

THIRTY-SEVENTH EVENING LECTURE.

(October 2, 1885.)

One of the most necessary and important qualities of a minister, my friends, is this, that he is animated by a sincere and ardent zeal to discharge his office properly and accomplish something of real value in the sight of God, namely, to pluck every soul that has been entrusted to him from hell, lead it to God, make it truly godly, and bring it into heaven. A faithful minister must have definitely given up seeking after good times, money and possessions, honor and renown in this world. His supreme joy must be the assurance that his labor

in the Lord is not in vain. That must be the most delightful reward for all his great and grievous anxieties and concerns. Daily and hourly the sigh, uttered by the aged and upright Pastor Lollmann in one of his beautiful morning hymns, must arise in his heart: —

O God, whose bread is feeding me,
Would I were of some use to Thee!

The most exalted example of genuine zeal in the discharge of one's office unquestionably is Paul, the great apostle to the heathen, who, in his great zeal for the salvation of his brethren according to the flesh, went so far as to say that he could wish himself accursed from Christ for his kinsmen. Rom 9, 3. *Luther's* opinion regarding this zeal is thus expressed in his *Church Postil*: "No reason can grasp what the apostle is doing: it is too sublime a thought that a preacher would rather be accursed himself than be the cause why any soul entrusted to him must perish."

However, while genuine zeal in the discharge of one's office is necessary and important, this cannot be said regarding any kind of zeal. There is a false, ungodly, carnal zeal that does not come from God and is not produced by the Holy Spirit, but is rooted either in animosity against those who teach a different doctrine or in the selfish thought that a display of zeal will bring the minister honor, at least in certain congregations, or in fanaticism. In the days of Christ, what zeal in the discharge of their office do we behold in the high priests, elders, scribes, and Pharisees who opposed Christ! They shunned no trouble and never tired of using their authority against Him. Accordingly, Paul says concerning the Jews: "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." Rom 10, 2 What zeal was shown by the false teachers who tried to make the congregations in Galatia distrustful of the pure evangelical doctrine of St. Paul! They traversed land and sea in their efforts; but the apostle says concerning them: "He that troubled you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be." Gal 5, 10 He means to say: "No matter how highly you esteem him as a great hero of faith, he has made you doubt the evangelical doctrine that you are saved by grace, through faith alone, for Christ's sake." What great zeal was manifested by the Anabaptists in Luther's time! For the sake of their religion they forsook house and home, wife and children, and a great number of them suffered drowning rather than revoke their doctrine. But why cite instances? All church history proves, and our own experience in this country corroborates, the assertion that false spirits,

fanaticists, manifest greater zeal in inculcating upon people their doctrine than orthodox teachers in preaching the pure truth into men's hearts. It is easy to explain why this is so. Preachers of false, man-made teachings are not hindered in, but incited to, their activity by their reason and their flesh and blood, while preachers of the pure doctrine of God's Word are continually restrained by their reason and their flesh and blood. That makes their task a thousand times more difficult. It is easy to speak from out of one's natural heart; but it is difficult to proclaim the truth on the basis of God's Word after earnestly searching the same, after fervent prayer, and after earnest struggles for enlightenment by the Holy Spirit. Why is it so difficult? Chiefly because it is so difficult rightly to divide the Word of Truth, or to separate properly the Law from the Gospel, and in nowise to confound these two doctrines, as the Apostle Paul requires of every approved laborer in the vineyard of God. Our Twenty-third thesis utters a warning regarding this matter.

Thesis XXIII.

In the nineteenth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when an attempt is made by means of the demands or the threats or the promise of the Law to induce the unregenerate to put away their sins and engage in good works and thus become godly; on the other hand, when a endeavor is made, by means of the commands of the Law rather than by the admonitions of the Gospel, to urge the regenerate to do good.

The attempt to make men godly by means of the Law and to induce even those who are already believers in Christ to do good by holding up the Law and issuing commands to them, is a very gross confounding of Law and Gospel. This is altogether contrary to the purpose which the Law is to serve after the Fall. This will very readily become manifest when we examine, among others, the following passages of Scripture: —

Jer 31, 31–34. Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the Land of Egypt; which covenant they brake, although I was a Husband unto them, saith Lord; but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my Law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his

neighbor and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. This precious, valuable text is like a sun that rose suddenly upon the gray dawn of the Old Testament. We see from it that, while the Law was written into the hearts of men even before the Fall, it did not serve the purpose of making men godly; for man had been created godly and righteous in the sight of God. The only reason why men had to have the Law in their hearts was that they might know what is pleasing to God. No special command was needed to inform them on that point. They simply willed whatever was God-pleasing; their will was in perfect harmony with the will of God. This condition was changed by the Fall. True, God, after the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, repeated the Law and reestablished a legal covenant with the Jews. However, what did the Lord tell them by the prophet Jeremiah? This, that the legal covenant had not improved their condition, because God had to force them to comply with his will, — and forced obedience simply is no obedience. Accordingly he speaks to them prophetically of a time when he will make an entirely different arrangement. That does not mean that the new arrangement was not in force even in the time of the Old Testament. The covenant, so far as it had been established with the Israelites, was a legal covenant. Yet during the time of this covenant the prophets were continually preaching the Gospel and pointing to the Messiah. Concerning the new covenant which God purposes to establish he says that he is not going to issue any commandments, but is going to write the Law directly onto their mind and give them a new and pure heart, so that they shall not need to be plagued with the Law, with enforcements and urgings: Thou shalt do this! Thou shalt do that! Because that will not help matters at all. We cannot fulfill the Law either. We are by nature carnal, and manifestations of the spirit are not forced from us by the Law. God says: “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” That is why the Law is written into our hearts. That means nothing else than this, that what the Law could not effect is accomplished by the Gospel, by the message of the forgiveness of sins. All that were saved in the Old Testament were saved in no other way, as Peter expressly declared at the first apostolic council. Now, then, what are those doing who make such a perverse use of the Law in the time of the New Testament?

They turn Christians into Jews, and that, Jews of the worst kind, who regard only the letter of the Law and not the promise of the Redeemer. Not only do they mingle the Law with the Gospel, but they substitute the Law for the Gospel.

Rom 3, 20: *Therefore by the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the Law is the knowledge of sin.* The plain meaning of the remarkable reason which the apostle offers for his statement is this: At the present time the Law has no other purpose than to reveal men's sins, not to remove them. Instead of removing them, it rather increases them; for when a person conceives evil lust in his heart, the Law calls to him: "Thou shalt not covet." That causes man to regard God as cruel in demanding what man cannot accomplish. Thus the law increases sin; it does not slay sin, but rather makes it alive.

Rom 7, 7–13 *What shall we say, then? Is the Law sin? God forbid! Nay, I had not known sin but by the Laws; for I had not known lust except the Law had said, Thou shalt not cover.* This is the most appalling feature of our condition, that, as we are by nature, we do not know hereditary sin and imagine, when evil lusts arise in us and we do not exactly delight in them, that God will not lay them to our charge. However the Law serves notice on us that evil lust renders us damnable in the sight of God. *But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.* Even pagans, the wicked Ovid among them have declared: "*Nitimur in vetitum, semper cupimusque negata.*" That means: We desire the very things which are forbidden. If they had not been forbidden, we might not desire them. The prohibition rouses our desire and a rebellious thought like this in us: "What? Is this to be denied us?" The fall of Adam proves this: The devil had quickly turn him to his side when he said: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden?" Gen 3, 1 That brought about the fall of our first parents. *For without the Law sin was dead.* While the spiritual meaning of the Law remains unperceived by man, sin lies dormant in his heart, like a frozen serpent. Man does not observe what an utterly corrupt creature he is, and while this condition lasts, he may not break forth in gross crimes. But as soon as the Law is proclaimed to him in its spiritual meaning, he becomes malicious and cries: "What? Am I to be damned because sin is stirring within me?" Yes, indeed; the Law damns him; if he refuses to believe it, he will learn by experience that this is so. That is all the Law can do. *For I was alive without*

the Law once. Paul means to say that he did not know the Law because he was so blind that he regarded himself as being without the Law. It is of no benefit, then, that people know the Ten Commandments if they do not understand their spiritual meaning. *But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. and the commandment which was ordained to life I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me and by it slew me. Wherefore the Law is holy and the commandment holy and just and good. Was, then, that which is good made death unto me? God forbid! But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.*

1 Cor 3, 6: *For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.* If the Law kills, how can it make a person godly? For these words do not mean: “The letter of the Holy Scriptures kills.” That is usually the way rationalists and also the Evangelicals (*Unierte*) interpret them. In consequence of this ungodly and abominable perversion of the words, these people say: One must not stick to the mere words. The context shows that by the term “letter” the apostle means nothing else than the Law. That kills and therefore cannot make anyone godly. It may accomplish this much, that on account of it we quit this or that vice, but it cannot change our heart.

Ps 119, 32 *I will run the way of Thy commandments when Thou shalt enlarge my heart.* The psalmist does not say; “When Thou smitest me with the thunder of Thy Law, I shall run the way of Thy commandments. No; in that case I do not run. But when Thou comfortest me so that my cramped heart is made large, I become cheerful and willing to walk the strait, the narrow, way to heaven.”

That is an experience which you may have made personally. After a long season of sluggishness and lukewarmness, during which you began to hate yourself because you saw no way to change your condition, you happen to hear a real Gospel sermon, and you leave the church a changed man and rejoice in the fact that you may believe and are a child of God. You suddenly become aware of the fact that it is not difficult to walk in the way of God’s commandments; you seem to walk in it of your own accord. How foolish, then, is a preacher who thinks that conditions in his congregation will improve if he thunders at his people with the Law and paints hell and damnation for them. That will not at all improve the people. Indeed, there is a time for such preaching of the law in order to alarm secure sinners and make them contrite,

but a change of heart and love of God and one's fellow-men is not produced by the Law. If any one is prompted by the Law to do certain good works, he does them only because he is coerced, even as the Israelites had to be coerced by the covenant of the Law.

Gal 3, 2 *This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the Law or by the hearing of faith?* The Galatians had suffered themselves to be misled into regarding Paul's preaching of salvation by faith, through the Grace of Christ alone, as very imperfect, to say the least, and hence as a dangerous doctrine by which a person might easily be led into perdition. Accordingly, they accepted the false prophets' doctrine of the Law. With great sadness Paul learned that these congregations, which he had founded himself and which had flourished wonderfully, were being disrupted and devastated by false teachers. Accordingly, he asked them the question in our text, his object being to remind them of the great change which had taken place in them when he preached to them the sweet Gospel of God's mercy. He called to their minds that they had received the spirit, namely the spirit of rest, of peace, of faith, of joy. He asks them: "Where is the blessedness ye spake of?" Yea, he says: "If it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes and have given them to me." Gal 4, 15 So thoroughly had they been seized by the grace of God, and so vividly had they perceived what a glorious, heavenly, precious doctrine Paul's was. They were transformed in heart, soul, and mind. The apostle wants them now to tell him whether they had received this new, heavenly peace in their hearts, this spiritual joy, this exceedingly great confidence, through the false teachers who had dragged them back into bondage under the Law. The apostle knew that the members of the congregations in Galatia went about sad and depressed, uncertain of their salvation. They were like men bewitched. They imagined, since salvation was such a great treasure, they must do something great for it, and their later teachers impressed this upon them as their duty. They regarded their misery, their unfitness for everything good, as something for which they had themselves to blame and not the false doctrine that had been put in their hearts.

Remember what the apostle is saying in this text. If you want to revive your future congregations and cause the spirit of peace, joy, faith, and confidence, the childlike spirit, the Spirit of soul-rest, to take up His abode among the members of your congregation, you must, for God's sake, not employ the Law to bring that about. If you find your congregations in the worst condition

imaginable, you must, indeed, preach the Law to them, but follow it up immediately with the Gospel. You may not present the Law to them today and postpone preaching the Gospel to them until a later time. As soon as the Law has done its work, the Gospel must take its place.

This abominable confounding of Law and Gospel is practiced in the grossest form by rationalists. There really are rationalistic preachers who regard the Gospel as a dangerous doctrine, a doctrine that makes men secure and unwilling to strive after godliness, because they are constantly being told that a person is made righteous and saved by faith alone. To make people godly, they preach ethics with great earnestness. What do these rationalists accomplish? The most zealous of them accomplish no more than this, that some of their hearers adopt a certain kind of probity and abstain from gross, shameful vices and crimes, but regard it as something not to be thought of that they must obtain a new heart and love God and their fellow-men. If some one were to arise in a congregation of such people and declare with great joy that he is loving God above all things and that God is his all, that he is everything to him, he would be regarded as speaking out of his mind. Such people have not the least inkling that it is possible to love God above all things. The Second Table of the Law receives no better treatment from them than the First. Little it is that a member of a so-called “free” congregation knows of the Second Table, in spite of the zealous preaching of virtue and piety by his minister. When he returns from church, he proceeds to cheat people in enormous fashion and calls that “business”. He may be merged in sin and shame and pass for an honorable man. On occasion he may show himself liberal and give a hundred dollars today, but cheat people out of a thousand tomorrow. His maxim is: Charity begins at home. When he is reproved for not conducting his business in the interest of his fellow-men, but for the purpose of making a lot of money, he considers that fanaticism. You see, by means of the Law we cannot raise anything better than miserable hypocrites.

The situation among the papists is similar. They know nothing of the free grace of God in Jesus Christ. They preach ethics continually, interspersed with all sorts of references to Mary and the saints, but not a word of the Gospel. They do not direct the poor sinner to Christ, but represent Christ as the Judge of all the world and urge men to seek help from the saints who are to intercede for them with Christ and make Christ gracious to them. That is the diabolical

teaching of the antichristian Papacy. What do they accomplish? What is the fruit of their teaching? Read the reports from countries in which the papists are dominant and are not be watched by the Protestants. Conditions in those countries and the lives of the priests are most abominable. The people know that their priest is the father of a number of illegitimate children; but since he has received ordination, they believe that one can obtain forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation from him. The most faithful Catholics are the Irish, a vulgar people who practice all kinds of knavery and go to confession at Easter, where they recite their wrong doings to the priest, have a money fine imposed on them, or are told to fast or eat fish on such and such days — and their account is settled. What an abominable practice!

However, this confounding of Law and Gospel occurs not only among rationalists and papists, but also in the orthodox Church, in numerous instances. It is committed, in the first place, by such as have arrived at the assurance of their state of grace only after much struggling and great anguish. They may have struggled for many years, refusing to be comforted, because they did not know the pure doctrine. When such people start out to proclaim the pure doctrine, they always intersperse their Gospel-preaching with remarks which cause their hearers to say to themselves that the preacher must be a godly man, but that he does not know what poor men his hearers are; for they are sure that they cannot meet the requirements laid down by the preacher. These preachers represent the best type among errors of this kind.

In the second place, this confounding of Law and Gospel occurs when ministers become aware that all their Gospel-preaching is useless because gross sins of the flesh still occur among their hearers. There may be drunkards among them or people who indulge in fist-fights, etc. These people come to church occasionally, but rarely to Communion and refuse to contribute when a collection is taken up. Now, the preacher may come to the conclusion that he has preached too much Gospel to them and must adopt a different policy; he must hush the Gospel for a while and preach nothing but the Law, and conditions will improve. But he is mistaken; the people do not change, except that they will become very angry with their minister for not permitting them to do what they very much like to do. A collection is taken up, which nets twenty cents, when he had expected twenty dollars. He resolves to give these people hell and damnation next Sunday. Possibly he may increase the collection by a few dollars, but the offering is worthless in the sight of God, because it was

made under coercion. Would a planter be pleased with slaves whom he sees, as a rule, lazily lounging about the plantation working only at the crack of a whip? Certainly not. Neither does God love service rendered under coercion. Preachers who have succeeded in abolishing certain evils by the preaching of the Law must not think that they have achieved something great. Even the most corrupt congregation can be improved, however, by nothing else than the preaching of the Gospel in all its sweetness. The reason why congregations are corrupt is invariably this, that its ministers have not sufficiently preached the Gospel to the people. It is not to be wondered at that nothing has been accomplished by them: for the Law kills, but the Spirit, that is, the Gospel makes alive.

Let me submit *Luther's* comments on Rom 12, 1 ("I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God."). He writes (St. L. Ed. XII, 318): "Paul does not say: I command you; for he is preaching to such as are already Christians and godly by faith, in newness of life. These must not be coerced by means of commandments, but admonished to do willingly what has to be done with the old sinful man in them. *For any person who does not do this willingly, simply in answer to kind admonitions, is not a Christian; and any person who wants to achieve this result by force applied to such as are unwilling is not a Christian preacher or ruler, but a worldly jailer.* A preacher of the Law comes down on men with threats and punishments; a preacher of divine grace coaxes and urges men by reminding them of the goodness and mercy which God has shown them. For He would have no unwilling workers nor heedless service; He wants men to be glad and cheerful in the service of God. Any person who will not permit himself to be coaxed and urged with sweet and pleasant words, which remind him of the mercy of God abundantly bestowed upon him in Christ, to do good joyfully and lovingly to the honor of God and for the benefit of his fellow men, is worthless, and all that is done for him is labor lost. If he is not melted and dissolved in the fire of heavenly love and grace, how can he be softened and made cheerful by laws and threats? It is not a man's mercy, but the mercy of God that is bestowed on us; and this mercy Paul wants us to consider in order that we may be incited and moved by it to serve God."

It is a shocking sight to see a preacher do all he can to produce dead works and turn the members of his congregation into hypocrites in the sight of God. When good works are forced from men by the threats or even the promises of the Law, they are not good works. Only those are good works which a person

does freely and from the heart. Everybody knows that. When a person whose funds are low is approached by a beggar and he reluctantly gives him an alms, his conscience tells him that the deed was worthless because it was done from constraint and not willingly. Or if some one makes you a present and you notice that he does it only to obtain a favor from you, you will not relish the present. You rejoice over a gift only when you know that it has been given from love. Even the most beautiful present is loathed when it is given under constraint. To our Father in heaven, likewise, forced gifts are repulsive.

An enforcer of laws, like a jailer, is not concerned about the condition of the heart of the person with whom he must deal, but only about enforcing that person's obedience. He stands before his victim with a scourge and tells him that the scourge will come down on his back if he does not obey. The jailer is not concerned about godly motives among his prisoners. The prisoners, on the other hand, while they are fast in stocks and in their cells and are forced to obey, are revolving plans in their minds how to avoid being caught at their next theft. That is what a preacher of the law does to the members of a Christian congregation: he puts them in stocks and fetters them.

Let no minister think that he cannot induce the unwilling to do God's will by preaching the Gospel to them and that he must rather preach the Law and proclaim the threatenings of God to them. If that is all he can do, he will only lead his people to perdition. Rather than act the policeman in his congregation, he ought to change the hearts of his members in order that they may without constraint do what is pleasing to God with a glad and cheerful heart. A person who has a real understanding of the love of God in Christ Jesus is astonished at its fire, which is able to melt anything in heaven and on earth. The moment he believes in this love he cannot but love God and from gratitude for his salvation do anything from love of God and for His glory. It is a useless effort to try to soften with laws and threatenings such hearts as are not melted by having the love of God in Christ Jesus presented to them. The best preachers are those who in this respect do as Luther did, such as preach the Law only accomplish nothing. In such measure as you exhibit the Law in its spiritual meaning, in that measure you sink your hearers into despair, but do not make them willing to serve God.

In conclusion, let me cite to you what Luther says in explanation of the words in Ps 110, 3: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauty of holiness." The prophet means to say: "At the present time,

sacrifices are not offered to God willingly, but in dread terror of hell and from fear. But when thou shalt have conquered, after the completion of thy redeeming work, then people shall offer willing sacrifices.” *Luther* writes (St. L. Ed. V 988 f.): “Furthermore, when the point is reached where preachers purpose to teach the people what God requires of us and preach the Law, or Ten Commandments, with their threats of punishment, and their promises of blessings to incite and urge men to godliness, it is possible that some may be moved to attempt being godly and serving God and exercising themselves diligently and earnestly in the works of the Law, as St. Paul did before he was converted and became a Christian.” Saul was quite earnest in his efforts, but all his doings were hypocritical; for the Law accomplishes no more than to make people perform outward acts, in which their hearts do not cooperate. It leads men to a pharisaical knowledge of the Law and to pharisaical activities. “However, all this is sheer hypocrisy and mere external piety, under constraint of the law, and does not pass muster in the sight of God. There is not yet any cordial love for the Law in it nor any cheerfulness of heart to do the Law; no genuine inward obedience, fear, trust, or knowledge of God. Yea, such people do not know or understand that the law requires perfect obedience of the heart; they do not recognize their sins and disobedience; they behold the Law only through a veil and continue in their blindness, never understanding what God requires from them and how far they are from rendering it. But when *the Law reaches its culmination* and puts forth its best and principal effort, by bringing man to a clear knowledge and understanding that God requires of him perfect obedience with all his heart, that he is not rendering, and cannot render, such obedience, and hence feels in and about himself nothing than sins and the anger of God, then it is that *the real, horrible disobedience against God begins to stir in him*, and he realizes the utter inability of his nature to render such obedience and the futility of forcing from him cordial and willing obedience to God by the Law. He finds that the very opposite effect is produced in him: sentenced by the Law, subjected to the anger of God, and condemned to hell, his nature begins to hate the Law and conceives a horrible anger and bitter hatred against God, sin is becoming very sinful in him, and he falls into blasphemy, despair, and eternal death, unless he is rescued out of this condition by the Gospel of Christ.”