

NINETEENTH EVENING LECTURE.

(February 20, 1885.)

One of the most important of the many doctrinal differences that were discussed during the first half of the eighteenth century between the so-called Pietists and the Orthodoxists was this: the Pietists — disciples, though not altogether faithful disciples, you know, of Spener, August Herman Francke, and John Jacob Rambach — held that any one unable to state the exact day and hour when he was converted and entered into grace was certainly not a true Christian and could be regarded as such neither by himself nor by others. The Orthodoxists denied this.

Now, it is indeed true that conversion does not require a day or an hour, but only a moment. For according to the Holy Scriptures it is nothing else than the quickening out of spiritual death unto spiritual life, or the turning out of the broad way leading netherward and into the narrow way leading upward, or the transfer from the kingdom of the devil to the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Since there is no intermediary way between the small way leading upward and the broad way leading downward nor an intermediary kingdom between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of Christ, any person is either spiritually dead or spiritually alive, is traveling either on the narrow or on the broad way, and is either in the kingdom of Jesus Christ or in the kingdom of the devil. In other words, a person is either converted or not; there is no intermediary state.

True, Holy Scripture presents some instances of men who could actually name, to the day and hour, the time when they were converted to God and obtained grace. Let me cite a few of these. The first human beings, who fell on the first day of their existence, were also converted again on that same day. By hearing the promise of the Woman's Seed, that was to bruise the Serpent's head, they rose at once from their fall and obtained grace, righteousness, life, and salvation. Concerning David, who spent an entire year after his fall in carnal security, we know likewise that, when the prophet Nathan came to him to reprove him for his awful sin, he became terrified and confessed his sin. Immediately the prophet told him: "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." 2 Sam. 12, 13. In that moment David was converted, and he praised and magnified God, in the words of the Thirty-second Psalm, for the

forgiveness of his sins. — Saul, the persecutor of Christians was vouchsafed great mercy when the Lord appeared to him in person. On hearing that terrible address: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” he collapsed and cried: “Who art Thou, Lord?” The Lord told him: “I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” In that moment Saul lay crushed before the Lord and became a child of God, a “chosen vessel unto Him.” For two or three days later he arose and, filled with the Spirit and with power, began to preach Christ Crucified. Acts 9. Concerning the three thousand who listened to the first Christian sermon on Pentecost, we hear that they were pricked in their hearts when the apostle charged them with the murder of Christ. But the moment they were told to believe in the Lord Jesus they received power from the Holy Spirit and believed. Lastly, we read of the conversion of the jailer at Philippi in the same night in which he had given two disciples of the Lord, Paul and Silas, the cruel treatment of putting their feet in the stocks in the inner prison; in the same night in which, during the earthquake, he was on the point of running his sword into his own heart, his question: “What must I do to be saved?” was answered by the apostle: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house,” and he actually became a believer.

All these persons could say: “On that day and in that hour I was converted and brought out of death into life, out of darkness into light, from my forlorn condition under the wrath of God into the state of grace.” But of many others we have no such record in the Scriptures. The history of the Church during the nineteen centuries of its existence shows that millions upon millions who were raised within the pale of the Church were unable to name the day and hour of their conversion, although they were well aware of the fact, and could prove, too, that they had become different men by being brought to a living faith in Christ by the Holy Spirit and by thus attaining to grace, righteousness, and the hope of everlasting life.

What may be the reason why the Pietists, who were really well intentioned people, hit upon the doctrine that no one could be a Christian unless he had ascertained the exact day and hour of his Conversion? The reason is that they imagined a person must suddenly experience a heavenly joy and hear an inner voice telling him that he had been received into grace and had become a child of God. Having conceived this notion of the mode and manner of conversion, they were forced to declare that a person must be able to name the day and

hour when he was converted, became a new creature, received forgiveness of sins, and was robed in the righteousness of Christ.

However, we have already come to understand in part what a great, dangerous, and fatal error this is. Tonight we shall take up the last part of Thesis IX, which tells us in particular that the word of God is not rightly divided “when sinners who have been struck down and terrified by the Law are directed . . . to their own prayers and wrestlings with God in order that they may win their way into a state of grace; in other words, when they are told to keep on praying and struggling *until they feel* that God has received them into grace.”

This system has been adopted also by the Methodists. But before taking up the discussion of their view, we shall have to warn against a misunderstanding of the doctrine that a person must not base his salvation and his state of grace on his feeling. For this doctrine is abused by many.

There are people who regard themselves as good Christians although they are spiritually dead. They have never felt a real anguish on account of their sins; they have never been filled with terror on account of them, have never been appalled by the thought of the hell which they have deserved, have never been on their knees before God, bewailing with bitter tears their awful, damnable condition under sin. Much less have they wept sweet tears of joy and glorified God for His mercy. They read and hear the Word of God without being specially impressed by it. They go to church and receive absolution without feeling refreshed; they attend Holy Communion without any inward sensation and remain as cold as ice. Occasionally, when they become inwardly agitated because of their Indifference in matters concerning their salvation and because of their lack of appreciation of God’s Word, they try to quiet their heart with the reflection that the Lutheran Church teaches that the lack of spiritual feeling is of no moment. They reason that this lack cannot harm them and that they can be good Christians notwithstanding, because they consider themselves believers.

However, they labor under a grievous self-delusion. People in that condition have nothing but the dead faith of the intellect, a specious faith, or, to express it still more drastically, a lip faith. They may say with their mouths, “I believe,” but their heart is not conscious of it. No, indeed; a person who cannot say, in accordance with Ps. 34, 8, that he has *tasted* and seen that the

Lord is good must not regard himself as being in a state of true faith. More over, the Apostle Paul says, Rom. 8, 16, "The Spirit indeed beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." Can the Holy Spirit bear this witness in us without our feeling it? The witness in court must speak loud enough for the judge to hear. The same is necessary in this case. According to God's Word any person who has never felt the testimony of the Spirit that he is the child of God is spiritually dead. He can offer no testimony in his favor and does wrong by considering himself a Christian nevertheless.

Again, the apostle says, Rom. 5, 1 "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Objective peace, established through the shedding of Christ's blood, exists prior to our justification. Accordingly, the apostle must be speaking of a peace that is sensed, felt, and experienced.

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul writes, Rom. 14, 17 "The kingdom of God is ... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." The joy of which the apostle speaks is not worldly, or carnal, joy, but spiritual Joy. A person that has tasted all the other joys except the last, is spiritually dead.

The examples of the saints recorded in the Bible corroborate this point. We behold them continually aglow with the praise of God because of what He has done for them. That presupposes that their hearts were conscious of the mercy which the Lord had shown them. Could David, without an inward experience, have exclaimed: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, Oh my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases"? He certainly had a very lively feeling of these matters when he spoke those words.

Lastly, ask any person who has all the criteria of a true, living Christian whether he has experienced all the things of which he speaks, and he will answer in the affirmative, telling you that, after experiencing the terror which God sends to a sinner whom He wants to rescue, he had an experience of the sweetness of God's grace in Christ. He will tell you that his heart is melting within him at every remembrance of his Savior's love. Again, he will also tell you that, spite of the fact that he knows he has obtained grace, he is frequently seized with fright and anguish at the sight of the Law.

Note, then, that our statement that no one must base his salvation and his state of grace on his feeling does not mean that he can be a good Christian without having experienced any feeling in regard to religious matters. That is

not what we teach. Let me offer a pertinent testimony of Luther, who differed, for instance, from Melancthon by being anything rather than a sentimentalist, which Melancthon was in the highest degree. Melancthon based his joy on his feeling; but no matter what Luther feelings were, he clung to the Word.

In his *Church Postil* (St. L. Ed. XII, 239 f.), commenting on the words: “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal. 4, 6). Luther, spite of the fact that he endeavored never to rely on changeable and delusive feelings, writes as follows: “At this point every one is to ascertain by self-examination whether he *feels* the Holy Spirit in His heart and *experiences* His speaking. [Mark you: the text says that the Spirit *cries*, ‘Abba, Father.’] For St. Paul in this passage says that in every heart in which the Spirit dwells He cries, ‘Abba, Father.’ Likewise, in Rom. 8, 15 he says: ‘Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.’ This crying is felt when one’s conscience, without wavering and questioning, conceives a staunch boldness to be quite certain, not only that his sins have been forgiven, but also that he is a child of God, assured of his salvation, and may with a cheerful and assured heart and with all confidence call God his dear Father and cry to Him. Of these things he must be more certain than of his very life and must be ready to suffer every kind of death, and hell in addition, rather than allow this assurance to be taken from him by yielding to doubt.

“It would be an offense to the rich life of Christ and to His suffering if we were not to believe that the superabundance of all His merits has been acquired for us and if we were not to allow His great living and dying to incite us to, and confirm us in, this confidence with the same force as sin and afflictions are deterring us from it and make us despondent.

“True, there may come a strife in a Christian causing him an anxious feeling, leading him to think he is not a child of God, and to imagine and feel that God is an angry, stern judge, as happened to Job and many others. But in a conflict of this kind childlike confidence, though trembling and quaking, must conquer in the end, or everything is lost.

“Were Cain to hear this, he would cross himself with hands and feet and say with great humility: God keep me from this awful heresy and temerity! Am I, poor sinner, to be so conceited as to call myself a child of God? No, no; I shall humble myself, acknowledge that I am a poor sinner, etc. People of this

kind you must shun and beware of them as of the greatest enemies of the Christian faith and your salvation. We know, indeed, that we are poor sinners; but in this business we are not to consider what we are and what we do, but what Christ is, has done, and is still doing for us. We are not talking about our human nature, but about the mercy of God of which Ps. 103, 11 f. says: ‘As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the West, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.’ Do you consider it something great to be a child of God? Then do not consider it a trifling matter that the Son of God is come, made of a woman and placed under the Law, for the purpose of making you such a child of God. Everything that God does is great. That is the reason why it produces *great joy and courage* and intrepid spirits, who are not afraid of anything and able to do all things.

“Cain’s attitude is narrow and produces nothing but despondent hearts, full of anguish, who are not fit either to suffer or to be active and get afraid at the sound of a shaking leaf, as Moses says, Lev. 26, 36. Cling, then, firmly to this text and know that *you must feel the crying of the Spirit in your heart*; for how can you fail to feel it when it is the crying of your own heart? Moreover, Paul uses the word ‘crying’ when he might have said: The Spirit lisps or speaks or sings. He wanted to use a far stronger term than these. He cries and calls with all might, from a full heart, so that everything seems full of life and energy through the confidence which He produces. To the same effect the apostle says in Rom. 8, 26: ‘The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered’; and in v. 16: ‘The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God!’ Is it possible that our heart should not feel this crying, groaning, and witness-bearing?

“And oh! a precious service is rendered the Christian by affliction and suffering, which incite him to such crying and rouse the Spirit in him. However, we never feel the Spirit and remain Cains because we are afraid of the cross and flee it. If you do not feel the crying of the Spirit, resolve never to quit praying till God hears you; for you are a Cain, and your spiritual condition is not what it should be.

“But you must not desire to bear within you only this crying of the Spirit and nothing else. There will be at the same time a murderous crying in your heart. That is to incite you to crying and to exercise you therein. Such has been

the experience of all other Christians. Also your sin will cry, causing abject despondency in your conscience. But the Spirit of Christ must drown these cries, that is, produce in you a stronger confidence than your despondency. For St. John says, First Epistle, chap. 3, 19–22: ‘Hereby we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask we receive of Him.’ This calling and crying of the Spirit within us, then, is nothing else than a strong, unwavering, trustful crying with our whole heart to God, as our dear Father, from us, as His dear children.”

The misery of our times is caused by the fact that the faith of which Luther speaks is rare. Either men are spiritually dead and therefore are unconcerned about their soul’s welfare, imagining that they will get to heaven anyway, or they are filled with anguish and uncertainty. Many who have spent their lives in their horrible “faith,” which looks like faith, but is not, die with the thought in their hearts: What will become of me now? Am I going to heaven or not?

What Luther teaches in this citation is repudiated, as you know, by the Roman Church, which declares not only that man can not, but even that he *must* not, obtain assurance of his salvation. The Roman Church regards the striving for such assurance as a crime and a presumptuous undertaking and declares that only upon receiving a special, extraordinary revelation from heaven a person may say: “I know and am certain that I have been received into grace by God and shall be saved.” That is an inverted gospel, and the entire teaching of the Papacy is nothing but a most pitiable perversion of the Gospel into a new law, and that, the Roman church laws.

People can be heard saying: “Oh, I know well enough that Christ has redeemed the whole world, but that does not answer the question whether *I* have been redeemed.” Those who speak thus have no knowledge of either Law or Gospel. For a person who has learned to know the Gospel will say: “Since the Son of God has redeemed the whole world, He has redeemed me also. Since He has redeemed me, He wants me to believe that. He does not prevent me from believing it by the Pietistic warning: Do not believe prematurely!” We cannot believe too soon; the moment the Gospel is preached to us, we are to believe it, as we love our souls, or we fall under the displeasure and wrath of God. But unless a person clings to the Word, he cannot feel

assured; he will waver and vacillate every day and hour. This moment he will imagine himself a Christian, the next hour he will think that he has deluded himself.

Luther contends that the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's children is accompanied by strife. There must be confidence in Christians and at the same time fear and trembling. This is possible. I can cross an awful abyss, trembling at the thought that I may be hurled into it; but seeing a barrier erected on both sides of my path, I gather confidence and cross over, confident of safety. That is the strange paradox in the heart of a Christian: he fears and trembles and still is assured.

As to the witness of the Spirit, Paul does not say that it is being borne in a general way, but "with our spirit." Accordingly, our spirit must spiritually hear the witness of the Spirit, and that is the "feeling" of which we speak; it is the witness of the Spirit within us. It is strange that a Christian beginning to doubt will hear a voice telling him: "Christ has died for you spite of your sins. You need not become despondent nor yield to despair; you are numbered with the redeemed of the Lord, and your destination is heaven. Be of good cheer!" Coming spontaneously, this voice, which we cannot produce at pleasure, is the witness of the Holy Spirit. It comes to us especially at a time of spiritual tribulation. You do not need a witness every day, but when you are being accused, you go in search of one. The same happens in our spiritual life: when a poor Christian is in very great distress, the Holy Spirit calls to him, Do not despair.

Cain became a fugitive from God and a vagabond, who did not know his true relation to God. That is not the condition of a Christian. However, a Christian may be ever so sure of his state of grace, and nevertheless he will still hear the murderous roaring of the devil. Into his assurance of the grace of God there will come a voice whispering to him that he is not yet rid of his sins, for, behold, by what evil thoughts has he been visited this very day, what sinful lusts have arisen in him, what useless words have proceeded from his mouth; and was not the good that he has done mere sham? Those are the murderous arrows from Satan's bow. In such moments the Holy Spirit steps forward to bear testimony for us if we are Christians.

We shall now pass on to the particular point in our thesis which is to engage our attention tonight, *viz.*, that Law and Gospel are grievously

commingled by those who assert that assurance of the forgiveness of sins requires praying, struggling, and wrestling until finally a joyful feeling arises in the heart, indicating to the person in a mysterious way that grace is now in his heart and that he can be of good cheer because he has forgiveness of his sins. Now, properly speaking, grace is never in man's, but in God's heart. *First* a person must *believe*; *after that he may feel*. Feeling proceeds from faith, not faith from feeling. If a person's faith proceeds from feeling, it is not genuine faith; for faith requires a divine promise which it lays hold of. Accordingly, we can be sure that the faith of those who can say: "I regard nothing in all the world except the precious Gospel; on that I build," is of the right sort. The devil may terrify and harass such people until they have no pleasant feeling of grace, but they will sing nevertheless: —

Though "No!" my heart should ever cry,

Still on Thy Word I shall rely,

or: —

I shall trust, though void of feeling,

Till before Thee I'll be kneeling.

The principal proof-text for this point of doctrine is 1 John 3, 19–20: *Hereby we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before Him. For [Luther: dass] if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things.* A Christian may feel the accusation of his own heart, that is, his conscience, and when trying to quiet his heart, he may hear a voice telling him that he is damned, that he has no forgiveness of his sins and no grace, is not a child of God and cannot hope for life eternal. To such a person the beloved apostle says: "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart." That is to say, our heart is indeed a judge, yet only a subordinate one. A higher judge, namely, God, is above our heart. I can say to my troubled heart: "Be still, my heart! Keep silence, my conscience! I have appealed to a higher court and inquired of God, the supreme judge, whether I am rid of my sins. From the higher court, which can always reverse the verdict of a lower court, I have obtained a verdict that my sins are forgiven, for I cling to the Word of God." A person who by the grace of God is enabled to believe this is a blessed person. Hell is closed, and heaven opened wide for him. Though all the devils in hell roar at him, "You are lost!" he can answer them: "It is not so; I am not lost, but redeemed forever. Here I have the written evidence in God's Word." And in due time the feeling of grace will return. In the very moment

when a Christian imagines that he is void of all feeling, cold, and dead, a miserable, lost creature, to whom the Word of God tastes like rotten wood, who does not relish absolution and has not the witness of the Holy Spirit in him, and all is over with him, — just in such a moment a great joy may suddenly enter his heart. God will not leave him in the slough of despair.

True, we cannot lay down rules for God. There is a great difference among Christians. Some have been highly favored in being led an easy way by God, always enjoying a beautiful, pleasant feeling and never being in need of strong wrestling. For persons who always find their experiences in harmony with the Word of God need not struggle for that harmony. Others, however, are nearly always led by God through darkness, great anguish, grievous doubts, and diverse afflictions. In the latter case we must be careful to distinguish between one who is dead and one who is afflicted. The distinction is not difficult. If I am worried about my lack of the feeling of grace for which I am earnestly longing, that is proof that I am a true Christian. For one who desires to believe *is* already a believer. For how could a person possibly desire to believe something which he regards untrue? No man desires to be deceived. As soon as I want to believe something, I am secretly believing it. This is a point for pastors to note when they are dealing with individual souls. Good congregation-members may come to the pastor complaining of great spiritual misery, claiming they cannot believe at all. If, upon being asked whether they would like to believe, they eagerly answer in the affirmative, they are to be comforted with the assurance that they may confidently consider themselves believers, and they should be told to wait until God permits the hour of their affliction to pass, when they will presently observe their faith breaking forth in great strength and joy.

John 20, 29 we read: *Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.* Thomas refused to believe that Christ had risen from the dead unless he would be able to put his finger into the nail-prints in Christ's body. Out of great compassion, Christ granted him that privilege, and Thomas fell down before Him, exclaiming, "My Lord and my God!" Thereupon the Lord addressed the words just quoted to him. Now, seeing is practically nothing else than feeling. For whether I receive a sensation through my nervous system or see something with my nerve of vision or hear something with my auditory nerve, cause and effect in each case are identical. The Lord's remarks to

Thomas mean that we must *first* believe and *then* see and must not desire first to see and then to believe. It is certain, then, that we must not desire first to *feel*, but we must rather believe and then wait until God grants us the sweet sensation that our sins have been taken from us.

Heb. 11, 1 states: *Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* We have here a definition of faith. If faith is what is here stated: a firm, reliant confidence, not doubting, not wavering, it is self-evident that faith dare not be based on sight, feeling, and sense. If it is, it is built on sand, and the entire structure thus set up will soon collapse. Pity the person who has become accustomed to regarding himself as pardoned while he has pleasant feelings. As a rule, these pleasant feelings vanish in the hour of death, when the final agony drives them away. Happy the man who in that hour can say: —I cling to what my Savior taught

And trust it whether felt or not. He can depart in peace. Pity the poor, unhappy wretch who in that hour discovers that he is void of any feeling of grace and must die without Jesus dwelling in his heart. Many who have joined the fanatical sects may have perished because they let go of Jesus in their dying hour, thinking that they were not permitted to apprehend Him. For all fanatics hold that the privilege of coming to Jesus and taking comfort in Him is not conveyed to them except by their feeling of divine grace. When they ask a brother of their communion, “How do you feel?” and he tells them that he is not aware of any feeling, they begin milling with the poor wretch in prayer, struggling and wrestling until he gets the desired feeling. The feeling that he gets, however, is merely physical, not the feeling of the Holy Spirit. For human nature, when put under an extraordinary strain, is apt to turn a person’s mind. Suddenly all nerves seem to have snapped, and he has the sensation of a drowning person who is rescued from the watery grave; such a person, too, has a sensation of delight, but it is not the delightful sensation of the Holy Spirit.

In his *Church Postil* (St. L. Ed. XI, 1577 f.), *Luther* writes: “Another quality of faith is that it waives previous knowledge and assurance of its worthiness to receive the grace of God and to be heard by Him. That is what doubters do who reach out after God and try Him. They are groping after God similarly to a blind man groping along a wall; they first of all want to feel and be certified that He cannot escape them. The Epistle to the Hebrews, in chap. 11, says: Faith is a sure confidence in things hoped for, not judging things by what they appear to be. That means, faith clings to things that it does not see,

feel, or apprehend by means of the senses. It is rather a trusting reliance on God, on whom it is willing to risk and stake anything, not doubting that it will come out winner. The outcome really certifies the correctness of such trust, *and the feeling and sensation will come to him unsought and undesired in and by his relying upon it and believing it.*”

Luther here gives an exact description of the true quality of faith: it declines to know and to be assured before it will give credence, but it gives credence the moment God’s Word is spoken. This is indeed followed by assurance, sooner in one person, later in another. The common experience is that a person who has become a Christian at once perceives a pleasant sensation. God treats His young children as an earthly father treats his. He feeds them light food, gives them sweets, etc. So God gives to Christians in their initial stage the sugar-bread of pleasant feelings. But when they have passed through a number of spiritual experiences which exercised their faith, the sugar-bread stops, and they are given black rye-bread, which sometimes is quite hard and tastes stale. God calculates that after sufficient experience has been gained in Christianity by these Christians, the new food will not be too severe a trial for them, while it would be indigestible to such as are still children in faith. When trials come, many Christians indulge in reminiscences of their former happiness, how they relished the sweet experience and joyful assurance that God in heaven was gracious to them, something of which they had no inkling prior to their conversion; how they retired at night, knowing that they would rest in the arms of Jesus, and rose cheerfully in the morning, knowing that Jesus and His angels would accompany them in all their ways; how sure they were that no misfortune would befall them, or if any should befall them, that it would be a blessing in disguise, as Paul Gerhardt views it, when he sings: —My heart from care is free,

Misfortune now is play,

No troubles trouble me,

And night is bright as day. They may long for the food of those former days, but they feel that they can digest the hard rye-bread that is offered them now.

If God were to withdraw His consolations from beginners in Christianity, they would say: “We decline leading such a miserable life. The ministers in their sermons always picture the Christian life as a glorious state. But now we see that a Christian is a most unhappy person; his whole life is filled with anguish, misery, and terrors.”

What a kind Father, then, is God to His Christians! He does not lay heavy burdens on them at the start. He gets them accustomed to His dealings gradually. Then He withdraws comforts from them in order that they may learn to lay hold of Him also in the dark. Accordingly, we must not think that we have fallen from grace or have forsaken our first love when we no longer have the blessed experiences of former days, or at least not in the same degree. The love which an aged, experienced Christian bears towards his Savior may not have the sweet flavor of his earlier life, but it is purer, because many dregs which it contained at the beginning have been purged from it.

Luther continues: “Tell me, who had given these lepers the duly sealed and stamped letter assuring them that Christ would hear their prayer? Do you observe in them any sensation, any feeling of His mercy, any information, knowledge, or certainty of His goodness? None of these items can be discerned in them. Well, what do we see in them? A frank risking and cheerful daring that relies on His unsensed, untried, and unrecognized goodness. They behold no marks indicating what He intends to do for them; they look solely to His goodness, and that incites them to the daring thought that He will not leave them in the lurch. Whence did they have their knowledge of His goodness? For although they had never made any trial of it through some experience, they had to have some previous knowledge of it. No doubt, they had gathered it from public rumors about all the good that He had done, though personally they had never had any experience of His goodness. For the goodness of God must be proclaimed through His Word, and men must rely on it before they have made a test of it or experienced it.”

When I have recited the Lord’s Prayer with proper devotion, — something, by the way, that happens very rarely, — I can cheerfully conclude by saying “Amen,” though I may not have felt while praying that it is really the Holy Spirit that is urging me to pray. I have had to struggle while praying, and my prayer is heard nevertheless.

In another place *Luther* writes (St. L. Ed. XI, 453 f.): “What I have said is this: God will not permit us *to rely on anything or to cling with our hearts to anything that is not Christ as revealed in His Word, no matter how holy and full of the Spirit it may seem. Faith has no other ground on which to take its stand.* Accordingly, the mother of Christ and Joseph meet with the experience that their own wisdom, calculations, and hopes fail them and turn out to be futile while they are hurrying from place to place seeking Him. For they are

not seeking Him where they should, but consult their flesh and blood, which is always staring about after some comfort other than that offered by God's Word and always desires something visible and tangible, which can be grasped by the senses and human reason. For that reason God lets them go down to failure and forces this lesson upon them, that no comfort, aid, and advice which men seek from flesh and blood, from other men or any creature whatsoever, is worth anything unless God's Word is grasped. They had to abandon everything: their friends, acquaintances, the entire city of Jerusalem, every ingenious device, all that they themselves and other men could do. All these things did not provide them with the proper assurance, until they sought Him in the Temple, where He was about His Father's business. There Christ is surely found, and there the heart recovers its cheer, while it would otherwise remain cheerless, since comfort can be provided for us neither by ourselves nor by any other creature."

"Hence, when God sends us such grievous afflictions, we, too, must learn not to follow our own calculations or the advice of such men as send us hither and thither and direct us to our own or other people's resources. On the contrary, we should remember that we must seek Christ in His Father's house and business: we must simply cling to the Word of the Gospel alone, which shows us Christ aright and teaches us to know Him. Learn, then, from this and any other spiritual affliction that, whenever you wish to convey genuine comfort to others or to yourself, you must say with Christ: What does it mean that you are running hither and thither, that you torment yourselves with anxious and sad thoughts, imagining that God will not keep you in His grace and that there is no longer any Christ for you? Why do you refuse to be satisfied unless you find Him in yourselves and have the feeling of being holy and without sin? You will never succeed; all your toil will be labor lost. Do you not know that Christ will be nowhere nor permit Himself to be found anywhere except in that which is His Father's, not in anything that is your or other people's? There is no fault in Christ or His mercy; He is never lost and can always be found. But the fault is in you, because you are not seeking Him where you ought to, namely, in the place where He is to be sought. You are being guided by your feeling and think you can apprehend Him with your thoughts. You must come to the place where there is neither your own nor any man's business, but God's business and government, namely, to His Word. There you will find Him and hear and see that there is no wrath and disfavor

against you in Him, as you fear in your despondency, but nothing else than grace and cordial love towards you, and that He is acting as your kind and loving Mediator with the Father, speaking the kindest and best words possible in your behalf. Nor does He send you trials with the intention of casting you off, but in order that you may learn to know Him better and cling more firmly to His Word and in order to rebuke your unreasonableness, thus forcing you to learn by experience how cordially and faithfully He cherishes you.”

Here you hear a verdict condemning all fanatical sects. No matter what other false doctrines they may teach, they all have this grievous error in common, that they do not rely solely on Christ and His Word, but chiefly on something that takes place in themselves. As a rule, they imagine that all is well with them because they have turned from their former ways. As if that were a guarantee of reaching heaven! No; we are not to look back to our conversion for assurance, but we must go to our Savior again and again, every day, as though we never had been converted. My former conversion will be of no benefit to me if I become secure. I must return to the mercy-seat every day, otherwise I shall make my former conversion my Savior, by relying on it. That would be awful; for in the last analysis it would mean that I make myself my savior.