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Homiletics: Outlines on the Nitsch Epistles

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Nitsch Epistles

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 THESS. 3:6-16

The Epistle for the 15th Sunday after Trinity speaks of the relationship of church members to one another (Gal. 5:25—6:10). It ends with a ringing appeal that good works be done to all men, especially for fellow Christians (v. 10). Today's Gospel speaks in detail of the most human concerns: the need of food, clothing, and shelter (Matt. 6:24-34). The lessons for today, therefore, speak specifically of those things which concern us and our fellow citizens over the Labor Day weekend. Our text speaks clearly to us in our time and circumstances.

The Blessings of Labor

I. Labor is the divinely established way for earning daily bread (v. 10)

A. God told our first parents in the Garden of Eden the truth which is here reiterated by St. Paul. Even before the Fall, man was to work in the lovely garden (Gen. 2:15-17). This work became heavy and difficult, however, after the Fall. (Gen. 3:19)

B. Our labor for daily bread is intimately connected with those affairs and activities upon earth which are universally regarded as of primary importance. Man will need food and other physical necessities as long as he lives upon earth. The newborn child's cry for breath is followed by his cries for food. Many of the problems of mankind today relate to the universal need of nourishment.

C. The young and the retired ordinarily are not engaged in full-time labor. The normal able-bodied person, however, works somewhere—home, office, factory, farm, etc. Do you recognize your place in this wonderful scheme of things? Do you thank God for the privilege of work? Are you doing what you can to see that others are fairly rewarded and treated? It is often said that three fourths of the people in the world are undernourished. We who are able to work and who have enough are highly privileged.

II. Labor is an honorable means of attaining independence and self-respect (vv. 6-9)

A. It is clear that there were some in the Thessalonian congregation who had been guilty of lazy and troublesome conduct. St. Paul sharply

finds fault with them and affirms that they were disobedient to the apostolic truth and teaching.

B. These troublemakers were also rebuked on the basis of St. Paul's personal record and example. The apostle had worked to earn his daily bread while he had been living among them in order to preach the Gospel. We know from other references that Paul was a tent-maker and was capable of self-support. (Acts 18:3; 20:34; 1 Thess. 2:9)

C. Paul clearly says that he could have asked for support from them (v.9). God's general rule is that ministers should be supported by the congregations with whom they work and labor. A minister, too, is a worker! (1 Cor. 9:13-15; Gal. 6:6.) The case of the Thessalonians, however, was a special one. Paul's financial independence of them was obviously advantageous and necessary. The apostle here provides us with an unusual example.

D. Think of what your own work enables you to be and do! Your self-respect and independence—who can measure the value of these things? Let these thoughts encourage you when your task seems uninteresting, tiring, and monotonous. Thank God for your work, position, reputation! (Prov. 22:7)

E. It is possible to have a godly self-respect even with little when it is honestly earned (Prov. 15:16). A good prayer for one who works: "Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny Thee and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal and take the name of my God in vain." (Prov. 30:8,9)

III. Labor is a positive help in avoiding trouble and disorder in the church of Jesus Christ (vv. 11-16)

A. There had been disorder and evil in the Thessalonian church because some refused to work while awaiting Christ's imminent return (2 Thess. 2:2). These troublemakers evidently used the "pious excuse" that work was unnecessary because Christ would soon appear in glory!

B. The apostolic direction was that if such people would work to support themselves they would have no time for gossip and futile speculation concerning the exact date of Christ's appearing. (1 Thess. 4:11, 12)

C. This is such a serious matter that Paul directs that the offenders should be admonished and rebuked. The purpose should be to correct

the wrongdoers in the church without breaking fellowship with them. They should be admonished as brothers. This is not a parallel case with that of excommunication. (Matt. 18)

D. Peace and harmony in the congregation are precious gifts of God. They are most secure when all do their duty and labor in the place in which God has placed them.

E. Do we always control our thoughts and guard our tongue? This direction of St. Paul suggests that we think of *our own* work and task when we are tempted to criticize another. When we are tempted to think or speak against a fellow member, we should rather consider whether we have done our full duty. There is plenty to do in every calling of the Christian life and in each congregation of believers.

On Tuesday morning we will, God willing, go back to work. Summer vacations are over. The children will be back in school. The "daily grind" starts again! Thank God for the privilege and the ability to work! Begin each day with Scripture reading and prayer. Consider your place and tasks in the light of the divine truth which you heard this morning. Then you will see yourself and your work in true perspective! The most humble duty assumes new value and importance in this light. A Christian need never feel useless. The futility which depresses many in our time need not afflict the believer. He knows that he works for daily bread and in order to serve others. He looks forward to the time when he will hear the blessed words from his Lord and Savior: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (Matt. 25:21)

Chicago, Ill.

JAMES G. MANZ

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JAMES 3:1-10

(Purpose: We must learn to accept ourselves if life is to be satisfying. But to accept ourselves must not mean to excuse or ignore our sins or to feel that we cannot change. Even that perverse member, the tongue, must be checked and directed by what God has made us in Christ, forgiven sinners on the way to heaven.)

One word spoken with a certain inflection can cause great joy, or it can cause great sorrow. A single word spoken in haste has at times been a turning point in history. The great deeds of famous men are associated with great words they spoke. Words send armies into battle,

call prodigals home, seal marriage bonds, heal enmities of long standing, drive people to despair, teach great truths, destroy men's reputations, and send thoughts of prayer and praise to God. Think of the occasions of even an ordinary life in which the tongue plays a major role—the first cry of a newborn infant, the joy of a mother at her child's first spoken word, the declaration of love and proposal of marriage, the sealing of many an agreement, the cry of pain or fear, and the comfort of the bereaved. One of the severe handicaps life brings to some is that they are deaf and dumb. As time goes on in life children gain more and more control of their movements and muscles, but the tongue no man ever tames completely. The sins of the tongue trouble us to the grave and are always occasion for seeking forgiveness.

The Untamed Tongue

I. *The tongue is mighty* (vv. 3-5)

A. Words are cheap, but often they are also very costly. Think of the pain husband and wife at times cause each other with words. Seldom do we realize how deep our words may strike because their motivation is not clear. (Prov. 18:21)

B. We all know momentous sentences which mark the course of history with words. Luther: "Here I stand"; Churchill: "Blood, sweat, and tears"; Lincoln: "Of the people, by the people, and for the people"; Patrick Henry: "Give me liberty or give me death." Text v. 5.

C. The power of the expression of encouragement, the statement of trust, and the word of praise is often not realized by parents, teachers, employers as it should be.

D. Words are potent symbols of thoughts and ideas. The tongue of the people of God is dedicated to the message of heaven. "Go, tell."

II. *The untamed tongue works evil* (vv. 6-10)

A. Etiquette and social custom may conceal the barb but does not of itself make the sting of the tongue less vicious or eliminate desire to sin. (V. 6; Prov. 29:20; Eph. 5:4; Job 38:2)

B. Even the child of God, who has new desires to help his fellow men, finds the tongue hard to control. Christians sin especially in omission and commission with their tongue, more than in some other ways (vv. 8,9). Cf. Ps. 141:3; Matt. 5:37.

C. Some people show in their words what vileness and filth a completely uncontrolled tongue inclines to. (Rom. 3:13,14; Luke 6:45)

D. The sins of the tongue hurt both ourselves and others. (Prov. 21:23; James 1:19-21)

III. *The tongue must also be brought in relationship to Christ (vv. 1, 2)*

A. The sins of the tongue are not trifling sins. They offend God and hurt man (Matt. 12:34-37). Recognize the power of the tongue for evil—and for good.

B. God-given humility is required to confess the sins of the tongue. God's Word shows us how our words sound to Him. He looks at the words and the motive. We confess and seek forgiveness in the blood of Christ.

C. Contrast the uncontrolled tongue and the tongue brought into relationship to Christ. Gossip, slander, lying, backbiting, anger, cursing, evil oaths, hate, threats vs. praise, worship, love, tenderness, forgiveness, promises, prayer.

D. Glorify God with your tongue. (Eph. 4:24, 29, 31; Ps. 50:23; 1 Peter 3:15, 16)

Animals can be tamed, missiles can be guided, but the tongue no one has mastered completely. Therefore we look to Christ and seek to build rather than destroy with our tongue also.

Fairbanks, Alaska

OMAR STUENKEL

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 COR. 8:1-9

Rarely a week passes without our receiving some appeal for a contribution to some cause. At the same time we are encouraged to make regularly a liberal and proportionate contribution to the support of the Lord's work in His kingdom. We can become hardened to the many appeals and may ignore all of them, both the good and the bad. Yet the admonition comes from the Word of God:

Abound in Christian Liberality

I. *Heed the admonition thereto from Paul*

A. As in the case of the Corinthians, the child of God today, whose daily life enjoys the Christian graces (knowledge, utterance, love, etc.), should also abound in the grace of Christian giving. The Christian life

is incomplete without this quality (vv. 6, 7). The well-rounded Christian possesses this trait.

B. Paul points out to the Corinthians that their profession of love is insincere if they do not prove their love by helping the poor (the saints in Jerusalem). Our profession of love for Christ and for the brethren is but an empty sound unless we, too, are willing to support our protestation of love with acts of Christian giving for charity and the poor, for the bringing of the Gospel to those who know not the Savior. (V. 8b; James 2:15, 16; 1 John 3:17, 18)

C. Paul brings the admonition because of his interest in, and desire for, the Corinthians. Your pastor has the same interest in and desire for you and asks you to heed this admonition to abound in Christian liberality. (Vv. 6, 8a)

II. *Learn the method thereof from the Macedonians*

A. The Macedonians overcame all the excuses for not giving liberally. They could have said: "The poor in Jerusalem are too far away; we have enough to do right here at home." Or: "We are very poor ourselves, we are in great tribulations ourselves; others should really be helping us." But, unlike many today, they in joy overcame all excuses. (V. 2)

B. With them we will abound in Christian giving if we follow their method, recognizing that Christian liberality is a quality that comes from the Lord and that we must go to the Lord for this grace (v. 1), giving willingly, not by coercion or by entreaty (v. 3). Whoever constantly needs the pressure of drives and gimmicks does not give willingly and as a result never abounds in Christian liberality. No waiting until the last moment and the need becomes a critical emergency.—First dedicating ourselves unto the Lord (v. 5). Many fail to abound in Christian liberality because they have never given themselves to the Lord. That person who knows that his own self and all his possessions belong to the Lord and surrenders all to the Lord will give liberally and not as little as possible.—Joining in the fellowship of the ministering to the saints (v. 4). There is a joy coming from helping fellow Christians and fellow people.

C. Let the example of the Macedonian Christians, who in their deep poverty abounded in Christian liberality, be an encouragement to you. As you follow their method, you, too, will be able to abound in this grace of giving.

III. *Receive the power therefor from Jesus Christ*

A. We need a power from without that will enable us to abound. Our own nature is too self-centered, too selfish and greedy to abound in Christian giving, and sees no value in giving and sharing with others.

B. That power is in Jesus Christ (v.9). The Lord Jesus, who possessed all the riches and glory of the eternal God because He is God, became poor, became man and humbled Himself, suffered and died in our stead, that we sinners might enjoy the riches of forgiveness and life.

C. When we turn to Jesus in faith, we receive among the riches He gives the power to abound in Christian liberality. The motorist whose car stalls because the gasoline tank is empty goes to the filling station and obtains a supply of gasoline that will power his car. The child of God whose Christian life stalls and fails to reveal Christian liberality must similarly go to the Lord Jesus for the power that will enable him to abound in this grace also.

In this day when the needs for our giving are great—the hunger and the needs of many—the Gospel needs of even many more—abound also in Christian liberality.

Springfield, Ill.

L. NIEMOELLER

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 TIM. 6:6-16

(The preacher should preach every sermon to himself first. This is especially true of this one, which discusses the preacher's attitude toward money and the sin of prostituting religious teaching for gain. "Direct method" of preaching this text would confine its use, therefore, to sermons for pastoral conferences. What is true of preachers, however, is true of their people too; and they will be minded to take its lessons for themselves—provided that the preacher is obviously himself aware of the maladies of the flesh and the goal of contentment with food and raiment. To abbreviate the text from the pulpit, use vv. 8-12.)

Christians would like to think that their lives should be untroubled; they like talk about "peace of mind," "victorious living." Or, they would like to think that the one trouble that can menace them is persecution; and in the safe environs of North America that seems to be still in the future. But this text makes clear that the Christian's

career is to be a fight, and one that sets in the moment that he possesses property and desires things. Our Lord once said that the proper use of money relates to life in God's own heavenly sphere (Luke 16:9); and this text underscores his warning that the misuse of money and the lust for things imperils that life for ourselves and others. Hence it is important that we

Fight the Good Fight Against Covetousness

I. *The good fight is really a fight*

A. Because it involves the clash of judgments in the mind. We are attacked by the belief that real living involves the possession of physical things. (Vv. 7-9; Luke 12:15)

B. Because it involves an attack upon the meaning of religion and faith. We are apt to assume that religious reverence and religious teaching has a goal of physical advantage and prosperity (v.5). St. Paul shows how this disfigured religious teachers of his time (vv. 3-5) and warned Timothy to shun this perversion. This every Christian must do, continually.

C. Because it involves the struggle in the heart between fleshly lust and faith. True godliness, the mindfulness of God as Giver, Lord, Helper, is only harmed and undermined by the lust for things (vv. 9, 10). Lust is not only the opposite of love, it is the opposite of faith. Yet this battle invades the recesses of the Christian heart at every turn and down to our last moment on earth.

II. *The good fight battles for noble goals*

A. The great objective of this inner warfare is eternal life. The devil, who co-ordinates the attack of world and flesh against us, aims at killing; our objective of the battle is life, eternal life (v. 12). That means God's kind of life, the life which God Himself lives and maintains in the heart, beginning already this side of the grave, entering a pure and unhampered phase in the "life to come." (Cf. Col. 3:1-4; John 17:3)

B. Hence the good fight of faith involves the constant pursuit of (v. 11): righteousness, the benign approval of God because of His forgiving mercy; godliness, the constant awareness of God as all, essential, needed; love, the will to be an instrument not just for the enjoyment, but the sharing with others of God's gifts; patience, the endurance of every trial that God's purpose might be fulfilled, including the trials of lust for things.

C. One mark of victorious progress in the battle is contentment (vv.6,8). This means not simply being satisfied with very little, but rejoicing in exactly that which God at any one moment gives. (Note Phil. 1:21-25; 4:10-13)

III. *The good fight is by faith*

A. What makes it a fight is faith (vv.11-16). Man is born into the world with a built-in apparatus of lust, the will to believe that things are life (John 3:3,5,6). To have a battle and to keep fighting the fight means that faith is brought in.

B. Faith in the fight is the confidence that the Leader who began the fight in us will also see it through to the end. That leader is God Himself, Ruler over all ruling ones even now (v.16). As we enroll under His banner we are enabled to wage this warfare. (V.13)

C. God strengthens us for the fight as we refresh within us the conviction that He has summoned us to this life in Him, which we are already living and to which He is leading and guiding (v.12); as we remind ourselves of what He did to help us win our war, namely to give His Son to go to His death steadfastly on our behalf, v.13 (remember the nature of Jesus' own temptations to bypass suffering and to enjoy things [Matt.4:1-11]; His obedience "unto death" in order to redeem us [cf. Heb.12:1-3]); and as we see God's plans for giving us life continually and bringing us to the Day of Judgment unscathed (vv.13-15). We cannot see God (v.16), but in Christ He has revealed Himself to us as Helper and Rescuer.

Concl.—It's a great fight. But it's a good one only if we're still fighting when He comes again. That takes, not foolhardiness and bravado—"making provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Rom. 13:14)—but patience and meekness (v.11), the realization that we are sustained only as we cling closely to the Lord and His Christ (vv.11,14,15). Let it be a good fight; but always the fight of faith, the battle against the lusts for visible things, sustained by the mercy in Christ of the Unseen God.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER