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Homiletics: Outlines on Ranke Epistles

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Outlines on Ranke Epistles

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

1 COR. 2:1-10

One need but read this text, or only v. 2 for that matter, and there is no mistaking the great theme of Paul's preaching: "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (Gal. 6:14). All that Paul had to say on the great subject of religion; all that he had to say concerning man's hope for this life and the next; all that Paul found is "the biography of a Man, with especial emphasis laid on one act of His history—His death. Christianity is Christ, and Christ is Christianity" (Maclaren). Let us weigh this truth in the light of our text and rediscover for ourselves that

The Simple Preaching of the Gospel of Christ and Him Crucified
Throbs with Wisdom and Power

I. The wisdom and power of the Gospel is not dependent on brilliant and clever presentations

There is a reason why Paul expresses himself so forcefully in the opening verses of this chapter (vv. 1-4). Paul had had some striking experiences on his European tour (Acts 16—18). "He had been imprisoned in Philippi; . . . smuggled away by night from Thessalonica; . . . hounded from Berea; . . . all but wholly failed to make any impression in Athens; . . . and came to Corinth with the conclusion recorded in my text . . . it was not for him to argue with philosophers or to attempt to vie with sophists and professional orators . . . His only way to meet Greek civilization, Greek philosophy, Greek eloquence, Greek self-conceit, was to preach 'Christ and Him crucified'" (Maclaren). And how true! (Phil. 3:7, 8.)

A. The Gospel does not need persuasive oratory, excellency of language (v. 1). Don't overestimate the gift and value of oratory and writing. We hear of Elizabethan letter writing, when letter writing developed into an art. "Letters were not dispatched till every sentence had blossomed into flower." The writer was primarily concerned, not with the content but with the desire to display his excellency of style. Similarly the Greeks had developed oratory. They aimed at perfection in rhetoric. Excellency of speech had to compensate for want of fact and matter.

B. Nor does the Gospel need artificial appeal, enticing words (v.4). Preachers do not have to resort to the quivering voice and mannerisms of the spellbinder to have a convincing message.

C. Nor does the Gospel need the support of human wisdom and learning (v.6). We do not want to cast any aspersions on the learning of our day. In fact, we marvel at the ingenuity and cleverness of human learning, and we thank God for all advances made. But the Gospel holds a field all its own and is beyond the reach of the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 1:20). Let human wisdom and ingenuity dress up the Gospel of Christ and Him crucified, and it's like letting a cartoonist try to improve a master painting. Even the princes of this world's brilliant men are lost when it comes to Gospel truths (vv. 6, 8). The fact is "that eye hath not seen . . ." (v.9).

D. The Gospel throbs with wisdom and power even when accompanied by human weaknesses (v.3).

Paul had bodily defects which put him at a certain disadvantage and which he feared hindered his work (2 Cor. 10:1; 2 Cor. 12:7; Gal. 4:13); and yet they did not vitiate the effectiveness of his Gospel preaching. A deep manly voice and a healthy handsome physique indeed belong to the gifts and graces of God, but the Gospel truth on the lips of the crippled, the sick, and the dying loses nothing of its wisdom and power. And why?

II. *The Gospel of Christ and Him crucified owes its wisdom and power to God*

The Gospel deals with matters that have not been discovered by human studies. It concerns itself with a wisdom that sprang from the eternal counsel of God. In our text Paul speaks of it as "a mystery, a hidden wisdom" (v.7; 2 Tim. 1:9). It deals with facts and issues that could never have dawned on man (v.9). The Gospel deals with judgments and solutions that reveal God's gracious will (v.5; 2 Cor. 4:7; 1 Peter 1:5).

A. Its wisdom lies in "what God hath prepared for them that love Him" (v.9).

Here let the simple Gospel facts make your lips eloquent, as you speak of God's gracious disposition toward sinful man (Ezek. 33:11; Is. 1:18); as you tell of His profound act of love in sacrificing His Son (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4,5), of the whole Christ's perfect obedience, resulting in a perfect salvation for sinners (Heb. 7:26,27), thus showing that in Christ Jesus "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

B. And its power flows from the working of the Holy Spirit, who searches the deep things of God (vv. 4, 10).

No one needs to prove the soundness of the Gospel truth by placing it in test tubes or attempting to add potent ingredients. The preaching of its simple truths and facts creates convictions that are born of the Spirit (Matt. 16:17; Eph. 3:5; 1 Peter 1:12). He opens eyes, and people see; He opens hearts, and people say: "I know," "I am persuaded!" And all of this power lies in the Gospel of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (Rom. 1:16).

All kinds of externals may aid the preaching of the Gospel in our public worship, and all of them may be good and edifying. But strip our worship hour of all ritual and liturgical features; take away the anthems of choirs, the singing of the congregation accompanied by the mellowing notes of the organ, and leave only the simple Gospel message, told even by trembling and fearful lips, and you still have all the wisdom and power that can break down the bulwarks of Satan and save souls that have slumbered in darkness for years.

And remember, this powerful tool that puts to shame the wisdom of the wise lies in your hands and mine.

Corvallis, Oreg.

A. W. SCHELP

LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY (TRANSFIGURATION)

ROM. 13:1-7

Two accents have worked side by side during Epiphanytide, closing today. The one has been Jesus' revealing Himself to us as Son of God and Savior; that climaxes today in the Transfiguration, and especially in the Passion, death, and resurrection of Christ, which we shall soon commemorate. The other accent has been our reflecting God's glory to one another and to our world. The first takes us to the heights where Christ sits enthroned in the glory of God. The second takes us to the depths of daily living where Christians are to prove that God is their Life even in the most seemingly secular and unspiritual pursuits. Hence our text today encourages the Christian to glorify God under civil government, as a citizen:

Obey the Government for God's Sake

I. It isn't hard to obey the government for man's sake.

A. Government does some good and useful things; we say that it is "for good" (v. 4). It checks crime and thus puts a premium on good citizenship, and we appreciate its protection and its public services.

B. But government also makes it "easy" for men to obey it. It doesn't wait for the inner impulse; it works with the motive of terror (v.3). It swings the sword and exerts force (v.4). It's "easy" to obey government, pay taxes, stay within the law, because it's going to hurt if we don't. We may grumble—but we obey.

II. *But it is hard to remember that God is working through it.*

A. Often our grumbling against taxes and other demands of government takes the form of belittling the people and projects involved in government.

B. But the good and useful things that government does are God's business. He establishes and supports governments. Their power is His doing. (V. 1.) This is not just validating the "divine right of kings," but it is emphasizing the purpose of government: what it does is what God wants done. Government is God's agency "for good" (v.4).

C. The good that God wants done is that people be kept living side by side in order, whether they have the necessary inner impulse for it or not, by means of thwarting and, if necessary, removing the destroyer of order (v.4). Actually this is only the beginning; God wants people to live together peaceably so that His Word and Truth can be made known (1 Tim.2:1-8); He is setting up a scene in which the drama of Epiphany is to take place.

D. When the requests of government strike us with discomfort, and particularly in the democratic process with its demands for far more than just paying taxes, it is hard for us to find and play our role under God in the task.

III. *And it is still harder to obey the government for God's sake.*

A. The Christian must remember that if he disobeys his government, he will be maligned as an evildoer and his God and church with him (1 Peter 2:15,20). Furthermore he will lose opportunities for showing love to people (Rom.13:8); his taxes, the peacefulness of his community, are for him to be a labor of love.

B. But the Christian must also remember that if he obeys the government only for the reasons and from the motives of non-Christian citizens, he is also failing in his citizenship. If he obeys just for "wrath's sake," to escape the penalty; just for the sake of avoiding its pressures (1 Peter 2:16), he denies the freedom into which God purchased him in Christ. The Christian man is to serve, and with the ability that God giveth (1 Peter 4:11). Not to do so is to wreck the epiphany in him of the living God.

C. Rather is he to obey for conscience' sake (v. 5); for the Lord's sake (1 Peter 2:13). He is to play his role because God has given it to him—the role of image, ambassador, witness, driven by His Spirit, as an epiphany of God.

D. Hence the dire need of standing under the impulse and Spirit of God in Christ at all times, so that even when we are rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's we are giving to God the things that are God's (Matt. 22:21). This can happen only as the great Epiphany of Christ keeps shining into us; as we remember His redeeming work and show forth His death till He come; as we channel the forgiveness and the life through Christ into the love and service that is our due in the community.

The Epiphany of Christ is that God has shined in Christ and into our hearts (2 Cor. 4:6). What a tragedy if it doesn't accomplish its purpose, if it isn't reflected forth again so that we give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus! How splendid when God helps us to succeed in leaving the Mount of Transfiguration, with Christ, to descend into the plains of daily human life! (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 135.)

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

2 COR. 8:1-9

In telling the Corinthians about those remarkable Macedonians, Paul seems to be enjoying a real thrill. The reason? Their manner of Christian giving. Not only Paul was thrilled to tell about it, but also the Macedonians found a real joy in their Christian giving.

Christian Giving Can Be Thrilling

I. *If it expresses our appreciation of God's grace to us.*

A. Only Christians look upon Christian giving with joy. Others look upon it as a burdensome duty. Words of text addressed to Christians (1 Cor. 1:4-8).

B. Christians appreciate the grace of God (v. 9).

1. Because Christ, who was rich, for our sakes became poor. Christ, the eternal God, rich in majesty and glory, served by angels, came to earth's poverty. Born in poverty. Lived in poverty. Died in poverty. (Phil. 2:6-8; Is. 53:2, 3.)

2. Because we, who were poor, have now become rich. Originally we were all spiritually poor (1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1 b; Rom. 8:7). But

because Christ became poor for us, we are now rich (Is. 53:5; 2 Cor. 5:21). Now we have faith, forgiveness, peace, security, hope. Describe these blessings.

C. The more we "know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," know it believingly, the more we appreciate God's love to us. When our Christian giving expresses our appreciation of God's grace, then it will be a thrill.

II. If it proves the sincerity of our love.

A. If giving is only the carrying out of a duty, and nothing more, it will provide little joy. Then giving is considered a burden instead of a blessing. That is why Paul did not command them to give (v. 8 a).

B. Christian giving should be an expression of our love (v. 8b). "We love Him because He first loved us."

1. This will move us to look upon giving as a privilege instead of an unpleasant task, as a favor bestowed upon us instead of a favor done for God (v. 1). Because the Macedonians considered giving a privilege, they literally begged Paul to receive their gifts. Delightful beggars! (V. 4.) When we look upon giving as a working with God and as a "ministering to the saints," then it brings joy.

2. This will move us to give liberally, even sacrificially (vv. 2, 3). The Macedonians were pinched with poverty and affliction. Note how Paul stumbles over words in his attempt to describe their liberality. No offering of excuses! Only an abundant shower of gifts! Even more than they could afford (v. 3). They deprived themselves of things they needed that they might enjoy this privilege of giving. And we in these days of lush prosperity? Are our gifts liberal? sacrificial? There's little joy in giving of the surplus. There's no joy in selfishly withholding what we should give. "Give until it feels good!"

3. This kind of giving will come only when we have first given ourselves to the Lord (v. 5). This, too, will bring joy. If I have given myself, my time, my talents, to the Lord, I will find joy in bringing my gifts to Him. Jesus says this is *the* life (Matt. 10:39).

As we have grown in other virtues (vv. 6, 7), let us grow in the grace of Christian giving, the kind that is a worthy expression of our appreciation of God's grace to us and that proves the sincerity of our love. This will bring deep and satisfying joy.

Riverside, Calif.

WILLIAM GRAUMANN

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

ROM. 14:13-19

Freedom is one of the great words of our time. During World War II the "four freedoms" became our objective: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. Today we want freedom for ourselves and for all the nations of the world. Too often we think of freedom *from* something when we ought to think of freedom *for* something. We Christians are free to worship God and serve Him with our talents. The text shows us freedom from the Jewish ceremonialism, such as the eating of meat, and freedom for a life of Christian charity.

True Christians Live in Charity with Others

I. *A description of Christians.*

A. True Christianity is not meat or drink (v.17). One does not become a Christian by default of something else. Nor do rules about food, drink, clothes, or any sundry regulations establish the faith. The day of Jewish ceremonies is past (Col.2:16).

B. True Christianity is righteousness, peace, and joy (v.17).

1. Righteousness. Justification (2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 2:8,9; 2 Cor. 5:15).

2. Peace with God (Matt. 11:28; Rom. 5:1; 8:6). Tranquillity under the Father's protection. No anxieties about our daily life.

3. Joy (Gal. 5:22; Phil. 4:4). With righteousness and peace goes joy even amid tribulations.

C. True Christianity also serves Christ (v.18).

Second Article: "That I may be His own and serve Him." Christ's will becomes our will, and we are His servants. We are directed and controlled only by Christ's will without a will of our own. Often the more one is a slave to Christ, the more the world hates such a Christian.

II. *The relationship of Christians with others is one of charity. Christians do not live in a vacuum or in isolation. Christians live with people.*

A. Christians will place no stumbling blocks in these associations (v.14).

1. Description of the stumbling blocks (vv. 13, 14; Luke 17:1; Rev. 2:14). In our day some actions or items may become stumbling blocks, such as card playing, drinking, etc.

2. Christians will avoid all stumbling blocks. In the spiritual interest of the brother some actions will be surrendered, even though these actions may not be wrong in themselves (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23).

3. Results of stumbling blocks (vv.13-15). A brother may be destroyed or fall. Some people may be discouraged from joining the church in which they will learn of Christ.

B. Christians will follow after the things which make for peace (v. 19).

1. Christians will seek out the positive virtues. One of these is peace. Peace with one another comes from peace with God. Other fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, etc. (Gal. 5:22).

2. Christians will edify one another (v.19). Let our light shine. We are living epistles for Christ; our life is public relations for Christ. We will witness with our lives.

We must use our Christian liberty to make wise choices to sustain and help people in a spiritual way. The coming season of Lent should find us all using our life in complete devotion to Christ and in the removal of any stumbling blocks.

Buffalo, New York

JOHN E. MEYER