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Homiletics: Outlines on Hannover Epistles

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Hannover Epistles

INVOCAVIT

1 JOHN 3:7-12

Several years ago a will was contested in Waterloo, Iowa, in which the deceased had directed that the income of \$75,000 of his estate should be distributed to persons "who believe in the fundamental principles of the Christian religion and in the Bible and who are endeavoring to promulgate the same." Ten of his nephews and nieces went to court to break the will. They said there is no common agreement as to the definition of Christianity. Clergymen of many different denominations who were called in to testify only beclouded the issue. On the question of the Virgin Birth, for example, one of them said, "I tell my people to pay their money and take their choice." Owing to the confusion, the will was broken. . . . The Bible is plain in its description of Christians. Our text offers such a

PORTRAIT OF A CHRISTIAN

I

The Christian is a person who is born again in Christ (vv. 8 b, 9 a). The Apostle had been speaking of Christians as the "sons of God" by adoption. He refers again to this new birth in v. 9: "whosoever is born of God." The basic characteristic of a Christian is his rebirth from spiritual death to spiritual life. By His redemption Christ "destroyed the works of the devil" (v. 8). The born-again Christian becomes partaker of this gift when God brings him to saving faith, covers him with Jesus' blood and righteousness, and plants his feet on the path of newness of life (2 Cor. 5:21).

II

The Christian is one who abstains from sin. This is a by-product of his rebirth. His portrait amid the darkness of this sinful world is like a Rembrandt painting: an illuminated face shining out of a dark background. "He cannot sin because he is born of God" (v. 9). He cannot persist in deliberate sin, in lawlessness against

God's will, for that would be contrary to his new nature. In saying this our text does not advance the "perfectionist theory," nor does it mean that the Christian cannot commit acts of sin. That would be contrary to 1 John 1:9, where it is made our duty to confess our sins. Also the Fifth Petition: "For we daily sin much." But with the Holy Spirit working in his heart ("His seed remaineth in him"), the regenerate person is happily disabled for a sinning life. An embargo, as it were, has been placed on his sinning powers.

III

Another mark of a Christian is that he "doeth righteousness" (v.7). The righteousness of Christ has been imputed to him so that he has pardon, peace, and life eternal. This righteous disposition of his heart, the relation to God as a forgiven child, as it is molded by faith, is bound to express itself in righteous conduct. Righteous character and righteous practice cannot be separated any more than one can separate heat from fire. Moreover, the Christian shows the fruits of righteousness *because he is a child of God*, because "he is righteous," not because he wants to earn his way into God's good graces or be seen of men, as did the Pharisees, or measure up to accepted social standards. It is a poor kind of righteousness, a poor kind of giving which gives only because the congregation publishes a financial statement of individual gifts. It is a poor type of honesty that would not take a dime from the cash register but hedges on income tax returns. It is a poor brand of obedience which walks the narrow way when parents are watching but runs wild when they are not around. Contrariwise, a person who fails to produce righteousness and who deliberately lives in sin shows thereby that he is still a child of Satan (v.8).

IV

A final feature of this portrait is that the Christian shows brotherly love (v.11). Note Scripture's strong emphasis upon it in 1 John 4:21; Eph. 5:2; 1 Peter 1:22. Such love is not a carefully thought-out schedule of actions but the very outgrowth (condition of heart) of our new life in Christ . . . who first loved us. Many church members may know the "Six Chief Parts" and pull out their confirmation certificate to prove it and yet have not

advanced beyond the ABC's in the practice of love. How warmly do you radiate love in these areas: (a) toward your children? (b) husband . . . wife? (c) in office, shop, social life? (d) toward your enemies? (e) toward unconverted people?

This is the portrait of a Christian that our text draws. . . . For our many failures there is the constant forgiveness through the blood of Christ. For our steady growth there is the power of prayer and the in coming of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament.

Topeka, Kans.

ALBERT C. BURROUGHS

REMINISCERE

2 COR. 7:1-12

Introduction: Not the least of the pastor's duties is that of admonishing the erring. This is an arduous task.

The one who is being admonished may be tempted to be indifferent to the warning itself or to think hard thoughts about the pastor when he is performing his duty. However, the reaction which ought to be found in the heart of the Christian when he is admonished is that of heartfelt gratitude to God for the service which his pastor is rendering him. In our text Paul encourages us to

THANK GOD FOR PASTORAL ADMONITION

- I. Because pastoral admonition indicates a love for souls on the part of the pastor (vv. 2-7).*
- II. Because pastoral admonition intends to lead us to godly sorrow.*

I

A. Paul had the Corinthians on his heart (v. 3).

1. Paul had founded the congregation on his second missionary journey.

2. In dealing with them he had always manifested the purest motives (v. 2).

3. Having left them, he still was concerned for their spiritual welfare (v. 5).

a. He had sent Titus to serve them.

b. He earnestly desired to hear of their welfare. He was uneasy

at not having had a report from Titus. However, he was overjoyed at hearing of their welfare (vv. 6-7).

B. Paul's very love for the Corinthians prompted him to admonish them (vv. 8 and 12).

1. A serious source of offense had arisen in the congregation. Cf. 1 Corinthians 5. One of their company was living in incest with his father's wife.

2. The congregation seems to have been remiss in disciplining the offender.

3. Paul wrote the Corinthians, urging them to deal with the offender (v. 8).

a. He wrote them sternly. Cf. 1 Corinthians 5.

b. Yet he had their spiritual welfare at heart (v. 12). His object was not primarily to deal with the offender, nor was it to vindicate the father. It was rather to indicate his caring for the Corinthians. To neglect to admonish would have been evidence of a lack of pastoral concern. His very admonition was an evidence of love. He did not want his members to become polluted by sin, nor did he want them ultimately to perish with the wicked.

C. Paul is a pastor after God's own heart. When there is sin threatening the spiritual life of the flock, Paul deals with it. His very love for the flock prompts his action. How thankful the Corinthians should have been to have a pastor like Paul.

D. No less thankful ought people today be for the admonition given by a Christian pastor.

1. Christian pastors are God-appointed watchmen over the flock, who must give an account to God for the care which they give the flock. Acts 20:28; Ezek. 3:17-21.

2. Also today the motive of the pastor in admonishing an individual is love. He is not seeking to stifle the liberty of the individual but rather he is seeking to preserve the soul of the individual from harm and from ultimate ruin.

3. Let us thank God for the admonition of a Christian pastor. Let us not become resentful if he must speak to us whenever we have not been conducting ourselves as Christians. Let us rather recognize that love for our soul prompts the pastor to speak to us.

In humility let us accept his reproof and pray the Holy Spirit's help that we may mend our ways.

II

A. Paul did not want the Corinthians to sorrow as does the world (v. 10).

1. The sorrow of the world is mere sorrow over the fact that one has made himself liable to punishment and must suffer on account of it. Cf. Cain, Judas.

2. This kind of sorrow works death because it despises the one means of help, the grace of God in Christ.

B. Paul wanted the Corinthians to have godly sorrow (vv. 9-11).

1. The sorrow of the Corinthians was of a godly kind (v. 9).

a. They recognized the seriousness of their sin as an offense against God. Cf. David in Psalm 51.

b. They showed that theirs was godly sorrow (v. 11).

2. Such godly sorrow works repentance to salvation (v. 10).

a. It not only recognizes seriousness of sin as an offense against God;

b. It also earnestly desires the one means of forgiveness: the infinite grace of God for sinners in Christ Jesus (Acts 2:37; 16:30).

c. Such godly sorrow leads the soul to salvation.

3. Their godly sorrow was a joy to the Apostle (vv. 7 and 9). His reproof had achieved the desired results.

C. How thankful the Corinthians should have been that God gave them a pastor like Paul. Christian pastors of today, when they admonish us, have the same objective in view as had Paul. They confront us with our sin in order that we may have genuine godly sorrow, that we may realize that we have sinned against the infinite love of God for us. They want us to think of our sin as Peter did when he went out into the night and wept bitterly. At the same time they would have us turn to the grace of God which calls to penitent sinners: "Come now and let us reason together . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

D. Let us therefore thank God for the admonition given by

a Christian pastor. Let us not despise his warnings. Let us rather accept them in a spirit of meekness. Viewing our sin with godly sorrow, let us humbly confess our sin to God, take refuge in His forgiving grace in Christ Jesus, put our sin from us, and perfect holiness in the fear of God.

If such is our sorrow, then God Himself will blot out our sins, to remember them no more against us. We shall have the peace of forgiveness and our pastor will have the joy of having helped us to return to the path of godliness.

Springfield, Ill.

HENRY J. EGGOLD

OCULI

2 COR. 6:11-18

Nobody wants to be a "queer," to stand out from the crowd. Like the chameleon, therefore, we change our color. In dress, talk, standard of living, even the things we laugh at, we conform to the company in which we find ourselves. Hence we Christians, in company of non-Christians, readily become ashamed of our distinctive faith, and hide our witness. We have not the courage to be "different."

Both the Gospel (Luke 11:14-28, esp. v. 23) and the Epistle (Eph. 5:1-9, esp. v. 8) join our text in urging the uncompromising truth: If you are a Christian,

YOU'VE GOT TO BE DIFFERENT

I

Paul's Five Sets of Opposites Demonstrate How Different Christians Actually Are

A. Different in the concept of "righteousness." "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?"

1. On the surface, the difference may not be very evident, for Christian moral standards have to a degree permeated our society.

2. Yet to Paul the difference is decisive.

a. In origin. Man's deeds versus God's free gift.

b. In acceptability. "Good works" of man are "unrighteousness" to God.

c. In the attitude of man. Self-satisfied pride versus repentant meekness.

3. Thus there can be no fellowship.

a. The difference is not of degree but of a kind. There can be no meeting of minds.

b. The world will not yield. Loves the pride of its own goodness.

c. You cannot yield. By accepting Christ you condemn all human self-justification.

B. Different in the concept of "wisdom." "What communion hath light with darkness?"

1. Human wisdom challenges the implication that Christianity alone has the true light.

a. Boasts of the light of modern science and education.

b. Insists that other religions also have light. What right has one to condemn another?

2. Yet the difference is decisive.

a. Jesus is the Light, man's only answer. What is man? Why evil? Where is there hope?

b. Christians are the light. We alone possess and transmit the truth of Christ.

c. All the wisdom of earth, with its vast accomplishments, shall perish in death and in judgment. Our light alone endures forever, and we with it.

3. Therefore communion is impossible.

a. Physically. Any light which permits darkness to exist is itself darkness.

b. The darkness will not compromise. Proud wisdom of man finds it intolerable that Christ alone should have truth, salvation.

c. You dare not compromise, lest you become darkness, lose Christ.

C. Different in attitude to sin. "What concord hath Christ with Belial?"

1. "Belial" is all that is ungodly, sinful. World makes light of sin and wrath. It says, "I am entitled to get some fun out of life.

God will overlook and tolerate my little faults. My good will outweigh my evil."

2. Such compromise is blasphemy!

a. Christ forgives sin, at the cost of His life — but never makes friends with it! No concord with Satan or Jewish temptors!

b. God forgives, yet remains just even as He justifies (Rom. 3:26).

3. To us the world's attitude is tragic blindness. In love we must protest against it at every opportunity. Harmony with such a world is impossible.

D. Different in the concept of "faith." "What part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"

1. World sees no problem. It says, "Every man to his own belief." Faith is reduced to "religious opinion and prejudice." Broad religious tolerance accepts everything, believes nothing.

2. Your faith is far more than subjective opinion. You do not just "believe"; you know the eternal truth and reality of God and Christ (1 John 5:13; 2 Tim. 1:12).

3. Thus you have nothing in common with the world. Only he who believes nothing can afford to be "tolerant." With you this is a matter of life and death. The terrible barrier between faith and unbelief may divide you from your closest loved ones (Matt. 10:34 ff.).

E. Different in the knowledge of God. "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God."

1. The world's easy answer. Essential identity of all religions. God has many names, worshipped many ways, but all the same God. Tragedy that men disagree so violently about religions, for God agrees with all!

2. Again we stand decisively apart.

a. Our God a living God, not an idolatrous opinion formed by the mind and imagination of man.

b. Our God tells men how to worship Him. He will not consent to be worshipped as men please.

c. Our God a jealous God, condemning all the world's gods as nonexistent. Not a shadow of compromise in the O. T. or the New.

d. Our God a personal Father—we His temple. He loves, forgives, dwells in us (v. 16).

3. Agreement is impossible! To all liberalism we reply with supreme "narrow-mindedness": "One true God, the Father of Christ. One way of worship, repentance and faith. One true religion, all else is damning idolatry." Thus faith condemns the world!

II

You Are Different. Have the Courage to Show It!

A. God demands it. "Be not unequally yoked. . . ." "Be separate. . . ."

1. God's concern for the purity of His O. T. people. Paul's concern about religious compromisings in Corinth.

2. This message is for us also.

a. Not all contact with the world is forbidden. O. T. Law forbade plowing with ox and ass together, not feeding them in the same pasture. The unbeliever can be your plumber. Even your spouse.

b. Only you dare in no way join him or encourage him in his self-satisfied work-righteousness, his smug tolerance, his false man-made worship.

c. Rather your whole manner of life must reprove him. Reprove his unrighteousness by your humble dependence on the righteousness of Christ; his ignorance by your testimony in Christ; his lighthearted sin by your sober holiness; his unbelief by the certainty of your faith; his idolatry by your confident, fearless, and unashamed reliance on the living God.

d. All this in love and meekness, not snobbery. Only be bold to be different, Christ's new man, a light in the world.

B. This is dreadfully necessary

1. For you, lest by denying Christ you lose Him (Matt. 10:32 f.).

2. For others. You will make enemies. The Gospel is still an offense. But only thus can you save sinners for Christ.

C. Accept the challenge with joy. For the same power that separates you from the world unites you to God (vv. 16 and 18). This is your strength and your glory!

NOTE: Part I presents and refutes the accepted religious philosophy of an overwhelmingly large segment of our society. Since this is entirely the philosophy of the lodge, it is not to be doubted that lodge influence has played a sadly dominant role in making this the Great American Idolatry, even within the organized churches. The separateness, in both its negative and positive aspects, as enjoined in II, A, 2, b-c, is a divine imperative for the individual Christian, also in his relation to the lodge and to members thereof. Thus the lodge problem can be adequately presented within the framework of this outline.

The difficulty is length. Considerable documentation ought to accompany any treatment of the lodge, especially in areas where it is strong. But the material suggested by the text is already so vast. In order to be able to cover the text exegetically, therefore, I have omitted direct reference to the lodge.

New Orleans, La.

PAUL G. BRETSCHER

LAETARE

HEB. 7:11-28

Most modern Christians, even of Jewish extraction, are not, in moments of wavering, under the pressures to return to an abolished priestly system such as the Hebrew Christians experienced in the early Christian decades. Therefore the extended arguments of the first portion of this pericope are not, for ordinary lay people, of the obvious immediate and urgent pertinence which long ago drew these verses from the inspired writer's pen. Nevertheless, they, too, were written for our learning; and they constitute a permanent substratum of foundation for our faith in the uniqueness of our blessed Savior's superiority and perfection as Redeemer and Mediator.

What *is*, of immediate and urgent, as well as perpetual, pertinence is the fact of the divine adequacy for our need of our Lord, now and forever, as our Great High Priest (vv. 24-28). Therefore, let us consider Him of whom it is said that "such an high priest became us" (v. 26), as we ponder:

THE PERFECT ADEQUACY OF OUR DIVINE HIGH PRIEST

I

His Adequacy in His Own Person Toward God and Man

A. He is "holy" (ἅγιος not ἅγιος) (v. 26) in His relationship to God. The Holy One of prophecy (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27).

Uncontaminated by any uncleanness before God. A quality God requires in His representatives (1 Tim. 2:8; Titus 1:8); yet is found perfectly only in Himself (Rev. 15:4). Only Christ can lift up perfectly holy hands to God for us.

B. He is "harmless" — guileless — in His relationships to man. No evil in Him to motivate Him to injure any man. Incapable of aught but good. He alone can be trusted to the uttermost.

C. He is "undefiled," "separate from sinners." Without stain or shadow on His immaculate being. Even the company of sinners, which contaminates to some degree all others (being already conditioned by sin toward evil), touched Him with no pollution. Nothing evil within Him on which external evil could fasten. He knew this. Therefore: "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" upon the cross — His amazement at this sore penalty without His personal guilt.

D. He alone has His Father's sanction of full approval. "Made higher than the heavens." His Father by the Resurrection proclaimed Him "to be the Son of God with power" (Rom. 1:4); and by His Ascension God has "highly exalted Him and given Him a name that is above every name" (Phil 2:9) and "crowned (Him) with glory and honor" (Heb. 2:9). No one else is so personally suited to represent the cause of redeemed sinners before His Father.

II

His Adequacy in His Office

A. He alone needs not to offer sacrifice for Himself, being sinless. He is thus able to fulfill continuously a priest's true function, which is to offer sacrifice valid for *others* (v. 27).

B. He alone could make the one availing sacrifice (done "once," v. 27; 9:26, 28) for sins — the sacrifice of *Himself* — because He is sinless. He alone could be "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." He validated all O. T. sacrifices; He gave to all the future the one eternally valid sacrifice, without which no forgiveness would be possible (dreadful prospect!).

C. He alone has an "unchangeable priesthood" (v. 24), continuing forever. He alone has all the requirements of effective

priesthood, and has them *forever*. Therefore He, and He alone, is "able to save to the uttermost" (v. 25).

D. He alone "ever liveth to make intercession" (v. 25). He remains forever, forever to plead the cause of us who sin daily, before the throne, and forever to apply, for the sake of our forgiveness, the fruits of His atonement to our salvation. Appointed long ago, "a priest forever" (Ps. 110:4), long before the Levitical priesthood, whose intercession was valid only because they represented Him, He exists as our Intercessor always.

How needlessly men are lost! Rejoice that our salvation is founded so adequately and securely and forever upon One who, in person and office, is so perfectly suited to our needs!

Milwaukee, Wis.

RICHARD A. JESSE