must not be used beyond the scope of its actual command. But even at that, the passage covers a large number of faults found among Christians.

In the first place, it covers every violation of the principle of *Christian propriety*. There is such a thing as Christian becomingness. The very dignity of Christian discipleship demands a corresponding conduct that must never be ignored if the preaching of the divine Word is not to be hindered. Wherever a Christian may be, he is always there as a disciple of Christ or as a child of God and, therefore, must conduct himself as it befits his high Christian calling.

It is, of course, self-evident that a Christian must conduct himself in agreement with the Moral Law. He must do what the

Decalog commands. There must be on his part no violation of the Ten Commandments. But our passage properly refers not so much to the transgression of the Moral Law as rather to the infraction of the principle of propriety in the areas that might be classified as the social relations in life. Of course, when the Corinthian tongue speakers desired to speak all the time, and all at the same time, they also went counter to the law of brotherly love and so, at least indirectly, they fell under the judgment of the Moral Law, which centers in love for God and the neighbor. But strictly speaking, theirs was not a transgression of the Decalog, but rather a non-observance of the duties demanded by their Christian social profession. They showed no special consideration for their fellow Christians as they endeavored to witness to the church the divine Word. In these areas of Christian social relations believers sin also today and so they, too, must be reminded of the demands of Christian social becomingness. However, not only in these areas, but whatever conflicts with the dignity of a Christian as such in his speech or life comes under the Apostle's command: "Let all things be done becomingly." Christians should so speak, act, and live as becomes their high calling in Christ Jesus. That is the proper scope of St. Paul's command.

"And in order," he adds. There should never be confusion when Christians meet, but always that proper and helpful order which renders the application of God's Word for instruction and comfort effective. That pertains not merely to congregational worship, but also to all other meetings held by church members. Parliamentary laws were certainly not primarily designed for church assemblies, but, if rightly applied, they do serve the cause of effective Christian assembly. Confusion is contrary to God's Word; order is in accord with it. Confusion injures the Church; Christian order serves the Church. Confusion characterizes the old Adam; order, the new man in the Christian.

If, then, the Apostle's exhortation is applied to all cases that come under the heads of Christian propriety and Christian order, it is applied rightly. Of course, proper consideration must be given to what really constitutes Christian propriety at a given place. We emphasize this because the values of social amenities vary at different places. The Christian living in the city differs considerably from the Christian living in the country. The Mexican Christian has his peculiar views of propriety that vary greatly from those of the New Englander. But while the lines of what constitutes Christian propriety cannot be strictly drawn and while we must avoid also at this point every legalistic approach, the principle of Christian love will also here serve as a safe norm, and above all, Christian love seeking the glory of God and the salvation of the neighbor. True Christianity makes for urbanity, courtesy, kind consideration of the neighbor, and is opposed to all forms of boorishness and selfishness. The true Christian always endeavors to prove himself a Christian gentleman.

Meyer, in his Commentary, remarks on the passage: "Whatever Christians do, should be done in a seemly way and in accordance with order, so that it is done at the right time and in the right measure and limits." JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

Pastoral Sermon at Chicago Convention, 1947

(Published by request)

The spirituality of a church never rises higher than that of the pastor. The proverbial saying "*Qualis rex, talis grex*," "As the shepherd, so the flock," is not a mere sentimental phrase, but states tersely a definite Scriptural truth. The Church of the Old Testament flourished as long as the shepherds were filled with obedience to God's Word and love to their flocks, and it became corrupt and sank to almost unbelievable depths of depravity when the shepherds no longer cared for the flock in harmony with God's will. God places the blame for the decay of the Church in Jeremiah's days on the pastors, saying: "Many pastors have destroyed My vineyard, they have trodden My portion under foot, they have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness" (Jer. 12:10). "Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture. . . . Ye have scattered My flock and driven them away." (Jer. 23:1-2.) In the days of fulfillment the indifference of the people, their earthly-mindedness and their self-righteousness were the reflection of the churchmen's spiritual attitudes, upon whom Christ pronounced one "woe" after another and whom He charged with shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men. In the Middle Ages the popes, bishops, and priests were responsible for the idolatrous, soul-destroying doctrines and for the dead formalism of the people. The Modernism in churches today, which ignores God's greatest deed of love for man's salvation, was introduced and promulgated, and is being promulgated today, by teachers and preachers. These so-called pastors are leading men to hell, and their contemptuous smiles over this statement will vanish when they will stand before the Lord, who says to the unfaithful pastor: "The wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand." The greatest calamity that can come upon a Church is the pastors' disobedience to God's directions for their work.—On the other hand, the Church in the past was a garden of God, a vineyard which served the purposes of a merciful, saving God, as long as the husbandmen faithfully performed their God-given duties. Thanks be to God, we can truthfully say that of our dear Missouri Synod during the past century. It gained sinners for salvation, because *the pastors*, at God's command, directed them to Calvary. It reclaimed many who had gone astray, because *the pastors* were in truth what their name implies, shepherds who loved and sought the lost. Many were strengthened and preserved in faith, because *the pastors* fed their flocks with the food supplied by the Lord and warned them with seriousness and love against the dangers threatening their

saving faith. It led many to glorify God by a godly life, because the pastors stressed Christ's love, which constrains believers to adopt the motto of St. Paul: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." We say all this not proudly, but in all humility and in gratitude to Him who gives "pastors and teachers for the edifying of the body of Christ." And we pray that the Lord will continue to bless our dear Missouri Synod by giving us pastors after His heart, pastors whose divinely wrought ambition is to preach and to apply God's Word for the saving of souls.

Tonight we, whom the Holy Ghost has made overseers of His flocks, are to think specifically of ourselves. We are to examine ourselves and prayerfully to resolve anew to do our work in harmony with the will of God. Paul's words in our text, by which he describes his pastoral work, can and, with the Spirit's aid, will help us to do just that. On the basis of our text, 1 Thess. 2:2b-8, I shall present to you

Two Characteristics of God-Pleasing Pastors

- I. *Their Lips are Filled with God's Message*
- II. *Their Hearts are Filled with Fervent Love to Sinners*

I

The Apostle Paul in our text describes his pastoral work among the Thessalonians. He stresses in the first place the *message* which he preached unto them. He had proclaimed unto them not his own message, not a message which he had thought out nor a message which others had given him, but a message which God commanded him to preach. He calls it the Gospel of God. He tells them that God had entrusted the Gospel unto him. At God's command he had told them that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world; that God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; that they should accept Jesus as the Redeemer and Savior and base their hope of eternal life not on what they had done or intended to do, but only on Him who had appeased God's wrath over their sin by suffering the punishment of their sin. Those who came to faith he exhorted to live for Him who died for them. His lips were filled with God's message.—As an *ambassador* of God he sought to please God and therefore followed His directions most faithfully. If His desire had been to please men, he would have preached another message. If he had wanted to please the Jews, he would have preached the message that a Messiah would come to make Israel the mightiest nation on earth. Had he wanted to please the Gentiles, he would have presented to his hearers the wisdom of the Greek and the Roman philosophers. The Gospel which God bade him to preach did not appeal to unregenerated man. Natural man does not want a Savior; he wants to save himself. Christ crucified is

"unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." Much contention, much opposition, was in evidence when he preached the Gospel in Philippi and Thessalonica. But since He was not desirous of pleasing men, of gaining honor and glory from men, but burned with the desire to do God's will, he preached that "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us . . . that we should live together with Him." He declared emphatically: I say "none other things than those which the Prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer and that He should be the first that should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles." He just *had* to preach the message of God. He said: "Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel." Paul preached God's Word, all of it, and nothing else.

God wants our lips to be filled with His message. Can we refuse? We are servants of *Christ*, the *Lord's* ambassadors. He called us to do *His* work. His directions concerning the message which we are to preach are specific and clear. He does not tell us to preach a message that pleases men, to adjust our preaching to the demands of the people at various times. He does not tell us to adopt the motto of the Modernists: "Truth is not static, but is in a constant flux." On the contrary, He tells us that heaven and earth will pass away, but His Word never. And He commands us to preach this Word. "Preach the Gospel." "Preach the Word . . . in season and out of season." He wants men to be saved through our work, and there is only one message that can save, the message which He has laid down in the Scriptures. The Scriptures are able to make men wise unto salvation. By the Scriptures the Holy Ghost works and preserves faith and urges the believers to lead a godly life. All ministers who ignore His directions for their work and preach otherwise than His Word teaches not only provoke His righteous wrath but also thwart His saving will. To them He says what He said of the prophets in Jeremiah's days: "They speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. . . . Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues and say, He saith." If we would really serve the Lord in our ministry, we must heed His directions: "Hold fast the faithful Word!" "Preach the Word!" And these directions refer not only to the fundamentals of God's Word, not only to those doctrines which are absolutely necessary for salvation, but to all that the Lord has revealed in His Word. Let us remember the words of Christ: "Teach them to observe *all things whatsoever* I have commanded you." It is a sacrilege to say: "I am going to preach and teach only such doctrines of the Bible as men absolutely need to be saved, but I am not going to quibble about other doctrines of the Bible." And let us not forget that indifference to so-called non-fundamental doctrines will finally result in the loss of the fundamental doctrines. The history of many churches during the past century corroborates this

statement. If we would be servants of God, we must preach the whole counsel of God.

Our fathers, the founders of our Synod, were indeed servants of the Lord. In their preaching and in their *Seelsorge*, they spoke as the oracles of God, whether men liked it or not. They were despised and ridiculed for it, and predictions were frequently made that a church body led by men so strictly adhering to the Bible could not grow or even continue to exist. But all this did not affect their divinely wrought determination to speak and to teach God's Word. They were tempted to be silent over against false doctrine, but they followed in the footsteps of Paul, who not only preached the truth, but also exposed false doctrine and sought to convince the gainsayers. They were tempted to overlook and to condone unscriptural practices, but they did not permit the desire for outward peace to silence their Scriptural testimony. They were tempted to ignore and to condone in their own congregations things which God pronounces wrong, but in obedience to God they warned against all things out of harmony with God's will, because they were bent upon pleasing God and not men. That is why God so abundantly blessed their work. A minister of a Free Protestant church compared his attendance of sixty on a Sunday morning to the attendance of about five hundred at our church and then told me how he was led into his liberal church. He came from Europe and went to Topeka, Kansas, where he had two uncles, one a member of the Missouri Synod congregation and the other a member of the Free Protestant church there. At first he lived with the latter, who warned him: "Don't go to the Missouri Synod church with your other uncle. The Missourians are so strict that they cannot last very long as a church." He then continued: "Last week I saw on the front page of the Topeka newspaper the picture of your beautiful new church. Our church has been dead for a long time. To hell with liberalism!" Many of our fathers had similar experiences. The work of our fathers was successful not in spite of their strict adherence to God's Word, but *because* of it. God blessed the work of our Synod, because the pastors' lips were filled with His message.

We, too, are being urged to be less scrupulous in preaching God's Word in all its truth and purity. We are tempted by the prince of hell frequently to presuppose the Gospel in our Sunday sermons and to present suggestions for an honorable life without leading our hearers to Calvary. But if we would be real shepherds and do our work in harmony with God's will, we must be like Paul, who wrote to the Corinthians: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." Christ the Crucified the only source of salvation, Christ the Crucified, in whom we must believe to be saved, Christ the Crucified the only God-pleasing motive for a godly life, He must be found in every sermon preached by us. That is what God wants us to do. That is why the sainted Dr. Pieper said to his students: "Wenn jemand einmal in seinem Leben eine Predigt von Ihnen gehoert hat, dann

muss er von Ihnen gehoert haben, wie er selig werden kann." We are tempted to ignore the Christless religion of the Masons and to find an excuse for permitting Masons to be members of our Church, and to go to Communion at our altars, in spite of the fact that they are told by their lodge to climb to heaven on the ladder which they have built by their own good works; but if we would be real pastors serving God, we must repeat His message to those who are "unequally yoked together with the unbelievers": "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." — We are tempted to close an eye to certain sins of our members, because we fear the consequences of our plain testimony against such sins, the resentment of those who live in those sins; but woe unto us if we yield, for by yielding to such temptations we cease to perform our duties in harmony with God's will. God grant us His grace that we, like our consecrated fathers, adopt anew and practice in our ministry the motto of the Savior: "I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy Law is within My heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation; lo, I have not refrained My lips, O Lord, Thou knowest. I have not hid Thy righteousness within My heart; I have declared Thy faithfulness and Thy salvation. I have not concealed Thy loving-kindness and Thy truth from the great congregation." (Ps. 40:8-10.) Then our ministry will be pleasing to God and also salutary for men.

II

Another outstanding characteristic of Paul's pastoral activity was his loving concern for the souls of men, especially for those who believed and were under his supervision and care. While it is true, as we have heard, that he did not seek the applause of men, but was guided in his preaching by the will of God, his heart was filled with fervent love to sinners. His approach was one of love, of genuine love. At no time did he use flattering words, but his friendliness was a manifestation of love. Nor did he treat the Thessalonians kindly in order to gain their generous support. He declined to take from them anything for the support of his body and life, though he emphasized the will of God "that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel," that also in the Church "the laborer is worthy of his reward." He supported himself to prove the sincerity of his love to them. He was gentle among them, even as a nursing mother is gentle to her suckling child. He was so affectionately desirous of their welfare that he not only preached the Gospel to them but was ready to lay down his life in serving them. "Ye were dear unto us," said this great Apostle to the Thessalonians. And because he loved them, he wanted them to be *saved*. He was made all things unto all men that he might *save* at least some of them. His love to them moved him to do everything that might redound to the strengthening and preservation of their saving faith in Christ.

And when we think of our fathers during this jubilee convention, we see this same loving concern manifested in their work.

They worked faithfully and diligently not only because the Lord wanted them to spend all their time and all their strength and all their mental and spiritual endowments in the work of upbuilding His kingdom, but also because their hearts were filled with love to the sinners. Think of Wyneken's journeys in northern Indiana at a time when traveling was connected with great hardships. Think of the pioneer work done by our fathers in the various Districts of our Synod. For us who now enjoy our modern comforts of traveling and living it is almost unbelievable what they endured in their efforts to bring the Gospel to perishing sinners. They spent much time in preparing their sermons, not only because they wanted to please God, but also because they loved their hearers and did not want them to be misled by a careless statement. Moved by love, they cheerfully came to the aid of the sick and dying and brought unto them the consolation of the Gospel. They spoke words of warning to those who carelessly exposed themselves to dangers, words of counsel to those who were perplexed, and words of exhortation to those who had grown negligent in the performance of their Christian duties—all because they loved their members and wanted them to be saved. They knew that true love to men demands that the truth be told them, though the speaking of the truth may be resented. With Paul they said to their parishioners: "You are dear unto us."

It is in harmony with God's will that we pause frequently for a self-examination and ask ourselves: Do we really love our parishioners? Pastors who consider their office chiefly as a source of income and jealously demand recognition of the honor due them love themselves and will neglect their sheep. Pastors without fervent love to sinners will pass up many an opportunity to bring the Gospel to such as know it not and, in general, will do only as much as will preserve them from the reputation of being lazy. A pastor may be lazy for years and years before he is found out, even as the conscientious application to duty of another pastor may not be fully known. The pastor who does not love sinners fervently usually yields to the temptation of doing no more than considered absolutely necessary by his members. He is not willing to give his soul to his people. Again, a pastor who does not love his flock will yield to the temptation of being a dumb dog instead of speaking what people should hear to be saved. Why should he take a definite stand over against the prevalent sins of the times, membership in the lodge, and unscriptural fraternizing with false teachers? Love of self decides the issue for him. — Are such things possible in our Synod, which God has so abundantly blessed during the past century? Yes, they are possible; and we should ask God to help us in opposing the beginnings of such tendencies in our own lives. The days are approaching which Christ describes in Matthew 24, the days in which the love of many will wax cold. Has our love waxed cold?

God grant us the grace to love our flocks with a fervent, Christlike love. Must we not love the sinners whom Christ loved

so dearly that He gave Himself for them? Must we who know that man has been created for eternity and journeys either to heaven or to hell — must we not out of love to men follow Him of whom Isaiah said: "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm and carry them in His bosom and shall gently lead those that are with young"?

The future of our Church will be what our ministers are going to be. If they become negligent, ignore God's commission and become self-centered, the Church that we learned to love and which led us to Calvary's Cross will deteriorate and finally cease to build the Kingdom of God. Secular knowledge and erudition, political backing and members mighty before men can never save our Church from ruin. But if by God's grace our ministers will faithfully preach the Word and with the love of a nursing mother supply the wants of sinners, our Church will continue to do God's saving work. Let us close with the prayerful wish of the sainted Dr. Walther: "May God give unto us a pious ministry." May God continue to give us pastors whose lips are filled with His message and whose hearts are filled with fervent love to sinners.

G. CHR. BARTH

