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ARCHIVES

Outlines on Hannover Epistles

PENTECOST

ACTS 8:14-25

Pentecost brings the wonderful story of the heart-moving and faith-creating powers of the Holy Ghost, which make the Gospel a power of God unto salvation. But while Pentecost thus reminds us of the converting and regenerating powers of the Holy Ghost, without which the Church would quickly founder and perish, Pentecost also brings the remarkable story of the miracles of speaking with tongues and of healing. These were particularly in evidence in the early Christian Church. It is with regard to these special gifts of the Holy Ghost that Christians are so frequently plagued with all manner of disturbing questions. — What was the purpose of these so-called charismatic gifts? Was every Christian endowed with them in the early Church? Why are they not more in evidence in the Christian Church today? What must a person do to acquire these special gifts of the Spirit?

The story in our text sheds considerable light on

THE SPECIAL GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST

I

Christians Come to Saving Faith Without Having These Special Gifts

A. The Samaritans were believing Christians.

Through Philip's Gospel preaching, there was "great joy in that city" (v. 8), and "they believed" (v. 12). These Samaritans had come to saving faith. They had accepted Jesus as their Savior and were baptized in His name. They had experienced the converting and regenerating powers of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Philip's preaching had so great a following in Samaria that even the Apostles heard about it in Jerusalem (text). Yet,

B. The Samaritans had not been endowed with the special gifts of the Holy Ghost.

V. 16 can only refer to these special gifts. Their faith, their Baptism, their joy in their salvation, gave proof of the Spirit's heart-moving work among them (1 Cor. 12:3). Not all Christians are endowed with healing and miracle-working powers. These gifts are distributed "severally" as God wills (1 Cor. 12:11-28 ff.). Think not, then, that a lack of these special gifts points to an inferior type of Christianity.

II

No One Can Earn, Purchase, or Acquire These Gifts at Will

A. The story of Simon (vv. 9-13).

Impressed with Philip's preaching and accompanying miracles, he gave up his sorcery. He recognized something higher and greater. He even believed and submitted to Baptism, but he could not keep his mind away from the miracles and signs that were done. If only he could acquire such powers! His attempt to purchase them (vv. 18, 19).

B. The reaction of Peter.

"Thy money perish with thee" (v. 20). "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (v. 21). "Thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" (v. 23). Simon's whole approach was wrong. He wanted these gifts to enhance his own position; to recapture his former greatness among the Samaritans. — Be sure you do not long for these special gifts for your own profit, to enhance your own importance. It warps your whole thinking concerning these gifts.

III

*God Bestows These Special Gifts on Whomsoever He Will
for the Benefit of All*

A. God bestowed these gifts on Philip (v. 6).

They were given him, not for his own personal advancement, but to lend power to his preaching. The Samaritans profited by them, even Simon, who learned that there is something higher than sorcery.

B. God bestowed these gifts upon Peter and John (v. 17).

They, too, used them for the benefit of the Samaritans, confirming them in their faith. Have we not all profited by these special gifts which God in His grace gave to some? Did they not strengthen our faith?

Be content with this grace and rejoice that through the workings of the Holy Ghost you have been brought to saving faith in Christ Jesus. Trust God to bestow His special gifts on whomsoever He will, whenever and wherever the growth of His kingdom is in need of them.

Tacoma, Wash.

A. W. SCHELP

TRINITY SUNDAY

2 COR. 13:14

Call attention to the root meaning of the beautiful old English word *good-by*: God be with you. A welcome remnant from a simpler age when outward expressions of piety were not considered abnormal or even fanatical. With the Trinity Festival we bid farewell to the festival half of the church year. Therefore the theme suggested by the closing verse of our text is very appropriate:

GOD BE WITH YOU¹

I

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ Be with You

A. The priority of grace.

1. A purely formal consideration: The order of the clauses here strikes us at first as abnormal. Our expectations are conditioned by the baptismal formula and the fixed creedal statements. But compare the usual benediction with which Paul closes his letters (Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 and

¹ Interestingly, *chairete* in v. 11 may be translated "good-by." Indeed, Moffatt does so translate it. (See also the R. S. V.) The striking play on words between v. 11 and v. 14 which then results in the English translation is, of course, not present in the Greek original. It should be noted that this outline depends almost entirely on v. 14. The occasion sufficiently justifies this treatment of the text. If this outline is followed, it may not be necessary to read the entire chapter from the pulpit.

2 Thessalonians). Our text is a liturgical amplification. On purely formal grounds, this is, therefore, the order we might expect.²

2. A deeper consideration: Grace is the one experience which as Christians we all know best. Thus in v. 5 Paul calls the Corinthian Christians back to their common experience of Christ. V. 14 is not a statement of mutual Trinitarian relationships, but of the order in which the Trinity is experienced by faith. Through the historical revelation of God in Christ we experience the love of God and the new life in the Spirit. Devotion to Christ first, then confession of Trinity. "The benediction is a prayer, and the fully developed doctrine of the Trinity has its theological roots in adoration of Jesus Christ" (Strachan).

B. The meaning of grace.

1. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is His divine favor merited by His whole redemptive action as set forth in the Gospel story. This grace rests on His supremely gracious act of self-giving undertaken for the sake of sinners—self-beggary (2 Cor. 8:9), self-humiliation (Phil. 2:5 ff.; cf. v. 3 of text). Consider the way we have come since Christmas.

2. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is a gift. — His act, as we have seen, was supreme self-giving. He gave of Himself completely in His historical life, that He might, through the Gospel of His forgiveness, give Himself to us now. The self-beggary was for our sake (2 Cor. 8:9. And the gift He now gives is nothing less than Himself. "Christ is in you" (v. 5).

II

The Love of God the Father Be with You

A. The Father's love is real.

The grace of Christ is "good news" because it gives convincing assurance of God's forgiving love. Because we know the grace, we know the love; not as an abstract idea, but as a living reality. The gracious favor of the Son is at once the loving favor of the Father. The gift of the Son's grace is the gift of the Father's love.

² A comparison with Rom. 5:1 ff., 1 Cor. 12:4 ff., and Eph. 4:4 ff. will show that the order of treating the three Persons of the Trinity is not fixed in Paul.

The Son gives Himself; the Father “so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son” (John 3:16).

B. The Father’s love is accessible.

If the Father so loved me, I can trust Him in everything (Rom. 8:32). Review various aspects of Father’s loving care as described in the explanation to the First Article. Even in life’s dark hours God’s love is sure. Example: A bereaved father asks: “Where was God when my son was killed in battle?” Answer of one who has become convinced of the Father’s love through Christ: “Where was God when His Son was killed on Calvary?”

III

*The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with You*³

A. The divine aspect of the Spirit’s fellowship.

If the Son is the Revelation and the Father is the Revealed, then the Spirit is the Revealer. He opens our minds and our hearts to the Son’s grace and the Father’s love. (See especially 1 Cor. 12:1 ff. and Rom 5:5.) Thus He creates that union with God which we know as faith. Paul can use the daring expression “Christ is in you” (v. 5) because of the overwhelming experience of the Spirit’s fellowship.

B. The human aspect of the Spirit’s fellowship.

The divinely created life of fellowship between God and man leads irresistibly to a new life of fellowship between man and man. This human side of the Spirit’s fellowship is the Church. The Spirit creates the Church through the Gospel, the “good news” of the gracious act of Christ, and the loving act of the Father. The Spirit sustains the Church through the gift of the Son’s grace and the Father’s love; namely, through the very life of Christ. Every pastor, alert to the particular needs and shortcomings of His congregation, will find a wealth of hortatory material in the first 13 verses of 2 Corinthians 13.

Repeat the theme and once more read the key verse.

Seattle, Wash.

WALTER BARTLING

³ For the purposes of this outline we take the genitive in the phrase *koinonia tou pneumatos* as both objective and subjective. Grammatical usage seems to favor the objective rendering, however. The best translation probably is “participation in the Spirit.”

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY JAMES 5:1-7

To the people who have learned the correct answer to the question: "Whom seek ye?" comes the other question: "What seek ye?"

During the festival half of the church year, we all learned anew that for our salvation we must seek indeed Jesus of Nazareth, not to betray Him and lead Him away to crucify Him, but to believe in Him for the forgiveness of our sins and for our salvation. As we went from Christmas and Advent to Ash Wednesday and Lent, to Good Friday and Easter, to Ascension Day and Pentecost, we sought and found the Prince of Life, who has in love made us the children of God.

Now, during the Trinity season of the church year, we learn anew the answer to the question:

WHAT SEEK YE?

I

Do We Seek Riches?

A. When we see the prosperity of the wicked (Ps. 73:2, 3), we may be tempted to make our goal and purpose in life the gathering of the riches of this sinful world. The rich man in the Gospel for today. That James writes a word of bitter denunciation on all such reminds us that there are many who do seek after riches as their great objective.

B. Lest we make riches our answer to the question "What seek ye?" see the fate of those who seek only after riches as their treasure heaped for the last days (vv. 1-3). Miseries shall come on them. Their riches are corrupted. As the rust eats their treasures, so their riches will be as a fire that will destroy them. In the Last Day you who seek only riches will be destroyed, as was the rich man, who lifted up his eyes in hell.

C. See also the results of such a goal in life (vv. 4-6). In your greed and selfishness you will cheat and defraud your fellow men, you will become wanton, you will abuse the just, making your way seem legal and just.

D. Realize that the Lord of Hosts will avenge such wickedness

and punish you. You may escape the condemnation of men, but you will not escape the judgment of God.

Therefore, as children of God who have learned to seek Jesus and His forgiveness, never make your answer to the question "What seek ye?" the answer that brings condemnation, namely, the riches of this world (1 Tim. 6:9, 10).

II

Do We Seek After Those Things Which Endure unto the Lord's Coming?

A. That which endures unto the coming of the Lord are things which are of the Lord. Righteousness before God, forgiveness, salvation; godly living, fair treatment of one another, honesty, etc.

B. Because these things last unto the coming of the Lord, they bring the Lord's blessings on us, such as answer to prayer, the care of the Lord of Sabaoth, and God's judgment of commendation. Those who seek after these are the "brethren" (v. 7) in Christ.

C. We are to seek after these things with patience (v. 7). As the farmer waits for the harvest after he has planted, as he waits patiently for the proper rains in expectation of the blessing of the harvest, so the child of God is patient in seeking after the glorious prize of God's salvation. Reverses, disappointments, and the success of the wicked will not keep him from seeking the things that endure to the Lord's coming. Like Lazarus in the Gospel, he looks patiently to the Savior.

What seek ye? What is your goal in life?

Springfield, Ill.

LEWIS C. NIEMOELLER

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JAMES 2:1-13

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:16). This is the burden of the old-line Epistle. Text contains a similar admonition.

WHY CHRISTIANS SHOULD NOT HAVE RESPECT TO PERSONS

I

They Are Christians

A. They have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ (who is) the Glory.

1. They profess faith in Jesus Christ, the second Person, who became man, humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death to give Himself a ransom for all, atoning for the sins of men by His active and passive obedience. It is worth noting that here and throughout the epistle of James indeed deals with Christian conduct, but ever does so on the basis of "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ," in which James is one with his brethren. "The entire substructure is soteriological." (Lenski, *Comm.*, p. 572.)

2. They worship Jesus as their Lord, the Glory. He is the Glory not only in the state of humiliation (Col. 2:9), but especially also in the state of exaltation (Phil. 2:9, 10). When Christians contemplate the celestial glory of their exalted Lord, they must consider the glory of men vain, not worth being impressed by it.

B. Christians are designated by James as "those who love God" (v. 5).

They love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19), and they love their neighbor for the same reason (1 John 4:11).

II

Because Preferring One to the Other Is Sin

A. The sin (vv. 2-4).

Two visitors come into the assembly of the congregation. The rich is given a prominent seat, the poor is almost disregarded. The readers are guilty of being respecters of persons, of judging by outward appearances. (In our day this sin frequently is racial discrimination.)

B. The folly of it.

1. God loves the poor, poor in earthly goods, but rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom. James refers to membership in the Church, where we find "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble" (1 Cor. 1:26). If these poor are believers, they are in reality rich, possessing spiritual wealth, grace, pardon, sonship. They are joint heirs with Christ (Heb. 1:12).

2. Unbelieving rich tyrannize, persecute, blaspheme, e.g., Pharisees, like Saul of Tarsus, who drew Christians before the judgment seats and blasphemed the holy name of Him by whom they were called. "No reason for bowing and scraping before some rich Jew, when these rich Jews treat a poor Jew with disdain."

C. The seriousness of this sin.

1. It is a transgression of the royal law of love (v. 9). On this hang all the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:40; Gal. 5:14).

2. V. 10. If one offers the excuse that by showing respect for the rich he is following the law of love, then the answer is v. 10. "Since when is keeping a part of the Law an excuse for transgressing some other part?" The Law is like a chain: when one link is broken, the chain is broken (v. 11). One sin makes us transgressors of the whole Law, subject to wrath, in need of repentance. Application to our own life (Luke 18:13).

3. The result of this sin. Unless men repent, they shall have judgment without mercy. Cf. the judgment scene (Matt. 25: 45, 46). There is something wrong with our faith if we have respect to persons (p. 4). As children of God we have reason for heeding admonition.

III

Christians Are Judged by Liberty's Law

A. Liberty's Law.

Not the Ten Commandments. He who lives by them is slave to them. Liberty's Law is often defined as the Gospel. Christians freely do the Law of themselves, moved by the power of the Gospel. We love God, who loved us and gave His Son to be a Propitiation for our sins. We are besought by the mercy of God.

B. The admonition (v. 12).

Ever speak and act as people who accept the Word by living faith. Then we shall bear in mind John 12:48. The Word is not the Law of liberty because it exempts us from the Law, but because it impels us to gratitude for the mercy of God, to willing obedience.

C. Judged by the Law of liberty, we shall have boldness on the Day of Judgment.

According to Matthew 25, Jesus looks upon our works of love as evidences of our faith and invites us to inherit the Kingdom prepared for us.

Thus mercy boasts against judgment, the mercy produced by the mercy of God, the evidence of faith. Thus we may have boldness on the Day of Judgment.

May God preserve us from loveless discrimination, from respect of persons, from sin in any form. May He grant us grace and an appreciation of His love and mercy, that we may heed the admonition of our text and that of 1 John 3:16, 23.

St. Louis, Mo.

PAUL KOENIG