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## Homiletics: Outlines on the Nitsch Epistles

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## HOMILETICS

### *Outlines on the Nitsch Epistles*

#### SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ROM. 10:1-11

This Sunday is still strongly under the influence of Trinity Sunday. The Triune God is not only the true God but also the living God, who alone does wonders. The Triune God is God revealed as active on our behalf, so that we receive all from Him and render Him nothing but thanks. The Triune God is God as He loves us by giving His life for us (the Standard Epistle for the Sunday), God as He delivers me because He delights in me (the Introit for the Sunday). As the Gradual cries out our most desperate need, it finds answer only in God's love that gave His life, not because of anything in us but altogether because He is the Triune God, the God who is Love. This God now comes to us through the Standard Gospel's invitation "Come, for all things are now ready." This is

#### The Word of Faith Which We Preach

##### *I. It destroys all attempts to create a righteousness of our own*

A. The history of the Jews is a record of people refusing what God gives in order that they might rather give something to God. (V.3)

B. This persistent zeal for God without knowledge is the root to this day of all false doctrine, which essentially is always the attempt to offer God our own righteousness. It is also to be found in us as anything which is generated by us as personal expression of serving God.

C. All such attempts need to be destroyed because they are a looking for salvation in judgment (v.5), they seek to please God in the very area where He reveals nothing but His total displeasure.

##### *II. It points to Christ as the One in whom all demands have met their perfect fulfillment*

A. Christ is God's righteousness upon us as gift. Any attempts at working out righteousness of our own, even though it be on the basis of God's own Law, is despising Christ.

B. This is perfect righteousness, everything that God demands by way of righteousness, because it is obtained by Him who came down

from heaven for this purpose and rose again from the dead as certainty of mission accomplished. (Vv. 6, 7)

*III. It creates that by which the perfect righteousness of Christ becomes our own*

A. It comes to us, and we do not go seeking it. This is man as he is utterly passive in order that God might be acknowledged as the sole Actor. (V. 8)

B. It works faith as the only proper response to God, who offers righteousness as gift (vv. 4, 9). The Word of faith does not demand faith (letter) but actually sets man in the proper relationship with God, so that he receives what God offers (this is Word as Spirit which giveth life).

C. It produces confession that gives all glory to God alone. (Vv. 9, 10)

1 Cor. 1:29-31. Christ is made by God to be unto them that believe everything that they need to be, that God wants them to be. Only faith comprehends that and so apprehends Christ. Only faith in that Christ as "the end of the Law" glories not in self but in the Lord, the Triune God, who is God alone.

Minneapolis, Minn.

WILLIAM A. BUEGE

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

EPH. 2:13-18

Human beings have always built walls. Think of the great wall of China, the stone walls around medieval cities, and today, walls around prisons, walls around farmers' fields, walls along rivers and around gardens. We consider the building of walls necessary and good, a praiseworthy human activity. Walls do an important job of keeping out or in, as the case may be, criminals, unwelcome persons, wild animals, stray dogs, and the like. However, the walls that St. Paul talks about in this text—also built by man—are evil walls. They do a devastatingly dreadful task. They keep the goodness of God from us. They are the walls that we build by our sins, the walls that separate us from one another, the walls that isolate us from God, the walls that hide us from reality and make us satisfied with our own sinful selves. But the text also reminds us how these walls are broken down by Jesus Christ. The theme is:

### Broken Walls

#### I. *By our sin we build walls of separation and enmity*

A. By our sin we build walls between ourselves and other people (vv. 14, 16). The "dividing wall of hostility" in v. 14 can be interpreted to mean the walls of sin that separate human beings from one another (this paragraph) and the walls of sin that tend to separate us from God (IB below). People who live closely together, even Christians, often find invisible walls of misunderstanding forming between them. This can happen in all human relationships. Refer to marriage and family relationships, current political crises between nations, other illustrations. We isolate ourselves as we build walls of selfishness and sin around us. The pathetic pleas for mercy found in so many introits, collects, and graduals are, in a sense, prayers beseeching God, "Help, God, by my sins I've built terrifying walls around myself." Cf. today's Introit, "Have mercy upon me . . . I am desolate and afflicted."

B. By our sin we build walls between ourselves and God (vv. 14, 16). The foremost result of sin and perhaps the best definition of hell is "separation from God." Experience teaches us that consciously compromising God's holy will causes us to drift farther and farther from God. Perhaps we are not as conscious of the walls that separate us from God as we are of the walls between ourselves and other people, but they are even more dangerous and deadly.

C. By building these walls we have placed ourselves far from God and His love (vv. 13, 17). By the phrase "you who were once far off" Paul meant the situation of the Ephesian Gentile Christians before their conversion to Christ. Theirs was a heathen and grossly sinful existence "far off" from God. They banished or exiled themselves from God's goodness. Illustrations: Banishment as an ancient form of punishment; the Russian practice of exiling political undesirables to Siberia. When we build walls of sin between ourselves and walls of sin separating us from God, we are performing self-banishment. We are placing ourselves in a dry and barren desert far from God and the oasis of His love.

#### II. *Christ has broken down these walls*

A. Christ has broken down these walls (v. 14). We can't possibly breach them or break them down. They are far too thick and high and strong. But Jesus Christ can and does breach them. He breaks down both kinds of walls. (IA and IB above)

B. Christ has done this in His flesh by the blood of the cross (vv. 13, 16). Christ used no powerful machinery, no mighty armies, no earthly power of any kind, to break the giant walls. His suffering

and death and the proclamation of success in His resurrection did the task. This is what amazed the converts in the early church, was and is often a stumbling block to conversion and growth in the knowledge of true Christianity, and often causes outright rejection. God's method is a miracle. It's just as much a miracle as the method used to break down the walls of Jericho in the Old Testament story. The nearer we draw to the Cross, the more we can see this miraculous power.

C. The walls are broken because through the cross Christ has abolished the power of the Law (v. 15). If we could keep God's Law, no walls of sin would be built, and there would be no need to have the walls breached. However, we do not keep the Law, and the walls built by our disobedience can only be destroyed by Christ.

### III. *Thus Christ has given us perfect peace*

A. Thus Christ has brought us who were far near to God (vv. 13, 17, 18). If you want to look at this positively rather than negatively, as we do with today's theme, "Broken Walls," you might think of Christ's redemption as the building of a great bridge. A bridge brings two shores, formerly inaccessible to each other, together. Illustration: the great new four-mile suspension bridge linking Lower and Upper Michigan over the Mackinac Straits. Christ brings God and man, formerly inaccessible to each other because of sin, together.

B. Thus Christ has brought all those "in Him" together into one new creation (v. 15). This is the church. It includes all those baptized into Christ. Artificial barriers of race and class ought to become meaningless. Ephesians is the great epistle on unity. Christ's redemptive struggle established unity between man and man and between man and God.

C. Thus Christ has brought us God's perfect peace (vv. 14, 15, 17). He *is* our Peace (v. 14). This is an astonishing statement. The Western World bewailed Secretary of State Dulles' illness because he was important to world peace, but no one was so foolish as to say that he *is* world peace. When walls of misunderstanding are broken in international crises, it brings us closer to world peace. When Christ breaks the walls of sin that we build, it brings us closer to God's true peace. Cf. Jesus' post-resurrection greetings to the disciples, "Peace be with you," and the word "peace" in the liturgy: Gloria in Excelsis, Votum, Agnus Dei, Benediction. Understand this peace. It does not imply the cessation of troubles and tensions in life. It means that the walls of hostility between man and God and man and man are broken.

Usually it's bad to break down walls. It's an act of war or vandalism. But Christ's breaking down of these walls of sin is a wonderful thing. Oh, the blessedness of the broken walls!

Berkeley, Mo.

HAROLD W. SCHEIBERT

#### FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

COL. 4:2-6

A very old saying bids us to "pray and work." That is good advice for every Christian endeavor. It is especially fitting for every endeavor in mission work. In fact, according to the God inspired words of the apostle Paul which lie before us for study, "Pray and work" is

#### The Key to a Successful Mission Program

##### I. *Pray* (Vv. 2-4)

A. *Steadfast*. "Continue in prayer." Prayer is power. No mission program will succeed without prayer. Furthermore, steadfast prayer is needed. The disciples of Jesus, after witnessing the Lord's ascension, "all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14). This they did for 10 days. Suddenly there was heard "a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind . . . when the Day of Pentecost was fully come!" (Acts 2:1, 2.) No wonder Peter was unafraid to lift up his voice and preach! No wonder "about 3,000 souls . . . gladly received his word [and] were baptized"! (Acts 2:41)

B. *Wakeful*. "Watch in the same with thanksgiving." Not only are we to be steadfast in our prayers for missions. To be wakeful is equally important. We are to be wakeful to the needs of our fellow men. We are to be wakeful to our mission opportunities. We are to be wakeful to the sure success of our mission efforts (Is. 55:10, 11; Luke 12:23). As we pray for God's blessing upon our mission efforts, let us thank Him for the success we are confident He will grant.

C. *Pointed*. Vv. 3, 4. Every Christian should be active and aggressive in every mission effort of the congregation and Synod; if in no other way, then in the praying of pointed prayers (Hymn 496). Pray for the pastor, the chairman, and the members of the mission committee. Mention them by name. Pray for mission fields and missionaries by name. Pray that God place on the lips of all Christians the words they "ought to speak" for the winning of souls for Christ. Too often the mission efforts of Christians lack pointed direction because their mission prayers lack pointed purpose.

## II. *Work (Vv. 4-6)*

**A. *Conduct.*** Through our conduct, through the things we do or leave undone, we work either for Christ or against Him. We are living epistles (2 Cor. 3:2). May our conduct be good reading—be *wise*. "Walk in wisdom." May our conduct reflect the beauty of Christ dwelling in our hearts and thus draw people to Christ. Let us employ the same wisdom, patience, perseverance, and finesse in winning souls for Christ as the children of this world employ to pile dollar upon dollar for themselves.

But not only is our conduct to be wise, it is also to be *urgent*. "Redeeming the time." There is no time to waste. Time is running out both for us who seek to win souls for Christ and for those whose souls need to be won for Christ.

**B. *Speech.*** There is a pleasant and an unpleasant way of saying a thing. Christians are to use the pleasant way, especially when doing mission work. The words of Jesus were gracious not only in content but also in the manner He spoke them. Let us follow the example of Jesus. When we speak about Jesus, may we remember the words "Let your speech be always with grace."

Gracious speech, however, does not mean insipid speech. Our speech must always be honest, truthful, wholesome, "seasoned with salt." We dare not belittle the seriousness of sin. We dare not minimize man's need for a Savior. We dare not modify the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. We dare not omit the necessity of proving faith with good works. When we speak the truths of Scripture in our mission work, we must be correct, clear, concise, and positive.

It is encouraging that throughout our Synod congregations are flexing their "mission muscles" more and more. Missions is not *a* work of the church; it is *the* work of the church. Every Christian and every congregation needs to pray more and work more for and in missions. Therein lies the key to success in the greatest work on earth.

Corpus Christi, Tex.

R. WIEDERAENDERS

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

GAL. 2:17-21

(The purpose of the sermon is to unmask self-righteous tendencies and to show the hearer the full glory of freedom through the redemption of Christ. Over and against Judaizing influences Paul sounds the trumpet call of justification by faith. For this reason Galatians has been called the Magna Charta of Christian freedom.)

Comté, a French philosopher of the 19th century, had the custom of being awakened every morning by his valet, who would cry, "Awake,

monsieur, you have a great work to do." We Christians have every reason to meet each new day in the same spirit. God has redeemed us from all sin, accepted us as His own, given us the privilege of being co-workers with Him. But often we show the opposite spirit. We are bogged down. We drag our feet through the day. We permit the burdens of life to depress us. Our text offers us a

### Key to Victorious Living

#### I. *Deadness caused by sin and guilt*

Let's recognize that victorious living in Christ is blocked by serving the law of sin. We need release from:

A. The curse of sin, under which we are by nature. (Eph. 2:1ff; Ps. 51:5; 14:3)

B. Serving the Law. Even when we have encountered Christ, we are likely to forget what Paul states in v. 19, "I am dead to the Law." Judaizing teachers had invaded the Galatian congregation. They were teaching people that it was through the door of Judaism that one entered the Christian fold. Even Peter had to be straightened out regarding Ceremonial Law entanglement. Relate v. 11. We are guilty of the same evil of serving the Law, blocking the flow of justifying grace by merely going through routines of religion, long-faced piety, pride in church performance, thinking moral goodness will induce God to accept us, confirmation complex.

C. Pride and impenitence, which refuses to surrender to Christ.— In a prominent nationwide survey taken in the U.S. sometime ago regarding basic religious beliefs, 95 per cent said they believed in God, the majority said they prayed, but only 5 per cent felt they needed God's forgiveness. This is building on the works of the Law (v. 18). Therefore God's Word declares Gal. 3:10.

#### II. *Alive in Christ*

We need the redeeming action of God to make us alive and set us free.

A. We are justified through the merits of Christ (v. 17). Jesus went forth to the rescue, took upon Himself the curse of the Law, assumed the full punishment of our sin, and by His atoning work on the cross delivered us from sin, death, and hell. When the Holy Spirit now moves us to confess our sin, to surrender, and to accept Christ, we are forgiven and made alive. The Cross reminds us once and for all that God is not waiting for us to primp ourselves with the cosmetics of

our own righteousness to attract Him. It is God taking the initiative to get at us and dress us in the garments of Jesus' blood and righteousness.

B. This justification and new life is ongoing—daily dying to sin, surrender—"crucified with Christ" (v.20), dead to the Law but "alive in God" (v.19). To keep us alive the Holy Spirit daily moves us to confess our sin, turn to God, and receive Christ by faith. Sin, hate, resentment, pride, pet sins nourished and unconfessed will choke our spiritual life. Take the high-powered motor in your car. It can produce great power. But what happens when you throw sand in the oil? The motor slows, grinds, sputters, stops. Sin, guilt, fear, worry, self-righteousness—this is sand in our spiritual life. We need constant cleansing. With sludge removed by the blood of Christ, new life surges through us once more. (John 15:3)

### III. *Living for Christ*

When Christ takes over, we not only have forgiveness but a source of power for victorious living.

A. "I *live*," Paul says, "Christ liveth within me," etc. (v.20). Despite trial and trouble he lived victoriously through Christ. Some people merely vegetate; they are bored; they merely exist. Spiritually they have tired blood. Geritol won't help that. But when Christ lives within, you *live*. Christ is not only your Savior. He is your Power for life. You may have discouragement; sorrows may assail you; death may enter your family circle. But with Christ at the center of your life you will be able to rise above them as did Paul.

B. This is a living *unto* Christ. Paul's doxology "Who loved me and gave Himself for me" (v.20). Victorious living means that we live out of self unto God (1 Cor. 7:20). People who live within the prison of self do not believe life is worth living. Someone has called this the "central neurosis of our age." When you travel through the six-mile Moffat Tunnel west of Denver, all is dark. But you emerge into the sunlight of majestic mountain scenery. In a much greater degree Christians experience something like this when they grow in Christ. If we live in the tunnel of sin and self, life is dark and dismal; but when we take Jesus by faith, He draws us out into a life of surrender, salvation, and service. We live unto Him—courageously (Rom. 8:31,32), confidently (Ps. 46:1), thankfully (1 Cor. 15:57). Keep yourself in touch with Him through His word. This is the key to victorious living.

Topeka, Kans.

ALBERT C. BURROUGHS