

ELEVENTH EVENING LECTURE.

(December 5, 1884.)

Page
87

Many solemn warnings against false teachers are found in Holy Scripture. One of the most solemn of them, if not the most solemn, is that found in Jer. 23, 22, where the Lord says regarding false teachers: "If they had stood in My counsel and had caused My people to hear My words, then they should have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings." This shows that by teaching false doctrine a preacher may keep the souls entrusted to his care from being converted and — a result awful to contemplate! — will cause them to be eternally lost. True, the people who permit themselves to be led astray by false teachings are lost by their own fault; for in innumerable passages of His Word, God has with great earnestness warned men against false teachers and prophets and has minutely described them. Any one, then, who despises these warnings will in the end have to blame himself amidst the wails of the hereafter. Still, this does not exculpate the false prophets and teachers who proclaim false teachings. On the contrary, their guilt is increased because they did not only choose the false way for themselves, but also pointed that way to the souls entrusted to them. For it is written, Heb. 13, 17: "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account." Alas, what terror will seize all false teachers on the great day of account when all the souls led astray by them shall stand before the judgment-seat of God and raise accusations against them! What terror will seize Arius, who questioned the deity of Christ and wanted to snatch the crown of divine majesty from Christ's head! What terror will seize Pelagius, who denied that a person is made righteous and saved solely and alone by the grace of God! What terror, greater than these, will seize the Popes, who have formed all anti-christian doctrines into a system! How will they quake with terror when the souls without number whom they have led astray and whose hearts they have poisoned will stand in the presence of God! On that day every false teacher will wish that he had never been born and will curse the day when he was inducted into the sacred office of the ministry. On that day we shall see that false teaching is not the trifling and harmless matter that people in our day think it is.

Page
88

My dear friends, heed well what God inspired His prophet Isaiah to write, chap. 66, 1: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at My Word." Of the men who are serving in the sacred office of the ministry and of those who are training for the same, — of us all, God requires, not only that we love His Word, but also that we tremble at it, that is, that we sincerely dread to deviate from a single letter of the divine Word, that we do not dare to add anything to it or take anything from it. We are to be ready to shed our blood rather than yield a tittle of God's Word.

Page
89

Choose our beloved *Luther* for your model. He says: "I have a sensation that one passage of Scripture could push me off the face of the earth." He means to say: Were I to note that the doctrine which I proclaim to the people is contradicted by one passage of Scripture, I should have no rest day or night. I would not know whither to flee. The situation would be too terrible for me. — Strive to have the mind of David, the royal prophet, who says, Ps. 119, 120: "My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee, and I am afraid of Thy judgments."

Such a mind, indeed, you cannot have, at least you cannot act upon it, while you are still without a clear and thorough knowledge of all doctrines of Holy Writ. For how can you keep what you do not possess? The course of study here at the seminary has been planned with the end in view of making you familiar with the entire Holy Scriptures and enabling you to understand each article of faith by itself as well as in its connection with, and in its relation to, all the other doctrines.

That is the object, likewise, of our Friday evening lectures, in which we are treating the distinction between the Law and the Gospel. For that is the paramount issue, that you learn rightly to divide the Law and the Gospel. I am not afraid — unless you become apostates — that you will set up new articles of faith; but I do fear that you will not rightly divide the Law and the Gospel. For this requires that you deviate neither to the right nor to the left, yielding neither to despondency nor to laxity.

Thesis VII.

In the third place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when the Gospel is preached first and then the Law; sanctification first and then justification; faith first and then repentance; good works first and then grace.

We are now to discuss a wrong division of the Word of God which occurs when the various doctrines are not presented in their order; when something that should come last is placed first. By this practise immense damage can be wrought in the hearts and the understanding of your auditors. Four types of this perverse sequence are possible.

In the first place, the order may be distorted if you preach the Gospel prior to the Law. You may think: “Can a person be so perverse? Why, every catechumen at school knows quite well that the Law comes first and then the Gospel.” However, this can easily happen. We have instances in history which show that even entire religious associations became addicted to this error. For instance, the Antinomians in Luther’s time, with Agricola, of Eisleben, as their leader; and the Herrnhuters (Moravians) in the eighteenth century. The latter preferred not to have the Law preached at all. Their chief tenet was: “The Gospel must be preached first; the suffering and bleeding of Christ must be presented, to start with.” This was fundamentally wrong. We shall readily admit that the Herrnhuters have made an impression on many, but it was a mere surface impression. Their hearers were never made aware of their deep sinful depravity; they were never made to realize that they were enemies of God, worthy to be cast down to perdition rather than to be saved. — By the way, when we use the term “Gospel” in this connection, we refer, of course, to the Gospel in the strict sense of the term, namely, as the opposite of the Law.

In Mark 1, 15 we read: *Repent ye and believe the Gospel.* “Repent ye” is plainly a Law utterance. In the preaching of our Lord this comes first, being followed by the Gospel summons: “Believe the Gospel.”

In this practise the holy apostles were followers of Christ. Paul goes on record describing his method of preaching in Acts 20, 21 thus: *Testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.* The apostle preached repentance first and then faith; the Law first and then the Gospel.

In his valedictory remarks to His disciples, before ascending to heaven, our Lord said *repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*. The Lord does not reverse the divine order, thus: “Remission of sins and repentance.” No; that would be a way that would absolutely not lead to salvation.

The second perversion of the true sequence occurs when sanctification of life is preached before justification, the preaching of forgiveness of sins; for justification by grace is nothing else than forgiveness of sins. I became righteous by appropriating the righteousness of Christ as my own.

Ps. 130, 4 David says: *There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared*. The psalmist practically says to God: “First Thou must grant us remission of sins; after that we shall begin to reverence Thee, by walking in a new, sanctified life.” The term “fear” in this text does not signify merely awe in God’s presence, but the whole work of sanctification.

Ps. 119, 32 we read: *I will run the way of Thy Commandments when Thou shalt enlarge my heart*. First come the consolations of God, justification, the granting of pardon to the sinner, the remission of sins. After that the psalmist expects to “run the way of God’s commandments.” He means to say: “Because Thou, O God, receivest me into Thy grace, therefore, because of this gracious act of Thine, I conceive a love for Thy commandments. As long as my sins are still unforgiven, I cannot love Thee and Thy commandments; no, I hate Thee. But as soon as I have been pardoned, I have obtained a new heart and gladly quit the world, for I find with Thee something better than what the world can give me.”

The apostle tells the Corinthians in his First Epistle to them, chap. 1, 30: *Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption*. Here we have the true sequence. The first requisite to obtain wisdom, knowledge and the way of salvation. This is the primary step. Next comes righteousness, which we obtain by faith. Not until this has been attained, comes sanctification. I must first know that God has forgiven my sins, that He has cast them into the depth of the sea, before it affords me real joy to lead a sanctified life. Before that it was a grievous burden to me. At first I was angry with God; I hated Him for demanding so many things of me. I should have liked to cast Him from His throne. I mused in my heart, It would be better if there were no God. But when I had been pardoned and justified, I delighted, not only in the Gospel, but also in the Law.

John 15, 5 the Lord says to His disciples: *I am the Vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing*. The Savior desires that we be grafted in Him like branches in a vine. That does not mean that we are to be physically incorporated in Him, but that we believe in Him with our whole heart, put our confidence and trust in Him, and embrace Him wholly with the arms of faith, so that we live only in Him, our Jesus, who has rescued us and saves us. When this takes place, we shall bear fruit. The Savior, then, shows that we must be justified before we can lead a sanctified life. If we become loose, severed branches, we wither and bear no fruit.

In His address before the apostles' convention at Jerusalem, Peter, speaking of what God had done for the Gentiles, says, Acts 15, 9: *He put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.* After being justified by faith, I am also purified, renewed, and sanctified by the same faith.

To confound justification and sanctification is one of the most horrid errors. The most beautiful preaching is rendered useless by this error. Only by a strict separation of justification and sanctification a sinner is made to understand clearly and becomes certain that he has been received into grace by God; and this knowledge equips him with strength to walk in a new life.

The third perversion of the true sequence — first Law, then Gospel — occurs when faith is preached first and repentance next, as was done by the Antinomians and is still done by the Herrnhuters in our time. Their current teaching is: “Faith is the primary affair; after that you must become contrite and repent.” What a foolish direction! How can faith enter a heart that has not yet been crushed? How can a person feel hungry and thirsty while he loathes the food set before him? No, indeed; if you wish to believe in Christ, you must become sick; for Christ is a Physician only for those who are sick. He came to seek and to save that which is lost; therefore you must first become a lost and condemned sinner. He is the Good Shepherd, who goes in search of the lost sheep; therefore you must first realize that you are a lost sheep.

Acts 2, 38 the following incident at the conclusion of Peter's Pentecostal sermon is recorded: *Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.* That is what Peter said in answer to the question of the Jews: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” He preaches to them, first, repentance; next, the remission of sins. Faith, then, follows repentance.

Under this head belong also all the passages cited before, especially Acts 20, 21. All who pervert this order have their teaching disproved by the rule: “Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” For a preacher these passages are the true guiding lights that keep him from straying from the right path.

Finally, the fourth perversion occurs when good works are preached first and then grace. The subjects mentioned in these four types are all analogous: one type is as bad as any of the others.

There is a golden text in Ephesians, chap. 2, 8–10: *For 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. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* The apostle does not say: “We must do good works in order to have a gracious God,” but the very opposite: “By grace are ye saved; but by grace ye are created unto good works.” When you have received grace, God has created you anew. In this new state you have to do good works; you can no longer remain under the dominion of sin.

Titus 2, 11, 12 we read: *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world.* Here we are told that grace is brought to us first, and then this grace begins a work of education upon us. We are placed under the divine pedagogy of grace. The moment a person accepts the

grace which brought God down from heaven that grace begins to train him. The object of this training is to teach him how to do good works and lead an upright life.

The character of the Old Testament is chiefly legalistic although the Gospel is proclaimed also in that part of the Bible; the character of the New Testament is chiefly evangelical, although Law portions are not lacking in it. The solemn revelation of the Law took place in the Old Testament, that of the Gospel in the New Testament. The Gospel was indeed available as far back as the days of Paradise, but its solemn inauguration had not yet taken place. The full revelation of the Law occurred on Sinai amid thunder and lightning and during an earthquake. It seemed as if the end of the world had come. In the New Testament era, at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, there also appeared fire, but it did not consume anything. Tongues of fire were seen on the heads of the apostles, but their hair was not singed. A mighty wind came roaring out of the sky, but it destroyed nothing; not a thing was moved out of its place. The purpose of the phenomena was to indicate that at that moment an entirely different, a comforting, revelation was about to be made.

Let us pass on to the apostolic epistles, especially to that addressed to the Romans, which contains the Christian doctrine in its entirety. What do we find in the first three chapters? The sharpest preaching of the Law. This is followed, towards the end of the third chapter and in chapters 4 and 5, by the doctrine of justification — nothing but that. Beginning at chapter 6, the apostle treats of nothing else than sanctification. Here we have a true pattern of the correct sequence: first the Law, threatening men with the wrath of God; next the Gospel, announcing the comforting promises of God. This is followed by an instruction regarding the things we are to do after we have become new men. The prophets, too, when they wished to convert people, began by preaching the Law to them. When the chastisings of the Law had taken effect, they comforted the poor sinners. As to the apostles, no sooner had their hearers shown that they were alarmed than they seemed to know nothing else to do for them than to comfort them and pronounce absolution to them. Not until that had been done, would they say to their people: “Now you must show your gratitude toward God.” They did not issue orders; they did not threaten when their orders were disregarded, but they pleaded and besought their hearers by the mercy of God to act like Christians.

Page
94

That is genuine sanctification which follows upon justification; that is genuine justification which comes after repentance.

Let me illustrate by a few specimens of sermon outlines how you may even by these betray your ignorance of the distinction between Law and Gospel. I shall select very crass examples, as Luther was wont to do; for such examples readily help us to understand the matter under discussion. I love to do as Luther did; for if there is any good that I have achieved, I have learned it from him.

INCORRECT SERMON OUTLINES.

First Subject: The Way of Salvation. It consists of 1) faith; 2) true repentance. A perversion of this kind would constitute you genuine Antinomians and Herrnhuters.

Second Subject: Good Works. We shall see 1) wherein they consist; 2) that they must be performed in faith. In such an outline you would state what good works are, without having spoken of faith. A

description of good works requires a statement that they are performed by believers. Otherwise you would have to formulate your judgment on good works from the Law. But that is wrong; for viewed in the light of the Law, any good work even of a Christian, no matter how good it may appear, is damnable in the sight of God.

Third Subject: Concerning Prayer. 1) True Prayer is based on the certainty of our being heard; 2) true prayer consists in faith. According to this outline the first part of your sermon would be entirely wrong.

Fourth Subject: Promises and Threatenings in the Word of God. 1) Promises; 2) threatenings. When I hear these parts of the sermon announced, I say to myself: First the preacher is going to comfort me; then he will proceed to throw rocks at me, causing me to forget everything that he said at the start. No; first you must come down on your hearers with the Law and then bind up their wounds with the divine promises. When a preacher concludes his sermons with threatenings, he has gone far towards making that sermon unproductive.

Fifth Subject: True Christianity. It consists, 1) in Christian living; 2) in true faith; 3) in a blessed death. This outline is simply horrible.

Sixth Subject: What must a person do to become assured of salvation? 1) He must amend his life and become a different man; 2) he must repent of his sins; 3) he must also apprehend Christ by faith. How is it possible to lead a better life when I have not yet reached that stage where I abhor sin and abominate a wicked life? The worst part is Part 3; for there is nothing that gives my greater assurance of being saved than faith.

Accordingly the view of the Pietists is certainly wrong, when they claimed that the various stages of the order of salvation are described in the Sermon on the Mount. They were tempted to adopt this view by the fact that Christ at the opening of this great sermon says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." But that view is untenable; for the phrase "poor in spirit" signifies "to have nothing to which the heart becomes attached." A millionaire may be poor in spirit; if his heart has not become attached to his money and chattels, he does not really possess them. On the other hand, a beggar may be the very opposite when he puts his trust in the little money he still has. The former is a "blessed" man, the latter is not.

In the view of the Pietists the second beatitude which Christ pronounced: "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted," refers to mourning over sin. They called this the second stage of the order of salvation. But Christ refers to the sorrowing and cross-bearing which His followers have to do in this life for His name's sake.

Continuing, Christ says: "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth." Here the Pietists have labored mightily to find a passable meaning. They were troubled by the fact that up to this point no mention has yet been made of justification by faith. That clogs their scheme of the order of salvation. They turn marvelous mental somersaults in an attempt to evolve their "stages" from the beatitudes; but their efforts are futile.

Next, Christ says: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." This is to represent the fourth "stage." Aye, but does meekness actually precede the other stages? — If you ever preach on the Beatitudes, have a care not to follow Pietistic preachers.

Luther was forced to declare his position over against the Antinomians. They contended that grace must be preached first and then repentance. Indeed, they insisted that in the churches the Law must not be preached at all. They claimed the Law belongs in the court-house and on the gallows; it is to be preached to thieves and murderers, not to honest people, least of all to Christians.

In his treatise *Against the Antinomians*, of the year 1539, *Luther* writes (St. L. Ed. XX, 1618): “The Antinomians have invented a new method by which grace is to be preached first and after that the wrath of God. The word *Law* is not to be spoken at all with in earshot of Christians. That is a pretty seesaw, which pleases them wonderfully, because by this trick they can turn the Scriptures up or down and think they have become *lux mundi* [a world’s marvel]. They force their notions upon the statement of St. Paul in Rom. 1.”

The Antinomians pointed to v. 16 in this chapter, where St. Paul says: “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” “You see,” they said, “that the apostle begins with the Gospel.” But these words are preceded by the introduction. The sixteenth verse states the subject of the entire epistle. In v. 18 he begins his first part and concludes it by saying: “What I have demonstrated so far is that all men are sinners and come short of the glory of God.” Not until he enters upon his second part, does he preach the Gospel.

Luther proceeds: “They do not see that Paul teaches the very opposite: he begins by exhibiting, first, the wrath of God from heaven; he denounces all men as sinners and as guilty in the sight of God. After that he teaches those who have been made conscious of their sin how to obtain grace and become righteous in the sight of God. That is his powerful and plain argument in the first three chapters. It is an extraordinary blindness and stupidity of the Antinomians to imagine that the wrath of God is something distinct from the Law. That cannot be; for the revelation of God’s wrath is the Law and its operation upon the intellect and the will of man. Paul expresses this fact when he says: ‘The Law worketh wrath’ (*lex iram operatur*). Now, then, haven’t they scored a fine point by doing away with the Law, in consideration of the fact that, after all, they have to teach it when they teach the wrath of God? But they put the shoe on the foot the wrong way, trying to teach us the Law after the Gospel and wrath after grace. I am well aware of the devil’s aim. I see what abominable errors he is bent on introducing by means of this exegetical teeter-totter. But I cannot treat of them at this time.” What Luther means to say by calling the Scripture interpretation of the Antinomians a *Katzenstühlchen* (seesaw, teeter-totter) is this: They have fixed matters so that they can set up the Law or the Gospel as they please.

In his *Commentary* on Genesis (chap. 21, 12. 16) *Luther* writes (St. L. Ed. I, 1427 ff.): “It is indeed correct to say that people must be raised up and comforted. But an additional statement must be made, showing who the people are that are to be comforted, namely, those who, like Ishmael and his mother, have been thrust out of their home and fatherland, who are nearly famished with hunger and thirst in the desert, who groan and cry to the Lord, and are on the brink of despair. Such people are proper hearers of the Gospel.” Hagar and Ishmael had to be brought into misery before they could be freed from their pride.

Man is by nature a conceited being. He says: “What wrong have I done? I have committed neither manslaughter, nor adultery, nor fornication, nor larceny.” Wrapped in these miserable rags of his civil

righteousness he purposes to make his stand before God. The spirit of pride in himself must be cast out. That requires an application of the hammer of the Law which will crush his stony heart.

Page 98 Luther continues: “Therefore the Antinomians deserve to be hated by everybody, spite of the fact that they cite us as an example in order to defend their teaching.” The Antinomians pointed to the fact that Luther himself at first had preached nothing but comfort. They claimed that he had now departed from his former teaching and had become a legalist. That, they said, explained his opposition to them. But they misjudged Luther. When he began his public activity, he did not have to instruct the people at great length in the Law. The people were so crushed that hardly one among them dared to believe that he was in a state of grace with God. For in their best efforts at preaching the Roman priests preached the Law, placing alongside of the divine Law the laws of the Church and the statutes of former councils, theologians, and Popes. When Luther came forward, he had passed through the agony that harassed the people; he knew that no more effectual help could be provided for the people in their misery than the preaching of the Gospel. That was the reason why the entire Christian Church in those days experienced a sensation as if dew from heaven or life-giving spring showers were being poured out upon them.

Accordingly, Luther proceeds: “They cite us as an example to defend their teaching, while the reason why we had to start our teaching with the doctrine of divine grace is as plain as daylight. The accursed Pope had utterly crushed the poor consciences of men with his human ordinances. He had taken away all proper means for bringing aid and comfort to hearts in misery and despondency and rescuing them from despair. What else could we have done at that time?” If Luther had smitten these miserable people still more, he would have been the meanest kind of torturer.

Page 99 Luther continues: “However, I know, too, that those who are surfeited, ease-loving, and overfed must be addressed in a different strain. We were all like castaways in those days and grievously tormented. The water in the jug was gone; that is, there was nothing to comfort men with. Like Ishmael, we all lay dying under the shrub. The kind of teachers we needed were such as made us behold the grace of God and taught us how to find refreshment. The Antinomians insist that the preaching of repentance must begin with the doctrine of grace. I have not followed that method. For I knew that Ishmael must first be cast out and made despondent before he can hear the comforting words of the Angel. Accordingly, I have followed the rule not to minister comfort to any person except to those who have become contrite and are sorrowing because of their sin, — those who have despaired of self-help, whom the Law has terrified like a leviathan that has pounced upon them and almost perplexed them. For these are the people for whose sake Christ came into the world, and He will not have a smoking flax to be quenched. Is. 42, 3. That is why He is calling: ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden.’ Ishmael had not been reduced to this strait before he was expelled from Abraham’s home; he was proud and secure and an antinomistic epicurean. Because he had been born before Isaac, he would say: I am lord and heir in this house; Isaac and Sarah shall have to yield to me. Now, was this pride of his to be praised and tolerated, or was he to be rebuked for it? If the latter, in what other way could he have been rebuked than by being driven from the house with his mother and not being permitted to take anything with him out of Abraham’s house except the wages of the Law, bread and water? For that is the way the Law usually acts: it leads the thief handcuffed to the gallows; before he is throttled, it refreshes him with a draught of

water. But at last there is no more water, and nothing remains to do but to die. More than this the Law never does. Let us learn the lesson, then, *viz.*, that God is an enemy of every proud person; but those who have been humbled and have felt the power of the Law He comforts, either by men or by an angel from heaven; for He does not want such people to perish. On the other hand, He will not suffer the secure and proud to abide in Abraham's house.

“Now, a teacher and preacher must be trained in these two things and possess skill and experience in them; *viz.*, he must both rebuke and crush the obstinate, and again, he must be able to comfort those whom he has rebuked and crushed, let them despair utterly and be swallowed up by the Law.”