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Homiletics: Sermon Studies for the New Church Year

J. H. Fritz

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Homiletics

A Series of Sermon Studies for the Church Year

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 PET. 3:15-18

The Text and the Day. — In the Introit the Christian asks God to deliver him from those who would destroy his soul. In the Gradual the Christian sings the praises of God. These thoughts correspond to the thoughts of the text.

Notes on Meaning. — V. 15. "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." These words speak of the Christian's own personal relation to God. "Sanctify" is the same word used in the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer. God's name should be kept holy. Reverence and adoration are due to God, almighty and gracious, the Father in heaven. However, not mere lip service, but "in your hearts." — The Christian should make confession of his faith, especially when asked concerning his hope, his Christian religion. In order to do so, the Christian must be well indoctrinated. — Since the Christian still has the sinful flesh, he needs to be warned not to let bitterness, haughtiness, anger, etc., frustrate his good confession when others do not readily accept it. Therefore the Christian is admonished to make his confession with meekness, humility, kindness, and in the fear of God.

V. 16. The Christian should in all things have and preserve "a good conscience," making sure that his life is in accordance with the will of God and has the right motivation, not selfish desires or self-glory, but the love of God and the welfare of the neighbor. Then the Christian's "good confession in Christ" will exert a good influence upon the ungodly, so that the false accusers will be put to shame, Rom. 12:20-21.

V. 17. Suffering for the cause of Christ is part of the Christian's life in this world, and it is not without the knowledge and will of God. When the Christian asserts himself, he must expect opposition, ridicule, even persecution, 1 Pet. 1:6-7; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12; John 15:18-19; John 16:1-4; but also 1 Cor. 10:13; Rom. 8:28, 38-39.

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V. 18. From Christ's victory over sin, death, and hell the Christian receives strength to resist sin, for Christ redeemed him not only from the guilt and punishment of sin, but also from its dominion. From Christ's example as a patient Sufferer ("the Just for the unjust") the Christian receives direction and encouragement. Christ "hath once suffered for sins"; after that no more. The suffering of the Christian also lasts only "for a season," 1 Pet. 1:6. After that, eternal glory. Rom. 8:17-18. — Christ had no sin of His own, but suffered "as the Just for the unjust." Christ's life was a life of well-doing, and yet He was despised and rejected. "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you," John 15:20. The Apostles "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name," Acts 5:41. — Christ, the innocent One, suffered for the guilty, that "He might bring us to God." When the ungodly see the Christian suffer patiently for well-doing, they may by the grace of God have their conscience aroused, be persuaded to inquire what makes the Christian that way and also to hear and accept the Gospel for their own salvation to the glory of God," Matt. 5:16.

Preaching Emphases. — The preacher should read the entire epistle. It was written to strangers, Christians, scattered through Pontus, etc., chap. 1:1. Those Christians had to endure much opposition on the part of their heathen countrymen. Peter therefore first (vv. 1-12) reminds them of their glorious and eternal inheritance and then admonishes them to remain steadfast, to be "as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance."

Preaching Pitfalls. — The words: "Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit," may not be readily understood, since even commentators differ in their interpretation. Both datives must be taken in the same sense, as datives of sphere and not of instrument. In the sphere of His flesh, Christ was put to death; in the sphere of His spirit (not the Holy Ghost) He was quickened, entered into the glorious resurrection of life. Even so the Christian, after suffering here on earth, enters into eternal glory, Rom. 8:18, 28, 36-37.

Problem and Goal. — The Christian's "good conversation in Christ" over against the opposition on the part of an ungodly world should be stressed. "If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together," Rom. 8:17-18.

Outline:**ENCOURAGEMENTS GIVEN TO CHRISTIANS TO LIVE
A GODLY LIFE IN AN UNGODLY WORLD**

- I. Christians should well look to their own personal Christianity, vv. 15-16.
- II. Christians should be well indoctrinated so that they can give a good account of their faith, v. 15.
- III. By daily living a godly life, Christians should give evidence of their Christianity, vv. 16-18. J. H. C. FRITZ

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PHIL. 2:12-16

The Text and the Day. — Both the Epistle and the Gospel for this Sunday suggest a sermon about the purpose of God's Law and the Christian's obedience to it. The same thought is reflected in the Introit, the Collect, and the Gradual. The text furnishes an opportunity to preach about the Christian's Obedience to God's will.

Notes on Meaning. — St. Paul praises the Christians at Philippi for their past obedience, which is good psychology for a preacher and exhorter. On the basis of past performance the Apostle expects future compliance. It is well to give Christians credit for their good deeds and piety. Jesus did that when he spoke of Nathanael. There is no danger of encouraging work-righteousness when true piety and good works are designated as the outflow of faith. Have no fear to praise a Christian, even when he is in a coffin, but praise his faith first. Verse 12 urges a tremendous *earnestness* in seeking one's salvation. The "fear and trembling" is not a quavering distrust of God's willingness to save us; God surely wants to save us, and He does everything for us to carry out that intention, v. 13. See also Ezek. 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4. But the Christian's earnest desire for salvation must evidence itself in his obedience to God's will. And this obedience must be gladly given; the Philippians gave it when the Apostle was there to exhort them, and they gave it when he was gone, v. 12. Obedience should be given without murmuring and disputing, v. 14. It needs urging and admonishing, but not coercion and threatening. The Christian is a light in the wicked

world by his obedience to God's will; he helps to make the world a better place to live in, v. 15. He is an example to others for their conduct. He is a good citizen. His home life is exemplary. He is esteemed by good people. He wins souls for God's kingdom by his Christian life, v. 16 a. People will listen to the Word on account of the piety of Christians. And when Christians obey God's will, they are a source of joy to those who trained and taught them, their parents, pastors, teachers, and others (v. 16), both in this life and especially in the life to come.

Preaching Pitfalls. — Do not hunt a contradiction between verses 12 b and 13 and try to reconcile them. Paul would not be so foolish as to put contradictions so close together. He is simply saying that we must be *earnest* in our desire for salvation (12 b) and depend upon God for carrying it out. (Earnest in our desire to put our salvation to work. — ED.)

Preaching Emphases. — The sermon should clearly stress sanctification as the necessary result of faith in Christ. The sermon must be linked with the recitation of Christ's atonement, vv. 5-11. The sermon should show the value and blessing of obedience to God.

Problem and Goal. — The preacher should feel in his heart a crusader's enthusiasm to achieve a greater respect for God's will among his members when he preaches this sermon. He should feel appalled by his own lethargy in making God's will the first rule in his life for his thoughts, words, and deeds. He should feel alarmed at the evidence of weakness in obeying God's will that he sees in his congregation. He should realize that unless he and his flock endeavor to do God's will, he and his flock will go to hell. And he should have the unremitting purpose to instruct and lead and guide his congregation in the direction of piety and holiness. That burning purpose will make him earnest and serious, yet loving and evangelical.

Outline:

THE CHRISTIAN'S OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WILL

1. It is motivated by faith in Jesus, vv. 5-10; "wherefore . . ."
2. It is willingly and gladly given, vv. 12 b, 14. It needs urging and admonition but no coercion and threatening.

3. It makes Christians useful members of society, examples for others, and winners of souls, vv. 15-16 a.
4. It creates joy in the hearts of parents, pastors, teachers, and others who see the fruit of their labors, v. 16. See Heb. 13:17. Sometimes parents, pastors, and teachers feel that their efforts are fruitless. But they learn, too, that in many cases their admonitions have good results. See Is. 55:10-11. They rejoice then, and their rejoicing will be complete when the obedient Christian, saved by his faith, reaches heaven "in the day of Christ."

FREDERIC NIEDNER

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ROM. 7:18-25

The Text and the Day. — The text is the chief parallel to the Epistle for the day, Gal. 5:16-24. The Collect petitions for power to overcome the frailty of the flesh and sin.

Notes on Meaning. — The Apostle discusses two principles, or powers, at work in him, as a regenerate man, side by side and simultaneously: the flesh and the spirit; the law in his members and the law of the inward man; the law of sin and the law of his mind. The point at which the former effects its chief attack is in the domain of the will. The regenerate self can indeed have good desires (v. 18, "to will is present with me"), but frequently fails to achieve actual performance; the regenerate self can desire not to do the evil (v. 19), but fails to prevent the deed. Hence the Apostle distinguishes between two "I's," or personalities: the flesh (v. 18) and a self of which he speaks as though it were more properly he, the self contrasted to the law of sin, v. 20. The principle of sin is not static, but active, seeking to extend its sphere over the entire domain of the self, v. 23; it is, in effect, a body of death (v. 24) and causes the Apostle to view himself as "wretched" and to cry out for deliverance. He sees that deliverance not simply in escape from the body of the flesh, but in Jesus Christ, v. 24. The process has been described in detail in chap. 6, especially v. 6: through the redemption of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit in Word and Baptism, a life is established which is dead to sin, and hence the body of sin loses its capacity for evil; it, too, dies.

Preaching Pitfalls. — This is not a text on justification, but sanctification; not on the process of forgiveness and faith, but on the process of growing in grace in order to overcome the dominion and influence of sin. — “Law” is not used of Mosaic or Natural Law or of the demands of God or men to obey certain commandments, but in the sense of “principle,” or “motive power.”

Preaching Emphases. — “Through Christ Jesus, our Lord” is in this text (v. 25) only a reminiscence of the abundant material of chapters 3, 5, and 6. Hence it needs careful delineation: Jesus Christ is central in the scheme not merely of justification, but of sanctification and conquest of the flesh.

Problem and Goal. — The preacher addresses people, in using this text, who have already come to faith, but who find the problem of sin still acute — who are, in fact, because of their faith, unusually aware of the problem of their continuing sin. In this sermon he aims not merely to bring his people to a fuller sense of forgiveness of sin, but to put them into the process of overcoming sin and reducing its influence more and more. The goals are also outlined Gal. 5 and 1 John 1—2.

Outline:

THE CHRISTIAN'S CONQUEST OF HIS DUAL PERSONALITY

I. The Christian man is two people.

A. He was under the bondage of sin.

B. Through Jesus Christ He has been redeemed from sin.

C. Through the power of the Spirit a new life has begun its work.

1. New impulses for the will have been put to work.

2. Yet these impulses meet with obstacles, and sin still plagues the Christian.

II. Through Christ the Christian man may conquer the flesh.

A. This side of the grave the plague continues.

B. Yet the Christian has the power for growth and victory.

1. Christ continues to be Guarantee for forgiveness and power.
2. The Christian therefore continues the battle against sin within himself, keeping under the body and enhancing the life of the Spirit.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 COR. 9:6-11

The Text of the Day. — This Sunday is one of the many of the Trinity season, the non-festival portion of the church year, in which the great truths of the festival portion of the church year are applied to workaday Christianity. The old Standard Epistle and Gospel lessons for this Sunday speak clearly and unmistakably of faith in action. Whereas the Epistle, in the last portion at least, speaks primarily of the generous use of one's possessions for the support of Christ's kingdom, the Gospel invites and urges us to let the Kingdom of God be our first and foremost concern. Cp. Gal. 5:25—6:10; Matt. 6:24-34. The text before us therefore fits well into this cycle of the church year. It is, as it were, an exposition of both the Epistle and the Gospel of the old church pericopes.

Notes on Meaning. — An offering to alleviate the suffering of fellow Christians in Judea was to be gathered. The Christians at Corinth had resolved to participate in this collection. Cp. 8:10-11 and 9:1-5. This offering was about to be gathered. In the text the Apostle urges the Corinthian Christians to liberality in giving. He cites an example from agriculture. One who sows sparingly, perhaps a peck of wheat, where a bushel and more is required, cannot hope to reap bountifully, v. 6. The motive behind such liberality is ungrudging gratitude to God for His amazing love and grace, v. 7. This requires a proper conditioning of the heart (v. 7), after which the giving will not be mechanical, or merely done to save face ("of necessity"), but it will be cheerful and willing, v. 7. And such giving is not in vain, for it has the promise of God's abundant blessing, v. 8. In the following verses (9-10), with a quotation from the Old Testament, the Apostle wishes his Corinthian Christians God's bountiful blessing upon their

liberality. And having by their liberality helped to alleviate the suffering of fellow Christians elsewhere, the Corinthian Christians will be the cause of thanksgiving to God on the part of many, v. 11.

Preaching Emphases. — The text is suited to impress on our Christians that the right spirit must be behind their giving and to urge them to greater liberality in their support of the far-flung activities of their dear Church. The heart of the text is this sentence: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give," v. 7 a. Cp. also 2 Cor. 8:5; Prov. 23:26. Such a heart has utter confidence in God's goodness and trusts implicitly in God's promises, v. 8. In such a heart there is joy over the privilege of rendering service to God, an assurance of basking in the love of God, v. 7 b. And by giving which comes from the heart "thanksgiving to God" is caused, v. 11.

Problem and Goal. — The 15th Sunday after Trinity suggests a 39-week review of stewardship performances during three fourths of the year, since this Sunday is at the very end of 39 weeks of the year. Three quarters of a year of grace and blessing have been added to eternity. Perhaps of much of the giving during that time it could be said: "He gives nothing but worthless gold who gives from a sense of duty." Our problem therefore is to get our listeners to put their heart into their giving. Again and again in our stewardship sermons we must point to God's goodness and grace and bountifulness. Our hearers must be taught to give from the heart, to be enriched in everything to all bountifulness. Bountifulness suggests that we at least investigate and, if possible, strive to reach the amount which our Government permits us to deduct from our gross income for this very purpose. This happens to be 15 per cent. Much of the giving of the past has been done "sparingly," only about 1 per cent last year. And because many give too sparingly, the Church and her work are seriously hampered, and perennial drives and appeals become necessary to carry on the most necessary work, to say nothing of expansion. Hence our goal is to awaken our Christians to greater liberality. Let us tell them: "Who gives himself with his alms feeds three" (cp. "The Vision of Sir Launfal," by James Russell Lowell), and "God loveth a cheerful giver."

Outline:

THE HEART OF GIVING IS THE GIVING OF THE HEART

I. Without the heart in it our giving will be bare and worthless.

A. Sparingly, v. 6 a. Grudgingly, of necessity, v. 7.

B. Then blind leaders of the blind, Luke 6:39.

C. Thereby manifesting a weak, anemic Christianity.

II. With the heart in it our giving will be truly sacrificial and worshipful.

A. Consciousness of God's love, v. 7 c.

B. Trust in God's grace and bountifulness, vv. 8-10.

C. Incite and provoke others to give thanks to God, v. 11.

Conclusion: Luke 6:38.

WALTER H. BOUMAN

