

## FIRST EVENING LECTURE.

(September 12, 1884.)

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MY DEAR FRIENDS: —

If you are to become efficient teachers in our churches and schools, it is a matter of indispensable necessity that you have a most minute knowledge of all doctrines of the Christian revelation. However, having achieved such knowledge, you have not yet attained all that is needed. What is needed over and above your knowledge of the doctrines is that you know how to apply them correctly. You must not only have a clear apperception of the doctrines in your intellect, but all of them must have entered deeply into your heart and there manifested their divine, heavenly power. All these doctrines must have become so precious, so valuable, so dear to you, that you cannot but profess with a glowing heart in the words of Paul: "We believe, therefore we have spoken," and in the words of all the apostles: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." You have indeed not seen these things with your physical eyes or heard them with your physical ears, like the apostles, but you ought to have an experience of them through your spiritual eyes and ears.

While in my dogmatic lectures I aim to ground you in every doctrine and make you certain of it, I have designed these evening lectures on Fridays for making you really practical theologians. I wish to talk the Christian doctrine into your very hearts, enabling you in your future calling to come forward as living witnesses with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. I do not want you to stand in your pulpits like lifeless statues, but to speak with confidence and with cheerful courage offer help where help is needed.

Now, of all doctrines the foremost and most important is the doctrine of justification. However, immediately following upon it, as second in importance, is this, *how Law and Gospel are to be divided*. The distinction between the Law and the Gospel shall now claim our attention and form the subject of our earnest study.

True, Luther says that he is willing to place him who is well versed in the art of dividing the Law from the Gospel at the head of all and call him a doctor of Holy Writ. But I would not have you believe that I intend to place myself ahead of everybody else and be regarded as a doctor of the Sacred Scriptures. That would be a great mistake. I admit that people sometimes call me a doctor of theology; but for myself I rather wish to remain a humble disciples and sit at the feet of our Dr. Luther, to learn this doctrine from him even as he learned it from the apostles and prophets. As often as you attend these lectures, I want you to come breathing a silent prayer in your hearts that God may grant us His Holy Spirit abundantly: you, to the end that you may profitably hear; me, to the end that I may teach effectively. Let us, then, take up our task with

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firm confidence that God will bless both our own souls and the souls of those whom we are to rescue.

Comparing Holy Scripture with other writings, we observe that no book is apparently so full of contradictions as the Bible, and that, not only in minor points, but in the principal matter, in the doctrine how we may come to God and be saved. In one place the Bible offers forgiveness to all sinners; in another place forgiveness of sins is withheld from all sinners. In one passage a free offer of life everlasting is made to all men; in another, men are directed to do something themselves towards being saved. This riddle is solved when we reflect that there are in the Scriptures two entirely different doctrines, the doctrine of the Law and the doctrine of the Gospel!

### **Thesis I.**

*The doctrinal contents of the entire Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testament, are made up of two doctrines differing fundamentally from each other, viz., the Law and the Gospel.*

It is not my intention to give a systematic treatment of the doctrine of the Law and the Gospel in these lectures. My aim is rather to show you how easy it is to work a great damage upon your hearers by confounding Law and Gospel in spite of their fundamental difference and thus to frustrate the aim of both doctrines. You will not begin to be interested in this point until you place before yourselves in clear outlines the points in which the Law and the Gospel differ.

The point of difference between the Law and the Gospel is not this, that the Gospel is a divine and the Law a human doctrine, resting on the reason of man. Not at all; whatever of either doctrine is contained in the Scriptures is the Word of the living God Himself.

Nor is the difference, that only the Gospel is necessary, not the Law, as if the latter were a mere addition that could be dispensed with in a strait. No, both are equally necessary. Without the Law the Gospel is not understood; without the Gospel the Law benefits us nothing.

Nor can this naïve, yet quite current, distinction be admitted, that the Law is the teaching of the Old while the Gospel is the teaching of the New Testament. By no means; there are Gospel contents in the Old and Law contents in the New Testament. Moreover, in the New Testament the Lord has broken the seal of the Law by purging it from Jewish ordinances.

Nor do the Law and the Gospel differ as regards their final aim, as though the Gospel aimed at men's salvation, the Law at men's condemnation. No, both have for their final aim man's salvation; only the Law, ever since the Fall, cannot lead us to salvation; it can only prepare us for the Gospel. Furthermore, it is through the Gospel that we obtain the ability to fulfil the Law to a certain extent.

Nor can we establish a difference by claiming that the Law and the Gospel contradict each other. There are no contradictions in Scripture. Each is distinct from the other, but both are in the most perfect harmony with one another.

Finally, the difference is not this, that only one of these doctrines is meant for Christians. Even for the Christian the Law still retains its significance. Indeed, when a person ceases to employ either of these two doctrines, he is no longer a true Christian.

The true points of difference between the Law and the Gospel are the following: —

1. These two doctrines differ as regards the *manner of their being revealed* to man;
2. As regards their *contents*;
3. As regards the *promises* held out by either doctrine;
4. As regards their *threatenings*;
5. As regards the *function* and the *effect* of either doctrine;
6. As regards the *persons* to whom either the one or the other doctrine must be preached.

All other differences can be grouped under one of these six heads.

Now let us have the Scripture proof for what I have said.

In the first place, then, Law and Gospel differ as regards *the manner of their being revealed to man*. Man was created with the Law written in his heart. True, in consequence of the Fall this script in the heart has become quite dulled, but it has not been utterly wiped out. The Law may be preached to the most ungodly person and his conscience will tell him, That is true. But when the Gospel is preached to him, his conscience does not tell him the same. The preaching of the Gospel rather makes him angry. The worst slave of vice admits that he ought to do what is written in the Law. Why is this? Because the Law is written in his heart. The situation is different when the Gospel is preached. The Gospel reveals and proclaims nothing but free acts of divine grace; and these are not at all self-evident. What God has done according to the Gospel He was not obliged to do, as though He could not possibly have remained a just and loving God if He had not done it. God would still have been eternal Love if He had allowed all men to go to perdition.

Rom. 2, 14. 15 we read: *When the Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by nature the things contained in the Law, these, having not the Law, are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.* Here we have the apostle's testimony that even the blind pagans bear the Moral Law with them in their heart and conscience. No supernatural revelation was needed to inform them concerning the Moral Law. The Ten Commandments were published only for the purpose of bringing out in bold outline the dulled script of the original Law written in men's hearts.

On the other hand, we have from the same apostle, and in the same epistle, this statement concerning the Gospel, Rom. 16, 25. 26: *To him that is of power to stablish you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.* In clear terms the apostle here testifies that it was impossible, since the

beginning of the world, to discover the Gospel. It became known only through an act of the Holy Spirit, who inspired men to write its message.

Try and realize this important distinction. All religions contain portions of the Law. Some of the heathen, by their knowledge of the Law, have advanced so far that they have even perceived the necessity of an inner cleansing of the soul, a purification of the thoughts and desires. But of the Gospel not a particle is found anywhere except in the Christian religion.

Had the Law not been written in men's hearts, no one would listen to the preaching of the Law. Everybody would turn away from it and say: "That is too cruel; nobody can keep commandments such as these." But, my friends, do not hesitate to preach the Law. People may revile it, yet they do so only with their mouths. What you say when preaching the Law to people is something that their own conscience is preaching to them every day. Nor could we convert any person by preaching the Gospel to him unless we preached the Law to him first. It would be impossible to convert any one if the Law had not been written in men's hearts. Of course, God could save all men by a mere act of His will. But He has not *revealed* to us that He intends to do so, and the definite order of salvation which He has appointed for us does not indicate any intention of this kind.

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The second point of difference between the Law and the Gospel is shown by the *contents* of either. The Law tells us what we are to do. No such instruction is contained in the Gospel. On the contrary, the Gospel reveals to us only what God is doing. The Law is speaking concerning our works; the Gospel, concerning the great works of God. In the Law we hear the tenfold summons, "Thou shalt." Beyond that the Law has nothing to say to us. The Gospel, on the other hand, makes no demands whatever.

But does not the Gospel demand faith? Yes; that, however, is just the same kind of command as when you say to a hungry person, "Come, sit down at my table and eat." the hungry person will not reply: "Bosh! I will not take orders from you." No, he will understand and accept your words as a kind invitation. That is what the Gospel is — a kind invitation to partake of heavenly blessings.

Gal. 3, 12 we read: *The Law is not of faith; but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.* This is an exceedingly important passage. The Law has nothing to say about forgiveness, about grace. The Law does not say: "If you are contrite, if you begin to make amends, the remainder of your trespasses will be forgiven." Not a word of this is found in the Law. The Law issues only commands and demands. The Gospel, on the other hand, only makes offers. It means, not to take anything, but only to give.

Accordingly we read, John 1, 17: *The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* What a momentous statement this is: The Gospel contains nothing but grace and truth! When reading the Law, pondering it, and measuring our conduct against its teaching, we are terrified by the multitude of demands which it makes upon us. If nothing else were told us, we

should be hurled into despair — we should be lost. God be praised! there is still another doctrine, the Gospel. To that we cling.

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Law and Gospel differ, in the third place, by reason of their *promises*. What the Law promises is just as great a boon as what the Gospel promises, namely, everlasting life and salvation. But at this point we are confronted with a mighty difference: all promises of the Law are made on certain conditions, namely, on the condition that we fulfil the Law perfectly. Accordingly, the promises of the Law are the more disheartening, the greater they are. The Law offers us food, but does not hand it down to us where we can reach it. It offers us salvation in about the same manner as refreshments were offered to Tantalus in the hell of the pagan Greeks. It says to us indeed: “I will quench the thirst of your soul and appease your hunger.” But it is not able to accomplish this because it always adds: “All this you shall have if you do what I command.”

Over and against this note the lovely, sweet, and comforting language of the Gospel. It promises us the grace of God and salvation without any condition whatsoever. It is a promise of free grace. It asks nothing of us but this, “Take what I give, and you have it.” That is not a condition, but a kind invitation.

Through Moses, God says, Lev. 18, 5: *Ye shall keep My statutes and My judgments; which, if a man do, he shall live in them.* This means that only the person who keeps the Law, and no one else, shall be saved by the Law.

Luke 10, 26 ff. Christ meets the question of the self-righteous scribe with the counter-question: *What is written in the Law? How readest thou?* The scribe answers correctly: *Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.* And now Christ says to him: *This do, and thou shalt live.* The Lord, on this occasion, testified that, if salvation is to come by way of the Law, only he who fulfils the Law can obtain it. (By the way, we are not to think that to those who do the will of God, salvation must come as a reward of their merit. By no means; their salvation, too, would be owing to the goodness of God.) But to return to our discussion, the aforementioned condition which is attached to the Law hurls us into despair.

On a certain occasion, when the Lord wished to instruct the disciples as to what they must preach, He said: *Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.* Mark 16, 15. 16. This shows that no condition whatever is attached to the Gospel; it is a promise of grace.

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Furthermore, we read Rom. 3, 22–24: *There is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* Again, Eph. 2, 8. 9: *By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.* Unconditional promises of grace and salvation — that is what we find in the Gospel. Verily, a precious difference! When the Law has laid us low, we can cheerfully raise our heads again because besides the Law we have another

doctrine which proposes to us no demands of any kind. Were we to ask Christ, “What is expected of me in order that I may be saved?” He would answer: “No works; I have done all the works that had to be done. You need not drink one drop of the cup that I had to drink.”

A person entering fully into the meaning of this fact must be moved to leap for very joy that these glad tidings have been brought to him. A person who in spite of this message continues to be despondent and muses: “I am an abominable man; there is no forgiveness for me,” does nothing less than reject the Gospel — reject Christ. Though I had committed the grossest sins and had to say with Paul, “I am the chief of sinners”; though I had committed the sin of Judas or the sin of Cain, nevertheless I am to accept the Gospel because it demands nothing of us.

The fourth difference between the Law and the Gospel relates to *threats*. The Gospel contains no threats at all, but only words of consolation. Wherever in Scripture you come across a threat, you may be assured that that passage belongs in the Law. He would indeed be a blessed person who could fully realize this comforting truth. The Holy Spirit produces this knowledge wherever it exists. Without the Holy Ghost this knowledge cannot be attained. Every person remains an unbeliever unless the Holy Ghost works this knowledge in him.

However, we are not to imagine that the Gospel makes men secure because it has no threats to hurl at men. On the contrary, the Gospel removes from believers the desire to sin.

The Law, on the other hand, is nothing but threats. As Abraham sent Hagar away into the desert with a loaf of bread and a jug of water, so the Law hands us a piece of bread and then thrusts us into a desert.

Deut. 27, 26 God says through Moses: *Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this Law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.* Indeed, man is invited by the Law to pronounce a curse upon himself. Only a person engulfed by infernal darkness can believe that the Law will give him no trouble.

The Gospel proceeds in a entirely different fashion. Paul says, 1 Tim. 1, 15: *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.* Hence even the foremost among sinners is not made to hear threats, but only the sweetest promise.

Luke 4, 16–21 we have this record: *He [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as His custom was, He went into the synagog on the Sabbath-day and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And He closed the book, and He gave it to the minister and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagog were fastened on Him. And He began to say to them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.* On this

occasion the Lord announced the contents of his doctrine, or of the Gospel. He meant to say: “I am not come to bring a new Law, but to proclaim the Gospel.” Happy the man who realizes this fact! May God help us all to attain to this knowledge!