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Homiletics: Outlines on the Standard Epistle Series

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Standard Epistle Series

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 COR. 3:4-11

The propers for this Sunday stress the need for God's help against those who seek after our soul. They confess that only God can give the gift of a life that serves Him. They praise and bless God for His work, which has changed human existence into real life. God is praised for what He has done for us through the Gospel ministry. This leads us to our message. Some years ago many of us hummed a very popular song titled "Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing." The love that is sung about is the romantic, stars-in-the-eyes, physical-attraction type that often leads to illicit relationships, immature marriages, often entered into without parents' consent and broken without God's consent. In many cases this love has more failings than splendors.

The true love, however, the love of God for humanity, is without the tiniest shadow of doubt a many-splendored thing. The way in which this love showed itself and the relationship established between God and man as a result are also things of untainted splendor.

It follows, then, that the work which strives to bring this love to humans and the campaign directed toward establishing the New Testament of divine love in Christ is also a thing of splendor.

The All-surpassing Splendor of the Gospel Ministry

I. *Splendor in what it offers*

A. Compare this ministry with the most splendid ministry of the Old Testament.

1. A glorious ministry of a great minister. Text, vv. 7, 9, 11. We need to empha-

size the greatness of Moses' ministry. One of God's greatest prophets. Type of Christ, Deut. 18:15. Mount of transfiguration. Liberator of his people. Faithful and fearless preacher of the Word. Patient leader in most difficult time.

2. The giving of the Law his shining hour. Confidant of the Lord on the mountain. Witness of transcendent power and glory at close range. Possessor of reflected glory too bright for average eyes, v. 7. Mediator between God and people, bringing His holy will to the chosen.

We talk about great moments in history and those who are privileged to participate in them or to witness them. This was one of the greatest. One man was on the "inside." No question about greatness.

3. Still, his ministry was in the final analysis:

a. A ministry of death, v. 7. Written in stone, hard and unyielding, the Law by itself produces death. It shows how stone-cold dead man is, and it can neither promise nor effect relief from this rigor mortis.

b. A ministry of condemnation, v. 9. Disobedience is standard human reaction to God's laws. Anger and judgment are logical divine reaction to man's flaws. Condemnation: eternal banishment from God's presence, with horrors to match.

c. A ministry of passing glory, vv. 7, 11. The glory that shone on Moses' face gradually disappeared. The Law, especially the Ceremonial but also the Moral Law as a cudgel and yoke, was to fade away. Moses' ministry was not the lasting one.

B. The Gospel ministry offers:

1. Righteousness, v. 9. Not the appearance of righteousness, not the chore of the routine of external goodness, not the self-

deluding aura of humanly-contrived holiness but a clear-through, deep-down righteousness that satisfies the most minute inspection through Christ and His blood, that creeps into all cracks of a corrupt person and "cleanses us from all unrighteousness." It gets out the deep-down grit and grime from the hardest spots to reach and is the only cleaning service that does more than redistribute the filth. The Gospel ministry always revolves about holiness given through that love of God which placed the Sacrifice on the crucial altar and invited faith freely to take the most precious possession. Here is holiness that satisfies Him. It should; He made it — He gives it.

2. Life, vv. 6, 8 ("ministry of the Spirit"; "the Spirit giveth life"). What is life? Knowledge of the saving God; inner self full of God's impulses; will inclined to please God; lines of communication open; able to serve God and live for Him above all.

3. Permanent glory, vv. 9-11.

a. God's lasting glory: His perfect gift through the suffering Christ. The cosmic rays of the "Sun of righteousness" will never burn out. The greatest light in the world will always be the brightness of pardon and peace for all human beings. Nothing can match it. Nothing can extinguish it.

b. Our lasting glory shared with God in heaven. This is the net result, the final purpose of the Gospel ministry. Positive permanency cannot be grasped until a life arrives at the door of eternity in heaven.

II. *Splendor in what it does*

A. It makes people live, v. 6.

1. The Spirit works faith through this Gospel ministry, and this gift of faith is the launching pad into the orbit of life.

2. Through this ministry the Spirit maintains "spirit" in the inner self, the inward, driving force which makes a man of faith so different from the empty man of self-sufficiency and ultimate frustration.

3. The condition of having "spirit inside" makes human lives "letters of God," v. 2. They are the most beautiful billboards along the turnpike of life.

B. It is complete; it does everything that could be done for everyone who needs the treatment. Vv. 4, 5. This is no "pitch," no "snake-oil" campaign. It really does cure all your aches and pains and gives you comfort and that glorious new feeling, the new lease on life. All that needs to be carted away it carts away. All that needs to be hauled in and installed it leaves in A-1 shape in the individual heart-house. A one-shot inoculation. A vitamin which tones up for this world and the world to come. Why and how so perfect a performance? Because of human factors? No. Sufficiency of the Gospel ministry comes from God. This is why Paul could be so confident of his ministry. So can any true Gospel minister today.

Thank God for the Gospel ministry — a many-splendored thing. It makes even someone like the parish pastor, with all his faults and limitations, an "angel of God," a precious gift. Use him not primarily as an able administrator, shining brightly in his executive insights, not as personality plus in the splendor of his social successes, but as a Gospel minister, great by grace and luminous in life offered through Christ.

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

GAL. 3:15-22

In the propers for this Sunday we ask God to remember His covenant and to permit no one who has trusted in His promises to be ashamed. We also ask Him to help us to obtain the promise and, to that end, to make us grow in the exercise of faith, hope, and charity. The emphasis is on God's covenant of promise.

We have heard much in past years about the importance of making a will and

of doing it right, of having it properly drawn up and witnessed. That way there will be no question about the disposition of our earthly possessions after we leave. The church urges us to remember the Lord and His work in our wills.

Human beings leave things more or less valuable, but all such value is ephemeral. Problems arise if a proper will is not left, but final destiny is not affected. Lasting happiness does not ride on any human will and testament. The final destiny of all people hangs on God's will and testament. God hasn't died. Far from it! He has left His will and testament so that we don't die forever. The will and testament of a living God is far more important, urgent, binding, and inviolable than that of a dead man or woman. This will applies to all generations. It should be read, examined, and personally probated by each of us.

God's Will and Testament Stands for All Ages

I. *No ratified testament can be set aside or altered*

A. Even a mere human will is considered inviolable if properly drawn up and witnessed, v. 15. When a will is probated after the death of the testator, it is examined very closely. If found to be in order, it stands and is carried out to the letter. Some rare wills have been heatedly protested, but nothing could knock out a single line if the will was properly executed.

B. God's will and testament is ratified, vv. 16, 17. Made to Adam and Eve (woman's Seed, Gen. 3:15), confirmed to Abraham (in thy Seed, Gen. 12:3). The ratification of the testament is the valid promise. The Seed appeared. The Messiah came.

C. Nothing can annul or modify this will and testament, v. 17. God left salvation fully available through faith in the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of His Son,

Jesus Christ. Nobody has even the semblance of a right to change this.

II. *The Mosaic Law didn't set the promises aside*

A. This is clear because of the time element, v. 17. If the Law were intended as the original contract and agreement, would it come 430 years after the promise? Should something that arrives much later take precedence over the older, original agreement? Would our nation after some 187 years suddenly bring in an entirely new constitution? Only if there were chaos and confusion. God is a God of knowledge and plan.

B. Because of the way in which it was given, vv. 19, 20. The promise was given unilaterally from God to man. The Law was mediated between two parties, God and His people (made His people by the testament promises), through Moses. Clearly the Law is not a substitute testament. It serves only to expose sin and to point up the great need for the Seed to establish all promises through His saving Sacrifice.

C. Because the Law is unable to give life, v. 21. What about the man who leaves his favorite son 145 bales of old magazines, 15 junked automobiles, and 53 acres of worthless swampland? He is either a cruel practical joker or mentally unbalanced. Would God leave us a will that would place us 768 miles from nowhere in the quicksand of frustration, sinking into damnation? If the Law were our will and testament, that's where we'd be! Could a perfect, all-wise, loving God replace a complete plan for life with a blueprint for emptiness? The emptiness of course is due not to the Law, but to our inability to keep it.

III. *The testament of promise stands permanently*

A. As the only medium through which God shows Himself gracious, v. 18. Crea-

tion shows Him powerful. The Law shows Him holy and just, a condemning Judge. God frowns; we tremble. But the testament of the promise reveals God's smile and shows His open arms. Proper translation of the last part of v. 18: "God showed His grace to Abraham by the promise." Luther's experience: where did he find the smiling, tender God? In monastic vows, penance, laws?

B. As the only means of acquiring righteousness, v. 22. The promise by faith of Jesus Christ brings the righteousness that depends not on fumbling fools but on the perfect Peacemaker. Righteousness rests on performance: Jesus' obedience took care of that. Righteousness is arranged by satisfaction and restitution. Jesus paid with His God-man's life for all offenses and irregularities. The promise puts our name above this achievement. We are credited with what Jesus accomplished when we claim this credit by faith.

C. As the only way to get the inheritance, v. 18. Inheritance is eternal life. Only the testament promises will see us through.

God's will stands. Who would want to contest it? Claim that inheritance and hang onto it for all eternity!

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

GAL. 5:16-24

The propers for the day point up man's need to be in God's house and to worship Him. It is good for a man to praise God and give thanks to Him, performing his vows of obedience unto the Lord. Therefore the Collect asks God's help, because of man's frailty, in avoiding all things which are hurtful and in choosing and practicing all things which are profitable to man's salvation. This is background for our message.

Have you ever gone "catalog shopping"? A generation ago, particularly in rural areas,

the catalog was the shopping center in many homes. It is still big business today. Every effort is made to make the catalog attractive, descriptive. Prevailing theme: Buy! Now! From us!

When you shop for the life you want to live, you also have catalogs to help you — two of them, put out by two different "companies," one infernal, the other celestial. Both want to control the market. Today we want to look them over and choose between them.

From Which Catalog Will We Order?

I. *The catalog of the deeds of the flesh*

The flesh, of course, is the fallen, perverted, corrupt, jaded human nature, unregenerate and rebellious.

A. These works of the flesh are quite well known, v. 19. "Manifest" could actually be rendered "public." They jump out at you from every side. You see them, read about them in the papers, have them paraded before you in magazines, TV shows, and movies every single day. They make the headlines. They create the sensations.

B. Let's look at them in detail.

Breaking and profaning marriage (adulteries), illicit sexual relationships (fornication), vicious and blatant immorality (uncleanness), sexual excesses (lasciviousness). Idolatry and "magic arts" (withcraft), v. 20. These two are so often connected. If one worships a "god" who does "supernatural" things for him in ways and at times and for purposes such as the spiritists and others boast, this is surely not the God of the Bible, the living, genuine God. Other forms of idolatry: Marxist communism, growing and virulent paganism, materialism, also the capitalistic kind. False goals and ideals.

Closer to home? Personal enmity (hatred), strife (variance), jealousy (emu-

lations), outbursts of uncontrolled anger (wrath), v. 20. A man refuses even to talk to a fellowman (maybe even a fellow member of the church, or a fellow pastor?). Everybody is scrambling for the top, and if the next man's head provides a stepping-stone, well and good. Nobody can stand to be outdone by the "Joneses," and nothing hurts worse than to see someone else really moving forward and getting along well. Emotional explosions with hard words and harder feelings are common fare, and an occasional fistfight garnishes it.

Even closer to home? Good church practice? Selfish ambition (strife), dissensions (seditions), heretical factions (heresies), envies (envyings), murders. Cliques, factions, groups claiming more wisdom than God, entertaining opinions, emotions, and passions which lead to dissension and disunity and great crimes. Purges, inquisition, etc. Drunkenness and eating orgies (revellings). Luther: *Saufen und Fressen*. In an age of cocktail parties and national overweight, no additional comment is necessary. This is the land of alcoholics and cholesterol-crazy coronary candidates.

C. These things, when performed continuously and willfully, exclude from the inheritance of the Kingdom, v. 21. Even when they are committed out of weakness, they tend to make the hold on the Kingdom weaker. Every concession to these works is the camel's head and shoulders in the flap of the tent. Beware of the hump, for when these works become a habit and the conscience is coolly calloused, we are separated from the Kingdom altogether and will stay that way as long as we act that way.

II. *The catalog of the fruit of the Spirit*

A. Notice the difference between "works" and "fruit." This is not the foul effervescence of corruption such as the "works" of the flesh but the carefully cultivated con-

sequence of reform produced by faith in Jesus Christ, who died to achieve this reform. The Holy Spirit brings this reform to your door by giving you faith in Christ through the Gospel. This, too, is spontaneous, but spontaneous as a good apple tree bears Winesaps, not as a volcano spews out destructive lava.

B. Fruit described in detail.

Love — the mother of them all. This is the love of intelligent comprehension with corresponding blessed purpose. Not *φιλία*, the social, friendship-type love; God couldn't have embraced the world with *φιλία* over a cup of coffee, but He did embrace it with *ἀγάπη* and sent Jesus to restore it to its original nature. This love, trying to lift up, repair, and restore, should be a Christian's everyday approach to his fellowman. We have it if we have Jesus.

Joy — a cardinal Christian virtue. This is the enduring joy that bubbles up from all the goodness of God in our possession, the blessedness that is ours through saving faith in Christ, undimmed by any and all tribulation.

Peace — the subjective, assured quietness of the soul, the opposite of dread and terror. This results from the knowledge that all is well between God and you. This can be contagious.

Forbearance — People may bait you and provoke you, but you treat them with patience. Not easy, but satisfying.

Generosity — the generosity of Peter and John to the lame man at the Beautiful Gate.

Goodness — moral excellence coupled with active help for others, doing good at every opportunity. Not headlines, maybe, but the backbone of any community or nation.

Faithfulness — the gift of being true al-

ways to God, and, as a result, true to one's self and to others.

Meekness — the opposite of arrogance, vehemence, bitterness, violence. When wronged or abused, the meek do not resort to resentment or threat of vengeance. When they are praised, there is no swelling of the head or tendency to crowd others out.

Self-control — holding all passions and destructive desires in check with positive purpose.

C. Against such virtues there is no law, v. 23. This points up the complete freedom that exists for Christian conduct.

III. *You can't order from both*

A. One is diametrically opposed to the other, v. 17. No man can serve two masters. No neutral position either. No "flesh" days and "spirit" days.

B. The Christian has crucified the flesh when he accepts Christ, v. 24. He accepts Christ's merits and full salvation; he belongs to Christ. First action of a Christ-man is to hang his old uniform on the symbol of his new life, the Cross. He sees to it every morning that the old Adam is securely nailed. No compromise. No soft approach.

C. In a Christian's life there will always be the positive conflict, v. 17. This keeps us from doing what we want to do.

D. The child of God will walk around in the spirit. "Spirit" is his new spiritual attitude and action. He views everything in the light of Christ's sacrifice for him on Golgotha. He does everything in the light of his reconciliation with God through Christ. He says everything in the light of God's will that all men be His and see the beauty of His holiness, willed to them through the Gospel. His hopes are rooted in the everlasting security of heaven. His future holds no shadows. He orders only from the "spirit" catalog. And you?

Miami, Fla. EUGENE F. GRUELL

THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

GAL. 5:25—6:10

Introduction: Some Sunday lesson series were originally devised in southern Europe. This is harvest time there. These Church Fathers were practical men who spoke to their times. They chose Bible readings on earthly goods to be read at the peak of the harvest. . . . Introit sounds like a line from the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." . . . Gradual . . . Harvest time is no time for envy, self-conceit, provoking one another, trespassing (slipping into neighbor's field at night to get a little more for one's own barns). It is time to bear one another's burdens, to share with the household of faith.

Theme: The love of Christ guides us in our use of earthly goods.

Title: "Serving God with Our Earthly Goods"

I. *Serving is spiritual living* (RSV, paragraph No. 1)

A. The Spirit creates life. "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life." Genesis reports that the Spirit of God was active in Creation. Our Lord speaks through today's Gospel and says: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow." God created them and He is still creating them. He said: "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." God created them and He is still creating them.

B. The value of human life. Jesus adds: "Aren't you (whom God created and whom He is still creating) of more value than they?" When mortals plant a bomb to kill human children in Sunday school, we wonder if the value of human life has been forgotten. You are of so much value that God's Son came to earth to live as Jesus of Nazareth, to rescue you from serving Satan. Jesus Christ was crucified, so that we might be His "to live under Him in His kingdom, to serve Him." The Christ carried our ini-

quities. He bore the condemnation we deserve under God's law. He took our nature upon Himself, and by faith in Him we are in what the text calls "the household of faith." God the Spirit is working through Word and sacraments to give ongoing spiritual life.

C. Whom does your life serve? God knows we cannot serve two masters. It just won't work. Who is the master, God or mammon? Which is the everlasting home, the harvest barns or the heavenly mansions? What law rules you, the law of financial profit or the law of Christ (which is the rule of love)? It is my privilege to remind you that you are Christians and that Christ is your Lord by faith in Him.

II. *Serving is bearing* (RSV, paragraph No. 2).

A. Be gentle with those who are guilty. It is too easy to point condemning fingers at others: "Look at him, all he lives for is the stock market." "Look at him; all he lives for is money in the bank." "Look at how little he gives to the church." "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should *restore* him in a spirit of gentleness." The law of Christ is the way of love.

B. You also may be tempted. Aren't you ever anxious about what you will eat and drink and wear (Gospel reference)? "Look to yourself, lest you also be tempted" "Test your own work" "Do not be deceived. God is not mocked."

C. Bear one another's burdens. We cannot bear the burden of God's wrath. We cannot bear the condemnation of God's law. We cannot be our own saviors. Only Jesus the Lord was strong enough to bear that burden. We can, however, bear one another's burdens, for example, on the level of earthly goods. Lend. Give, doing your "share" and the weak brother's "share" in giving to missions. Build up (restore) the household of faith.

D. Bear your own load. "Burdens" we can

share. The "load" each man must bear alone. God calls you personally to live by His Holy Spirit. Jesus calls you personally to follow Him as His soldier. The Holy Spirit calls you personally to serve God with your earthly possessions.

III. *Serving is sharing* (RSV, paragraph No. 3).

"Let him who is taught the Word share all good things with him who teaches." Re-count the Old Testament Lesson, 1 Kings 17: 8-16, Elijah and the widow of Zarephath. You are to share your income with me, your pastor. And I thank you for your generosity in this respect. But I am not the only one on the staff. For, through our affiliation with Synod, we have many other pastors, missionaries, professors, administrators, etc., doing God's work of teaching the Word—with you and for you, Synod—an agency through which you and I are teaching the Word. Are we "going shares" with Synod?

IV. *Serving is spiritual sowing* (RSV, paragraph No. 4).

You reap what you sow, Jesus says. Live for the flesh, and the end is corruption. Live for the Spirit, and the end is everlasting life. "In *well*-doing, let us not show an *ill* heart" (Lightfoot). God's Word does not return to Him void. Let us continue our Faith Forward spiritual life endeavor. "In due time we shall reap, if we do not lose heart."

Conclusion: The message a few weeks ago was: Do good to the neighbor (Good Samaritan). Today's message is: Do good to all, but especially to the brother.

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

EPH. 3:13-21

Introduction: There is great comfort for troubled Christians in today's readings. Why do the righteous suffer? We do not know the reasons behind this. But God has given us His Gospel, the power of God for salva-

tion. God has called each of us to faith in the love of Christ. The theme of the Sunday is announced in the Introit. And the Introit (in reverse) offers an outline for today's sermon.

Theme: Faith in God's love empowers those who suffer.

Title: "A Prayer for Suffering Christians"

I. *We do not understand our various tribulations.* "Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, hear me: for I am poor and needy."

A. The Old Testament Lesson: The sufferings of men (Job 5:17-26) Fearing "the beasts of the earth," "destruction," "the scourge of the tongue," "sword" and "war," "death," "famine," "six" and "seven troubles." God "smites." "He wounds." "God reproves." There is "the chastening of the Almighty." I do not understand why.

B. The Gospel: The troubles of death. The widow's son at Nain. Agonies of sorrow, separation, loss. We know of sin. Death is the wages of sin. And we can understand this. But when death comes to your family, you may wonder why. What is God's purpose behind this? The fact remains that when death comes, needy hearts cry.

C. The Epistle: Suffering for your Christian faith. Suffering in the name and for the sake of Jesus the Lord. The church may suffer simply because it is the church of Jesus Christ. Paul had sufferings due solely to his allegiance to Jesus Christ.

D. Why suffering? We do not know the purpose behind this. But we know that God is not concerned about theories. God is interested in people. God's purpose is found in the love of Jesus Christ. And His goal is that we experience Him in love.

II. *God's purpose is in the love of Christ.* "For Thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive: and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee."

A. God is the Father. Every family in

heaven and on earth derives its existence from Him. He has made us. He is the potter; we are the clay. Our Lord's words in Matt. 7:9-11 assure us that God is not cramming rocks and snakes down our throats. We may not understand them, but the troubles of Christians are for good. Martin Luther's explanation of the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer is helpful.

B. God the Trinity has His good purposes. In times of suffering, God can strengthen us "with might through His Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost . . . beginning . . . now . . . ever shall be."

C. His purpose is that we might become saints, holy people, Christians. The Gospel is the "power at work within us." The Gospel is the only power by which saints are developed. St. Paul prays that we be empowered by the Gospel of God's Word and sacrament, "to comprehend with all the saints." "Saints in Suffering: A Story of God's Love" could be the title of a history of the Christian church.

D. His purpose is revealed in Jesus Christ. "That you be filled with all the fullness of God," "rooted and grounded in love," "that you may know the love of Christ." The dimensions of Christ's love are given.

1. Christ's love is broad. It stretches from the Cross of Calvary to "all over." His love covers all people—no segregation, no exemptions. God's purpose is that we come to know the breadth of the love of Christ.

2. Christ's love is long. From Adam and Eve to the present God loves every single soul throughout the whole length of history. And love is God's purpose.

3. Christ's love is high. It reaches up to heaven and includes God, for God is love. That you might realize the height of God's

love—and know that it is higher than human knowledge—is God's purpose.

4. Christ's love is deep. The Christ came down from heaven, took on human flesh, carried our sin, humbled Himself for our salvation. He stooped so low to rescue me, the chief of sinners. God is no theorizer; He acts in the love of Jesus Christ.

III. *We pray for faith in Christ.* "Be merciful to me, O Lord: for I cry unto Thee daily."

A. Faith takes its stance in prayer. Saint Paul bowed his knees before the Father. "I ask you not to lose heart." Let us not be cowards in the face of troubles. "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father . . . that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

B. This is faith in the resurrected and victorious Christ. Christ was raised from the dead and became the "firstfruits of them that slept." The Gospel's: "God has visited His people." He gave the widow's son a foretaste of the resurrection of the body of the Last Day. Glorifying Christ is living the faith that He is Lord. Refer to the Old Testament Lesson's victories in Him: "His hand heals," "He will deliver you from six troubles," "He will redeem you from death," etc. The Gradual: He is our Help and our Shield. Trust in the Lord.

Conclusion: Science has its theories of evolution, relativity, etc. But God has given us no theory of troubles. He has revealed Himself in the love of Jesus Christ. We are poor and troubled people who need God's power. His only purpose is that we be rooted and grounded in love—that we be filled with Christ—that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith. When all is said and done, we can do no better than to repeat the doxology of Paul's prayer, and the end of the text: "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to

him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

EPH. 4:1-6

Introduction: The paradox in the readings: Definition of paradox and some Biblical examples, including today's Gospel. In the Bible the text follows last Sunday's, and it also deals with living the Christian faith and love in the household of faith. First, St. Paul urges the Ephesians to live under the lordship of Jesus Christ. There must have been some trouble in the church at Ephesus. The unity and peace of the congregation were disturbed. So St. Paul admonishes the Ephesians to remember who they are, prisoners of Christ. "Down on your knees!" Here is a call for humility in our relationship with our fellowmen, the body of Christ, the household of faith, the church. Secondly, we have freedom in the triune God. "Stand up! Have hope! You are free!"

Theme: We are called as prisoners of the Lord to have freedom in His Body.

Title: "Christian Freedom"

I. *An exhortation to live as captives of the Lord.*

A. We are prisoners of the Lord. Jesus is Lord. He came from heaven to snatch us from the rule of Satan. He is the victorious Son of God. In His death He conquered the devil. With His resurrection we are released from captivity to Satan. We were carried over into the prisons of the Lord. Jesus has redeemed us. You have accepted Him as Lord by faith in Him. You are bound to Him by faith. Your prayer is that He will deal with you not as enemy but as "servant." (Introit)

B. We are called to be the Lord's servants.

You were not put into chains by a monstrous tyrant. You were invited into this relationship as prisoner of the Lord. You were called by the Holy Spirit, through the Gospel, to become a member of the church.

C. Let us walk worthy of our calling.

1. Worthy? We are not worthy. "We are by nature sinful." Even our righteousnesses do not impress God (cf. Is. 64:6). "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." "Thou, O Lord, art worthy" (Rev. 4 and 5). Christ alone is worthy. His worthiness is attributed to us by faith in Him. Here is an exhortation to live in faith lives that are worthy of our calling.

2. Let us live "in lowliness and meekness." Remind the congregation that Ephesians has a great deal to say about the church. What is being said pertains to keeping unity and peace in the household of faith. Today's Gospel makes it clear that there is an order of rank in the Christian church; He alone determines the rank—who sits where. Reference to the Old Testament Lesson: "Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence." Prisoners are invited guests who do not need "to be put into their places." They are humble. They subordinate themselves. There is no "ruling it over" the brethren. As Ralph Gehrke puts it: "It is grace if I am called; I know that I am called as the least."

3. Let us live "with patience, forbearing one another in love." Note the words of the Introit. "According to mercy" is the opposite of "according to merit." There are no flawless lives on earth. Let us remember our rank as prisoners of the Lord. We are to be patient with our fellow prisoners, long-suffering with the weaknesses of Christian brethren. We are going to have to endure life with fellow Christians, if there is going to be peace and unity in the church. The Lesson suggests that we not be hasty in going to court with our neighbor. Christians are not hopelessly embittered by the defects

which still cling to fellow Christians. We are all perplexed and plagued by the daily battle with the devil, the world, and our own flesh. We will just have to endure one another in love as a sacrifice.

4. Let us be "eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." This sounds easy! But it is not Law—not something we do. The Holy Spirit gives unity and peace. We are prisoners of Him from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds. His peace guards and keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. His peace is the bond which holds us together. The Spirit's bond of peace keeps unity. And yet God says: "Down on your knees! Humble yourselves! Be diligent to maintain this unity. Live as the Lord's servants."

II. *The fact of our freedom in the triune God*

A. This is also a calling. We are invited to freedom. The host has invited you by the Gospel to take your place in the church. But, in what remains to be said, the individual is not emphasized. This is not a continuation of the above admonition.

B. The triune God gives freedom. (Stoeckhardt's commentary is helpful here.)

1. The Holy Spirit is at work for your freedom. "There is one body and one Spirit . . . one hope." The one Spirit calls by the Gospel. He alone works sanctification. He alone keeps you in the one true faith of the church. You are free from alien spirits. Obituaries leave the impression that some people feel that they must belong to a hundred and one bodies to be worthy in the hour of death. But there is one body, the body of Christ, the household of faith, the church. A call into this body is enough. You are freed from the idea that you must be a member of many bodies to be saved. Perhaps it has been your hope that the church is brought about by human efforts. You are freed from this illusion. The church is not

a creation of man. The church is the work of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Christ is at work for your freedom. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." All lords but One are vain idols. In baptism you "put on" Christ. Faith is the subjective means and baptism is an objective means by which we have become members of the Lord's body. Baptism is initiation into Christ's body. There is no other initiation to find the true Lord or a deeper level of brotherhood. It is only by faith in Christ that we are saved. Refer to some gods which do not really exist, as "The Man Upstairs." We are freed from allegiance to all these gods. For there is one Lord and His name is Jesus the Christ. Refer to the Gradual.

3. God the Father is at work for your freedom. "One God and Father of us all, etc." God has made us; and He loves us as dear fathers love their children. He is "over all": higher than all knowledge; all kings will bow before Him. He is with us in the trinitarian church.

Conclusion: We are prisoners of Christ. The Redeemer has taken us into His kingdom. You have accepted this calling through faith in Jesus Christ. And you are free. No man can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and mammon. You are freed from service to mammon, to live for God. You are freed from service to the devil, the world, and the flesh. You are free to live for God alone. Pray the Collect.

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

1 COR. 1:4-9

Introduction: Leaves on trees have turned and are falling. Signs of death in nature remind us that another fall is here. But today's text is one of thanksgiving and hope, not of death or despair. Children are back in school. Education is in progress. Today's

readings emphasize intellectual gifts. Solomon prayed for and received wisdom and knowledge. In the Gospel, Pharisees engaged in intellectual quizzing of our Lord. Jesus Himself asked a few questions. The Introit speaks of God's people and servants. We are speaking of "the fellowship of Jesus Christ." This is education for the church, the household of faith, the body of Christ. Five times the word "Christ" occurs in today's short text. This is Christ-centered education. "In every way" we are "rich" in Jesus Christ.

Theme: God has called us by grace in Christ, and He is faithful to sustain us in the power of the Word as we await the Advent of Christ.

Title: "The Education of the Christian Fellowship"

I. *God has called us by grace in Christ.*

"Free Education." God has called us into His church, invited us by the Gospel. The Spirit gets all the credit. Christian education is a matter of grace. Not one of us is in the church because he or she passed entrance examinations. No one did that well in Confirmation. No IQ was high enough. No achievements were great enough. No record was commendable enough. God has simply given us His grace in Christ Jesus. He, the Superior, has given His grace to us, the inferiors. We will never have to reimburse God; there is no loan to pay back. All we want to do is to thank God—continually. We thank Him for the grace of Christ which allows new life in the members of this congregation.

II. *God is faithful to sustain us in the power of the Word as we await the Advent of Christ.*

A. "Ongoing education." There is usually a terminal point for secular education. But God sustains us in our Christian course to the very end. And there will be no end to

Christian education. It all begins in baptism. This is ongoing, for we renew our baptismal vow daily. In confirmation we are sustained. The Word of God is preached and taught in church, Bible classes, Bible institutes, homes, so that Christ may dwell in us richly. We often eat at the Lord's Table, so that we might be enriched by His true presence. We are speaking of God's Word, not just fancy rhetoric. God's Word has been with this congregation for many years; we are rich. God is faithful to His Word and promises. He who believes in Jesus Christ and is baptized has been saved. We may consider our church membership as we consider our shoes: we put them on and take them off, wear them for a while and remove them for a while. We may be unfaithful. But God is faithful. We do not lack any spiritual gift. We are not behind other churches in this respect. We are given the same God's Word which He gives to every congregation in His kingdom. We are not in want. God's care of us is ongoing. He is constantly educating us in His Word. (But, are we educable?)

B. "Education with a purpose." Any teacher worthy of the name is concerned about what is happening to his pupils. What purpose is served by the education given? Is it just free baby-sitting — a matter of keeping children off the labor market — a matter of getting through textbooks and manuals? There is a purpose in Christian education too. John 3:16. The spotless Lamb of God had our sins heaped on Him. "He was wounded for our transgressions." He says to you: "Your sin is forgiven. Believe Me. You are guiltless, blameless, unimpeachable in the day that I return." Certainly, you are not free from sins. The devil continues to tempt and you continue to fall. But by the power of the Holy Spirit you live in a state of spiritual renewal. God's purpose is that you live by the forgiveness of sin. We were all impressed by today's Gos-

pel: "You shall love. . . . On these two commandments depend all the Law and Prophets." Love is the fulfilling of God's purpose. Here is no invitation to pious self-service, but the unbreakable connection of God's love with human need. God is love. He stepped down from heaven to deal with our state of destruction. He rescued us from death by the death of His Son. This is love. Love sacrifices self for the need of others. And this is the purpose of a Christ-centered education, that we live by the love of Christ. In the Collect we prayed that God would "direct and rule" us. We prayed that we be ruled by love, by Christ — that we might truly be in the fellowship of God's Son. Love is the prerequisite of this fellowship. 1 John 4:7-9. This fellowship exists now and extends to eternity.

C. "Education for the future." "A Career for the Future." Such phrases appeal to youthful ears. But all ears need hope and good news for what is ahead. The body of Christ is awaiting the Advent of Jesus Christ at the end of the world. We are eagerly expecting Him who will come in the clouds with the trumpets of God. The dead in Christ will be raised to meet Him in the air. Then we who are still alive will also be raised, to meet Him in the air. We can be forever with the Lord. We are being educated for this future, to "look forward" to the glories awaiting us in heaven. In the Collect we prayed that we might wait in patience. The choir sang the Introit's message: "O Lord, reward them that wait for Thee." And the words of both Introit and Gradual rang out the hope of Christ for the future: "I was glad when they said unto me: Let us go into the house of the Lord." Where does our Christian education begin? It begins here in God's house, God's Word, Holy Baptism, Holy Communion. Here we are made rich in God's Word of God's love. How precious is this house! Where does Christian education end? Jesus said: "In My Father's

house are many mansions, and I go to prepare a place for you." How glad we will also be when our Lord calls us into the heavenly home.

Conclusion: For all this we thank God. Reiterate the theme and the four points on

Christian education. I shall be glad when the Lord says to me: "Come, let us go into the house of the Lord." Bring me up (educate me) to this end, O Lord, I pray.

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