

FOURTEENTH EVENING LECTURE.

(January 16, 1885.)

As regards the difference between the Lutheran and the Reformed Church, my friends, the Lutheran people, at least in former times, imagined that the whole difference was this, that in reciting the Lord's Prayer in German, the Lutheran put the word "Father" first, the Reformed the word "Our" and that in the Lord's Supper, wafers, which are not broken, are used in the Lutheran Church, while the Reformed churches use ordinary bread, which they break at the distribution or before. For this horrible ignorance the unfaithful ministers of our Church are to be blamed. They have shamefully neglected their people.

In view of this ignorance it is, of course, not surprising that these poor Lutherans finally yielded to overtures for a union with the Reformed. Recently, however, a change has taken place: the violently enforced establishment of the United Church in the very country where it was attempted first, in Prussia, has brought about a reconsideration by our beloved Lutheran people of the points of difference between the Reformed and the Lutheran Church. In 1817, when the Union was inaugurated, *Claus Harms*, pastor and professor at the University of Kiel, published a new series of Ninety-five Theses for use at the celebration of the Tercentenary of the Reformation. In Thesis 95 he says: "A copulation is now contemplated, which is to enrich that poor handmaiden, the Lutheran Church." However, he adds this warning: "Do not attempt it on Luther's grave; his bones will take on new life, and then the Lord have mercy on you!" His prophecy has been fulfilled. Nowadays any Lutheran child that has received at least a passable instruction in the Christian doctrine knows that there is indeed a great difference, involving the principal articles of Christian doctrine, between the Lutheran and the Reformed Church. To-day the Lutheran people are well informed on this point: Lutherans adhere firmly to the words of Christ, forever true: "This *is* My body; this *is* My blood." Lutherans, accordingly, believe that the body and blood of Christ are substantially and truly present in the Holy Supper and are administered to, and received by, the communicants, while those clear words, plain as daylight, are interpreted by the Reformed to mean: "This signifies the body of Christ; this signifies His blood." Accordingly, the Reformed contend that the body and blood of Christ are removed from the Holy Supper as far as the heavens are from the earth, because they are limited to the heavenly mansions and His return to earth is not to be expected until the Last Day.

Nowadays all Lutheran people know that according to Scripture, the Book of eternal truth, Holy Baptism is the washing of regeneration, a means by which regeneration is effected from on high through the Holy Spirit; while the Reformed contend that Baptism is merely a sign, symbol, or representation of something that has previously taken place

in a person.

Nowadays all Lutheran people know that the human nature of Christ, through its union with the divine nature, has received also divine attributes, namely, that omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and the honor of adoration have been communicated to it; while the Reformed contend that between the man Christ and other men there is a difference only of degree, namely, that Christ has received greater gifts. However, even the highest gifts which His human nature possesses are claimed to be creature gifts, the same as in other creatures.

Nowadays all Lutheran people know that according to the Holy Scriptures the saving grace of the Father is universal; so is the redemption of the Son, and likewise the effective calling of the Holy Spirit through the Word; while the teaching of the Reformed Church on these three points is particularistic, because the Reformed most emphatically contend that God has created the greater part of the human race unto eternal damnation and has accordingly assigned them even in eternity to everlasting death. In the clear light of the precious, saving Gospel this is an appalling, a horrible doctrine.

To be brief, every Lutheran knows nowadays that the difference between the Lutheran and the Reformed Church is fundamental: it lies, not on the circumference, but in the very center of the Christian doctrine.

What is the reason, then, that in spite of these facts many who claim to be Lutherans have allowed themselves to become enmeshed in the unionistic net and, while claiming to be Lutherans, calmly remain in the Union, which is nothing but an emergency device? They are in a Church that has not been established by Christ, but by an earthly king; a church in which not all speak the same things nor hold the same views, as the apostle requires in I Cor. 1; a Church in which there is not that one faith, one Baptism, one hope, which the apostle, Eph. 4, predicates of the Church of Jesus Christ. What is the reason? It is nothing else than the notion that, spite of the many and grave errors of the Reformed Church, there is an agreement between it and the Lutheran Church in the principal points. It is claimed that the relation between these two churches is entirely different from that existing between the Lutheran and the Romish Church. There is truth in the claim mentioned last; but if the Reformed Church were in agreement with us in the main points, — a consummation devoutly to be wished! — it would speedily reach an agreement with us also in the few points of minor importance. But what the Reformed Church lacks is just this — it cannot correctly answer the question, “What must I do to be saved?” In the very doctrine of justification, the cardinal doctrine of the Lutheran Church, the Reformed Church is not in agreement with us; it does not point the right way to grace and salvation. Few there are in our day who perceive this point. All the Reformed, and the sects that are derived from the Reformed Church, affirm that a person is saved by grace alone. But the moment you examine their practise, you immediately discover that, while they hold this truth in theory, they do not put it into effect,

but rather point in the opposite direction.

The thesis which we are approaching tonight invites a discussion of this subject

Thesis IX.

In the fifth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when sinners who have been struck down and terrified by the Law are directed, not to the Word and the Sacraments, but 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.

The doctrine which is denounced in this thesis is common to all the Reformed and to the sects of Reformed origin, including the Baptists, the Methodists, the Evangelical Alliance, the Episcopalians, the Presbyterians. All these are only branches of the great tree of the Reformed Church. The pure evangelical doctrine of the way in which a poor, alarmed sinner arrives at the assurance that God is gracious to him is not heard among these people; this way is not shown by any of these sects.

In order to obtain a divine assurance regarding the proper way of rightly dividing the Word, so as to meet the errors named in our thesis, let us examine a few pertinent examples recorded in Scripture. Let us observe the holy apostles, who were filled with the Holy Spirit and, being prompted by Him, no doubt divided the Word of God rightly and showed alarmed sinners the right way to rest and peace and assurance of their state of grace with God. In order to remove every possible doubt, let us examine the treatment which the apostles accorded the greatest and grossest sinners.

In Acts 2 we have a record of the way in which the Apostle Peter treated people who a few weeks previously had cried, "Crucify, crucify Him!" These recreants, who at the tribunal of Pilate had shouted, "'Away with Him!' Hustle the cursed wretch to the gibbet! We shall gladly exchange Him for Barabbas!" had been led by curiosity to the house where the outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place. They heard the roaring of the mighty wind and came to investigate the phenomenon. We observe that Peter, to begin with, reproved those who mockingly said the apostles were filled with new wine. He showed them that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was nothing but the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy. He next rehearses the story of the suffering, death, resurrection, and final ascension of Jesus, concluding with these words: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ." Though expressed in a few words, that was a terrible Law sermon. Accordingly, we are told in v. 37: "Now, when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart." When these words of the apostle struck their hearts, they had the sensation of having been stabbed there with a dagger. They trembled; they were horrified; and the Holy Spirit drove the apostle's thrust home and made them realize what a terrible sin they had committed by crucifying their own Messiah. "And they said to Peter and to the

rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

How does the apostle act in this instance? Does he say: "You will have to make a personal effort to amend your conduct; you must come to a still more penitent knowledge of your sins; you must go down on your knees and cry for mercy; perhaps God will then help you and receive you into grace"? Nothing of the kind. He said to them: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Μετανοεῖτε ("repent ye") means: "Change your minds." It refers quite plainly to what is called the second part of repentance, *viz.*, faith. The term is here used in the figure of synecdoche, because the Law had already done its work upon these hearers. Accordingly, it was far from the Apostle Peter's mind to bring about their salvation by hurting them into still greater distress, anguish, and terror. Now that their heart had been pricked, he was satisfied. They were now prepared to hear the most blessed Gospel and receive it into their hearts. Therefore the apostle now addressed them thus: "You must change your minds and believe the Gospel of the Crucified One; you must dismiss all your errors and be baptized at once in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." This answer of the apostle testified to them when they received Baptism: "Your sins are forgiven. You are now in a right relation to God. Your terrible sins are remembered no more." The apostle adds these words: "And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"; and the record of this incident is concluded thus: "For the promise is unto you and to your children and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord, our God, shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

That is the whole story. Other demands the apostle did not make; his hearers were only to listen to his words and take comfort in these soothing words of consolation, this promise of the forgiveness of their sins, of life and salvation. We are not told about measures such as the sects in our day employ. More about these anon.

That was the first sermon delivered by Peter, coming, so to speak, fresh from the forge of the Holy Spirit. He went to work with the most intense ardor of faith and with a single sermon gained three thousand souls, to whom he brought rest and peace and the assurance of salvation. In v. 42 we are told: "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Hence, theirs was not a transient fervor, such as that frequently produced by itinerant enthusiasts in our day at their revivals. No; their hearts had been profoundly stirred and completely changed. They rejoiced and cheerfully took upon themselves all ignominy and persecution, all sufferings which the Christians of that time had to endure.

To this first example illustrating the apostles' practise let me add a second one: the conversion of the jailer at Philippi, which is recorded Acts 16. While we met with Jews in the first instance, we are here told about a heathen, and a very godless heathen at that.

In vv. 19 and 20 we read: “And when her masters” (the masters of the damsel from whom Paul had expelled the soothsaying spirit of divination) “saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas and drew them into the market-place unto the rulers and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being *Jews*, do exceedingly trouble our city.” That was their politic move — the Jews were universally hated and despised. They raised this further charge, v. 21: “And teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive neither to observe, being Romans.” These noble people claimed to be baked from better dough than any other nation. The record proceeds: “And the multitude rose up together against them. And the magistrates rent off their clothes and commanded to beat them” (mark you, without their having been given a due hearing). “And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely; who, having received such charge, thrust them into the inner prison and made their feet fast in the stocks.” Vv. 22. 24. The jailer had not been ordered to apply the severe measures last named. He did not know whether the apostles had been lawfully committed to jail, but he did not care. He was an inhuman brute.

The story continues: “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them.” V. 25. Undoubtedly the jailer, too, heard them, and it surely must have made a powerful impression on him. Very likely he had expected them to sit in their cell gnashing their teeth and cursing the jailer; instead he hears them chanting praises to God. He must have mused: “These are queer men; never before did I have prisoners in this house of correction like these.”

And now we read: “And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep and seeing the prison-doors open, he drew out his sword and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.” Vv. 26–27. Inattention to duty was no joke under the government of the Romans. If prisoners escaped from jail, the keeper of the prison was held responsible. In the case of especially dangerous characters the jailer was apt to be punished with death if they escaped. Now, this jailer did not believe in a God who would judge him. Accordingly he calculated thus: Since I am to be sentenced to death anyway, what is life worth to me? I prefer to be my own executioner.

“But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm, for we are all here.” V. 28. Imagine the impression that cry made on the jailer! He had thrust the apostles into the inner prison, and instead of bearing him a grudge for that and plotting revenge upon him, they arrest his suicidal hand by shouting to him as they did.

From the psalms the apostles had sung the jailer had very likely understood this much, that they were men who wished to tell the people how to find a happy fate beyond Hades. In his great distress he now beseeches the apostles: “Sirs, what must I do to

be saved?" V. 30. If the apostles had been fanatics, they would have said to him: "My dear friend, this is no easy matter. Before a godless, reckless man like you can be saved, an elaborate and extensive cure is necessary, which we shall prescribe to you." Not a word of this. They behold in the jailer a person fit to receive the Gospel. He was as godless as before; he had not yet conceived a hatred of sin. He says nothing about that. All he wants is to escape the punishment of sin and obtain a happy, blessed fate beyond the grave.

Notwithstanding this we read: "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house. And they spake unto him the Word of the Lord and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway." Vv. 31–33. *That same night* the jailer is converted, obtains faith and the assurance that he is accepted with God, and reconciled. He is become a beloved child of God.

What measures did the apostles apply to him? Nothing beyond proclaiming the Gospel to him without any condition attached to it. They tell him unqualifiedly: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." That makes the apostles' practise plain. In every instance where their word had produced faith, they administered Baptism immediately. They did not say: "We have to take you through an extensive course of instruction and expound to you accurately and thoroughly all the articles of the Christian creed. After that, we shall have to put you on probation to see whether you can become an approved Christian." Nothing of the sort. The jailer asks to be baptized because he knows that is the means for receiving him into the kingdom of Christ; and they promptly administer Baptism to him.

Compare with this apostolic practise that of the Reformed Church in our day. (I am referring to all the sects that have sprung from the Reformed Church.) If they were to see a Lutheran minister adopting the practise of the apostles, they would cry out: "How can that godless and lax preacher act that way? Why, he ought first to impress on the sinner that he must feel the grace of God in his heart. Instead of that he comforts him and even baptizes him." However, that is the Biblical method, and being Biblical, it is the Lutheran method; for the Lutheran Church is nothing else thin the Bible Church; it does not deviate from the Bible, does not take aught away or add to it, but stands squarely upon the Word of God. That is the leading principle which the Lutheran Church carries out in all its teachings and in its practise.

In conclusion we read: "And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." He had a good reason for rejoicing. He meant to declare that, while formerly he had no God and was without hope in this world, he had now found God and a Savior who had redeemed him, having purchased him with his precious God's blood, and had given him the promise that he would come again and receive him into the Kingdom of Glory.

That is the second example from the apostles' practise, which exhibits their method of procedure when it devolved upon them to lead a person to the assurance of the grace of God. Let me now introduce the instance of the conversion of the Apostle Paul himself, recounted very beautifully by himself, Acts 22.

How was this abominable man, who had horribly persecuted the Christians, converted? Speaking from the Temple stairs to the excited Jewish mob, he begins the story of his conversion thus: "Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defense which I now make unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence.)" Vv. 1–2. Nearly on every occasion when he appeared in public, especially before an audience of Jews, Paul told the story of his conversion. On this occasion he addressed them in Hebrew, to arouse their attention. Few people at that time understood Hebrew well, but Paul, being a learned man, understood it well. In the complete silence that now fell upon his audience not a word was lost to his hearers. He told them: "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel and taught according to the perfect manner of the Law of the fathers and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest cloth bear me witness and all the estate of the elders; from whom also I received letters unto the brethren and went unto Damascus to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem for to be punished." Vv. 3–5.

Paul classifies the Jews in their present state with himself in his unconverted state. He, too, had persecuted the new religion, forcing its adherents by painful tortures to renounce and abominate Christ.

He proceeds: "And it came to pass that, as I made my journey and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And I answered, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light and were afraid, but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me." (Paul was to know that *he* was meant; he alone heard the voice. For that reason, too, Jesus addressed him by name.) "And I said, What shall I Do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do." Vv. 6–10.

He was to be converted by nothing else than the Word. The Savior, at this point, does not preach conversion to him. He is to learn through men what he is to do to be saved.

"And when I could not see for the glory of that light," Paul proceeds, "being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the Law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came

unto me and stood and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.” Vv. 11–13.

Ananias had had a vision from the Lord in which he had been told what to say when he would see Saul. In view of the instruction he had received he immediately, upon entering, addressed Saul as “brother.”

Continuing his account, Paul relates: “And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee that thou shouldest know His will and see that just One and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth. For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now, why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Vv. 14–16.

Ananias, then, does not say: “First you must pray until you have a sensation of inward grace.” No, he tells him: Having come to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus, your first step must be to receive Baptism for the washing away of your sins. And then call upon the Lord Jesus. That is the true order of saving grace: not praying first for the grace of God, but after one has learned to know the grace of God. Prior to that he cannot pray acceptably.

In this instance the practise of the Lord Himself is exhibited to us. He surely knows how to deal with poor sinners. As soon as Saul became alarmed about his sins, Jesus approached him with His consolation. He did not require him to experience all sorts of feelings, but promptly proclaimed to him the Word of Grace. That shows a true minister of Christ how to proceed when his object is to lead sinners who have been crushed by the Law to the assurance of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

What, now, is the method of the sects? The very contrary of this. True, they also preach the Law first with great sternness, which is quite proper. We do the same, following the method of the apostles and of Christ. The only wrong feature in this part of their preaching is their depiction of the infernal torments, which is usually done in such a drastic manner as to engage the imagination rather than to make their words sink into the depth of the heart. True, they frequently preach excellent sermons on the Law with its awful threatenings; only they do not bring out its spiritual meaning. The faulty effect in the Law preaching of most sects is this: instead of reducing their hearers to the condition where they profess themselves poor, lost, and condemned sinners, who have deserved everlasting wrath, they put them in a state of mind which makes them say: “Is it not terrible to hear God uttering such awful threatenings on account of sin?” If you do not lead a man by the Law to the point where he puts off completely the garment of his own righteousness and declares himself a miserable, wicked man, whose heart is sinning day and night with his evil lusts, thoughts, desires, dispositions, and wishes of all kinds, you have not preached the Law aright. A preacher of the Law must make a person distrust himself even in the least matter until his dying hour and keep him confessing that he is a miserable creature, with no record of good deeds except those which God has ac-

complished through him, spite of the corrupting, deteriorating, and poisoning effects of his own act. If the heart is not put in such condition, the person is not properly prepared for the reception of the Gospel.

But the incorrect preaching of the Law is not the worst feature of the sects. They do not preach the Gospel to such as are alarmed and in anguish. They imagine they would commit the worst sin by immediately offering consolation to such poor souls. They give them a long list of efforts that they must make in order, if possible, to be received into grace: how long they must pray, how strenuously they must fight and wrestle and cry, until they can say that they feel they have received the Holy Ghost and divine grace and can rise from their knees shouting hallelujahs. In order to accelerate this process in larger gatherings, Methodist preachers induce the brethren and sisters to kneel with the candidate for conversion and cry for the forgiveness of his sins. Sometimes the effort is futile, sometimes the desired result is not attained in weeks and months. If a sincere candidate confesses that he only feels his inability and is full of evil inclinations, he is told that he is still in a sorry condition and that he must continue to wrestle in prayer until he finally experiences a feeling of divine grace. Then he is told to praise God because he is rid of sin; all is well with him, the penitential agony is over, and he has become a child of God's grace.

But the required feeling may rest on a false foundation. It may not be the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the heart, but a physical effect, produced by the lively presentations of the preacher. That explains why sincere persons who have become believers not infrequently feel one moment that they have found the Lord Jesus, and in the next, that they have lost Him again. Now they imagine that they are in a state of grace; at another time, that they are fallen from grace. What distress is created for such souls in their dying hour when they have no sensation of grace and are worried with the awful thought of damnation and eternal perdition! This may happen oftener than we think. I have no doubt, however, that the Holy Spirit comes to the aid of the poor souls that have been in the hands of such bad practitioners and makes them cast all reliance upon their own laboring, wrestling, and striving overboard, throw themselves into the arms of the free grace of God, and die in peace. However, that blessed effect, wherever it occurs, is not due to Methodist preaching, but to the operation of the Holy Spirit spite of Methodist preaching.

We gather from what I have stated that the faulty practise under review is based on three awful errors.

In the first place, the sects neither believe nor teach a real and complete reconciliation of man with God because they regard our heavenly Father as being a God very hard to deal with, whose heart must be softened by passionate cries and bitter tears. That amounts to a denial of Jesus Christ, who has long ago turned the heart of God to men by reconciling the entire world with Him. God does nothing by halves. In Christ He loves

all sinners without exception. The sins of every sinner are canceled. Every debt has been liquidated. There is no longer anything that a poor sinner has to fear when he approaches his heavenly Father, with whom he has been reconciled by Christ.

However, people imagine that, after Christ has done His share, man must still do his, and man is not reconciled to God until both efforts meet. The sects picture reconciliation as consisting in this, that the Savior made God *willing* to save men, provided men would be willing on their part to be reconciled. But that is the reverse of the Gospel. God is reconciled. Accordingly, the apostle Paul calls on us: "Be ye reconciled to God." That means: Since God has been reconciled to you by Jesus Christ, grasp the hand which the Father in heaven holds out to you. Moreover, the apostle declares: "If one died for all, then were all dead." 2 Cor. 5-14. That means: If Christ died for the sins of all men, that is tantamount to all men's dying and making satisfaction for their sins. Therefore nothing at all is required on the part of man to reconcile God; He already is reconciled. Righteousness lies ready; it must not first be achieved by man. If man were to attempt to do so, that would be an awful crime, a battle against grace and against the reconciliation and perfect redemption accomplished by the Son of God.

In the second place, the sects teach false doctrine concerning the Gospel. They regard it as nothing else than an instruction for man, teaching him what he must do to secure the grace of God, while in reality the Gospel is God's proclamation to men: "Ye are redeemed from your sins; ye are reconciled to God; your sins are forgiven." No sectarian preacher dare make this frank statement. If one of them, for instance, Spurgeon, does do it in some of his sermons, it is a Lutheran element in the teaching of the sects and an exception to the rule. Moreover, he is being severely criticized for it as going too far.

In the third place, the sects teach false doctrine concerning faith. They regard it as a quality in man by which he is improved. For that reason they consider faith such an extraordinarily important and salutary matter.

It is true, indeed, that genuine faith changes a person completely. It brings love into a person's heart. Faith cannot be without love, just as little as fire can be without heat. But this quality of faith is not the reason why it justifies us, giving us what Christ has acquired for us, what hence is ours already and only need be received by us. The Scriptural answer to the question: "What must I do to be saved?" is: "You must believe; hence you are not to do anything at all yourself." In that sense the apostle answered the question when it was addressed to him. He practically told the jailer: "You are to do nothing but accept what God has done for you, and you have it and become a blessed person." That is the precious teaching of the divine Word.

Having this doctrine, what exceedingly happy and blessed people we Lutherans are! This teaching takes us to Christ by a straight route. It opens heaven to us when we feel hell in our hearts. It enables us to obtain grace at any moment without losing time by following a wrong way, striving for grace by our own effort, as we sometimes do with a

good intention. We can approach Christ directly and say: "Lord Jesus, I am a poor sinner; I know it; that has been my experience in the past, and when I reflect what is going on in my heart now, I must say, that is still my experience. But Thou hast called me by Thy Gospel. I come to Thee just as I am; for I could come no other way." That is the saving doctrine which the Evangelical Lutheran Church has learned from Christ and the apostles.

Use this doctrine to your own advantage, my friends. It would be awful if one of you would have to retire this evening with the thought in his heart: "I do not know whether God is gracious to me, whether He has accepted me as His child, and whether my sins are forgiven. If God were to call me hence to-night, I would not be sure whether I should die saved." God grant that no one of you will retire in that frame of mind; for he would lie down to rest with the wrath of God abiding on him.

God's disposition towards us is as we picture it to ourselves. If one believes that God is gracious to him, he certainly has a gracious God. If we dress our heavenly Father up as a scarecrow, as a God who is angry with us, we *have* an angry God, and His wrath rests upon us. However, the God that is angry with us has been removed by our Savior; we now have a God who takes pity on us.

I cherish another wish concerning you, to wit, that you may be filled with great cheerfulness to proclaim this most blessed doctrine some day with joy to your congregations. If you had to preach nothing else than sterile ethics, you might consider that a tedious task, yielding meager results. But if you have experienced in your heart what it means to convey to poor, lost, and condemned sinners the consolation of the Gospel and say to them: "Do but come and believe," — I say, if you believe this and ponder the full meaning of this, you cannot but look forward with joy to the day when you will stand for the first time before your congregations to deliver this august message. Moreover, you will surely be forced to say: "I have certainly chosen the most beautiful and glorious calling on earth." For a messenger of good tidings is always welcome. God grant that by His gracious help such may be your good fortune!