

Concordia Theological Monthly



OCTOBER • 1952

Outlines on Synodical Conference Epistles

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ROM. 14:4-12

Trying to get along in life without some kind of satisfactory standard for attitude, conduct, and action is foolhardy and often disastrous. Idea of having some kind of standard reaches down into everything which is a part of our daily existence. True in homes, schools, institutions, business, industry, professions, etc. Easily and effectively illustrated by selecting one branch and picturing this truth. Folly and disaster can be practically demonstrated at any length in keeping with experience of the hearers to lead effectively and naturally to theme:

THE HIGHEST STANDARD FOR TRULY WORTHY LIVING

I. *This standard is derived from a personal relationship to our living Lord and Master, Jesus Christ (vv. 4, 8, 9)*

A. Our own standard can never be high enough or effective enough.

The low standards of men are everywhere in evidence, especially in our time. If anywhere the blight of sin on the whole of life can be observed, it is in the wholly unworthy lives which men round about us are ready to live. Illustrate by the many low standards which men set up. Selfish, materialistic, transitory, weak, ineffectual, ineffective, temporal, no power to make life truly worthy and purposeful. True of all of us by nature because of the influence of sin upon aspirations, ideals, attitudes, etc.

B. Christ's whole life and work was designed to serve this end.

Apostle's words (vv. 8-9) wonderfully impressive and ought to be impressively treated to give the whole discussion the rich evangelical Gospel power and force which it requires and demands. The appeal to each hearer to appreciate the fullness of this wondrous relationship, to be sure that they stand in such a relationship to Christ as Lord and Master through faith in His redemptive work, is inescapable.

Application: Is this relationship helping you set up the highest standard for your life? How often led to adopt, accept, adapt, lower standards! How easily influenced by world around us!

II. *This standard is further derived from a sincere personal appreciation of the strong bond between time and eternity* (vv. 8-12). See Phillips' *Letters to Young Churches*

A. Most men naturally see no relationship between the two whatsoever.

No real concern or thought in life of man by nature for eternity or meaning of life in terms of such thought. Live as though life were to go on forever. Amply illustrated in thousands of ways all around us. Also in our own lives.

B. This relationship is necessary for the highest standard for worthy living.

Life which only meets the tests of time is empty and vain. It must have the high sense of eternity, that it will last beyond the vanities of this present life.

Application: Simple and direct. Illustration of man building house as temporary shelter, protection for a season, and building house to take care of needs for years to come. Only Christian can know the intimacy of relationship between time and eternity.

III. *Finally, this standard is derived from a real, personal sense of individual responsibility* (vv. 4, 10, 12)

A. The emphasis upon individual responsibility is basic to the whole argument of the Apostle.

1. In our judgment and criticism of others.
2. In our attitude toward ourselves.

B. We are responsible to the Lord Jesus Christ and to God as our Judge.

Here is the real climax of the text. Phillips: "At every turn life links us to God; and when we die, we come face to face with Him." And "we shall all be judged one day, not by each other's standards or even our own, but by the standard of Christ," and "it is to God alone that we have to answer for our actions."

The application, with the judgment scene in mind, is direct and personal.

Conclusion: We are always giving an account of our life. The accounting process goes on in every phase of life. Only when our standards for our daily living and conduct in all phases is the highest will life be truly worthy both now and forever.

Rockford, Ill.

ERICH V. OELSCHLAEGER

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ROM. 4:1-8

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,” says the Savior (Matt. 6:33). That righteousness is the most important thing in the world. The righteous man is the man whom God regards favorably; upon whom He looks as belonging to Him; of whom He thinks as His. How can we have that righteousness? The great chapter on that subject is Romans 3. In this postscript St. Paul restates his answer to the question by means of an object lesson, the patriarch Abraham, and he underscores the lesson with a quotation from Psalm 32.

WE ARE GOD’S CHILDREN BECAUSE HE REGARDS US SO

I. *It’s important to have God think of us as His children*

- A. The text speaks of the justified man, which means the man who has been made or regarded righteous; and it terms him the blessed man, one who is completely whole before God. For that is righteousness: to be, in the sight of the perfectly right God, one on whom He looks with favor.
- B. The righteous man is in right relation to God. He can pray to Him. He can produce “the fruits of righteousness” (Epistle for the day; Phil. 1:11), which are godly thoughts and deeds; he can look forward to an eternity with God. God is the opposite of all unrighteousness, He has wrath for sin; it’s important that God can nevertheless view the sinner as His own.

II. *But it’s human to imagine that God so regards us because of our behavior*

- A. The Jews, the children of Abraham after the flesh, were prone to believe that a human being is righteous before God because he does righteous deeds. The Pharisees, of whom Paul had been one, drove this assumption to its ultimate degree (Phil.

3:4-6). Hence Paul is anxious to correct this faulty assumption, especially in Romans 2 and 3. It's a part of the natural and fleshly self of every human being to imagine that his deeds "justify" him.

- B. But this assumption is fallacious. For the work itself is unrighteous; how can it make a man righteous? (Romans 2.) That way of justification, furthermore, is contrary to His plan; for His way is that which is not of man's deeds, but of God's grace, to be accepted not by doing, but by believing; text (v. 5).

III. *Hence the glory of God's way, that we are His because
He so regards us*

- A. The meaning of "justify": account as righteous, regard as righteous. God "justifies" us through an act of His regarding, accounting. The Psalmist expresses it: not imputing our sins to us (v. 8). In Abraham it worked this way: His trust in God's grace and goodness was accounted for righteousness, and he was not righteous because of his own deeds (v. 3; cf. Gen. 15:6).
- B. But how can God forgive? How can the holy God, whose scrutiny is constant and "with whom is no respect of persons" (Rom. 2:11; 1 Pet. 1:17), overlook a man's sin? Because He forgives sin, because sin is covered, namely, by the redeeming work of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24-25; text, v. 7). God is not ignorant of man's sin, nor does He simply ignore it, but He gives His own dear Son as Redeemer. He forgives sin because of the work of His Son.
- C. Hence we are made righteous before God simply by accepting this gift of His so regarding us; our righteousness is a gift which we take by faith and do not try to earn by works (v. 4). True, the Christian works, but He does so because God has made Him righteous and not in order to be made righteous.

This is the foremost question in the world: How are we righteous before God? And here is the answer: God does it all; He imputes righteousness without works. All the rest of our precious and important relations with God build on this foundation. May nothing move us from it!

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ACTS 20:26-32

The work and importance of the ministry often take a strange turn. Signs are not lacking that Lutherans are also affected. This text is usually reserved for pastoral conferences. It is certainly profitable for congregations to know what they may expect of their called servants and what the N. T. norms are for a blessed ministry. It will be both humbling and strengthening for the pastor to work through this selection.

THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPEL MINISTRY

I. *The work of the ministry*

A. To declare the Word fearlessly (v. 27).

1. Paul did not shrink to make known the counsel of God. He did not tone down the message though there seemed to be sufficient reasons—contrary to reason, militates against pride, roots out tradition, invites the ill will of men, assails bigotry and narrowness, demands full acceptance; in short, the Gospel never fits in with the spirit of the times.
2. Paul preached the entire counsel of God. He was not liberal, progressive, conservative, nor reactionary. He continued loyally with the Word: sin and grace; declared what the God-Man had done for us, what the man of God does for Him.
3. Preached only the Word ("of God").

B. To pasture the whole flock (v. 28).

1. The ministry is more than proclaiming. The minister is also the pastor who "keeps sheep," i. e., does all that a shepherd does for his sheep: feeds, guides, protects, binds the wounded, fights for, loves (Is. 40:11; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:2; John 21:16; 10:1-16).
2. The whole flock. He does not lose sight of the individual (Matt. 18:12). Rich and poor; strong (those who "behave") and weak (those who "misbehave"); sheep and lambs.

II. *The guardianship of the ministry*

- A. The ministry is a trust from God.
Neither the office nor the appointment is of man. A sacred trust which requires faithfulness. Steward (1 Cor. 4:1 ff.); ambassador (2 Cor. 5:20); husbandman (1 Cor. 3:9); slave (Rom. 1:1).
- B. Therefore God holds the minister accountable for the souls (Ezek. 3:18-21).
Paul was not an accessory to the eternal death of a soul (v. 26); Acts 18:6; 2 Cor. 7:2).
- C. This guardianship demands constant self-watch (v. 28: "take heed," present tense).
Cp. also 1 Tim. 4:16 — against ambitions, indolence, professionalism, fears and doubts, and special weaknesses.

III. *The importance of a faithful ministry*

- A. The church is redeemed by God's blood (v. 28).
This love of God is a basic consideration for a faithful ministry. The guardianship of the pastor is no trifling matter. It is a blood-bought flock.
- B. The church is in constant danger (vv. 29-30).
Paul knew what was coming (Matt. 7:15; 1 Tim. 4:1 ff.). He had experienced it. He mentions no names, but classifies.
1. Errorists from without coming in the guise of the Word. The manifest heathen are not meant, but the abusers of the Word. Hence so dangerous.
 2. Also the division makers from within.
- C. Paul's own ministry shows that faithfulness is so important (v. 31).
There is no complaining of the "sacrifices" he made as a minister. God's love for him, the church, and the world seals his mouth.

IV. *The promises given to the faithful minister* (v. 32)

The minister is commended to God and the Word.

- A. These build up.
The one source which builds the church also builds the pastor. Use it.

B. These will glorify him.

They assure him of the inheritance with the saints already glorified.

St. Louis, Mo.

ARTHUR C. REPP

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

REV. 3:7-13

The end of the church year is at hand. It is a good time to take stock not only as individual Christians, but as congregations as well. The text affords the opportunity. Accordingly we ask ourselves:

IS OURS A CONGREGATION PATTERNED AFTER PHILADELPHIA?

- I. *Does it merit the Lord's praise?*
- II. *Does it heed the Lord's admonition?*
- III. *Does it cherish the Lord's promise?*

I

V.7. "The Holy One," who Himself is without sin, but has atoned for the sins of the whole world; "He that is true," whose Word is reliable; "He that hath the key of David," Himself the true David, the Son of Man, the Savior of the world; the All-knowing ("I know thy works," v. 8). This we must remember; for then praise, admonition, promise, come into their own.

"Thou hast a little strength" (v. 8). Congregation at Philadelphia not large, perhaps also poor in possessions and in members with prestige. Before the world it was a small, despised group. And yet it had "strength," was powerful and glorious in the eyes of God. This is unfolded to us in the text.

"Thou hast kept My Word" (v. 8). God's Word, the Gospel of grace, is "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1:16; 1 Peter 1:5). It is important that a congregation not only have the Word of God, but also follow it in faith and life.

"Thou hast not denied My name" (v. 8). Cp. Matt. 10:32-33. Many like Peter deny their Savior.

Is ours a congregation patterned after Philadelphia? Praise God,

we have the Word in its truth and purity. But does everyone also believe it with all his heart? Does everyone build his salvation alone on the grace of God in Christ Jesus? Does everyone in his private living conduct himself according to God's Word? Does everyone confess his Christian faith freely and clearly before the ungodly world? Blessed are you if you are able to answer these questions with a resounding "yes"; for then you, too, have a little strength. Then ours is a congregation patterned after Philadelphia.

II

"Hold fast that which thou hast" (v. 11). There is no greater treasure in the whole wide world than the Word of God (Ps. 119: 96-105). Alas, too many have lost it by their own fault! This is true today also. "Deeds, not creeds" is demanded more loudly right along. Unionism is the password in visible Christendom. We, too, are imperiled (1 Cor. 10:12). Retaining and clinging to the Word of God, we are despised as being unscientific, fossilized, outmoded, dogmatic, intolerant. God have mercy on us and His poor Christendom!

With the loss of God's Word man loses his salvation as well. "That no man take Thy crown" (v. 11). Loss of money and goods, loss of health, prestige with men, etc., are hardly to be compared with the loss of the crown of glory. And how quickly may one be summoned before the judgment seat of God! (1 Pet. 1:24.) "Behold, I come quickly!" (V. 11.)

Are we heeding the signs of the times, the Lord's admonition in them? Then a congregation patterned after Philadelphia.

III

"Him that overcometh," etc. (V. 12.) Here a pillar of the Church, hereafter gloriously adorned as child of God (1 John 3: 1-2); will enter the new Jerusalem, will be like his Savior (Phil. 3:21; John 17:22, 24).

Will a congregation be able to withstand? The answer is given v. 10. We are living in the times "of temptation which shall come upon all the world." Cp. the sad conditions of the year now ebbing to a close. Thereby God tries men. But all too few accept direction. But God will keep those who are faithful to Him. There lies our comfort.

Every Christian congregation is to be a mission-minded congregation (Mark 16:15). The text tells us that God will crown these our efforts with success (v. 8). He has set before us "an open door." However meager our efforts have been, God has certainly crowned them with success during the past church year. Ours has been the work, but God alone gave the increase. Even some of worst enemies gained (v. 9). Extremely difficult work among Mohammedans just begun. Thereby our courage to do mission work is renewed. We are so often fearful and timid because we rely upon ourselves rather than upon God's certain and glorious promises (1 Cor. 15:57-58).

V. 13. May it please God that ours qualifies as a congregation patterned after Philadelphia.

Adapted from a German outline, CONCORDIA THEOL. MONTHLY, Vol. XI, No. 11, page 839 ff.

Duluth, Minn.

WALTER H. BOUMAN

THANKSGIVING

1 PETER 2:9

How clearly men have again revealed themselves as selfish, self-centered, conceited, proud, managers of their affairs, masters of their fate! It has always been so, will always be so. 1 Peter 2:9 therefore commends itself as an ideal Thanksgiving text. Well known to pastor and people, it may never have been used in the parish for Thanksgiving Day. It gives us opportunity to discuss the fact that

WE CHRISTIANS ARE THE THANKSGIVERS OF THE WORLD

In the introduction the preacher could refer to one or more important roles of Christians: World evangelists, light of the world, salt of the earth. In our text the thanksgivers of the world.

I. *We were chosen for this*

Text: "Chosen generation . . . that ye should show forth." Chosen means picked out from among others. Israel chosen from among all other nations (Deut. 7:6-7; Is. 43:10, 20). Today God chooses individuals. You and I among them. Chosen in Christ (don't let the hearer forget this) out of a thankless world. Men show themselves proud. They *won't* give thanks. But we are chosen for that very purpose. Chosen not just to be God's children, but

to live as God's children. Part of living is thanksgiving. Text: "To show forth." We praise Him as the Redeemer, the Sanctifier of men, but also as the Giver of all gifts: government by the people, another President, produce of our farms, products of our factories. God gives daily bread also to all the wicked. May He lead us to know it and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. Never forget: We are chosen to be thanksgivers of the world.

II. *This we are privileged to be*

Text: "Royal priesthood." Unbelievers *cannot* pray. Can't approach God's throne. Their "prayers" a mockery. We are God's friends, His children through Christ.

As kings we are *prepared* for prayer: Trusting, confident, assured. Luther: "To the true believing kings who are in Christ's kingdom, shame is glory, hell is heaven, death is life, the devil a strawman, sin is righteousness, misfortune fortune, poverty riches. For they are lords of all . . . have God as their Father, in whom they have riches, great treasure, and all good things in richest measure."

As priests we are *called* to pray. A part of our office. Unbelievers cannot pray, but we can pray for ourselves and them. Though God in a measure makes us dependent on them to produce the crops, mine the coal, manufacture the products, prepare the prescription we need from day to day, He put us in the control room of the whole world with our prayers. Faithful Jacob fed from the granaries of pagan Egypt that Joseph, God's child, had caused to be filled. Unbelievers won't acknowledge our role, but that causes us no concern. We are concerned that God give them daily bread to keep them alive that they may yet acknowledge the true Bread of Life, who Himself prayed when He fed the five thousand and still feeds the thousands in answers to the prayers of His children, the thanksgivers of the world.

III. *This we are actually called by God*

We don't deserve the title. If God waited for man's prayers and praises, the unbelievers would receive nothing and we Christians very little. What shameful neglect! Hymn: What peace we often forfeit! But the Lord is gracious, calls us a holy people. Text. Has

created us to good works and constantly makes up for our lack and laziness. What reason to thank and praise Him who has chosen us to such a glorious life, has given us such an exalted privilege, and, forgiving our neglect, gives us a place of honor at His side!

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MARK J. STEEGE

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 17:20-25

Rather than ask the Savior *when* the Kingdom of God would *come*, the Pharisees should have asked Him, "What *is* the Kingdom of God?" The answer to the latter shows the irrelevance of the former. Setting aside, then, the pride of the Pharisees, who deemed themselves "masters in Israel," let us humbly seek to learn from our Lord

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

I. *It is not a carnal, this-worldly kingdom*

A. This view was and is widely prevalent.

1. Deeply imbedded in national mind in Christ's day. Messianic idea of that age largely temporal and materialistic — a salve to the pride of Jews chafing and suffering under alien yoke. View even of the Twelve, till after Ascension (Acts 1:6 f.), despite frequent instructions (Luke 19:11; 21:7; etc.).
2. Still current — not always by the name, nor only among religionists. A heaven on earth to be promoted politically, economically, technologically, as well as chiliastically. Inherently suspect are all efforts to promote Christianity *because* it brings peace, freedom, plenty: they secularize Christianity.

B. This view is essentially pagan, as natural man is.

1. A flowering of the flesh; therefore a fascinating idea. Stems from original sin: "the things of the Spirit of God . . . are foolishness," whereas solid values are always of pride, intellect, senses. Characteristic of heathen heaven, whether in this world or next.

C. If this view were correct, the Pharisees' question would be in place.

1. The Kingdom could then be fixed in time and space.
2. It would have its accompaniments of circumstance, appurtenances.
3. Exact schedule of approach and arrival would be important.

II. *Rather, the Kingdom is spiritual and other-worldly*

A. It is spiritual and hence invisible.

1. It is spiritual, for it comes only by the will of the Spirit (John 3:8). Affects the inner life of man first (Ps. 51:10); then the outward expressions thereof. The means of admission: Means of grace (John 3:5), spiritual in kind. Requires spiritual qualifications, especially humility (Mark 10:15; James 4:6) and faith (Heb. 11:6; Eph. 2:8; etc.) Entrance: Christ, the Door.
2. It is consequently invisible. "Within" or (unseen) "among" you (v. 21). In either view — the disagreement is complete — connotation of ἐντός is the invisibility of the Kingdom. No signs, terrestrial dates, of its coming are possible or even needed; no "Lo, here" or "there"; seen only by faith, "the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1 RSV). To all others: unreal, silly, profitless figment.

B. It is other-worldly.

1. Its nature is such: "Our commonwealth is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20 RSV). Called, particularly in St. Matthew, kingdom of *heaven*. Entered by renouncing love of the world (1 John 2:15), rejecting flesh for the Spirit (Rom. 8:9, 13), and self for Christ (Gal. 2:20), and by recognition of reality of the unseen (2 Cor. 4:18).
2. Its revelation, in full glory and to all, at world's end, when carnal and temporal done with. Called "day" or "days" "of the Son of Man" (vv. 24, 22). Manifestation sudden but certain to everyone (v. 24). No chiliasm: persecutions to the end (v. 22). Certain premonitory signs that "the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (Luke 22, espec. v. 31), but still so general that "of that day and that hour knoweth no man" (Mark 13:32).

III. *The Kingdom is the achievement, for us, of Christ's Passion*

- A. First, to make the Kingdom possible, *His* sufferings for us (v. 25), that the world, with its lust of flesh and eyes of pride of life (1 John 2:16), together with the consequences of death and hell, may be overcome (John 16:33).
- B. But first also *our* suffering (text, v. 22; Acts 14:22) and our victory in Him (1 John 5:4).
- C. Then the eternal sharing of His kingdom (Rev. 3:21).

Hence the admonitions of the Savior: Matt. 6:33; Matt. 16:24-27. Latter particularly spoken regarding His last coming. World wants temporal blessings of Kingdom — without cost of crucifying its flesh to enter Kingdom. Child of God desires Kingdom itself — and gratefully receives, as bonus of mercy, consequent temporal blessings.

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