

Concordia Theological Monthly



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HOMILETICS

A ROYAL PRIEST—IN MY OWN HOUSEHOLD

The Theme for May.—Themes concerning the Royal Priesthood are discernible in the Propers for this month: Jubilate, the Collect and the Epistle; Rogate, the Epistle and the Gospel; Exaudi, the Epistle and the Gospel. The services as a whole do not particularize with reference to the Christian's household, but the applications are natural.

Sermon Study on 1 Peter 3:8-9

For Jubilate

The Day. The third Sunday after Easter is the day of Jubilate: "Make a joyful noise unto God." "Sing forth the honor of His name," and "make His praise glorious!" (Ps. 66:1-2.) It is the echo of the joy of Easter. Yet both the Gospel and the Epistle for the day seem, on first sight, to contain sad notes. In the Gospel lesson the disciples are sad because the Savior will leave them, and the Epistle lesson reminds Christians that they are strangers and pilgrims. Yet the brightest hope shines through both lessons. Jesus will return, and the strangers are on a pilgrimage to a better world. In view of their high calling and glorious hope all those "that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion . . . eschew those things that are contrary to their profession and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same" (Collect). For, as James states (1:27), Christian living is pure worship.

This is the great sacrifice of royal priests, the members of the Christian Church. As Christ brought the sacrifice of death, so they are to bring the sacrifice of life (Rom. 12:1). Thus the text presents the royal priests not busied with sacrifices of herculean proportions nor evolving abstract ideals of cosmic implication, but striving, with the power of the Spirit, to make the High Priest's prayer "that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us" an actuality in their own household.

Context. In the verses which precede the section under consideration the Apostle gives divers instructions concerning the deportment

of the Christian in the world. The exhortations are preceded by the following words of the day's Epistle:

Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (2:12).

Then follow special instructions regarding duties of subjects (2:13-17), servants (2:18-25), wives (3:1-6), and husbands (3:7).

The words of vv. 8-9 apply to all Christians. "Although many differences of persons, language, office, and gifts may exist among Christians, they must nevertheless live, grow, and be preserved in the unity and identity of the spirit as in one body" (Luther). Homiletically the text may have ecumenical, local, or domestic application.

V. 8. The πάντες is in contrast to the differentiation in preceding verses. Whereas in external life it is necessary that there be distinctions of persons, stations, and duties, such distinctions are not to exist in the inner life. Hence the things which the writer is now about to say apply to all — servants, masters, wives, husbands, children, etc.

Τὸ δὲ τέλος is used adverbially — "finally" (L., *denique vero*; Vulgate, *in fine autem*). Profane authors usually omitted the article in this adverbial use. In philosophy τέλος came to be used for the end or goal and hence considered synonymous with "the good." The commentator Oecumenius feels that connotation of the word here. He finds in vv. 8-9 the goal or law for all striving, inasmuch as love is the fulfilling of the Law.

Peter now introduces a series of adjectives which are descriptive and hortatory. The first three reveal the loving unity of Christians and the last two (or three according to some readings) the attitude of the Christians to all.

Ὁμόφρονες is basic for Christian unity. "This virtue is the most prominent and necessary among Christians; for if the other virtues are to follow . . . the hearts must first of all be one and united" (Luther). The Greek word comes from ὁμός and φρήν. The latter designated the midriff, that is, the muscle which parted the heart and lungs. The φρήν was considered the seat of mental faculties (perception, thought, will, understanding) and also of emotions (fear, courage, joy). The intellectual attitudes and emotions of

Christians are to harmonize. Followers of Christ should be of one and the same mind and heart (concordant; Vulgate, *unanimes*; unanimous).

The same thought is expressed in different ways by the Apostle Paul: "Be of the same mind one toward another" (Rom. 12:16); "be like-minded one toward another (Rom. 15:5); "be like-minded" (Phil. 2:2).

The nature of the word here used shows that the intellectual and emotional harmony is to be no external gloss, but is to come from the innermost being. From the mental viewpoint the word would indicate agreement on the fundamental principles of life and with unity of will striving toward common goals and details of thought centering in such fundamental principles. Common perceptions, thoughts, and emotions are not created haphazardly, but arise in minds and hearts functioning on the basis of common principles. Thus the Christ-centered life is presupposed, which makes minds and hearts of the same quality and therefore of the same reactions. The unity is a Spirit-created unity, the result of "one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all" (Eph. 4:5-6).

The emotional connotations of the word are dependent on the mental. The common joy, courage, and fear would be occasioned by common perception, understanding, and will.

The above word and the following one contain notes of advice. Since basic unity contributes much to a harmonious household, a Christian foundation should be sought by those who are about to establish a home.

Drum prüfe, wer sich ewig bindet,
Ob sich das Herz zum Herzen findet!
Der Wahn ist kurz, die Reu' ist lang. — Schiller.

In the established home the basic intellectual and emotional unity should be kept alive and strengthened by active use of the Word (Col. 3:16-17).

The translation "having compassion one of another" for *συμπαθεῖς*, while radically correct, might give a wrong impression of the idea which Peter here presents. The word comes from *σύν* and *πάσχειν*. The latter means to receive an action from without, to receive or feel an impression. The impression itself may be good

or bad. The Greek word, then, primarily means "receiving the same impressions," "feeling the same way," reacting the same way."

The use of the word in music may afford a deeper insight into its meaning. Theon of Smyrna (2d cent.) used it for chords which vibrate together. If a sound catches one chord and causes it to vibrate, then those which are in harmony with it also vibrate. Similarly Polybius (2d cent. B. C.) uses the word for sympathetic vibration of bronze vessels. Philosophers used the word for affinity of body and soul or the parts of the body with one another.

Perception of things and resulting emotions, scholars say, depend on two things: the stimuli which come from without and that which the recipient is. This thought carries back to the basic quality which must be present before there can be genuine Christian sympathy, namely, the fundamental nature and unity of Christ-centered lives.

The chords previously mentioned furnish an illustration of Christian sympathy. The chords may be of different lengths, but the vibration of one is caught by all in harmony with it. In the household, too, there are different age levels, varying powers of perception, unequal powers of will; but basically all should be unified in Christ. Hence stimuli, whether good or bad, produce harmonious, sympathetic responses. This applies to joys as well as sorrows. It requires hearty and manly Christianity, with Bible-based confidence, to enter into the joys of others. To sympathize with sorrows, on the other hand, means more than a passing sigh. It means getting in and actively bearing the burden. True sympathy means actions, not moods. The father who enters into his son's joys and sorrows may himself maintain an equilibrium. For additional thoughts see Rom. 12:15; Heb. 4:15; Heb. 10:34.

The next adjective comes from φίλος and ἀδελφός. Φιλεῖν describes the feeling evoked by something pleasant in the object loved. "Like" would probably translate it better than "love." We like those who have attitudes similar to our own. The compound, then, means "like each other as brothers and sisters," "mutual love between brothers." In 1 Maccabees the compound is used for the attitude which Israelites should have toward fellow Israelites. In the New Testament it is used for love among Christians (*amor fraternitatis*. Cf. Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1; *et al.*). Christians are

attracted by something worth while in one another. They like one another because they have much in common and can appreciate Christian character.

Εὖσπλαγχοι literally means "with good bowels." The bowels were considered the seat of feeling among the Greeks, though chiefly the feeling of anger. In the New Testament the bowels are considered the seat of finer feelings, such as mercy, kindness. The compound is used only in the physical sense in classical Greek. The expression here means that the Christian has potentialities for love and kindness, he is inclined to mercy.

The translators of the A. V. may have followed the reading φιλόφρονες when they translated "courteous." The word preferred by the better manuscripts is ταπεινόφρονες. Since both words end in the same way, there is a possibility that both were in the original and that scribal error caused the deletion of one or the other.

The first word would occur only here in the New Testament. It, however, occurs frequently in classical authors and means "kindly-minded," "friendly." This is a characteristic which the Christian should have toward all, even those who are not of one mind with him. Serious-minded people are apt to forget this suavity and urbanity.

The second word had a negative meaning in the classics — "faint-hearted," "mean-spirited," "base." The New Testament uses it with a good connotation: "having a humble spirit," "having a modest opinion of oneself" (cf. Acts 20:19; Phil. 2:3; Eph. 4:2). Here, again, Christ is the great Example (Phil. 2:1-8). For the Christian to have a humble spirit does not imply hypocrisy. It is not necessary for him to act "below his level." All that is required is straightforward honesty and understanding of self. Honest self-evaluation kept Paul (1 Cor. 15:9) and Peter (Acts 3:12) humble. Rom. 3:22-27 is a sufficient mirror for all.

V. 9. In the previous verse the Apostle has dealt with qualities which are mutual in the Christian household. There are, however, times when the positive virtues are not reciprocal. Often Christians are placed in environments where they must suffer evil and even abusive treatment.

When "unity" and "sympathy" are absent and even "to like"

seems impossible, the Christian must draw heavily upon *agape*, the love created in the heart by the Spirit. He loves and deals kindly with hostile men, not because of what they are, but because of that which the Holy Ghost has made him; not because of things which his fellow men do to him, but because of something which God has done in and through him. The source of his action is the spontaneous love of Christ which moved Him to die for men who were His enemies (Rom. 5:10).

On the basis of that love the Christian does not reward evil for evil. The *κακόν* is general. The Christian is not to meet any kind of baseness with counterbaseness. There should be no tit for tat, no eye for an eye, no tooth for a tooth.

While the *lex talionis* has disappeared from civilized parlance, its principles are still strongly entrenched in the hearts of men and also Christians must be constantly on guard against it. When a person fears that someone will hurt him in his profession, business, or socially, his first impulse is to fight fire with fire, to give evil for evil. It is regarded a matter of survival to treat others as they treat you. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy," said the old Jewish maxim (Matt. 5:43). Such action is not only unchristian, it is also foolish. Who would think of overcoming evil in children that way? The second evil does not wipe out the first, but only makes a bad situation worse. "Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the Lord, and He shall save thee" (Prov. 20:22). "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men" (1 Thess. 5:15. Cf. Rom. 12:17). Christianity is positive, not negative. It is a life, a spirit—not a code, not a legal formulation. Vengeance would sacrifice the life to evil; the good, vanquished, would rely on its opposite to combat baseness.

A particular kind of evil, and one of the most difficult to endure, is covered by the word *λοιδορία*. The etymology of this word is uncertain. It means to rail at, to abuse, to revile. The children of Bethel reviled Elisha (2 Kings 2:23). The mockery of the Jews while Christ was on trial and on the Cross is classed as raillery (1 Peter 2:23). The Pharisees reviled the man whom Jesus healed on the Sabbath Day (John 9:28). That such abusive, reviling speech is not lightly regarded in Sacred Scripture is shown by the

fact that revilers are classified with fornicators, covetous, idolaters, drunkards, and extortioners (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10).

In the heathen world raillery was common. The old man, the cripple, those having physical or mental defects, as well as others were often subject to raillery. The heathen gods themselves were guilty of it.

Christians are not to meet abusive, railing, reproachful language with the same kind of speech, but, on the contrary, with "blessing." The Christian is to wish the reviler well (Vulgate, *benedicentes*) and show him kindness by word and deed (cf. Matt. 5:44-48). Some commentators have referred the εἰς τοῦτο to εὐλογοῦντες, "we were called to bless those that revile us." It is better to take the ἵνα clause as appositive: "to this, namely, to inherit a blessing, we were called." The blessing is not to be obtained as a reward for work, for it is to be an inheritance. The blessing which we are to inherit, however, should motivate us to bless.

This blessing is primarily in the world to come. That this world is not entirely excluded is shown by vv. 10-12 (*benedictionem aeternam, cuius primitias iam nunc pii habent.* — Bengel).

Homiletics. Sermons on this text may differ in scope. The Christian in the world of converted and unconverted may be the center of interest. The royal priest may be considered in the entire visible Church or in the local congregation. The term "household" would then be used in its wider sense, meaning all who are apparently of the household of faith. Finally, it may be applied to the Christian as a royal priest in the home.

OUR LOVE TOWARD OUR OWN

- I. It consists of true inner unity
- II. It fosters kindness and humility
- III. It triumphs over evil and scorn

or

- I. Qualities of our Love
 - A. consentient
 - B. sympathetic
 - C. brotherly

- II. Characteristics of our love
 - A. kind
 - B. humble
- III. Power of our love
 - A. overcomes evil with good
 - B. concentrates on blessings

THE ROYAL PRIEST IN HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD

- I. He fosters basic harmony
- II. He displays kindness and humility
- III. He maintains his Christian attitude in difficult situations

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