

## THIRTY-THIRD EVENING LECTURE.

(September 4, 1885.)

It goes without saying, my friends, that the first and the indispensable requisite of a theologian is a complete, accurate, and clear knowledge of every single doctrine of the divine revelation. It is a self-contradiction to call any person a theologian who does not possess this knowledge. Theologians, you know, are to be curates of men's souls. A physician must know, above all, the remedies which nature furnishes for the healing of bodily ills. In like manner the physician of souls, that is, the theologian, must have a good knowledge of the spiritual remedies which the Word of God furnishes for the ills of the soul. These spiritual remedies, however, are nothing else than the doctrines which God has revealed for our salvation.

However, while an accurate, complete, and clear knowledge of every single doctrine of God's revelation to man is indispensably necessary to a theologian, this does not by any means represent his entire need. There are chiefly two additional requisites which are no less needed by him; namely, *in the first place*, a good knowledge of the mutual relations of doctrines to one another, which will enable him to make the proper application of each; *in the second place*, courage, love, and liking for his theological calling. A physician may know all sorts of medicaments which possess the natural virtue of healing, but by ignorantly mixing them in a wrong way he may neutralize their virtue and, instead of curing the physical ailment of his patient, hasten on his death. In

like manner a theologian who does not know which doctrines he may combine and which doctrines he must carefully keep separate may easily harm more than help a soul. Lastly, a physician will properly discharge his onerous duties only when he is actuated by love and a liking for his special work and is unconcerned about the filthy lucre which he may gain for his work. Even so a theologian will be faithful in his calling only when he is filled with enthusiasm for it and finds his chief reward in the help which God affords him for the saving of souls, in the destruction of the kingdom of Satan, in the building up of the kingdom of God, and in the increasing number of those who are peopling heaven.

I have ever considered it my sacred duty, not only to present the pure doctrine in my dogmatic lectures according to the grace which God has given me, but I also deemed it necessary to find an hour at least once a week when I might gather the entire student-body of our beloved Concordia about me and show them the importance, the meaning, and the practical applications of the doctrines that are studied in dogmatics and, above all, cheer their hearts for their difficult calling. We call these Friday evening lectures, which form, as it were, the conclusion of the week's instruction, "Luther Hours," chiefly because in these lectures I let our beloved father Luther, the God-appointed Reformer and the common teacher of our Church, speak to you. God has hitherto graciously blessed these lectures; for my beloved students have gladly attended these evening lectures, and many of them have solemnly assured me that they have been benefited by them, that they have not only gained a clearer knowledge of the Christian doctrine, but have also been made more certain of the forgiveness of their sins, of their adoption, by God, as His dear children, and of their future blessedness. I cherish the hope that God will help also the students who just entered our Concordia and whom we welcome tonight to have the same beneficial experiences. I shall pray God to grant me grace to speak to you as I should and that what I say will be well received by you. Bear in mind, however, that, if my prayer is to be heard, you will have to add your prayer to mine for a blessed experience of the truth. For you are not here for the purpose of acquiring knowledge of secular sciences, but for the purpose of being taught how to become familiar with a doctrine which, in the first place, will save you and then save many others through your ministry. This requires very earnest application. You will have to put off the shoes of your earthly, carnal mind and, with Mary, sit down at Jesus' feet, to hear from Him what is

the one thing needful. God grant this and make me be a helper to you for all time!

On the basis of twenty-five theses we started last year to discuss the distinction between the Law and the Gospel. Five theses still remain to be discussed, and these are by no means unimportant. We must finish these before we take up another subject. I hope that our new entrants, although they will hear only a fragment of the present subject discussed, will nevertheless get some food for their spirit out of these lectures, some strengthening of their faith, and some inducement to withdraw from the world and leave the service of sin, and something that will attract them to Jesus. For if we who are here assembled are not true Christians, we are utter reprobates, on whom God cannot but look down in anger. For can there be a drearier prospect than not being a Christian and yet drawing pay for the time which one serves as pastor of a congregation? I hope that you are all true Christians, that the blessed Word of God has drawn you and by its divine power has made a deep and lasting impression on you, and that some day when you leave this institution, you will go forth equipped not only with a fine stock of theological knowledge, but also with a heart burning with zeal to proclaim the great things which the Lord has done for mankind.

I hope that the students of last year will not consider it tedious if I read all the theses which have already been discussed in order that our new friends may know what the discussion has been about and how important the remaining theses are.

(The first twenty theses were read and briefly commented on.)

True faith, which does not grow spontaneously out of any person, is so firm that, though the heavens were to cave in and hell were to open its maw, its possessor could defy them by his believing appeal to Jesus Christ, true God, who has redeemed him, a lost and condemned creature, with His precious blood, and secured him against the ravages of all the devils of hell. The faith of hypocrites, however, is like the snow of March, which melts in the sun.

Some imagine they are quite strict Lutherans when they assert that no one can be saved who is not a Lutheran or who does not profess the Lutheran doctrine at least on his death-bed. But this claim stamps them, not as genuine Lutherans, but as apostates from Lutheranism. The Lutheran Church does not set up such a claim, but it does indeed instruct men how to be justified and saved by grace. There are persons living among the sects that love the truth and may be better Christians than some Lutherans. Christ rules everywhere, even among His enemies.

## Thesis XXI.

*In the seventeenth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when men are taught that the Sacraments produce salutary effects ex opere operato, that is, by the mere outward performance of a sacramental act.*

The grave error which is scored by this thesis is held by the papists, who teach men that they will derive some benefit by merely are still unbelievers, provided they are not actually living in mortal sins. That mere act is said to bring them God's favor or make God gracious to them. They teach the same regarding the Mass and the Lord's Supper, *viz.*, that grace is obtained by the mere act of attending these rites. This impious and abominable teaching contradicts pointblank the Word of God, in particular, the Gospel, which teaches that a person is justified before God and saved by grace alone, and that he cannot perform any good work until he has been thus justified.

Rom. 3, 28 Paul writes: *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law.* If I am justified, if I obtain grace by my act of submitting to baptizing or by my act of going to Communion, I am justified by works, and that, altogether paltry works, scarcely worth mentioning. For that is what Baptism and Holy Communion are when viewed as works that we perform. It is a horrible doctrine, wholly contradicting the Bible, that divine grace is obtained if a person at least makes external use of the sacraments. The truth is that Baptism and Holy Communion place any person under condemnation who does not approach them with faith in his heart. They are means of grace only for the reason that a divine promise has been attached to an external symbol. Having water poured on me is of no benefit to me. Nor am I benefited by actually receiving the body and blood of the Lord in the Holy Supper. Yea, I am rather harmed by going to Communion without faith, because I become guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. It is of paramount importance that I believe, that I regard, not the water in Baptism, but the promise which Christ has attached to the water. It is this promise that requires the water; for only to it has the promise been attached. The same applies to the Holy Supper; it is impious to imagine that the act of approaching the Lord's Table, doing something that the Lord wants done, is one more merit that He

will have to credit to our account. The Lord says: "Take, eat; this is My body, *which is given for you.*" "Drink ye all of it; this cup is the new testament in My blood, *which is shed for the remission of sins.*" These words open up a heaven full of divine grace to the communicant, and to these words he must direct his faith. The mere act of eating the bread with the body of Christ and of drinking the wine with the blood of Christ produces no good effect in us. Grace does not operate in a chemical or in a mechanical manner, but only by the Word, by virtue of God's saying continually: "Thy sins are forgiven thee." To this word I must cling by faith. If I do that, I can confidently meet God on the Last Day; and if He were preparing to condemn me, I could say to Him: "Thou canst not condemn me without making Thyself a liar. Thou hast invited me to place my entire confidence in Thy promise. I have done that and therefore I cannot be condemned, and I know thou wilt not do it." If God were to try the faith of His Christians even on the Last Day, all His saints would cry: "It is impossible that we should be consigned to perdition. Here is Christ, our Surety and Mediator. Thou wilt have to acknowledge, O God, the ransom which Thy Son has given as payment in full for our sin and guilt."

Rom. 14, 23 we read: *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.* How, then, can a person who uses the Sacraments without faith become acceptable to God by that act or obtain God's grace by it, since he is committing a sin by doing something that does not proceed from faith?

In this connection the statement, too, deserves to be pondered that is recorded concerning the working of God's Word on the inner powers of man, Heb. 4, 12 *For 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.*

False teachers admit that preaching, unless it is received by faith, does not benefit the hearers, but rather increases their responsibility. However, they claim, the situation is different as regards the Sacraments, since these have, they say, this great advantage over the preached Word, that God operates with His grace through them whenever men merely use them. That is an impious doctrine, because the Sacraments are nothing else than the Word of God attached to a symbol. Augustine beautifully calls them *verbum visibile*, the visible Word. The Word of God does not benefit a person who does not believe. Even so an unbeliever is not benefited by going through the action of

being baptized. When we urge men to believe in their Baptism, the meaning is that they are to believe their heavenly Father, who has attached such a glorious promise to Baptism. The idea that God is highly pleased when a person offers his head to have water sprinkled on it is an abominable misuse of the *verbum visibile*. As the Word does not benefit a person who does not believe, even so the Sacraments help only those who embrace them by faith.

Therefore the charge of fanatics that Lutherans do not urge conversion is baseless. The charge rests on the assumption that Lutherans teach men to rely on the fact that they have been baptized and received Holy Communion. But that is not at all what we teach. This is our doctrine: There is a certain promise of God attached to Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which is to be embraced without doubting. That can be done only by men who have become poor sinners. To say to a person "You must take comfort in your Baptism" and "You must turn to Jesus Christ" is identical. A person may imagine that he is a believer, but a brief affliction will suffice to dissipate that notion. Only the Holy Spirit can give a person true faith.