

CONCORDIA
THEOLOGICAL
QUARTERLY

Volume 50, Numbers 3 and 4

CTQ

JULY-OCTOBER 1986

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SERIES A EPISTLES

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Romans 13:11-14

November 30, 1986

This epistle presents a timely Advent text. As Paul describes the worship life of the church, based on the mercies of God (Ro 12), he places the Christian life of service within both the church and the civil realm (Ro 12:9-21 and 13:1-7) in the context of the coming salvation of the Lord (text). Using the imagery of the night far spent and the day at hand, Paul urges proper Advent living, which casts off the works of darkness such as revelry and drunkenness and puts on the armor of light which refers to the daily power of our baptism in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction: A new church year begins today with a forward look to the coming again of Jesus Christ, the same Jesus born in a manger 2,000 years ago. The world of Christmas glitter goes on its merry way, masking the darkness of sin as the hour grows late. Today's epistle from Romans 13 cuts through both the darkness and the dream-like holiday atmosphere with the clarion call (v 11):

Time to Awake

The text shows us how to awake for the day of salvation.

- I. We awake by casting off the works of darkness (vv 12b, 13b). ☐
- A. Paul describes the works of darkness.
 1. Revelry—noisy partying which is demeaning to self and a nuisance to others.
 2. Drunkenness—severely condemned by the heathen Greeks, who knew how to drink properly.
 3. Immorality—the desire for the forbidden bed, a common heathen sin.
 4. Shamelessness—so gripped by lust as to engage in open immorality without shame.
 5. Contention—wanting to win power and prestige at any cost.
 6. Envy—never content but always looking for what others have.
- B. We confess our shady works of darkness as unsuitable for the light. The six works of darkness listed above characterize our world today and affect Christians as well as unbelievers. Pornography, drug and alcohol abuse, the American fixation on cut-throat competition, and the endless pursuit of materialism, e.g., the life of the Yuppies (Young Urban Professionals), reveal the sin which stand between us and God.
- II. We awake by walking in the day (v 13).
 - A. Paul describes walking in the day in context.
 1. Love your neighbor as yourself (Ro 13:8-10).
 2. Submit to the governing authorities (Ro 13:1-7).
 3. Avoid offense to the weak brother in eating and special days (Ro 14:1-12).

- B. We confess our frequent failure to walk in the day. Our sins of omission loom large as we relate to fellow Christians, community, government, and weaker believers.
- III. We are awakened by putting on the armor of light (the Lord Jesus Christ) (vv 12b, 14).
- A. Paul points to our baptism into Christ as the power for awaking. "Put on" means being clothed with and relates to the baptismal section in Romans 6. See also Galatians 3:26-27.
 - B. We receive daily forgiveness as we put on Christ who came to us in our baptism.
 1. Christ came as a light into the dark world of sin. He cast off the works of darkness, walked in the light, and conquered the powers of darkness on Calvary, awakening from the dead on the new Easter day.
 2. Christ comes to us in our baptism with His light and provides the armor of light through Word and Sacraments so that we can walk in the day.
 3. Christ will come in the new day of eternity to receive us to Himself and to let us experience in its fullness salvation from darkness into the light.

Conclusion: Advent before us—a season to let God penetrate the deeds of darkness with the light of His Son Jesus Christ and a time to awake for a walk in the day as we put on the Lord Jesus Christ each day.

Stephen J. Carter

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Romans 15:4-13

December 7, 1986

Not only does this text relate to the Advent season with its emphasis on hope which comes to us from God through the Scriptures, but it also discusses the purpose and importance of the Old Testament Word for the apostolic message. Set in the practical section of Romans which urges Christians to bear the burdens of the weak, this section clearly announces that the Old Testament Scriptures speak relevantly and authoritatively to the New Testament church by proclaiming Christ as hope for the common life of doxology. Old Testament references (2 Sm 22:50; Ps 18:49; Dt 32:43; Ps 117:1; Is 52:15) richly color the text.

Introduction: Discouragements abound in our world today—the hopelessness of international terrorism, the threat of nuclear war, uncertainty about world economics, the decline of moral values. Closer to home, we struggle with keeping our family together, holding a steady job, and making ends meet. Today's text provides specific help to deal with our problems. Paul writes to the Roman Christians that we are

Abounding in Advent Hope

- I. Through the hopeful Scriptures.
 - A. The Old Testament provides instruction about Jesus, the Messiah for Jews and Gentiles alike (vv 4a, 8-12).
 1. By pointing to several Old Testament verses, Paul demonstrates how Jesus brings hope and reason for rejoicing.
 2. We often feel hopeless because we either neglect to read the Scriptures or take them for granted. Consequently we miss Jesus as the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.
 - B. The Scriptures build patience and comfort (v 4b).
 1. Paul promises that reading the Scriptures will bring steadfastness and strength.
 2. We find Advent hope as we let the Scriptures make us steadfast and strong. Regular worship and Bible study during Advent will help us.
- II. Through the God of hope.
 - A. The God of hope produces like-minded praise (vv 5-6).
 1. Both Jews and Gentiles responded to the Advent hope with lives of praise together.
 2. We often fail to praise during Advent because we look to our problems and helter-skelter Christmas preparations instead of the God of hope.
 - B. The God of hope fills us with joy and peace in believing (v 13).
 1. The God revealed in Scripture gives us His Son Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, who fills us with joy and peace.
 2. Having confessed our failure to praise, we receive God's joy and peace in Jesus during Advent and celebrate together with praise in voice and life.

Conclusion: Problems and difficulties continue. But our Advent hope, Jesus Christ, remains. Through the Scriptures we receive patience and comfort which rekindle our hope. The One who makes the Scriptures authoritative is the God of hope who fills us with joy and peace in believing—no wonder we praise God. We are abounding in Advent hope.

Stephen J. Carter

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

James 5:7-10

December 14, 1986

The approaching anniversary of Jesus' first coming to earth as a human being reminds us that He is coming again. His second coming will be as Judge and King, in glory and in power. The suggested goal of the sermon based on this text is that God's people should not be diverted from the work which the Lord has assigned to us while we wait for His coming, but rather focus with

renewed precision on the task of proclaiming the Good News of God's love in Christ. We can more zealously proclaim God's love when we

Wait Patiently for the Lord's Second Coming

- I. The activities of the rich and unscrupulous are a test of our patience. The "therefore" of verse 7 points to the content of verses 1-6.
 - A. We are so eager to stop the rich from robbing the laborer of his due.
 - B. We are eager to stop all abuses by which the rich are benefited at the expense of the poor.
 - C. Our natural inclination is to make quick judgments and to seek vengeance upon those who through dishonesty and abuse exploit the poor.

Application: Impatience seeks to lash out in whatever way possible to correct injustices and to avenge immediately. The heavenly Judge, however, takes care of vengeance in His way and time.
- II. Exercising "patience" means that we pursue our God-given calling with undivided attention until the Lord comes again.
 - A. The farmer plants his seed with care and nurtures it to maturity. Application: The Lord has commanded us to make disciples (teach and baptize, Mt 28). Do this diligently!
 - B. The farmer waits for harvest. Attempting to correct wrongs developing in the growth process destroys the harvest. Wait for the harvest! Application: Harvest time is when the Lord comes again. To grumble and to judge prematurely interferes with the harvest. Wait patiently!
- III. God's servants speak His Word but wait for His time of judging.
 - A. His Word reproves sin and corrects the sinner.
 - B. Through God's Word the repentant sinner is forgiven and restored.
 - C. God's servants may expect suffering and abuse, even as Jesus did. Examples are the prophets (Job; vv 10-11).

Conclusion: Waiting with patience is made easier as we remember that Christ is coming soon.

Rudolph A. Haak
Cambridge, Minnesota

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Romans 1:1-7

December 21, 1986

The text is well chosen for the Sunday before Christmas since it reminds Christians of the Gospel of God told beforehand by the prophets through the Scriptures. Some of these Gospel promises could be mentioned in the introduction of the sermon. (See also I A of the outline.) The text also solidly undergirds the Christmas message. It confirms the fact that the Christmas Good News

(Jesus' birth) has its source in the heart of God Himself. It confirms the fact that the Good News is for all. The suggested goal of the sermon is that through it the Lord will enable the hearers to proclaim the Christmas message with greater vigor, confidence, and enthusiasm.

Introduction: Good news is always welcome. But if it is not authentic and real, it becomes bad news. If the news is good for only a select few, then it may be bad news for me. Today's message directs us to

Good News Worth Repeating

- I. It rests firmly upon the person and work of Jesus Christ (vv 2-4).
 - A. Promised long ago by God's prophets (v 2).
 - B. Descended from David's line as foretold (v 3).
 - C. Confirmed to be God's Son by His resurrection from the dead.
 1. His resurrection proves that He is God's answer to the problem of sin.
 2. His resurrection demonstrates His victorious power over sin, death, and the devil.
- II. The Good News is a message of grace (v 5).
 - A. Good News for the undeserving, the sinner.
 - B. It assures us of God's forgiveness and on-going love.
 - C. It is meant for all (vv 5-6).
 - D. We, the slaves of Jesus Christ, are to be carrying and proclaiming it to all the world (vv 1, 6).
- III. The goal of the Good News repeated is the obedience of faith (v 5).
 - A. It is aimed at bringing a "yes" response to God's offer of His love in Christ Jesus.
 - B. It is aimed at lifting us out of the morass of sins' consequences (guilt, fear, enslavement) to a new life in Christ.
 - C. It is aimed at bringing a trust in our gracious God which brings peace (v 7).
 - D. It is aimed at bringing an obedient faith which abandons worry and leaves life in the hands of God.

Conclusion: Our God, who so faithfully remembered and kept His promises concerning Jesus, is altogether trustworthy as the object of our faith. Proclaim the Good News with vigor, confidence, and enthusiasm.

Rudolph A. Haak
Cambridge, Minnesota

CHRISTMAS DAY

Titus 3:4-7

December 25, 1986

The text is loaded with Gospel terms that are intimately and inseparably associated with the "appearing" of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in whom God shows Himself in the fullness of His grace:

"Kindness": graciousness, God's constant readiness to bestow His blessings and to forgive.

"Love" (*philanthropia*): love of mankind, benevolence.

"Mercy": the clemency of God in providing and offering salvation to humankind by Christ.

"Justify": to declare just and righteous for the sake of Jesus Christ.

"Regeneration": spiritual birth, new birth (cf. Jn 3:5).

"Renewal": spiritual newness repeated daily, over and over again.

"Hope": joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation.

God's Kindness and Love Manifested

- I. Manifested in our justification.
 - A. Saved by His mercy.
 1. We need God's mercy because of our condition (v 3).
 2. In clemency God provides and offers salvation.
 - B. Declared righteous by grace.
 1. Not by our works done in righteousness.
 2. But by God's grace.
- II. Manifested in His making us heirs in hope.
 - A. God provides rebirth; life begins all over again—a qualitative, not a quantitative, thing (cf. Jn 3:5).
 - B. God pours out His grace in baptism.
 1. Grace is sufficient for all.
 2. The Holy Spirit grafts us into Jesus Christ in baptism (cf. Ro 6:5).
 3. We are made coheirs with Christ of all God has for them that love Him.
 - C. God makes us heirs in the hope of life eternal.
 1. Hope is the joyful, confident expectation of eternal salvation (cf. 1 Pe 1:3ff.).
 2. We are renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit in the Word daily.

Norbert H. Mueller

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Galatians 4:4-7

December 28, 1986

"In the fullness of time": The time appointed by the Father and preeminently tied to the coming of Christ. This time fixed in the purpose of God was probably a common thought of early Christianity (cf Jn 2:4, Eph 1:10). "Sent": a reference to God's sending His Son from His preexistent state into the world (cf. Php 2:6). In the phrases "sent forth His son" and "made of a woman" there is brought together the deity and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. Involved are Christ's humiliation and His ultimate purpose to deliver those under the Law (cf. Php 2:7,8).

Jesus Was Sent in the Fullness of Time

- I. To redeem those under the Law.
 - A. To redeem He had to be a unique person.
 1. Made of a woman.
 2. Made under the Law (cf. 2 Cor 5:21).
 - B. To redeem He had to carry out a special work.
 1. Fulfilling all the righteous demands of the Law.
 2. Suffering all the penalties due for disobedience of the righteous demands of the Law.
 3. Doing all this vicariously, that is, in our place, for us.
- II. That all might receive adoption as sons.
 - A. We have been adopted into the family of God.
 1. We are no longer slaves to the Law.
 2. We are children of God, for in faith we cry, "Abba! Father!"
 3. We are heirs, coheirs with Christ Jesus.
 - B. God sends us the Spirit of His Son.
 1. Grafted into the church by the Spirit working through our baptism.
 2. Sustained in our relationship through the Spirit working through the Word of promise.
 3. Nurtured by the Spirit working through the Lord's Supper.
 - C. The spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

Norbert H. Mueller

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18

January 4, 1987

Paul opens his letter to the Ephesians with a glorious Trinitarian doxology (vv 3-14). Lenski says, "Christ is the golden string on which all the pearls of this doxology are strung. He is the central diamond around which all the lesser

diamonds are set as rays”(p.350). The second portion of the lesson consists of verses of 15-18, in which Paul in prayer asks God to grant the Ephesians the wisdom to understand the hope that is theirs in Jesus Christ. The celebration of our Lord’s incarnation is an excellent time for us once again to remind ourselves and our hearers of our Christian hope.

Introduction: Hope in the Christian’s understanding should be more than wishful thinking; it is firm confidence. Using the word “hope” as an acrostic may help us better understand and hold

The Hope to Which You Have Been Called

- I. “H” = Holy. The hope we hold centers in the holy Son of God.
 - A. Our spiritual blessings are in Jesus Christ who came as the holy Child of Bethlehem to bring us the riches of the Father’s kingdom.
 - B. Through the holiness of Christ God sees us as His holy people.
 - C. As God’s holy people we have access to the Father and therefore can be confident of the hope to which we have been called.
- II. “O” = Our. The hope to which we have been called is ours through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - A. We lay personal claim to the hope in Christ by virtue of the faith given to us by God’s gracious Spirit.
 - B. Our hope ever increases as we in faith come to know our Jesus better.
 - C. God chose us even before time that we might be His and live in a personal relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ.
- III. “P” = Promise. Our hope is not based on wishful thinking but on the promise of God in Christ Jesus.
 - A. God is faithful to His promises. Jesus Christ is the proof of His faithfulness.
 - B. Our hope is anchored in the ageless promises of God. Based on His promise we can project our hope into the future.
 - C. The promise of God is the guarantee of our election, redemption, and eternal hope.
- IV. “E” = Eternal. Our hope in Jesus Christ is eternal.
 - A. Our hope is eternal because it is rooted in our everlasting God.
 - B. We have been chosen to be the adopted heirs of our eternal God; therefore, His riches, including eternal life, are our inheritance.
 - C. The eternal character of our hope allows us to be unconsumed by the momentary struggles of the day.

Conclusion: I pray that all of us might better comprehend the hope that is ours in Jesus Christ.

William G. Thompson
Utica, Michigan

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**Acts 10:34-38****January 11, 1987**

"God shows no partiality." The original compound is found only here in the New Testament. The idea is that God does not make judgments regarding individuals on the basis of their appearance or circumstances. In fact, just the opposite is true. God accepts those who fear Him and do what is right.

Introduction: We as a society of people like to smell good and look attractive. In 1984 we in this country spent 15.8 billion dollars on cosmetics to help assure our beauty. With all of our concerns about outward appearance, are we overlooking the inner beauty that comes from a close, living relationship with our Savior? Maybe we need to ask ourselves,

Is Beauty Only Skin Deep?

- I. Human inclinations seem to encourage superficial judgments. However, God never judges on outward appearances.
 - A. Our concerns about how others see us are based on how we look at them.
 1. We too frequently are quick to judge others on the basis of appearance.
 2. Knowing how quickly we judge may cause us to fear being seen without our "make-up," fearing that we will be unfairly judged by others.
 - B. None of us wants to be judged on the basis of superficial evidence. Thankfully, God is never that inconsiderate; He looks deeper than the surface.
 1. Peter in the text affirms that God does not judge on the basis of bigoted opinion or outward beauty.
 2. The text literally says, "God does not accept or reject persons on the basis of facial features."
 3. God in His grace looks into the heart to see if there is faith in Christ.

Transition: Peter learned the truth of God's unbiased love through a vision given him (Ac 10:9-22). Through his testimony you and I are also granted the same revelation: to God beauty is much more than skin deep.

- II. God accepts individuals on the basis of His love for them in Jesus Christ.
 - A. God accepts individuals of every nation who "fear" Him.
 1. To fear God is to have faith in Him.
 2. To fear God is to rightly understand the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ.
 3. To fear God is to live in the "peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all."

- B. God accepts individuals living under all circumstances who seek in Christ "to do what is right."
1. To do right is to repent and seek forgiveness in Jesus Christ.
 2. To do right is daily, through the power of one's baptism, to crucify the old and bring forth the new person to live to God's glory.
 3. To do right is to strive to honor God by doing what one knows to be in keeping with the Lord's will.

Conclusion: With or without "make-up," God loves each person. He has proven His unbiased love in giving His Son to "reconcile the world unto Himself." We are recipients of that love. He looks beyond the surface right to the core of our being where He wants to see a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

William G. Thompson
Utica, Michigan

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

January 18, 1987

One of the hardest jobs connected with being a coach is leading the team to have a positive attitude about itself. To do this the coach might make a speech like this right before a big game: "Team, you have practiced hard, you are hitting well, you are in top physical shape, you are bigger than the other team, faster than the opponent, you have been working well together. There is no reason why you should not win this game!" Whether or not all this is true is beside the point. The coach has to build up his team.

We might say St. Paul is doing the same thing in the introduction of his letter to the Corinthian congregation. His words about his prayer for the Corinthians sound like a great build-up, and they are. However, he is not saying anything about what the people did. Paul gives all the credit for the build-up to God. What the people there were facing was reality, challenges they could not escape, not the least of which was staying faithful until the final epiphany of Jesus Christ. The congregation was not perfect. Immediately after the beautiful build-up, Paul taxes them with their divisions, their fornication, their arguments about baptism, the Lord's Supper, and other things. Paul does not sell the grace of God short. Instead, he tells the people how God has given them, and us as well,

The Great Build-up

- I. The great build-up is the reality of the grace in Christ Jesus given to all of us (v 4).
 - A. We meet this grace throughout the church year. The festival half of the year is one grand epiphany of God's grace after another (elaborate).
 - B. We experience this grace.
 1. By faith we become those who are sanctified (v 2).
 2. We are given the qualifications to be called holy (v 2).
 3. We are tied to all those who call on the name of Jesus with us (v 2).

4. This is not just lofty talk; the grace of God in Christ changes us.
- II. The great build-up is for our Christian life (vv 5,6,7).
- A. There is an immense richness in what we as Christians know and say.
 1. All of our congregation's educational programs are designed to help people know Christ and the will of God.
 2. What we know determines what we can say. This congregation has a lot to say. All of us are mingling with other people each week--and how we can talk! Some of our conversation turns to some good words about God's grace and God's will.
 - B. We do not come behind in any gift.
 1. Paul praised the Corinthians because, compared to what other believers were doing, they were right there with them, not behind. We can also assume that God's grace led them to perform in such a way that God was pleased. God had given them a lot and He expected them to keep up with other believers in their care of the poor, sick, grieving, and the like.
 2. Our congregation has been built by God so that we do not come behind either. (Preacher, pour on some compliments!).
- III. God will continue the great build-up, enabling you to stand in the final epiphany (v 8).
- A. Many people fear the final "buzzer," but there is no need to fear.
 - B. God's grace will confirm you to the end so that you will be blameless.
 1. The Christian's scoreboard has the Savior's face on it--His score.
 2. God has built you up. You have faith, forgiveness, and therefore God's righteousness.
 3. God is faithful. He means what He says when He calls you into fellowship with His Son. He will not let up on His grace; He will not forsake you now or ever.

Conclusion: This is quite a build-up. It is the truth about Christ and you. It is what Epiphany is all about.

Lowell F. Thomas
Lakeland, Florida

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

January 25, 1987

Any pastor who has served a divided congregation shudders at the thought. Divisions sap the church's vitality, ruin relationships, prevent goal-setting, and create pain in every part of the Body. Any pastor who has witnessed a divided congregation heal the breaks will stand in awe at the grace of God. Not only does it work again; it can work with a newly found energy and purpose.

Introduction: Some acerbic wit has observed that, where two or three

Lutherans are gathered together, there will be a split. This observation may be more fact than fiction. Consider how many new congregations have been formed because of a disagreement in the church. Attend some of our voters' meetings and listen to the disagreements that can occur. Some, of course, are good natured or just good debate. Others can soon turn into a "step outside and say that" confrontation. God forbid that we should ever suffer a division in our congregation! God grants us grace to heed Paul's words to the Corinthians in our lesson. He gives us

An Anatomy of a Division Healed

- I. The division is detected.
 - A. A division is usually detected by hearing its noise.
 1. People quarrel rather than discuss matters. In a quarrel people seek to win, right or wrong. A discussion trades ideas to aid understanding.
 2. The noise can be heard firsthand or secondhand. A division, by its nature, cannot be contained. Jesus said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand" (Mt 12:25). A division always creates a split.
 - B. Paul heard from Chloe's household about a quarrel concerning personal attachments to various leaders (vv 11,12).
 1. There seems to have been a contest about which leader was the best. The options included Paul, the great apostle; Apollos, a converted Jew, eloquent, instructed by Aquila and Priscilla (Ac 18:24-26); Peter, whom we all know; and Christ, the Lord of the Church.
 2. Christians can become too attached to leaders today. We see this problem when a preacher is praised more than Christ by some, while others talk as much about his faults.
 - C. Have we been quarreling?
 1. Christians do not have the right to fight. Even a feisty confession can be divisive.
 2. When a division takes place, the matter is great in the minds of those involved.
- II. The cause is revealed.
 - A. People forget who the Savior is (vv 13-15).
 1. "Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into his name?" The answer was and is obvious.
 2. A necessary question for a divided congregation is this: "Where is Christ?"
 - B. People also forget the real purpose of the church.
 1. Paul's seemingly careless record-keeping indicts any over-emphasis on human institutions (v 16). Did church records ever save anyone?
 2. The purpose of the congregation is to preach Christ (v 17).
 3. A necessary question for a divided congregation is this: "What does this issue have to do with preaching Christ?"

III. The healing is effected.

- A. Restoration is a gift connected with the name of Jesus Christ (v 10).
 - 1. The name of Jesus allows the guilty to repent.
 - 2. The name of Jesus is all that Jesus is and had to give to sinners: forgiveness of sins, peace with God and man.
 - 3. Restoration is an activity of the congregation carried out through the office of the keys. Those who have been healed help heal others.
- B. Perfect agreement is experienced among minds glued to Christ.
 - 1. Of course, there will be differences. God created us in that way and the varieties of gifts enhance the possibilities for service--not quarreling.
 - 2. The Spirit of God leads people to keep Christ in the center of their lives and church. While this point should be obvious, it is not always so. We constantly pray that the Spirit grant us such lives and such a church.
- C. Healing leaves scars; but they only point to what once was hurting but now is healed in Jesus' name.
 - 1. Let us dwell on Christ, not on the scars.
 - 2. Let us catch any divisions early and settle them in the name of Jesus.
 - 3. Let us be gentle with each other. We are all by nature troublemakers. By God's grace we are peace-makers.

Lowell F. Thomas
Lakeland, Florida

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

February 1, 1987

From a human perspective, God operates in a very strange fashion. He does not prize or value those qualities men and women cherish. Boasting of one's wisdom, power, and status counts for nothing in the sight of God. In the Old Testament, when He called His people to Himself, He chose a most unlikely and undeserving band of slaves. He molded these "nobodies" into His own nation (Dt 7:6-8). God's strategy has not changed in the New Testament. What the human eye values (v 26) is of no consequence to God (vv 27-29). Only in Jesus (v 30) do we learn of how God perceives the issues of wisdom and power and status. Once we share His world view, we quickly learn that the only cause for boasting is in the Lord Himself (v 31).

Introduction: Where there are differences of opinion, people often make every effort to work out a compromise. In some cases this is most appropriate. However, Paul indicates that there can be no compromise when human and divine world views meet each other. Here there is only collision.

Colliding World Views

- I. Views collide on what constitutes wisdom.
 - A. There is a view from the human perspective.
 1. Wisdom is determined by the degrees and the skills one has acquired.
 - a. The Greeks valued this wisdom in Paul's day (Ac 17:16-21).
 - b. Many value this wisdom today.
 2. This wisdom is inadequate.
 - a. Many very wise people still have very big personal problems.
 - b. Human wisdom fails to deal with issues like sin and death (1 Cor 3:19,20).
 - B. There is a view from God's perspective.
 1. Real power is demonstrated by the servant Christ (v 27; Mt 20:28).
 - a. Through His servant life He has reconciled us to our God (2 Cor 5:18-21).
 - b. Through His servant life He has restored us to each other (Php 4:2).
 2. Real power is demonstrated by the servant church.
 - a. Jesus shows how this power is to be used (Jn 13:15,16).
 - b. Display of this power identifies us as true disciples (Jn 13:34,35).
- II. Views collide on what matters in life.
 - A. There is a view from the human perspective.
 1. Status and position are what matter.
 - a. That was the hallmark of Greek society (v 26).
 - b. Our society today is not much different.
 2. This view suggests that some lives are more significant and valuable than others (Jn 4:9).
 - B. There is a view from God's perspective.
 1. All life is precious.
 - a. Jesus sought out the unlovable (Mt 9:10-13).
 - b. Jesus died for all (1 Jn 2:1,2).
 2. All life is to be precious to us (Jas 2:1-7).

Conclusion: In the collision of world views there can be no compromise. Only one is the true perspective. May God grant that we see from His perspective at all times.

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Bloomington, Indiana

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**1 Corinthians 2:1-5****February 8, 1987**

Never before have there been so many "proclaimers of the Gospel" as today. In addition to pastors who occupy pulpits in churches across the land, there is a host of radio and television proclaimers who build their own churches, cultivate their own fellowships, operate their own networks, and establish their own universities. Where do these proclaimers fit into God's plan? What is their place in the church of Jesus Christ? It is easy to be confused about the role of these proclaimers. In some cases people base their faith not in Christ but in a certain proclaimer. Others see their relationship to the church as totally dependent on the personality of a proclaimer. Some are willing to heed the Word of God only as long as the proclaimer has a dynamic style. Proclaimers are not the essence of the church. They do not make the Church what it is (v 5). Jesus alone is Head of His church (v 2). The kingdom of God is not dependent on the personality or the speaking ability of any proclaimer (vv 3,4).

Introduction: What are we to make of all the proclaimers of the Gospel who confront us on radio and television? What about the proclaimers of the Gospel in our own churches? What St. Paul—the chief proclaimer of the Gospel—said of himself so long ago has significance for us today.

Proclaimers of the Gospel

- I. They are gifts from God.
 - A. There are no self-appointed, self-designated gifts to the church.
 1. This is how some appear (Ac 8:9-12).
 2. This is not God's plan.
 - B. God sends the proclaimers.
 1. He sent Paul to Corinth (Ac 16:6-10; 18:9-11).
 2. He sends pastors today (Eph 4:11).
 - C. God equips the proclaimers.
 1. They are not left to their own dramatic devices.
 - a. Some dramatic proclaimers have a big following.
 - b. The content of their message may be far from the truth (2 Cor 4:20; 2 Tm 4:3,4).
 2. They are empowered by the Holy Spirit.
 - a. Paul's speech was not impressive (vv 3,4).
 - b. God worked through Paul as He does through others today (v.4; 2 Cor 12:9).
- II. They testify to Jesus.
 - A. Paul proclaimed the crucified Christ (v 2; 2 Cor 4:5).
 1. He did not have to dream up his message (Ga 1:11).
 2. He was entrusted with the Gospel.
 - a. He was an apostle to the Gentiles (Ac 9:15).
 - b. He proclaimed a message for the sin-corrupted world (Ro 5:6-11).

- B. Today the same Christ is proclaimed.
 - 1. Passing centuries have not lessened our need for the Gospel.
 - a. Proclaimers do not have to come up with their own "contemporary" message.
 - b. Sin still destroys life.
 - 2. Jesus is all we have to proclaim (Ac 4:12).
 - a. His sacrifice is eternally effective (He 9:25,26).
 - b. His promises are eternally comforting (Jn 10:27,28).
- III. They are not perfect.
 - A. Sometimes we expect perfect proclaimers.
 - 1. We look for those who excel in all gifts and make no mistakes.
 - 2. We are easily disappointed.
 - a. Some were disappointed in Paul (2 Cor 10:10).
 - b. Some are disappointed today.
 - B. Proclaimers are frail sinners (2 Cor 4:7; 11:30; 1 Tm 1:15).
 - 1. The church is not built on proclaimers but on Christ (2 Cor 4:5).
 - 2. The glory belongs to God alone (2 Cor 3:5; 1 Cor 1:30,31).

Conclusion: In his wisdom God uses frail proclaimers of the Gospel to spread His Word and shepherd His people. However, these men do not make the church what it is. We thank God for proclaimers of the Gospel, but we also remember that our faith rests in no man—only in Christ.

Lawrence W. Mitchell
Bloomington, Indiana

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

1 Corinthians 2:6-13

February 15, 1987

This text underscores that all we believe and teach which gives us life with God now and eternally is not human invention. Rather, it is the great saving act of God which He himself has revealed to us by His Spirit. The world has never ceased promoting its own wisdom (1:22) and Paul is not about to join the philosophical flock (2:1-5). Thus, still today, we must affirm the genuine source of our salvation.

Introduction: Knowledge about the things of this world multiplies every year. We know far more about the processes of life now than we did only fifty years ago. Such knowledge is not necessarily linked to wisdom, even though today there are countless proponents of philosophies and "guidelines for living," both ancient and modern. But has such wisdom made life better? Does it truly take care of our sinful situation and meet our most basic need of salvation? Paul submitted his own knowledge and wisdom to that of God (2:1-2) because he believed that the latter makes us wise unto salvation as it directs us through this life. From God we have

A Superior Wisdom

- I. God's wisdom is superior to human wisdom.
 - A. It encompasses all human experience.
 - 1. It is from eternity (v 7).
 - 2. It had been hidden in time past but revealed for the good of humanity (v 7).
 - 3. It has as its goal to bring us to glory, to give us all we need for time and eternity (v 7).
 - B. It is greater than human wisdom.
 - 1. Human wisdom deals with the things of this life (v 6).
 - 2. Human wisdom does not understand the things of God. If people at Jesus' time had understood, they would not have crucified Him (v 8).
 - 3. Human wisdom has no final, glorious purpose and fulfillment. It ends up without eternal blessings (v 6).
 - C. We must not substitute human wisdom for the wisdom of God, for we will end up with nothing.
- II. God's wisdom is that which He reveals to us.
 - A. Even we who are God's people cannot comprehend God's wisdom of ourselves (v 9).
 - B. But God reveals it to us by His Spirit, who alone knows God's mind (vv 10-11).
 - C. He reveals the Good News of all that He has prepared for in Christ (v 9, 2:1-2).
- III. God's wisdom brings us ultimate blessings.
 - A. It does not mislead us like the wisdom of this world can (v 12).
 - B. It is a wisdom that opens us to the free gifts of God (v 12).
 - C. Thus, we can be sure that we have the truth that truly enriches our lives.

Conclusion: Knowledge is important. We need to know what and whom God has revealed. To know Christ and Him crucified is to have the wisdom from God which is superior to all, for it is the wisdom that saves.

Luther G. Strasen
Fort Wayne, Indiana

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

February 22, 1987

The general thrust of the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians is the divisiveness that was taking place in the congregation at Corinth. Yet at this point Paul's emphasis is not so much the divisions as it is the foundation upon which the church is built in contradistinction to divisions. The apostles whom Paul mentions are not themselves false teachers, but to place misguided loyalties in them

endangered the construction of the church. Of note is that the Greek word for “destroy” used twice in verse 17 describes firstly the action of those who wreak havoc on the church and then the destruction of God upon them for their false leadership. The KJV “defile,” used in the first case, does not carry through the construction—versus—destruction theme of the pericope.

Introduction: “You yourselves are God’s temple,” Paul tells us. He is picturing God’s people as a holy building which has as its basic foundation Jesus Christ. That building is what today we call the Holy Christian Church and each of us who believes in Jesus Christ is a part of it. But already at Paul’s time there were problems in the church which were causing erosion of the temple rather than its construction. In the Corinthian congregation there were those who gave their first loyalties to the apostles they knew and were in danger of following the teachings of men rather than trusting in Jesus Christ. The apostle deals with this detrimental situation in the first three chapters of First Corinthians. He now sums up his appeal by reminding all of us who are God’s people that for the church to grow and fulfill its mission it must be

Built on Christ

- I. The church is always being built.
 - A. God has used people like Paul, Apollos, and Peter. They were wise builders (3:5-6, v 10).
 - B. Through the centuries, spiritual leaders have built upon what the apostles constructed (v 10).
 - C. Yet it is always God’s grace that enables anyone to build (v 10).
 - D. And the basic foundation must always be Jesus Christ. There can be no other (v 10).

- II. The church must be built carefully.
 - A. The church is God’s holy temple in whom God dwells (v 16), all who have been called out of darkness into God’s wonderful light through Jesus, the foundation (1 Pe 2:4-10).
 - B. What is built upon the foundation must spiritually connect and conform to the foundation so that what grows is the holy temple, giving evidence in both faith and action (Mt 5:38-48).
 - C. There are those through the centuries (and still today) who have built on their own wisdom, which is foolishness in God’s sight and fulfills nothing (vv 18-20).
 - D. The building is torn down then, rather than built up (v 17).
 - E. But God, in turn, will destroy those who destroy (v 17).
 - F. Thus, we, as a denomination or congregation or as individuals (both pastor and people), must be certain that we are building with genuine spiritual materials.

- III. The church will grow as it is constructed on Jesus Christ.
 - A. We thank God for the true builders of the past and rejoice in them, but we do not boast or glory in them (v 21).
 - B. We have abundant gifts from God, including spiritual leaders. However, what makes us grow is not that we belong to them, but that we are of Christ (vv 21-22). That is the greatest gift.

- C. And Christ is of God. Through Christ we are recipients of God's salvation; we are His holy temple.

Conclusion: We are built and we are builders. With Jesus Christ as the foundation, the building which is His church grows to the glory of God.

Luther G. Strasen
Fort Wayne, Indiana

LAST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

2 Peter 1:16-19 (20-21)

March 1, 1987

As the first letter of Peter speaks of problems created by those who persecuted the church from without, this second letter addresses problems encountered within the Christian fellowship. False teachers were raising doubts in the hearts of individual believers, and the apostle sees the need for the Morningstar to arise within these simple hearts once again (v 19). By their sophistry the false teachers were able to strip away from some believers a firm defense of the Christian hope (1 Pe 3:15). The claim was made that the saving acts of God in Christ, remembered from the past, were nothing more than fairy tales which reasonable adults abandon when they advance beyond childhood. On the other hand, the Christian hope for the future was said to be nothing more than one empty promise upon another. All that remained, the false teachers said, was the present: Live as if there is no tomorrow! In answer to this rhetoric Peter testifies that when life is lived in a vacuum, without regard for the past or the future, the inevitable result is aimless licentiousness. It is plain to see that the Transfiguration made a tremendous impression upon Peter. He speaks of the event as one who on several occasions had experienced serious doubts himself: "I saw what happened on that mountain!" Call it "poetic mercy," if you will, that the man who once sank beneath the waves of Galilee could now bolster the faith of others. We also note in Peter's message a sense of urgency which is befitting every minister of the Gospel. He was deeply concerned about what would happen to the small flock of the faithful after he himself had put off the tent of his body (vv 12-15).

The Word Made Sure

- I. The Christian and the past.
 - A. His faith is anchored in the Old Testament prophets.
 1. Moses and Elijah testified concerning Christ (see Lk 9:31).
 2. The Old Testament promises witness to a plan of God long in the making (Lk 24:45-47).
 - B. The New Testament facts confirm the Old Testament promises.
 1. The Father glorifies the one He announces as his Son, the Messiah.
 2. The apostles testify: "We saw and heard all of God's promises fulfilled."

II. The Christian and the present.

- A. His life in the present is founded upon the past.
 1. He listens only to the living Word of the prophets and the apostles (1 Pe 3:2).
 2. He always goes back to his beginnings, distinguishing human novelties from the ever-new mercies of God (Lm 3:22,23).
 3. He lives every day according to the will and purposes of a loving God.
- B. His life is directed toward the future.
 1. By faith in the promises of God the future is already present and real.
 2. He directs others toward God's promised future as a bearer of light to a dark world (v 19).

III. The Christian and the future.

- A. The world will be darkest before the dawn, but then the Morningstar will arise.
- B. The promises of the second coming of Christ are as sure as the fulfilled promises of his first coming.

James Bollhagen

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Romans 5:12 (13-16), 17-19

March 8, 1987

This pericope serves as an explanation of how we are saved specifically by the life of Christ (end of v 10). Since our salvation is entirely the work of another, it is thoroughly completed *extra nos*, apart from our participation. But at the same time Paul carefully notes that man's condemnation results from personal involvement and culpability, "because all men sinned" (v 12). Although Paul limits his words to the fall and redemption of mankind, we remember that the whole creation is involved (8:20). The Adam-Christ typology and our solidarity with them both is seen in a somewhat different light in 1 Corinthians 15:45ff. The phrase "in life" (v 17) is seen by some commentators, including Lenski, as referring to eternal life in heaven. This is undoubtedly right, but this present life lived by faith in the Son of God is not thereby excluded. The new creation in Christ has already been initiated here in this fallen world in the lives of believers, and its repercussions for daily life are limitless (vv 1-5). The law-Gospel dialectic is clearly in evidence, and it is also abundantly clear that "mercy triumphs over justice" (Jas 2:13). God hastens to His proper work, that of removing from our lives the spell of death. We observe that both condemnation and justification flow out of (*ek*) the transgressions of man (v 16). This enigma of grace is reminiscent of how God sent the Flood because of man's sin and of how He promised never to send another flood for the very same reason (cf. Gn 6:5 and 8:21). Finally, in this text Paul does not conceive of death as merely a final punctum like a period at the end of a sentence. It is an omnipresent force in our world and an ever-present determinant in the lives and ac-

tions of sinners. Living under the shadow of death, man is bent upon self-preservation, and virtually every sin can be traced back to that motivation.

Life out of Death

- I. The spell of death.
 - A. The primal sin of Adam brought the condemnation of death into the world.
 - B. Man lives under the power and control of death.
 - C. Death's control is evidenced by man's sinful acts of self-preservation.
- II. Christ: the removal of the spell of death.
 - A. The Second Adam has ushered in a new creation.
 1. The grace of God has miraculously appeared in the midst of sin.
 2. Christ came as the obedient Son of God.
 - B. The Second Adam has provided a gift.
 1. The abundance of God's grace is received by faith (v 17).
 2. The gift flowing from His grace is a favorable verdict based upon an alien righteousness.
 3. The favorable verdict will always stand up in the face of condemnation.
- III. Life in the new creation.
 - A. God's favorable verdict is in force here and now.
 - B. Where the sting of death has been taken away self-preservation can give way to self-sacrifice.
 - C. The new life means reigning with Christ eternally.

James Bollhagen

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

March 15, 1987

The central thought is justification by God's grace for Christ's sake through faith. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers rejoice in this fact so much that they seek no self-made crutch to help them stand before God. The problem is that we regard even faith as a good work. The means to the goal is showing that *sola fide* emphasizes *sola gratia* and *solus Christus*. (See Robert D. Preus, "Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification," *CTQ* 45 [July, 1981]: 163-84. N.B.: In part I below, misinterpretation of the Gospel is discussed; hence, the thrust is Law. In part II.B. the Law is mentioned to demonstrate the contrast with the Gospel.)

Introduction: "Salvation by faith" is not good news if I worry about how weak my faith is. Really "justification by faith" is shorthand for "justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith." The shorthand can be true or false, depending on how one understands it. So we ask,

Does Faith Save?

- I. Yes—in that it eliminates all crutches on which to stand before God.
 - A. Faith is the opposite of works, as shown by Abraham (vv 3-4).
 1. Paul set forth a clear alternative: one or the other.
 2. But the rabbis viewed Abraham's trusting as a good work. We are similar when we emphasize unduly the psychology of faith or the great things faith leads us to do.
 - B. Faith is the only way to receive a promise (vv 13-14,16).
 1. "This is Paul's chief argument, which he often repeats" (Ap.IV:84, q.v.; also Ap.IV:70).
 2. Therefore, the promise calls for faith. It is not conditioned on or validated by either works or faith (see Ap.IV:297).
 3. Salvation is completely God's work, in spite of our deep desire to contribute something to it. If we *did* contribute, even faith, God would not be the Savior (see v 2).
- II. No—in that faith itself does not become our virtue before God.
 - A. Christ is our righteousness, not faith itself (v 5 together with vv 6-8; cf. images like "drinking" in Jn 4).
 1. His "not guilty" verdict on us is based on His work, not ours.
 2. Jesus, His work, and the results of His work constitute the object of our faith and form the center of our piety.
 - a. We are saved not because of faith, but because of our Lord.
 - b. We can thus be certain of our salvation (v 16).
 - B. The quality of our faith is never good enough (v 15).
 1. When saving faith is compared to climbing into a tightrope walker's wheelbarrow, the implication is that faith must be very bold to be real.
 2. When the "health" of the church is analyzed in terms of how zealously it carries out the Great Commission, faith's production of fruit becomes the criterion of Christianity.
 3. When we look upon the fervency or effects of faith as a reason why God is not playing favorites when He loves us, we do neither Him nor ourselves any favors.
 - C. God justifies the one who has no virtue but Christ (v 5). This is the Gospel alternative to an enslaving obsession with faith.

Conclusion: To say, "faith saves," is like saying, "eating makes you strong." Eating itself does not; the nutritional value of the food does. Faith saves in that it receives the Savior.

Ken Schurb
Columbus, Ohio

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Ephesians 5:8-14

March 22, 1987

In this text "light" refers to aspects of both law and Gospel, emphasizing the salvation-good works connection. The central thought is that Christians should live out their status as God's beloved people and oppose evil. The goal of the sermon is that the hearers have a day-to-day lifestyle in which Christ's claim on them dominates. The problem is that alienation from God and its resultant works confront us constantly. The means to the goal is proclaiming that Christ's claim redeems and transforms.

Introduction: Imagine trying to describe light to a blind person. "It enables one to see" may be the best you can do. You have explained the nature of light in terms of its activity, though it is possible to distinguish the two. The text is similar as it discusses Christ's light.

The Effects of the Light in a Darkened World

- I. It shows the way (vv 8-10).
 - A. To God.
 1. Lest we forget, we were once darkness (v 8a), a condition not of mere sadness, but being targets of God's wrath (v 6).
 2. Now we are light in Christ (v 8b). God fought darkness not by switching on a light within each person, but by setting up a great illumination among us (see Jn 9:39). Jesus has overcome sin and its darkening effects on us (Jn 1:4-5).
 - B. Therefore we can find a path in the world (v 8c).
 1. It is not a matter of rote. Just as light shines, trees give fruit, and children take after their parents, we who are light in Christ act like Him (vv 8c-9).
 2. Therefore, our desire is to please Him in all things (v 10).

Transition: Our present circumstances in addition to our past surround us with darkness, however. On the Third Sunday in Lent the church traditionally warned of the danger of turning back to the world. But what should we do instead?

- II. It exposes the darkness (vv 11-13) .
 - A. By establishing a clear contrast.
 1. We refuse to have part in dark works (v 11a; compare v 7).
 2. We view them with horror (v 12). We know they stand against the entire work of Christ and would thwart His work through us.
 - B. By actively opposing darkness (v 11b; see resources on *elegcho*).
 1. By word and deed we show people their sin (v 13a; Jn 3:20f).
 2. We lead them to see things for what they really are (v 13b).

Transition: No matter how dark a room is, light has a way of filling it. If the law "targets" every sin to put a person to shame, the Gospel "targets" every sinner to raise him up with the offer of God's grace.

III. It awakens the sleeper (v 14).

- A. Christ puts us (and those with whom we speak about Him) in the midst of His light--not to condemn, but to save.
- B. No one sleeps so "lightly" that he does not need this light, and no one is so dead that it cannot raise him.
 - 1. Darkness becomes light only when light comes in from outside.
 - 2. The words of verse 14 are a "Gospel imperative."

Conclusion: "The Father's light shines upon the flesh of the Lord, so that a glow may come to us from His flesh, and thus man may come to incorruption" (Irenaeus). When Christ's light shines on us, we are light and we shine; *we do as we are.*

Ken Schurb
Columbus, Ohio

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Romans 8:1-10

March 29, 1987

Here God's words show us the Spirit of life in Christ, which (1) infiltrates our fragile physical existence, giving us hope in victory based on the incarnation of Jesus Christ; (2) indwells in our personal lives so that righteousness can be fulfilled; (3) influences our attitudes so that we can overcome the negative, destructive forces of evil; and (4) inspires hope in everlasting life to give us peace in the face of death.

The Spirit of Life in Christ

- I. The Spirit of life in Christ infiltrates our lives and is based on God's sending His own Son (v 3).
 - A. God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (v 3).
 - 1. Therefore, He identifies with our weaknesses.
 - 2. Jesus' obedience to the will of the Father leads us to faith.
 - B. God condemns sin in the flesh (v 3).
 - 1. Through Christ's holy life God provides a model which gives us a sense of the sacredness of life.
 - 2. Christ's teachings condemn the fleshly sins.
- II. The Spirit of life in Christ indwells in us personally to set us free from sin (v 2).
 - A. When the Holy Spirit is in us, Christ is also in us and we are set free from the power of sin (v 10).
 - 1. Without Christ dwelling in us we would be under the control of sin.
 - 2. When Christ dwells in us, the Spirit gives us life because of His righteousness (v 10).

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- B. The Spirit of Christ sets us free from sin so that the righteous demand of the law might be fulfilled in us (v 4).
 - 1. We are lifted above fleshly beastliness.
 - 2. Our potential is fulfilled by Christ's Spirit dwelling in us.
 - III. The Spirit of life in Christ influences our mind-set as seen in our attitudes and values (v 5).
 - A. Those whose priorities are according to the flesh mind the things of the flesh (v 5).
 - 1. The mind of the flesh is enmity towards God.
 - 2. Those whose being is in the flesh are not able to please God.
 - B. Those whose being is according to the Spirit mind the things of the Spirit.
 - 1. They discipline themselves to maintain a life of prayer.
 - 2. They know that Christ who dwells in them is greater than the satanic curse.
 - IV. The Spirit of life in Christ inspires eternal hope in us to set us free from the havoc of death (v 2).
 - A. The mind of the flesh is death (v 6).
 - 1. The mind of the flesh and a person's consciousness, which depend on the flesh, are sustained only for the life-span of the flesh.
 - 2. The mind of the flesh tries to escape the reality of death.
 - B. The mind of the Spirit is life and peace (v 6).
 - 1. When we take on the qualities of mind of the Spirit, we strengthen our faith in God's saving grace.
 - 2. A peace comes to us when we know that we are freed from the limits of death.

Conclusion: A seventy-year-old man summarized the Spirit of life in Christ when I called in his home representing the "Alive in Christ" fund-drive of the church.

"My wife died recently. I've retired as an engineer, and my health seems to be slipping since I retired," he said.

"Would you like to help with our church's historic effort to support education, missions, etc?" I asked.

"Yes. I've left my savings to my children, which will be adequate to care for them. My old firm has asked me to return part-time. I'll do that, which will make the payments on a \$25,000 pledge. It will give me something meaningful to work for in my retirement. To whom do I write the check for the first payment?"

Harold H. Zietlow

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Romans 8:11-19

April 5, 1987

St. Paul describes the fulfillment of certain expectations with four terms: (1) revelation, (2) resurrection, (3) adoption, and (4) glorification. The Greek word he uses for these expectations is *apokaradokia* which literally means to watch with one's head stretched out, to keep an eager lookout.

Eager Expectations

- I. We have eager expectations of the revelation of the sons of God (v 19).
 - A. All of creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.
 1. Until that revelation, creation struggles under the dark curse of pain and death.
 2. At the time of the revelation of the sons of God, Christ will usher in His visible kingdom.
 - B. We, the children of God, welcome this promise of the revelation of all those who will appear in everlasting life.
 1. Now we see "through a glass darkly."
 2. God's revelation of the sons of God will manifest the miracle of life over death.
- II. We have eager expectations of the resurrection of our bodies through the promise: "He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also. . ." (v 11).
 - A. "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, . . . you will be resurrected to everlasting life" (v 11).
 1. God's life-giving Holy Spirit enters our life to dwell in us through the Word and Sacraments.
 2. Our faith appropriates the promises and gifts offered by Christ's Holy life-giving Spirit.
 - B. Consider the options; those who do not trust in the indwelling, life-giving Spirit separate themselves from God forever.
 1. In this life they are without hope.
 2. In death and in judgment they die the "second death" of God's wrath.
- III. We have eager expectations of the adoption as "... the children of God" (v 15).
 - A. We no longer have to fear falling back into slavery.
 1. We are freed from sin; "... God has given us not the spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Tm 1:7).
 2. We are freed from death; we have the glorious liberty of the children of God (Ro 8:21).

- B. As adopted children of God we can enjoy communicating with Him as our Father.
 - 1. We can say, "Abba, Father," because the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit.
 - 2. As adopted children of God we escape the stunting lovelessness of orphans.
- IV. We have eager expectations of glorification (v 17).
- A. We who are in Christ suffer together with Him in the frailty of life and against the forces of evil.
 - 1. "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Ac 14:22).
 - 2. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor 4:17).
 - B. We who suffer with Christ shall also be glorified with Him.
 - 1. "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim 2:12).
 - 2. "Though the outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16).

Conclusion: As I was writing this outline, I received a phone call telling me that my ninety-year-old aunt, sponsor at my baptism, died. Like so many devout children of God whom you and I know, she encouraged me in my catechetical instruction and my work as an ordained pastor in the church. She had been suffering pain from cancer and the natural loneliness of old age. The Spirit of Christ was in her, so she could look forward to death with eager expectations of the rich promises of God's Word. Her joy to be with the Lord was expressed with the same happy smile she expressed on the photo of our visit to her when she joined us in prayer to our Father in heaven.

Harold H. Zietlow

PALM SUNDAY

Philippians 2:5-11

April 12, 1987

Whether Palm Sunday or the Sunday of the Passion is observed on this day, our text is fitting. Paul's *sedes doctrinae* on the humiliation and exaltation of Christ speaks most pointedly to the events of Holy Week, events which had their preview on Palm Sunday with the paradox of Jesus' humiliating, yet exalted entry into Jerusalem. And Paul certainly had in mind the cross of Good Friday and the empty tomb of Easter in his *etapeinosen* of verse 8 and *hyperhysosen* of verse 9.

The context of this passage is sanctification. Paul is calling the Philippians to a life of humility and selflessness (vv 2-4,12-13). In order to make his point in the strongest possible terms, he injects into his exhortation the example of Christ Jesus. He is saying, "If you want to know how to live in this respect, look at Jesus and imitate Him." The text itself, however, whether an early Chris-

tian hymn or creed used by Paul or Paul's own composition, remains as one of the clearest Christological teachings we have. Its emphasis is evangelical, to show Jesus as Savior, "that every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord." Both text and context should be emphasized, for only in looking to Jesus in faith are we able to follow Jesus' example in life.

Introduction: Whether we admit it or not, we are all imitators. Consciously or unconsciously, we conform our lives to a standard of behavior patterned after individuals we admire. We look to others, follow their example, and even idolize their words and behavior. For that reason, it should be an easy transition for us to follow St. Paul's exhortation in our text. He encourages us:

Look to Jesus

I. As our example.

A. He is our example in humility.

1. He is God from eternity.
2. Selfless love caused Him to become one of us.
 - a. To become "a man" (incarnation) v 8a.
 - b. To become "a slave" (humiliation) v 7b.

B. He is our example in obedience.

1. He obeyed the Father's will (cf. Lk 22:42; Jn 4:34).
2. He obeyed to the point of death on a cross, the lowest degree of humiliation. The cross was a scandal to the world (Ga 5:11) and separation from God (Mt 27:46), but it was God's way of redeeming sinners (Ro 5:8).

Transition: That God should stoop so low as to become a human slave and die in our place is beyond our comprehension. But God's love is not to be rationalized; it is to be believed. His example of humility and obedience is not just to be admired; it is to be imitated. Jesus Himself gives us the desire and the ability to imitate Him.

II. As the object of our worship.

A. We worship Him because God has highly exalted Him (v 9a).

1. Jesus was victorious in His resurrection. He is a Hero with whom we proudly identify.
2. No longer is Jesus limited in the use of His divine attributes. He has entered His glory (Lk 24:26) and now rules powerfully (Eph 1:20-22).

B. We worship Him because God has given Him a name above every name (vv 9-11).

1. "Jesus Christ," God's Chosen One, our Savior. The name tells us everything we need to know about what God has done for us and is still doing for us.
2. "Lord," God's name for Himself, a name He possessed from eternity, but through His humiliation and exaltation, a name which is now confessed to the glory of God.

Conclusion: What more could we want out of life than to imitate and to worship the Lord who has saved us. "Let us then fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith" (He 12:2).

Paul E. Cloeter
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EASTER SUNDAY

Colossians 3:1-4

April 19, 1987

The second half of Colossians, a section which begins with our text, is the practical application of the doctrinal material presented in the first two chapters. What the precise nature of the heresy plaguing the Colossians was is debated. It certainly included Judaizing elements (2:16-17,21-22) which insisted on the practice of certain observances in order to improve and complete one's faith. The fact that Paul also has to stress a proper Christology (1:15f) would indicate some confusion in this area. Perhaps for these reasons, Colossians 2:9-10 expresses as well as any passage the scope of this letter. In our text, Paul contrasts these visible "things that are on earth" (i.e., legalistic requirements) with the hidden "things above." We have been raised with Christ, a fact which also is invisible. The exhortation of Paul, "seek those things above where Christ is," refers to the things that make for true Christianity and bring joy and meaning to life.

Introduction: Easter is about living. It proclaims a living Savior, one whose victory over death also benefits us. "Because I live, you shall live also." This life is not reserved just for heaven. For those of us who, like the Colossians, have been raised with Christ, resurrection living has already begun. The fact that we do not often realize this fact would lead us to ask:

How Do We Live the Resurrection Life?

- I. Live with a remembrance of how Christ has changed us.
 - A. You have died to what you once thought was real life (v 3).
 1. This death took place in Christ as we were connected to Him by faith (2:12).
 2. This death put into the past all work-righteous efforts on our part (2:8,20).
 - B. We have died to all desires to continue a selfish life of sin (Ro 6:2ff).
- II. Live with a mind occupied by things that really count (v 1b,2).
 - A. "The things that are on earth" do not satisfy.
 1. The Colossian error and all other legalistic attempts to manipulate God's grace.
 2. Materialism and other "visible" efforts to find the good life on earth.

- B. "The things above" are "hidden" but are the heart's desire of one connected to Christ.
 - 1. This is where Christ and His gracious rule exist.
 - 2. Included are all God's great acts of salvation (1:14; 2:3) and daily growth in sanctification (2:19).
- III. Live with a hope of the future, glorious life (v 4).
 - A. The victorious resurrection life is a hidden life now. Christians do not seem to be any better off than others. In fact, because our hope and joy are unseen, it appears to others that "we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:19).
 - B. But Christ will one day appear to vindicate His resurrection people.
 - 1. Our hidden life of faith will be revealed with Christ for all to see (cf. 1 Jn 3:2).
 - 2. We will join Him in glory.

Conclusion: Easter is a glorious day, not just because it promises us life after death. It allows us to participate in resurrection living now. Live, then, with a memory of Christ's great victory in the past, with a mind set on His presence and blessing now, and with a certain hope of sharing in His glory to come.

Paul E. Cloeter
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SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

1 Peter 1:3-9

April 26, 1987

The salutation shows that Peter wrote his first epistle to Jewish and Gentile Christians scattered throughout northern Asia Minor. Peter's purpose was to encourage and strengthen his readers in their sufferings by reminding them of the living hope which sustains them on their earthly pilgrimage. The opening doxology of the text points to the crowning manifestation of God's great mercy, His raising of Christ from the dead (v 3). Christ's resurrection makes possible our new birth (regeneration) which occurred in our baptism (Col 2:12; Ro 6:4). Because Christ lives, the hope we received in our baptism is a living hope which looks forward to a heavenly inheritance (v 4). Christians can be sure of coming into this inheritance because God Himself guards them in faith (v 5). "In this you rejoice" (v 6) refers to rejoicing in the new birth, in the hope of heaven, and in God's protection. The verb means "to exult, to leap for joy." Christians can rejoice even though trials now cause grief. Trials are part of God's plan, for they are God's means of testing Christians. As perishable gold is tried in the fire, so faith is tested that it may be purged of its dross and the good metal discovered when Christ is revealed. Faith that endures trials is recognized as genuine (v 7). Although the Christians addressed by Peter expected Christ's coming, they had still to believe without seeing Him (v 8). Through faith in Christ they had a foretaste of heavenly joy and could rejoice in whatever happened because the consummation of their faith was assured (v 9).

Introduction: Probably all of us have thought of how pleasant it would be to come into an inheritance of property or money. We may have envied people who have won a million dollars in a lottery. But inheritances and lottery prizes fade away. And they are good only for this life. Did you ever see vehicles loaded with the possessions and money of the deceased following the hearse to the cemetery? There is, however, an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. It is the heavenly inheritance of which Peter speaks in the text. It is

The Greatest Inheritance of All

- I. God has made us heirs of it.
 - A. By His great mercy.
 1. Because of our sins we deserved to be shut out from God and heaven forever.
 2. But because God wanted us to be with Him, He showed mercy to us and sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for us.
 - B. Through Christ's resurrection.
 1. Christ's resurrection guarantees the completeness of Christ's work and assures us of eternal life.
 2. Christ's resurrection makes possible our new birth as Christians who have the hope of the greatest inheritance of all.
- II. God will bring us to it.
 - A. By using trouble to test our faith.
 1. The dross is driven out.
 2. The genuineness of our faith will be seen at Christ's appearing.
 - B. By using His power to sustain us to the end.
 1. Through Word and Sacrament God will guard our faith.
 2. We can rejoice even though for a little while we may have to suffer various trials.
 3. The outcome of it all is our enjoyment of the greatest inheritance of all.

Conclusion: The longer we live, the faster the years flit by. Life is a short pilgrimage. We are just passing through this world to the greatest inheritance of all. Of this inheritance we can be sure because God has made us heirs of it, and God will bring us to it.

Gerhard Aho

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

1 Peter 1:17-21

May 3, 1987

Verse 17 is a warning against carnal security. In the preceding verses (vv 15-16) Peter reminds his readers that, as God who called them is holy, they are to be holy in their conduct. While we call upon God as our Father, we do not forget that He is a holy God and therefore not an indulgent father. He judges every

person impartially, without favoritism, according to that person's deeds. It follows that we are to live out our lives in reverent fear of God. We are to be afraid of insulting and forsaking God by showing indifference to His Word and will. This fear is prompted, above all, by the knowledge of our redemption (v 18). If we persist in sin's futile ways, we show frivolity towards God's holy will and no regard for the ransom our redemption required. Before the foundation of the world God destined His own Son to be the Lamb for sinners slain (vv 19-20) so that our confidence (our faith and hope) might be in God and not in anyone or anything else (v 21).

Introduction: It is a travesty of the Christian Gospel to say that, because we are saved through faith without works, it does not matter what kind of works we do. We must not deliberately continue in sin. Rather, we must be imitators of God. In the verses preceding the text, Peter urges us to be holy in our conduct as God is holy. But what motivates us to holy conduct? We look at outward deeds, but God looks at what prompts those deeds. The text makes clear that the highest motivation for good deeds and words and thoughts is the ransom paid for our redemption. Peter urges us to

Live As Ransomed People

- I. Because living in sin is futile.
 - A. It brings only emptiness.
 1. Sensual pleasures and material wealth provide some kind of enjoyment for a while, but in the end they do not satisfy.
 2. Sin, once yielded to, tends to create an appetite for greater sin which leaves the sinner more jaded and spent in a seemingly purposeless existence.
 - B. It incurs God's judgment.
 1. He judges each person's deeds impartially.
 2. We must not think, because we call God our Father, that it does not matter to Him how we live. We insult Him when we purposely continue in what we know to be wrong.
 - C. But living in sin is futile, above all, because we have been ransomed from sin. How futile to remain in a bondage from which we have already been freed! That is like a kidnapped person insisting on remaining the captive of his kidnappers even though the ransom has been paid.
- II. Because the ransom price was precious.
 - A. No perishable thing sufficed to redeem us.
 1. Such as silver or gold.
 2. Such as a good reputation or great achievements.
 - B. The ransom was none other than the precious blood of Christ.
 1. He was the spotless Lamb who was able to take our place by bearing our sin.
 2. Before the foundation of the world God destined His own Son to be the payment by which we were ransomed from the dominion of Satan and the power of sin.

III. Because the blessings received are great.

- A. We have received faith.
 - 1. The object of our faith is the living, changeless Christ.
 - 2. Our faith may waver but Christ never will. Because we are joined to Him by faith, we can endure every earthly trial.
- B. We have received hope.
 - 1. We have hope because Christ has been raised to glory.
 - 2. We can always have hope because no matter what we go through now, we belong to Christ, and we will one day be with Him in glory.

Conclusion: We surely have reason to live as the ransomed people we are. We have been delivered from sin's futile ways, we have been redeemed by Christ's precious blood, and we have been given faith and hope in God.

Gerhard Aho

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

1 Peter 2:19-25

May 10, 1987

In verse 19 the phrase translated "mindful of God" (RSV) means literally "for conscience of God," that is, consciousness of God's will. Even if suffering is unjustly inflicted upon us, it is God's will that we bear it patiently (Mt 5:39). The Greek word *kleos*, which the RSV translates "credit," occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. To be patient when suffering a deserved punishment may be difficult; yet it is no more than our duty. But taking wrongful suffering patiently is more than merely recognized duty. Such conduct brings honor to Christianity and has God's approbation (v 20). In verse 21 Peter urges us to imitate Christ in suffering undeserved affliction patiently. Christ suffered even though He had committed no sin (v 22). He did not return evil for evil (v 23). He did not revile or threaten, but He trusted (committed) His revilers to God who judges justly (possibly a reference to Christ's prayer, "Father, forgive them"). Having spoken of the Lord as our example of patience in suffering, Peter emphasizes the deeper significance of Christ's sufferings. Already in verse 21 he had spoken of Christ suffering for (*hyper*) us. Peter thus points to Christ suffering in our stead by vicariously bearing our sins (v 24). The reference here is to Isaiah 53:12, where the idea is suffering the punishment of sin. Christ died so that we would have nothing to do with sin but rather submit to the will of God. When we fall into sin, it is comforting to know that the stripes (the marks of scourging left in Christ's flesh) bring healing to us who believe in Him. For the sickness of our sin we are given the health of Christ's righteousness (v 24). Because in Christ we are healed we can endure patiently the physical and emotional strain our suffering brings us. Our patience is increased also by the assurance (v 25) that we who were lost in sin have been brought back to Christ, the chief Shepherd and Guardian of our souls which He bought for Himself with His innocent suffering and death.

Introduction: What have I done to deserve this? Have you exasperatedly asked that question in your suffering? We tend to show impatience if we cannot specify wrong actions for which we deserve our suffering. We are somewhat more ready to suffer patiently for wrongs we know we have committed (traffic violations, for instance). But there is nothing especially commendable about patience in such circumstances. What is highly commendable—indeed, has God's approval—is patient endurance of suffering that comes when we are trying to do right. How can we find the patience to take such suffering? Peter tells us.

Enduring Suffering Patiently

- I. By remembering Christ's example (v 21).
 - A. We are called to follow Christ's example of non-retaliation (v 23a).
 1. No reviling back.
 2. No threatening those who wrong us without cause.
 - B. We are called to follow Christ's example of committing our persecutors to God's judgment (v 23b).
 1. Knowing that vengeance belongs to God alone (Ro 12:9).
 2. Yet asking God to forgive them (Lk 23:34).

While Christ's behavior in undeserved suffering is an inspiration to us, His example alone is not enough. What we need most of all to endure our suffering patiently is the healing Christ provides.

- II. By looking to Christ for healing (v 24c).
 - A. We have healing through Christ bearing our sins (v 24a).
 1. We no longer have to bear the eternal consequences of our sins.
 2. God has forgiven our sins, also our sin of impatience in suffering, and therefore our sufferings are not God's punishment.
 3. Suffering is our lot in a fallen world (Ac 14:22) and as Christ's followers (Jn 15:20), but in Christ's wounds we find spiritual health.
 - B. We have healing through Christ caring for us (v 25).
 1. Christ is our Shepherd who in our baptism restored us to His fold.
 2. Christ is our Guardian who by Word and Sacrament keeps us from giving in to anger and self-pity when we suffer unjustly.

Conclusion: It is the healing we have in Christ as our sin-bearer and soul-carer that enables us to endure suffering patiently.

Gerhard Aho

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

1 Peter 2:4-10

May 17, 1987

The stone to which Christians are continually coming (v 4) is not an inert mass but is full of life. This stone (cornerstone in verse 6) is Christ who rose from the dead and is alive forevermore. Christians are living stones because of

their union with Christ who builds them up into a spiritual house (v 5), the antitype of the temple building. The temple is associated with the priesthood, and thus the living stones are also priests. The Christian church as a holy priesthood is the fulfillment of Exodus 19:6. Christian priests no longer offer animal sacrifices because Christ, the once-and-for-all sacrifice, offered Himself on the altar of the cross. The priests of the spiritual temple offer spiritual sacrifices of praise, good deeds, and themselves. These sacrifices they offer through Jesus Christ, through whom alone the sacrifices are acceptable to God. The quotation in verse 6 of Isaiah 28:16 stresses the security of those who trust in Christ. Such will "not be put to shame," literally, "not be in haste," not rushing about aimlessly because of fear and uncertainty. In verse 7 the literal translation, "to you therefore who believe is the honor," makes clear that the honor of not being confounded belongs to Christians. This meaning of the original is conveyed more clearly by the NASB than by the RSV or the NIV. From this honor it can, however, be implied that the stone (Christ) has precious worth to those who believe. To those who rejected Christ Peter applies the words of Psalm 118:22 to show that, despite their rejection of the living stone, it became, through that very rejection, the head of the corner, the chief cornerstone. In verse 8 Peter quotes Isaiah 8:14 to emphasize that, for the disobedient, Christ is also a stone of stumbling on which they fall and are broken. The Greek word for "disobey" in verse 8 implies willful opposition. The idea of some being destined or appointed (v 8) does not mean that God has appointed certain people to destruction. Rather, the disobedient, by persevering in their rejection of Christ, bring upon themselves the judgment appointed by God for all those who reject the Son. In verse 9 Peter contrasts the disobedient (unbelieving) and Christian people. The church consists of one chosen race because all its members have been granted a new birth by the Spirit. Their royal priesthood denotes the kingly honor they share with Christ. Christians are an holy nation because they possess Christ's holiness by faith and are thus God's children in a special sense, God's own people. The Greek words convey the idea of keeping something for one's self. As God's special people Christians have the privilege of telling others the virtues or excellencies of Him who called them out of the darkness of sin into the marvelous light of His grace. According to verse 10, where Peter quotes the prophecy of Hosea 2:23, it is God who calls people to be His special people. This call of God comes through the Word, by which people are empowered to receive God's mercy.

Introduction: Each Sunday Christians gather to worship in buildings made of wood, glass, steel, cement, and stone. The church, of course, is not buildings, not even stone buildings that have stood for centuries. Yet Peter in the text likens Christians to stones—living stones. He is telling us (*LW* 291):

"We Are God's House of Living Stones"

- I. We live in Christ.
 - A. Christ is *the* living stone.
 1. He is such because He died for us, rose from the grave, and will never die again.
 2. Consequently, God made Him the chief cornerstone which gives coherence and strength to all the other stones (v 6a).

- B. We are living stones because we derive our life from Christ.
 - 1. Our spiritual life began in our baptism when we were added to the living stones which make up the Christian church (v 10).
 - 2. If later in life we become indifferent to the Word of Christ, we can lose our faith. Then Christ will no longer be for us the stone on which we are built, but a stone of stumbling that portends our eternal destruction (v 8).
 - 3. We can remain living stones only as we continue to believe in Christ as our precious cornerstone (v 4a; 6b).

The life we have from Christ flows out from us to others, as living stones in Christ.

II. We live for Christ.

- A. We do so when we offer spiritual sacrifices (v 5c).
 - 1. We have the privilege of telling others the wonderful deeds of God (v 9).
 - a. We can praise God for having called us out of a darkness characterized by deadness, inertness, and opposition to God into that marvelous light in which we have a lively confidence of His mercy.
 - b. In our conversations with other people we can let them know what great things God is still doing for us.
 - 2. We have the privilege of praying earnestly and persistently for ourselves and others.
 - 3. We have the privilege of doing kind and gracious deeds.
- B. Our spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God.
 - 1. Christ atoned for the imperfection that stains even the good we say and do.
 - 2. Since we are accounted holy through faith in Christ, God regards as holy all that we do in faith according to His commandments.

Conclusion: The church does not consist of buildings made of stone or another material. It consists of people like you and me who through Word and Sacrament become and remain living stones. "We are God's house of living stones."

Gerhard Aho

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

1 Peter 3:15-22

May 24, 1987

This text includes the primary passage for the descent of Christ into hell. If you listen to the average Christian recite this part of the Apostles' Creed, you might well get the impression that Christ's descent into hell was the absolutely worst thing that could have ever happened to Him. Just the opposite is true! Christ was made alive and descended into hell for a great victory parade right through the enemy's camp! He thus assures every disciple of victory over

Satan. Christians should say those words of the Creed with excitement and joy. God has not called us to be merely different, but to be dynamic for Him in the world. The problem is that when our faith is challenged, we offer little for others to grasp. When challenged to tell why we believe, we find "That is what the pastor told us in confirmation class" just is not good enough. Our text presents a far better way.

Introduction: When we become Christians, there is a distinct danger that we may heave a sigh of relief that we escaped hell and are now headed for heaven. I say this is a danger if we thereby feel that that is the end of our Christianity. God not only saved us from something terrible and for something good in the future (heaven), but He wants our new lives in Christ to count for something right now.

Christian, Make a Positive Impact

- I. Honor the Lord.
 - A. With a proper answer to inquirers (v 15).
 1. What do you believe?
 2. Why do you believe it?
 - B. With proper actions (life-style) among accusers (v 16).
 1. Your conscience is clear.
 2. Your accuser's evil is exposed.
- II. Jesus leads the way.
 - A. Through suffering.
 1. Jesus suffered (v 18).
 - a. Unjustly.
 - b. Vicariously.
 - c. Once—completely on the cross.
 2. Christians, too, will suffer.
 - a. We are freed, therefore, from suffering to atone for our sins (v 18).
 - b. We are open to suffering for our faith and life in Christ (v 17).
 - B. Victory is assured.
 1. Christ conquered.
 - a. He was "quickened" (vivified, made alive) by the Spirit.
 - b. He paraded victoriously through the enemy's headquarters in hell on Easter morning (v 19) for Satan and all who, like those who rejected God's patient grace in Noah's day, abide in hell (v 20).
 - c. He ascended into heaven where He rules in glorious majesty (v 22).
 2. We, too, are conquerors.
 - a. We are joined to the Victorious One by baptism (v 21).
 - b. His promises to us are backed by His resurrection power.

Conclusion: As Christians we are not merely called out of the evils of sin and death. Instead God Himself gives us the honor, opportunity, and power to make

an impact on our world as our lives and lips speak the Gospel. Jesus Christ, powerfully risen from the dead, leads us to be conquerors through His name. What a challenge!

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SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

1 Peter 4:12-17; 5:6-11

May 31, 1987

This Sunday between the Ascension of our Lord and Pentecost gives us cause to shift our attention from His saving work on our behalf to our activity on His behalf in carrying out His great commission. Our work is not easy and will, in fact, often entail suffering. The problem may be that we are tempted to relegate suffering for Christ to those martyrs in Communist or other oppressed countries who dare to live as Christians and witness to their Savior. American Christians are too easily comfortable with their Christianity in such a way that they are unwilling to risk much in sharing it with others, much less in rejoicing in suffering. The text points us to our God of grace, who in Christ Jesus calls us not only to faith, but also to a strong witness in daily life to our Redeemer. The two sections of the text may not at first seem united. Yet they compliment one another in calling us away from self-pity in suffering to a positive response to suffering for the name of Jesus.

Introduction: This past week we joyfully celebrated the Ascension of our Savior to the Father's right hand where He is enthroned in glory, majesty, and splendor forevermore. In addition, He promises that He will come again to receive us unto Himself that by His grace we might share His glory in heaven forever. Meanwhile we have a job to do for Him—to live to His glory, to share His love everywhere! That can be very difficult. Therefore the Apostle Peter in our text helps us in

Dealing with Suffering between the Ascensions

- I. Expect suffering.
 - A. Suffering is part of the Christian life.
 - 1. We experience it in common with other Christians (5:9b).
 - 2. Sometimes it is severe (4:12; Nero).
 - B. Be sure you suffer for the right reason.
 - 1. Suffering for sin is disgraceful (4:15; Lk 23:41).
 - 2. Suffering as a Christian (4:16) may be very subtle but real as you live as a Christian and witness boldly to Jesus.
- II. Rejoice in suffering.
 - A. Rejoice that your suffering glorifies God (v 16).
 - 1. It identifies you with the suffering Savior (4:13; 2 Cor 4:10).
 - 2. It spotlights His name (v 14). (Recall baptism.)

- B. Rejoice that your suffering is followed by eternal joy and glory (4:13b; Ro 8:17-18).

III. Act wisely in suffering.

- A. In vigilance.
1. Against the devil (5:8).
 2. Knowing the "stakes" are high (5:8).
 3. Constantly—lest indifference, ease, or pride blunt your witness.
- B. Live under God's care.
1. Humbly (5:6). You cannot make it through on your own.
 2. Trustingly.
 - a. God can take care of you (5:6, 10b).
 - b. God wants to take care of you (5:7; Ps 55:22).
 3. Confidently. You are His by grace (5:10).
 - a. Through Christ, who effectively suffered for our sins.
 - b. Called (effectively) to be His.
 - c. To end in eternal glory.

Conclusion: As we see Christ ascend into heaven, we long to ascend with Him. Yet while we look wistfully toward heaven, our feet are still planted firmly on earth. Let us live and witness, not fearfully, but confidently—even rejoicingly—as a part of the faithful band of the Lord.

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THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

Acts 2:1-21

June 7, 1987

In the book of Acts Luke chronicles how the Word of the Lord grew. The birthday of that growth process was the Day of Pentecost. Pentecost was an annual festival of the Jews which followed the Feast of Firstfruits by a week of weeks (seven weeks or 49 days). It was also known as the Feast of Weeks and could be likened to a Thanksgiving festival. "Pentecost" is a Greek derivation meaning fifty because it was the fiftieth day after the Firstfruits Feast. It was a time of rejoicing among God's people. It was time to come to the temple to offer up sacrifices of thanksgiving. Thus, there were Jews from the Diaspora, Hellenistic Jews, as well as proselytes who had gathered from the civilized world at the temple.

From Joel to Jesus the promise was repeated, "You will receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you" (Ac 1:8). What happened on that first Christian Pentecost was the fulfillment of divine promise that the Spirit's power would become manifest in the apostles. The Lord's men were together in one place, no doubt in or near one of the porticoes of the temple. (This open area would offer sufficient room for the great multitude who heard the wonderful news of Christ). There was *pneuma*, a wind powerful and strong, although the skies

were clear and calm. As God in past ages made His presence known in fire (Moses and the burning bush and Elijah and the chariot of the Lord), so there was fire here. It divided and danced over the disciples and they spoke in tongues they did not normally use or know. People gathered to witness the phenomenon. Here were simple country folk from Galilee suddenly speaking in foreign tongues understood by those assembled from the many ancient lands around Israel. The contention of charismatics that the apostles were using a "spirit language" by virtue of a "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" is not borne out by the word *dialektos*, which implies an understandable language. There can be no doubt that it was the divine power of God's Holy Spirit which was manifested on that first Pentecost. In that outpouring there is the dynamic power which causes the Gospel to take root and bear abundant fruit. The preacher would do well to dissect the events of Pentecost and the manifestation of the Spirit, for in our day the work of the Holy Spirit is perhaps the most misunderstood aspect of God's dealings with His people.

Introduction: Once while watching youngsters compete in the "Special Olympics," I was moved by the tremendous spirit which these special children exerted in their competition. That strange, indefinable thing that compels retarded children to compete in athletics is "spirit." There is spirit in athletic contests. There is a spirit of patriotism that can grip a country. Also there can be a spirit of enthusiasm that permeates a church on the move for Christ.

Christians, too, talk of the Spirit. It is not some vague nebulous feeling, force, or power; rather it is the Holy Spirit. It is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity whom we all need to become and remain Christians and who was manifested in a most unusual way on the first Pentecost. That is the Spirit of which we speak today when we say:

"That's the Spirit"

- I. That's the Spirit who comes to us in God's own way.
 - A. He came to the apostles in God's own time.
 - B. He came to them with God's own sign.
 - C. He does not come to us in all the same ways as He did of old, but we have the assurance that He comes through the Word and Sacraments.
- II. That's the Spirit who proclaims God's love in Christ.
 - A. The apostles did not retreat to themselves, but they began to speak about Christ.
 - B. They spoke in languages which many people of that world spoke and understood.
 - C. The Spirit lays upon the church the responsibility of proclaiming the good news of Jesus to all, far and near.
- III. That's the Spirit who helps us become living proof of God's love.
 - A. Some mocked this Spirit's outpouring as intoxication. (People can mock the Spirit but to their own damnation.)

- B. Those who believe fulfill God's promises of old through the prophets. There were those who believed Peter and the others and who by the Spirit became living proof of God's love.
- C. When the Spirit moves us to believe, we also become living proof of God's love in Christ.

Conclusion: Young Jim was in little league. He was playing his favorite position in a play-off game. A ball came whistling at him at second base and almost in self-defense he held his glove in front of his face. The ball struck and a rally by the opponent was cut off. The coach yelled from the bench, "That's the spirit, Jim!" The Spirit who was manifested at Pentecost came in God's own way. He came to proclaim Jesus as Savior and Lord, and He came to make us living proof of His life-saving work.

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TRINITY SUNDAY

2 Corinthians 3:11-14

June 14, 1987

In chapter 3 of 2 Corinthians Paul would note the splendor of the New Testament ministry as opposed to that of the Old Testament exemplified by Moses. The Apostle contrasts the splendor of God in the Old Testament with that of the New revealed in Jesus Christ. The Apostle notes that the glory of the Old is far transcended by the New. Therefore, Paul says we can be "bold" or speak plainly. Moses, the mediator of the Old Testament, shared in the splendor of God on the smoky heights of Mt. Sinai—so much so that he covered his face with a veil when he appeared before the people of Israel. Yet Moses' splendor was a fading one, because he, as well as Israel, shared in the human condition of sin. There is a lasting splendor in Christ and the proclamation of His Gospel that never fades.

In our outline for this text for the Feast of the Holy Trinity, we have endeavored to note the contrast in splendor between the Old and New Testaments. There is a great difference between the light of a candle and the beaming brightness of the sun. God revealed His splendor of old to Moses and His people, but this splendor was but a candle compared to the splendor of God that we can see revealed in the face of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Introduction: Having travelled extensively throughout the western United States, I have been captured and captivated by the splendor of what "God hath wrought!" There is a rugged splendor in the churned rock formations of the Grand Canyon. Who could ever forget the moving splendor of Yosemite's El Capitan, or the mighty sentinels of God's oldest living things, the Redwoods? Of course, there are the Grand Tetons and crowded Yellowstone Park. Our land

abounds in glory and splendor. All of this is but a hint of the splendor of our God and the testament He has established on behalf of His people. It is of that point which Paul wrote and of which we speak when we say:

From Splendor to Splendor

- I. There was splendor in the Old.
 - A. Moses caught a flash of that splendor in God's presence.
 - B. Israel caught a glimpse of that splendor in Moses' appearance.
 - C. We catch a glimpse of the glorious splendor of our God in His presence and covenant at Sinai.
- II. There is a greater splendor in the New.
 - A. Moses could see this splendor only through distant prophecy.
 - B. The New Testament believer sees it in the testament established through Christ.
 - C. We see this lasting splendor of God, which requires no veil to spare us its brightness, in the face of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: The intensity of light is measured in candlepower. One candle may flicker and glow and be seen but a few feet while the beacon of a great lighthouse can be seen for miles. They both have a light and a certain splendor, but there is a vast contrast between the two. So is there a vast contrast in how we see the splendor of God. There was a splendor of God in the Old Testament, but it was a fading one. If we desire to see the true and lasting splendor of our all-glorious God, we must see Him in His New Testament which does not fade in glory and which ever remains a splendor in the face of the brightness of Jesus Christ.

Edmond E. Aho
Chula Vista, California

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 3:21-25a, 27-28

June 21, 1987

The "law" (*nomos*) in the first clause of verse 21 denotes religion embodied in statutes. Because statutory obedience cannot justify, God manifested a righteousness "apart from the law," apart from the exacting principle of man's complete obedience to laws. This righteousness is not opposed to the teaching of the law and the prophets in the Old Testament but rather finds its attestation there (v 21b). It is God's righteousness (v 22) in the sense that Jesus, God's Son, manifested it in His perfect life and innocent death. All people need this righteousness because all have failed (v 23) to measure up to God's glory, to the righteousness God has as God. As all have sinned, so all are justified (declared righteous) by God freely without any human effort on the basis of Christ's redemptive work (v 24). Christ's death had propitiatory power (v 25). God's justification of sinners benefits those sinners only who believe God's declara-

tion of their forgiveness. Because this faith too is entirely God's work, our salvation excludes all boasting by us (v 27) as though we had done something to earn it. In verse 28 Paul sharply distinguishes between faith and works as two different religious systems. The faith principle is a renunciation of any confidence that legal obedience might inspire.

Introduction: It is natural for us to justify ourselves. When someone questions our behaviour we declare it acceptable by pointing to its rightness and propriety. We are quick to defend our actions. That is not what St. Paul means by the term "justify" in our text. He is talking about God's act of justifying, not ours. To say that God justifies means that God declares human beings acceptable to Him. If that is so, we have no need to justify ourselves before God or anyone else. Therefore, the most freeing thing that could happen is for God to justify us, to declare us forgiven. This is precisely what God has done.

Our Justification by God Frees Us

- I. From making the law our justifier.
 - A. Our natural tendency is to use the law to justify ourselves before God.
 1. We do so when we try to keep God's commandments to win God's approval.
 2. We do so when we refuse to let the law reveal our failures in keeping it.
 3. We do so when we do not see ourselves as sinners who fall short of the holiness God requires (v 23).
 - B. What God did through Jesus makes using the law as our justifier totally unnecessary.
 1. God sent Jesus to atone for our sins (v 25a).
 2. God has declared us forgiven, freely, despite our sin and without preliminary improvement of our behavior, on the basis of the redemption secured by Christ.
 - C. It is good that the law is not our justifier.
 1. We have no need to worry about whether we have done enough to please God.
 2. We have no need to justify ourselves before God or before people by comparing our keeping of God's law to others' keeping of it.
 3. Of course, we try to keep God's law, but not for our justification. The law is not our justifier; God is. He justifies "apart from works of law" (v 28).

Paul says we are "justified by faith." Some have interpreted "by faith" to mean that faith is our justifier. But our justification by God also frees us

- II. From making faith our justifier.
 - A. If faith is our justifier, faith becomes a work of the law.
 1. Faith becomes something we contribute to our justification.
 2. We could never be sure whether we had enough faith.
 - B. Faith is God's gift, not our achievement that causes us to be justified.
 1. We cannot boast even of our faith (v 27).
 2. Faith is the very opposite of works (v 28). Faith is instrumental—the hand by which we receive God's forgiveness.

- C. It is good that faith is not our justifier.
1. The strength or weakness of our faith need not determine our justification. Our faith is never as strong as it should be.
 2. We need not have faith in our faith but only in Jesus Christ. What matters is this: I believe God when He says that He has freely, for Christ's sake, justified me.

Conclusion: What a freeing thing it is to be justified by God!

Gerhard Aho

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 4:18-25

June 28, 1987

Paul shows that the method of justification is the same in both the Old and the New Testaments. Abraham's faith was both contrary to hope (as far as the natural workings of the physical body could provide hope) and rested on hope (that God could do what nature could not). It was God's purpose that Abraham should have many descendents (v 18). At a hundred years of age Abraham was fully aware of the deadness of his own body with respect to virility and also the deadness of Sarah's womb. Yet Abraham was fully persuaded that what God had promised God would do (v 19). Impossible as it seemed for Abraham to have an heir, his faith in God's promise did not waver but grew even stronger (v 20). He was utterly convinced God had power to quicken what was humanly dead (v 21). Abraham's faith was "reckoned to him as righteousness," that is, he was justified by faith (v 22). In essence Abraham's faith corresponded to ours (v 23). As the object of his faith was God who gives life to the dead, so the object of our faith is God who raised Jesus from the dead. Verse 24 identifies in principle Abraham's faith and ours. While Abraham's faith was in a divine promise which only divine power could fulfill, the Christian's faith is in God who by His great power has fulfilled the promise in Christ. The omnipotence of God provided at infinite cost for the expiation of sin. God's great work in Christ is described in verse 25: Jesus was delivered into death for our sins (to make atonement for them) and was raised on account of our justification (that the forgiveness Christ secured might be applied to all). While Christ's work was finished on the cross, its result was guaranteed by Christ's resurrection. Thus, He both died and was raised for our justification. Our faith is in the risen Lord through whose death God no longer imputes to people their sins.

Introduction: Most of us have made promises we could not keep or have been disappointed when others failed to keep promises to us. Disappointment turns into heartache and trauma when broken promises destroy a marriage. Also in money matters and job performance broken promises bring anguish. We have learned that we cannot always count on people to keep their promises. God, however, never breaks a promise He has made. The text assures us that

We Can Count on God to Keep His Promises

- I. God raised life from Abraham.
 - A. God promised Abraham many descendants (v 18).
 1. The idea seemed impossible because Abraham and Sarah were old and childless (v 19b).
 2. Abraham believed God could nevertheless do what He had promised (v 21) .
 3. Abraham was counted righteous through faith in God's promise (v 22).
 - B. God raised life from Abraham by letting Sarah give birth to Isaac.
 1. Thus Abraham became the father of the Jewish nation.
 2. Thus Abraham became the forefather of Christ.
 - C. What God did for Abraham shows that nothing is too hard for God.
 1. To us it may appear at times that God is promising the impossible when He promises to deliver us from trouble (Ps 34:17), to let good accrue from our suffering (Ro 5:3-4), to be with us always and everywhere (Gen 28:15a).
 2. Yet we like Abraham can believe God's word no matter how circumstances speak against it.
- II. God raised Jesus to life.
 - A. The promises and assurances of Christ's resurrection were hard to believe.
 1. For the people in Christ's day, even for Christ's own disciples (Jn 5:46-47; Lk 24:25).
 2. For the people of Athens in Paul's day (Ac 17:32a) and for many today.
 - B. That God did actually raise Jesus from the dead (v 24b; 1 Cor 15:3-8) shows that God accomplished the hardest thing of all, our deliverance from sin.
 1. Christ was put to death to atone for our trespasses (v 25a).
 2. He was raised from the dead to assure us of our justification by God (v 25b).
 3. Like Abraham we are counted righteous through faith in God's promise—a promise God has now fulfilled.
 - a. God keeps His promise to remove each day our burden of guilt.
 - b. God keeps His promise to reckon us each day as His pure and holy people in Christ.

Conclusion: We human beings may break promises, but God never will. He who brought life out of old Abraham and raised Jesus from the dead can surely be counted on to keep His promises.

Gerhard Aho

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**Romans 5:6-11****July 5, 1987**

The lessons for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost center upon the shape of the church's mission. In the Old Testament lesson, Moses announces that God initiated a relationship with Israel that was to be for all nations, and that the church's mission began as a divine fiat separating Israel as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation on the world's behalf. The gospel for the day shows that behind the church's mission is Jesus Christ who completed the Father's mission of salvation by teaching, healing, and exorcising in a fallen world that could only be restored by His incarnation and self-sacrifice. His mission of redemption included calling twelve disciples to carry out the church's mission of teaching, healing, and exorcising in a fallen world that needed to hear that in Christ the kingdom of heaven was at hand. In the Epistle Paul zeros in on the scandal that made possible the church's mission. While the world was weak, languishing in sin and at enmity with God, God's love sent forth His Son to diagnose the world's terminal illness and to perform radical surgery on the world through death on a cross. All this our Lord did for the ungodly. Thus, through His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ is the church's model for faithful Christian mission.

The preacher could introduce this theme by showing that as the church continues its mission in 1987, it does so by constantly focusing on Jesus Christ, who scandalized the world by suffering the humiliating death of a cross. The church's faithful mission is not accomplished by insisting on a certain cultural notion of success that sanitizes this scandal. Rather, it is accomplished by confronting the reality of the world's sin and the reality of the world's reconciliation. If the church's faithful Christian mission softens, in any way, the radical nature of Christ's cross, whatever growth it experiences is malignant, because it denies that Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is the model for faithful Christian mission. (For further discussion of this Sunday's pericopes along these lines see D. L. Tiede and A. Kavanagh, *Proclamation 2 Series A* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981], pp. 30-35.)

Jesus Christ—A Model for Faithful Christian Mission

- I. Through His uncompromising diagnosis of the human condition (Ro 5:6,8,10).
 - A. He confronts the problem at its source.
 1. The world is helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Ro 5:6; Mt 9:36; 10:6).
 2. The world is ungodly, steeped in sin (Ro 5:6).
 3. The world is hostile, enemies of God (Ro 5:10).

- B. He knows the tragic results of the problem.
 - 1. The world seeks its own help by positive thinking.
 - 2. The world seeks its own wisdom by denying the consequences of sin.
 - 3. The world seeks its own reconciliation through emotional exhilaration.
- II. Through His radical demonstration of God's love (Ro 5:8ff).
 - A. He solves the problem through His messianic mission of salvation.
 - 1. By the scandal of Jesus the Word taking flesh to restore creation.
 - 2. By the scandal of Jesus the Lamb dying a sacrificial death.
 - B. He knows the boastful results of His messianic mission of mercy.
 - 1. The declaration of righteousness to the sinner through His blood (Ro 5:9).
 - 2. The salvation of the sinner from the wrath of God (Ro 5:9-10).
 - 3. The reconciliation of the sinner to God through His death (Ro 5:10-11).
- III. Through His empowering of the apostolic missionaries (Mt 10:1-7).
 - A. To proclaim to the world the presence of His kingdom (Mt 10:7).
 - 1. Christianity is the world's exorcist (Mt 10:1,8).
 - 2. Christianity is the world's healer (Mt 9:35; 10:1,8).
 - 3. Christianity is the world's teacher (Mt 9:35; 10:7).
 - B. To give to the world access to the presence of His kingdom.
 - 1. Baptism continues Christ's mission by plunging one into His death.
 - 2. The Eucharist sustains Christ's mission by nourishing one on His body given, His blood shed.

Arthur A. Just, Jr.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 5:12-15

July 12, 1987

The theme from last Sunday continues into this Sunday with particular attention upon the realities of the world's condition and God's radical solution to the problem of sin. The dilemma confronted by all three lessons is the reality of the church's mission. The church is called upon by God to endure the same dangers that Jesus Christ endured in bringing redemption to a fallen world. Once again, our focus is missions, but a concern for missions that understands the true nature of Christian mission. All three lessons give us examples of those who have understood their calling by God, endured the hardships that went with that calling, and emerged victorious because they were faithful to that mission and to the One who sent them on their mission. Such witness can give courage to those who understand that preaching the theology of the cross brings persecution, mockery, and rejection. The church that grows is that church that faces these realities squarely and does not shrink from the wrath of a yuppie generation. The hard lesson in reality taught to the church this week by Jeremiah,

Paul, and our Lord himself is that the mission of the church is fraught with danger, but a danger that gives rise to the glorious celebration of Christ's triumph. (For further discussion on this Sunday's pericopes along these lines see *Proclamation 2 Series A*, pp. 36-41.)

A Hard Lesson in Reality

- I. Taught to us through the suffering prophet—Jeremiah (Jr 20:7-13).
 - A. A reluctant prophet victimized by the message he proclaims.
 1. Who feels seduced by God (v 7).
 2. Who feels mocked by his own people (vv 7-8).
 3. Who experiences "terror on every side" (v 10).
 - B. A compelled prophet chosen by God to proclaim this message (v 9).
 1. With a mission that embraces an entire world.
 2. With a destiny to proclaim hard words to a hardhearted people.
 3. With sufferings for the sake of the Gospel.
 - a. A hard lesson in the reality of the human condition.
 - b. A hard lesson in reality learned firsthand by Jeremiah.
- II. Taught to us through the persecuted apostle—Paul (Ro 5:12-15).
 - A. Who sees the hard reality of the prophet-apostle's existence.
 1. To proclaim the original sin that infects us all (vv 12-13).
 2. To identify the world's problem as sinful people (v 14).
 3. To call a people to repentance and faith.
 4. To challenge any denials of this hard lesson in reality.
 - a. This lesson is an ugly one to learn.
 - b. This lesson diagnoses the reality of the human condition.
 - c. This hard lesson in reality was learned firsthand by Paul.
 - B. Who sees the hard reality of God's solution to the problem (v 15).
 1. With confidence in the exclusivity of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.
 2. With constant remembrance of the presence of God's solution in the life of the church.
 - a. "In the Word heard and preached" (*Proclamation*, p. 40).
 - b. "In the Sacrament of the Word faithfully observed and celebrated" (*Proclamation*, p. 40).
- III. Taught to us through the crucified Lord—Jesus (Mt 10:24-33).
 - A. Who faced the heard reality of sin by dying on a cross.
 1. Through suffering, He destroys suffering.
 2. Through death, He destroys death.
 3. Through His resurrection, He restores creation to newness of life.
 - B. Who teaches His disciples how to face the hard realities of suffering and dying for Him.
 1. "Don't expect better treatment than your teacher and Lord received" (*Proclamation*, p. 40).
 2. "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (v 28).
 3. "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven" (v 32).

- C. Who teaches us to be "clear-eyed realists who rejoice in His triumph by reigning with Him from His cross" (*Proclamation*, p. 41).

Arthur A. Just, Jr.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 6:1b-11

July 19, 1987

Human logic is clearly not a reliable tool in considering biblical truth. Nowhere is this more obvious than in St. Paul's comments in the text before us. Although it is true that God's grace abounds in the presence of sin, only a satanic kind of logic would reason that people of God can continue in sin, thereby giving grace an opportunity to increase even further. In truth this is impossible. As Paul affirms plainly, a fundamental change has occurred in a genuine Christian. There has been an active participation with Christ in both His death and resurrection. Repeatedly (vv 3,5,6,8) the Apostle describes the believer's union with the dying and living Lord. As the Christian is joined with Christ, it is inconceivable that he should seek to take advantage of grace. A believer is not simply "wounded" to sin. He is dead to it (v 11).

This does not mean that sin is no longer dangerous. It, in fact, remains quite deadly. But the child of grace has no intention of dabbling in it, thinking that grace will "cover" him if he strays too far. A Christian has turned away from sin, empowered by a Savior who defeated it completely. This is not perfectionist theology. Believers do sin, but they do not want to do so. When they do, their life in Christ assures them that grace heals and forgiveness is sure because of the Christ in them.

Introduction: People walking the beaches along certain parts of our coastline sometimes come upon jellyfish which have washed ashore. Even though these sea creatures may be dead, many have learned from experience that picking one up can be a painful event due to the toxins that remain. In a sense this is an image of sin. Believers have in Christ died to it. Yet it is not to be ignored because it is still deadly. Sin, in truth, is

Defeated But Still Dangerous

- I. Dying with Christ means death to sin.
 - A. We have been crucified with Him (v 6).
 - B. We have been buried with Him by baptism (v 6).
 - C. We have died with Him and to our old self (v 6).
 1. This death has freed us from slavery to sin.
 2. Because we are dead to sin, it is inconceivable and even impossible that we should continue eagerly in it.

Transition: Genuine children of Christ have participated with Him in His death. They share in His victory. Though sin remains dangerous, it has no final power over them as they remember that

II. Living with Christ means life in grace.

A. We have been joined with Christ in His resurrection (v 5).

1. His victory is our victory.
2. His life assures life for us.

B. We have a life in Him that means also a life for Him.

1. Our life is new, freshened by His grace and motivated by His victory.
2. His indwelling presence ("in Christ," v 11) empowers us to live with a deep aversion to sin and a sincere desire to follow only Him.

Conclusion: Sin, though defeated, can still menace God's people. But they have no interest in being drawn into its perversion. They have a new life which is interested in living for Christ, because He both enables them and empowers them.

David E. Seybold
Fredonia, Wisconsin

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 7:15-25a

July 26, 1987

One of the ironies of the Christian life is that it is the person who has experienced the free grace and forgiveness of God most fully who is the most acutely aware of his sin and weakness. The Apostle Paul is a fitting example of this fact, even as he describes it in the text before us. In truth, he perceived painfully that a very real "civil war" raged in the heart of every Christian between flesh and spirit. The good which is desired is not achieved, and the evil which is shunned seems to succeed. To a Christian this is utterly distressing. It heightens the sting of the law, even as it deepens an appreciation for the Gospel. The goal of the sermon is to lead the hearer to understand the nature of the Christian struggle and come to the same conclusion that Paul did, that only through Christ can we be delivered "from this body of death" (v 24).

Introduction: Extensively educated people often admit that the more they study and learn, the more they understand how little they really do know and how much there remains to be learned. Christians have a similar experience. The more they grow in faith, the more they realize how sinful they really are and how much they have yet to learn about discipleship. This heightens the struggle within them, even as they perceive ever more clearly the nature of both law and Gospel. In this way they come to know the glorious answer to the powerful question,

“Who Will Deliver Me?”

- I. From my struggle with evil.
 - A. The law heightens the knowledge of sin.
 1. We know what we should do but cannot seem to accomplish it.
 2. We know that our “flesh” is evil and leads us into actions that are admittedly wrong (v 18).
 - B. The law increases the pain of sin.
 1. We suffer because our actions do not match our desires (v 22).
 2. We struggle over our wretched captivity which dwells in our flesh and wars against our “mind” (v 23).

Transition: As the Christian understands more deeply the demands of the law and his inability to achieve them in spite of his best intentions, the struggle within him intensifies. Like Paul he wonders, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” It is Christ in His empowering and healing Gospel.

- II. For my dedication to God.
 - A. The “Good News” announces that God’s love and grace are far greater than man’s sin.
 - B. The “Good News” affirms that the struggle with sin has been won by Christ, who will deliver His people from their wretched personal war (v 24).
 - C. The “Good News” leads the struggling believer to live thankfully and with devotion for a Savior who strengthens him (v 25).

Conclusion: With an increase in faith comes a heightened awareness of the demands of the law and an intensified struggle between flesh and spirit for the believer’s heart. This “civil war” is both frustrating and debilitating, a true “body of death.” The eternally encouraging truth is that it is Christ who can and will deliver us from it. His love is greater than our sin!

David E. Seybold
Fredonia, Wisconsin

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 8:18-25

August 2, 1987

The lessons for the Eighth and Ninth Sundays after Pentecost are from the same sub-section in Romans 8. Verses 18 to 25 form a unit which treats of the creation and man, respectively, awaiting the fruition of hope; verses 26-27 treat of the Holy Spirit’s help to the saints in keeping the hope alive. Verse 17 is a transition which anticipates the whole argument. In the time of the present indwelling of God’s Spirit in us previous to the realization of our future inheritance, we live with an indebtedness to the Spirit. The Spirit continuously assures us of being God’s children and of our future lot by crying, “Abba Father.” This is the “internal witness” of the Holy Spirit to our human spirit (vv 12-16).

A new factor enters—suffering! In verses 17-18 our glorification is juxtaposed with suffering. Verse 17 does not state a condition, but rather a circumstance (as in v 9): “seeing that we suffer with Him now (or for His sake), that we may enjoy the glory of the final consumation.” Hence, our present state of suffering is contrasted with our future hope of glory. The Holy Spirit gives to us the gift of hope in the midst of present suffering.

Romans 8:18-25 will hardly be properly understood unless the poetic quality displayed in it, especially in verses 19-23, be recognized. Its outward structure but more so its inner quality of imagination, feeling, sympathy, and breadth of vision is poetic. All of creation is portrayed as being in sympathy with the believer and with the Holy Spirit in “groaning” while awaiting the revealing of the sons of God (vv 22,23,26). Paul’s source is not Jewish apocalyptic nor Stoic literature, though he could cite from these traditions and is possibly appealing to people’s knowledge of the imagery of Stoic cosmologies and Eastern apocalypses. He is personifying the entire cosmos. After all, the Evangelists report that at the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus a great earthquake occurred and the graves of many saints opened (Mt 27:52-54; 28:2; cf. Ps 65:12f; Is 24:4,7; Jr 4:28; 14:4).

A final word about the use of some terms in this section would be in order. The most difficult and variously used is *ktisis* (vv 19, 20, 21,22). The only probable interpretation is that it refers to the sum-total of sub-human nature both animate and inanimate. So the translation “the creation” or “the created universe” is preferred to “creature.” The word “earnest expectation” or “confident hope,” *apokaradokia* (v 19), used elsewhere only in Philippians 1:20 in the New Testament, is an intensely poetic term, giving the picture of “craning forward with the neck and head.” The use of the phrase “in hope” in verse 20 is different from its use in verse 24. In the former it points to the creation after the promise of Genesis 3:15 had been given. The “in hope” of verse 24 is a “modal dative” in that it expresses not the means by which we are saved, but the mode: “we are saved by Christ in a condition in which we have hope.” Luther’s rendering is right: “Denn wir sind wohl selig, doch in der Hoffnung.” The difficult expression “inexpressibly groanings” of verse 26 will be discussed below in the outline. Its history of interpretation from the second century on is interesting, but not apropos to the sermon.

Introduction: Hope and despair are all around us. Contrast them in these lines: An ancient epitaph in Asia Minor reads, “Here lies Dionysius of Tarsus, sixty years old, having never married; I wish my father hadn’t either”; while Paul says, “For me to live is Christ, to die is gain” (Php 1:21). Someone in *South Pacific* sings of being “struck like a dope with a thing called hope”; while Peter says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has begotten us to a lively hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pe 1:3). Yes, the Christian has hope, and this hope exists in the context of suffering and pain. (Thus, verses 17 and 18 are themselves an introduction for the sermon.)

The Spirit Keeps Hope Alive Amidst Suffering

- I. The content of hope (vv 18, 19, 21, 23b).
 - A. We are God's children (v 19).
 1. Our sonship is still veiled. Our incognito status is recognizable only to faith. That is why all creation is standing on tiptoes "awaiting the revelation of the sons of God" (v 19).
 2. But we are real children of God. That is why the creation groans as it waits; even so Christians groan while they await their adoption. We have put on the righteousness and the life of Christ in our baptism (Ro 6:1-11), and we are already children of God, though not yet manifest (1 Jn 3:1-3; cf. Ga 3:26ff).
 - B. We have an inheritance.
 1. Our inheritance, though real, is also concealed (vv 17, 23-25).
 2. With faith we, like Abraham of old, already see our inheritance allotted to us because we are "joint-heirs with Christ" (v 17).
 3. The Holy Spirit keeps hope alive in spite of the suffering around us (vv 18, 20), because it is the very nature of the Spirit's indwelling that He holds before us what we do not and cannot see now (vv 24-25).
- II. The present painful context of hope.
 - A. The sufferings of the present time in nature (v 18).
 1. All creation is groaning because it has been subjected to vanity and frustration. This subjection occurred when God said, "Cursed be the ground for thy sake" (Gn 3:17-19). Note the mutability and mortality of everything.
 2. All creation has been subjected "to vanity" (v 20) and a "slavery to moral corruption" (v 21). It includes the slavery to the "weak and beggarly elements" (Ga 4:9) and to the futility, disorder, and absurdity of things of which Ecclesiastes speaks. The whole sub-human creation has been subjected to the frustration of not being able to fulfill its purpose, to glorify God.
 3. As Christians enlightened by the Word, we understand that the basis of the suffering and enslavement of creation is sin. The Gospel promise of Genesis 3:15 was followed immediately by the curses of Genesis 3:16-19.
 - B. The sufferings of the present time in the Christians (v 23).
 1. God has given us the pledge of the Holy Spirit. He is the "Guarantee" (2 Cor 5:5).
 2. As the creation groans while it waits, so the Christians groan while they await their adoption.
 3. The object of our expectation is the redemption of our bodies (v 23). This expression must refer to our own resurrection at the parousia. That, at least, is the final liberation (1 Cor 15:54; Php 3:21).

Conclusion: Is it worth the wait, the groaning, the suffering? God does not, and cannot, deceive us. He has promised that the "unseen things" for which

we hope are far better than even our fondest expectations. There where there is "fulness of joy" and "pleasures forever" (Ps 16:11) is a worthy hope which the Holy Spirit alone can keep alive in us.

G. Waldemar Degner

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 8:26-27

August 9, 1987

Introduction: We have heard about the "groaning" of nature and about the "groaning" of the believer; now we come to the "speechless groaning" of the Spirit of God in us. The obvious picture is that of a little infant who is totally dependent on its parents. We are completely dependent on God, even in our life of prayer and intercession. Our text tells us why we are helpless, and then from where our help comes.

The Holy Spirit Helps Our Weaknesses

- I. We are weak, even when we are praying; we need help (v 26).
 - A. We do not know "how to pray," nor even "what to pray"—though we are God's children (v 26a).
 1. Some try to practice glossolalia (1 Cor 12-14), but this effort is not the same as "inexpressible groanings." True glossolalia was a special gift given only to some in apostolic times, not to all Christians.
 2. The text (v 26) means that Christians do not know "what they are to pray." The emphasis is not on the art of prayer (how), nor on the object of intercession, but on the very content of our prayer. This lack of knowledge is a weakness indeed. In this context "the Spirit helps our weakness." The word "help" is found elsewhere only in Luke 10:40 where Martha wants Jesus to ask Mary to help her in the kitchen. So here the thought is broader than just intercessory prayer. The Spirit, rather, helps in all our needs.
 3. The Holy Spirit is our Helper. This is perhaps the best translation for "Paraclete," as used in John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7. The NASB and the NKJV adopt that translation. In the context of John, the Holy Spirit helps us in our witness, in our encouragement, in teaching and leading, and even in admonishing the world through us. Paul and John are very close in their teaching on the Holy Spirit.
- II. Though we are weak, we are also God's saints (v 27).
 - A. The Holy Spirit searches our hearts (see 1 Sm 16:7; 1 Kgs 8:39; Ps 7:9; 17:3; 26:2; 44:21; 139:1,2,23; Pr 15:11; Jr 17:10; Ac 1:24; 15:8).
 - B. The Spirit cleanses and renews the heart, fills it with God's love (Ro 5:5) and leads us to the throne room of God where "we have access to His grace" (Ro 5:2; cf. Eph 3:12).

Conclusion: We are God's saints, made holy through the blood of Christ Jesus. The direction of the Spirit's ministry in the entire eighth chapter of Romans is "in behalf of the saints." Here is a great vicarious concept by which the Holy Spirit, through the Word, holds before our eyes the self-sacrifice of Jesus for us. Here is the help in weakness that we need.

G. Waldemar Degner

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 8:28-30

August 16, 1987

From pure maple syrup to pure gold, the qualifier pure connotes that which is the finest, the richest, that which is of the highest quality. The text is pure Gospel. It presents to us some of the best news to be found anywhere in the Holy Scripture. This text should intoxicate the believer's heart with the love of God in Christ. It speaks powerfully about both sanctification and justification. Verse 28 highlights the ongoing work of God in the life of a believer, which without exception has as its goal that which is good. Verses 29 and 30 set forth the eternal call and love of God as it is manifested in the believer's life from before the cradle to after the grave.

Introduction: The psalmist in Psalm 19:1 states, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork." St. Paul in our text in essence states that you, the people of God, also declare the glory of God and show forth His handiwork.

We Are the Handiwork of God

- I. We are the handiwork of God because He made us to be His own (vv 29-30).
 - A. God determined to make us His own.
 1. He foreknew us (v 29).
 2. He predestined us to be conformed to the likeness of His Son (v 29).
 - B. God unilaterally made us to be His own (v 30).
 1. He called us.
 2. He justified us.
 3. He glorifies us.
- II. We are the handiwork of God because He consistently works in our life for good (v 28).
 - A. God works for good in every experience of our life.
 1. God is not absent from any of our experiences (Ps 121; Mt 10:30).
 2. God's purpose is to weave our life into a tapestry of His design.
 - B. God often works for good in our life behind the scenes of our current awareness.
 1. We cannot read the mind of God (Ro 11:33-34).
 2. God's ways are not our ways (Is 55:8,9).

Conclusion: God made us to be His own. He works consistently in our lives to accomplish His good purpose. Truly we are the handiwork of God.

Mark R. Oien
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ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 8:35-38

August 23, 1987

We live in a world where separations can be a hurtful reality. With one out of every two new marriages ending in divorce, with a record number of children being raised in broken homes, with a fluid society where family members move from coast to coast and beyond, with strong polarities in politics and religion, with growing stress between labor and management, with farmers being torn from their land, separation and its pain is no stranger to the human condition. Into a world of separation comes our text which speaks unequivocally and forcefully of the unbreakable union established by God in Christ with every believer. In an age of insecurity and anxiety about the stability and permanence of relationships, St. Paul anchors us firmly in the unchanging commitment of God to love us in Christ. The hearers should walk away from their encounter with this text steadied in their faith and convinced that, indeed, nothing in all creation is able to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

We Are More Than Conquerors

- I. We are more than conquerors through Him who loves us (v 37); God's love for us is centered in the cross.
 - A. From the cross He forgives us.
 - B. From the cross He empowers us.
- II. We are more than conquerors because nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (v 39).
 - A. Earthly trials cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (v 35).
 1. Earthly trials may separate us from the things we love.
 2. Earthly trials may even separate us from the people we love.
 3. However, earthly trials can never separate us from the God who loves us.
 - B. Spiritual trials cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (v 38).
 1. Spiritual trials may assail our soul.
 2. However, spiritual trials can never separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Conclusion: Because of Him who loves us and because nothing can separate us from His love, truly we are more than conquerors!

Mark R. Oien
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TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 9:1-5

August 30, 1987

Paul begins by asserting with great emphasis his sorrow over Israel. Having, for the most part, rejected their Messiah, the Jews are without hope, for through unbelief they have forfeited their inheritance. Paul's sorrow is great for he is of the same race and loves them greatly. The text builds to a crescendo as it enumerates God's blessings upon Israel and reaches its climax in verse 5 as it points to the incarnation of the Son of God "who is God over everything." Obviously the text loses a great deal of its power and the meaning is substantially changed if one follows a translation which in verse 5 deprives Jesus of His deity. The traditional translation attributing divinity to Jesus provides a more natural translation and fits well into the general context.

Introduction: God in the flesh! It sounds like a contradiction of terms. How can we even speak of the eternal, almighty, and holy God in the same breath as we speak of mortal, weak, and sinful human beings? But the Word of God reveals to us the greatest wonder of all time—the Son of God in the flesh, but even more, for all flesh.

In the Flesh and for the Flesh

- I. God in the flesh.
 - A. The Word became flesh (Jn 1:14).
 1. The Word did not simply appear to become flesh (docetism).
 2. This flesh was not simply a man filled in a special way with God's Spirit and blessed with God's favor (adoptionism).
 3. According to Paul, the man Jesus was God over everything, blessed forever (v 5).
 - B. The Word became Jewish flesh.
 1. The Jews were God's children (v 4).
 3. Theirs were the promises of the Christ (v 4).
 3. From them according to the flesh came Christ (v 5).
- II. God for the flesh.
 - A. The Word did not become flesh simply as a "statement" on God's part of His loving nature.
 - B. The promises (v 4) made to God's children were to assure them that a Savior was coming for them.

- C. Christ, the anointed one who came in the flesh (v 5), was anointed for a purpose.
 - 1. He was anointed to take the place of all flesh in judgment (Is 53:3-5).
 - 2. He was anointed to bear and take away the sins of all flesh (Jn 1:29).
 - 3. He was anointed to bestow everlasting life on all who believe in Him (Jn 11:25-26).

III. God and the flesh.

- A. Although Christ, according to the flesh, came from Israel, Israel rejected the testimony of the Spirit concerning Christ.
- B. The flesh without the Spirit "profiteth nothing" (Jn 6:63).
- C. We were not born God's children according to the flesh (Ps 51:5).
- D. The glory, the covenant, the law, the worship, the promises are not ours according to the flesh (v 4).
- E. We become God's children when the Spirit brings us to faith in Christ (Tit 3:5).
- F. As God's children through faith, we have become the true Israel and the inheritance is ours (Ro 5:6-8).

Conclusion: God's invitation extends to all without exception; God's promise is made for all; God's love is offered to all flesh. For in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Ga 3:28).

Daniel O. S. Preus
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THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

September 6, 1987

The key to this entire discourse of Paul is clearly verse 32, which sums up all of Paul's previous thoughts in this chapter. The point Paul makes is that no one, in and of himself, is able to make any claim upon God. Regardless of station, race, etc., all are disobedient and without God's grace are "bound" in disobedience. (A review of Luther's *Bondage of the Will* would be helpful in preparing to preach on this text.) But God's mercy is also universal. This text, especially verse 32, is an excellent application of both Law and Gospel. It should be noted that the Greek word translated by the KJV as "conclude" actually means "to lock up together."

Introduction: Everyone likes to consider himself unique in one way or another. Whether you are a rich man, poor man, beggar-man, thief, doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief, whether you are a farmer, a businessman, a housewife, a teacher, a student, or a pastor, you probably would not appreciate hearing someone say about you and all the others in your profession or station, "You're all the same."

We do not want to be the same as everyone else. We like to think that somehow we are special, we are different, we are not simply a carbon copy of somebody, of everybody else. But Paul presents us with a striking statement in his Epistle to the Romans. He tells us that before God we are truly all the same. None of us is unique or special. There is no difference at all.

There Is No Difference

- I. There is no difference between sinners (v 32a).
 - A. All have sinned and have failed in God's sight (Ro 3:23).
 - B. All are bound in slavery to sin and in disobedience (v 32).
 1. The Jews have disobeyed (vv 30-31).
 - a. They sinned against God (forty years in the wilderness).
 - b. They did not believe God (the murder of the prophets, the rejection of the Messiah).
 2. The Gentiles have disobeyed (v 30).
 - a. They were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1).
 - b. They did not believe (they worshipped false gods).
 3. We have disobeyed.
 - a. We have broken God's law (sins of commission).
 - b. We have ignored God's commandments (sins of omission).
 - c. We have not always trusted completely in Him and in His Word.
 - C. Neither the Jews nor the Gentiles nor we can break out of the prison in which we are bound by reason of our sin.
 1. The Jews who had the law and the promises failed.
 2. The Gentiles who did not have the law and the promises failed.
 3. If left to ourselves, we, too, must fail (Ro 7:18-24).
- II. There is no difference between sinners before God (v 32b).
 - A. The Son of God has come for all.
 1. He lived a life of obedience for all (active obedience).
 2. He died and was punished for sin in the place of all (passive obedience).
 - B. The Son of God stands before God in the place of all ("Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness," etc.).
 - C. God's mercy is extended to all.
 1. Our salvation has been accomplished (Jn 19:30).
 2. Our sins have been forgiven (2 Cor 5:19).
 3. Heaven is offered (Jn 3:16).

Conclusion: There is no difference. Without Christ we are bound. We lie under the curse of God and are lost. But also from another perspective there is no difference. In Christ we have mercy. We are holy and righteous in God's eyes. Our sins are forgiven. We can say:

Since Christ hath full atonement made and brought to us salvation,
 Each Christian therefore may be glad and build on this foundation.
 Thy grace alone, dear Lord, I plead, Thy death is now my life, indeed,
 For Thou hast paid my ransom.

Daniel O. S. Preus
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FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 11:33-36

September 13, 1987

The text forms a doxology which fittingly concludes St. Paul's discussion (9:1-11:36) of God's role in Israel's rejection of the Christ. Paul notes how God "has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens" (9:18), but he emphasizes how God makes disobedience to His Law serve the overarching purpose of His grace in Christ. Gentiles, though formerly disobedient to God, have now received God's mercy through faith in Christ. God has brought them salvation by means of the testimony of the remnant in Israel. Similarly, Jews, though presently disobedient to God, having rejected Christ, will later receive God's mercy through faith in Christ. God will offer them salvation through the testimony of the New Israel. It is God who works all in all, for the good of all. This fact evokes the doxology.

The pericope is structured as *chiasmus* (inverted correspondence) and, thus understood, readily suggests the structure and content for the sermon. In verse 33a, riches, wisdom, and knowledge are the individual members of the chiasm (and should be translated coordinately, as in the RSV). Paul stresses how God alone possesses each of these things by asking successive rhetorical questions—in verse 34a about knowledge, in 34b about wisdom, and in 35 about riches. Paul's threefold ascription to God (v 36a) again reflects the pattern—all things are from God (out of His riches), through God (established through His wisdom), and to God (brought to God by His all-actualizing knowledge).

Introduction: Probably the most difficult and thought-provoking questions begin with the simple, little word, "why." Because we want to understand what is going on around us, we often ask, "Why?" But there are times when why-questions should not be asked. A soldier in the heat of a battle must simply trust his commander and obey his orders; he does not ask why. A child must learn to trust his parents and to obey them, even without asking why. And for all people there is a time when why-questions should never be asked: the time when God speaks. When God says that He has brought us His riches, wisdom, and knowledge in Christ, we do not ask why. St. Paul tells us in our text,

Let God Be God!

- I. Consider His riches (v 33a).
 - A. No one has first given anything to God, so as to have it repaid to him (v 35).
 1. Some think they have given God "their lives" and therefore deserve help from God.
 2. But God says no one has given Him anything (Job 41:11).
 - B. Nonetheless, God freely gives us all that we are and have (v 36a).
 1. As a potter gives his clay a form, God has given us a form (Is 64:8).
 2. As a potter forms his clay with a certain purpose, God has formed us with a certain purpose (Ro 9:23a).

Let God be God! Do not presume to ask for what you think you deserve. Instead, trust in God's inexhaustible riches, which He freely gives in Christ. Consider the depth of His riches.

II. Consider His wisdom (v 33a).

- A. No one has ever counseled God on the way He considers and judges all things (v 34b).
 - 1. Some, in effect, try to advise God on how He should consider or judge people: "God would never condemn to hell a person who did not believe in Jesus, if he never had a chance to hear about Jesus." "God must take into consideration how hard a person tries to do what is right."
 - 2. But God says that no one counsels Him. His judicial verdicts are His own. God's judgments are "inscrutable" (v 33b), incapable of being searched out or understood.
- B. Nonetheless, through His eternal wisdom, God established salvation for us (v 36a). By His Law (part of His wisdom) God has judged all to be disobedient (v 32a).

Let God be God! Do not presume to call into question how God judges people. Instead, accept His wisdom—His Law and His Gospel. Repent of your disobedience, and trust in Christ for your salvation. Consider the depth of His wisdom.

III. Consider His knowledge (v 33a).

- A. No one has ever measured God's mind (v 34a).
 - 1. Some think that they have understood God's mind. They "know" why God allows suffering—to punish certain sins. They "know" why God saves some and damns others—those whom He saves are better people, or they resist the Holy Spirit less.
 - 2. But God says that no one has measured His mind. The "why" behind God's actions and conduct remains hidden to man (Ps 77:19; v 33c).
 - 3. Those who try to measure God's mind are playing God. God's thoughts are far above man's thoughts.
- B. Nonetheless, by His perfect knowledge, God actually brings us to Himself (v 36a).
 - 1. God's knowledge of us is complete, down to the minutest details of our changing bodies (Mt 10:30), our secret actions (Mt 6:6), and our deepest needs (Mt 6:8). Most especially, He knows us as His own people.
 - 2. Because He has also foreknown us as His own, He has called us by the Gospel to believe in Christ as our way to God. "For those whom He has foreknown . . . these He has also called" (Ro 8:29,30). That is the way God brings us to Himself. ". . . and these He has also glorified" (Ro 8:30).

Let God be God! Do not presume to measure God's mind. Instead, depend on His perfect knowledge of you. He has foreknown you as His own and in that foreknowledge has called you to believe in Jesus. Consider the depth of His knowledge.

Conclusion: "To Him be the glory forever" (v 36b). Out of His great riches and wisdom and knowledge, He has condescended to save us in Christ Jesus. Let God be God!

Jonathan E. Shaw
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FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 12:1-8

September 20, 1987

Having just expounded the mercies of God in Christ Jesus, whereby God brings salvation to disobedient sinners, St. Paul turns to the topic (12:1-15:13) of how Christians should then live. Verses 1 and 2 introduce this section and stress the element of change in the Christian's life. The earthly desire to follow the sinful world must give way to the inner, spiritual desire to say yes to God's good will. In verses 3-8 Paul gives his first practical example of what this Christian transformation looks like. Arrogance becomes out of place (v 3a). All grounds for false pride are removed when one considers that callings and abilities (e.g., vv 6b-8) are gifts from God, given out of His grace (vv 3a,6a). Furthermore, "God has divided up to each a measure of faith" (v 3b). God intends differences in calling and ability, and He desires that Christians exercise their faith in different ways. (Bultmann: "As *pistis* individualizes itself into specific attitudes, so divine *charis* individualizes itself into specific gifts of grace.") Finally, Paul appeals to the illustration of the body and its members (vv 4-5) to show that there is no room for arrogance in the church. The body is one, and all its various members are complementary.

Introduction: Many people enjoy playing an occasional game of cards. Depending on the game, certain cards are usually considered better or more valuable than others. But inherently no one card has any more or any less value than any other card. This was made clear on June 4, 1977, when Carter Cummins built a house of cards with fifty-one levels which stood nine-and-a-half feet tall. He used 2,206 playing cards, and every card was vital to the structure of the house. To have thought, for example, that a king was more valuable than a two, or that a three was less valuable than a queen, would have been foolish. Yet that kind of foolish thinking sometimes arises in the church. Some may think of themselves as being better or more valuable members, while others may think of themselves as being worse or less valuable. The reasons vary. One is either a leader or "just a follower." One is either well-to-do or "just average." One is either knowledgeable and experienced or "just a beginner." But in today's text St. Paul brings good news to those who have viewed themselves as less than others and a warning to those who have viewed themselves as more important than others. He tells us that

God Values All Christians the Same

- I. God has made all Christians one in Christ.
 - A. God had compassion on us through Christ.
 1. Each of us at times has thought too highly of himself (v 31).
 2. Christ suffered also for our sin of pride. We have received the "compassion of God" (v 1) instead of the punishment deserved.
 - B. God has united us through faith in Christ.
 1. Through faith we Christians are one body in Christ (vv 4a,5a). This body is the holy Christian Church.
 2. Through faith we Christians are individually members one of another (vv 4a,5b). We have a stake in what happens to one another.

God has shown how highly He regards each of us by giving the gift of faith. Out of His grace, He gives Christians yet other gifts.

- II. God gives all Christians spiritual gifts.
 - A. God Himself individualizes His grace into specific gifts.
 1. His gifts are according to the "grace given" (vv 3a,6a), not merit (vv 6b-8).
 2. He has forgotten no one. He gives certain callings and abilities to each member of the body (vv 4b,6a), according to what He knows is best (1 Cor 12:18).
 3. Therefore, arrogant thinking must give way to sensible thinking (v 3a).
 - B. God commissions Christians to work together for Him by using these gifts.
 1. He tells us how important our individual gifts are. God divides up the work (v 3b) and gives us each a vital part.
 2. He tells us how to use our gifts. We are to recognize our God-given callings and abilities and to utilize these strengths in the work of the church (vv 6-8 give examples).
 3. He tells us how they work together. We are complementary members of the one body of Christ (vv 4-5).

Conclusion: God values all Christians in the same high way. He has brought them together through faith in Christ's suffering, He gives each of them special gifts, and He commissions them to work together using these gifts. Truly, in the church, God has a place for everyone, and everyone is in God's place.

Jonathan E. Shaw
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SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 13:1-10

September 27, 1987

There are several problems of grammar and thought in this text. Three stand

out. (1.) What is the meaning of *hypotassesthoō* in verse 1? It is often assumed that it means "to obey," but the evidence for this is sketchy (cf. Liddell and Scott), and drawn, in the main, from the New Testament itself. It is probably better to see its meaning as "to be subject to." In the words of Cranfield (ICC, *Romans II*, 662): "in the NT *hypotassesthai tini* can denote the recognition that the other person, as Christ's representative to one, has an infinitely greater claim upon one than one has upon oneself and the conduct which flows naturally from such a recognition." This principle applies to the state as well as to individuals, and does not mean an uncritical obedience of every command of the state, for "the final arbiter of what constitutes *hypotassesthai* in a particular situation is not the civil authority but God." (2.) How do we handle the apparent difficulty in verse three that Paul seems not to allow for the fact that the state might be unjust, rewarding that which is evil and punishing that which is good? One explanation is that Paul had such overwhelmingly good experiences with the Roman authorities that such a possibility never occurred to him. This idea seems unlikely, considering his own experiences (cf. Ac 16:22ff.) and the experience of his Lord. It may be better to see this verse as saying that the state, whether it knows it or not, will, in fact, honor the Christian even if it intends (improperly) to punish him, for he will be honored by God (either here or in eternity); while if the Christian does evil, he will be punished, even if temporarily he seems to be honored. This is not an easy verse to handle completely satisfactorily. (3.) The verb *teleite* in verse 6 is almost surely an indicative mood form and not an imperative (though in theory it could be either). Note the *gar* after *dia touto*, which renders an imperative extremely unlikely.

The Paradoxical State of the Christian

- I. In bondage to everyone, including sin.
 - A. Man is a (fallen) creature.
 1. He is centrifugal, designed to love and serve God and to love and serve his neighbor.
 2. Our creaturely obligations extend beyond the religious sphere to include the political.
 - a. We have obligations to the state, established by God.
 - b. Therefore, we ought to be subject, for it is both God-pleasing and useful.
 3. Since the fall man is centripetal, self-centered and turned away from both God and neighbor alike.
 - B. The Law of God is a mirror which shows us our sin, holding up to our vision the loving service for which we were designed.
 - C. A summary of the Law is useful: "Love is the fulfilling of the Law."
 1. It keeps us from getting caught up in "keeping the rules."
 2. It is factual: love does fulfill all obligations, because love does no harm to anyone but seeks the other's welfare.
- II. Free from bondage, including sin.
 - A. In God's Son is full perfection and fulfilment of all the requirements of God.
 1. God's Son loved perfectly—for us.
 2. God's Son lived perfectly—for us.
 3. God's Son fulfilled the will of God perfectly—for us.

B. In Him we see the contours of how love fulfills the whole Law.

James W. Voelz

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 14:5-9

October 4, 1987

In this text Paul is addressing the problem, not of varying beliefs within a congregation, but of the difficulties encountered by Christians from differing religious backgrounds as they seek to live together (the same problem addressed by the decrees of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15). The problem is not that which Paul encountered in Galatia, where some felt that certain works were needed to supplement faith for salvation. Rather, some (the "eaters") felt that, since the Christ had come, who was the goal and substance of the Old Testament laws, the portions of the Torah which we often characterize as "ceremonial laws" no longer needed to be obeyed. Others (those who did not eat, the "weak") felt that their response of faith to Jesus Christ included continued obedience to all Old Covenant laws, though not in the sense (cf. Galatia) that such observance earned salvation before their God. There is a great similarity in both vocabulary and thought between Romans 14:1-15:13 and 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 (the chapters dealing with food sacrificed to idols). The problem in Romans is probably more general, however, since otherwise it would be odd that Paul in Romans would never use the word *eidoolodytos* even one time. (Also, there is the matter of the observance of "days.") Cranfield (ICC, *Romans II*, 697) is probably right when he observes that *pistis* (cf. also *pisteuoo*) in this section means neither *fides qua* nor *fides quae* but "confidence" to take a certain course of action.

Living Together As Christians

- I. Living together in Christ: the problem.
 - A. In the early church Gentile and Jewish believers often clashed.
 1. Gentiles made no distinction between what could and could not be eaten (v 6), in the observance of days (v 5), etc.
 2. Many Jewish believers (the "weak") were bound to old ways and found it difficult to give up observance of dietary laws, special days, etc. (vv 5,6).
 - B. Today this problem can often arise in our own midst, especially with converts from other denominations or with people from strict "blue laws" backgrounds.
 1. Lutherans can be very "antinomian" in life-style.
 2. Converts may be bound to beliefs assumed to be biblical: abstinence from alcohol, work on Sunday, dancing, card playing, etc.

II. Living together: the solution.

A. Theory.

1. We are the Lord's faithful slaves.
 - a. We all belong to the Lord (v 4).
 - b. We all live to the Lord (v 8).
2. Therefore, we all are equal before the Lord.

B. Practice.

1. Because we are the Lord's, each should and can be convinced in his own mind concerning his course of action (v 5).
2. Because we are the Lord's, each should and can be tolerant of the other (vv 1-3).

III. The overarching truth (v 9).

- A. Jesus died and rose again to forgive all breaking of all rules and regulations.
- B. Jesus died and rose again to fulfill all rules and regulations.
- C. Jesus died and rose again so that our life might be in Him, conformed not to laws but to His loving will.

James W. Voelz

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**Philippians 1:1-5 (6-11), 19-27****October 11, 1987**

The faithful undershepherd concerns himself with joyous living of the flock entrusted to him. To show them abundant life he must first deal with their fear of death. The epistles for the next four Sundays give us preachers opportunity to present Paul's joy of living in Christ in times of trouble and death.

Introduction: A hundred years before Paul sat in jail an important battle was fought near Philippi. On one side was the army of Antony and Octavian, on the other the forces of Brutus and Cassius. That battle determined the fate of an empire and Octavian became Caesar Augustus. Paul wrote of a more important battle. Today the Holy Spirit, through Paul, urges us:

Living or Dying, Advance the Cause of Christ

I. Would your death advance the cause of Christ?

- A. Many Christians do not like to talk about death. We have two fears: death itself and the process of dying. We know that God "has begun a good work in us," yet our old natures and the devil cause us to doubt He will "carry it on to completion." We hear that "to die is gain" and yet we have no personal experience of it. We confess that "to depart and be with Christ is far better," but we fear the unknown.

- B. Death is a time of transition for family and friends as well as for the one who dies. The details surrounding your death will give you a wonderful opportunity to witness to people who are especially open to the Gospel.
1. We want to "set our house" in order by writing a last will and testament. Here is a wonderful opportunity to include a Christian preamble.
 2. Now is the time to make sure that your funeral will witness to your faith in Jesus as your Savior who died on the cross for you and rose again. Surely you want to discuss with your pastor the hymns and the text of your resurrection celebration.

Some people avoid thinking about wills and funerals because they think such talk is morbid. How much better it is to make your own final arrangements as a plan for living today.

II. Does your living advance the cause of Christ?

- A. Live by means of the Gospel (v 5).
1. You have received the grace of God—in the worship service of the church, in family devotions, in baptism, in Sunday School, in your personal study of the Word.
 2. Let that love in you abound more and more in knowledge and insight (v 9). Paul's prayer of joy celebrated total stewardship by the Philippians. We too show the effect of the Gospel on our lives, not only in the use of our pocketbooks, but also 168 hours a week, even in routine everyday activities.
- B. Live worthy of the Gospel (v 27).
1. Live worthy of Jesus, not to gain salvation, but because you already have it!
 2. Live worthy of the Gospel by standing firm in one spirit. Put aside the internal dissension that troubles some congregations. Rather, reach out to your community with one mind, the mind of Christ.

Conclusion: At the death of a life-long church member, a fellow office worker said, "I never knew he was Christian!" God forbid that such a charge should ever be laid to us. To advance the cause of Christ in your dying, advance His cause in your living.

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NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Philippians 2:5-11

October 18, 1987

Introduction: People usually try to excuse themselves by placing the blame on other people [cite some current examples]. Where we try to place the blame on others, the Holy Spirit through St. Paul urges us to

Take the Mind of Christ

- I. The "mind of Christ" does not grasp (vv 5-6).
 - A. People of the world are forever grasping at excuses.
 1. The child says, "Mommy is making me cry because she won't let me have my way!"
 2. Adam blamed Eve, even God, for his own sin (Gn 3:12).
 - B. Our attitude is to be the same as Jesus²—not grasping. Remember who Jesus was (Jn 1:1; 2 Cor 4:4b)! Yet He did not think that His divine attributes were something to be exploited to His own advantage (Ro 15:3).

But it runs against our nature not to grab all we can (cf. Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed; Ro 8:3).

- II. The "mind of Christ" comes from Jesus' obedience (vv 5-8).
 - A. Jesus willingly died for you (Jn 10:18a; Mt 26:39b,42b; 2 Cor 8:9; Mt 20:28). It had to be this way (He 2:17).
 - B. Perhaps we can get some idea of Jesus' attitude by remembering the little girl who had a beautiful mother with scarred hands; those hands had been burned saving the baby girl from fire.
 - C. Jesus offered more than His hands for you (Ro 5:19). He rose with a glorified body, yet marked in hands, feet, and side. Even today the only man-made things in heaven are the scars He wears for you.

In those scars we find power to take the mind of Christ.

- III. The "mind of Christ" comes from spending time with Him (vv 9-11).
 - A. The newly-hired office boy was told to spend his days following the bank president. As the wise man went about his work, the boy listened and observed. Just by being with him, the boy became like the important man.
 - B. You take the mind of Christ as you fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 45:23b. Bow your knee and confess with your tongue (He 12:2). Daily rehearse your baptismal and confirmation vows; daily review the passion of our Lord; daily invest time in the love letter He sends you; daily bow your knee and make daily confession your continual attitude.

Conclusion: In a hostile world, Jesus did not blame anybody. Rather than blaming someone else, He volunteered to take your blame. Now you need not take the blame before God because you are forgiven in Jesus. You need not place the blame on other people because they are forgiven in Jesus. Living daily in Christ, you take the mind of Christ. Jesus promises rest from placing the blame elsewhere (Mt 11:29).

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TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**Philippians 3:12-21****October 25, 1987**

The first part of chapter three serves as a prelude to the section under consideration. Paul was concerned that his friends at Philippi might follow the example of people who had perverted the Gospel. The Gospel had been perverted by two different ideas of Christian perfection. "Perfection" to some (3:2-5) was having a status under the law that was impeccable. "Perfection" to the others (3:18,19) was freedom to use everything in creation as they pleased. "Perfection," according to the Gospel, however, actually consists in being transformed in mind and body into the likeness of Christ. This perfection will not become a reality in this life. Paul, therefore, makes perfection a goal, not to be earned, but for which we are to strive, the ultimate prize that Jesus will give to those who are in Him.

Introduction: Christians are very often engaged in vigorous competition. Frequently, however, it is competition with each other to see who is the best, the most authentic, or the largest in number. This kind of competition separates, tears down, and even creates enemies. Paul did not appreciate a competitive Christianity which tore people apart and perverted the Gospel. Yet Paul knew how important a competitive spirit was in attaining the final prize. His kind of competitive spirit is our goal as we hear Paul's word for us today.

Competitive Christianity

- I. We need to eliminate "earthly" competition.
 - A. One form of "earthly" competition is based on a legal scorecard.
 1. "Perfection" would mean that a Christian would have to have perfect credentials (3:4,5).
 2. "Perfection" would mean that a Christian would have to have kept the law completely (3:6, "legalistic righteousness").
 3. "Perfection" would mean that a Christian would have to show overflowing zeal (3:6).
 - B. Another form of "earthly" competition is based on unrestricted freedom.
 1. "Perfection" would mean an uninhibited fulfillment of our wants (3:19).
 2. "Perfection" would mean the elimination of sin by stating that wrong is good (3:19).
 3. "Perfection" would mean the secularization of religious concern (3:19).
 - C. This kind of competition will end in loss.
 1. Christ would not be our Savior, for we should be trying to save ourselves.
 2. Christ—like behavior would not result.
 3. Our competition would end in separation from God and separation from others.

II. We need "heavenly" competition.

- A. It is reaching for a promise (3:12).
 - 1. Christ took hold of me for a purpose (3:12).
 - 2. Christ took hold of me so I may have Him (3:7).
 - 3. Christ took hold of me to transform me into His likeness (3:21).
- B. It is striving for a prize.
 - 1. The prize is resurrection (3:11).
 - 2. The prize is heaven (3:14).
 - 3. The prize is transformation (3:21).
- C. It is the hope of winning that spurs us on.
 - 1. It is moving ahead, not looking back (3:13).
 - 2. It is moving toward a goal (3:14).
 - 3. It is to experience the purpose of God's call (3:14).

Conclusion: So let us stop competing against each other, using false standards. Rather, let us compete against the lure of Satan and world to win the prize. Let us do everything in the Lord!

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TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Philippians 4:4-13

November 1, 1987

The key word in this selection is "rejoice." Not only is this word thematic for the letter; it is also one of Paul's concluding imperatives (3:2). In this third chapter "rejoice in the Lord" stands in contrast to one of Paul's main concerns. That concern is that God's people should not put their confidence in their status under the law. In effect, Paul is saying, "rejoice in the Lord, not in your legal status." Paul is directing the emphasis toward being "in the Lord" rather than in being legally right. In chapter four Paul uses the phrase again. This time, however, the phrase is used not in contrast to a false status, but in harmony with actions and attitudes which flow from union with Christ. Rejoicing then, is expressed in forbearance, lack of anxiety, prayer, and thanksgiving. From these flow the "peace of God." All of the above produce a positive, Christ-like way of thinking and acting. It is the "mind of Christ" at work in the believer.

Introduction: Living in the Lord is the manner in which we must approach life in this world. Unfortunately we sinful humans work too hard at living in earthly ways rather than in heavenly. Rejoice, for in the Lord we can already begin a heaven-like way of living on earth.

Living in the Lord

- I. Sorrow and separation are the results of an earth-bent life.
 - A. Contention and hostility are the fruits of living like earthbound people (4:2).

1. Families break up because people pursue a self-centered life.
 2. Churches become places of contention and factionalism because too many are not concerned about each other.
 3. Neighborhoods deteriorate because few care about the problems that exist.
 - B. Anxiety and stress become common ailments among earthbound people (4:6).
 1. Breakups reduce security and cause fear.
 2. Relationships are strained, causing stress.
 3. Mental and physical health break down because of anxiety, and poor health causes the cycle to get worse.
 - C. Immorality is judged healthy by earthly-minded people (4:8).
 1. What is dirty is thought to be clean.
 2. What is degrading is thought to be advanced thinking.
 3. What is ugly is pictured as being beautiful.
- II. Joy flows out of the believer who is living in the Lord.
- A. Peace rather than contention and anxiety will flow from living in the Lord.
 1. It is a peace that transcends all understanding.
 2. It guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
 - B. Positive thinking which elevates mind and body will flow from living in the Lord.
 1. Our minds are directed toward "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, whatever is praiseworthy."
 2. Our actions will copy the apostle.
 - C. This is a happy way to live.

Conclusion: We make so much sorrow for ourselves by living outside the Lord and following earthly ways. Joy is in the Lord, who leads us to ways of living which come from above; and it is all ours for the asking.

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THIRD LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

1 Thessalonians 2:8-13

November 8, 1987

The two letters of Paul to the Thessalonians were written fairly early in Paul's ministry to a congregation which was created by God through Paul's ministry. Despite the faith of the people (1:4-10) there were forces which sought to undermine both Paul and his message. The apostolic defense then is not only personal but theological. His personal defense involves reminding the Thessalonians of his hard work, his integrity, and his self-sacrifice along with Silas and Timothy. The theological defense is in 7:13. This verse is important because it

teaches both the normative authority of God's Word and also its causative authority or power. A reasonable sermon outline, then, would center on the authority of the Word.

Introduction: Many messages make claims on people—television, films, books, and so on. Many “authorities” push themselves forward as worthy of our attention, such as television, evangelists, salesmen, politicians, representatives of philanthropic causes, and so on. Now Paul comes with a message which he claims is more important than any other and even all others put together. This is the apostolic message (1 Th 2:4,6) of Jesus Christ, the Gospel of Christ's death, resurrection, and return (1 Th 4:13).

What Good Is God's Message?

- I. God's Bible message shows us God's will.
 - A. Our sinfulness makes us unable to discover God's will ourselves.
 1. Without the Word we would follow idols (1:9).
 2. We could never know God's grace.
 - B. The Bible is not the word of men only (v 13).
 1. The apostles were approved by God to speak His will (v 14).
 2. The apostles sought only to please God (vv 5-6).
 3. The apostles sought only to represent God in their message (vv 8-12).
 - C. The Bible tells us of God's gracious will in Christ.
 1. It teaches us the doctrine of Christ's redemption (1:10).
 2. It tells us stories of faith, e.g., Paul.

Transition: But the Bible does not just inform us of Christ and wait for us to respond.

- II. God's Bible message also accomplishes God's will (Ps 55:10-11).
 - A. Wherever Christ is proclaimed, God is powerful.
 1. He creates faith by His Word (e.g., David, Ps 51:10; 1 Pe 1:23ff.).
 2. He produces works with His Word (Col 1:5-6).
 - B. In fact, all God's power is in His Word of Christ.
 1. Power to forgive.
 2. Power to live (Eph 1:29-30).

Application: People in the quest for spiritual power look to their prayers, their experiences, their decisions, their feelings, or even the sincerity of their faith. Paul tells us to look to the Gospel of Jesus.

Conclusion: Be a cynic or a critic or even an unbeliever when it comes to all the other messages you might receive [refer to the introduction]. But expect something different from God's Word. His Word is special. His Word is good—because it tells us God's will, because it accomplishes God's will.

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SECOND LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

1 Thessalonians 3:7-13

November 15, 1987

Paul had preached the word to his church in Thessalonica. But before this preaching was complete, he was wrenched away from them (1 Th 2:17). Consequently, he had to endure a time of uncertainty as he waited to hear from Timothy, his messenger, whether the ministry in Thessalonica had borne fruit. The news brought him joy. His joy is really the topic of discussion in 1 Thessalonians 3. It seems appropriate therefore to discuss not only Paul's joy but the joy of all true pastors. That which made Paul joyful should make pastors joyful today.

The word "blameless" in verse 13 is not to be understood as morally righteous nor as having perfectionistic overtones. It refers to a public reputation similar to the "above reproach" enjoined upon pastors. The idea is that God's choice of us as His children and His work in us will be apparent upon Christ's return since He will let others see our good deeds or blamelessness.

Introduction: Everyone, deep down, wants to make the pastor happy. There are many ways: You could pay him more, but he would just spend it. You could send him on a trip to the Holy Land, but he would, in time, forget it. You could tell him how well he preaches, but he already knows how well or poorly he does. You could give him a new washer or dryer which would probably make his wife happy. But I shall tell you what really will make your pastor happy.

What Makes Your Pastor Happy

- I. The faith of God's people makes the pastor happy (vv 7-9).
 - A. Christian faith is a sign of effective ministry.
 1. Without faith in Christ our sin condemns us.
 - a. God is angry.
 - b. Satan has his way (1 Th 3:5).
 - c. The work of the ministry is wasted (1 Th 3:5).
 2. Faith in Christ is the proof that the Word has been effective.
 - a. This is especially important if preaching was cut short.
 - b. Paul's case provides an example (1 Th 2:17).
 - B. Christian faith means salvation, for it grabs hold of Christ.
 1. Who has forgiven us by His life and death (1 Th 5:9-11).
 2. For whom we wait.

Transition: Pastors are happy when they see the faith of Christians. It shows their work is not wasted and it means salvation for people, but there is more that makes the pastor happy.

- II. Pastors are happy when they supply what is lacking in faith (v 10) (i.e., when they continue to teach and train Christians in the Bible).

- A. Bible study makes pastors happy because it leads to more mature faith.
 - 1. More informed faith, e.g., the doctrine of the last things (1 Th 4:13ff).
 - 2. Stronger faith during tribulation.
- B. Bible study makes pastors happy because it is a sign of Christian maturity.
 - 1. It shows that Christians have their priorities in order.
 - 2. It shows that Christians want to please God.
- C. Bible study makes pastors happy because it is what they are called and trained to do best.
 - 1. Ephesians 4:11, 2 Timothy 2:15.
 - 2. Congregational Bible study opportunities.

Transition: Thus Bible study makes the pastor happy. It also prepares people for Christ.

- III. Pastors are happiest when Christians are prepared for Christ's coming.
 - A. Christians are set apart by God—holy.
 - 1. Which happens through the Word.
 - 2. Which happens by grace alone.
 - B. Christians are to be blameless.
 - 1. This does not mean sinless or morally perfect.
 - 2. Rather, it involves the good works pointed out at Christ's return.
 - 3. Our sins have been forgiven.
 - C. Nothing will make the pastor happier than the end.
 - 1. He will see his congregation behold Christ.
 - 2. He will hear their works mentioned.
 - 3. He will know his ministry was responsible.

Conclusion: So go ahead, give the pastor a raise, send him on a trip to the Holy Land, tell him you like his sermons, buy him a new television. All these will make him happy. But remember what makes him happiest. When Christians have faith, when Christians are supplied with spiritual nourishment, when Christians are prepared for Christ.

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LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

I Corinthians 15:20-28

November 22, 1987

The reason for Paul's presentation and defense of the resurrection is not only doctrinal, but motivational. Ever the realist, Paul knows there must be a reason—an adequate reason—to "put up with" the struggle of the Christian life! The final verse of chapter 15 shows this emphasis. Without the doctrine of the resurrection, the Christian faith would be a pitiable deception (v 19), and we would have no reason to "fight the good fight" (vv 30-32).

Introduction: It is not done yet, the repair job is not finished. It is true of our world and in our life's experience. Struggle and sin, pain and powerlessness, are all around to see for those who do not shrink from facing the reality of our world. But one day it will be finished. Through Jesus Christ, God will one day complete the repair of our world. There is reason for faith, for hope, for endurance, and for obedience.

Our King Will Finish the Job He Began

- I. Jesus began and guaranteed the work by rising from the dead.
 - A. We are free from sin.
 - 1. He has already released us.
 - 2. We rejoice now in a perfect relationship with God—we are His holy people.
 - B. We have help in time of need from the living Redeemer (Hymn 200).
 - 1. We may pour out our hearts before God (Ps 62:8).
 - 2. Every enemy is not yet under His feet (v 25)—but nothing can chase Him away. The work has been promised and guaranteed by Jesus' rising from the dead.

Transition: Our King will finish the job He began! Remember that the guarantee, the "first fruits," is Jesus' rising from the dead. We already have that gift of righteousness and a right standing with God the Father. And there is certainty of more to come.

- II. Jesus will complete the job by abolishing death, the last enemy.
 - A. This separation interrupts the full enjoyment of God's grace.
 - 1. All of life's separations are "little deaths." We all know of their pain. All of us have felt overwhelmed and defeated.
 - 2. That great enemy, and all his little soldiers, will be removed. Death itself will be gone.
 - B. God will be all in all. Everything and everyone found in Christ will be perfectly in tune with the perfect will of God, open to giving and receiving His unconditional love.

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