

THIRTEENTH EVENING LECTURE.

(January 9, 1885.)

Page
111

To achieve creditable results, my friends, a minister must needs preach the Word of God in its truth and purity, without any adulteration whatsoever. This is the first and foremost requisite for success. Some preachers of our time hush certain teachings that are offensive to worldly people. They do this with the good intention of not shocking their hearers. But this is a great mistake. You cannot make a person a true Christian by oratory, though it be ever so sublime and fervent, but only by the Word of God. The Word of God alone produces repentance, faith, and godliness and preserves men therein unto the end.

Page
112

The second requisite for effective preaching is that the preacher not only himself believe the things he preaches to others, but that his heart be full of the truths which he proclaims, so that he enters his pulpit with the ardent desire to pour out his heart to his hearers. He must have an enthusiastic grasp, in the right sense of the word, of his subject. Then his hearers get the impression that the words dropping from his lips are flames from a soul on fire. That does not mean that the Word of God must receive its power and life from the living faith of the preacher; for the Lord says distinctly: "The words that I speak, they are spirit, and they are life." John 6, 63. Moreover, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: "The Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Heb. 4, 12. But when a preacher proclaims what he has ever so often experienced in his own heart, he easily finds the right words to speak convincingly to his hearers. Coming from the heart, his words, in turn, go to the hearts of his hearers, according to the good old saying: *Pectus disertum facit*, that is, it is the *heart* that makes eloquent. This does not mean the artificial eloquence acquired in a school of elocution, but the sane spiritual art of reaching the hearts of hearers. For when the hearers get the impression that the preacher is in full and dread earnest, they feel themselves drawn with an irresistible force to pay the closest attention to what the preacher is teaching in his sermon. That is the reason why many simple, less gifted, and less learned preachers accomplish more than the most highly gifted and profoundly learned men.

Would that you, my dear friends, were, first of all, real Christians, filled with ardent zeal for the truth. That is the equipment for becoming, in the course of time, powerful preachers, whose spirit seizes the hearers with irresistible force, as the example of the apostles evidences. The people could not tell why the preaching of these simple men made such a powerful impression on them.

Page
113

Far from suggesting that great gifts and thorough theological learning are not to be highly esteemed, I should rather claim the contrary to be true. For if to the living faith of the preacher there are added great gifts and thorough learning, he will, in the end, be a mighty, efficient tool in the hands of God, since all natural endowments and whatever we have acquired by our natural zeal is not put aside by God when we enter the ministry, but is purified and pressed into His service. That is the reason why great happenings took place and great results were achieved in the kingdom of God whenever great gifts and thorough learning were coupled with living faith. First and foremost I wish to point to the Apostle Paul, who was the only scholar among the apostles. According to his own testimony, he labored more and accomplished more than the rest. Another instance is that of Luther, the great Reformer. If he had merely had a heroic faith and would not at the same time have been a great, highly gifted, and learned man, he would never have become the Reformer who gloriously accomplished the greatest work of his age.

Accordingly, I would exhort you, during this period of your studies, to strive day and night to attain the highest mark in every branch of theological knowledge, not only in Didactic but also in Practical Theology. My cordial good wishes are with you, and I pray the Lord that they be fulfilled. If they are, you will be living proofs of the importance of joining these two factors, a living faith and good endowments, with faithful and diligent study.

I pass on to another point. But do not regard my remarks so far as the usual introduction; it was merely a preamble. I wish that my words, though spoken in weakness, would find permanent lodgment in your hearts. God the Holy Spirit grant it! For much, my friends, very much, depends not only on your bearing aloft the light when you enter upon your public activity, but on being lights yourselves. You are to be such not by immediate, but by mediate illumination. Let us now pass on to our subject.

We finished our consideration of the first part of Thesis VIII, which declares that the Word of God is not rightly divided if the Law is preached to such as are already alarmed over their sins. We proceed to the second part of the thesis, which tells us that the Word of God is not rightly divided if the Gospel is preached to such as live securely in their sins.

The latter error is as dangerous as the former. Incalculable damage is done if the consolations of the Gospel are offered to secure sinners, or if one preaches to a multitude in such a manner that secure sinners in the audience, by the preacher's fault, imagine that the comfort of the Gospel is meant for them. A preacher who does this may preach crowds of people into hell instead of into heaven. No, the Gospel is not intended for secure sinners. We cannot, of course, prevent secure sinners from coming into our churches and hearing the Gospel, and it devolves upon the preacher to offer the entire comfort of the Gospel in all its sweetness, however, in such a manner that secure sinners realize that the comfort is not intended for them. The whole manner of the preacher's presentation must make them realize that fact. Let me offer you a few proof-texts from Scripture for what I have said.

Matt. 7, 6 our Lord says to His disciples: *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn again and rend you.* A remarkable utterance! What is meant by "that which is holy"? Nothing else than the Word of Christ. What is meant by "pearls"? The consolation of the Gospel, with the grace, righteousness, and salvation which it proclaims. Of these things we are not to speak to dogs, that is, to enemies of the Gospel; nor to swine, that is, to such as want to remain in their sins and are seeking their heaven and their bliss in the filth of their sins.

Isaiah says, chap. 26, 10: *Let favor be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness. In the land of uprightness will be dealt unjustly and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.* It is quite useless to offer mercy to the godless. They imagine either that they do not need it or that they already have all of it. The trifling sins, they say, of which they are guilty have long been forgiven, and grass has grown over them. To a person of this stripe I am not to preach the Gospel; in other words, I am not to offer him mercy, — for that is what preaching the Gospel means, — because he will not be benefited by it. A wicked person, who wants to remain in his sins, whether they be gross or refined sins, — for the devil can bind men not only with the ropes of filthy, gross sins, but also with such delicate threads as pride, envy, lovelessness, — such a wicked person, Isaiah says, does "not behold the majesty of the Lord." He does not see what a great treasure is offered him. He does not understand the doctrine of salvation by grace; either he spurns it, or he shamefully misapplies it. He thinks: "If mere faith is all that is necessary for my salvation, my sins, too, are forgiven. I can remain such as I am, and I shall still go to heaven. I, too, believe in my Lord Jesus Christ." The preacher who is to blame when secure sinners misapply the Gospel loads himself with a great guilt and responsibility before God.

Prov. 27, 7 we read: *The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.* You may set screened honey before a person who has eaten his fill, and even this dainty food will nauseate him, while it is relished by a hungry person. The Gospel which is sweeter than honey and the honey comb is to be preached only to hungry souls. The "bitter thing," that is, the Law, is for those who are not hungry.

A pattern after which we are to model our preaching we find, in the first place, in our dear Lord Jesus Christ. Observing His conduct in the Gospel records, we find that, whenever He met with secure sinners, — and such the self-righteous Pharisees in those days certainly were, — He had not a drop of comfort for them, but called them serpents and a vipers' brood, denounced a tenfold woe against them, revealed their abominable hypocrisy, assigned them to perdition, and told them that they would not escape eternal damnation. Although He knew that these very persons would nail Him to the cross, He fearlessly told them the truth. That is a point to be noted by preachers. Though knowing in advance that they will share the fate of the Lord Jesus, they must preach the Law in all its severity to secure, reckless sinners, to hypocrites and men who are their enemies. I do not mean to say that we are able to endure what our Lord endured; we cannot drink the cup that He drained. But we shall feel the enmity of people. They will either oppose us openly or plot against us continually in secret. But there is no way out of this dilemma. Whenever the preacher faces this class of people, he dare not preach anything else than the Law to them. Moreover, when he preaches before a multitude, his hearers must get the impression that what he says does not apply to all of them indiscriminately, but to the would-be righteous, who claim the Gospel for themselves.

True, our Lord says: “Come unto Me, *all*,” but He immediately adds: “ye that labor and are heavy laden.” Thus He serves notice upon secure sinners that He is not inviting them. They would only ridicule Him if He were to lay His spiritual, heavenly treasures before them.

On a certain occasion a rich young man approached Jesus and said to Him: “Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” Jesus declined the title “Good Master” because it would have put Him in the same class with the self-righteous young man, who considered himself a “good master.” That rich young man was not sincere in addressing the Lord thus. If he had regarded Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of the world, if he had believed in Christ and *for that reason* had called Him “Good Master,” it would have been quite proper. But because he merely meant to offer the Lord a bit of flattery, Christ declined the title and turned to the young man with the challenge: “Keep the commandments.” When the young man asked, “Which?” Jesus said, “Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother, and Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” The young man replied: “All these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?” He meant to say: “If Thou hast no other teachings to propose, Thou art not such a wise man as some consider Thee to be. What Thou hast told me I have known for a long time.” How does Christ answer the young man’s last question? Does He say, “You lack faith?” By no means; since He is dealing with a miserable, secure and self-righteous person, He does not preach one word of Gospel to him. Though knowing in advance, by reason of His omniscience, that all His efforts would be in vain, He felt that He must first bring him to a realization of his spiritual misery. God, in His love, does many things that to us may seem useless in order that on judgment Day no man may have an excuse for not coming to faith in Christ. God will say to many: “This and that I did for you, but you spurned Me.” Jesus, accordingly, said to the rich young man: “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me.” Now the record states: “When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.” He departed with an accusing conscience, which, no doubt, told him: “That is indeed a different doctrine from the one I used to hear. What He tells me I cannot do. I have become too greatly attached to my possessions. I would rather forfeit my fellowship with Him than do what He says. I am not going to roam the country with Him like a beggar.” Probably his conscience also testified to him that according to the teaching of Christ he was damned, that hell was his goal. That was the effect which the Lord had intended to produce in dealing with this young man. Whether he was converted later, we do not know, nor is it of any consequence here. The point is that in this episode we have an example to guide us when we are dealing with such as are still secure and self-righteous. True, we cannot issue orders such as Christ, the Lord of lords, issued. But there are enough questions that we can ask to make a person of this kind realize that he is still deeply steeped in sins and a lost creature.

Page
116

This episode with the rich young man is recorded Matt. 19. A similar episode with a lawyer is recorded in Luke 10.

The apostles, we find, observed the same practise as their Lord and Master. They first preached the Law, and with such force that their hearers were cut to the quick.

Page
117

Let us examine Acts 2. In his first Pentecostal sermon, Peter first fastened the murder of Christ upon his hearers, and that charge went home. They were frightened and asked: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” And now Peter says to them: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” Preaching the Gospel to them, he tells them that they can have forgiveness of all their sins, even of the worst ones. That was the general practise of the apostles everywhere, not only in Jerusalem, but also in Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, etc. Everywhere they preached repentance first and then faith; for they knew that everywhere they were, as a rule, facing secure sinners who had not yet realized their most miserable, sinful condition. However, they did not only apply the Law sternly to those who had not yet heard anything about the Christian religion, but also to those who pretended to be Christians, but were living securely in their sins.

There is a remarkable instance of their practise in the two concluding chapters of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. The holy apostle writes: “I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not; lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults.” 2 Cor. 12, 20. He means to say: “You will imagine that I am

going to preach the Gospel to you. But you will be surprised when I come and you will hear me preach.” Among the things that he is going to preach he does not mention knavery, fornication, theft, blasphemy, murder, but all such sins, especially hypocrisy, as are still found in all Christian congregations. He proceeds, v. 21: “And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.” They were not at that time living in fornication and uncleanness, but they had formerly lived in these sins. They had become Christians by a process of reasoning, but had not truly repented of their sins. They professed the Christian religion with their lips, but their faith was not faith of the heart. They had not been regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Continuing, the apostle says: “This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. I told you before, and I foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare.” 2 Cor. 13, 1. 2.

Page
118

We have here an excellent example for a preacher to follow. When people begin to engage in all manner of sinful practises with impunity and imagine that everybody will have to regard them as good Christians provided they attend church and go to Communion, the pastor must say to himself: “It is time that I lay down the Law to my people, lest I live in careless ease while my hearers are going to perdition and lest they rise up to accuse me on the Last Day and say: You are the cause why we have to suffer eternal torment.”

The apostle had to reflect that, when he resumed his ministry in the Corinthian congregation, he would still find secure members whom he would have to rouse. In those godless, sodomitical times the apostle did not care whether the people would turn against him and become his enemies. He told them in advance that he was not going to spare them. He would tell to their very faces that eternal damnation was awaiting them unless they would repent; he would rebuke them as being people who had been found out as continuing to sin against their conscience and yet claimed to be Christians.

Accordingly, we may not preach the Gospel, but must preach the Law to secure sinners. We must preach them into hell before we can preach them into heaven. By our preaching our hearers must be brought to the point of death before they can be restored to life by the Gospel. They must be made to realize that they are sick unto death before they can be restored to health by the Gospel. First their own righteousness must be laid bare to them, so that they may see of what filthy rags it consists, and then, by the preaching of the Gospel, they are to be robed in the garment of the righteousness of Christ. They must first be induced to say from the heart: “I, a lost and condemned creature,” as the Catechism puts it, in order that they be induced, next, to exclaim joyfully: “Oh, blessed man that I am!” They must first be reduced to nothing by the Law in order that they may be made to be something, to the praise of the glory of God, by the Gospel.

We cannot, indeed, prescribe to sinners a certain *degree* of penitence; for an examination of the Holy Scriptures on this point reveals the fact that the degree of penitence, with those persons whose conversion has been recorded, has been quite different. But every person must have experienced something of the bitterness of penitence, or he will never even begin to relish the sweetness of the Gospel. *In leading a person to salvation, God may permit him to obtain faith without previously passing through a great deal of anguish and fear; but He always compensates for that later.* Those whom God in His mercy has led quickly to faith and joy in their Savior must by that same mercy be merged again and again in genuine sorrow over their sins lest they fall away. Time believers [*zeitgläubigen* — “Those who believe for a time”] have been described by the Lord as follows: the seed of the divine Word promptly takes root in them, causing faith to spring up in them rapidly. They receive the Word with joy, but are not profited by it. Unless the rocky subsoil in their hearts has been pulverized by the Law, the sweet Gospel is of no benefit to them.

Page
119

It is indeed a common observation that all those who have passed through great and profound sorrow at the beginning have become the best and most stalwart Christians. Those who in their youth were deeply merged beneath floods of anguish and sorrow on account of their salvation turned out to be the best pastors and theologians.

This is illustrated by the instance of our beloved Luther. The reformation of the Church, the greatest task that any one could have accomplished in that age, had been entrusted to him. Without giving him any

premonition, God prepared him for this task; not by making him very smart and enduing him with a keen knowledge of men or by giving him immediately a very clear understanding of the Word of God, — for he did not possess such understanding at the start and did not obtain it until the Holy Spirit kindled the true light in his soul, — but by forcing him upon his knees in anguish and terror, so that he was in danger every moment of yielding to blasphemous thoughts. That, however, was the proper school from which the future Reformer was to be graduated.

Another instance is that of Flacius, who, beyond question, was the greatest theologian of his time, second only to Luther. Pity that he fell into error at a later time and would not accept correction. He, too, was for a long time at the brink of despair. Luther ministered to him until he was in a condition at last to receive the consolation of the Gospel.

Page
120

Furthermore, we read that John Gerhard, one of the very greatest dogmaticians, during his college days was for more than a year in deepest anguish and sorrow. Nobody succeeded in raising him up, until John Arndt, his spiritual physician, healed him with the comfort of the Gospel. When Gerhard had emerged from this infernal anguish and realized that he was a miserable sinner, he became a great man.

Much of the life-story of all great theologians, as a rule, has not been published and will not be known except in the hereafter. Could we know it, now, we would observe that all those great men became great after previously having been made small and worthless. They became the great men in the kingdom of God and the great instruments of God that they are acknowledged to be after they had been freed from their anguish and distress, began to believe the Gospel, and thus became new men.

A young man who has arrived at “faith” in God’s Word by a sterile conviction of his intellect is a pitiful sight. If he is an acute reasoner, he can easily be led to accept all sorts of errors and become a heretic, because he has never passed through any real anguish of soul. But any one who has experienced the power of the Word and passed through the ordeal of genuine and serious penitence will not easily slip into the hidden spiritual sink-holes, for he has been made wary by experience. When his reason begins to hold forth to him, he clings to the Word and bids his reason be silent. God grant that you have not only been polite listeners to my remarks and resolve to put them to practise in the ministry, but that you also have experienced them in your own hearts.

Let me submit a few testimonies from *Luther* on this matter. First one from his *Commentary on Chapters in Exodus* (St. L. Ed. III, 858 f.) : “The Gospel is not fit to be preached to gross, vulgar, reckless sinners, who spend their lives without a thought of the hereafter; on the contrary, it is a consolation intended for afflicted souls. Matt. 11, 28. For it is a delicate food, which requires a hungry soul. Accordingly, the blessed Virgin Mary sings in her Magnificat, Luke 1, 53: ‘He hath filled the hungry with good things!’ Otherwise the rude masses will fall upon it, all claiming to be evangelical and Christian brethren, and then start schisms and all sorts of distress. They are headed wherever the devil leads them. A Christian is not reckless, wild, and vulgar, but his conscience is timid, low-spirited, and despondent. He feels the gnawing of his sin and trembles at the wrath of God, the power of the devil, and the thought of death. A heart bruised and crushed like this relishes the Lord Christ greatly. Furthermore, redemption from sin, death, devil, and hell are much appreciated by those who are being swallowed up by death, who are feeling their distress and yearn for rest. They obtain rest if they have believing hearts; but they feel at the same time what a frail thing their Old Adam is.”

Page
121

When I reprove a person and he becomes angry with me, he shows that he is not a true Christian; for a Christian receives reproof meekly, even if the reproof is uncalled for. He is not greatly surprised that people should charge him with wrong-doing, knowing that no person who is still in his natural state can be expected to do good. If he knows himself to be innocent of the charge, he says, God be praised! I am not guilty.

It is an important remark of Luther when he states that those are certainly no Christians who do not feel the gnawing of their sin, are not wrestling with it, and are even apt to ask, Why, what wrong am I doing? He who speaks thus is in a sorry condition. Were he a true Christian, he would say: “Indeed, my sins go over my head. That was my plight, not only in the days when I was not converted, but it is still my plight. I do not believe this merely because I read about it in my Bible, but I experience every day what a wicked thing my heart is and how frail my Old Adam.”

Furthermore, in his treatise *Concerning Councils and Churches* Luther writes (St. L. Ed. XVI, 2241 f.) : “My friends the Antinomians preach exceedingly well — and I cannot but believe that they do so with great earnestness — concerning the mercy of Christ, forgiveness of sin, and other contents of the article of redemption. But they flee from this inference as from the devil, that they must tell the people about the Third Article, of sanctification, that is, of the new life in Christ. For they hold that we must not terrify people and make them sorrowful, but must always preach to them the comfort of grace in Christ and the forgiveness of sin. They tell us to avoid, for God’s sake, such statements as these: ‘Listen, you want to be a Christian while you are an adulterer, a fornicator, a swill-belly, full of pride, avarice, usurious practises, envy, revenge, malice, etc., and mean to continue in these sins?’ On the contrary, they tell us that this is the proper way to speak: ‘Listen, you are an adulterer, fornicator, miser, or addicted to some other sin. Now, if you will only believe, you are saved and need not dread the Law, for Christ has fulfilled all.’ Tell me, prithee, does not this amount to conceding the premise and denying the conclusion? *Verily, it amounts to this, that Christ is taken away and made worthless in the same breath with which He is most highly extolled.* It means to say yes and no in the same matter. For a Christ who died for sinners who, after receiving forgiveness, will not quit their sin nor lead a new life, is worthless and does not exist. According to the logic of Nestorius and Eutyches these people, in masterful fashion, preach a Christ who is, and is not, the Redeemer. *They are excellent preachers of the Easter truth, but miserable preachers of the truth of Pentecost.* For there is nothing in their preaching concerning sanctification of the Holy Ghost and about being quickened into a new life. They preach only about the redemption of Christ. It is proper to extol Christ in our preaching; but Christ is the Christ and has acquired redemption from sin and death for this very purpose that the Holy Spirit should change our Old Adam into a new man, that we are to be dead unto sin and live unto righteousness, as Paul teaches Rom. 6, 2 ff., and that we are to begin this change and increase in this new life here and consummate it hereafter. For Christ has gained for us not only *grace (gratiam)*, but also the *gift (donum)* of the Holy Ghost, so that we obtain from Him not only *forgiveness* of sin, but also the *ceasing* from sin. Any one, therefore, who does not cease from his sin, but continues in his former evil way must have obtained a different Christ, from the Antinomians. *The genuine Christ is not with them, even if they cry with the voice of all angels, Christ! Christ! They will have to go to perdition with their new Christ.*”

Page
122

The Antinomians, you know, were followers of John Agricola, of Eisleben, who taught that the Law must not be preached in the Christian churches because it belongs in the court-house, on gallows’ hill, etc. Luther has given an extreme description of Antinomian preaching. None of you will readily imitate that method, but it is easy to fall into something like it. When you are about to comfort people effectually who are in anguish and distress because they imagine that their sins are too great, that they have sinned too long a time, etc., then you must proceed to glorify grace and say: “Though you had committed all sins that have ever been committed on this earth, though you were Judases and Cains and had persecuted Jesus, you need not despair of the mercy of God.” However, this correct statement must be delivered in such a manner that reckless sinners will feel that the statement applies only to such sinners as are alarmed and in distress over their sins and not to people like themselves, who think that, after all, matters will not be so bad as the preachers say. Be careful, then, for God’s sake, when preaching the Gospel, not to make sinners secure and thus become seducers unto sin and defenders of sin.

Luther’s remark about the class of sinners for whom Christ died must not be interpreted to mean that Christ did not die for all sinners. Luther manifestly means to say that Christ did not die to make sinners secure.

Page
123

Luther’s remarks about Easter and Pentecost preachers deserve to be remembered. It is well if on Easter Day you emphasize with great force, and expatiate on, the victory of Christ over sin, death, devil, and hell. But you must also be good Pentecostal preachers and say to your hearers: “Repent; for then the Holy Spirit will come with His grace and comfort, enlighten, and sanctify you.” We shall never attain to perfect sanctification in this life, but we must make a beginning and progress in this endeavor. For he that does not increase, decreases, and he that decreases will ultimately cease entirely using what God has given him. Finally, he will be a dead branch on the vine.

What a stern utterance are these remarks against the Antinomians by Luther, who is known throughout the Christian Church as the greatest witness for the magnitude and riches of the grace of God in Christ, and

who, as few others in the Christian Church, had the gift of speaking words of comfort to men. You see, when it is incumbent upon him to preach the Law, he is stern and incisive; he spares no one; he brings the staff Bands down on all the secure.

In his *Instruction for Visitors*, written in 1528, *Luther* writes (St. L. Ed. X, 1636f.): “As regards doctrine, we find, among other things, this to be the chief fault that, while some preach the faith by which we are to be made righteous, they do not give a sufficient explanation how we are to *attain* faith. Thus nearly all of them omit an integral part of the Christian doctrine, without which no one can understand what faith is or what deserves the name of faith. For Christ says, Luke 24, 47, that ‘repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name.’ However, nowadays many speak only of forgiveness of sin and say little or nothing regarding repentance *notwithstanding the fact that without repentance there is no remission of sins, nor can remission of sins be understood without repentance*. If remission of sins without repentance is preached, the people imagine that they have already forgiveness of sins, and thereby they are made secure and unconcerned. *This is a greater error and sin than all errors of former times*, and it is verily to be feared that we are in that danger which Christ points out when He says, Matt. 12, 45: ‘The last state of that man shall be worse than the first.’ Accordingly, we have instructed and admonished the pastors to do their duty and preach the Gospel entire, not one part without the other. For God says, Deut. 4, 2, that nothing is to be added to His Word nor anything to be taken from it. Our preachers nowadays scold the Pope for having made many additions to Scripture, which, alas! is but too true. But these men who do not preach repentance tear a great portion out of the Scriptures and meanwhile talk about the eating of meats and such other trifling matters. Of course, on the proper occasion these matters are not to be passed over in silence; for Christian liberty must be defended against tyranny. But what else does the practise of the preachers to whom I have referred mean than ‘straining at gnats and swallowing camels,’ as Christ expresses it Matt. 23, 24? We have admonished them, therefore, to exhort the people diligently and frequently unto repentance, contrition, and sorrow over their sin and fear of the judgment of God. We have warned them not to omit from their teaching the important and necessary element of repentance; for both John and Christ rebuke the Pharisees more sharply for their saintly hypocrisy than ordinary sinners. In like manner, pastors are to reprove the common people for their gross sins, but make their exhortations to repentance much sterner wherever they discover spurious sanctity.”

Shouting at masses of people, “Believe, only believe in Christ, and you will be saved,” leaves them in ignorance as to the preacher’s object. The ax of the Law must first come down on them. When they hear the thundering of the Law and look up at the preacher startled, they begin to reflect: “If the preacher is right, what is to become of us? Woe upon us!” Then they are ready for the consolation of the Gospel.

Luther’s statement about the greatness of the Antinomian error as surpassing the errors of former times deserves to be noted. Before Luther began his activity, the Law alone held sway. The poor people were in anguish and terror. When Luther had come to understand the Gospel, he preached it in all its sweetness to these poor, stricken sinners. He was misunderstood by many, who concluded that, to preach like Luther, they must preach faith, justification, and righteousness without the deeds of the Law every Sunday. This practise of theirs Luther denounced as a greater error than the error of the papists. By preaching faith only and saying nothing about repentance, the preacher leads his hearers to that awful condition where they imagine they are not in need of repentance, and finally they get so that they are past help.

Note also this point in Luther’s remarks, that, while it is indeed necessary to preach against gross vices, yet that is not what is meant by forcibly preaching the Law. Such preaching produces nothing but Pharisees.