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Homiletics: Outlines on Synodical Conference Epistles

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HOMILETICS

The New Series of Every-Sunday Outlines

Beginning with this issue the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY proposes, after an interval of some years, to publish suggestions for sermons for every Sunday and major festival. These helps come in the form of brief outlines on pericopic texts. Till the end of the current church year the texts considered will be the Epistles adopted by the Synodical Conference and published in the annual *Pocket Diary* of Concordia Publishing House. Beginning with the First Sunday in Advent, the outlines will be based on the Second Series of Gospel Lessons published in the same listing. Contributors have been selected from as representative a cross section of the Church as possible. We commend their studies to our readers.

Outlines on Synodical Conference Epistles

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 JOHN 4:1-6

Every human being is confronted with a destiny-determining decision: To whom shall he entrust his soul's welfare, whose guidance shall he follow? The champions of human wisdom and philosophy? The Scriptures? Or those who would compromise between them? In any case, faith is required. He will have to rely on someone's word, either God's or man's.

The Bible leaves no room for doubt as to the correct course. The wisdom of the wise is foolishness, 1 Cor. 1:19-20; natural man is without spiritual insight and power, 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 4:18. God's program, on the other hand, is outlined Mark 16:15-16, based on Ps. 119:130; John 15:3; 17:17; Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19. No salvation aside from the Gospel, Mark 16:15-16; Luke 16:29.

This explains Holy Writ's unsparing condemnation of false

teachers, e. g., Christ in today's Gospel, Matt. 7:15; also our text, in which St. John pleads for spiritual alertness and discernment with respect to religious teachers. It may be summarized thus:

CHRISTIANS, TEST YOUR TEACHERS

I

V. 1.—Let us note first the nature of the test, the criteria for judging teachers. "Spirit" is one who propounds spiritual teachings, either being moved by God's Spirit or falsely laying claim to such distinction. To test them is not a matter of choice or indifference, but of obligation. Cf. Elijah's famous appeal on Mount Carmel; Matt. 7:15; Rom. 16:17-20; 1 Tim. 1:3; 6:3; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 3:5-7; *et al.* God refuses to grant error the right of existence in His Church. Reason is plain: human philosophy and speculation in religion does not help, but harms; never builds up, but tears down; leads to doubt, confusion, unbelief, cynicism, eventually to despair and damnation. Hence the appeal: Test the spirits!

How distinguish? Vv. 2-3. Basic test: What does a prophet teach about Jesus? Vital issue, Acts 4:12. Does he proclaim the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, including his deity, vicarious atonement, victorious resurrection, thus establishing Himself as coming from God? Or does he deny these fundamentals and brand himself Anti-Christ, already prophesied and in principle already at work (1 John 2:18; 2 Thess. 2:3-7)?

This not the only test. False teaching has taken on additional forms, hence v. 5. False prophets are of the world and speak of the world, also on other points of doctrine. This, too, should be tested. Christ wants all His entire counsel proclaimed, Matt. 28:20; hence Christians should guard against all error.

Such attitude is frequently regarded loveless and intolerant. But be not disturbed. The Sermon on the Mount with its Golden Rule, which alone many regard as their religion, contains that devastating denunciation of false prophets, Matt. 7:15. And it was John, the Apostle of love, who wrote our text. It is not loveless and intolerant to show a man his error and to refuse worship with him if he persists in it. Rather it is a service of love, James 5:19-20. It is God's will that men learn and proclaim only His pure Word, therefore also to distinguish between true and false spirits.

II

Note also the implications of John's appeal. Addressed to the laity, not merely the clergy. Every individual has this responsibility, lest his soul be harmed. Nor is this beyond average ability. The Bible is not a dark book, but a lamp and a light, also for laymen. With sufficient knowledge of language anyone can read it in his vernacular and learn the truth about Jesus as well as other doctrines. Cf. Aquila and Priscilla instructing Apollos, Acts 18:26; Col. 2:8, 16, 18.

Another implication: Scripture must be used faithfully so as to be able to cope with smooth talkers, Rom. 16:18b. The Scriptures encourage the laity to check on their pastors' preaching, like the Bereans, Acts 17:11, so that they can say with the citizens of Sychar: John 4:42. True pastors appreciate the confidence of their people in their teaching, yet they urge diligent Bible study. They want people's faith founded on Scripture, not on the pastor. No excuse on Judgment Day for those who were deceived through pride or indolence or ignorance.

The latter days will be evil days, Matt. 24:23-28; 2 Tim. 3:1-5. Let Christians beware. Through the power of the Holy Ghost they have overcome the world, v. 4; they stand in the faith. Let them so strive that the world may not again overcome them. Too, let them bear faithful witness, knowing v. 6a and Rom. 1:16.

St. Louis, Mo.

OTTO E. SOHN

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 TIM. 6:6-10

In the ancient world as well as in the modern world men have been searching tirelessly for happiness. Enormous efforts of brain and brawn have not brought men what they desired most. Happiness and contentment do not stem from men, they come down from God. St. Paul is very explicit about this truth, as he counsels Timothy concerning

TRUE CONTENTMENT

I. Not Found in Material Things

The normal human being anywhere in the world does not require lengthy instruction to induce him to provide for regular wants.

Inbred drives impel him so satisfy thirst, hunger, need for clothing, shelter, and protection against enemies. There has always been some mutual helpfulness in the quest for making a living. But in all communities a few strong, domineering, self-seeking people began to oppress their neighbors and found special delight in grinding them down under their heel. The more property and power they gained, the more they set out to obtain. Intrigue, cruelty, robbery, theft, murder, deceit, war are means they use to achieve their end. The great empires that rose and fell along the River Nile, in the Mesopotamian Valley, around the Mediterranean Sea all tell the same story. Their rulers and nobility failed to find the contentment they sought. Wormwood and ashes after all were their lot. Modern rulers who sought contentment in Berlin, Rome, and Tokyo have fared no better.

Others besides rulers and nobility also fall into the snare of trying to find contentment in material things. Every human being without exception, spoiled by sin, has within himself the seed that makes him believe he can build his own happiness and make himself content by his own effort. The avenues a man can travel in pursuit of contentment are many. There are farming, manufacturing, finance, transportation, communication, music, writing, teaching, surgery, sports, and many more. Along all these avenues people see the glitter of money and believe that will bring them contentment. Their hope is never realized. All these people make the same tragic mistake. They push God out of their life and refuse to bow before Him in worship. The poison of death strikes them down and robs them of contentment.

II. Found Only in Christ, the Savior

God certainly wants you to use your intellect for the purposes for which He has given it to you. Under Him you shall earn your daily bread. But the daily bread you earn with your hands or with your brain does not put you into proper relationship with Him nor feed your soul. Sin that tears your body and mind with pain and hurls you into death and decay has separated you from God. True contentment lies in being joined to God again. Since your own means of finding contentment utterly fails you, God came to you in love and brought you His Son, Jesus Christ, the Savior, 1 Tim. 1:15; 2:3-6.

As soon as you accept Jesus as your Savior who died for your sins, you have found genuine contentment. Your whole world changes. Within you there is no longer that urge for mastery in some intellectual or muscular activity, because you want more and more money and wish to make an impression on others. Your desire now is on the track that leads to God. Whatever your work is, you do it because you want to serve God and your neighbor. As farmer, office worker, manufacturer, lawyer, doctor, financier, teacher, musician, you carry on your business to satisfy your own needs and to have money to help spread the Word of God to others so that they may possess and enjoy the same contentment in God through Christ that you have found.

Let nothing stand in your way to keep you from getting a firmer grip on true contentment through Christ. Be regular in Bible reading, church attendance, and attendance at the Lord's Supper, for these are the means you ought to use to give yourself a stronger hold on the contentment which God alone can bring you.

St. Louis, Mo.

A. W. C. GUEBERT

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 4:8-20

Epistle for the Day describes the gifts of the Holy Spirit in action; Gospel and Introit describe particularly faith at work against the enemies of the Church. Those are the keynotes of this sermon text, which provides a case study from the Apostolic Church in Jerusalem of this so important gift of the Spirit—boldness to confess the name of Jesus. We cannot afford simply to bemoan the passing of that trait, for these are the days that need it as much as ever; but we can explore its resources in the heart of the believer and note the use to which God Himself puts it. For the purpose of that boldness is to set forth

THE GREAT NAME OF JESUS

I. It Is the Name and Revelation of Jesus Christ as Savior

A. God's people had trusted and worshiped the name of God, Ex. 3:15; Ps. 111:9; Is. 63:16; "name" meant everything that God had revealed of Himself.

B. But now the Apostles were doing signs and wonders by the

name of Jesus Christ. Cf. Acts 3:6, 16. It was what they knew of this Jesus that caused them to do their acts of healing and to be courageous in testimony in the face of attempts to silence them. Cf. Acts 4:1-7.

C. What did they know of Jesus? What was His name to them?

1. He it was who had been crucified by the Jews, 3:13-15; 4:10.

2. He it was whom God had raised up from the dead, thus demonstrating that this was the Prince of Life, the Messiah and Redeemer, whom He had ordained to save the world, 3:15, 18, 22; 4:10-11. His dying and rising was not accidental, but this was the one foretold by God (Ps. 118:22; Is. 28:16) and confirmed by the Apostles as the one Savior. Cf. also 1 Peter 2:7; Rom. 9:33.

3. His is the one name still given among men whereby they may be saved. That makes this event from Jerusalem long ago pertinent to this group of worshipers today. Still they need salvation from their sins and rescue from death; and still the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, attested by His resurrection, is the one and only way of life revealed by God to men, the one name whereby we must be saved, v. 12.

4. It is the one name through which God brings His grace and healing to men today in their bodily needs. With St. Paul, (2 Cor. 12:1 ff.) we know that we can trust only in God's grace for help in our weakness; that grace is ours through the great name and the perfect revelation of God in Christ Jesus, as much today as when Peter said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk," Acts 3:6; 4:10, 12.

II. It Is the Name Courageously to be Witnessed to Men Everywhere

A. The name of Jesus is the source of boldness to witness. He Himself had it, cf. John 7:26; and He gives His Spirit to His own that they might witness, Rom. 10:9.

B. That boldness continues to meet with obstacles. Even though the rulers of the people could not deny the miracle of the text, they still sought to stifle the witness, vv. 16-18. We need not expect that the offense of the Gospel vanishes with our pluck to proclaim it. But let us beware that we do not give in to the obstacles and seek to counterfeit or to substitute for the basic witness to

Christ. "Come to my church" — "listen to our music" — "we have a fine bowling league" — "we have a powerful denomination" — those are some of the substitutes and counterfeits. They look bold on the surface; actually they are fear reactions, forsaking the boldness to speak the Gospel because of the materialism and pride of the unbelieving world.

C. But the true Christian must say, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard," v. 20. True Christian boldness is not a flareup of brashness or an advertising campaign; but it is the surface reflex of the inner faith, it is simply the purpose for which Christ leaves us in the world, John 17:13-15. It goes back to that Christ, His work of redemption, for the food for its message and the fuel for its courage. It prays with the Introit: "As for me, I will call upon God, and He shall hear my voice; He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me."

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 TIM. 4:1-8

Many deny the truthfulness of the theme suggested by our text. They claim that doctrinal preaching is inert, ineffective, unimpressive, outmoded. However, if we reject doctrinal preaching, we reject a most wonderful means for upbuilding the Church, comforting the distressed, strengthening the weak, and establishing faith in the hearts of the people. It is fitting indeed that we in this Trinity (Pentecost?) season, give thought to the workings of the Triune God, particularly of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, through

TRUE DOCTRINAL PREACHING — ALWAYS TIMELY, ALWAYS
EFFECTIVE

I

The Essence of True Doctrinal Preaching

A. It is based on God's Word, v. 2.

Doctrine is "that which is taught or set forth for acceptance or belief; the creed and dogma of a church" (dictionary). Paul

solemnly charged (*diamartyromai*) Timothy to preach the Word and to exhort with doctrine. God's Word and true Christian doctrine are correlatives.

B. It presents eternal truths, v. 4.

God's Word and truth are correlatives. Jesus: "Thy Word is truth," John 17:17. Jesus equates His own Word with truth, John 8:31-32. True doctrinal preaching frees from the chains and shackles of unbelief, superstition, an erring conscience, sin, and guilt.

C. It is evangelical in character, v. 5.

Since its great purpose is to save souls, it is based on the Gospel of God's love and grace through Christ. A true evangelist trusts the inherent power of the Gospel and thus receives strength and power from God rather than from some human source. "The God of Israel is He that giveth strength" (Introit).

D. It is efficacious.

The preaching of God's Word always prospers whereto He has sent it, Is. 55:10-11. "My heart trusted in God, and I am helped" (Gradual).

E. It is always opportune and timely, v. 2.

The preacher of pure doctrine must be instant, ready at every moment; death is ever imminent and Judgment Day at hand, v. 1; John 2:18.

II

The Constant Need for True Doctrinal Preaching

A. Man's needs are constant, v. 2.

Hence the preacher of Word and doctrine applies Law and Gospel. "After the manner of physicians, having shown the wound, he gives incision, then applies the plaister" (Chrysostom), Mark 2:17. He reproves and convicts, John 16:8; rebukes and censures Ps. 38:11; exhorts and admonishes (*parakaleo*: calls to his side, in a brotherly manner, 1 Tim. 6:2).

B. Man's need for the Gospel is constant, vv. 2-5.

a. He who dispenses true Christian doctrine must be a true evangelist, v. 5. Since only the Gospel shows how man may be

saved, the Christian preacher dare never preach without preaching Gospel.

b. The preacher must have the mind and spirit of a true evangelist. The very condition of those with whom he deals requires this. He must be patient, understanding, long-suffering, v. 2; Gal. 6:1.

c. Like Christ, he labors as a friend of sinners and is not of a carnal and vindictive mind and spirit, which militates against evangelical doctrine, John 8:4-7.

d. On the other hand, he is not to have itching ears which seek gratification in pleasing men and making them averse to the eternal truths of sound doctrine.

e. He is not to heap to himself unsound teachers who turn away people from God's eternal truth, Eph. 4:14.

C. Man's needs require that the preacher of true Christian doctrine make full proof of his ministry.

a. He is to live up to what he preaches and must minister to needs also when not in the pulpit, e. g., at the sick and deathbed, in mission work, when instructing, etc.

b. This work is so vastly important that he devotes his entire life to it, 1 Cor. 9:16.

c. Because of the exalted character of this work Christian people are to honor and revere the preacher and his calling, 1 Tim. 5:17.

III

The Blessed Results of True Doctrinal Preaching

A. These were experienced by St. Paul, vv. 6-8.

His own doctrinal preaching, based on biblical truth, had helped to

a. Establish Paul in the Christian faith, v. 7;

b. Give him willingness, strength, and endurance to battle for the truth, v. 7;

c. Suffer all things for the sake of the Gospel, v. 5; 1 Cor. 9;

d. Assure him that there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness, v. 8.

B. These may be experienced also by us, v. 8, provided

a. Our doctrinal preaching is based on genuine Biblical truth and not merely on human tradition and the commandments of men, Mark 7:7;

b. We, with the help of the Holy Ghost, rely only on the truth of God's Word and not on error and fables, v. 4;

c. We permit the preaching of sound Biblical doctrine to bear fruit in our lives in abundance, Col. 4:17;

d. We, like Paul, are among those who love the appearing of Jesus Christ, v. 8

1. In our hearts;

2. On that glorious Day of Judgment.

Suggested hymns from *The Lutheran Hymnal*: 296, 264, 261.

St. Louis, Mo.

WALTER E. BUSZIN

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 COR. 3:12-18

Introduction. — "Six years ago I was an atheist," a man on the street once told a pastor, "then I became an agnostic. Today I am thoroughly convinced there is a God. I have come a long way, don't you think, Reverend?" Admittedly not a Christian, this man had not come as far in his faith as he thought he had. Who, including the Christian, has plumbed the depths of God's majesty and glory? It is not enough that we know there is a God. We must face Him. Ignorance, fear, pride, etc., are constantly veiling our vision. The unveiling of God's glory ought to be a continual process in the life of the Christian.

THE UNVEILING OF GOD'S GLORY

I

The Unveiling of God's Pure Holiness.

A. God's pure holiness is reflected in His flawless Law.

1. God revealed His Law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

2. When Moses relayed the Law to the Children of Israel, his face was dazzling bright, a reflection of God's pure holiness, Exodus 34.

3. God's Moral Law still expresses the unchangeable demands of an unchangeable God and reflects His unchangeable holiness.

B. God's holiness hidden by the veil of fear.

1. When Israel was confronted by Moses' brilliant countenance, they could not bear to behold it; so Moses put a veil over his face, v. 13; Ex. 34:32-35.

2. The cloth veil of Moses was symbolic of the veil of fear that the condemned Israelites pulled over their eyes. With their dull, dirty deeds they could never face a pure God and enter into holy communion with Him. Nor we.

C. God's Holiness unveiled.

1. We may look into the mirror of God's Law, and we should, that we may see ourselves as we really are, but—

2. There can be no unveiling of God's pure holiness until we are restored to God's favor. That is effected by the unveiling of the more brilliant side of God's glory, His glowing love.

II

The Unveiling of God's Glowing Love.

A. God's glowing love is revealed in Christ.

1. Christ is the end of the Law, Rom. 10:4. His active and passive obedience. See Rom. 5:6-11.

2. Revealed through the Holy Spirit, God's agent to remove the veil of blindness and fear, v. 17.

3. Declared openly, confidently, by the Apostle Paul (v.12) and by every true preacher of God's Word.

4. Where there is a turning to Christ by faith, God's glowing love is unveiled and man may face God's holiness, v. 16.

B. God's glowing love is hid by the veil of pride.

1. Self-righteous pride refuses to accept mercy and insists on earning the right to meet God.

2. False teachers in Corinth, the Israelites and Jews (vv. 14-15), tried to pull this veil over the eyes of the people. Modern preachers of work-righteousness still do it.

3. Pride may whittle down God's Law to fit human capa-

bility; it may hide God's blinding glory; but it can never dim it. Neither can it change the essential glory of His glowing love.

C. A glorious transformation, v. 18.

1. **Instantaneous**—the moment the glory of God is unveiled to the believing sinner, he becomes acceptable in God's sight. He has complete forgiveness. He wears Christ's spotless robe of righteousness.

2. **Progressive**—"from glory to glory." He grows in personal righteousness, reflecting more and more the holiness and love of God, and in eternity he is restored to the complete and glorious image of God.

Conclusion.—Christ is and always will remain the only answer to the problem: "How can I face my God today, on Judgment Day, and forever?" Turn to Him again and again, and let His Holy Spirit remove the veil of fear and pride from your hearts that your eyes may feast on the glories of God now and forever.

Bel-Nor, Mo.

ALVIN C. MACK