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All of the outlines in this series have the suggested general theme of "The Righteousness of the Kingdom." They have been prepared by Dr. Richard Sommerfeld, Concordia Senior College, Fort Wayne, Ind.

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

2 COR. 4:6-10

Some years ago Charles Atlas advertisements offered strength and an attractive body through comfortable and convenient exercises. A key part of the ads was the promise of personal power, confidence, and security. The ads were attractive, and thousands hopefully responded.

In the text St. Paul speaks of one of the promises of God. But God makes no shallow promises. God does not offer physical strength today and inevitable debility with age tomorrow. God does not glibly offer mental and emotional confidence and security for the present, with senility waiting just around the corner of time. God's promised gift and treasure is deeper and more lasting. God's promise is indeed for time, but it is also for eternity.

In Earthen Vessels

- I. Not external but internal
 - A. Regardless of polished exterior, God looks deep into the heart and soul. He finds not His perfect image, but the rotten core of selfishness and evil.
 - B. To this spiritual corruption God in Christ addresses Himself (v. 6). To give us His glory (cf. use of *δόξα* in Rev. 15:8; 19:1; also in John 5:41; 2 Cor. 6:8 [favorable recognition, honor] and negatively 2 Peter 2:10 and Jude 8 [dignities, divine virtues]).
- II. The setting and the treasure contrasting the nature of man and the grace of God
 - A. God's proffered treasure isn't hidden in any kind of flowery and flossy virtues of man and so lost to view. Rather His gift is set in an earthen vessel (v. 7a), in you and me totally inadequate in the face of the holy God. Like a jewel in a clay dish.
 - B. The treasure makes the container (God's grace makes man eternally adequate), not vice versa (v. 7b). That we might know ourselves to be of God, to be favorably recognized by God through Christ, to be honored of God, to possess the dignity and virtue of God (reaply *δόξα* here).
- III. The eternal, nontransitory result of having received the grace and forgiveness of God
 - A. No momentary panacea for life, as with the "gift" of Charles Atlas. No promise of a life in a temporal bed of roses. Quite the contrary. For seeing by the light of God (cf. v. 6b) and His will we are more aware of and affected by the things of this life than others are.
 - B. However, in the face of trouble, perplexity, persecution, and depression (vv. 8, 9) we have the security of a self-sacrificing God and are not distressed, in despair, forsaken, or destroyed.
- IV. The righteousness of God in an earthen vessel
 - A. The strength of the Christian is not the strength of a Charles Atlas body or an Einstein brain. It is the power (*δύναμις*, v. 7) and glory (*δόξα*, v. 6) of Christ, crucified and resurrected for me (v. 10). Not mine, but His who died for me that I might

be His and as He is (cf. Luther's explanation to Article II of Apostles' Creed).

- B. The strength to live (mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually) and to die in my appointed time grows out of what God has made of me.

Indeed, the Christian's strength and confidence, security and peace, rest on the rock . . . (vv. 6, 7). (An optional ending would draw in the continuing sustenance of the Word and the sacraments.)

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ROM. 8:12-14

An elderly minister with a strong German background used to read the funeral service with an obvious accent. He would read: "In the midst of life we are in dett." He may have mispronounced "death," but he was accurately expressing one of the Scriptures' great lessons.

We Are Debtors

- I. By grace of God we have become, through Christ, His sons
 - A. We were formerly strangers and foreigners to God and the things of God (Eph. 2:19). In Christ we have become the honored and accepted sons of God. (1 John 3:1; tie in phrase from the Absolution in the liturgy, p. 6 of hymnal)
 - B. All this through God's gift to earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:6, 7). Not through our earning or deserving.
- II. We are indeed "in debt" to God, but He never reminds us of this debt in order to pry response from us
 - A. We are indebted to Him for the salvation He has provided freely for us through Christ. The gift of forgive-

ness has placed us under an obligation (cf. ancient Chinese custom obligating person saved from physical death to serve his or her savior because that savior through rescue was felt to have given [continued] life to saved person).

- B. The reasonableness of God's expectation (Rom. 12:1). We are disappointed when countries receiving our foreign aid fail or refuse to respond and even promote opposition to us. So also God now expects that our lives be led not apart from Him, His ways and His work (v. 12) but in keeping with Him as true sons.
- III. The stewardship of Christian life and living
 - A. Christian stewardship is living as a freed and forgiven child and son of God. Not in fear but in the divinely received love now guiding and directing our redeemed selves, as a manifestation of the righteousness of the Kingdom in us. He has given to us, and now we respond.
 - B. We seek to respond with our all. We respond first in and with ourselves (Rom. 12:1). We respond through the sharing of our blessings with others.
 - C. The congregation serves as an organized channel for sharing with one another through corporate worship and Christian education. With others in the community and to the uttermost parts of the earth through missions.

In the midst of Christian life and living we are truly in debt. But our indebtedness is to a loving God and Father who, in Christ, has already given completely of Himself for us to prepare for us both the way and the means of responding to Him.

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

JOHN 21:15-19

After dinner with an intimate friend casual conversation is always particularly enjoyable. Jesus and His disciples were having dinner together. Suddenly Jesus began to question Peter. It was not just a polite opening for a casual conversation. Jesus had in mind a particular lesson that He wanted to teach to Peter and to all those present.

Jesus questioned Peter about the matter of personal action being consistent with personal faith. He asked: Do you love *Me* more than you love these others? Then follow *Me* and *My* ways.

To Restore the Penitent

I. The Christian's office of the keys

A. Jesus had given to His disciples some wonderful powers. They had received the power to forgive sins in His name, and also to withhold forgiveness if the circumstances so dictated (cf. John 20:22-23). Now it was a matter of maintaining a balance, a perspective in forgiving and not forgiving.

B. Damning a person, even politely, is always more attractive and ego-inflating than forgiving a person. But Jesus indicated through His conversation with and questioning of Peter that forgiving and feeding should be uppermost.

II. Christians, the church, and the office of the keys in practice.

A. Without hesitation Christians and the church recognize sin and evil as it exists and where it exists. Neither Christian nor the church can be like the statuary hear-no-evil, see-no-evil, speak-no-evil monkeys (1 Cor. 4:1; Acts 20:28). But this is only the beginning.

B. The will of God is not centered in

damnation. The will of God is centered in restoring the penitent. Even as He through Christ restored us, so would He also restore others (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Tim. 1:15; Matt. 18:11; John 1:29; 1 John 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:15 and so on almost endlessly throughout the Scriptures). Our function, purpose, and goal as His ambassadors in this day and age is also to restore the penitent where at all possible. (Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Peter 2:9; especially Gal. 6)

III. The example of God in Christ for us

A. As with Peter, God has worked toward restoring us. As with Peter in the text, God now urges us to reach out in a similar feeding and restoring fashion. This too is a part of the fulfillment of the righteousness of the Kingdom in us, and particularly through us to others.

B. The old Adam and our ego rebel at this. We are inclined toward self-exaltation by comparison (Pharisee in the temple, Luke 18:10-14). But remember we are earthen vessels that bear the glory of God. (Cf. 2 Cor. 4:6-10)

Restoring the penitent is not a weakness in Christians; it is a strength. Such restorations are based on the love we hold for Christ and occur in response to what He has done for us (His restoration of us). As God's restored ones through Christ, God would now lead us with these words: Lovest thou *Me*? Then follow *Me*, and feed *My* sheep.

THE NINTH SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY

JAMES 1:12

In the previous sermon outline the emphasis was on restoring the penitent. The focus was from us to others and conversely,

at least by implication, from others to us. Now we ought to turn to the other side of the coin, that is, our responsibility for ourselves. (Read the text to the congregation at this point.)

Enduring Temptation

- I. The gift of free will
 - A. One of the grandest gifts of creation was free will. In the order of creation God gave Adam the privilege of thought and choice (Gen. 1 and 2). Now this gift and privilege has been redesigned in the face of our sin. Our activity in any choice of the good must be credited to God, although our determined efforts are not excluded.
 - B. The gift of thought and choice introduces many possibilities, some God-pleasing and some God-offending. It also definitely introduces the consideration of responsibility (cf. example of Adam trying to get away with blaming Eve and God's rejection of this buck-passing).
- II. The test of God and the test of Satan
 - A. The word "temptation" in the text might also be translated "test" (cf. *πειρασμός*, as used in 1 Peter 4:12; Gal. 4:14). Tests require both thought and decision.
 - B. Too often the attractiveness and the thrills of the test become the basis of thought and decision toward responding, particularly where the tests of Satan are concerned. At the constructive tests of God all too often we are inclined to grumble and yell, "Foul," implying God is now being ungracious and unloving.
- III. Enduring the tests of God and Satan
 - A. Enduring means to pass the test successfully by God's standards. It is God who has redeemed us to be His own, who will judge and who will reward. It is not simply a matter of enduring by any means we can find but of enduring according to God's means and by His standards. Cf. Job, Abraham, Isaac, and Paul.
 - B. The whole concept of a test includes the idea of a thoughtful decision and a judgment of that decision. We are reminded in this text of two things: temptations can be turned into blessing, and the goal of God's tests is the crown of life. God holds out to us both the general promise of blessedness and the reward of "the crown of life." He has promised these things to those who love Him because He first loved us. Within this context, who can make a light and irresponsible decision (v. 12 b)?
- IV. God's forgiveness and our personal responsibility
 - A. How does forgiveness fit into all this? God's forgiveness is not a license. Christ didn't die to turn us loose; He died to make us His own, to live under Him in His kingdom of righteousness. Once redeemed, we have the responsibility of living as His own and in His way.
 - B. By faith in the Redeemer we have the power to meet our responsibilities.

In the light of both of the concepts of man's responsibility and divine forgiveness, God says, "Blessed is the man who thoughtfully and decisively resists the tests of Satan and in true Christian love and faith passes My constructive and edifying tests, for he shall receive the crown of eternal life."

THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JAMES 2:8-10

Within the memory of most of us America was a regional country. People frequently

grew up and lived out their lives in one community, even at one address. Neighborhoods remained unchanged over decades.

Today one out of every five American families moves every year. The population seems to be playing musical chairs. Today in the course of a lifetime the individual comes in contact with more people than ever before.

Respect of Persons

I. Respect for, not of, persons

A. For many people the determining factor in meeting people is custom and tradition. The traditional values, the social class images, the group prejudices, the lazy and unfair stereotyping.

B. The Christian looks to higher guidance in human relations. James spoke pointedly on this matter to the early Christians, who found themselves in an expanding and changing population scene (vv. 8, 9). All human relations were to be based on the royal law of God's love. Christ for all and all called to Christ.

II. Comparison and contrast

A. The Christian views human relations in the perspective of divine creation and redemption. Others are out of the same creative hand from which I have come. My Christ died for them also. I am concerned for them as I am concerned for myself and for my own welfare (v. 8b). There is no such thing as social living in isolation, and there is no such thing as Christian living in isolation. Receiving God's love requires also sharing God's love. Sharing Christ is not just a cute slogan; it's a way of life—God's way of life for us.

B. James contrasts the above pattern with the expression "respect to per-

sons." This is in effect making ourselves god over the other person. It is being socially, politically, economically, and/or spiritually gatekeepers, selfishly deciding who shall be accepted and who shall be rejected and expecting God to ratify our decision.

III. The totality of Christian living

A. Christianity is no part-time, part-people faith and life (v. 10). The example of God in Christ (Rom. 8:32; 2 Peter 3:9). Enduring the temptation of selfish distinguishing among persons. (James 1:12)

B. Am I in my thinking, speaking, and acting a roadblock to God's grace to anyone? Am I blocking the righteousness of the Kingdom for anyone? Am I serving in my life as an active, unbiased, nonrespecting witness to Him whom I claim as both Lord and Savior? (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8)

Fulfilling the royal law of love means, in effect, being "little Christs" to everyone whom you meet and being faithful to your calling as a redeemed child of God, not just in your heart but also in your social living, that thereby you might win some.

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ROM. 14:1-9

One of the peculiar and significant characteristics of man is culture. Culture, as the term is here used, means that way of human life that is learned, practiced, and transmitted. In short, it is the learned way of doing things.

Culture is not, in and of itself, necessarily either good or evil. It simply involves that historic experience of people which comes to you and from which, to a very great extent, you make your choices in life. It is, in a sense, your set of preferences for living.

Christianity and Culture

I. Culture in the Roman congregation

- A. The text tells us that within the Roman congregation a group preferred to avoid certain food in the diet. Others attached special observances to certain days. Paul wisely points out that many of these things were simply learned ways that did not necessarily cast any reflection on the faith of the practicing individual.
- B. However, where there was evidence that perhaps one person or a group was "weak in the faith," the answer to that person or group's needs was not ridicule. Especially in such instances the strong are to receive the weak in true fellowship to support and guide them. In this connection compare Gal. 6 and contrast Luke 18: 10-14.
- C. Culture is a valid consideration on the human level, but it is of no effect where Christ and Christianity are concerned. There is no divine merit in disputation and in persuading the other person to "your side." (V. 6)

II. Christ and Christianity

- A. The heart of Christianity is Christ, and Christ alone. All Christian living must be strictly in terms of Christ (v. 8), who died that we might have life both abundantly and eternally (v. 9). The making of a Christian is God's gift of *grace* and forgiveness, not the acceptance of a particular cul-

tural pattern (cf. clash of Peter and Paul on question of eating with Gentiles for the Christian approach to purely cultural problems).

- B. Beware of confusing Christ and culture also in a dedicated Christian congregation. Cultural sameness in food, drink, social contacts, politics, etc., is not a Christian ideal. Remember Paul's willingness (within obvious limits) to be culturally all things to all men that thereby he might have the opportunity to preach Christ.

III. Unity in a congregation

- A. Within a Christian congregation there can be differences. Some differences, such as talents and abilities, are a direct result of activities of God (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4 ff.). Other cultural differences are (within obvious limits) legitimate human inventions and preferences. Christ is the unifying Factor. One in faith, individual in other matters. (1 Cor. 12:27)
- B. The proper spirit is not one of arbitrary indulgence but of Christian liberty. Carefully not confusing Christ and culture, but thoughtfully exploiting the gift of that Christ and the various gifts of the members of the congregation.

Living and dying have many modes in contemporary civilization, but in all things we must remember that we are the Lord's. (V. 8b)