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Homiletics: Sermon Studies for the New Church Year

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Homiletics

A Series of Sermon Studies for the Church Year

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 TIM. 1:14-17

The Text and the Day. — Our text is well in tune with the day's Standard Epistle Lesson, in which St. Peter calls upon all Christians to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God. It is also in tune with the Standard Gospel Lesson, in which the Son of God is presented as the Man "who receiveth sinners and eateth with them" and who, after speaking the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, said: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Notes on Meaning. — Our text is the greater part of an apostolic hymn of praise beginning with v. 12. The glorious Gospel of the blessed God was committed to the Apostle's trust. He is keenly aware of the grace of God that was bestowed upon him, vv. 12-13; 1 Cor. 15:1, 2, 9, 10; Gal. 1:13-16; Phil. 3:4-9. A special reason for his indebtedness and gratitude to God is stated in v. 13. He knows himself as a former blasphemer, persecutor of Christ, to whom he had also been insolent. The Apostle is humbling himself under the mighty hand of God. He makes a frank confession of his guilt. Joyfully, however, he exclaims v. 13 b. With him sin abounded, but grace did much more abound, Rom. 5:20-21. His blaspheming, persecuting, and being insolent had preceded his coming to the saving knowledge of the grace of God in Christ. Therefore his lamentable deeds were not those of wantonness and perverseness. His had been a blind and misguided zeal, which he now deeply deplores but does not excuse. — And now to the text. V. 14. No wonder that the Apostle eloquently speaks of the superabundant grace of his Lord bestowed upon one who had abounded in sin. The effect of this bestowal was sincere faith and ardent love for Christ. Instead of blaspheming, he now believes in Christ; instead of persecuting, he now loves Christ; instead of being insolent, he now gives all glory to Christ. — Vv. 15-17. The Apostle now

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offers a summary of the doctrine of the superabundant grace of God and shows that this grace of God is to be applied universally. Trustworthy, fully deserving complete approbation, is the word "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," evidently a saying in which the Apostolic Church summed up its practical belief in the incarnation and its salutary purpose. Jesus similarly stated the gracious purpose of His coming Matt. 18:11; Luke 19:10; John 3:16-17. The Savior came to rescue from eternal perdition those who had missed the mark set by God in His holy Law. Christ fulfilled the Law for all mankind. In addition, He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us "that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Cor. 5:21. Among these rescued sinners the Apostle humbly and sincerely reckons himself as first. Eph. 3:8; 1 Cor. 15:9. From the depth of this humility he rises triumphantly to extol the superabundant grace of God in Christ Jesus, who had shown him such merciful consideration. In his experience the Apostle is set forth as an example and type of all such as accept Christ as their Savior after having led a life of depravity and, by the grace of God, have come to true repentance. Once he was in the front rank of the enemies of Christ; now he is in the front rank of the believers in Christ, serving him in grateful obedience. This is a comforting spectacle for all those who in the light of God's holy Law have been terrified by the number and enormity of their sins. No sin is too great or grievous to be forgiven by a gracious God for Jesus' sake.—The text closes with a fitting doxology, v. 17. Grateful for undeserved grace, the Apostle gives all glory to the eternal, immortal, invisible, and only wise God.

Preaching Emphases.—The text contains a notable contrast. The last verse is a testimony of the majesty of God. Contrasted with it is the Apostle's confession: "I am the chief of sinners." The sermon will do well to emphasize anew the universal grace of God for all sinners.

Preaching Pitfalls.—After studying this well-known text, meditating on it, how can a preacher escape extoling the grace of God that saves sinners? On the other hand he will present the recipient of this grace not as a person who perhaps gloats over past wickedness and loves to recount it with a sort of pride, but as a person who is truly and always penitent.

Problem and Goal. — The goal is the glory of God and the salvation of all sinners by grace through faith in Christ.

Outline:

THE SUPERABUNDANT GRACE OF GOD IN CHRIST

I. Eloquently proclaimed by the penitent Apostle.

- A. Only a truly penitent person has real appreciation for the grace of God in Christ, vv. 13-15 b.
- B. Therefore he is capable, guided by the Spirit of God, to confess and proclaim this grace, vv. 14-15.

II. Joyfully accepted and gratefully praised by him.

- A. The superabundant grace of God was also accepted by the Apostle, vv. 13-16.
Joyfully he says: I obtained mercy. — It is worthy of acceptance. — I am a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him.
- B. All glory for this grace is given to the eternal God of all grace, v. 17.

H. C. HARTING

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

COL. 4:2-6

The Text and the Day. — The text presents the "claims of the outsiders." "Them that are without" necessarily implies them that are within. It is all over with the Church on that day when there are finer characters outside it than in it. The feature of the Christian life is that it is filled with prayer. It is our Christian duty to pray for all men. The text appeals to the Christian to be "savory, discreet, and seasonable" in their discourses so as to give the outsider no advantage against him, nor should he expose himself to their malice and ill will.

Notes and Meaning. — V. 2. "Wakefulness in prayer" is enjoined by Christ in Matt. 26:41 and Mark 14:38. Paul: "Be ever praying and at the same time watching." "In connection with thanksgiving." We are ever to be thankful for the Vicarious Atonement. We are Christians because Christ made us so. We are ever to cling to Him in prayer, watching that nothing may separate us from the love of Christ and constantly thanking Him for our completeness in Christ.

V. 3. Pray also for "us," i. e., Paul and Timothy. Pray

"that God may open for us a door for the Word." God must open the doors . . . wherever God may have one. Paul is thinking of his release and praying for an open door. When that door opens, Paul also begs this result: **"so that we may utter the mystery of Christ."** Paul means: To make plain to men the whole blessed Gospel mystery of Christ's universal redemption, received by grace through faith. For this Gospel Paul was in prison. V. 4. Especially does he want to preach Christ at his trial in the court of the whole empire. A lot would depend upon how Paul would speak in defense of the Gospel at his trial. It would affect the Colossians also. Therefore pray for me.

V. 5. When you are praying for the progress of the Gospel in the whole world, you will not be hindering it in your own city. "Those outside" are the non-Christians. Do not prejudice them against the Gospel, but win them to the Gospel.

V. 6. "Salt" is the wholesomeness of what we say. Paul wants to say the right thing at the critical time of his trial so as not to damage the Gospel. But that desire should be the Christian's at all times. Speak "ever with grace" in a kindly spirit, be mindful of the wholesomeness of what you say, and know what you are talking about so as to make the most of your opportunities to win the outsider.

Preaching Pitfalls.—Commending the Christian cause without the Christian's Christ. Emphasizing the Christian's behavior toward men of the world, which becomes a mere social ethic or a Golden Rule religion. Christian testimony does not consist in meeting logical or emotional objections with more logic and emotion. *Christian testimony consists in telling men, with an ever-thanking heart, about the great atonement for sin through the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. He for me.*

Preaching Emphases.—The power of Christian testimony is the product of grace. The motive for Christian testimony should be the love of Christ and love for man's soul. The glory of Christianity must be seen from within the Christian heart, the Christian home, the Christian house. Let us be filled with Christ's spirit and emulate His example. Let us speak the things we do know, the things we have heard and seen—the good news of the love of God in Christ Jesus. The "outsider" has a claim on us.

Problem and Goal.— God forbid that our hatreds, jealousies, and bitternesses should rob the Christ and His Gospel of its love. How many of us are austere and sad! Are we living epistles? good public-relations departments? trumpets of God and messengers of peace in our daily life and conversation? The Christian must act judiciously toward all men. We must maintain a high character. We must cherish a gracious spirit. We must give a Christian testimony.

Outline:

THE INGREDIENTS OF CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY

- I. It must have appeal.
 - A. The appeal of Christian testimony is a wakeful prayerfulness with thanksgiving.
 - B. The appeal of Christian testimony is witnessing by word and deed to the love of God in Christ at every open door.
 - C. The appeal of Christian testimony is a power and grace from the Holy Spirit.
- II. It must have attraction.
 - A. Christian testimony must maintain a high character.
 - B. Christian testimony must cherish a gracious spirit.
 - C. Christian testimony must possess a believing and thankful heart.
- III. It must have interest.
 - A. There is nothing in the world like the Gospel.
 - B. Christian testimony is founded upon the Bible and not on logic and emotion.
 - C. Christ's love for a man's soul is the greatest news.

EDWIN E. PIEPLOW

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PHIL. 3:8-14

The Text and the Day.— The theme of the day is the cry of the contrite heart to attain the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus. The Introit states: "The Lord is my Light and my Salvation." In the Collect we pray that we may obtain God's promises, "which exceed all that we can desire."

Notes on Meaning.— St. Paul's beloved congregation at Philippi was threatened by Judaizing errorists. He warns: "Beware of evil workers." Cf. context, vv. 2-3; 18-19. These "enemies of the Cross of Christ" vaunted themselves of their legal righteousness. The Apostle had more reason for boasting than they. As "touching the righteousness which is in the Law," he was "blameless." Cf. vv. 4-6; 2 Cor. 11:10 ff.

Vv. 8-9. "All things," his material possessions, his family connections, his Pharisaic righteousness, once so highly treasured, he now counts but loss and rubbish for the "excellency (surpassing worth) of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord."— This knowledge includes the saving faith. John 17:3; Luke 1:77. It regenerates, transforms, sanctifies man and places him in fellowship and communion with Christ and His merit.— "And be found in Him" (the city of refuge, Num. 35:25).

Vv. 10-11. St. Paul, at this writing in prison long after his conversion (2 Cor. 4:6), still has the desire "that I may know Him," to know Him ever better, a lifelong process. 2 Pet. 3:18; Eph. 4:15.— "And the power of His resurrection." This divine power, *dynamis*, manifests itself in regeneration, Eph. 1:19-20; 2:5-6; at Holy Baptism, Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12-13; in sanctification, 2 Cor. 12:9; 13:4; in our resurrection, John 5:28-29; John 11:25 f.; 1 Cor. 15:43 ff.

The fellowship of His suffering, conformity to His death, and attaining to the resurrection imply both by faith to appropriate the merit of Christ and in life to follow and conform to His example. It implies to be crucified with Christ, to die unto sin and to rise with Him in newness of life.

Vv. 12-14. A Christian is never perfect but must constantly strive to become a thorough Christian. This "reaching forth" can take place only after Christ has taken hold of us and made us His own. 1 John 4:19; 1 Pet. 1:5.— "The prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Heaven and its glory is the final goal. To this we are effectually called. 1 Thess. 2:12; Eph. 1:18; 2 Thess. 2:14; 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:10; Rom. 8:30.

Preaching Pitfalls.— When urging to follow St. Paul's example, beware of Arminianism, synergism, and the Melanchtonian error that "good works are necessary for salvation."

Pieper, *Christl. Dogmatik*, Vol. III, p. 84 (Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 423).

"The high calling," v. 14, does not refer to the holy ministry. Other texts must be used for sermons at the ordination or installation of pastors.

Preaching Emphases. — "The righteousness which is of God by faith" over against every form of self-righteousness. — Ever to grow in the knowledge of supreme worth, "the knowledge of Jesus, my Lord," to know His person, His life, His work and merit, His teachings. To win Christ and possess Him, His grace and blessings, and so attain the "prize."

Problem and Goal. — Christians in this materialistic and hectic age must be led properly to evaluate, and to concentrate their thinking on, the crown of life. With the help of the Holy Spirit through the Word they must be incited to action. Each hearer should leave with the conviction: "Brethren . . . this one thing I do. . .," vv. 13-14.

Outline:

St. Paul in his Epistles evidences interest in athletics, especially in the Olympian games of his day. The victor in the race had the goal before his eyes. The coveted prize was the wreath of olive branches. In our text he urges us to

"PRESS TOWARD THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE"

I. What is the prize?

A. Men might have various ambitions, objectives in life. St. Paul in his early life. Context vv. 4-6; 2 Cor. 11:10 ff.

B. V. 14: "The high calling of God in Christ Jesus," 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 2:14; 1 Pet. 5:10. Eternal salvation, heaven.

II. How are we to attain the prize?

A. Athletes train. To be on the "honor roll" in any temporal occupation requires vigilance, effort, stamina, pressing towards the mark.

B. The "prize," v. 14, is attained not by "having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law," v. 9 a. Our heart's desire must be "to win Christ," "know Him," "to be found in Him," vv. 8-9; to "know the power of His resurrection," vv. 10-11.

The regenerated and justified Christian strives for, and centers his life's efforts on, perfection in holiness. "This one thing I do!" Vv. 12-14; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 John 3:9; Col. 1:10. Pieper, *Christl. Dogmatik*, Vol. III, p. 39 ff. (Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 400 ff.).

HERMAN W. BARTELS

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ROM. 6:12-18

The Text and the Day. — The post-Trinity season of the church year stresses Christian living. The old-line Epistle for this Sunday, the section in Romans 6 prior to our text, stresses the fact that our flesh is to be crucified and that we should live unto God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. The text for this Sunday, Rom. 6:12-18, therefore, fits well into the picture of true Christian living.

Notes on Meaning. — "Let not sin reign." Christians who have died unto sin and are alive to God can prevent the reigning of sin so that they are no more slaves to sin. They who are justified are delivered from the tyranny and domination of sin. "In your mortal bodies." The seat and source of sin is the soul. The body is the instrument of the soul. The inner dethronement of sin is accomplished for us by Baptism and the means of grace. Cf. Romans 6:4. The lusts referred to in v. 12 are attributed to the body, because it is animated and because the "lusts" need the bodily members and the physical conditions for their gratification. V. 13 speaks of instruments of unrighteousness and instruments of righteousness. "Unrighteousness" is everything that contradicts God's Law, or normal right. Sin wants our bodily members in order to misuse them as wicked aids. At one time, when we were alive to sin, it pleased us to furnish our members as such aids; but since we died to sin, we stopped this. God can use only righteous aids, for all the works of God are righteous. The hands to do God's work, the feet to run the way of His commandments, the tongue to pray and praise, the eyes to read His Word, the ears to hear it. "Grace" in v. 15 is general and is regarded as the opposite of "Law." Here it includes all that comes to us from the grace of God through Christ. Justification, Baptism, the new life and the newness of life. "But ye have obeyed from the heart" (v. 17) means that Christians

have become obedient "from the heart" in all sincerity to the form of teaching unto which they are delivered. The whole Christian life is obedience. "From the heart" indicates sincerity and depth of service, the opposite of "with eye service" in Eph. 6:6.

Preaching Pitfalls.—Since this text repeats the same thought in various ways, it is comparatively easy to become lost in the detail of the text, in trying to explain every phrase and to forget the main thought that the true Christian, the reborn child of God, is dead unto sin and alive to God. One must avoid to make people think that all is well if sin does not reign even if some sin is present. The text stresses the fact that Christians are delivered from the tyranny and bondage of sin although the overthrown tyrant of sin may still harass us. One must not make the body and the members of the body the seat and source of sin. That seat is always the soul. Matt. 15:19. There is always inclination to think that the Law stops sinning and that grace alone is insufficient for this purpose. For this reason many Christians are legalistic. It also is true that some are inclined to think that since grace pardons sin so freely, one need not be careful about sinning and that a few sins more or less will make no difference to grace, which will take care of the addition. Paul does not say in the words of our text that by committing sin while being under grace and not under the Law Christians would at once change masters, adopting the sin, their former tyrant, and leaving God, their blessed liberator.

Preaching Emphases.—In preaching on this text it is well to keep in mind at all times that the old life is to be reckoned as dead, that the Christian is to be dead unto sin, that he is to have self-control, resist temptation, and mortify the flesh. In preaching on this text it is also well to stress the new dispensation, the spiritual liberty which the Christian enjoys (v. 14), the ready obedience which he now shows. The Christian with a renewed heart, thankful unto God for liberation, grateful unto God for the spiritual liberty which he enjoys, is happy to become a servant of righteousness.

Outline:

"HOW REBORN CHILDREN OF GOD LIVE"

I. They are dead unto sin.

A. Sin does not reign in their mortal body, v. 12.

- . B. The members of the body are not instruments of sin, v. 13.
 - C. Sin shall have no dominion over them, v. 14.
 - D. Show how this is demonstrated in everyday living, in resisting temptation, in overcoming sin.
- II. They will live unto God.
- A. How did Christians become alive unto God?
 - 1. Through the means of grace, vv. 6, 4.
 - 2. Obeying from the heart the form of doctrine, v. 17 b.
 - B. How does the new life show itself?
 - 1. Yielding "yourself" to God.
 - 2. Using members as aids of righteousness, v. 13.
 - C. Christians are alive unto God as servants of righteousness.

They

- 1. Enjoy spiritual liberty.
- 2. Do and obey the Word of God.
- 3. Are happy as servants of righteousness.

E. L. ROSCHKE

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

HEB. 12:5-11

The Text and the Day. — "Oh, clap your hands . . . shout . . . with . . . triumph" (Introit; Gradual), since God's "never-failing Providence" grants "what is profitable for us" (Collect; "eternal Life," Epistle; physical needs, Gospel). Our text guarantees that even afflictions are a blessing and "profitable."

Notes on the Meaning. — V. 5, *ekleleesthe*, perf., lit.: "Ye have clean forgotten the exhortation" of Scripture (Prov. 3: 11-12). Dr. Wand translates this:

Despise not, son, the chastening of the Lord,
Nor when rebuked, in chagrin miss your aim.

(V.6): For in correction is love revealed,
And the son punished is the son received.

V. 7. "If ye endure." The majority of MSS read *eis* for

ei (if), which occurs only in *minusculis*, hence, lit.: "It is for the purpose of discipline (*paideia*, training or correction) that ye are called to endure chastening." "For what son," lit.: "Who is a son whom. . . ?" V. 8, lit.: "Whereof all have become partakers," e. g., those in Hebrews 11. Illegitimate children are usually abandoned by their fathers (see also Gal. 4:21-31). V. 9, lit.: "We had fathers of our flesh as trainers." "Father of spirits," who gives us His Holy Spirit for faith and sanctification (1 Cor. 12:3; James 1:12, 17-18; John 3:5-6; Matt. 7:11; Luke 11:11-13; Gal. 3:26-27; 4:6; John 17:17; cp. John 6:63); his angelic spirits for service and protection (Heb. 1:14; Ps. 91:11-12); and countless other gifts for our good (1 Cor. 12 ff.). V. 10: "That we may be made partakers of His holiness," Eph. 4:24; 1 Pet. 1:7, 16-18; 2 Pet. 1:4. V. 11: "It yieldeth," present, lit.: "It *continuously* gives the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that have been put through gymnastics thereby," i. e., through such discipline.

Preaching Pitfalls. — The problem of textual criticism in v. 7 is too insignificant to warrant a place in the sermon. It would be folly also under the name, "Father of Spirits" to pose the problem of "creationism vs. traducianism" (Delitzsch; see *Pulpit Commentary*), for the emphasis of this text is on the value of spiritual discipline.

Preaching Emphases. — Press the necessity and blessings of cross-bearing. Luther: "Wer kein Crucianus ist, dass ich so reden moege, der ist auch kein Christianus," i. e., he who does not bear his cross is not a Christian; for he does not conform to Christ, his Master" (vv. 2-3). Hence "shout . . . with . . . triumph" (Introit) under every affliction. It is a sin not to do so, a despising of Scripture (vv. 5, 12), and may cause the "lame" to stumble (v. 13). By all means read the excursus, Pieper, *Christl. Dogmatik*, Vol. III, p. 84 ff. (Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, pp. 424—428).

Goal. — To make our hearers aware of the seriousness of the sin of despising the value of Christian discipline; to guarantee "eternal life" (Epistle) to those who repent of such sin (i. e., who acknowledge it and believe that Christ has atoned for it); and so to move them by the "compassion" of Jesus (Gospel) to supplant their indifference with gratitude for, and joy under, trials.

Outline:

GOD INTERPRETS THE TRIALS OF THE CHRISTIAN

I. As a Symbol of Sonship.

- A. God's children of old had their trials, too (ch. 11), even God's Son, Jesus (12:2-3); also the Hebrew Christians at the writing of this Letter, though as yet "not unto blood" (v. 4).
- B. All believers must expect to be tried (v. 8), for vv. 6-7. To be without such trials signifies no sonship with God (v. 8).
- C. Hence God interprets the trials of a Christian as proof of divine love and sonship (vv. 6, 8; Prov. 3:11-12).
- D. To reject this truth is a death-deserving sin (Rom. 6: 21-23), for which Christ died (Rom. 5:17-21) that we might live (Rom. 6:23). Repentantly let us therefore put aside this sin and replace it with the faith that trials are a sign of sonship and love.

II. As a Guarantee of Good.

- A. Parental training is restricted to the brief span of childhood (v. 10 a); not so the Lord's (v. 10 b); and parental chastening, because of selfishness, is often unprofitable for the children (v. 10 a) not so the chastisement of God (v. 10 b and 9 b).
- B. God chastens only to restore to us the "image of God" (v. 10) and to give us the "peaceable fruits of righteousness" (v. 11). While "grievous" for the moment, such chastisement has God's guarantee of good (vv. 10-11).
- C. To regard God's disciplinary measures as evil rather than good is wicked and merits death (Rom. 5:17-21).
- D. Thank God for the compassion of Jesus, who frees us from the curse of this sin. Let us demonstrate our gratitude by following the example of Jesus (vv. 2-3), the instruction of our text, and the call of the Introit.

THEODORE F. NICKEL

