

THIRTIETH EVENING LECTURE.

(June 5, 1885.)

Many young men whom God has endowed with splendid gifts, gifts especially suited for the office of the ministry, and who even have a certain inclination toward that office, nevertheless do not like to become ministers. They think that in this office they would have to sacrifice their life's happiness and their freedom. However, this is a great self-delusion. Any one who wishes to be saved must be ready, if Christ so desires, to sacrifice his life's happiness and surrender his freedom for His sake. Not only a minister, but every Christian must choose the narrow path, which leads to heaven, if he wants to get to heaven. He must forsake the world, fight against his flesh and crucify it,

and work out his salvation with fear and trembling if he does not want to perish eternally. Accordingly, a young man does not gain any or only a small advantage for his lustful flesh by refusing to become a minister. Every Christian must be a spiritual priest, even if he is not a minister, if he does not wish to thrust the grace of God from him. It is indeed true that a person who wishes to become a minister must first be a sincere Christian. That is the *conditio sine qua non*, the indispensable requisite, for becoming a minister. The Apostle Paul concludes his enumeration of the qualities required for a bishop, or, what amounts to the same, a minister, with these words: "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." 1 Tim. 3, 9. This shows that a minister must have a purified conscience, cleansed not only by the blood of Christ unto the forgiveness of sins, but also by the sanctification of the Spirit. A minister must have come to the momentous decision that he will not live for himself, but for Him who died and rose again for his sake. At his ordination, when he is separated from the world for service in the sanctuary, a minister must have bidden farewell to the world and become irrevocably divorced from it. He must have reached the conviction which the pious poet has thus expressed: My heart, now make thy choice:

On Him stake thy reliance,
Or thou'lt not come to rest
Renounce the world and all
That does thy flesh enthrall;
With Jesus take thy stand

And thus the matter end. Blessed are you, my dear friends, if you make the poet's words: "With Jesus take thy stand And thus the matter end," the sighing of your heart. Not until you do this, will you "end the matter."

Accordingly, it is a real and a great misfortune when a congregation obtains an orthodox, but unconverted minister, who, though he has grasped the pure doctrine quite well with his intellect and memory, does not believe what he preaches. Such a minister, having the pure doctrine, will, as a rule, lead his congregation to good pastures in his pulpit work, but he will be a sorry watchman and curate of souls and a still sorrier example to his flock. His congregation will not at all behold in him the portrait of a Christian who has renounced himself and the world. If it is to his advantage, he will indeed adhere to the pure doctrine and even fight bravely to maintain it, but if a situation arises that brings him into contempt or yields him ingratitude as a reward for his zeal; if he has to suffer dishonor and persecution for the sake of

the pure doctrine, he will speedily fall away from it, and it will be apparent that his Christianity sprang from a corrupt root and that his congregation has obtained a cheat. For in times of tribulations, when wolves and foxes try to break into the Hock, it is of paramount importance that the shepherd take a firm stand and be ready to give his life, to shed his blood, for the truth and for his flock. An unconverted person would consider it ridiculous to sacrifice a pleasant living in a nice position with a snug income for what he considers a subtile point of doctrine, because he has never yet had a perception of the right connections of the parts of the saving doctrine. When the question is, not about doctrines objectively or speculatively considered, but about teachings which in a purely practical view belong to the true knowledge and experience of the heart, an orthodox minister of this type will talk like a blind man about color. At times he will have an exaggerated view of genuine Christianity; at other times he will entertain an unduly inferior view of it. We have seen at our last meeting how Law and Gospel can be confounded by an exaggerated view of Christianity. Tonight we shall hear how a minister can place genuine Christianity 'on a lower level than its essential quality requires.

Thesis XVIII.

In the fourteenth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when the universal corruption of mankind is described in such a manner as to create the impression that even true believers are still under the spell of ruling sins and are sinning purposely.

You will observe that I am speaking of the claim that the universal corruption of mankind embraces living in dominant and wilful sins on the part of believers. No one who is conversant with the pure doctrine will make the unqualified assertion that a christian can be a fornicator and an adulterer. Such a thought would not enter the mind of a true teacher of the Word of God. but a preacher trying to give a very drastic description of the universal corruption of mankind is easily tempted to deviate from the pure doctrine. I am speaking of mistakes that are frequently made by zealous ministers and also by theological students. In their first sermons submitted for review they quite frequently say that all mankind lives in this or that sin, mentioning manifest sins unto death as though Christians also were living in sins of that kind. What damage can be done when people are made to hear that we human beings are living in every abomination, shame, and vice, without the qualifying statement: "as we are by

nature” or “as long as a person is still in the state of natural depravity and is unregenerate.” With these qualifiers, of course, you cannot overdraw the horrible qualities of man’s natural condition. However, when addressing a Christian congregation, you will have to be very careful not to speak as if also all Christians were living in shame and vice. It was a harmful and dangerous attempt on the part of the Pietists to divide mankind into so many classes that nobody was able to tell in which class he belonged. But this must not keep us from pointing out in our sermons the two great classes into which mankind is really divided, *viz.*, believers and unbelievers, godly and ungodly, converted and unconverted, regenerate and unregenerate persons. This classification is current throughout the Scriptures. Christ always preached: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Mark 16, 16. “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” Matt. 9, 13. God “maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” Matt. 5, 45. In each one of these texts Christ recognizes only two classes of human beings. Matt. 13, 38 He speaks of “the children of the Kingdom” and “the children of the Wicked One,” of wheat and tares. This thorough division, this *aut-aut*, either-or, must appear in every sermon of a sincere preacher. This is what your hearers must learn, *viz.*, that they are either spiritually dead or spiritually alive, either converted or unconverted, either under the wrath of God or in a state of grace, either Christians or unchristians, either asleep in sin or quickened unto a new life in God, subjects in either the devil’s or God’s kingdom. It is a damnable heresy to speak of Hades, as modern theologians do, where man will have another chance to be converted. Incalculable harm is done by this doctrine. May God keep you from embracing it!

Make plain to your hearers in all your sermons that there are but two goals at the end of this life — heaven and hell. There will be only two sentences pronounced on men, either unto damnation or unto eternal life. Accordingly, there are only two classes of men in the present life; those of the one class are headed direct for hell, those of the other, straight for heaven. For Christ says distinctly: “Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” Matt. 7, 13–14. There are but two gates, two roads, and two terminals. To confound the two classes of men that are concerned in these two ways is an abominable mingling

of Law and Gospel. The Law produces reprobate sinners, the Gospel free and blessed men.

Although the matter is as clear as daylight, still, since it is so easy, when one pictures “*what abominable* sinners we are who need the Savior,” to fall into error in spite of our good intention, let us hear a few Bible-texts on this subject. When you speak of “abominable” sinners, you must not refer to Christians, in whom we find, on the one hand, weaknesses, which are covered with the righteousness of Christ, and, on the other hand, good deeds, which God does through them and which are pleasing to Him. Every Christian may apply to himself the declaration of God: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Matt. 3, 17.

Rom. 6, 14 we read: *For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the Law, but under grace.* What the apostle actually says in this text is that sin shall not be able to dominate Christians. It is absolutely impossible that a person who is in a state of grace should be ruled by sin. A pilgrim traveling on a lonely road, when attacked by a highway man, escapes from him at the first opportunity. He does not want to be overcome and slain. Christians are pilgrims through this world on their way to heaven. The devil, like a highway robber, assaults them, and they go down before him because of their weakness, not because they meant to go down. To a true Christian his fall is forgiven because he turns to God in daily repentance with tears or at least heartfelt sighings for pardon. If a person allows sin to rule him, this is a sure sign that he is not a Christian, but a hypocrite, no matter how pious he pretends to be.

I Cor. 6, 7–11 we read: *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.* No one, then, who falls into the aforementioned sins and fails to repent of them shall inherit the kingdom of God. The Christian’s repentance shows itself in this, that he desires to commit these sins no more. Whoever commits these sins intentionally has, by that token, a proof that he is not a Christian, but a reprobate, who is moved, not by the Spirit of God, but by the hellish spirit.

2 Pet. 2, 20–22 the apostle writes: *For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb. The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.* With this important passage we confront the Calvinists, in particular, who say that a person who has once obtained faith can never lose it. The Apostle Peter is here speaking of persons who had been children of God, had had a living knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and had been in a state of divine grace. How, then, can any one be so bold as to assert that a person who had been truly converted, stays converted even when, like Peter and David, he falls into some particular sin?

Rom. 8, 13. 14 we are told: *If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* The apostle does not say: “Never mind your sinning. God will keep you in His grace and bring you around again”; but he says: “If you live after the flesh, you shall die. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” That means, per contra, that those who are not led by the Spirit of God, but by their flesh, are not the children of God, but servants of Satan.

Gal. 5, 19–21 Paul writes: *Now, the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, sedition;, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* Stop and consider this passage. In view of this text, is it not shocking in men who want to pass for Christian theologians to say that men can be in a state of grace while living in abominable sins such as are named in this text? This text locks the kingdom of God against them and announces to them the judgment of God.

Eph. 5, 5–6 the same apostle writes: *For this ye know, that no whoremonger nor unclean person nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you*

with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. The apostle's warning, "Let no man deceive you," means: Do not listen to those who tell you the contrary. Unbelievers will be damned for the reason that they live in sins like the above. Consider, then, that, if you were to live in the same sins, you would share their fate in perdition. — This Paul asks the Ephesians to ponder.

I wish to call your attention to the fact that passages like those which I quoted, are found in the pericopes. They should prove valuable to you when you use them for a lively presentation of the doctrine now under discussion. I am always pained when I attend church and find that these splendid texts are not used for the sermon. You ought to form the resolution that, when the particular time for a pericope containing these texts arrives, you will expound them to your hearers and tell them that, as God lives, they will be damned if they live in this or that sin. If you only tell them that Christians remain sinners until they die, you will frequently be misunderstood. Some will lull themselves to sleep with the reflection that they are poor and frail human beings, but that they have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, — however, a lip faith.

Let me urge upon you in general to take a survey of the pericopes on which you are going to preach and to note beforehand particular passages that suggest subjects to you on which you feel you ought to preach. If you wait till Wednesday or Thursday with looking up the pericope for the coming Sunday and after a superficial reading decide on some topic which will yield you eight pages of manuscript, sufficient for a talk of forty-five minutes, you act like an abominable hireling. A faithful pastor begins on Sunday evening to consider the subject of his sermon for the coming Sunday and determines fully to redeem the precious minutes during which he will face his congregation. The only thing that will keep him from following this practise is a visit he has to make or receive on Sunday evening. He delights in storming now 'this, now that stronghold of the devil. True, he will not achieve the overthrow of every one of these strongholds, but it must be his earnest intention to do so; otherwise many will continue in their spiritual misery under sin, and he will have *himself* to blame for it. If you do what divine grace enables you to do, the Savior will not put you to shame on account of your deficiencies, but will graciously reward you in the end with the crown of glory. To strengthen the conviction which I am trying to produce in you, let me cite a testimony from the *Smalcald Articles*, Part III, Art. 4, §§ 42–43 (Mueller, p. 319; *Trigl.*

Conc., p. 491): “On the other hand, if certain sectarists were to arise, some of whom are perhaps already extant, and in the time of the insurrection of the peasants came under my own observation, holding that all those who had once received the Spirit or the forgiveness of sins or had become believers, even though they should afterwards sin, would still remain in the faith and such sin would not harm them, and hence crying thus: ‘Do whatever you please; if you believe, it all amounts to nothing; faith blots out all sins,’ etc., — they say, besides, that, if any one sins after he has received faith and the Spirit, he never truly had the Spirit of faith: I have had before me, seen and heard, many such insane men, and I fear that in some such a devil is still remaining.

“It is, accordingly, necessary to know and teach that, when holy men, still having and feeling original sin, also daily repenting of and striving with it, happen to fall into manifest sins [mortal sins, which everybody recognizes as such], as David into adultery, murder, and blasphemy, that then faith and the Holy Spirit has departed from them. For the Holy Ghost does not permit sin to have dominion, to gain the upper hand, so as to be accomplished, but represses and restrains it, so that it must not do what it wishes. But if it does what it wishes, the Holy Ghost and faith are certainly not present. For St. John says, First Epistle 3, 9: ‘Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, . . . and he cannot sin.’ And yet it is also the truth when the same St. John says, First Epistle 1, 8: ‘If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.’ ”

Now, lest you think that we are vainly arguing about self-evident matters and to prove that the Calvinists have received into their doctrinal system the error rejected in our thesis, I wish to cite from the decrees of the *Synod of Dort* the following statement: “God, who is rich in mercy, according to His immutable purpose of election, *does not wholly remove the Holy Spirit from His own even when they sin grievously*, nor does He permit them to fall entirely out of the grace of adoption as children of God and out of the state of justification.” Now, any one who falls into a mortal sin slips — back entirely into the state of sin. According to the confession of the Reformed, then, Peter, David, and others were justified sinners while they committed mortal sins, remained in a state of grace as children of God, and retained the Holy Spirit. This we reject, while we indeed assert that the elect *cannot until their death* remain in a reprobate state, otherwise they could not be elect.