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Homiletics: Outlines on Hannover Epistles

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HOMILETICS

Outlines of the Hannover Epistles

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27

Scripture clearly teaches that Christians are close to their Lord. Jesus speaks of His disciples as His servants (Matt. 10:24, 25). Jesus is the Shepherd; His people are the sheep (Psalm 23; John 10:11). Jesus is the Vine; His people are the branches (John 15:5).

St. Paul in his striking way speaks of believers as being "in Christ." They are really in the closest possible relationship to Christ and to each other. Paul addresses our text to the Christians in the church, the body of believers. To the Corinthian church, and to all churches, Paul says:

YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST

I

The Privilege of This Position (12-14)

A. God alone can grant the blessing of membership in His church, Christ's body. Christians are baptized by "one Spirit" into "one body" (Eph. 4:4, 5). God cleanses His people and makes them His own (John 3:3, 5). "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

B. God offers His grace through Christ to all: "Jews or Gentiles . . . bond or free. . . ." His church is open to everyone. Christ makes no distinction between race and caste. There are to be "many" members in Christ's body (v. 14). Its life is to be strong, diversified, rich with the gifts of all who belong. Cf. the preceding context (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

C. Therefore God Himself sets the standards of church membership. It is a divine, holy, heavenly fellowship. Christ is our Lord and our Life. We are the members of His body.

D. Many people think of church membership only in terms of belonging to a human fellowship. "I want to join your church because I like the people there," etc. No one really joins the church if he puts man or the human fellowship before Christ and His body. It is by faith in Christ that one joins the church! If he joins merely a human association, he does not really belong to his Lord.

E. Since the church is really Christ's body, we do not join it without thought or compromise our position in it in any way. Membership in His body is the highest honor we can know and demands our full and heartfelt allegiance. Thorough instruction in God's Word should be undertaken before we assume the honor and responsibilities of this membership. We must be willing to renounce all ties which are inconsistent with our membership in His body. (Evil associates, anti-Christian lodges, etc.) Those who really belong to the church belong to Christ! What greater honor could come to us?

II

The Responsibilities of This Honor (15-27)

A. All fellow members in Christ's body are equal in worth and dignity. Some, indeed, seem to be humbler than others. Cf. the vivid picture language of our text with the well-known illustrations of the parts of our own bodies. The foot thinks itself lower than the hand (v. 15). The ear feels inferior to the eye (v. 16). Yet there would be no *body* if there were not different members (vv. 17-19). They are all necessary and have been placed by God so as to make *one body* (v. 20). The living and working organism of the body depends on every member.

B. Therefore let no one member exalt himself over the other (vv. 21-24). The seeming superiority of the eye, the head, and the "comely parts" is only an illusion. Indeed, the hands, the feet, and the less-honored or -known organs in the body are just as necessary for life and health.

C. Every member of Christ's body is under a solemn obligation to work for unity. There is to be no "schism" or division. The members *need* one another and are to have real respect and care for one another (v. 25).

D. We must therefore be willing to suffer with one another when necessary. It is also our privilege to rejoice together in a fitting time (vv. 26, 27; Rom. 12:15).

E. The practical lessons are most obvious and necessary. Jealousy and pride are to have no place in the church. Nor are some to fret because they think themselves to be of no account. All have their work, place, and office. Differences in our tasks and places only *seem* to make us more or less important. In reality all members are needed in Christ's body.

F. Here is the answer to the difficulties sometimes experienced in the everyday work and life of the church. Differences among members are not really solved by mere tact or psychology. The real power in the church is the Word, which brings us Christ's Spirit. Our real membership is in Christ, and in Him alone do we find a lasting and powerful unity!

Did you ever hear anyone say: "I'm a Christian, but I want to be all alone. I can be a better follower of Christ in this way"?

The very idea is wrong. When one really comes to faith in Christ, one joins His church. His body! One is surely not alone then!

To the church Paul says: "You are the body of Christ." What greater honor could come to you? What greater incentive for holy living than this blessed fellowship?

Chicago, Ill.

JAMES G. MANZ

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 CORINTHIANS 9:13-23

St. Paul had a great rule: "I do not beat the air" (v. 26). He preached, taught, wrote, fought to a purpose. The same principle will lead the pastor to ask: What in this text is current, helpful, needful? The problem which occasioned this text is not a problem today. Congregations (except a few extreme sectarians whose views hardly deserve to be made conspicuous) recognize their duty to give financial support to their pastors. Such support ought to be adequate, but that statement is not in the text.

There are nuggets of gold here, however; and congregations will

be enriched by them. It will be refreshing and stimulating to look into the heart of this noble servant of Christ, who finds liberty in enslavement, life in service. Paul had been accused of just about everything. They said he isn't a regular Apostle, lacks courage, doesn't face up to an issue, is beside himself. Latest charge: "He's commercializing his ministry." Paul recognized the source of these poisoned shafts, and he knew their deadly purpose. Ministers are a special target for the devil. In the fall of one he can achieve the fall of many. But Paul is not going to get off course. He is chained to a Master, and he will listen only to Him.

A MAGNIFICENT ENSLAVEMENT

I

I Am Everyone's Servant

Christians are under new management. They have been bought by their Lord, and this Lord owns all there is of them. "Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20).

The price paid for us was high, very high. Not gold or silver, but the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:19). Usually the value of an article is determined by its cost. No higher cost was possible in this case. Not until this cost sinks deep down into our conscience will we respond: "The love of Christ constraineth me." Here is the deep-down secret of all enslavement to Christ and full dedication to Him.

This Lord has given us a high honor. He has made us His kings and priests (1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6). He has saved us to serve Him and everyone whom He served. One purpose of our calling: "That ye may show forth the praises of Him who hath called you."

The believer-priest is commissioned by the Lord, who occupies the throne of the universe in the interest of His kingdom. "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." God's own method of releasing the vital power of the Gospel into the common life of humanity is through the priesthood of all believers. Martin Luther's words are helpful: "As soon as we have become Christians through this Priest . . . we have the right to teach and confess the Word. . . . For though we are not all in the public office or calling, still every

Christian should teach, instruct, exhort, comfort, reprove his neighbor through God's Word whenever and wherever one is in need of it."

Six times after His resurrection the Lord placed evangelism on the conscience of the church. Through the Holy Ghost we are administrators of the estate purchased by Christ Jesus, comprising forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. The Holy Spirit wants all Spirit-born men and women to make the theme of soul saving the pervading theme.

Paul: "I have made myself servant unto all" (v. 19). Have you ever looked at humanity in that way? Because my debt has been lifted, I am in debt to all mankind to share the message of the huge debt paid in full by the gold of the Savior's grace. We shall never win a person whom we do not love. Therefore the burning concern with all of us shall be to love mankind, to serve mankind, to help everyone we meet to the solution of his greatest problem, the problem of sin, and to the joy and peace which follows forgiveness. Every person ever brought into the life and salvation of Christ has received this blessing because someone was Christ's slave.

II

By All Means, I Must Gain Souls

Soul saving is the cause nearest our Lord's heart, and it should be nearest ours. We need St. Paul's realism. He wasn't just playing with words when he used the word *gain* five times in four verses (vv. 19-22). His critics were right, he was greedy for gain, but it was a gain in souls.

He knew that men were dying in the fires of sin and that the Gospel alone could put the fire out. He knew that one door had been opened into heaven, and he was going to tell men about that open door. In the regular way, or the irregular, he was going to get this job done. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). This purpose was primary in St. Paul: "How can I get the Gospel of the living Savior to people in their homes, shops, factories, fields?"

Paul decided that he was going to cross out all self-interest. What his Lord wanted most he wanted most. Therefore he was

going to be all things to all men. He was going to speak to the Jew on the level of his own interests and experiences. He would seek a common ground of approach to the Gentile. He was willing to stoop low to the lowest. He was ready "to be a dog for the Lord Jesus Christ."

This is our foremost task as Christians. We should think it, breathe it, eat and drink it all the time—gaining souls for the Kingdom. Study your prospects. Become acquainted with their interests. Begin on the ground of their experiences and needs.

Kingdom building is the greatest work in the world today.

We have so frequently failed our Lord, sought our own interests, been cold in our love for others, careless in our witness. How great our shame! How deep our remorse! How earnest our repentance!

This work is solemn, let none trifle; the task is difficult, let none relax; the opportunity is brief, let none delay; the path is narrow, let none wander; the prize is glorious, let none faint.

Los Angeles, Calif.

CARL WALTER BERNER

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-11

The text seems so clear even at the first reading that we may be tempted to draw from it such stern and evident judgments against groups holding wrong opinions that we shall not be aware of the extent to which the text speaks directly of our own weakness. The text emphasizes how easily and often superstition and iron self-discipline combine to replace real godliness. Such a combination is fatal to conscience and to faith. True godliness derives its strength from trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all, but in a special sense the Savior of those who believe.

Specific illustration of doctrines sown by devils can certainly be given especially concerning marriage prohibitions and food prohibitions. Care must be used that the impression is not given that all who follow such teachings are speaking lies in *hypocrisy* or are totally reprobate. There are those, too, but many who seem to be with them stand rather in imminent danger of losing the faith than having already lost it by trusting not in God but in rules.

The elders at Ephesus are again reminded with great force, even as Paul had bared his heart to them in person in Acts 20:17-38, that grievous wolves also of their own number would seek to lead them away from Christ.

In ourselves we constantly witness a way of measuring faith according to rules which can become a serious menace to real trust in God as our Savior. Strangely, the very strictness and sternness of the rules and the apparent self-denial of many satisfying comforts give others as well as ourselves an impression of real spirituality. Against such tendencies within us and among others there is no better antidote than godliness. Our faith is nourished by words from God, by good doctrine, by laboring and suffering reproach because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those that believe. The context that follows our text dwells in greater detail on how godliness is exercised.

COMBAT ERROR WITH GODLINESS

Some food is much more appetizing to us than other food. There are some things we just cannot eat. Under given circumstances our food varies. On a hunting trip we do not eat as we do around the dining-room table. On Thanksgiving Day our meal usually is more elaborate than on another day. Always good, nourishing food is to be received with thanksgiving.

In the abundance in which we live there is much to be thankful for. Nor should we imagine that enjoying food, or marriage, or other good things of life makes us less spiritual than sour-faced, dour ascetics or people who can never enjoy anything with a good conscience. By the Word of God and prayer life's good things are sanctified.

I

Falsehood in Spiritual Matters Always Endangers Faith (v. 1)

A. We must not imagine that tolerance demands that error go unopposed and even unidentified.

1. Some will follow error with such emphasis that they will lose their faith (1 Tim. 6:3-21; 2 Tim. 2:14-18).
2. Satan often uses a point of contention for the overthrow of faith (1 Tim. 1:3-19).

3. God has not left us in ignorance concerning His will for us. We can be sure. (Eph. 4:14; Colossians 2; Rom. 16:17, 18; 1 Cor. 3:11, 21.)

B. Some apparently stern prohibitions and self-depriving goals do not express godliness nor faith.

1. Seducing spirits and evil-minded men sometimes mislead consciences with hard rules for their own advantage (v. 2).

2. Man-made prohibitions which deprive people of blessings God intends for them are detrimental to spiritual health (v. 3). Cf. Matt. 15:9, 13; Heb. 13:9.

3. Superstitions must not replace God's commandments (v. 6; Titus 1:10-14).

4. "Bodily exercise"—discipline of the body by fasting and asceticism—can be beneficial, but does not get at the heart of the matter (v. 8). Compare Matt. 6:16-18; Col. 2:20-23.

II

To Combat Error, Godliness Is Profitable

A. Too easily we detest such errors as are referred to in the text in the lives of others with more diligence than in our own (vv. 1, 4, 6).

1. Our text gives us a warning to be on our guard but becomes also a call to repentance (Romans 6).

2. In Jesus Christ we see our Savior, and in Him we have also a life to follow in the use of earthly blessings (1 Peter 4:1-7).

B. Godliness is profitable in every way (v. 8).

1. It benefits us now. The Christian faith does not make us give up anything that could add to our total contentment. It may call on us to analyze our appetites.

2. It has eternal benefits.

C. Because we trust in God and receive His creation gratefully, we may be called on to endure (vv. 9, 10).

1. To see the world and all people as God's creation makes us labor to have all recognize it.

2. Some will accuse us of being too lax, others of being kill-joys (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:33, 34).
3. Our living God, our Savior Jesus, is honored when we use His blessings rightly (Eph. 4:20-24).

To combat error in yourself and in the teachings of others, follow after godliness through faith in the living God.

Portland, Oreg.

OMAR STUENKEL

THANKSGIVING (Free Text)

PSALM 36:6-10

So easily thanksgiving, even of the religious variety, becomes defaced by being grateful exclusively for tiny things. True, God cares even for the sparrow and watches over every hair of our head (Matt. 6:26-30). Yet so frequently on the day of national Thanksgiving people worship God with praises that have to do exclusively with the "things after which the Gentiles seek." In our Psalm David ponders the goodness of God in preserving physical life; but he does not linger there. He goes on to reflect that God's gift is life of a higher sort and that God's faithfulness extends to the preservation of that life.

LET US THANK GOD THAT HE IS THE GIVER AND PRESERVER OF TRUE LIFE!

I

Our Thanks Are Directed to a God Who Is Immensely Great

A. Thanksgivings are so often only politeness. We have been trained from childhood to "say thanks to the nice man." The anticipation of possession is over; we have the gift in hand. Thus thanks degenerates to mumbling. What blasphemy when we speak to the most high God!

B. David gazed at the stars over the mountains, at the march of seasons and their provision for flocks and herders, and sensed the immensity of God. Modern man, gazing into his telescopes and staring at the atomic explosion, should realize it even more. Yet just the power and greatness of God is not enough for true thanksgiving.

II

*Our Thanks Are Directed to a God Who Is Merciful
and Faithful*

A. Note the accent of the text: God is preserving, supplying fatness and abundance—but for the needy. "Man and beast" are bracketed (v. 6) as though to stress that both are equally in need. Cf. Jonah 4:11. The response to this mercy is a trust, a seeking the way human beings yearn to rest under the shade in desert country (v. 7). Cf. Is. 32:2; Ps. 91:1. The heart of the thanksgiving of God's man is that he trusts His loving-kindness and His mercy, goodness which he has not deserved.

B. Paired with God's mercy is His faithfulness (v. 5). That is the characteristic of God as He pursues His mighty plans and carries out His promises. Our thanksgiving is not response to caprice on the part of God: this year it was good, next year it will be bad. For whatever God is doing for us, He is carrying out His plan of faithfulness, He is being true to us. Hence the believer's thanksgiving is coupled with a firm faith in the forecast of future goodness (v. 8). What about death? Trouble?

III

*Our Thanks Are Directed to a God Who Faithfully
Preserves True Life*

A. The first part of this Psalm deals with the wicked and iniquitous, the man who is cut off from God and has no fear of God. It is the most staggering ingredient in the immensity of God's mercy that He can forgive sin and that He is faithful to bring men back to Him. God is righteous and has judgment (v. 6), rock-ribbed and unchanging. It is the miracle of God's goodness that we are not consumed, but that this righteousness can view us as righteous and that we can stand under that judgment. Cf. Psalm 32. Without that we could not praise God that He preserves us through another Thanksgiving Day.

B. The aim of God is to preserve life, for He is the Fountain of life. Without that men are in darkness, lost from God; God is the Giver of light. That He has done through His Son Jesus Christ, whom He gave into the world to be the Source of that

righteousness by which we stand before God and possess life which Christ Himself not only has but is and shares with us. The Father gave Him to bear the judgment of our sin (John 14:6,7). Thus He is the Light of the world (John 1:9; 8:12).

C. Through Jesus Christ we are, then, thankful to God today; but also throughout the days to come; for in Christ God promises to us a loving-kindness and righteousness that will continue (v. 10). That is a "lively hope" which sustains thanksgiving amid even persecution and adversity (1 Peter 1:3-7; Phil. 4:19).

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER