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Homiletics: Outlines on Ranke Epistles

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Outlines on the Ranke Epistles

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 16:13-40

This huge text assembles several stories normally treated independent of each other. In so doing it achieves a remarkable unity. The spotlight is thrown on one household—that of Lydia, with the apostle Paul a temporary guest. The household is thrown into consternation through the episode of the imprisonment. Then Paul returns and “comforts the brethren” before going on to Thessalonica. The unity of this text revolves actually around the Gospel of Jesus Christ—its power to convert and to sustain (this can well be read through consecutively, as the interesting story that it is; if abbreviation is essential, try vv. 14, 33, 34, 40).

The textual introduction, normally unwise, is interesting here. If the maxim “Begin with the hearer” is observed, try an opening of this sort: We prize the Gospel of Christ as the one source of turning hearts to Christ; Synod, its missions at home and abroad, PTR. But let us always remember that its purpose is also to keep turning hearts to God—

The Gospel Turns and Re-turns

I. *The turning power*

A. From idolatries

1. Lydia was a person of means and probably did her share of worship of things, wealth. Her worship (v. 13) may well have been a sop to her conscience, an expiation of a god who was not getting full share of her life. Men today battle these same idols, palliate their service with these same superstitions. “God is my Partner.” “Seek first the kingdom of God *so that* all these things will be added.”
2. The heart of Lydia was opened to hear and apply the Gospel of Christ; and the Word of God worked through preaching and Baptism to turn her and her house to faithfulness to Christ (vv. 14, 15). Thus the Lord works still, in two stages. He brings even the materialistic and superstitious into the range and mindedness of hearing the Gospel; and then He thrusts with the Gospel to move them to receive forgiveness of sin and come under a new allegiance—to Christ as Lord.

B. From despair

1. The jailor was a man of arms and knew how to defend himself. Yet circumstances could conspire so that he found no way of help in his own craft; he faced only the forfeiting of his own life for his prisoners. So men today frequently confront the complete anxiety of helplessness and hopelessness (v. 27).
2. The Gospel of Christ, recommended by the circumstances of life and the total witness of its confessors (vv. 23-28), affirmed (v. 31) but especially reaffirmed in the ongoing contact with the anxious person (vv. 32-34) works its rescue; for because of the completed redemption of Jesus Christ it is the Word of salvation.

II. The re-turning power

- A. The Gospel turns people into brethren. Text: the households viewed as units, Paul and his companions living in the household of Lydia. The individuals of the church are summoned into a fruitful and witnessing fellowship (cf. Paul's words to these same people in Phil. 2:13-16). In the normal church service the audience of this sermon is such a group of Christians with this task before them.
- B. But Christians continue to need comfort, the "standing by" of the believing helper
 1. Lydia sensed this need for her household the moment that she came to faith (v. 15); and Paul sensed it for her household. After his release he deliberately refuses to depart, even though he had work in the next towns. He returned (vv. 35-40).
 2. So Christians, who have come to faith, still need the help of God (Phil. 2:12, 13). God sets open doors before Christians, but many are the adversaries (1 Cor. 16:9). Some of this opposition is right in the heart itself: in its discouragement, in its replacement of the task of God with the quest for the satisfactions of physical life alone, in its wear and tear between those who should be fellows in the task (Phil. 4:1-3).
- C. Hence we are grateful for the Gospel, which fits us for our task and turns us anew day by day toward it

1. In the glow of fresh conversions Paul did not forget the task of re-turning the needy Christians through the comfort of his ministry of the Gospel (v. 40). The epistles had that same function (cf. 2 Cor. 1:3-7; Phil. 2:1-13).
2. It is the Gospel which conveys that comfort, brings the redeeming Christ and His Spirit, who reminds of Him, to work continually upon our hearts. Hence we remind one another of Christ's cross and resurrection, God's power of forgiveness and will to heal and guide. This is the fellowship of the church—that we all stand by one another in this sharing and communing of the grace of God assured and reassured in Christ Jesus, our crucified and risen Redeemer.
3. Thus we are enabled anew to be the witnesses of God's comforting presence and to take up our task again to direct the Gospel, which re-turns us out upon those in our world who are to be turned to God.

Conclusion: The chain reaction of God's work: conversion, witness. But be sure to be sustained in God's own spiritual atomic power.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 17:15-34 (Read vv. 16, 22-24, 30, 31)

"Do it yourself" is fine until applied to religion. The majority of people today have developed their own religion, following in the footsteps of untold millions. So popular in our own land, so hard to expose as man-made. Our text presents man-made and God-made religions in sharp contrast. In this Reformation season may the Holy Spirit give us Lutherans a clear understanding of the differences, and may He lead us ever to worship the true God with a clear and strong confession, after the example of Martin Luther.

"May We Ever Worship the True God"

I. *Man-made religion*

A. Some of its principal beliefs as reflected in our text

1. There is a god, almost assuredly polytheistic (v. 16—filled with idols).

2. This god can be worshiped satisfactorily and appeased by certain outward forms (vv. 24, 25, 29).
 3. Man is definitely dependent upon this god (v. 28). And then man-made religion adds that man has a right to demand God's help whenever he feels the need or chooses to do so (Oral Roberts, N. V. Peale).
 4. Most likely this god has worked out the complete pattern and plan for our lives. Stoicism, fatalism.
- B. Some practical applications to daily life of this man-made religion
1. It always produces uncertainty (vv. 20-23). Devil worship, Athens, the Roman pantheon.
 2. It almost always develops false pride and self-satisfaction
 - a. Stoicism—by a path of self-control, the Stoic became a wise man, a king, complete in himself, in no need of atonement. Modern Pharisaism in all its forms. Roman Catholic and Protestant moralism, liberalism.
 - b. Epicureanism—in its basic philosophy and in its later degenerate practice taught the doctrine of a good life achieved through (judicious) pursuit of pleasure, again with no need for atonement. The modern cult of pleasure-seekers.
 3. It always creates a deadening apathy over against true religion (v. 32). "We're all going to the same place." Let us always retain a sympathetic approach to those who have been led into this blind alley by blind leaders. Beware of our own Pharisaism.

II. *God-made religion*

A. Some of its chief principles

1. God has revealed Himself through natural channels (vv. 24-30). This is not saving knowledge and never is referred to as such in God's Word.
2. In the Bible, God has given us the full revelation concerning Himself and us.
 - a. God is One (ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας, v. 24).
 - b. God is a spirit (vv. 24, 25, 29).
 - c. God is interested in every human life (v. 27).
 - d. God is full of steadfast love toward us (v. 30).

3. A day of reckoning has been appointed for all men (v. 31).
4. Only with faith in Christ Jesus can a man meet this day confidently and successfully.
 - a. Christ Himself is the Standard of God's judgment (v. 31).
 - b. Christ Himself is the Satisfaction of God's demands for justice.
5. These basic facts have been assured by the astounding fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead (vv. 18, 31). The Lutheran Reformation and its Christocentric emphasis.

B. Some of its glorious consequences in daily life

1. It always produces full certainty (v. 23).
2. It always produces peace through the assurance of forgiveness (vv. 30, 31).
3. It always creates a life filled with the purpose of glorifying the one true God. Epistle, Gospel, Collect.

"May we ever worship the true God with a clear, strong confession."

Janesville, Wis.

HERBERT T. MAYER

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 20:17-38 (Read v. 24)

We sit in our pews today anxiously awaiting Word and Sacrament that we may be refreshed and refilled with God's energy for the Christian life. Would it startle you to think of the purpose of your coming in terms of strengthening your ministry? You may not be Paul, but the same bonds of purchase, the same slavery to Christ, is yours. Your service to Christ is no less important than his.

Won't you, then, join the elders of Ephesus and see

Paul, an Example for Us of Spiritual Service

I. We stand in awe at the ministry of Paul

- A. He served with humility and tears (v. 19, cf. also 1 Cor. 3:5ff.)
 . . . a slave of Christ remembering always how God graciously changed him from a persecutor of the church into an apostle.
- B. He placed more value on testifying to the Gospel of the grace of God than on his own life (v. 24, cf. 1 Cor. 9:15-23 and

2 Cor. 6:1-10). As Christ had promised, Paul found his life in losing it.

C. He courageously followed the Spirit in spite of awaiting trials and afflictions (vv. 22, 23; cf. Paul's glorious record, 2 Cor. 11:23-33).

D. He earned his own living lest his preaching become a source of personal gain (vv. 33-35).

II. *We still need this same kind of spiritual service today*

A. Pastoral ministries. Church needs pastors dedicated to feeding flocks and guarding against "men speaking perversities," even as the church at Ephesus did (vv. 28-32).

B. Teaching ministries. "Feed the flock" is a task often demanding special training. Professors, parish school teachers, ministers of education—vital to feeding flock in our day.

C. Lay ministries. Witnesses at home, labor union, business, country club, school, etc. Faithful servants of Christ in these areas also need to place testimony above self.

III. *Paul's source of power is also ours*

A. Paul's Damascus experience is ours each day we kneel before the cross and see our sin laid upon the Lamb.

B. Thankful lives are strengthened by Word of grace (v. 32). Word and Sacrament give us courage, humility, strength to suffer, love for our ministry of service.

IV. *Given Paul's dedication to spiritual service, it is a great time for us to be alive*

A. Our world is in many exciting and momentous changes. Our spiritual service is needed and may shape outcome.

B. Our church faces exciting period of expansion and growth.

C. Our personal problems and difficulties become opportunities of spiritual growth and greater service to others.

We can in spirit understand why elders at Ephesus wept. But we see what they also saw later—that God continues in His grace to provide the forgiveness, the love, and the Spirit to create more and more slaves of Christ.

Alton, Ill.

REUBEN C. BAERWALD

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 28:16-31 (read vv. 30,31)

One dictionary defines love as "concern for the welfare and happiness of another." The Second Table of the Law shows how extensive this love should be. Through the Fall man lost his capacity to love as God wants us to love and thus also his concern for the glory of God and the welfare of his neighbor.

Illustrations: Cain unconcerned about Abel. Gen. 4:9: "Am I my brother's keeper?" Ps. 142:4b: "No man cared for my soul." Priests and elders toward Judas in his despair (Matt. 27:4: "What is that to us? See thou to that").

We are tempted to the same unconcern. We read of tragedy involving human lives but dismiss it because the parties are unknown to and live far away from us. Easy to join the priest and the Levite in walking on the other side of the road (Luke 10:31,32). Only when God's Holy Spirit moves in on us can we begin to show a God-pleasing concern for one another. Illustrated in our text.

Christians Are Concerned for One Another

I. *The object of such concern*

- A. Paul's first object was to get to Rome (Rom. 1:9-11; 15: 23,24). Therefore his present imprisonment not altogether tragic.
- B. Paul's object in getting to Rome was at least twofold: (1) to indoctrinate these Christians (Rom. 1:11); (2) to effect a better integration between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians. The Jewish Christians still were inclined to claim prerogatives over Gentile Christians and to foist upon their conscience the observance of certain Old Testament laws. The Gentile Christians were inclined to disregard the sensitiveness of the Jewish Christians and thus to offend the weaker brethren (Rom. 2:11-29; also chs. 3, 4, 9, 11, 14).

Application.—We can have no lesser concern than Paul had: to indoctrinate one another (Col. 3:16), in order that we might all grow in knowledge and in grace (2 Peter 3:18); thoroughly to integrate new members into our fellowship.

II. *The motive for this concern*

- A. Love to God. Paul invites the chief of the Jews to his hired house to have an opportunity to speak to them (v. 16). Reason:

1. Out of love to God he is concerned about the honor of God's name and therefore wishes to explain the reason for his imprisonment (vv. 17-20), lest they draw wrong conclusions about his God from what they observed in him, the prisoner.
 2. Paul is also concerned about the honor of God in His final condemnation of the unbeliever. Therefore he pleads with these people to accept Christ (v. 23), and he warns those who reject Christ (vv. 24-28).
 3. Likewise loving gratitude to God prompted Paul to show this concern. Christ had converted him and forgiven him and now meant everything to him (1 Cor. 15:9, 10). He felt an inner compulsion to preach the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:16).
- B. Love toward his fellow men. Paul was moved by the pitiful living conditions of the Jews in Rome. History tells us that then already they had their ghetto. Cf. Conybeare and Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, page 677. He was even more concerned about their spiritual needs (Rom. 9:3). Because he was motivated by love, he could do this in spite of the shabby treatment received at the hands of his countrymen in Palestine (Acts 25:26). His own actions are the finest illustration of what he wrote on love (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

Application.—We, too, should be motivated by love: love to God that we do not dishonor His name (Rom. 2:24); love toward our fellow human beings, a sincere concern for their eternal salvation, even when they are unlovely toward us.

III. *The zeal in such concern*

- A. Paul's zeal is so great that he is willing to go into imprisonment to see the Christians at Rome. He could have escaped it simply by conforming to the prevailing opinions of his countrymen in Jerusalem, but his zealous concern for the truth of the Gospel, the honor of God's name, and the salvation of human souls would not allow this easy way of escape (v. 20).
- B. In his zeal he does not permit imprisonment to hinder him in his work. Others might have excused themselves under similar circumstances. Paul's zeal in testifying is seen in that he (1) expounds and testifies the kingdom of God; (2) persuades them concerning Jesus; (3) masterfully uses the Scriptures for his evidence; (4) tirelessly testifies from morning to evening (vv. 17, 23).

C. Paul zealously continues to testify for a period of two years in spite of what others considered failure (vv. 24, 30, 31).

Application.—We cannot hope to accomplish much with halfhearted efforts. God abhors lukewarmness. He alone can give us the spirit to be concerned about others. Let us pray for it fervently and regularly.

Milwaukee, Wis.

HERBERT BERNER

THE FESTIVAL OF THE REFORMATION

2 CORINTHIANS 3:12-18

What a contrast between the Christian pastor and Moses! Let's look at it, as we ponder the theme

I. *Likenesses* Moses and I

A. We both possess letters of recommendation

1. Moses' letter—the two tables. These were his credentials. By them he could command the people's listening ears, obedient lives, respect, and submission.
2. My letter—you (3:2, 3). You, with your faith in Christ and faithfulness to Him, are my letter of recommendation from the Lord, my credentials as God's spokesman. The difference is striking. Moses' letter in stone, my letter in flesh, *your* flesh.

B. We both dispense a covenant

1. The covenant of Moses

- a. Was a written code in stone and on scrolls (v. 6), not in people. This shows its transitoriness. Stones eventually crumble, dissolve. People endure.
- b. Contained a lot of commands, do's and don'ts that couldn't be kept. It didn't work because of sin.
- c. Therefore it was a killing code (v. 6). If your way to God and salvation is a lot of do's and don'ts, you're killing yourself. For example: Do go to church to get to heaven. You're killing yourself. Don't curse or get drunk that God will smile on you and hand you heaven. You're killing yourself.
- d. It was a conditional covenant (Ex. 19:5).
- e. Still it served a good purpose. It was the tutor, the teacher, who brought us to Jesus (Gal. 3:24). It was our husband

until we were married to Christ (Rom. 7:2-4). Notice, this union to Jesus dissolves our marital bond to our first husband, the Law. The Law curbs coarse outbursts of sin (1 Tim. 1:9) and mirrors our great guilt before God (Rom. 3:20; 7:7). Perhaps we should take a few more and longer looks into the mirror. We might not be as good-looking as we think we are.

f. Therefore it has a passing glory (v.7).

2. My covenant

a. It's a *new* covenant (v.6). See Jer. 31:31-34, and note the blessings outlined there.

1) God is our God; we are His people.

2) The divine "amnesia," a forgetting (note the double negative: "never, never remember their sins") of our sins. God forgets our sins only because He remembered them against Christ on the cross. For it was Jesus' broken body and spilled blood that were the body and blood of the "new covenant" (1 Cor. 11:25).

b. It's a covenant of pure, unconditional giving on God's part. No strings attached. This is Father God, falling on the neck and kissing the Prodigal Son, even before the wayward boy has a chance to confess his guilt. This is God, the Husband, taking back you and me, the unfaithful wife, not because of our promise of intended reformation but only because He loves us.

c. This is a covenant that gives righteousness instead of demanding it (v.9: "dispensation of righteousness"). Actually, this covenant was before the killing code of the Law (Gal. 3:6-18; Rom. 4:13-25). The righteousness of the new covenant is righteousness of faith in Jesus' righteousness for us, the righteousness of doing nothing and letting God do all, the righteousness of taking God at His Word and of letting Him give us everything from food to forgiveness.

d. This is a covenant that gives life (text, v. 17, "freedom," the "freedom" of Rom. 8:1, 2 or of Rom. 7:6). To live by this covenant, to have its gift of righteousness, to accept its blessings — this is the life, eternal life. Not doing, but taking what God gives and does for us in Christ.

In Summary. — A Christian minister is a giver, not a

demand, a "do" and a "don't" man. For he is the dispenser of God's new covenant, and this is a covenant of pure giving.

The Christian minister is a giver of righteousness. The new covenant gives righteousness rather than demanding it, and this is the covenant the Christian pastor dispenses.

The Christian minister is a giver of life. The new covenant gives life. And as a dispenser of this covenant, the Christian pastor is a life-giver. A giver of righteousness and life—this is how you are to view your pastor.

II. *The big difference—he wore a veil, I don't*

A. The veil of Moses

1. The misinterpretation of Israel. They thought the veil covered an eternal brightness of the Law. Didn't see the glory was only temporary until Christ came.
 - a. The cause of this misinterpretation—the veil of their own hardness of heart. This veil prevented Israel from seeing that veil over Moses' face, that is, the glory of the Law, was only temporary, passing (vv. 14, 15; see also 4:4, where "worship of the God of this world" is said to be the cause of this veil).
 - b. The result of this misinterpretation—God's new covenant is rejected and with it righteousness and life (Rom. 9:31, 32; 10:2, 3).
 - c. The correction of this misinterpretation. This veil is removed only through Christ (vv. 14, 16). Only when Israel sees that at the death of Jesus the veil of sin that separated unholy men from holy God was rent; only as Israel sees that at Jesus' death the veil in the temple that kept them from God's presence was torn in two—only then will the veil of hardness and ignorance fall from their hearts; only then will they tear the veil from Moses' face (that is, the glory of the Law) and see its transitory, outdated glory. Cp. also Rom. 10:4.
2. Is this our misinterpretation? Is there a veil over our hearts, a veil of pride which makes us think the Law is still the way to God? Example: God forgives us because we pray for pardon. This is having a veil over our hearts, a veil as detrimental as the veil of ignorance over hearts of Israel. Do I think: God loves me because of my good church at-

tendance, my giving, and my Communion record? If so, I have a veil over my face which prevents me from seeing that our doing of the Law in no way gives us salvation. How get rid of this veil? Through Christ, "the end of the Law for righteousness for us who believe." The look of faith must be away from ourselves with our dirty-rag righteousness and halfhearted holiness to Jesus alone.

- B. We don't need a veil, for the glory we reflect is that of Christ Himself. And He is fadeless in glory (v. 18; I prefer the rendering "reflecting" to "beholding" for the participle κατοπτριζόμενοι. This picture would then depict us as living mirrors. This glory

1. Consists in:

- a. Fruit-bearing (John 15:8). This was Christ's glory (John 17:1; 12:24); even so may it be ours. On fruit see Gal. 5:22ff.
 - b. Faith (Rom. 8:20). This is the greatest glory we can give, that is, to take God's glorious gift to us—forgiveness and heaven through Christ.
 - c. The resurrection of our Baptism (Rom. 6:4; Col. 3:1-4). This glory is in us like a wrapped Christmas present. It is present in our present weak, sinful, mortal frame. It is like a planted seed that holds promise of a new life of beauty.
2. Is constantly increasing (v. 18—"changed from one degree of glory to another"). Each new day sees just a bit more glory in us—the glory of a stronger faith, the glory of greater fruit-bearing accomplished through the pruning of pain (John 15:2). The day will come when "this perishable nature puts on the imperishable, this mortal nature puts on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53); the day when we shall perfectly realize this "freedom" of the Spirit mentioned in v. 17, the freedom from the bonds of corruption (Rom. 8:21-23); the day when He who is our Life shall appear (Col. 3:4), and we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). We shall appear with Him in perfect glory (Col. 3:4), as our lowly, inglorious body becomes fashioned like His glorious body (Phil. 3:21).

You may conclude with this material on "increasing glory."

Richmond Heights, Mo.

HERBERT E. HOHENSTEIN