

# Concordia Theological Monthly



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## *Outlines on the Nitsch Epistles*

SEXAGESIMA

ROMANS 5:1-11

*Special Accent or Purpose.*— This text is a combination of appreciation for God's tremendous love in the sacrifice of His Son and a statement of how we (ought to) live because we are reconciled to God. This is a fitting text to help the church in her transition from the Christmas-Epiphany to the Passion-Easter season. It traces the need for a Savior in its "while we were" expressions, emphasizes God's determination to do something about it and the plan He carried out. The purpose is appreciation and gratitude for God's action and a corresponding expression of joy over our new status because of it. The theme might be: *Rejoice in the fact that God has rescued you from an "impossible state of affairs" and has given you the power to glimpse His glory in all things, even tribulation.*

"A Changeless Christ for a Changing World." True, God is changeless. He, nevertheless, is a changing God in the active sense of the verb. He changes things. He brings life out of death, peace out of war, joy out of sorrow, love out of hate, good out of evil. While the world is changing in many ways, without God it would be changeless in the only way that really counts. Without God we would remain unchanged in our spirit and life. We would be altogether the old Adam. There would be no new man. But with God changing us by the power of His love, we live a life which would be impossible without Him. We are helped by knowing that our God holds in His authority the power to change.

### "A Changing God for a Changeless World"

I. *Before becoming Christians, we were in need of change and could do nothing about it ourselves*

A. Because we were helpless to do so (v.6). Change depends on power. In natural state we have no spiritual power. Even our righteousness is as filthy rags. Gospel: helpless to understand the Word of God by themselves. (Luke 8:10)

B. Because we were godless or ungodly (v.6). Not only helpless but worse, without God. Man's choice was to live without God, apart from Him, separated from Him, the state of death. Concupiscence is the history of man's rejection of all that is godly, good, righteous, etc.

C. Because we were sinners (v.8). Not only without God but transgressors of His laws, full of sin and wickedness. All kinds of sin—

original (last half of this chapter is a commentary), actual, both omission and commission. Against God and against fellow men. Sin offends God, drives Him away.

D. Because we were enemies of God (v. 10). Not only transgressors of laws but against the Lawmaker, and He against us. From our point of view, this meant resentment, rebellion, hatred of God. From God's point of view, it meant smashing judgment of death.

II. *God has responded to our need and not only has created the possibility of a change for us but has produced it in us*

A. God has provided a means of reconciliation (v. 11) and established peace (v. 1). "At the right time" (v. 6) the Prince of Peace was born. Peace between God and man. Enemies are to be reconciled by the Mediator. How? By His blood and resurrection (v. 10). This is the bridge from Christmas to Easter. The action of God in the interest of men.

B. By the Holy Spirit, God has communicated the love He has for us (v. 5). The action of Christ is transmitted to us by the Holy Spirit. God takes the initiative again, as in creation and redemption. Even as we were helpless to reconcile, apathetic toward it, yes, hostile against it, so we could not discover the reconciliation accomplished by God. Spirit makes this known to us through the Word. Today's Gospel.

C. The Spirit's work engenders faith in Christ, who alone is our Access to God (vv. 1, 2). Jesus Christ is our Door (John 10), and we come to the Father only through Him, the Way, Truth, and Life (John 14:6). As we were helpless, enemies, sinners, etc., through Adam, so now we become powerful, lovers of God, holy, etc., through Christ. (Romans 5:12 ff.)

III. *Our lives are changed as a result of God's love and work*

A. We now rejoice in God (v. 11) and in our hope of sharing His glory (v. 2). In our helpless, sinful, hostile state, we could share only the shame of death and "live" in fear of God. We were powerless to change. Now, because of God's love, we *rejoice* in God and become sharers in His glory. His glory is His power, holiness, love, joy, everlasting life. We are no longer helpless, but can do all things through Christ; no longer godless, but Christ dwells in us; no longer sinners, but washed clean in the blood of the Lamb; no longer enemies of God, but lovers of God.

B. We rejoice in whatever God sends us to alter our lives, for He changes only for good (vv. 3-5). Those who share the glory of God also share the glory of His sufferings. Today's Epistle. These do not discourage us, but they are a cause for rejoicing, because sorrow produces Christian virtues which never let us down.

From the day of our birth we stand in need of change, but we are powerless, apathetic, actually hostile toward the One who can produce it. In spite of our hostility, God manifests His love to us by working out our salvation and imparting it to us. As God changes us and grants us the gifts of joy, peace, power, we will express them in our lives to His glory and our own great rejoicing.

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EDWARD MAY

### QUINQUAGESIMA

JAMES 3:13-18

"Who is wise and understanding among you?" We'd probably have plenty of volunteers. "I am," many would answer. Perhaps not highly educated, but I have practical business sense; if not that, then adept at handling people; if not that, then genius at homemaking and child training; perhaps not that, then truly pious, etc. James' readers thought themselves wise. Many trying to be teachers to the rest. We all do that occasionally in conversation. But *true wisdom is Christ Himself. Having Him by faith, we have Wisdom; and when He rules our lives, we live by Wisdom, show a life of meekness like His own life.*

I. *True wisdom is Christ Himself, and we can be wise only by faith in Him*

A. Jesus Christ is the Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24; Col. 2:3). How can a person be wisdom? Here's how: God planned in His wisdom a course of action to remedy our sin. His plan materializes and becomes concrete from 4 B.C. to A.D. 29—30 as Christ enters flesh, lives under sting and bite of our sin, dies on the cross the death we deserved, rises to proclaim that He has fulfilled God's wise plan. Made God's wisdom concrete by taking it out of planning stage into action. Hence He is God's Wisdom made concrete, Fulfiller of God's wise thoughts.

B. By faith in Jesus Christ we can have wisdom. James 1:5,6: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask in faith." Definition: Faith means holding onto Jesus Christ. Christ is Wisdom of God. Hence true faith is having hold on God's own Wisdom. Through hold of faith on Him God's forgiveness and peace are yours through Him.

## II. *Wisdom will show itself in our living*

A. Wisdom is Christ living in you. Text: "wisdom from above." Definition: Not encyclopedic knowledge; not philosophical frame of mind; not being able to beat everyone else in arguments. Wisdom in Bible is ability to make right decisions in living. It is an automatic pilot keeping plane of life on course. Can do this because Wisdom is Christ dwelling in you, teaching you what to do in complex and difficult situations life presents. Illustration: Children, this is like having your schoolteacher with you all the time you're doing your homework. Wonderful!

B. Wisdom will show itself in a life of meekness (vv. 13b, 17). Wisdom will always show in behavior. This will be the kind of behavior you'd expect of Christ, since Wisdom is Christ in you. "I am meek and lowly of heart" (Matt. 11:29). Hence you will be meek, living at peace with others. Today's Epistle (1 Cor. 13). Peace (definition) not just cessation of hostilities. Has come to mean that today when we're relieved with just negative peace among nations. But in N. T. peace is a bond between people making them one through Christ. Life of God best cultivated with others. Peace is bond which ties together with others. Wisdom within will help you to behave in love toward others so as to cultivate that bond of peace. Harvest of righteous behavior. (Text, v. 18)

## III. *Bitter jealousy, ambition, and boasting are the opposite of behavior based on Wisdom; they originate with devils*

A. Jealousy, ambition, and boasting are opposites to wisdom, and they are false to the truth (v. 14). Truth means that God's plan of redemption in Christ is carried out in human lives. When you cut other lives off from Christ by your jealousy, ambition, boasting, you prevent His plan from coming true in them through your witness. Hence you are false to the truth.

B. Such impulses produce a harvest of disorder and every vile practice (v. 16). This behavior breaks up the bond of peace between people. Others become tools for your own ends. You throw tools aside after use. When this happens in a workshop, it is soon disorderly, can't find anything, can't do work properly. Jealousy, ambition, and boasting, since they use others as tools and throw them aside, can hurt the workshop of the church of Christ.

C. Such impulses originate with devils, are earthly, and unspiritual. When you stop listening to the voice of Wisdom, i. e., Christ, you will listen to the voice of the devil (v. 15). Devil's objective: to keep

God's plan from materializing wherever he can, i. e., to prevent the *truth*. Hence he is a liar and the father of lies. He works to get us to manifest jealousy, ambition, boasting, in order to wreck the peace bond we have with others and keep God's plan from coming true in others through us and in us through them.

Wisdom can be ours today as Christ by faith moves into our lives, helps us to heed His counsel, to live out His meekness at peace with those around us. Result: God's plan will be realized in us and around us and through us. Want Wisdom, for to want Wisdom is to want Christ Himself.

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WILLIAM BACKUS

### INVOCAVIT

### GALATIANS 5:13-18

Today first Sunday in Lent—*in* but not *of* Lent, in spite of the fact, that violet paraments color the chancel. Like saying: "Christians are *in*, but not *of*, the world." They are still colored by their environment. On Sundays in Lent we are never far from Gethsemane, Via Dolorosa, or Calvary. Every Sunday is shadowed by the cross of Christ. The very freedom we speak about this morning is characterized by the cross—by which it was won and which it bears.

Christian freedom is utterly different from all that men call freedom. Our sinful nature makes us wish to be "free from God"—that delusion which makes men say that when they can do as they wish, when they are free from all external authority, when they have tamed conscience, then they are free. In reality they are enslaved to passion, lust, anxiety, sin, death, hell. That freedom is always self-assertive, shadowed by self, and completely unsatisfactory when at last the appetites are jaded.

Christian freedom also differs from political freedom—though both kinds are "bought with a price," both are gifts, both carry responsibility. The minutemen, doughboys, and bomber crews did not die for the kingdom of God, and Jesus Christ did not die to preserve the "American way of life." Political freedom frees man from the coercion of the state. But even in free societies there are jails and mental institutions, which seem to suggest that a free state cannot really free a man, least of all from himself. It can only give him the opportunity to find freedom. But freedom is not something you find or achieve. It is a release, a new birth, a gift, a calling. Our human destiny of freedom, frustrated and forfeited by sin, is restored to us by Jesus Christ, who became a servant, one of us, a life-span human, to live as a man among us and to die to set us free from death, caused by sin. For the Christian

freedom is always realized in community, the community of church and neighborhood. It is a freedom in service (bondage, slavery) to God and man. Both St. Paul and St. Peter make it clear that the Christian slave is a truly free man, while his pagan master is in utter bondage. Thus Christian freedom is unconditional and not environmental.

### Called for Freedom

#### I. *You were called for the purpose of freedom*

A. Man wishes to be free — from God. God wishes man to be free — in Him. God calls man from bondage to freedom, from darkness to light, from death to life. Freedom is not absence of constraint but a way of life. Would you say that Jesus was free? In every way? He has freed us from trying to achieve freedom, from our slavery to self, from defiance, from paralyzing fears. Your calling is to follow Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. You are not free until you freely wish to please God, until you freely follow Christ, until you freely love your neighbor as yourself. And only God can set you free to live in this kind of freedom. Such God-motivated people do not need the coercion of an external law. This is the good news of redemption, the meaning of Christ's death on the cross and of His Resurrection — your freedom as children of God. "If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed" (John 8:36). Review Jesus' discussion of this freedom.

B. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh (v. 13). The flesh (σάρξ) is not the body (σῶμα). Your σῶμα is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), your σάρξ is not. Flesh (σάρξ) in the New Testament includes our body, mind, emotions, spirit (our "higher" nature, as well as our "lower" nature). When our whole being centers in self, not to satisfy the needs of the body but the evil desires of the self — this is "the lust of the flesh." The flesh uses sex to satisfy lust, possessions to satisfy acquisitiveness, publicity to advertise self. But the fleshly abuse does not make our bodies or sexual nature bad, so that we must try to get away from our bodies to pure spirit in a Platonic way. Christian marriage is no Platonic affair; it is a "holy estate." Furthermore, the "cult or rite" peculiar to Christianity is to present our bodies as "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1, where St. Paul excommunicates Plato from Christian theology). This means that we serve God with our bodies, not just our minds — by visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the destitute, showing hospitality to strangers, sitting in church, doing manual labor. What St. Paul here means is that a Christian is not free to flaunt

authority, to tyrannize subordinates, to “get even,” to chisel and cheat, to gossip, or to covet. He is freed only to do the will of God from the heart which God demands by right and Law. He is not free for himself but for his neighbor.

C. Through love be servants of one another. Luther’s famous dictum: “A Christian man is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” Luther says further: “A Christian man lives not in himself but in Christ and his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, and in his neighbor through love.”

1. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 14).
2. But if you bite and devour one another (v. 15), watch out that you do not wind up in the cannibal’s pot. Paul was no stranger to the “survival of the fittest,” the “law of the jungle,” or “dog eat dog” manifestations in society. Robertson cites the old tale of two snakes that grabbed each other by the tail, and each ate the other. By whose law do you live in society: the Law of God or the law of the jungle?

## II. *Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh*

A. The Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel, dwells in us, enlightens us, guides us, motivates us — all in accordance with God’s Word. Seek to please God in your behavior.

B. Do not live for the purpose of gratifying desires and lust of the flesh (v. 16).

1. The desires (ἐπιθυμεί-lusts) of the flesh are against the spirit (v. 17). Check yourself on your real desires, the things you really want from life — are they fleshly, worldly, or spiritual? Again, not a Platonic differentiation, as if matter were evil, spirit good. But are you a “Christian materialist”? (St. Paul: “All things are yours” — “eat, drink, live, to glory of God.”) People building a career, a house, an inventory, a clientele — have little time for church, God, Bible, prayer? Things conspire to take our allegiance away from God and spend them on things and self. (For a more complete statement of the conflict between flesh and spirit see Romans 8.
2. The spirit is (ἐπιθυμεί is lacking in Greek text) against the flesh (v. 17). Not against the body — as the ascetics falsely suppose. Body must be kept in subjection (1 Cor. 9:27) as an



athlete keeps in condition, not because the body is bad but because the self is lazy and indulgent.

3. These (flesh and spirit) are opposed to one another (v. 17) and cause the conflict which besets us.
4. In this inner conflict (v. 17) "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Thus there is no freedom until we are freed from this conflict of desires, which is the seed bed of our anxiety. There is no such conflict for the godless person who loves sin with all his heart and soul and strength and mind — and nobody like himself. This conflict comes alive and is sharpened, causing almost excruciating pain, to one who really wishes to do God's will and finds himself dragged back by his own flesh. Christ has freed us from the guilt, anxiety, and power of this conflict. The Holy Spirit "strengthens us in the inner man" and motivates us with God's love to serve God, whose will is our pleasure and in whose service there is perfect freedom.
5. *Therefore*, if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law (v. 18). You do not need the Law for coercion, only for guidance. For you now wish to do God's will on earth as angels do in heaven. The Law has been your schoolmaster. It has brought you to Christ. And He has set you free — for freedom.

*Is that the way it is with you?* You know that it isn't. For sin hangs on, our old sinful nature reasserts itself, sin still allures, Satan still tempts. You are *simul iustus et peccator*. Would you then continue to be free — really free? Then keep on confessing your bondage to the flesh, asking God for deliverance, accepting the freedom God gives you in Christ. You will then also keep on praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and setting your mind to do those things which please God, and you will help your neighbor. Remember the cross of Christ, by which you are set free, and carry the cross He gives you, your badge of freedom — in loyalty to God, in service to man, in fulfillment of self, in growth of spirit, in the community of the church.

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WAYNE SAFFEN

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## REMINISCERE

1 JOHN 2:12-17

Lent is a time during which we like to appeal for a deeper level of sanctification on the part of Christians. The danger is always present that in so doing we shall fall into unevangelical modes of thought. Sermons having as their goal the call to holier living and greater consecration sometimes fail to derive that call from God's deed in Christ. Happily the text for this Sunday helps us

to avoid such a mistake. The evangelical approach to sanctification is beautifully sustained. The text is in good agreement with the thought of the standard Epistle for the day.

"Carrying water on both shoulders" is a proverbial saying which illustrates contempt for compromise. When the demands upon us are in the moral and spiritual realm, "carrying water on both shoulders" is even more disdained. The Bible continually reminds us that our life as Christians must be consistent. Today we have an opportunity to examine ourselves again in this regard as we pursue our Lenten goal of achieving a deeper and more consecrated spiritual life.

### Consistent Christianity

#### I. *Christians should not love the world but God*

A. Christians will not love the world (v.15). Review briefly the theological conception of the term "world" as St. John uses it here. (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, s. v., 7)

B. The world according to our text manifests itself vividly in two ways: sexual deviation and materialism (v.16). Our times reflect this same condition in a crassly obvious way.

C. The world is transitory and fleeting and faces impending destruction (v.17). God's judgment upon such evil is certain.

D. The Christian is a man who turns away from the artificial attraction of the world and loves his God. V.15b: "love for the Father." This is the shape of the Christian's religion, its inner core and content.

#### II. *Sometimes Christians do love the world*

A. The Christian, being yet in the flesh and not made perfect, sometimes succumbs to the blandishments of the world. The younger element is attracted by the lust of the flesh and eyes and the older element by the pride of life. (Vv.13 and 14 compared with v.16)

B. When the Christian is overtaken by such temptation, he sins; for love for the world and love for the Father are antithetical. (V.15)

C. Each individual must examine himself today to see whether this has happened. Older and younger members alike must review their lives.

#### III. *St. John reminds us who we are to foster more consistent Christianity*

A. The congregation is addressed as "little children" (vv.12,13). Our status is that of forgiven children of God for Jesus sake (v.12), who know the Father (v.13). (The preacher will dwell lovingly

on that act by which God procured our forgiveness in Jesus Christ so that we could "know" Him and be His children.)

B. Such a status will mean that we act consistently with the gift that has been given to us. Observe the forceful terms the apostle employs to describe the new life of the congregation. (Vv. 13, 14)

C. Such consistent Christianity is destined for great blessing. (V. 17)

Remember who you are! Here the apostle reminds you of your status—redeemed, restored, forgiven. As God's beloved children certainly you will flee the world and remain with Him whom to know means everlasting life. (*Lutheran Hymnal*, 430, 605)

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