

## **TWENTY-SEVENTH EVENING LECTURE.**

**(May 8, 1885.)**

All mankind, you know, is distributed among three estates, appointed and ordained by God Himself: the estate of teachers, of producers, and defenders, the *Lehrstand*, *Naehrstand*, and *Wehrstand*, as the Germans call them. In view of the statement of David in Ps. 11, 3: "His work is honorable and glorious," none of these God-ordained estates is to be esteemed lightly; for in each one of these estates a person can pursue his way to heaven, please God and God's children, and serve God and his fellow-men. What more do we need? In the estate of teachers we have those who teach in the Church and in the schools; in the estate of producers we have peasants, artisans, artists, and scholars; in the estate of defenders we have governors, state officers, jurists, and soldiers.

True, the estate of teachers has, in general, been little respected, especially in ages gone by; and as far as the teachers of the Word of God are concerned, they are, of all men, most despised and even hated by the world. Nevertheless their estate and office is the most glorious of all, for the following reasons: —

1. The work of their office centers about man's spiritual welfare, his immortal soul.

2. They employ the most salutary means and instrument in their work, namely, the Word of the living God.

3. They aim at the most salutary and glorious end, namely, to make man truly happy in the present life and to lead him to the life of eternal bliss.

4. They are most wholesomely engaged in an occupation which entirely satisfies their spirits and advances their own selves in the way of salvation.

5. Their labor yields the most precious result, namely, the salvation of man.

6. Their labors have the most glorious promise of the cooperation of the Lord, so that they are never entirely futile and in vain.

7. Their labors have the promise of a gracious reward, which consists in a glory in the world to come that is unutterably great, exceeding abundantly above all they ever could have asked and prayed for in this life.

If men would stop to consider these points, they would come crowding into the sacred office of the ministry and that of teachers of religion, as they are crowding into great state offices, which yield them honor and great emoluments. Parents would deem it a high honor and a special grace of God if they could have their sons trained for this sacred office. Young theologians would feel constrained every day to go down on their knees and praise and magnify God's holy name for having done such great things for them, predestinating them from eternity to this exalted and sacred office. Yea, I am forced to say that, if the holy angels, who have been confirmed in eternal bliss, were capable of envy, they would, even in their state of celestial glory, unquestionably envy every teacher of the Gospel. For all that is recorded concerning them in Holy Scripture does not equal the greatness of the office of teachers and preachers, in which men become helpers in the task of bringing fallen creatures back to their Creator. Without doubt these rescued people will forever and ever thank those by whose ministry they were saved from perdition and brought into life everlasting.

However, this reflection upon the estate of preachers and teachers of the Word of God must make them ever more faithful in the performance of their office. They must strive to present the doctrine which they preach in a pure and unadulterated form and teach it in such a manner that their hearers will learn to know, on the one hand, their own misery, and, on the other, the goodness of God, become believers, be kept in the faith, and finally come to those blessed abodes where they shall see God and praise and magnify Him forever and ever.

We have seen that the principal task of a preacher is rightly to divide the Word of Truth. He must not be like a carpenter who is trimming a block and does not mind where the chips fall, but he must be like a goldsmith who is working with a precious metal and is careful to pick up even the minutest particle that drops from his working-table. May God grant you His Holy Spirit abundantly and make you faithful guardians over the immense treasures which will be entrusted to you when you enter the ministry! May you truly provide for the precious souls which God puts in your care, in order that it may be said of you when you have finished your labors: "Their works do follow them." Then you will never feel sorry, neither during these years of study nor later in the ministry, that you have had to submit to penurious conditions. You will praise God when you shall see that from pure grace He is making you to shine as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars forever and ever.

We have examined the principal proofs for the fifteenth thesis and have repelled some of the objections that are raised against it. I wish to call attention to two additional objections.

In the first place, it is objected that Scripture itself calls the Gospel a law and that, hence, the Gospel may be called a preaching unto repentance, because the Law serves the purpose of leading men to repentance. Rom. 3, 27 is cited, where we read: "Where is boasting, then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay; but by *the law of faith*." According to the apostle's own terminology the objectors say that the Gospel, too, is a law. This is drawing a faulty inference from the apostle's words. The apostle in this passage employs the figure of antanaclasis: he uses the same word which his opponent has used, however, in a different meaning, to refute the opponent.

To illustrate: When the Jews, from a self-righteous motive, asked Christ: "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" John 6, 28, He

answered: “This is the *work* of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.” V. 29. They had misunderstood the term “work of God” which the Lord had used, imagining that He was referring to works which man must do to please God. Christ retains the term, but employs it in an entirely different meaning. He means to say: “Works do not save a person; but doing no works for the purpose of achieving some merit, relying solely on Christ the Redeemer and His grace, — that is what saves.” Hence a person is made righteous in the sight of God by what He receives from God. This figure of speech is used also in ordinary daily life. When a son who has been slovenly in his work comes to his father and impudently asks for his *wages*, the father will say: “Indeed, I shall give you your *wages* — with the rod.” The simplest people make use of this figure of speech. In a similar manner death is called the *wages* of sin. Now, death is not really a premium that God has put on sin. Again, the Lord, we are told in Matt. 24, 51, will appoint to the evil servant “his *portion* with the hypocrites, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Hence it cannot be established from Rom. 3,27 that the Gospel is a preaching unto repentance. Only a person who is not conversant with rhetoric will cite this passage for proof. Among the requirements for a proper understanding of Holy Scripture are the rules of rhetoric; for Scripture is quite rhetorical and full of tropes.

*Quenstedt* says: “Properly speaking, and in contrast with the Law, the Gospel is not a doctrine that enjoins upon men inherent righteousness, of which faith, regarded as a work, is either a part or a disposition for it; but it proclaims the gracious forgiveness of sin and the righteousness that is valid in the sight of God, as something that is to be accepted by faith, as the receiving organ. For this reason the Gospel is called ‘the ministration of righteousness.’ 2 Cor. 3, 9.” (*Theol. Did.-Polem., cap de ev., s. 2, 9. 4 f. 1029.*)

Another objection is raised on the basis of Rom. 10, 16: “They have not all *obeyed* the Gospel.” It is argued that, since it is really the Law which enjoins obedience, the Gospel is not merely a message of joy, but an improved law. However, it is an utter perversion of this text to try to prove from it that the Gospel in the strict sense is a preaching unto repentance. We are to obey the will of God not only as expressed in the Law, but also His gracious will. But the latter is not a will of the Law. By His gracious will, God offers and gives us all things. If we accept what He gives, we are said to obey Him. It is an act

of kindness on God's part to call it obedience. And indeed, when we do obey Him thus, we are also fulfilling the First Commandment, for faith is commanded in the Law, not in the Gospel. The Gospel is called "glad tidings"; but glad tidings cannot be anything that imposes a task on me which I am to perform. Only those tidings are good tidings which tell me to put away all fear because God is gracious by advancing to meet me.

*Gerhard* writes: "The accusation of unbelief belongs to the Law as illumined by the light of the Gospel. Luther takes cognizance of this fact when he says that the work of believing in Christ and the contrary sin of unbelief are related to the First Commandment." (*Loc. de ev.*, § 111.)

We have previously noted that Luther speaks of faith as a return to the First Commandment. To accept the grace of God as soon as it is offered to me, to take comfort in it, to thank God for it, and not to be so insolent as to try to achieve by one's own effort what the Father in heaven is offering by grace, — that is the sublimest way of fulfilling the First Commandment.

Hear the testimony from *Luther's Preface to the New Testament* (St. L. Ed. XIV, pp. 85–90): "As the Old Testament is a book in which have been recorded the Law and commandments of God, together with the history both of those who kept them and those who did not keep them, so the New Testament is a book in which have been recorded the Gospel and the promises of God, together with the history of those who believed them and those who did not believe them. For the term *Gospel* is a Greek term; its German meaning is: a goodly message, glad tidings, good news, a good report, of which men speak and sing in cheerful strains. As, for instance, when David had conquered the great Goliath, a good report, or the good news, circulated among the Jewish people that their worst enemy was slain and that they had been delivered and restored to happiness and peace. So the Gospel of God and the New Testament are glad tidings and report, which were spread throughout the world by the apostles, concerning One who was a true David, fighting against sin, death, and the devil and conquering them and by His victory redeeming, justifying, quickening, saving, and restoring to peace with God, all those who were in bondage under sin, tormented by death, and overcome by the devil, and causing them to sing, thank, and praise God and rejoice forever, provided they firmly believe it and remain steadfast in this faith.

“This report and comforting message, these divine evangelical glad tidings, are also called a *new testament*, because, as in a testament, by which a dying person disposes of his goods and orders them to be distributed among his appointed heirs after his death, Christ, prior to His death, has given command and directions to proclaim this Gospel throughout the world after His death, therewith bestowing upon believers, as their possession, all His goods, to wit, His life, by which He has swallowed up death, His righteousness, by which He has wiped out sin, and His salvation, by which He has defeated eternal damnation.

“Now, a poor human being that is dead in sins and consigned to hell cannot be told anything more precious than this blessed, lovely message concerning Christ. If he believes that it is true, he must rejoice in his heart of hearts and be glad. ...

“The Gospel, then, is nothing else than preaching concerning Christ, the Son — of God and David’s Son, true God and man, who by His death and resurrection has overcome sin, death, and hell for all those who believe in Him. Accordingly, the Gospel may be set forth in a brief or in a long statement by various writers. An extensive account is given by the four evangelists, who recount many works and words of Christ. A brief account is given, for instance, by Peter and Paul, who do not describe the activities of Christ, but indicate briefly how He, by His death and resurrection, has conquered death and hell for those who believe in Him.

“See, then, that you do not make Christ a new Moses or His Gospel a book of law or instruction, as has been done heretofore in some prefaces that have been written to the New Testament, also by St. Jerome. For the Gospel, properly so called, does not require our works for making us godly and saving us; yea, it abominates our works. On the contrary, it demands that we believe in Christ, namely, that He has conquered sin, death, and hell for us and makes us godly, quickens us, and saves us, not by our works, but by His works and His suffering and dying, so that we may appropriate His death and victory as if we had achieved it ourselves.

“The many commandments and instructions, however, and the expositions of the Law which Christ in the Gospel and also St. Peter and Paul have given, are to be received like all other works and blessings of Christ. Knowing the works and history of Christ is not yet knowing the true Gospel; for that does not embrace the knowledge that He has conquered sin, death, and the devil. Even so, knowing the doctrine and commandments recorded in the New

Testament is not yet knowing the Gospel; but this is the Gospel, when you hear the voice which tells you that Christ is your own with His life, teaching, works, His dying, His rising from death, and everything that He is, has, does and is able to do.

“Accordingly, we see that He is not compelling men, but invites them with kind words, saying: ‘Blessed are the poor,’ etc. The apostles use terms like these: ‘I exhort, I beseech, I pray you.’ All of which shows that the Gospel is not a law-book, but, properly speaking, a sermon concerning the blessings of Christ, given us to have as our own if we believe. Moses, however, in his writings drives, compels, threatens, beats, and chastises men in a horrible fashion; for he is a writer and enforcer of the Law.

“That is the reason why no law is given to believers to make them righteous in the sight of God, as St. Paul says, 1 Tim. 1, 9; for the believer is made righteous, is quickened, and is saved by Christ. Nothing is required of him but that he manifest his faith by his works. Indeed, when there is faith, it cannot be restrained; it manifests itself, it breaks forth in good works, it confesses and teaches the Gospel publicly and risks its life in doing so. All that a believer does during his life is made to tend to the advantage of his fellow-men and their aid; not only that his fellow-men may also obtain the grace of the Gospel, but also that he follows the example of Christ and sacrifice his life, possessions, and honor for others as Christ has done for him. That is what Christ means when at the end of His life He gave His disciples no other commandment than this, that they love one another, telling them that thereby men would see who were His disciples and sincere believers. For faith, unless it breaks forth in works of love, is not genuine, and in such persons the Gospel has not yet taken root, nor have they come to know Christ aright.”

Here we have Luther’s *Introduction to the New Testament*. It is quite brief, but of much greater value than that of modern scholars, the majority of whom have made it their aim to tear down the foundation of faith by making the Bible unreliable.

Note the salient points in the citation from Luther. Luther admits that, when the term *Gospel* is used in a synecdochical sense, it may, in certain passages, reprove men’s sin. But it is a remarkable fact that, while the term law is frequently used so as to include the Gospel, the term *Gospel* is never used in the place of the Law; nor will you find in all the Scriptures a passage in which the term Law can be substituted for the Gospel in the strict sense.

What Luther says in definition of the Gospel in the strict sense should make you extremely careful not to mingle any elements of the Law into your statements regarding the Gospel. You must proclaim the Law forcefully; your pulpit must reverberate with its thunder and lightning. But the moment you begin to speak of the Gospel, the Law must be hushed. Moses set up a barrier around Mount Sinai, but Christ and the apostles placed no barrier around Golgotha. Here everybody is accorded free access. The person approaching the God of the Law must be righteous; the person approaching the reconciling God on Golgotha may come just as he is. Yea, he is welcome for the very reason that he is a sinner, if he will but come.

According to Luther's description of the Gospel as the last will and testament of Christ, the Gospel is not a doctrine teaching us how we may make ourselves worthy in the sight of God, but what we are to receive from God. Luther occasionally uses this expression that, objectively, every person is already righteous in the sight of God because of the living and dying of Christ in his stead. When God justifies an individual by offering him the Gospel and the individual refuses to accept it, he is, indeed, not justified, but is and remains a condemned sinner. To such a person the chief torment of hell will be the fact that he knows: "I was redeemed; I was reconciled to God; I was righteous; but because I would not believe it, I am now in this place of torment." The joyful message which you are to bring to your people is this: "You are redeemed; you are reconciled to God; you have been made righteous; you are blessed people. Salvation has been acquired also for you. Do but believe it. Of what use would it be if some one were to offer you millions, holding them out to you, and you would not deem it worth while to extend your hand and take them? You would still remain beggars until your dying day." Untold numbers of men remain in their state of condemnation in spite of the perfect redemption of Christ proclaimed to them and offered them in the Gospel.

It is indeed correctly said that the mere regarding of the Gospel as a truthful record is not justifying faith, but Luther means that a person *believes that what the Gospel says concerns him*. He who does not consider *himself* redeemed does not believe that the Gospel is true. The Gospel is God's message to every individual throughout the world, telling him: "You have been received into grace by God; God is no longer angry with you. His Son has wiped out all your sins. The only thing you need do is to accept this message." Adopt this as

a principle for your activity in your congregation, always to proclaim this glad message in your pulpit, so that your congregation will rejoice at having a pastor who is a true evangelist. Do not follow your reason, which will tell you that by preaching the Gospel to them you will make your hearers secure. It is not so; on the contrary, when the grace and glory of the Gospel are truly held out to men, this rouses them, makes them joyful and therefore willing to do good works and, as it were, kindles a heavenly fire in their hearts. This effect is inevitable. Any one coming in contact with fire is made to glow; a person who comes in contact with the fire of divine love is made to glow with love to God and his fellow-men. It goes without saying that the Law must be continually preached, lest the hearers become surfeited, so that the Gospel does not benefit them.

You may be assured that the Lutheran Church is distinct from all others by the fact that it preaches a perfect redemption and hence does not represent faith as a work, but merely as the receiving hand by which the sinner accepts the gifts of God; furthermore, that it invites all sinners who are alarmed over their sins, no matter how abominable their conduct may have been, to come, for all things are ready for them. The reason why our Church has also the true doctrine of the Sacraments is that it teaches the true doctrine of salvation by grace alone.

Luther says the Gospel is not a law-book, not even a book of instruction, but a message of joy. Men cannot rejoice over it too soon, and their joy, whenever it enters their hearts, is a heavenly, divine joy. If a person constantly complains that he cannot see in what way he is to be benefited by the Gospel, and if the preaching of the Gospel leaves his heart empty, he has no one to blame but himself and his refusal to believe.

As to Jerome, who, next to Origen, was the greatest linguist of the early centuries of the Christian Church, Luther was very much loath to read his writings because there was precious little of the Gospel in them.

When David had slain Goliath, all that the children of Israel had to do was to make use of their liberty. After the defeat of their leader the enemies had fled. Christ has conquered our enemies and done everything to set us entirely free. We have no more to do than the Israelites when David returned victorious from his conflict. They were no longer to be afraid of a defeated host. We are, likewise, no longer to be afraid of the Law, sin, death, the devil, and eternal

perdition. All these were our enemies, and they have been put to flight. To continue fearing them is a reproach to Christ, which incites God to anger. If I believe God to be angry with me, I certainly have an angry God; if I believe Him to be kind to me, I have a kind God and need not vex my mind with doubts whether, after all, He may not be angry with me.

Whenever Luther spoke of the Gospel as preaching repentance and the wrath of God, he was far from referring to the Gospel in the strict sense. The citation which you have heard shows you how he speaks whenever he refers to the Gospel in the strict and proper sense. He wrote that preface in the time of his first love, in 1522, and reiterated and augmented it in 1527. His whole discourse is glowing with such ardent love that a poor sinner, on hearing this testimony, feels like leaping for joy. True, a slave of sin, who is wallowing in his filth, does not relish this soul-food; he is like the well-known beast that prefers acorns to anything else. In Lutheran congregations the Gospel, these truly precious tidings, must be preached, and the entire congregation must be pervaded by the Gospel spirit. If that is the case, the people are not continually put in terror by the Law, but are made glad by the Gospel. When we preach the Law, it is not to make men saints, but sinners.

When Luther speaks of the manifestation of faith by works, we must bear in mind that works are not necessary *per se*; in God's estimate they are not necessary at all for our salvation. But they are necessary on men's account, in order that they may see a Christian exercising his faith by means of them, may praise the Father which is in heaven, and accept Him as their God. We should test our own faith by these remarks of Luther. Faith cannot be shut in. It is like a sea that can be tapped: it rushes irresistibly through any proper opening that is made for it. A believer is ready to serve everybody wherever he can. He cannot but profess the Gospel before men, even though he foresees that he will reap nothing but ridicule and scorn for it; yea, he is ready also to give his life for the Gospel. He knows that, if he refuses to do these things, he will have to forsake Christ and that, if he denies Christ, the light of faith will be extinguished in him. Accordingly, he confesses Christ not merely because Christ has said: "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven," Matt. 10, 32, but because he cannot do otherwise.

Let us now take up the Bible-passages which refer to the Gospel in the strict sense, and learn by what marks we may know them. There are five marks: —

1. Whenever the Gospel is contrasted with the Law, it is quite certain that the term *Gospel* does not refer to the Gospel in the wide, but in the narrow sense.

Eph. 2, 14–17 we read: *He is our Peace, who hath made both one and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having established in His flesh the enmity, even the Law of commandments, contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby; and came and preached peace*[Luther: by the Gospel] *unto you which were afar off and to them that were nigh.* According to this text the preaching of the Law, which does not bring peace, precedes and is followed by the Gospel, which brings peace.

2. Whenever the Gospel is presented as the peculiar teaching of Christ or as the doctrine that proclaims Christ, it cannot refer to the Law at the same time; for we read, John 1, 17: *The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

Jesus Christ did not first publish the Law, but He purged the Law from the false interpretations of the Pharisees, because the proper knowledge of the Law is necessary before a person is able to accept the Gospel.

Luke 4, 18–19 the Lord says: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.* In this text the Lord Jesus sets forth His mission to the world, the real object of His preaching as Christ, the Savior of the world. He concluded the foregoing statement by saying, v. 21: “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” He had not spoken to his audience a word concerning the Law, but had only referred to the doctrine that is offered to the poor, the sick, those of a bruised heart, and those in the bondage of sin and the devil.

Acts 17, 18 we read: *Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him. And some said, What will this babbling say other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them* [Luther: the Gospel concerning] *Jesus and the resurrection.* The doctrine which has Jesus for its subject is the Gospel in the strict sense.

Under this head belong also the following passages: 1 Cor. 15, 1–4: *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the GOSPEL which I preached unto you, which also ye have received and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.* Rom. 16, 25–26: *Now, to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my GOSPEL and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.* Gal. 1, 6–7: *I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you-into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel; which is not another; but there be some that trouble you and would pervert THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.*

3. Whenever poor sinners are named as the subject to whom the Gospel is addressed, you may be certain that the reference is to the Gospel in the strict sense. Matt. 11, 5 *The poor have the GOSPEL preached to them.* Luke 4, 18: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach THE GOSPEL to the poor.*

4. Whenever forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and salvation by grace are named as effects of the Gospel, the reference is to the Gospel in the strict sense. Rom. 1, 16: *I am not ashamed of THE GOSPEL of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.* Eph. 1, 13 *In whom ye also trusted after that ye heard the Word of Truth, THE GOSPEL of your salvation.*

5. When faith is named as the correlate of the Gospel, the reference is to the Gospel in the strict sense. Mark 1, 15 *Repent ye and BELIEVE THE GOSPEL.* Mark 16, 15–16 *Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.* Also the passage cited last certainly refers to the Gospel in the strict sense. The remarks of the Lord about unbelievers who shall be damned, are not indeed a part of the Gospel, but Law. The Lord adds these remarks in order to let those who reject the Gospel know that by their unbelief they are doing that which will hurl them into perdition.