

FOURTH EVENING LECTURE.

(October 3, 1884.)

Page
28

When a theologian is asked to yield and make concessions in order that peace may at last be established in the Church, but refuses to do so even in a single point of doctrine, such an action looks to human reason like intolerable stubbornness, yea, like downright malice. That is the reason why such theologians are loved and praised by few men during their lifetime. Most men rather revile them as disturbers of the peace, yea, as destroyers of the kingdom of God. They are regarded as men worthy of contempt. But in the end it becomes manifest that this very determined, inexorable tenacity in clinging to the pure teaching of the divine Word by no means tears down the Church; on the contrary, it is just this which, in the midst of greatest dissension, builds up the Church and ultimately brings about genuine peace. Therefore, woe to the Church which has no men of this stripe, men who stand as watchmen on the walls of Zion, sound the alarm whenever a foe threatens to rush the walls, and rally to the banner of Jesus Christ for a holy war!

Page
29

Try and picture to yourselves what would have happened if Athanasius had made a slight concession in the doctrine of the deity of Christ. He could have made a compromise with the Arians and put his conscience at ease; for the Arians declared that they, too, believed Christ to be God, only not from eternity. They said: ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν (there was a time when He did not exist), meaning, He had *become* God. But they added: “Nevertheless He is to be worshiped, for He is God.” Even at that remote time, had Athanasius yielded, the Church would have been hurled from the one Rock on which it is founded, which is none other than Jesus Christ.

Again, imagine what would have happened if Augustine had made a slight concession in the doctrine of man’s free will, or rather of the utter incapacity of man for matters spiritual. He, too, could have made a compromise with the Pelagians and put his conscience at ease because the Pelagians declared: “Yes, indeed; without the aid of God’s grace no man can be saved.” But by the grace of God they meant the divine gift which is imparted to every man. Even at that time, had Augustine yielded, the Church would have lost the core of the Gospel. There would have been nothing left of it but the empty, hollow shell. Aye, the Church would have retained nothing but the name of the Gospel. For the doctrine of the Gospel that man is made righteous in the sight of God and saved by nothing but the pure grace of God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, is, as everybody knows, the most important doctrine, the marrow and substance of Christian teaching. Wherever this doctrine is not proclaimed, there is no Christ, no Gospel, no salvation; there men perish, and for such people it has been in vain that the Son of God has come into the world.

Lastly, picture to yourselves what would have happened if Luther had made a slight concession in the doctrine of the Holy Supper. At the time of the Margburg Colloquy he could have made a compromise with Zwingli and put his conscience at ease, because the Zwinglians said: “We, too, believe in a certain presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord’s Supper, but not in the presence of Christ’s corporeal substance, because God does not set up such sublime, incomprehensible things for us to believe.” By this claim Zwingli made Christianity in its entirety a questionable matter, and even Melancthon, who was usually greatly inclined to make concessions, declared that Zwingli had relapsed into paganism. Had Luther yielded, the Church would have become a prey to rationalism, which places man’s reason above the plain Word of God.

Page
30

Let us, therefore, bless all the faithful champions who have fought for every point of Christian doctrine, unconcerned about the favor of men and disregarding their threatenings. Their ignominy, though it often was great, has not been borne in vain. Men cursed them, but they continued bearing their testimony until death, and now they wear the crown of glory and enjoy the blissful communion of Christ and of all the angels and the elect.

Their labor and their fierce battling has not been in vain; for even now, after 1500 years, or, in the last-named case, after several centuries, the Church is reaping what they sowed.

Let us, then, my friends, likewise hold fast the treasure of the pure doctrine. Do not consider it strange if on that account you must bear reproach the same as they did. Consider that the word of Sirach, chap. 4, 33: “Even unto death fight for justice, and God will overthrow thy enemies for thee,” will come true in our case too. Let this be your slogan: Fight unto death in behalf of the truth, and the Lord will fight for you! —

We now take up a thesis for study which tells us that, since the two doctrines of Scripture, Law and Gospel, are so different from each other, we must keep them distinct also in our preaching.

Thesis II.

Only he is an orthodox teacher who not only presents all the articles of faith in accordance with Scripture, but also rightly distinguished from each other the Law and the Gospel.

This thesis divides into two parts. The first part states a requisite of an orthodox teacher, viz., that he must present all the articles of faith in accordance with Scripture. This, in our day, is regarded as an unheard-of demand. Even in circles of so-called believers, people act as if they were shocked when they hear some one say: “I have found the truth; I am certain concerning every doctrine of revelation.” Such a claim is considered a piece of arrogance. Young students in particular dare not set up such a claim. In Germany they are told: “Whatever you do, do not believe that you have already found the truth. Keep on studying until you have reached the goal. Never say you have already reached it!” Even the German professors who speak thus to their students never reach the goal; if one of them claims that he has, he is immediately regarded with suspicion.

There are people who find their delight, not in eating and drinking or in hoarding up wealth or in a life of ease, but in quenching their thirst for knowledge. True, in theory this tendency is not approved, but that is practically what the professors are advising when they say warningly to their students: “Never speak of the Christian doctrine in terms of finality!” They are afraid that some one might speak with finality on an article of faith instead of ceaselessly rolling the stone of research, as Sisyphus in the Greek hell is rolling the stone that he wants to bring to a higher level and which always slips from him. That was the reason too, why Khanis, who had been a faithful Lutheran, sought to justify himself in the preface of his miserable *Dogmatik* by citing the Latin proverb: *Dies diem docet* (One day is the teacher of the next). He meant to say: “A year ago I believed this and that; but other thoughts came to me, and I found other doctrines.” That is a miserable, yes, an appalling position for a theologian to take. Scripture requires that we have the Word of God absolutely pure and unadulterated and that we be able to say when coming down from the pulpit: “I could take an oath upon it that I have rightly preached the Word of God. Even to an angel coming down from heaven I could say: My preaching has been correct.” That explains the paradox remark of Luther that a preacher must not pray the Lord’s Prayer when coming down from the pulpit, but that he should do so before the sermon. For an orthodox preacher need not pray after delivering his sermon: “Forgive me my trespasses,” since he can say: “I have proclaimed the pure truth.” In our day, men have become merged in skepticism to such an extent that they regard any one who sets up the aforementioned claim as a semilunatic.

The Word of God tells us in a passage where the Lord is introduced as speaking, Jer. 23, 28: *He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.* Our sermons, then, are to contain only wheat and no chaff.

The Apostle Paul warns the Galatians, chap. 5, 9: *A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.* He means to say: A single false teaching vitiates the entire doctrine.

The warning with which John concludes the last book of the Bible is sounded as far back as in the days of Moses, who says, Deut. 4, 2: *Ye shall not add unto the Word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it.*

It is, then, a diabolical teaching to say: “You will never achieve the ability to give a Scriptural presentation of the articles of faith.” Especially when students hear a statement like this, it is as if some hellish poison were injected into their hearts; for after that they will no longer show any zeal to get to the bottom of the truth, to have clear conceptions of the truth.

Page
32

But suppose some one could truthfully say, “There was no false teaching in my sermon,” still his entire sermon may have been wrong. Can that be true? The second part of our thesis says so. Only he is an orthodox teacher who, in addition to other requirements, rightly distinguishes Law and Gospel from each other. That is the final test of a proper sermon. The value of a sermon depends not only on this, that every statement in it be taken from the Word of God and be in agreement with the same, but also on this, whether Law and Gospel have been rightly divided. Of the same building materials furnished two architects one will construct a magnificent building, while the other, using the same materials, makes a botch of of it. Crack-brained man that he is, he may want to begin at the roof or place all windows in one room or pile up layers of stone or brick in such a fashion that a crooked wall will be the result. The one house will be out of plumb and such a bungling piece of work that it will collapse while the other stands firm and is a habitable and pleasant abode. In like manner all doctrines may be treated by sermons by two preachers: the one sermon may be a glorious and precious piece of work, while the other is wrong throughout. Note this well. When you hear some sectarian preach, you may say, “What he said was the truth,” and yet you do not feel satisfied. Here is the key for unlocking this mystery: the preacher did not rightly divide Law and Gospel, and hence everything went wrong. He preached Law where he should have preached Gospel, and he offered Gospel truth where he should have presented the Law. Now, any one following such a preacher goes astray; he does not arrive at the sure foundation of the divine truth; he does not attain to an assurance of grace and salvation. Not infrequently this happens in sermons of students. There are found in them comforting remarks like these: “It is all by grace,” and then we are told: “We must do good works,” and then again: “With our works we cannot gain salvation.” There is no order in a sermon of this kind; nobody understands it, least of all the person who needs it most. There must be a proper division of Law and Gospel. Be careful to follow this rule in writing your sermons. Perhaps, for once, the words veritably flowed into your pen. But I would advise you to read your sermon over and see whether you have rightly divided Law and Gospel; for then you may often discover that there is where you made a mistake. In that case your sermon is wrong although it contains no false doctrine.

Page
33

Now let me also give you the Bible-texts which testify to the truths just stated. We read 2 Tim. 2, 15: *Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.* The term *ορθοτομεῖν* in this text, which has been rendered by “rightly dividing,” is plainly used in a metaphorical sense. It is derived either from the action of priests when dividing the sacrificial offerings or from that of the head of a family when he apportions food and drink to the members of his household. The latter meaning seems to be the correct one; however, many of our theologians adopt the former.

Luke 12, 42 the Lord says: *Who, then, is that faithful and wise steward whom his lord shall make ruler over his household to give them their portion of meat in due season?* Two things are here required of a good householder. In the first place, he must give to each individual his due portion, exactly what he or she needs. If a steward were to do no more than bring out of his larder and cellar all that is in them and put it on a pile, he would not act wisely; the children, probably, would grab large portions, and the rest might not get anything. He must give to each the right quantity, according to the amount of work that has been done. When children are at the

table with adults, he would be foolish to set meat and wine before children and milk and light food before adults. But how difficult it is to perceive that these very mistakes are often made in sermons! A preacher must not throw all doctrines in a jumble before his hearers, just as they come into his mind, but cut for each of his hearers a portion such as he needs. He is to be like an apothecary, who must give that medicine to the sick which is for the *particular* ailment with which they are afflicted. In the same manner a preacher must give to each of his hearers his due: he must see to it that secure, care-free, and willful sinners hear the thunderings of the Law, contrite sinners, however, the sweet voice of the Savior's grace. That is what it means to give to each hearer his due.

Ezek. 13, 18–22 we read: *Thus saith the Lord God; Woe to them that sew pillows to all armholes and make kerchiefs upon the head of every stature to hunt souls! Will ye hunt the souls of My people, and will ye save the souls alive that come unto you? And will ye pollute Me among My people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread to slay the souls that should not die and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to My people that hear your lies? Wherefore thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I am against your pillows wherewith ye there hunt the souls to make them fly, and I will tear them from your arms and will let the souls go, even the souls that ye hunt to make them fly. Your kerchiefs also will I tear and deliver My people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand to be hunted; and ye shall know that I am the Lord, because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad and strengthened the hands of the wicked that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life.* Here you have an instance of the execration of a preacher who knows that his congregation needs an application of the Law, but who for a piece of bread keep silent. Verily, let woe be cried, woe upon every one who furnishes soft pillows and cushions for secure sinners! They are lulling those to sleep with the Gospel who ought to be roused from their sleep by means of the Law. It is a wrong application of the Gospel to preach it to such as are not afraid of sinning. On the other hand, an even more horrible situation is created if the pastor is a legalistic teacher, who refuses to preach the Gospel to his congregation because he says: "These people will misuse it anyway." Are poor sinners on that account to be deprived of the Gospel? Let the wicked perish; nevertheless the children of God shall know how near at hand their help is and how easily it is obtained. Any one withholding the Gospel from such as are in need of consolation fails to divide Law and Gospel. Woe and again woe to such a one!

Page
34

Zechariah relates the following, chap. 11, 7: *I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock.* A real, spiritual shepherd has two staves, or rods. The rod Beauty is the Gospel, and the rod Bands is the Law. He must be well informed as to the persons to whom he is to apply either the one or the other of these staves. The Messiah — who is the Speaker in this passage — says that He used the rod Bands against the flock of slaughter, that is, against sheep which were to be slaughtered and not to be led to the pasture. The "poor of the flock" represent poor sinners. Among them He uses the comforting staff and rod of the Gospel. Most preachers make the mistake of hurling the rod Bands among the sheep and using the rod Beauty for wicked knives.

(By the way, Luther's translation of this passage is unexcelled. Would that the people who want to revise Luther's Bible would stick to their private affairs!)

Even nature teaches that certain materials must not be mixed if they are to retain their salutary virtue. There are certain substances that are, by themselves, salutary; but when they are mixed, they are turned into poison. That is what happens when Law and Gospel are mingled. Or take an instance from colors: when you combine yellow and blue, it is neither yellow nor blue, but green. In like manner there arises a third substance (*tertium genus*), when Law and Gospel are confounded in a sermon. The new substance is entirely foreign to either original substance and causes both of them to lose their virtue.

Page
35

In his *Sermon on the Distinction between the Law and the Gospel* (St. L. Ed. IX, 799 f.) Luther writes: “It is therefore a matter of utmost necessity that these two kinds of God’s Word be well and properly distinguished. Where this is not done, neither the Law nor the Gospel can be understood, and the consciences of men must perish with blindness and error. The Law has its goal fixed beyond which it cannot go or accomplish anything, namely, until the point is reached where Christ comes in. It must terrify the impenitent with threats of the wrath and displeasure of God. Likewise the Gospel has its peculiar function and task, *vis.*, to proclaim forgiveness of sin to sorrowing souls. These two may not be commingled, nor the one substituted for the other, without a falsification of doctrine. For while the Law and the Gospel are indeed equally God’s Word, they are not the same doctrine.”

You may correctly state what the Law says and what the Gospel says. But when you form your statement so as to commingle both, you produce poison for souls. Remember: Law and Gospel are God’s Word, but different kinds of doctrine.

A person who does not understand this difference, the true difference, has nothing whatever to offer people. But even the mere knowledge or memorizing of this difference does not prove helpful; for one can learn the facts of this difference in a few hours when preparing for an examination. This knowledge must be reinforced by experience. Not until that is done, will a person understand that the distinction between these two doctrines is a glorious one.

In the beginning of the sermon just referred to Luther says: “This is the meaning of St. Paul: Among Christians both preachers and hearers must adopt and teach a definite distinction between the Law and the Gospel, between works and faith. Accordingly, Paul enjoins this distinction upon Timothy when he exhorts him, 2 Tim. 2, 15, rightly to divide the Word of Truth, etc. This distinction between the Law and the Gospel is the supreme art among Christians. Each and all of those who glory in the name of Christian or have adopted it may and should understand this art. For wherever there is a deficiency in this respect, it is impossible to distinguish a Christian from a Gentile or Jew. So important is this distinction. For this reason Paul so strenuously insists that these two doctrines the Law and the Gospel be well and properly distinguished among Christians. Both the Law, or the Ten Commandments, and the Gospel are indeed God’s Word; the latter was given by God at the beginning, in Paradise, the former on Mount Sinai. But the matter of decisive importance is this, that these two words be properly distinguished and not commingled; otherwise the true meaning of neither will be known nor retained; yea, imagining that we have both, we shall find that we possess neither.”