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Homiletics: Outlines on Hannover Epistles

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HOMILETICS

Outlines of the Hannover Epistles

MISERICORDIAS

ROM. 14:6-13

Church quarrels often have their beginning in petty things, in matters neither commanded nor forbidden by God, which our Church calls *adiaphora*. These include forms of worship in church and at church functions; rules and traditions applied to church assemblies, properties, and organizations; customs and practices with respect to amusements, clothing, the use of tobacco, spirituous drink, make-up, etc. The Apostles, too, met with problems in this field. (Text; 1 Corinthians 8 and 10.)

In order that such things may never become harmful to the Church, our Lord laid down certain principles by which we are to be guided in the use of *adiaphora*. Hence our theme:

GOD-GIVEN GUIDES

FOR MATTERS NEITHER COMMANDED NOR FORBIDDEN

I. Our text teaches that whatsoever a Christian does he should do as unto Christ, his Lord

A. It bases the Lordship of Christ on His death and resurrection.

1. "To this end He died and rose," v. 9.

2. He is the Shepherd who gave His life for His sheep, and we are His own, restored to the flock, v. 8. (Gospel; Epistle.)

B. We ought therefore to live unto the Lord (v. 8 and Epistle).

1. Let us live no longer to ourselves, v. 7.

a. Selfishness is natural (Rom. 7:7, 14) and robs us of life (Matt. 10:39; borne out by psychiatry).

b. Since He served not Himself, let us not "seek our own," v. 9. (Epistle; Gospel; 1 Cor. 13:5; 1 Cor. 10:24, 33.)

2. Let us aim only to serve and to please Christ, our Lord.

a. We ought to make this our highest goal, v. 9. (Matt. 6:10; Phil. 2:8; Epistle, "His steps.")

b. Then it will matter little to us whether others like our

practices or not, vv. 6, 8; and yet we shall be considerate of their opinions and weaknesses, vv. 3, 10.

c. We shall find great reward in serving Him (v. 18) and for His sake work for peace, v. 19. (Phil. 1:21.)

II. Our text teaches that whatsoever a Christian does he should do with Christ, his Judge, in mind

A. We not only belong to the Lord, but also shall appear before Him for final judgment.

1. All shall appear, vv. 11, 12.

2. His evaluation will be final and perfect, vv. 11, 12. (Is. 45:23, quoted here, tells us that everyone at the final Judgment will confess God, i.e., approve His verdict.)

B. Let us therefore refrain from placing too much emphasis on man's judgment, including our own.

1. Each of us shall give account to God (v. 12) and stand or fall to his own Master, v. 4.

2. Let us not be critical of others in their practices with respect to *adiaphora* nor despise those who seem to us overscrupulous, vv. 3, 10.

III. Our text teaches that whatsoever a Christian does he should do with a view to the well-being of his fellow believer

A. The salvation of the sinner is to Christ the most important thing.

1. He died and rose again to achieve salvation, v. 9. (John 10:10; Luke 24:46-48; John 3:16-18; 17:17-21; Matt. 28:18-20.)

2. He went to great lengths to get disciples and to keep them. (E.g., Peter, Matt. 17:1-10; 26:21-35, 40; Mark 14:37, 38; Luke 22:31-34; Mark 16:7; John 21:15-22; Gal. 2:11 f.)

3. Christ wants not the destruction of a single soul, vv. 13, 15, 21-23. (Matt. 18:7-14; Ezek. 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9.)

B. To despise and to entrap those who are weak or overscrupulous in matters of this kind may cause their destruction.

1. To sin against what one considers to be his Christian conviction is a damnable sin that could cause the loss of faith altogether, v. 23. (1 Cor. 8:11 f.)

2. What at first may seem to be a "stumbling block" for a brother may turn out to be a "death trap" (*skandalon*, lit., a kind of trap that usually proves fatal, translated with "offense" or, as here, with "occasion to fall"), v. 13 (e.g., drinking with one inclined to alcoholism may ultimately lead to his destruction).

3. Let us therefore be considerate of those who are weak and who have serious scruples about things neither commanded nor forbidden in the Scriptures. And let us acknowledge that they can also please God by their practices so long as they do not seek to foist their points of view on others (e.g., a woman with scruples about the use of make-up can please God without make-up, but must not condemn those who feel free to use it), vv. 5, 6 (1 Cor. 8:8), vv. 4, 13.

With such principles put to practice and with such sublimation of self to the service of Christ, the fellowship of Christians can be a great blessing. Our sin is that too often we disregard these principles when they apply to us. It is then that we need the "goodness" ("*misericordias*," lit., "the tender mercies," Introit) of our risen Christ and the assurance of faith that He still accepts and regards us as His own. And herein we have abundant inspiration for service to Him in greater consideration of one another. Amen.

Chicago, Ill.

THEO. F. NICKEL

JUBILATE

2 TIM. 1:3-14

The pastor's path is not always sprinkled with rose petals. Sometimes he must "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," 2 Tim. 2:3.

Not all pastors can list as many scars as could St. Paul. 2 Cor. 11:23-28 (the R. S. V. translation of this passage is good).

Timothy, Paul's dearly loved "son in the faith," was having a hard time. Paul, Timothy's senior by 30 years, loved this young man, had ordained him, knew about his timid nature, his ready tears, his frail body.

Have you ever wondered who helps a pastor when he is despondent? A good Christian wrote recently: "It dawned on me the other day that my pastor has no pastor, no human under-shepherd to whom he can turn when the days are dark. Like most

church members I have called my pastor when there was need, and he has never failed me. But who is his pastor? Who rushes to his side when the load is heavier than he can bear alone? Is there not something within all of us which cries out for human sympathy and understanding? Is my pastor an exception merely because he is my pastor? . . . I have a resolution which, by God's help, I will not break. I am determined that my pastor shall know that I love him, that he shall not lack the sympathetic understanding which I can give. As a member of my church I will, in some way, be a shepherd's friend. I will stand at the side of the man who has no pastor."

What Paul wrote to help Timothy out of the chains of his despondent mood will help us when clouds are black and fears increase. Fears will afflict us all the days of our life, for fear is of the flesh. It can be overcome of the Spirit.

HOW TO BECOME A CONFIDENT PERSON

I. Remember that God called you to His side.

II. There is victory on God's side.

III. Your labor on God's side is not lost.

First, a few friendship flowers:

A. Timothy, you are always in my prayers.

B. I have a longing to be with you in person.

C. I remember how readily your tears flow.

D. I recall the faith of your mother and your grandmother, and yours, too.

E. I know that you are a true man of faith.

What a blessing to have a pastor who not only serves as the servant of God, but also as a true friend! Paul was "willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because you were dear unto us," 1 Thess. 2:8.

Timothy's heart was heavy. Paul had warned: "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers," Phil. 3:2. They were barking at Timothy now. "Look at your scandalous religion. The most devoted servant of this Lord whom you proclaim is in chains!"

Sound familiar? Satan attacks all of us at this point. Enemies make sport of Christ's followers when they see them weak or burdened.

Paul: "Timothy, think of your ordination, the joy and peace and power of God you experienced. God does not want us to be fearful and defeated people. He is strong, and we can be strong in Him. Even when you suffer, He knows all about it. It is part of His plan."

I. Remember that God called you to His side.

Undoubtedly Paul had often related to Timothy how he himself had been called: Paul, I want you "to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the Children of Israel," Acts 9:15. Timothy, don't forget who it is that called you, that wrought the miracle of the new life within you. He must want you, or He wouldn't have called you. He called you to inherit that grace and glory which from eternity was set apart for you in Christ. The weak darts which men are throwing at you cannot remove the granite of God's eternal plan.

How clearly this passage shows that we are Christians, not by virtue of anything in us, but by grace in Christ! Even as nothing in you, but only Christ's grace prompted God to call you, so nothing in you, but only Christ's grace, prompts God to keep you.

II. There is victory on God's side.

All that I am saying is fully accredited. It has been historically validated, this grace of God in Christ. The Gospel reveals His victory over sin and death and all our enemies. He swept every enemy away.

Do we keep that in mind when discouragements threaten to overwhelm us? We are serving a Lord who never knew defeat. The majesty of His victory is embraced in His triumph over death. Death has been killed. Now we have in bud that which shall flower out in full bloom in the new world. We who were dead in trespasses and sins have life, eternal life. That's what the Conqueror of death promised: "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live," John 5:25. "He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life." We have the earnest of the new life in our hearts. It's all too glorious for words.

III. Your labor on God's side is not lost.

But God has placed it into words, the words of the Gospel. Ever wondered why the Gospel is called the Word of life? It

alone gives life. No other power on earth can give life. God calls us to life by the Word, God gives us the new life through the Word, God sustains us in the new life by the Word.

Timothy, don't you see you must never let anything keep you from wholehearted dedication to the Gospel? Don't be ashamed of it. I am not ashamed of it. I have suffered plenty because of it, but I am resolved to stay true to this trust of God. See 1 Tim. 1:11 and 6:20. Now these majestic words of Christian confidence: "I know in whom I have believed. . . ."

What He has committed to me, the Gospel of His grace, can never fail. It is God's power. You can lean the whole weight of your trust upon it. It is the Word of life, and it has the power to do God's work. It is not sterile and impotent. It is the only power in the world that has life in it, that has the element of eternity in it, that has the promise of victory in it.

Timothy, have new courage in the Gospel. Stir up the gift of the Holy Ghost which you had at the beginning. Keep yourself consecrated to the Gospel. It is the only thing that really counts. As a good soldier guards a treasure, so you guard and promote the Gospel.

On this golden ground of truth we can overcome fear and discouragement and live confident lives. We are serving a King who has never lost a single battle.

"His is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever." (Psalm 2; Rev. 19:11-16.) Our King occupies the throne of the universe. He has brought to that throne the love of Calvary and the power of Easter. The trumpets of victory sound for us in His Gospel. They will sound fully when He comes in glory. Then, Timothy, you will be glad for every scar you bore for Him, for each scar will become a shining diadem.

Los Angeles, Calif.

CARL W. BERNER

CANTATE

2 TIM. 2:14-23

The best silver, the best dishes, and the finest tablecloth are marks of honor we bestow on distinguished guests and dear friends. We do not expect our leaders in political and business life to live in circumstances as modest as the average man.

The greatest honor to a ruler are loyal citizens; to a teacher, devoted and conscientious pupils; to a business leader, satisfied customers and enthusiastic employees. We honor God best, not by our offerings nor by our words, but by what we are. Our text makes clear *that we are not to become involved in religious trivialities which may lead us to deny great spiritual truths, but we should rely on God and avoid iniquity; for then God can use us to His glory.* It is then that we are vessels unto honor, fit for the Master's use.

FIT FOR THE MASTER'S USE

I. The Lord knows those that are His, v. 19. Refer to Num. 16:5.

A. In Christ we are His.

B. The Lord knows whom He can use and how.

C. Foolish words (v. 14), blasphemous denials (v. 16), and subtle intellectualisms (v. 18) do not change the truth of God's Word ("nevertheless," v. 19). Cp. 1 Cor. 15:12.

D. Rely on God. "The foundation of God standeth sure"—however insecure the superstructure, the visible Church, seems to be. Ezek. 9:4; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13.

II. Purge yourself of too much concern with trifles as well as of evil desires and actions, vv. 21-23.

A. Do not let ways of expression be an obstacle to Christian life. Not only is an argument about words alone futile, but it is malignant. Definitions are not as important as reactions and spiritual relationships. V. 14, *logomachein*.

B. Avoid useless argument and contention based on a determined misstatement of the problem, willing ignorance of God's revelation, or frivolous sentimentalism. Vv. 16, 23.

C. Temptations of the flesh as well as errors of the intellect, when followed, make one unfit for the Master's use as a vessel of honor. V. 22. See 1 Tim. 4:12.

III. Seek to be fit for the Master's use, vv. 15, 20, and 22.

A. In a congregation there will be a difference in capacity for use by God. Some are weak; some are novices; some are subject to repeated yielding to temptation; some may be impostors; some

are faithful but limited by experience, ability, or training; some are tried, faithful, and believing. V. 20.

B. Self-examination must be a part of Christian living. In contrast to the contenders about words, attempt to help others by the correct use of God's Word for comfort and for warning. V. 15.

C. In spite of temptation do not become corrupt and unfit for the Master's use.

D. Strive for sincerity, godliness, faith, a concern for others, and peace. V. 22.

E. God will use you.

God knows you. Those that are His He will use as they yield themselves to Him. Ready yourself for His use, and seek to be as God desires; for then He can use you for greater honor to Himself. Be a vessel unto honor.

Portland, Oreg.

OMAR STUENKEL

ROGATE

1 THESS. 5:14-25

On our pilgrimage to heaven, neither you nor I can travel alone. There are too many dangers and temptations along the way. We need each other. Above all, we need the directing and sustaining hand of our heavenly Father and the elder Brother, Jesus. We must all stick together as a family, leaning on and supporting one another, in the company of our loving God. Let us, therefore, on this Rogate Sunday exhort one another to

PRAY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE SPIRITUAL FAMILY

I

*Pray for the Preservation of the Spiritual Family
Because It Is Needed*

A. There are weak brothers and sisters in the family (v. 14): the "unruly" (disorderly, those who get out of line); the "feeble-minded" (fainthearted, small-souled, those with little courage to withstand temptation and evil); the "weak" (spiritually weak, some of whom may be hanging on to their faith by just a thread).

B. There are troublemakers in the family and such as encourage troublemaking by repaying evil with evil, v. 15.

C. There are enemies outside the family who seek to disrupt the spiritual family (vv. 14, 15, "all men"). We need to pray for them not only that their evil attacks may be thwarted but also that they may be gained for the family.

D. We ourselves are not perfectly strong and perfectly good. We need to pray for ourselves, and we need the prayers of our brethren, v. 25.

II

Pray for the Preservation of the Spiritual Family Because God Wills It

A. God wills our uninterrupted happiness, now and forever, v. 16. He wants not only me or a select few but every member of the family, and everyone outside the family, to enjoy the complete, universal, and eternal redemption which He has perfected in Christ.

B. God wills our perpetual communion with Him, v. 17. He wants us to be aware, without ceasing, of our dependence on Him and to be in constant touch with Him. All our needs, individually and collectively, should be made known to Him.

C. God wills our recognition of Him as the Source of all good, v. 18. He wants us to be grateful even for the afflictions which He lays on us.

III

Pray for the Preservation of the Spiritual Family Because God Will Answer Our Prayers

A. God is faithful. He keeps His promises, v. 24.

B. God answers through His Holy Spirit. Through His power we shall be preserved blameless (shall remain justified through the merits of Jesus Christ) in our total being (spirit, soul, and body) until Judgment Day, v. 23. Through His power the members of His spiritual family are able to correct their sinful, disrupting ways and progress to greater heights of holy living, until they shall reach the pinnacle of perfection in eternal glory, v. 23. Let us not hinder His operations by quenching His promptings, v. 19.

C. God answers through His Word.

1. Many an answer is already recorded for us in Holy Scripture.

We pray that God will lead us to the answers through our careful searching and the God-given ability of correct interpretation, v. 20.

2. The Word also is a standard of testing what is good and what is evil, vv. 21, 22. The Word should be used also as a test as to whether our inner promptings are from the Holy Spirit or not.

D. God answers through us, vv. 14, 15. These verses are God's partial answer to our prayer for the preservation of the spiritual family. It is He that tells us to "warn" (admonish, correct) the unruly, to "comfort" (encourage) the fainthearted, to support the spiritually weak, to be patient (long-suffering) toward all men. It is He that tells us to pursue that which is good and right at all times, no matter what the provocation, and never to repay evil with evil. How much easier it seems to us to overlook or disown the weak and troublemaking brothers and sisters in the family; but this is not God's answer.

Pray that God will use you and me to preserve the fellowship, to give you and me the courage and the tact to admonish lovingly when necessary, and to give you and me the humility to permit ourselves to be corrected and strengthened when we need it.

ALVIN C. MACK

St. Louis, Mo.

THE FESTIVAL OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

1 PETER 3:15-22

The coronation of Queen Elizabeth was an outstanding news event of 1953. However, she had actually been ruling as queen of Great Britain and her dominions prior to the date on which she was crowned.

When Christ became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, His human nature was endowed with all the qualities of His divine nature (communication of attributes). During the early years of His life and throughout His public ministry these divine attributes were only now and then manifested forth, as, for example, in His miracles and on the Mount of Transfiguration. But after His death had gained the victory for us, our Lord always and fully used His divine power and majesty.

When He ascended on high, He publicly assumed the full glory

which He also as man had always had. This is His Coronation Day. The glory road was a difficult one for Him.

We, too, hope for glorification. Since the disciple is not above his Master, we can expect the glory road to be difficult for us, too. That is the burden of our text.

THE GLORY ROAD A GORY ROAD

I

For Our Lord

A. The crown is His.

1. He had descended into the pit to do battle with "the old dragon." The fury and noise we noted on the cross. All was still.

2. He issues forth. He arose through His power and was raised by the Father's power. True God He is as well as God's successful Champion who accomplished what He set out to perform and thus merits the Father's approbation.

3. Descent into the infernal regions (v. 19). His purpose was to show the unbelieving children of men, among whom were the antediluvians, that He had conquered and that they were forever doomed. (No second chance. "Preach," or "proclaim," a neutral verb used also for proclamation of destruction.)

4. Ascension from Olivet in view of the Eleven (v. 22 a). Went up in attitude of benediction. Plainly visible when cloud removed the sight of Him.

5. Session (v. 22 a). God's ruling through Him in behalf of His Church. Government of God.

6. Angel ministrations in behalf of God's children (v. 22 b). Jacob's ladder (John 1:51). Through Christ God's help for us.

Peace of mind can be ours when we remember that since God's arm is bared in our behalf, the world must serve our interests. No matter how great our trouble, sickness, or sorrow, God rules through Christ, our Savior and Brother.

B. But it was an expensive crown.

1. He suffered innocently for sins.

2. Cruel death laid Him low.

3. He knew the depths of misery before He won the crown, yet He won through to glory.

II

For Us

A. The Gory Road.

1. "They will hate you," He told His disciples, "because they have hated Me." Peter emphasizes this (v. 17). Nero had begun persecutions in Rome. Would soon follow also to provinces. You must expect it. Huguenots in France. Siberia. Colombia today.

2. But in spite of this persecution, fearless confessing of truth (v. 15), but with meekness and fear. No compromise to avoid persecution. Goes without saying that the consequences of an evil life are not persecution (v. 16).

3. Fearless living up to the standards of Christianity, both hearts (v. 15) and lives (v. 16). Difficult, but glorious, since we suffer with Him. Peter and John scourged. Paul and Silas in Philippi: Songs out of the night.

4. Christ observes and tempers, guards and keeps. Jesus "saw" the disciples on the stormy lake and rescued them.

B. The glory that shall be revealed.

1. Now only hope of heaven (v. 15), glory with Christ (1 John 3:2).

2. But also "good conscience" before God (v. 21). No fear, no misgivings, since Christ has paid the full price of heaven.

3. This hope and good conscience engendered and maintained by "Baptism" (v. 21). Not an outward, formal thing, but a real means of grace. Whenever we see a Baptism, we are to have our hope and good conscience renewed by recalling God's grace in our Baptism.

4. Also the Word—Peter teaching them here in this Epistle. They were hearers.

Peace of mind here a wondrous blessing. Hope of heaven, too. To have it, accept this your King. Give Him fealty and service. Amen.

San Francisco, Calif.

ARTHUR C. NITZ

EXAUDI

JAMES 1:2-11

The text is one of seven in the Hannover Epistles taken from the Epistle of James. At first glance it might seem that this series was partial to the Epistle of James. But the Nesper listing of texts

shows that the Letter figures strongly in other series as well. There are seven texts from James in the Saxon and the Swedish series, six in the Rheinisch and Hamburg series, four in the Wuerttemberg, three in the Eisenach, and two in the old-line series. The five brief chapters offer fourteen separate texts, each in one or more groupings of verses. Our text has four groupings: Vv. 2-8; 2-11; 2-12; and 9-12.

The texts are offered for practically every season in the church year from Advent to the twenty-sixth Sunday after Trinity. The Epistle furnishes twice as many texts for the several series as do the Letters of Paul to the Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. It is used more often than any of the Pastoral Epistles or the Letters of Peter.

Obviously our Church was not disturbed by the fact that James was one of the antilegomena and considered of lesser value in the Reformation period. The reason for its repeated use is undoubtedly the ethical character of the Letter. It fits the needs of the Church, even as does the Sermon on the Mount.

It seems an excellent choice for the Sunday after the Festival of Ascension.

The preacher could describe the scene on the Mount of Olives when Jesus, the risen Savior, ascended into heaven . . . visibly . . . the disciples watching in wonder and worship. Then came the instruction to return to Jerusalem and to wait for the coming of the Spirit. Try to put yourself in their place. They are filled with joy and return to Jerusalem to wait for the Lord. But periods of waiting are often a time for doubts and misgivings. Satan is busy at work seeking to rob men of confidence and trust. The situation, coupled with the teaching of the text, suggests the theme

TEMPTATIONS THAT COME WHILE WE WAIT FOR THE LORD

I

Temptations Do Come at Such Times

The text speaks of being patient for this very reason. Waiting often brings on impatience. No indication that the disciples were tempted in this way, but it is possible. Scripture tells of many who were tempted while waiting for the Lord. Saul, waiting for Samuel to sacrifice before he goes to war, is tempted to sacrifice in his stead.

Abraham, waiting for God to give him a son, is tempted to raise up seed through Hagar. Jacob, waiting for the Lord to give him the blessing promised to him, is tempted to deceive his father. Such temptations come to all. They come quickly. Text: "Ye fall into temptation." They come when we least expect them, when the Lord has been especially good to us, promising us blessings. They come to all (text): to the rich and the poor.

II

Temptations Come to Try Our Faith, Vv. 3, 4

The Lord could have given the disciples His Spirit before ascending into heaven. He could have given Abraham a son at once. He could have induced Isaac to remember the promise. He didn't have to wait in sending the Flood. He could have come to Mary and Martha while Lazarus was still alive. But faith would then have no chance to exert itself, to be tested and tried. Faith must grow. We can't be babes all our lives.

III

God Tells Us Clearly What to Do About Them

We are to take them to the Lord. Ask for wisdom (text). The Lord will either show us His plan and purpose or at least assure us that the temptation, the testing, is in line with His purpose. And we are to leave our temptations with the Lord. Ask in faith (text). Trust in the Lord. He will come through. He sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples. He gave Abraham the promised son. He forgave Jacob and blessed him. He is the same Lord with the same power and love today. Wait for Him. Pray to Him. Believe in Him. Then no temptation will be too great for you. You will receive all that the Lord has promised and in the end eternal life (v. 12).

Springfield, Ill.

MARK J. STEEGE