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Homiletical Studies

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Galatians 5:16-24

September 7, 1980

Although the flesh, our natural sinful nature, is not at rest but constantly opposes the new man, the Holy Spirit does not rest either but in the severity of the battle (vs 16-17) strengthens us so we do not gratify fleshly desires. The person who is led by the Spirit is no longer under the Law (v 18), keeping the Law in order to be saved. In vs 19-21 Paul designates the works of the flesh which are in opposition to God and to the new life in the Christian. Four classes of sins are mentioned: immorality, idolatry, enmity, carousing. Gentile churches were peculiarly subject to these sins. Paul repeats his warning (v 21) that those who practice (*prassontes*, i.e., habitually practice; not a form of *poieo*, i.e., occasionally do) these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. In contrast to the works of the flesh are virtues (v 22-23) which are an outgrowth of the life of the Spirit. These are states of mind or habits of feeling more than concrete actions. The genitive, "of the Spirit," denotes that these belong to the Spirit in that the Spirit influences Christians to produce them. Yet there is strenuous endeavor on the part of the Christian because of the opposition of his flesh. The singular "fruit" (*karpos*) emphasizes that the fruits comprise an organic unity. They are consistent with each other so that one fruit does not take away from another. "Fruit" points to wholeness and harmony, which is not the case with the works of the flesh. They are confusing and conflicting, contending with each other for mastery in a human being. For these fruits to be produced, the Spirit must work an inner change. A bad tree cannot produce good fruit. These fruits are not produced under the compulsion of the Law (v 23b) but are the normal outcropping of the Holy Spirit within. The new life of the Christian will express itself in a crucifying of the flesh and in genuinely fine fruit.

The central thought of the text is that the Holy Spirit empowers Christians to crucify their sinful flesh and to produce beautiful spiritual fruit. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would more fully produce the fruit of the Spirit. The problem is that the flesh sometimes gets the upper hand. The means to the goal is that the strong Spirit dwelling in us who belong to Christ leads us to ever greater production of fruit.

Introduction: A person with whom I worked at a chemical plant one summer when I was going to college informed me almost every Friday, "Boy, am I going to live it up this weekend!" And on Monday, without fail, he would regale me with stories of his drinking and carousing. This is the common notion of "living it up." Maybe we Christians get the idea sometimes that we cannot have any fun, that we cannot really live it up. But that is not so. Our text says we can. It tells us how we can be

Living It Up As Christians

- I. Crucifying the flesh.
 - A. It is a real battle to crucify the flesh.
 1. Our sinful human nature constantly opposes our new spiritual nature (v 17).
 2. From the sinful nature spring powerful desires that contend for mastery in our lives.
 3. These desires, if yielded to, lead to works which may bring momentary gratification but in the end bring confusion, conflict, and condemnation (v 19-21).

- B. Yet we can win more and more battles.
1. Because Jesus has already won the war by His death and resurrection, and we who "belong to Christ Jesus" (v 24a) participate in His victory (Ro 7:24-25).
 2. Because the Holy Spirit is in us and leads us so to walk that we do not gratify the flesh (vs 16-18).
 3. The fight will not let up as long as we live, but by the Spirit we will experience an increasing number of victories. We are not helpless victims of our instincts and drives. That is exhilarating. That is living it up as Christians.
- II. Producing the fruit of the Spirit.
- A. These fruits are qualities or states of mind.
1. They are not natural attributes, which are always a bit one-sided.
 2. They are qualities of Christ himself; they come with Him. Therefore every person who belongs to Christ has all these fruits to a greater or a lesser degree. We do not just naturally get better or nicer.
 3. A whole new kind of life is possible in which we give evidence of Christ in us.
- B. Our job is not to be fruit inspectors but fruit producers.
1. We are not to measure others' performance or our own: Am I patient? Am I joyful? Am I loving?
 2. Producing fruit is a matter of doing as much as we know of God's will.
 3. Producing fruit is a matter of attitude: What is pleasing to Christ?
 4. The Spirit does not bring about fruit production by just adding a touch of love, a bit of patience, a dash of kindness. He does not work with us in the way a sculptor does with a statue, chipping away here and there, all the time remaining separate and outside his creation. He works in us, infusing Christ's life into ours so that we become more and more like Christ.

Conclusion: Is not that an exciting way to live? That is living it up as Christians.

GA

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Galatians 5:25-6:10

September 14, 1980

Some of the Galatians doubted the sole sufficiency of the Gospel. They said that the Old Testament law still had to be observed and fulfilled. One reason for this, they claimed, is that without the restrictions of the law, profligate and wanton living would surely result. In this epistle, Paul defends the simple and pure Gospel. He establishes the primacy of Gospel over Law both in time and in intent (cf. chapter 3), and in chapters five and six he answers the "profligacy" objection by saying (1) that faith is not simple head-knowledge but trust which is active in love (cf. 5:6) and (2) that God calls his people to holiness. He says that the new covenant is not something which is at odds with the old. Rather, the Law, in addition to exposing sin, was the Jews' *paidagogos* to lead them to Christ. The regulations of the sacrifices pointed to the perfect sacrifice of the new covenant, while the regulations of life pointed to the kind of person God would create in the new covenant, namely, the Spirit-controlled man who lives by love. Therefore, he talks about love and the law of Christ, which is the law of love, for the law of love given by Christ is the fullest expression of the will of God for his people, the "fulfillment," if you will, of the Old Testament Law (cf. Mt 5:17, 18). In our text, Paul describes what the life of love is like and specifies what some of the implications are for the law of love in everyday life.

Chapter 5:25 states the basic assumption — that we *do* live by the Spirit. Now we are to show this fact forth. Chapter 6:1 probably refers to “getting caught in the act” (note the emphatic position of the verb, plus *kai*, in the word order). The “spirit of meekness” is not hendiads for “meekly” but the Holy Spirit, whose fruit is meekness. “Restoring” pertains both to the man’s status before God and to his status in the Christian community. In the following verse Paul says that Christians ought to bear one another’s burdens, not the burden of legal regulations. Notice how the command reflects the fact that the Christian’s life is like Christ’s who bore our griefs and sorrows (Is 53) and our infirmities (Mt 8:17). Verse 5 does not contradict verse 2. Paul is saying that each man will be weighed down with his own shortcomings, if he examines himself and does not simply look at others. Pay for preachers is probably not the point of verse 6 but the matter of listening to and heeding the good things which the teacher of the Gospel has to impart. In regard to verse 7: Every man has a god, Luther said — God or mammon. Everyone is controlled by one of two forces, the flesh, or the Spirit.

Introduction: Every person is either a slave to God or a slave to sin, death, and the devil.

Because We Are Saved, Let Us Live “Life” And No Longer Be Controlled By The Forces Of Sin And Death

- I. If a person is a slave to sin:
 - A. He will show forth his slavery daily in one of two ways.
 1. He will be a legalist and be proud of his own accomplishments.
 - a. The Galatians sought to obey the Judaic Law fully.
 - b. We may seek to be saved by our obedient life.
 2. He will be a profligate.
 - a. Some of the Galatians used their freedom as a pretext for satisfying their every desire.
 - b. Our society, media, urges us to do the same.
 - B. He will eventually reap destruction.
 1. The ways of the law issue in condemnation and therefore in death.
 2. Profligacy also issues in death, for all that resists God will eventually be destroyed.
- II. If a person is a slave to God:
 - A. He will reap eternal life.
 1. God gives life to conquer death through His Spirit.
 2. We have this eternal life right now.
 3. Though the results of this life may be hidden now, they will finally bear fruit and be forthcoming.
 - B. Led by the Spirit of God he will daily walk according to Christ’s law of love.
 1. Christ’s “law” supersedes the Old Testament law and consists simply in service, first to Christians, then to all men.
 2. Christ’s “law” leads us to serve others and not ourselves and such “burden-bearing” precludes profligacy.
 - C. He will live under the forgiving grace of God.
 1. Even for the child of God, sin is inevitable; faults occur.
 2. As a child of God, forgiveness is his, both from God and from his brothers.
 3. This forgiveness is found in the word of God shared by believers in the Christian community.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Ephesians 3:13-21

September 21, 1980

The theme of Ephesians is stated in the first part of chapter 3: the mystery of God has now been revealed, *viz.*, that all men, both Jew and Gentile, are heirs of the promise of God (3:6). Paul says that he has been entrusted with this glorious message (3:7) and will both proclaim it (3:8) and bring it to light (3:9) for all the world to see (3:10). It will be manifested in the church (3:10, v21). The key is Jesus, in whom we have salvation and, therefore, boldness to approach God (3:12) as we believe in Him (3:12).

From this perspective, Paul, in our text, asks his hearers not to grow weary of his afflictions (v13), which, he says, are on their behalf (cf. 3:1 and Col 1:24). Versus 14 and 15 reflect nicely the cosmic significance of God's redemptive act in Christ Jesus (cf. 1:10 and 3:10), while vv16 and 17 show again (cf. Ro 7) Paul's deep understanding of Christian anthropology: the inner man is the "new man" (cf. 2 Cor 4:16), which is the believer's "true nature" as a Christian, but it needs strengthening daily, and that through the Holy Spirit. Verse 17 is probably appositional to "being strengthened" in v16 and describes this ultimate gift of God from another point of view: the indwelling of Christ in our hearts through faith. The perfect participles at the end of v17 should be read as part of the *hina* clause of v18. The entire thought gives the purpose of the strengthening and indwelling just mentioned: being rooted and founded in love, we will be able to comprehend God's great and glorious plans and know his all-surpassing love. This God is worthy of all praise (vv20, 21).

Introduction: We hear so much about salvation and being saved. What does "salvation" mean? In the text Paul says salvation is God acting for the whole world's benefit. He describes

God's Glorious, Cosmic Salvation

- I. Glorious in view of what God has to overcome.
 - A. A "universe-al," cosmic, rebellion against God is in progress.
 1. Powerful evil forces "in the heavenly places" (cf. 3:10) enthrall all things.
 2. These forces are active *now*; they are not relics of a past age.
 - B. Each human being is part of the rebellion.
 1. The fallen nature of man is at enmity with God.
 2. Even Christians participate in this rebellion, as their "outer man" wars against the "inner man" (new Adam).
- II. Glorious in view of what God did to overcome.
 - A. He has conquered the evil forces.
 1. God is more powerful than anything evil — Satan, witchcraft, demons.
 2. He has shown His superior power in the life and work of Christ.
 3. He conquered the evil forces once and for all in the death and resurrection of Christ.
 - B. God has conquered you.
 1. He has brought you to faith, so that He is now your Father and you His child.
 2. He has renewed you (the "inner man"); as you are in Christ, Christ lives in you.
 3. He helps you to grow in your faith.
 - a. God's purposes are not always clear to His children.
 - b. We can be sure that, as we are rooted in Him, we will grow in our understanding of God's ways.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Ephesians 4:1-6
September 28, 1980

The lesson for this Sunday follows directly after the lesson for the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity. It begins a section of commands: imperatives and prohibitions. This section follows chapters 1-3, which are indicative in nature (stating facts), and in so doing illustrates good Biblical theology: statements of God's grace and salvation *precede* demands for holy living. Here is the proper pattern: You have been saved; therefore, show forth your salvation. (Cf. the OT: first the exodus, then Sinai, Ex 20:2.) Note verse one of our text, especially the *oun*. Paul says, On the basis of what I have just described, I now exhort you . . . walk worthy of your high calling. (This verse is really a summary of the next three chapters.) In the rest of the verses, Paul describes what it means to walk in a manner worthy of Christ's salvation. Key words like "humility," "meekness," "longsuffering," "love," and "peace" abound. He also returns to his theme of the mystery of God, the oneness of Jew and Gentile in Christ; hence the emphasis on unity in vv3-6. (It is in this sense that "one baptism" is to be understood, v5. It is not speaking to the issue of a second or Pentecostal baptism.)

Living As Part Of The Restored Creation

- I. Recalling our restoration.
 - A. God's purpose is to restore us to wholeness.
 1. God is more powerful than the forces of dissolution within us and around us.
 2. The church is the preliminary fulfillment of God's plan to unite all things in Christ.
 - B. You personally have been restored to wholeness through faith and baptism.
 1. You have been made one with God.
 2. You have been made one with your fellow-believers.
- II. Acting like restored people.
 - A. Living in unity with your redeemed brothers and sisters in Christ.
 1. Since we have all been saved by God's action, there is no difference --- no one has merit.
 2. Therefore, we can be at peace with one another.
 - B. Serving your redeemed brothers and sisters in Christ.
 1. As Christ served, now we also are called to serve.
 2. In such service, the unity and harmony of all creation is restored.

JWV

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

I Corinthians 1:4-9
October 5, 1980

Paul remained in Corinth one and one-half years on his second missionary journey. His letter is in response to a letter he received from the Corinthians in which they asked a number of questions. Verse 4: Paul's thanksgiving is a feature in almost every epistle except Galatians. "All this": constantly. "I thank my God": even though this letter was written "with many tears" (2 Cor 2:4). "Given you": The aorist refers to the decisive moment of their conversion. "Grace": The undeserved love of God given once is given forever and is continually manifested. "In Christ Jesus": God's manifestation of grace is always in connection with Christ Jesus (Ro 6:23; 2 Cor 4:11-12; Col 3:3-4; 2 Tm 1:1; 1 Jn 5:11). Verse 5: "In Him": in your union with Christ by faith. "Utterance" (*logos*) means "dis-

course" or "reason." Luther: "in all doctrine." They had insight into the truth of the doctrine of God and its application. Verse 6: "Even as": inasmuch as. "The testimony of Christ": the testimony about Christ. "Was confirmed": Not only was it established among them, but they were living confirmations of the testimony. Verse 7: "Gift": gift of grace (1 Cor 12:1-11) needed for edification. "Come behind": fall short. The Christians expected the return of the Lord soon (1 Th 1:9-10; Jn 5:8-9; 1 Pe 4:7; 1 Jn 2:18; Re 22:20). Verse 8: "Who" refers to Christ. "Confirm you": strengthen you, ratify you, make you steadfast and unmoved in the face of judgment. Beck: "so that no one can accuse you on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ." Unto the end": to the end of this age and to the coming of Christ (Mt 28:20; He 3:6:13; 6:11). "Blameless": unimpeached (Col 1:32; 1 Tm 3:18; Tt 1:6). He will establish us to be blameless, that we should no longer be guilty and under the condemnation (Ro 8:33-34). The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us by faith (Php 3:9). Verse 9: "Called": The call is the pledge of the final blessing (Ro 8:30). Our hope of eternal life is based upon the promise of God, who is the faithful God (Tt 1:2). Note that each verse in this pericope has a reference to Christ.

Introduction: A person can live on the level of complaining or thanksgiving. Paul lives on the level of thanksgiving as he thinks of the divine blessings showered upon the Corinthian Christians.

Living In A Spirit Of Thanksgiving.

- I. For God's grace.
 - A. God's grace is revealed in Christ Jesus, v4.
 1. The world is estranged from God.
 2. God was in Christ reconciling the world to God (2 Cor 5:18-20).
 - B. The Holy Spirit has made us rich.
 1. He brought us to faith through the Gospel (v6. Ro 1:16-17).
 - a. The knowledge of doctrine (v5).
 - b. The ability to apply doctrine (v5).
 2. He endows with special gifts (v7. cf. 1 Cor 12).
 - a. Some gifts of the early Church have fallen away but some are still in use (cf. 1 Cor 12).
 - b. Any gift of the Spirit is to be used, not for self-aggrandizement, but to edify (1 Cor 12:7; 14:12).

Summation: Let us thank God always for the gift of His Son and for the gift of faith and the abilities God gives. Let us use our gifts for building up the body of Christ.

- II. For God's faithfulness (v7).
 - A. The early Christians waited in faith for the coming of the Lord as we do (v7).
 1. Christ has promised to come again to judge the living and the dead (Jn 14:3; Mt 25:31ff.).
 2. This is a glorious day for the Church (Re 7:9ff.).

Transition: We may wonder whether we will enter our eternal home. The devil likes to fill us with doubts.

- B. We are certain that God is faithful (v9).
 1. He gave us a foretaste and pledge of heaven by calling us into fellowship with Christ (v9; Ro 8:30).
 2. He will confirm us, strengthen us, unto the end (v8; Jude 24; Jn 10:27-29).
 - a. So that no one will be able successfully to accuse us on judgment day (v8; Ro 8:33-34).
 - b. So that we will be with Christ forever (1 Jn 3:1-2).

Conclusion: Let us live lives of thankfulness to God for His grace and faithfulness. May the grace and faithfulness of God comfort us in life and death and motivate us to lives of Christian service.

HJE

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Ephesians 4:22-28

October 12, 1980

“Put off” (*apothesthai*): as we put off a garment (v 22). The reference is not to change merely of opinions or customs, but to one of life and character. The present participle *phtheiromenon* indicates a process of corruption. The “old man” deceives with his lusts, and, if unchecked, will bring ruin. The verb, “be renewed,” is passive, expressing spiritual change or transformation from old to new. “Put on” (*endusasathai*) (v 24) is aorist, as in v 22, to indicate an act, while renewal (v 23) is a process. We are to live the kind of life that shows we are a new creation according to the divine likeness in true righteousness and holiness. There is to be something better than the ceremonial rectitude of the Pharisee or the self-contained virtue of the heathen. This is righteousness and holiness expressed in right conduct born of the Gospel. Therefore (v 25), because (*dia*) of putting off the old man and putting on the new, certain actions follow. Christians are to be truthful with one another because of their union with each other through their union with Christ. As each member of the human body is of and for the other in service, so it is in the spiritual body. Anger has its rightful place but it can easily pass into the sinful (v 26). Even righteous wrath (Mk 3:5) can pass into sin if over-indulged. Anger (*Parorgismos*, used only here in the New Testament) denotes exasperation, sudden violent anger which must be checked without delay (Ps 4:4). The activity of the devil demands vigilance at all times so that he does not get a foothold (v 27). Even Christians might continue to steal; so they must be warned to cease (v 28). Among the Ephesians stealing was probably a result of laziness. The apostle urges them to do honest work. By working one acquires not only what he needs but is able to help others.

The central thought of the text is that putting off the old man and putting on the new issues in right conduct. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers would live righteously in their relationship to each other and to God. The problem is that unrighteous conduct often manifests itself among Christians. The means to the goal is our union with Christ, which empowers us to recognize our union with one another and to treat one another accordingly.

Introduction: If you were offered a new dishwasher for your broken one, would you take it? If you were offered a new suit for your worn-out one, would you take it? Sometimes old things may be preferred to new — valuable antique cars or historical artifacts, for example — but ordinarily we prefer the new to the old. The kind of new thing Paul talks about in our text is certainly to be preferred to the old thing that he puts alongside it. He describes our life as Christians as

Putting Off The Old And Putting On The New

- I. This is possible in Jesus.
 - A. We cannot put off the old man and put on the new man by sheer willpower and determination.
 1. Our old man is utterly corrupt (Jr 17:9).
 2. Its lusts are terribly deceitful (v 22b).
 - B. We need help from Jesus.
 1. We have been taught the truth as it is in Jesus (v 21b). All Christian truth centers in Christ and His redemptive work.

2. Our putting off the old man and putting on the new is a way of participating by faith in Christ's death and resurrection.
 3. Our union with Christ by faith results in an ongoing renewal of our mind in which we daily cast off the old man like a garment and clothe ourselves in the new (v 23).
- II. This shows itself in right behavior.
- A. We speak the truth with one another (v 25).
 1. We are often so afraid of being thought fanatic that we end up "not only not calling a spade a shovel but pretending it really is a silver spoon." No more of those "little lies"!
 2. We must put away falsehood and speak the truth, because as new people in Christ we are joined to Christ and to one another. Members of the same body do not work against each other.
 - B. We avoid sinning when we become angry.
 1. There is a place for righteous anger (Mt 21:12-13).
 2. But even righteous anger can easily become sinful if retained. Sudden outbursts of anger will certainly need to be checked.
 - C. We deal honestly with one another.
 1. Although we do not rob banks or forge checks, stealing may be done in more subtle ways — listing unqualified dinners and trips as business expenses, gouging customers in car or appliance repairs, stealing reputations by gossiping.
 2. We must put in a full day's work for our pay, not only to be honest with our employers, but also so that we can work for what we have and give to others.

Conclusion: Sometimes the old may be preferred to the new. But when it comes to the old nature and the new nature, the new is certainly to be preferred. Putting off the old and putting on the new is what Christian living is all about.

GA

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Ephesians 5:15-21

October 19, 1980

St. Paul has contrasted the "sons of disobedience" with the "children of light" in Eph 5:1-14. He warns that the world is very evil (v16). Yet he does not want God's people to have merely a survival mentality. These are opportune times (*kairos*, v16), times that can be redeemed (same word as in Ga 3:13, 4:5) or "made the most of," as believers witness to outsiders (Col 4:5) and to fellow-believers (vv19-21). The times will not be used wisely by simply following the world's ways, as with drunkenness (vv15-18). The word translated "debauchery" (v18) has the implication of wastefulness, as well as immorality. Rather, believers must keep "gaining insight" as to God's will (v17), looking at their lives in comparison (v15), and then trying not to live in "foolish" ways (v17). The word translated "foolish" implies morally stupid actions. Believers will thus contrast with unbelievers and be witnesses to them and to the light of Christ (v14), making the best use of their time among them.

Likewise, time will not be used wisely among believers, if all that people talk about is the weather, sports, or their accomplishments. No edification will go on in that way (4:29-32). Rather, Christians should address one another with God's Word and spiritual wisdom (v19), living in humility toward one another (v21 — this verse belongs grammatically with vv15-20, as the Nestle text editors and most older commentators agree) For it is God who deserves all the glory and

thanks for what He has done in Christ (vv20, 21). Here is the Gospel of a God who has redeemed us in Jesus and now keeps on filling us with the Holy Spirit (v18), so that we can make the most of the time we have.

Introduction: Many Christians live with a "fortress" complex. The days are so evil that all they think they can do is protect themselves and survive. In contrast, Paul says these are opportune times which we can "redeem," make the most of, among believers and unbelievers (v16).

Make The Most Of The Time!

- I. Make the most of the time by walking wisely among unbelievers. How?
 - A. Seek to understand God's will (v17).
 1. It centers in Jesus Christ and trusting Him (Jn 6:28, 39-40).
 2. Understanding comes through God's mercy and blessing along (v14, Ro 12:1-2, Col 1:9-10).
 - B. Look carefully at how you are living (v15).
 1. Examine your life in the light of what God wants you to do.
 2. Ask forgiveness and strength for a new life (I Jn 1:8-10).
 - C. Avoid foolish, wasteful, and dissipating activity (vv17-18).
 1. Excessive drinking is a prime example.
 2. It is the opposite of God's wisdom and good use of time (Pr 23:29-24:7).

Summation: Your different style of life will show and will be a good witness, day by day, to unbelievers.

- II. Make the most of the time by worshipping thankfully and humbly among believers.
 - A. Seek always to edify one another (4:29).
 1. Talk with one another about God's Word and spiritual matters (v19, Col 3:16).
 2. Be humble and submissive with one another, as Christ was our servant (v21, I Pe 5:1-5).
 - B. Give all praise and thanksgiving to God (vv19-20).
 1. He deserves all the credit (2:8-10).
 2. Our songs and praises are sweet to Him (Ps 33:1-3).
 3. He fills us with His Spirit, so that we can respond to Him (v18, 2:16ff.).

Summation: Your faith will be strengthened in this way, and you will be a blessing to other believers, to the glory of God, every time that you get together.

Conclusion: All the verbs in this text are present tenses. These are things that we are to be doing continually by God's grace. Every moment we have is prime time to make the most of!

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TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Ephesians 6:10-17

November 4, 1979

This text and theme would have sounded strange, even outrageous, to the hearers of ten or fifteen years ago. Scientific, modern, futuristic humans had arrived. The unexplainable could be explained, the mysterious could be penetrated. God was dead, Satan was silly, and evil could be eradicated with money and good intentions. This is not so today. The mysteries have returned, some of them mere superstitions, but others fearful and despairing of rational solution. Among these is an intense interest in the occult and satanic. The devil is "in"!

“The Exorcist” and its imitations on the screen are popular manifestations of this phenomenon. For some the devil is a silly being dressed in red long-johns. For others he is so real that demon-possession is feared. And for most, including many Christians, there is profound ignorance of the devil. The preacher has to deal with all of these views among his hearers. Yet the preacher has an overriding goal that this text emphasizes in verse 13. We need to allow God’s Spirit to enable the hearers to “take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

Facing Up To The Devil

- I. Do not underestimate the devil!
 - A. He is a real “person.”
 1. He came personally to the first Adam.
 2. He came personally to the second Adam, Jesus, in the wilderness.
 3. Luther: “A Christian should know that he is sitting among devils and that the devil is closer to him than his coat or shirt.”
 - B. He is called Satan (accuser) and devil (adversary).
 - C. His influence pervades the “atmosphere” (Eph 2:2).
 1. Demon-possession is like sighting a polluting smokestack; it is localized and easily seen.
 2. Be more aware of the “invisible pollutants” of demonic influence (v12).
 3. Do not limit Satan to one tiny place or influence; it is certain that he does not do so!
- II. Do not overestimate the devil!
 - A. Devils are fallen angels who rebelled.
 1. They oppose God and all that is good.
 2. They will nevertheless be judged and damned.
 - B. Know Satan’s power and limitations.
 1. The devil is cunning, but not all-knowing.
 2. The devil is powerful, but not all-powerful.
 - a. Jesus was tempted from *outside* in the wilderness.
 - b. God limits Satan’s power (1 Cor 10:13).
 - c. We cannot rationalize, therefore, saying, “The devil made me do it.”
 - C. Give the devil his due, but not too much due!
- III. Stand up to the devil (vv10-11, 13-17)! The “evil day” is that day when God’s love, care, mercy, and even His existence are called into question. On that day:
 - A. Gird yourself with truth.
 1. The devil tries to persuade with lies and half-truths.
 - a. “God knows that if you eat . . .”
 - b. “All these I will give you . . .”
 2. The basic truth in which we stand is: “You shall worship the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.”
 - B. Put on the breastplate of righteousness.
 1. We are vulnerable to the devil’s “Yea, hath God said?” for our righteousness is a gift which we do not deserve.
 2. Yet the breastplate covers the cleansed heart, and we can stand firm and say, “Yea, God *hath* said so!”
 - C. Let your feet be shod with the Gospel of peace.
 1. What if the forces of evil are hurled against us? Can we stand?
 2. We stand in the peace of God through Christ.
 - D. Hold the shield of faith.

1. Temptations will not be stopped by plastic crosses or plastic religion.
 2. Faith in Christ stands between us and temptation.
- E. Put on the helmet of salvation.
1. Especially in times of trial we may question our salvation.
 2. Then we must look beyond what we think to what God "thinks" of us.
- F. Take the sword of salvation.
1. This is the offensive weapon of God's Word.
 2. This is the same weapon — nothing more or less — that Jesus used.

Conclusion: The devil is real and cunning and powerful, and he wants you and me! Do not underestimate the devil's power. But do not overestimate it either. God has equipped us with His mighty protection and with the word of His promise. Stand, therefore, in Christ your mighty Victor!

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TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Philippians 1:3-11
November 11, 1979

I once knew a minister who refused to acknowledge or thank anyone in his congregation publicly because he was afraid that someone might become prideful. Too many ministers, upon leaving a congregation, experience such an outpouring of love that they cannot help wondering why that affection had to wait until they were leaving. We Christians are not very good at affirming each other, and ministers are no exceptions to this rule. St. Paul, however, was very good at commendation, and not just to a "good" congregation like that at Philippi, but also to a "bad" congregation like that at Corinth (I Cor 1:4-7). This text presents an opportunity for the preacher to thank God for his people publicly and to encourage them toward being the best people God can make them.

A Joy-Filled Thanksgiving

- I. For our partnership in the Gospel (vv3, 4).
 - A. Partnership requires selflessness.
 1. We call this servanthood, being foot-washers, being a community of self-forgetful people. (One should use examples from his own congregation.)
 2. Our "status" is found in Jesus Christ (Php 2:5-7).
 - B. Partnership requires trust.
 1. You have trusted that your pastor is not the only saint, but an equipper of the saints.
 2. You have trusted that God is working in you through Word and Sacrament to build you up as partners in the Gospel.
- II. For our growth (v9).
 - A. We can point to statistical growth.
 1. We have grown in the number of people reached and won to Christ.
 2. We have grown in the number of people fed upon the Word.
 - B. We can especially point to growth in love.
 1. We could easily become self-centered and self-satisfied.
 2. But the Lord has produced "knowledgeable love" among us.
 - a. You are God's creative minority in the world, and you know it!
 - b. You have learned to make the classroom, workbench, and kitchen sink an "altar" where God is praised and love is shared.
 3. The Lord has produced "discerning love" among us.

- a. This shows in our Christian marriages and Christian homes.
 - b. This shows in difficult choices and trying times that you have experienced.
- III. For our goal (vv6, 10-11).
- A. We continue to operate with congregational goals: in Sunday School and Bible Class enrollment, in evangelism, etc.
 - B. Above every goal stands the ultimate goal.
 - 1. Our goal is to make every day a day of service to Christ.
 - 2. Our goal is to overflow with the "fruits of righteousness."
 - 3. Our final goal is to be ready for the Day of Christ and eternal life.

Conclusion: In the meantime, in the time of grace today, we pause to speak to God of joy — for our partnership in the Gospel, for our growth as Christ's people, and for the eternal goal that is ours by faith.

RGK

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Philippians 3:17-21

November 18, 1979

We live in a time of apathy. There is the old joke about an interviewer asking, "Do you think people are apathetic today?" And the answer came: "I don't know, and I don't care." It is so easy for Christians and Christian congregations to get off track, to forget what they are and what they have. In spite of the positive things which St. Paul could say about the Philippian congregation, he saw lurking in the shadows the possibility of it getting derailed and losing all that Christ had gained for the Philippians. Apathy gets us off the track. This is why Paul wrote (v16): "Only let us hold true to what we have attained." We get smug, self-satisfied, and sit back. But we never live in a vacuum. The devil, the world, and our flesh stand ready to enter in and take us far from the "goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (v14). The text tells us about:

Getting Back On The Track

- I. By remembering our calling (v17).
 - A. None of us can duplicate the example of St. Paul's life (2 Cor 6:3-10).
 - B. But we can imitate his faith (Php 3:14).
 - C. We can admit our daily need for God's forgiving power (Php 3:12).
 - D. You and I are "sermons" to each other.
 - 1. Parents to children.
 - 2. Young to old, old to young.
 - 3. Mature to the immature.
- II. By examining our lives (vv18, 19).
 - A. Be sure that you are not a "poor imitation."
 - 1. Those who have gone off the track can be identified: "Their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."
 - 2. Check yourself out.
 - 3. Confess your faults to God, who alone can get you back on track.
 - B. Turn the poor imitations around.
 - 1. Be an example of those who delight to feast on God's food (and thereby defeat the belly-food of selfishness).
 - 2. Be an example of those whose daily conduct praises God (and thereby defeat the god of shameful self-gratification).
 - 3. Be an example of those who are lovingly involved in the world which God loves (and thereby defeat those who make this world into a god).

III. By remembering our destiny (vv20, 21).

A. Recall the promises of God.

1. The Emmaus disciples got disrailed by discouragement.
2. Jesus answered them with the question, "Have you not read the Scriptures?"

B. Recall the hope in which we live.

1. We can so easily suffer from "compassion fatigue."
2. Then we can remember the King and the kingdom.

Conclusion: The belly servers, the shame-revelers, the this-world people will not endure. We who "hold true to what we have attained" surely will.

RGK

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Colossians 1:9-14

November 16, 1980

The Colossian heresy is not dry history. Still today we are tempted to think that we are not smart enough, do not understand enough, and do not live well enough to be acceptable to God and to qualify for His kingdom. To this fear St. Paul addresses himself, piling up the images which depict how God qualifies us (v12) by Christ's own saving work: rescuing us from captivity (v13), moving us to a new kingdom (v13), making payment for us (v14), and forgiving us our sins (v14). All this He did by submitting to the hour of the "power of darkness" (Lk 22:53) and conquering Satan by "His glorious might." In Christ we are already qualified. The inheritance is ours. We have redemption.

This "spiritual wisdom" is active wisdom and transforms our lives (vv9-10, Ro 12:2) from qualification-rounds for heaven, in which we must perform properly, to daily opportunities to thank the Lord with joy for His love and mercy in Christ (vv11-12). We bear fruit and desire to please the Lord only through His power and because of what He already has done for us (vv9-11 I Th 2:12, Eph 2:10). God fills us with His wisdom, as we listen to His Word alone (v9, Ac 20:32, in contrast with 2 Tm 3:7). The qualifying is all God's doing, and it is ours by faith in Christ. Paul prays that we know that and believe it!

Introduction: How disappointing it is when you have your heart set on winning something and suddenly find that you are disqualified. How much more tragic it is to be desiring a heavenly inheritance and to discover yourself disqualified. But it need not happen. You do qualify!

You Qualify!

I. Christ has met the qualifications for you!

A. The requirements seem impossible.

1. The price is too high for us to pay (Mt 18:23-25, Ac 8:18-20).
2. We are too deep in darkness and captivity (v13, Eph 2:2-3, 6:12).
3. We do not have the strength and knowledge that we need.

B. Christ has fulfilled everything for you.

1. He has paid the price (v14, Eph 1:7).
2. He has delivered us from captivity (v13, Lk 22:53).
3. He has been strong and true in every respect (vv10-11).

C. God therefore counts you as qualified by faith in Christ and His work for you (v12, vv4-6, Eph 1:18-19, Ac 26:17-18).

Transition: We are in the running. We qualify now through Christ. But how do we know that we will not be disqualified later on? After all, we are still so weak.

- II. Christ strengthens you to perform worthily.
- A. He fills us with knowledge (v9, Eph 1:17-18).
 - B. He strengthens us through His Word (v11, Ac 20:32, not like 2 Tm 3:7).
 - C. He makes us so thankful that we want to do well for Him (vv10, 12).
 - D. Even when we stumble, there is forgiveness and new life to keep us going (v14).

Conclusion: You will do well through Christ who strengthens you (Php 4:13). In a sense we have gone far beyond qualifications. We have won already (v14, 1 Pe 1:3-5)! Let us thank our Lord for the medals of victory (v12).

JPB

LAST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

November 23, 1980

Much of I Thessalonians deals with questions about the end time. Here Paul discusses "when" Christ will return. He says that his readers already know "precisely" (v2) that nothing precise can be known about the time of judgment, except that it will come suddenly (vv2-3). Therefore, all need to be alert and self-controlled (v6) and equipped with the faith, hope, and love (v8) which come through Jesus Christ (v9). Then, as sons of the light, they will be prepared for Christ's return (vv4-5) and will be able to help prepare one another (v11). No other person or thing on earth can offer lasting "peace and security," though people often think so (v3). Only Christ can give certainty of salvation in the midst of life and death (vv9-10; see 4:13-18 as a commentary on living with Christ, whether awake or sleeping.) If we have faith in Christ and the hope and love which flow from faith, we have all the essential armor we need to live now and forever. There is no reason to fear the wrath of God any longer (v9).

Introduction: We all experience how difficult it is to be serious about our Christian faith and live it every day. We are in a constant battle with society's way of thinking, with friends who are bad influences, and with our own evil thoughts. We feel so ill-equipped. But there is armor available for us, St. Paul says, so that we may endure to the day of the Lord.

Here Is The Armor You Need

- I. We need faith (v8).
 - A. The faith we have is often distorted or misguided.
 1. We look for peace and security in people or things (v3, Lk 21:34-35).
 2. We misread times and seasons (v1, Mt 24:23-27).
 3. Ours becomes a lazy, lethargic faith (vv6-7, Lk 12:35-40).
 - B. True faith is a gift from God.
 1. It comes through the preaching of Christ (Ro 10:14-17).
 2. It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Ga 5:22, Eph 2:8).
 3. It gives us assurance of salvation (v9, Ro 1:17).
- II. We need hope (v8).
 - A. So much of life right now seems hopeless (e.g., Ro 4:18-21).
 - B. We wonder if there is any hope of escaping the coming judgment (vv2-3).
 - C. Faith in Christ produces hope in the midst of every situation (vv4-5, 9-10, Ro 5:1-5).
- III. We need love (v8).
 - A. Often "love" is only self-gratification (1 Jn 2:15-17).
 - B. Christian love is a gift from God, a fruit of the Spirit (Ga 5:22).

C. It enables us to give one another the needed encouragement until Christ returns (v11).

Conclusion: With faith, hope, and love we have the abiding armor (I Cor 13:13) we need to live now and to eternal life. This is armor which God provides for us, as we put on Christ and live in Him (Ro 13:11-14).

JPB