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Homiletics: Outlines on the Standard Epistle Series

William F. Bruening

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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*Outlines on the Standard Epistle Series*THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

EPH. 4:22-28

Many things are excused in a child. As the child grows older, it is disciplined for the things once considered harmless. By that time the child should "know better."

Put Off the Old and Put On the New

I. *Christians often do not act in a mature way*

A. The Ephesians ought to have "known better." "Ye have not so learned Christ."

B. Gentiles do not know better—"darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, they have become calloused and have given themselves over to immorality with a certain greediness to practice every kind of uncleanness."

C. There are those today who are "greedy of uncleanness." We do not excuse them, but they often do not know better.

II. *Christians can be mature*

A. The Ephesians had "learned Christ." By faith they had embraced Him and all that He means. The implication is that truly knowing Christ would impel them to keep from doing the things the Gentiles do.

B. We, too, have "learned Christ."

1. "Learning Christ" means putting off the "former conversation," i.e., way of life, old nature, the "B. C." nature. "Putting off the old life" does not only mean improving the old, polishing it up a bit; it means throwing it away.

2. "Learning Christ" means "being renewed in the spirit of your minds." Renewal starts where it ought to start: with right

thinking. Right thinking is basic to right action.

a. To "be renewed" is something that happens to us, not something we do. The new man is "created." We were "created" once by the power of God's might. We are "re-created" by the power of His grace.

b. This new man is "after God." We "take after" God in this renewed life. It will show itself in a number of ways:

"Putting away lying." Speak the truth.

"Be angry but do not sin, let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Even justifiable anger over wrongs must not be harbored, nurtured.

"Don't give the devil room."

"Let him that stole steal no more, but work with his hands . . ."

Conclusion: As newborn Christians, made such through the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism, we have learned Christ, and we are to put off the old man and put on the new man, the Christ-centered and controlled man.

THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

EPH. 5:15-21

Many people live very carefully; they stay out of drafts, eat only certain food, insist on certain hours of sleep. All of us observe certain safety measures and health rules. "Be careful" is a watchword worth observing. The text suggests that we ought to be just as cautious about our spiritual lives.

Living Carefully

I. *Why should the Christian live carefully?*

A. Because he has been enlightened by Christ (v. 14) and filled with His life.

B. "Because the days are evil."

1. The days have always been evil. They were so in the apostles' time, they are today.

"Evil days" are a characteristic of this world age rather than of a specific generation. There is no doubt about our days being evil. *Time* magazine in the past year devoted six pages to an article on morals in which it was pointed out that a change in attitude towards morals has been developing for a number of years. The article suggested that "the rebels of the 60's have parents with only tattered remnants of a code, expressed for many in this fashion, 'What is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after.'" The days are certainly evil.

2. The constant threat to the peace and security of the world is a reminder that the days are evil.

3. The heinous crimes committed in our cities with great frequency tell us the days are evil.

C. Because it is expected of Christians to live "not as fools but as wise."

D. Because the basis for such "careful living" is the statement preceding the epistle: "Christ shall give you light." The epistle begins with: "See *then* that ye walk circumspectly."

II. *What does living carefully include?*

A. "Redeeming the time," making the best use of it. Stewardship of time is just as important as stewardship of possessions. We must give account of the use of our time. Is it making the best use of time when we keep late hours and make ourselves unfit for our tasks, when we use it exclusively or predominantly for material pursuits, when we "kill time," when we are consistently late, forcing others to waste time because of us, etc.?

B. "Understanding what the will of the Lord is." We must not allow our wishful

thinking to be mistaken for God's will. We must ask the Lord to help us know that will better and to apply it to our lives. "Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God. Lead me in the path of righteousness." (Ps. 143:10)

C. "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery" (v.18). Whereas Scripture does not rule out the use of wine but only its excessive use, "living carefully" requires that the Christian be able to determine what is "excess" and stop long before such excess. This danger is especially prevalent today. "Being filled with the Spirit" instead of "spirits" will help the Christian avoid this temptation.

D. Keeping a song in the Christian's heart, "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns . . . making melody in your heart to the Lord." Such singing will result in "giving thanks for all things." Such gratitude will contribute toward our happiness.

Conclusion: Let us live carefully because the days are evil, being careful not to be carried along with the stream of the times. As God's children, redeemed to be His own through the blood of Christ, we ought to live as such, asking God for direction that our lives may more nearly conform to His will, avoiding excesses, living in moderation with a song in our hearts because in Christ we are God's own.

THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

EPH. 6:10-17

A question which confronts the leaders of our nation at all times is: How much should be spent on the defense program of the country? We need to be prepared to defend ourselves and to forestall attack.

In the emphasis we place on the defense

of our bodies, property, and physical possessions against military aggression we must not forget our defense in that other war that never ends, where no armistice is possible, no compromise can be considered, and no peace be negotiated.

The epistle tells us something about the powers against which we fight and some of the defenses God has provided for us.

The Christian's Defense

I. *The powers we face*

A. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood . . . spiritual wickedness in high places" (v. 12). Cf. Phillips' translation: "Our fight is not against any physical enemy . . ."

1. The power of the world. Ephesus was a city of the world. The same temptations from the world come to the committed Christian today as came to the committed Ephesian Christian.

2. Customs and traditions. Christians had to defy many customs and traditions. Today's Christian must often defy customs and traditions.

B. The real enemy was unseen—principalities, powers, the wiles of the devil. This is still the greatest enemy today. "Behold, the devil as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour." We have never seen him. He does not appear with horns and a tail. There are phenomena in our lives which cannot be explained in any other way than that the devil is at work. We must set up a defense against invisible opponents.

C. Sometimes invisible forces use visible means, e. g., the contagious power of crowds, individuals who unknowingly become tools of the devil, etc.

D. Such temptations made attractive, e. g., "So when she saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight for the eyes and to be desired to make one wise . . ." (Gen. 3:6)

II. *The defense available*

A. "Put on the whole armor of God." Not our own defense but God's armor, the defense He supplies. "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

B. The belt of truth. The girdle, or belt, held the soldier's fighting instruments and gathered together his loose clothing to enable him to fight freely. The Christian must fight error with truth—the truth of God.

C. The breastplate of righteousness. This, too, is God's armor, for our own righteousness is imperfect and a useless breastplate. We need to put on the righteousness of God, that righteousness which is by faith in Christ, Christ's righteousness.

D. The next article of defense has to do with readiness. "Having your feet shod with the preparation [or readiness] of the Gospel of peace." Sometimes the best defense is offense. We must be ready to give an account of our faith by witnessing to the Gospel we know and profess.

E. "The shield of faith." This shield will not keep away the bitter and unpleasant circumstances in life. A shield did not keep darts from coming, but it was so constructed that it intercepted and neutralized them. Faith keeps the fiery circumstances of life from harming us in the spiritual parts, where damage may be fatal.

F. Salvation is our helmet. Salvation is not only forgiveness of past sins. It is also strength to conquer wrong in the days to come.

G. "The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." We need only to think of Christ's temptation in the wilderness to see how He met every attack of Satan with the Word: "It is written."

H. The final defense is not identified with any piece of armor, but it is identified as prayer: "praying always." Such prayer must be constant, alert, and unselfish. (V. 18)

Conclusion: We have very powerful enemies always ready to attack, but God will supply our defense with His armor. We can be "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

Under the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,
And our defense is sure.

THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PHIL. 1:3-11

Philippi was apparently a favorite congregation of the apostle. The whole tone of the letter to the Philippians is one of affection and commendation.

The Philippians had sent a gift to Paul for his sustenance. He wrote a letter to thank them for their generosity. In the opening chapter he enumerates some of the things about them for which he is thankful to God. In a sense the epistle for today could be considered

A Thank-You Letter

I. For every remembrance

It is a wonderful thing for a pastor to be able to say of a former congregation or his present charge, "I thank God every time I think about you."

II. For fellowship in the Gospel

We use the word fellowship so often that we may not get the full impact. Other words might express it more clearly: partnership, communion, sharing, togetherness, the feeling that "what is mine is yours."

A. This fellowship, the feeling of a common interest, a common goal, a common Savior could serve as the definition of the church at a certain place.

B. This fellowship grows as it is cultivated around the Word, "fellowship in the Gospel."

C. Because this fellowship is so important, the enemy is intent on destroying it. Christians must not unwittingly become his agents by disrupting this fellowship.

III. For hope shared

"Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ."

A. The Philippians had a good start. They still had a way to go.

B. They could depend on God to go on completing the work of growing in spiritual dimensions. This was Paul's hope for them.

C. We need to ask: Has this good work been started in us? Or have we refused to allow ourselves to be touched by His Word? Or if it has been begun, have we stood in the way of His completing it? Are we afraid to become too involved? Are we satisfied to be on the fringe?

IV. For love

Paul does not say this in so many words, but he writes: "I pray that your love may abound more and more. . . ." As he suggests that the faith of the Philippians and all Christians is not a finished product, so love, too, grows.

The word used for love is not merely affection but the word that is used of God's deep love for us, which stopped at nothing, not even at sending His Son for our redemption.

This love begets love in the Christian. "We love because He first loved us." "Whoever loves God will love his brother also."

A. This love affects lives. Christians will discriminate between the essential and non-essential, and they will live "sincere and blameless lives until the Day of Christ."

B. What all of the commandments in the world cannot do, love accomplishes.

Conclusion: It was love in operation in the Philippian congregation that caused Paul to write this thank-you letter. They had their

weak moments (cf. later chapters), but in general because they had shared His Gospel, had expressed it in their lives, were growing in love, he writes: "I thank God every time I think of you." _____

THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PHIL. 3:17-21

Some years ago a book appeared which later became a motion picture, *One Foot in Heaven*. It is the story of a preacher's life. It is perhaps not a typical picture, but it made an interesting story. The connotation of the title was that the hero, while treading the way of the earth with one foot, had the other foot in heaven. In a certain sense this is what is expected of every Christian. The Christian has a twofold citizenship with

One Foot in Heaven

I. *The apostle's heavenly citizenship*

A. The apostle knew this twofold citizenship. He had one foot in heaven. "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). "Our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven." (Phil. 3:20)

B. The apostle demonstrated this twofold citizenship by his heaven-centered life. "Join in imitating me" (RSV). To the Corinthians he writes twice: "Imitate me," and then goes on, "even as I imitate Christ."

II. *The Philippians' heavenly citizenship*

Many so-called Christians of Paul's acquaintance were far from having one foot in heaven.

1. "For many, of whom I have told you before and now tell you with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."

2. These people are not identified. They

may have been Gnostics, who claimed to be Christians but tried to intellectualize Christianity.

3. Still another group took advantage of Christian liberty, declared all law was gone, distorted grace, declared that a man could sin as much as he liked, it would make no difference to a forgiving God.

4. The phrase "citizens of heaven" could be understood by Philippians; they knew the privileges of Roman citizenship, could never forget it, lived up to it. As citizens of heaven their conduct should match their citizenship.

III. *Christians today and their heavenly citizenship*

A. Christians today sometimes use their liberty for license. Some "live life up to the hilt." Some abuse the grace of God and treat it as a license for sin.

B. God's forgiveness is boundless, but the Lord also says: "Go and sin no more." In the words of our liturgy: "To them that believe on His name He giveth power to become the sons of God and hath promised them His Holy Spirit." He gives the power to be and act like God's sons so that their conduct may prove their heavenly citizenship.

C. The Christian's anticipation of Christ's return keeps him from being earthbound, with the world as the limit of his horizon. He lives with one eye on the sky, "from which we also eagerly await the Savior Jesus Christ . . ."

D. The time will come when the Christian will have full heavenly citizenship with "both feet in heaven." "Who will change our lowly body to be like His glorious body."

Conclusion: Though we look forward to the day when Christ will return and we shall "ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17), while we are still here, because by grace we have been made citizens of heaven, we live as such citizens should live—with "one foot in heaven."

THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

COL. 1:9-14

It is so easy to start and end with ourselves even when we pray. If anything should be unselfish, it ought to be prayer. Even when we have helped others in any way that we can or when we cannot help them in any other way we can pray for them. "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men" (1 Tim. 2:2). Our epistle gives us

A Sample Intercessory Prayer

I. *The content of the prayer*

A. Paul prays: "That you might be filled with the knowledge of His will." In prayer we are not so much trying to persuade God to do what we want Him to do as to find out what He wants us to do and be persuaded to do it.

B. Paul prays for "spiritual wisdom and understanding" for the Colossians. This is the will of God translated into everyday living. The Christian must know what God's will is, not in a vacuum, not in a religious textbook, but in the business of living from day to day. For this he needs "spiritual understanding."

C. Paul prays "that you might lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him." Since spiritual understanding must issue in right conduct, Paul prays for this.

D. Since for this we need a strength and power we do not possess, Paul prays "that you might be strengthened with all might according to God's glorious power." Paul writes to the Romans: "To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not."

If the Lord told us only what His will is, that might be frustrating; but He also gives us the power to perform it.

II. *The qualities prayed for*

A. Patience and long-suffering are often mentioned together. They have a way of keeping company. Patience here has the connotation of fortitude. This does not mean sitting down and allowing the tide of events to flow over us but rather to turn them into victory with spiritual grace. With this fortitude the Christian actually becomes stronger under the load of trouble. We need to pray for this patience, or fortitude, for those who seem to have unusual burdens to bear.

B. Long-suffering. This includes patience with people. It is just as necessary to be patient with people as with problems. For this long-suffering we have Christ's own example, "who when He was oppressed and when He was afflicted opened not His mouth."

C. Joy. Paul prays that Christians may have joy in living a life worthy of the Lord.

D. Thankfulness. "Giving thanks unto the Father . . ." (V. 12)

III. *The foundation of the prayer— the Gospel*

"Who has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son, in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

Conclusion: We need to pray for others in unselfish intercessory prayer, including some of the things which the apostle here suggests; and as we pray for others, we also pray for these blessings for ourselves.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 THESS. 4:13-18

Time flies. Another church year is drawing to a close. In this season the church has turned its attention to the end of things, the end of the world, the end of life. Tra-

dition also dictates that our thoughts turn to those who have died during the past year. We need to prepare for death as we prepare for any other important step. We need to think of it and arrive at a right attitude toward death, our own and that of loved ones. Today we think about

Those Who Are Asleep

I. *The fate of the faithful departed is not an "unknown" to the Christian*

"I would not have you to be ignorant." (V. 13)

II. *We know enough about death to comfort ourselves*

There may still be some unanswered questions about death, but we know enough to satisfy us, enough so that "we do not sorrow without hope."

A. We know that from our point of view it is a "sleep." The New Testament uses this term. It uses others also. Believers "are gathered to their fathers," "depart and are with Christ." Sleeping presupposes awakening.

B. Knowing that the faithful departed are with the Lord, we "do not sorrow as those who have no hope."

C. We know that this sleep refers to the body only and that the faithful departed live on in God's presence. "Blessed are the dead." "Therefore are they before the throne of God." Those "who sleep in Jesus" will, according to the epistle, be raised at the sound of the trumpet. "I believe in the resurrection of the body."

III. *We know who those are who "sleep in Jesus"*

A. They are the ones who have lived with Christ here, who have come to the knowledge of and faith in Jesus Christ as Savior from sin through Holy Baptism. They have been absolved; they have partaken of our Lord's body and blood. They were "with" and "in"

Christ while here, so "God will bring them with Christ on that day."

B. We think of those who "sleep in Christ," who "die in Christ" as being with Christ now. "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ." (Phil. 1:23)

IV. *We know the time will come when their bodies also will rise and live again*

Cf. 1 Cor. 15:37 ff., where the burial of the body is compared to sowing a seed. The text speaks of the resurrection of the body as a fact.

V. *We know that those living at the time of the Lord's return will be changed*

The apostle says they shall not "come before," that is, have an advantage over those who had fallen asleep.

VI. *We know the sequence of events*

A. The Lord will descend.

B. The trumpet will blow.

C. The dead in Christ will rise first.

D. Then the living will be caught up.

Cf. 1 Cor. 15:52.

VII. *This knowledge is the basis of our comfort*

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words." On the basis of this knowledge we sing our Christian hymns of hope.

Conclusion: This knowledge enables us to live as if we were to live forever, yet live in constant readiness for the "time of our departure." We have no morbid yearning to leave this world but a readiness born of the knowledge that through Christ's victory death has been made only a sleep.

THE TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 THESS. 1:3-10

The keynote of any Christian's life ought to be the word "grow." This theme is re-

peated in the New Testament. "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." This theme is particularly in place at this time of year, when Christian stewardship is our theme in connection with the annual spiritual life mission. The keynote is

Grow in Stewardship

I. *The word "stewardship"*

A. Because the meaning of stewardship is sometimes misunderstood, some have contended that a new word ought to be found. Stewardship is a good word, derived from the English translation of the Bible. "Joseph said to his steward, Up and follow after them" (Gen. 44:4). "The Lord of the vineyard said to his steward . . ." (Matt. 20:8). "A certain rich man had a steward" (Luke 16:1). "It is required of stewards that a man be found faithful." (1 Cor. 5:1)

B. A word that might better convey the meaning of the word today is the word "manager." We know the manager of an apartment house, of a drug store or supermarket, of an office. The apartment or drug store does not belong to the manager; he merely manages it.

C. The manager makes reports to the owner. He is responsible. He takes a personal interest. He must give an accounting regularly.

II. *Our stewardship before the Lord*

A. The idea of stewardship, or management, is predicated on the truth that God owns all things. (Ex. 19:5; Ps. 24:1; 1 Chron. 29:14; Haggai 2:8)

B. God distributes to each one according to his ability to manage. We do not all manage the same amount. The Lord entrusts to us what we can manage. (Cf. Matt. 25:15)

C. The Lord judges the manager not on the basis of success but on the basis of faithfulness. (1 Cor. 5:1; Matt. 25:21)

D. This management includes *all* that He has placed into our hands. To mention a few items:

1. Life, body, mind, intellect, social relationships, family associations, time, talents, special aptitudes, worldly possessions, money, income.

2. The Word of God, the sacraments, faith. We are "entrusted" with the Gospel.

III. *Our acceptance of this stewardship*

A. We practice good stewardship to a certain degree.

B. Some churches practice good corporate stewardship.

IV. *The need for growth in this grace of stewardship*

A. Growth in all areas of our Christian life is assumed in the Scriptures. The text: "Your faith groweth exceedingly." It has made "great strides" (NEB). Stewardship growth is the result of growth in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. This growth must be personal. Text: "Without individual exceptions." (NEB)

C. Each one knows best where he is deficient, where he needs to grow. Prayer life? Worship? Use of the sacraments? Study of Scriptures? Daily improvement of life?

Conclusion: Whether it be dedication of more time or of more talent or of more treasure to the Lord and His work, it must always be on the right basis. "Your faith has made such strides."

WILLIAM F. BRUENING

Washington, D. C.