

### THIRD EVENING LECTURE.

(September 26, 1884.)

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MY FRIENDS: —

Christ Himself has described the way to heaven as a narrow path. Just so narrow is the path of the pure doctrine. For the pure doctrine is nothing else than the doctrine regarding the way to heaven. It is easy to lose your way when it is narrow, rarely traveled, and leads through a dense forest. Without intending to do so and without being aware of it, you may make a wrong turn to the right or left. It is equally easy to lose the narrow way of the pure doctrine which likewise is traveled by few people and leads through a dense forest of erroneous teachings. You may land either in the bog of fanaticism or in the abyss of rationalism. This is no jest. False doctrine is poison to the soul. An entire banqueting party drinking from cups containing an admixture of arsenic can drink physical death from its cups. So an entire audience can invite spiritual and eternal death by listening to a sermon that contains an admixture of the poison of false doctrine. A person can be deprived of his soul's salvation by a single false comfort or a single false reproof administered to him. This is all the more easy because we are all naturally more accessible to the shining and dazzling light of human reason than to the divine truth. For "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them." 1 Cor. 2, 14.

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From what has been said you can gather how foolish it is, yea, what an awful delusion has taken hold upon so many men's minds who ridicule the pure doctrine and say to us: "Ah, do cease clamoring, Pure doctrine! Pure doctrine! That can only land you in dead orthodoxism. Pay more attention to pure life, and you will raise a growth of genuine Christianity." That is exactly like saying to a farmer: "Do not worry forever about good seed; worry about good fruits." Is not a farmer properly concerned about good fruit when he is solicitous about getting good seed? Just so a concern about pure doctrine is the proper concern about genuine Christianity and a sincere Christian life. False doctrine is noxious seed, sown by the enemy to produce a progeny of wickedness. The pure doctrine is wheat-seed; from it spring the children of the Kingdom, who even in the present life belong in the kingdom of Jesus Christ and in the life to come will be received into the Kingdom of Glory. May God even now implant in your hearts a great fear, yea, a real abhorrence, of false doctrine! May He graciously give you a holy desire for the pure, saving truth, revealed by God Himself! That is the chief end which these evening lectures are to serve.

We shall now proceed with our study. Even to-night we cannot take leave of our thesis at once. We have indeed observed the points of difference between the Law and the Gospel. By hearing two testimonies of Luther on the subject we have also been strengthened in our conviction that what we have heard about these differences is true. Now I must give you a practical exhibition of the manner in which these two doctrines must be proclaimed without mingling the one with the other. To this end let me submit a passage from Luther's exposition of chapters 6, 7, and 8 of the Gospel of St. John, written in the years 1530 to 1532. —

There is a general tendency among young people to value the beautiful language and style of an author more than the contents of his writings. That is a dangerous tendency. you must always have a greater regard for the matter (*quid?*) than the manner (*quomodo?*) of a treatise. —

The Law must be preached in all its severity, but the hearers must get this impression: This sermon will help those still secure in their sins towards salvation. Whenever the Gospel is preached, this is the impression that the

hearers are to receive: This sermon applies only to those who have been smitten by the Law and are in need of comfort.

On the words of Christ, John 7, 37: “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink,” Luther offers this comment: “These are the two subjects on which we preach. The Law produces thirst; it leads the hearer to hell and slays him. The Gospel, however, refreshes him and leads him to heaven.”

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Luther speaks of this difference not only when explaining passages in which the terms *Law* and *Gospel* occur, but wherever he has an opportunity to preach these “two subjects.” “The Law tells us what we are to do and charges us with not having done it, no matter how holy we are. Thus the Law makes me uncertain; it chases me about and thus makes me thirsty.”

Now, when Christ invites those who thirst, He means such as have been crushed under the hammer-blows of the Law. Directly Christ invites only these to come to Him; indirectly, indeed, He invites all men. A person thus thirsting is not to do anything but drink, that is, receive the consolations of the Gospel. When a person is really thirsty and is handed but a small glass of water, how greatly refreshed he feels. But when a person is not thirsty, you may fill one glass of water after the other for him, and it will do him no good; it will not refresh him.

Luther proceeds: “The Law says: ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ Its whole urging is directed towards what I am to do. It says: Thou shalt love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself. Thou shalt not commit adultery, nor swear, and not steal. And then it speaks out thus: See that you have lived or are now living according to what I command you to do. When you have reached this point, you will find that you do not love God with your whole heart as you should, and you will be forced to confess: O my God, I have not done what I should; I have not kept the Law, for neither did I love Thee from my heart to-day, nor will I do so to-morrow. I make this same confession year after year, *viz.*, that I have failed to do this or that. There seems to be no end to this confessing of my trespasses. When will there be an end of this? When shall I find rest unto my soul and be fully assured of divine grace? You will ever be in doubt; to-morrow you will repeat your confession of to-day; the general confession will always apply to you. Now, where will your conscience find rest and a foothold because you assuredly know how God is disposed towards you? Your heart cannot tell you, even though you may be doing good works to the limit of your ability. For the Law remains in force with its injunction: Thou shalt love God and man with your whole heart. You say: I am not doing it. The Law replies: You must do it. Thus the Law puts me in anguish; I have to become thirsty, feel a terror, tremble, and exclaim: How am I to act in order that God may lift up His gracious countenance upon me? I am to obtain the grace of God, but on condition that I *keep* the Ten Commandments, that I have good works and many merits to show. But that will never happen. I am not keeping the Ten Commandments, therefore no grace is extended to me. The result is that man can find no rest trusting in his good works. He would be glad to have a good conscience. He yearns for a good, cheerful, peaceful conscience and for real comfort. He thirsts for contentment. That is the thirst of which Jesus speaks. It lasts until Christ comes and asks: Would you like to be at ease? Would you like to have rest and a good conscience? I advise you to come to Me. Dismiss Moses and no longer think of your own works. Distinguish between Me and Moses. From Moses you have the thirst which you are suffering. He has done his part for you; he has discharged his office to you; he has put you in anguish and made you thirsty. I am a different Teacher: I will give you to drink and refresh you.”

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A person who has not been put through this experience is a sound without meaning (*sine mente sonans*), a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. But a preacher who has personally passed through this experience can really speak *from* the heart, and what he says will go *into* the hearts of his hearers. It is a mere accident when some one is awakened from sin and converted by a preacher who is himself unconverted.

Accordingly, when preparing to preach, the preacher must draw up a strategical plan in order to win his hearers for the kingdom of God. Otherwise the hearers may say of his sermon, “Oh, that was nice!” but that will be all. They will leave the church with an empty heart.

“If any one were well versed in this art, I mean, whoever could properly make this distinction, he would deserve to be called a Doctor of Theology. For the Law and the Gospel must be kept apart the one from the other. The Law is to terrify men and make them shy and despairing, especially rude and vulgar people, until they learn that they *cannot* do what the Law demands nor achieve God’s favor. That will make them despair of themselves; for they can never accomplish this aim, obtaining God’s favor by their efforts to keep the Law. Dr. Staupitz, I remember, said to me on a certain occasion: ‘I have more than a thousand times lied to God that I would become godly and never did what I promised. Now I shall never again make up my mind to become godly; for I see that I cannot carry out my resolution. I shall never lie to God any more.’ That was also my experience under the papacy: I was very anxious to become godly; but how long did it last? Only until I had finished reading Mass. An hour later I was more evil than before. This state of affairs goes on until a person is quite weary and is forced to say: I shall put away from me being godly according to Moses and the Law. I shall follow another preacher, who says to me: ‘Come to Me if you are weary; I will refresh you.’ Let this word, ‘Come to Me,’ sound pleasant to you. *This Preacher* does not teach that you *can* love God or how you *must* act and live, but He tells you how you must become godly and be saved *spite of the fact* that you can *not* do as you should. That preaching is wholly different from the teaching of the Law of Moses, which is concerned only with works. The Law says: Thou shalt not sin; go ahead and be godly; do this, do that. But Christ says: Thou art not godly, but I have been godly in thy place. Take from Me what I give thee, — thy sins are forgiven thee (*remissa sunt tibi peccata*). *These two sermons must be preached and urged upon men at the same time.* It is not right for you to stick to one doctrine only; for it is only the Law that makes men thirsty, and it does this only to terrify men’s hearts. But it is the Gospel alone that satisfies men, makes them cheerful, revives them, and comforts their consciences. Now, lest the preaching of the Gospel only produce lazy, frigid Christians, who imagine that they need not do good works, the Law says to the Old Adam: Sin not; be godly; shun that, do this, etc. But when the conscience feels these smitings and realizes that that the Law is not a mere cipher, man becomes terror-stricken. Then you must hear the teaching of the Gospel because you have sinned. Then hear the Teacher Christ, who says to you: ‘Come, I will not let you die of thirst; I will give you to drink.’ ... If these facts had been preached to me, Dr. Luther, when I was young, I should have spared by body considerably and should not have become a monk. But now that these truths are preached, the people of this godless world despise them. For they have not endured the sweat-bath through which I and others had to pass under the papacy. Not having felt the agony of conscience, they despise the Gospel. They have never thirsted, therefore they start all manner of sects and fanatical doings. It is a true saying: *Dulcia non meminit, qui non gustavit amara* (He does not remember sweet things who has not tasted bitter things). He who has never been athirst has no taste. Thirst is a good hostler, and hunger is a good cook. But where there is no thirst, even the best drink is not relished.

“The doctrine of the Law, then, was given for this purpose, that a person be given a sweat-bath of anguish and sorrow under the teaching of the Law. Otherwise men become sated and surfeited and lose all relish of the Gospel. If you meet with such people, pass them by; we are not preaching to them. This preaching is for the thirsty; to them the message is brought: ‘Let them come to Me; I will give them to drink and refresh them.’ ”

In the manner here sketched by Luther the Law and Gospel must be proclaimed, without mingling one with the other.

A preacher who is not simple in his preaching preaches [not Christ, but] himself. And any one preaching himself preaches people into perdition, even when they say of his preaching: “Ah, but that was beautiful! That

man is an orator!” Even a true, honest preacher is visited by thoughts of vanity that spring from his sinful flesh. But as soon as he notices this, he casts these cursed thoughts of vanity from him and cries to God to rid him of them. He enters his pulpit a humble man. People can tell whether his preaching comes from the heart or not.

Of course, you cannot speak like Luther. Still you must revolve in your mind this problem: “How can I preach the Law to the secure and the Gospel to crushed sinners?” Every sermon must contain both doctrines. When either is missing, the other is wrong. For any sermon is wrong that does not present all that is necessary to a person’s salvation. You must not think that you have rightly divided the Word of Truth if you preach the Law in one part of your sermon and the Gospel in the other. No; a topographical division of this kind is worthless. Both doctrines may be contained in one sentence. But in your audience every one must get the impression, “That is meant for me.” Even the most comforting and cheering sermon must contain also the Law.

Let me cite you a passage from Luther’s exposition of Ps. 23, 3: “He restoreth my soul.” Luther says: “Inasmuch as the Lord, our God, has a twofold Word, the Law and the Gospel, the prophet by these words, ‘He restoreth my soul,’ indicates with sufficient clearness that he is not speaking of the Law, but of the Gospel.”

When you meet with statements in your Bible containing threats of punishment, classify them with the Law. Words that comfort, words that speak of giving, offering something, belong to the Gospel. You will not find a Gospel pericope from which you could not preach both the Law and the Gospel.

Luther proceeds: “The Law cannot restore the soul, for it is a word that makes demands upon us and commands us to love God with our whole heart, etc., and our neighbor as ourselves. The Law condemns every person who fails to do this and pronounces this sentence upon him: Cursed is every one that doeth not all that is written in the book of the Law. Now, it is certain that no man on earth is doing this. Therefore, in due time the Law approaches the sinner, filling his soul with sadness and fear. If no respite is provided from its smiting, it continues its onslaught forcing the sinner into despair and eternal damnation. Therefore St. Paul says: By the law is only the knowledge of sin. Again: ‘The Law worketh nothing but wrath.’ The Gospel, however, is a blessed word; it makes no demands upon us, but only proclaims good tidings to us, namely, that God has given His only Son for us poor sinners to be our Shepherd, to seek us famished and scattered sheep, to give His life for our redemption from sin, everlasting death, and the power of the devil.”

The question might here be raised why it is that the Law leads men into the horrible sin of despair. That is merely an accidental feature of its operation. In and by itself the Law, too, is good.

Let me follow this up with a passage from Luther’s *Commentary on Galatians*. On Gal. 2, 3, 4 Luther says: “Accordingly, when your conscience is terrified by the Law, and you are wrestling with God, the Judge, do not consult your reason or the Law, but take your stand alone on the grace of God and His word of consolation. Cling to this and act as if you had never heard a word of the Law. Enter into that darkness (Ex. 20, 21) where neither the Law nor human reason gives its light, but only the dark word of faith. The believer relies with a certainty on being saved in Christ, without the Law and regardless of it. Thus the gospel, without, and regardless of, the light of the Law and reason, leads us into the darkness of faith, where the Law and reason exercise no authority. We must, indeed, hear the Law also, yet in its proper place and at the proper time. When he has come down from the mountain, he is a legislator and governs the people with the Law. In this manner our conscience is to be exempt from the Law, but ours is to obey the Law. ... Hence, any person who understands well how to distinguish the Gospel from the Law may thank God and know that he is a theologian. In times of tribulation, indeed, I do not know how to do this as efficiently as I should. Both teachings are to be distinguished in such a manner that you place the Gospel in heaven, the Law on earth; that you call the righteousness which the Gospel proclaims a heavenly and divine righteousness, the righteousness which the Law proclaims an earthly and human righteousness; and that you are as careful to distinguish the righteousness of the Gospel from the righteousness of

the Law as God with great care has separated heaven from earth, light from darkness, day from night. One of these doctrines shall be the light of day, the other the darkness of night. Would to God that we could put them still farther apart!

“Therefore, when we are speaking of faith and are ministering to men’s consciences, the Law is to be utterly excluded; it must remain on earth. When you treat of what men are to do, light the night-lamp of works, or of the righteousness that is by way of the Law. Thus the sun and the unmeasured light of the Gospel and of grace is to shine during the day; the lamp of the Law, however, at night. A conscience, then, that has been thrown into terror by feeling its sin should argue thus: I am now engaged in earthly tasks. Here let the donkey labor, slave, and carry the burden that is laid upon him. That is to say, Let the body with its members be subject to the Law, But when you ascend to heaven, leave the donkey with its burden on earth. For the conscience of a believer in Christ has nothing to do with the Law and its works and the righteousness of this earth. Thus the donkey stays in the valley, while the conscience, with Isaac, goes up into the mountain, ignores the Law and its works, and keeps its eye only on the forgiveness of sin, on nothing but that righteousness which is exhibited and given to us in Christ. ... This point of doctrine, *vis.*, the distinction between the Law and the Gospel, we must needs know because it contains the sum of all Christian teaching. Let every one who is zealous to be godly strive, then, with the greatest care to learn how to make this distinction, that is, in his heart and conscience. The distinction is made easily enough in words. But in affliction you will realize that the Gospel is a rare guest in men’s consciences, while the Law is their daily and familiar companion For human reason has by nature the knowledge of the Law. Therefore, when the conscience is terrified by sin, which the Law points out and magnifies, you are to speak thus: There is a time to die, and there is a time to live; there is a time for acting as if you were ignorant of the Gospel. At this moment let the Law begone, and let the Gospel come; for now is not the time to hear the Law, but the Gospel. But how about this? You have not done any good; on the contrary, you have committed grievous sins. I admit that, but I have the forgiveness of sins through Christ, for whose sake all my sins have been remitted. However, while the conscience is not engaged in this conflict, while you are obliged to discharge the ordinary functions of your office, at a time when you must act as a minister of the Word, a magistrate, a husband, a teacher, a pupil, etc., it is not in season to hear the Gospel, but the Law. At such a time you are to perform the duties of your profession,” etc.

Our own righteousness is to serve us for this life, but the righteousness which the Gospel brings us is a heavenly righteousness.

We shall hear anon that Law and Gospel must be kept apart not only in the sermon, but above all in a person’s own heart.