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Homiletics: Sermon Studies for the New Church Year

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Homiletics

A Series of Sermon Studies for the New Church Year

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 JOHN 4:1-7

The Text and the Day. — “Bestow bounteously upon us, we beseech Thee, Lord, the Spirit (in order) to think things that are good and to perform them promptly: that we, who cannot exist without Thee, may be made strong to live by Thee; through. . . .” This literal translation of the ancient Leonine Collect for this Sunday helps to emphasize the key thoughts in the text — “be of God,” “be born of God,” “know the Spirit of God,” “know the Spirit of truth,” “know the spirit of error,” “know God.” Our whole being, our physical as well as our spiritual existence, depends on God, in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

Notes on Meaning. — The Apostle John has no thought of penning up the Christians on islands isolated from contact with agencies that might undermine faith in Christ and true spirituality. He leaves the Christians where they are in the stream of life, surrounded by all the current thought tendencies, Christian, semi-Christian, non-Christian, and calls upon them to exercise their judgment in distinguishing the good from the bad, the acceptable from the non-acceptable. The criterion which he lays down for them, by which they are to judge whether a teacher professing faith in Christianity is trustworthy or not, is to be accepted as a brother in the faith or not, is not involved nor does it entail long, arduous theological training. The criterion is very simple: “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” Anything to the contrary flows from the mind of false prophets and must be recognized as the spirit of error. The crucial phrase around which every thought in our text revolves is *ek tou theou*. Eight times in rapid succession it marches through our verses, emphasizing upon each occurrence that faith in Christ is something that flows from the very inner Being of God into the heart of man through the means of grace and can never be engendered in man apart from God.

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"To know God" is equivalent to have faith in God. Behind the words "to know God," "to be born of God," lies the whole work of the Holy Ghost as summarized in Luther's explanation to the Third Article.

Preaching Pitfalls. — Do not engage in polemics. St. Paul's words: "Preach the Word; be instant in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2), must not be misapplied here. The terms "false prophets" and "spirit of anti-Christ" in the text are general, practically synonymous with "world," and do not warrant a blacking out of v. 7.

Preaching Emphases. — "Love" is the term that needs emphasis. In a world where the word "love" is known, but where the characteristics of love are sparsely practiced, where the first fervent love of Christians is chilled by a cold war in politics, economics, social life, and religion, where the individual must struggle for existence, where he finds soul interests buried under rising heaps of debris composed of vanity, greed, lust for power, a mad chase after money, a frenzied interest in loose living, an avid hunger for intellectualism — in this world the message that our people must hear is the message of love, of love toward one another growing out of love of God, love of Christ, love of everything embodied in the Word of Reconciliation.

Problem and Goal. — The preacher's problem is to have the people realize anew the source of all love and let them see the duties and privileges which naturally flow from such love. On the one hand, the love of God should increase the love of the members within the congregation for one another. On the other hand, the love of God should alert the conscience so that it will not be misled by false prophets and permit the soul to lose real life and heaven.

Outline:

WHAT WILL YOU DO BECAUSE YOU KNOW
GOD LOVES YOU?

- I. You will confess Christ.
- II. You will carefully prove every spirit to see whether he is of God.
- III. You will lift up your voice against the spirit of error.
- IV. You will heartily love your brethren.

ALEX WM. C. GUEBERT

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 TIM. 6:6-10

The Text and the Day. — The chief thought for this Sunday is in the words of the Introit: "God is mine Helper." The Collect implores: "Let Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy humble servants." After listing the sins and subsequent punishments of Israel as warnings for us, the Epistle comforts: "God is faithful . . . who will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." — The sermon can make effective use of these thoughts, especially in the conclusion, for the text shows that those who "will be rich" are in danger of losing the great gain of godliness. They must seek God's help against this temptation. He will help them.

Notes on Meaning. — V. 6: *porismos*, not "gain," but "means of gain." The thought is not: The two separate states of the heart, godliness and contentment, together bring great gain. There is no true godliness without contentment. Contentment is always a part of godliness. The proper interpretation: Godliness — and contentment is always part of it — is a great means of gain. Thus there are two separate thoughts in v. 6, i. e. (1) godliness is a great means of gain, (2) contentment is a necessary part of true godliness. The first thought is treated in Part I of the outline, the second in Part II. — V. 7: This verse gives a very logical explanation of the contented Christian's disinterest in earthly gain. Lenski: "What is so striking is Paul's *hoti* and the thought it contains, that *because* we cannot bring anything away, we brought nothing along when we arrived. . . . The two second aorists are exact opposites: did bring in — to bring out." — V. 8 states with what true godliness is content. *Skepasmata*, literally "coverings," thus both clothing and shelter. — V. 9: *boulomenoi ploutein*, not those who are rich, but those who desire to be rich, those who desire to have possessions far above their needs. *Empiptousin*, the present tense, denoting repeated, continued action, "they keep falling." — V. 10: *Philargyria*, money love. Lenski: "All things that are bad may grow out of money-love as shoots grow out of a root, nothing good ever grows out of it." *Oregomenoi*, literally: reaching after, aspiring to, "to give one's self up to" (Thayer); here best translated by "cul-

tivating" (Lenski), cultivating the love of money. By cultivating love of money some have already been made to wander away from the faith. They have thus lost the great gain of godliness. Paul knows of such; their experience is a pointed warning. "Themselves," it was their own doing. "Sorrows" (Thayer: pains), both in this life and in that which is to come. Note the tone of sadness in the last part of this verse.

Preaching Pitfalls. — It is well to remember that the text advocates contentment with the things necessary for life; it does not advocate asceticism, the attitude of contempt for anything above the barest necessities. Scripture does not oppose the temperate use of God's many earthly gifts; it opposes their misuse. We misuse them when we develop an ungodly love for them, when we place the desire for them above all else and make their possession our chief aim in life. — The Gospel must be added, for it is not directly contained in the text. It is, however, implied in the words "godliness is a great means of gain." When these words are dealt with in Part I, the Gospel can be brought out fully and richly. Godliness is the state of being in faith in Christ and of living a consecrated life as a fruit of such faith. It is a means of great gain, not because we ourselves merit the promised temporal and heavenly blessings of godliness, but solely because Christ earned them for us, and we receive them by God's grace through faith. — The Gospel should again be added at the end of Part III. Those of our hearers who are beset by the dangerous sin of money-love will need the comfort and the strengthening of the Gospel.

Preaching Emphases. — The stress in this sermon is on two main thoughts. (1) By grace through faith in Christ we Christians enjoy great earthly and great heavenly blessings. (2) Love of money, the craving to become rich, will, if not curbed, cause us to lose our faith and thus to lose the blessings of godliness. We must seek strength of faith through God's Word and Sacrament so that we can overcome this desire for riches and view this perishable world with the contentment characteristic of true godliness.

Problem and Goal. — The love of money and the desire for wealth are the mainsprings of life around us. The dollar is the key to comfort, honor, power, yes, to life itself. The Christian's flesh desires these rewards of wealth. It is so easy, yes,

almost necessary, to develop and cultivate the attitude of loving money and of striving to become rich. — The goal of the sermon is to warn the Christian against the danger of money-love and to persuade him by the power of God's Word to see with new joy the great gain of godliness and to view the world not with desire for riches, but with contentment.

Outline: .

LET NOT THE LOVE OF MONEY ROB YOU OF THE GREAT GAIN OF GODLINESS

- I. True godliness is a means of great gain (v. 6).
 - A. It has the promise of the life that now is (1 Tim. 4:8 a).
 - B. It has the promise of the life which is to come (1 Tim. 4:8 b).
 - II. True godliness views the world with contentment.
 - A. Contentment is a necessary part of true godliness (v. 6).
 - B. Since we have brought nothing into this world because we can carry nothing out, why should we Christians, then, strive to get rich now? (V. 7.)
 - C. In this world we Christians seek only the food, raiment, and lodging of passing strangers — no more (v. 8).
 - III. The discontented who are bent on getting rich are in danger of losing the great gain of godliness.
 - A. Money love is a root from which all evils and no good may grow (v. 10 a).
 - B. Those who seek to be rich keep falling into temptations, snares, and lusts, which sink men into destruction and perdition (v. 9b).
 - C. Some who cultivated love of money have thereby been made to wander away from faith into destruction (v. 10 b).

A. R. RIEP
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TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 COR. 3:11-17

The Text and the Day. — The Standard Gospel Lesson presents Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, yet determined to save and continuing on to the cross. The Epistle Lesson presents the Holy Spirit endowing His Church with gifts to profit withal. God is in deep earnest in behalf of man. He calls us to be laborers together with Him, to preach the Gospel, to build the Church.

Notes on Meaning. — Paul refers to the continuous activity in the construction of the spiritual temple of God: the accession of souls by mission work, their growth in knowledge by indoctrination, their untiring application to love and worthwhile, God-pleasing church work in general. The context indicates that the occasion for this discourse was the confusion of errors, which interrupted and hindered true progress. Paul presents three groups of people who claimed membership and architectural talent: the wise, who will enjoy a reward; the unwise, who receive no reward; the vicious, who will be punished. The wisdom of Paul consisted in laying the one and only true foundation. He is the master builder who starts and then directs. — V. 12 shifts from the *pos* of v. 10 to the building material, sorted as permanent or as perishable and useless. The choice of the *pos* and of the material requires wisdom. — The day is the day when the building is completed and the workers lay aside their tools: the Day of Judgment. See 1 Cor. 4:5. The passage reminds us of the importance of faith and love on that Day, Matt. 25:31-46. — The fire (vv. 13-15) first probes, and then it reveals either stability or dross and ashes. — *To ergon*, in this connection church work, is classified in vv. 14 and 15, and in v. 15 it is disconnected from the worker in that he is stripped from his perishing work. — V. 16 introduces an appeal to the members and to their dignity as the temple of God and closes with the fearful warning that the just God will avenge any wrong done to His Church.

Preaching Pitfalls. — Do not conclude from the possibility of marring the temple that it is destructible, Matt. 16:18. — The unwise builder (v. 15) is saved not by his sincerity, zeal, or fanaticism. He is saved by faith in Him on whom and to whom

he endeavored to build. — Purgatory can be extinguished by a brief reference to *hemera, dokimasei, epoikodomesen*.

Preaching Emphases. — Christ, the Church's one Foundation, must be preached. The wisdom of building on Him permanent material with the proper means must be stressed. Emphasize Paul's reference to the individual (*hekastos*). Three results of activity: reward and joy; no reward, but disappointment; punishment and pain. The reward is of grace. The building is done by preaching and living the true doctrine; the defiling of it is done by teaching and living false doctrine. The wood, grass, straw, signifies valueless doctrine and self-chosen service. Point out that the building is to be done at home, in the Christian school, in congregational life, in contact with people. We fetch the material, and God embodies it in the temple. To bring a soul to God is service far superior to self-chosen service.

Problem and Goal. — Draw the hearers away from the vagaries of personal opinions on church work to the Bible principles of God-pleasing building of the temple. Mark 16: 15-16; Matt. 28: 19-20; James 5: 19-20; John 15: 16; Matt. 5: 16. Convince the hearers that the saving of human souls is better service than the entertaining of their pleasures, evangelizing better than socializing. Let us all join the first group.

Outline:

THE WISE MASTER BUILDERS OF THE CHURCH

I. They build wisely.

- A. Three groups: the wise, the unwise, the vicious.
- B. The master builders ever keep in mind that they are building the temple of God, the one and only spiritual edifice in this world, v. 16.
- C. They build on Jesus Christ, the one and only Foundation of God's Church, v. 11; 1 Pet. 2: 4-7. This is wisdom.
- D. In this they differ from those who defile the temple (v. 17), craftily commending themselves and worldly wisdom (see vv. 18-20) as the foundation and material.

II. They build solidly and permanently.

- A. They sort all material, select and use only the valuable and priceless; they employ as tools only the

means of grace, as good stewards teaching and living the Gospel everywhere. They pray fervently for success, v. 7 b. This is wisdom.

B. In this they differ from the unwise, who use perishable material, teaching and living the doctrines of men.

III. They only are blessed by the Lord with a reward.

A. God will examine and reveal the work of each builder.

1. The defilers will be punished by Him.

2. The unwise will suffer loss.

3. The wise will be rewarded.

B. The individual builder, man, woman, child, should examine the manner, the means, the purpose, of his work, and ever strive to please the Lord by joining and abiding with the wise master builders under God's direction and blessing.

G. H. SMUKAL

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 THESS. 5:14-24

The Text and the Day. — In the Epistle for today St. Paul stresses the primary facts of the Gospel and the grace of God bestowed on him in the preaching of that Gospel. In the Gospel for the day, Christ shows the need we all have of divine mercy and forgiveness.

Notes on Meaning. — The Thessalonians, like the Philipians, were very dear to the Apostle's heart. His mission in Thessalonica had been more than ordinarily successful. He had experienced much joy in that city. But opposition by fanatical Jews had driven Paul and his co-workers out of Thessalonica prematurely. In his absence the Apostle was defamed and his whole purpose misrepresented. The Thessalonian Christians stood up well under persecution. Yet they needed to be warned against prevalent evils, strengthened in their weakness, and comforted in their sorrows.

V. 14. *Brethren* — primarily the presbyters referred to in vv. 12-13. It was their duty to instruct, warn, comfort, etc. But all church members are included as having similar obliga-

tions. — *Unruly*, disorderly, probably as not working, neglecting human duties, because they were looking for the Lord's early return. — *Feeble-minded*, discouraged, fainthearted, low-spirited, either because of concern for their own standing in grace or for the condition of their beloved dead when Christ would return. — *Weak*, not physically, but in knowledge and faith. — *Patient*, or forbearing, not only toward members of the household of faith, but toward all in the community.

V. 15. The Christian, imbued with the Spirit of Christ, has but one set of principles, not two, in dealing with fellow-believers and with those outside the Church.

V. 16. *Rejoice* always (cf. Phil. 4:4), under all conditions. Only a child of God, assured of the Father's love and forgiveness in Christ, can do that.

V. 17. Maintain a prayerful attitude at all times; commune with the Lord in your heart anywhere. Persevere in prayer.

V. 18. Not "for everything," but "in everything," under all circumstances. Show a cheerful resignation to God's will and a happy spirit of trust in His wisdom and mercy. "This," such a spirit of gratitude, God rightly expects of His redeemed children.

V. 19. *Quench not*; cf. Eph. 4:30, grieve not. By neglect of prayer, by failure to rejoice in the Lord and to thank Him for all His benefits, the gracious work of the Holy Spirit is checked. Ultimately He leaves those who persistently oppose His influence.

Vv. 20-21. *Prophecyings* — originally, the miraculous gift in the early Church of setting forth divine truth in an ecstatic, enthusiastic, and convincing manner. Now, any orderly proclamation of divine truth, the preaching or teaching of God's Word. — *Prove*, check such declarations with the inspired Scripture; test all teaching by the revealed truth; accept and hold what is good and true; reject all error.

V. 22. *Appearance* or form of evil. Christians cannot be too cautious in avoiding all evil, for the sake of their own souls and not to give offense to others.

Vv. 23-24. A most beautiful prayer and benediction, well suited for confirmation and other occasions, or as a pulpit benediction.

Preaching Pitfalls. — The many injunctions in the text can

easily lead the preacher into lecturing and moralizing. Make it clear that these admonitions and exhortations were addressed to "saints," who, however, were not yet perfected saints. They needed guidance and encouragement for progress in sanctification. The virtues which the Apostle calls for must be set forth as specifically *Christian* virtues, as the outflow of faith in Christ and love to Christ.

Preaching Emphases. — The nobility and the beauty of a truly Christian life should be brought out in bold relief. Though the Christian must renounce much, his compensation is great, even in this life. In Christ he has obtained salvation and with peace and joy, a spirit of contentment and thanksgiving, and great confidence at the Lord's appearing. How the expectation of Christ's return must animate a believer's conduct should be stressed. In these days of world distress we need to refer more often and more hopefully to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Problem and Goal. — The preacher should set forth that the Christian lives his life not in isolation, but in society, among fellow believers and unbelievers. The blessings which he has received from the message of salvation in Christ he is to share with others: by word (v. 14 a) and conduct (v. 14 b-15) and by example (vv. 16-22). Cf. Gen. 12:2; Matt. 5:13-14; John 15:16. The whole chapter shows that the exhortations are addressed not merely to the individual, but to the Christian community in Thessalonica. — A congregation made up of sincere and earnest disciples of Jesus will exert a wholesome influence on the community. The chief emphasis, however, must rest on the peace, joy, comfort, and hope which the believer increasingly experiences in his progressive sanctification.

Outline:

EXHORTATION AND BENEDICTION

- I. In the name of the Lord Jesus the Apostle exhorts us also:
 - A. To high-type Christian fellowship, vv. 14-15.
 1. Brotherly admonition, v. 14 a.
 2. Christian sympathy, v. 14 b.
 3. Fair practices, v. 15 (cf. ch. 4:1-7).
 - B. To high-level spiritual living, vv. 16-22.
 1. To rejoice.

2. To pray.
 3. To give thanks.
 4. Not to hinder the work of the Spirit.
 5. Not to despise the preaching of the Word.
 6. To refrain from all evil.
- II. Like the Apostle, we should earnestly pray for divine benedictions:
- A. Sanctification of the whole personality.
 - B. Preservation of spirit, soul, and body, until the Lord's return.
 - C. Confidence in the Lord's unfailing faithfulness.

Conclusion. — V. 25. Not only must we preachers carry our hearers on praying hearts, but we should also request them to remember us and our labors in their prayers.

MARTIN WALKER

