

THIRTY-FIFTH EVENING LECTURE.

(September 18, 1885.)

Jesus says regarding Himself: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." John 14, 6 Peter confirms this statement by his declaration before the Jewish Sanhedrin, saying: "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Acts 4, 12 Paul adds his testimony by telling his Corinthians: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." I Cor 2, 2. Verily, then, it is a great and awful sin not to draw any soul that has been entrusted to us for instruction to Jesus and not to tell that soul again and again what a treasure it has in the Lord Jesus, its Savior. To keep some one from believing in Christ is such an awful sin that words cannot express it. A preacher who restrains a soul from confidently laying hold of Christ — no matter whether he does it consciously or unconsciously, purposely or from blindness, through malice or as the result of a perverted zeal for the salvation of souls — deprives that soul, as far as he is concerned, of everlasting life. Instead of being a shepherd to that soul, he becomes a ravening wolf to it; instead of being its physician, he becomes its murderer; yea, instead of being an angel of God, he becomes a devil to that person. Alas, ever so many preachers have not realized until their dying day how many souls they have kept away from Christ by their unevangelical preaching and by their own fault have cause the souls entrusted to them to die of spiritual starvation. The result was that these unhappy preachers shortly before their death have had a severe soul-battle to fight with self-accusations and despair, and not a few of them have departed this life without consolation, in anguish, misery, and despair.

The worst offenders in this respect are the so-called rationalistic preachers, who with diabolical audacity mount Christian pulpits and instead of preaching Christ, the Savior, to all sinners, recite their miserable moral precepts for a virtuous life and fill the ears of the people with their empty bombast. To these rationalistic mercenaries, "whose God is their belly," Phil 3, 19 the terrible woe is addressed, even in our day, which the Lord denounced, saying: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." Matt 23, 13. What terror shall seize these preachers who used to call themselves friends and adorers of Jesus Christ when they must appear before His judgement-seat and hear Him address them in words of flaming anger: "I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." Matt 7, 23.

However, equally grievous is the offense of papists in this respect. They, too, do not draw men to Christ, the Savior and Friend of sinners, but represent Christ as a more rigorous lawgiver even than Moses because he has laid on men many more and much more

rigorous commandments than Moses. A poor sinner coming to a priest in his anguish for advice is not directed to Christ, but to Mary, the so-called “Mother of Mercy”. They have taught men to be afraid of Christ, telling them that Mary must take them under her sheltering cloak. Or they direct them to some tutelary saint. For this horrible sin of directing poor souls away from Christ they will have to suffer the wrath of God, which will consign them to the place where “the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever.” Rev 14, 11 For failing to teach and proclaim Christ, telling men not to believe in Him, is as heinous an offense as blasphemously to brand Christ as a fanatic as the unbelievers do.

Well, it is easy to avoid this gross manner of keeping men away from Christ. I need not warn you against it. But it is difficult to avoid doing the same thing in a more refined manner. Innumerable preachers imagined that they were preaching Christ and proclaiming His doctrine until their eyes were opened and they saw that they had concealed Christ from the eyes of poor sinners and had directed men away from Him rather than to Him. This more refined way of keeping men away from Christ is discussed in our twenty-second Thesis.

Thesis XXII.

In the eighteenth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when a false distinction is made between a person's being awakened and his being converted; moreover, when a person's INABILITY to believe is mistaken for his not BEING PERMITTED to believe.

During the first half of the eighteenth century those who were guilty before others of this serious confusion of Law and Gospel were the so-called Pietists. To these belonged, among others, such theologians of Halle as August Herman Francke, Breithaupt, Anastasius Freylinghausen, Rambach, Joachim Lange, and those who had publicly adopted their views, like Bogatsky, Fresenius, and many others. These men were guilty of that more refined way of confounding Law and Gospel, namely, of keeping men away from Christ. They did this by making a false distinction between spiritual awakening and conversion; for they declared that, as regards the way of obtaining salvation, all men must be divided into three classes: 1. those still unconverted; 2. those who have been awakened; 3. those who have been converted.

Admitting that these Pietists were well-intentioned men and by no means wished to depart from the right doctrine, still their classification was utterly wrong. They would have been right if by people who have been awakened they had understood such persons as occasionally receive a powerful impression the Word of God, of the Law and of the Gospel, but promptly stifle the impression, so that it is rendered ineffectual. For there are, indeed, men who can no longer continue to live in their carnal security, but suppress their unrest until God smites them again with the hammer of His Law and then makes

them taste the sweetness of the Gospel. But the awakened persons to whom the Pietists referred are no longer to be numbered with the unconverted. According to Scripture we can assume only two classes: those who are converted and those who are not.

True, there are people who, when contrasted with true Christians, could be called awakened if they are not measured by the pattern of Holy Scripture. A great number of instances of such people are found in the Scriptures. Herod Antipas was one of them. We are told that he heard John the Baptist gladly because John preached many comforting sermons in which he pointed to the promised Messiah. He also asked John's advice occasionally and followed it. Nevertheless he remained the Herod he had always been. By this King's order John had to lose his head to please a miserable dancing girl.

Another instance is that of Felix the governor. Paul preached to him with great zest concerning righteousness, temperance (chastity), and judgment to come. Paul's sermons struck home, and his own conscience convicted Felix of being a reprobate, and if Paul preached the truth, which he did, Felix would be lost, fornicator, unjust judge, and adulterer that he was. But he stifled the conviction immediately and dismissed Paul, saying: "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." Acts 24, 25. But he never did call for him; he was unwilling to hear that reproving voice again.

A similar instance is that of Festus. When Paul had thundered at him, preaching the Law to him, and then had proclaimed the good tidings of the Gospel, he cried: "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." Acts 26, 24 In spite of the deep impression which the preaching of Paul had made on him, he declared Paul a fanatic.

Another instance is that of Agrippa, who even said to Paul: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Acts 26, 28. What a powerful impression the apostle's address must have made on the king to wrest this public profession from him that it would not take much to make him one of the despised and maligned Christians! What was lacking to make him a Christian? Nothing else than this, that he would not cease his willful, stubborn resistance and allow the Lord to overcome him. On the contrary, he tried to conquer the Lord and remained in his unconverted state.

People like these must not be numbered with the converted. But it is wrong to call them awakened. When Scripture speaks of awakening, it always means conversion. You must bear this in mind when reading writings of Pietists, which contain a great deal of good. You must divide men into only two classes. The following passages will show you that by awakening Scripture means conversion: —

Eph 5, 14 *Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee light.* This is evidently a call to genuine conversion and repentance. We are to awake from spiritual sleep and arise from spiritual death. Any one who is thus awakened is roused, not from spiritual sleep, but from spiritual sleep, and being awake, he

has become alive,, which means nothing else than that he is a Christian.

Eph 2, 4–6 *But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace are ye saved) and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ.* According to this passage being awakened and being quickened are identical. Anyone who has been awakened is in a blessed state: he has been translated into a heavenly life the moment he was awakened by the Holy Spirit.

Col 2, 12 *Buried with Him in Baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead.* The event described in this text took place “through faith”. Accordingly, no one can be awakened unless he has faith. That means, he must be a Christian.

However, Pietists object that a person who has not experienced a genuine, thorough contrition in his heart is not yet converted, but merely awakened. By thorough contrition they mean a contrition like that of David, who spent whole nights crying and weeping in his bed and walked almost bowed down with grief for days. Anyone who has not passed through these experiences, who has not yet been sealed with the Holy Spirit, is not quite assured of his state of grace and of salvation, is always wavering or shows himself uncharitable, lacking genuine patience, and the proper willingness to serve his fellow-men; such a person, they claim, is certainly not a Christian, still unconverted and only awakened. This is an erroneous assumption. A person may have become a true Christian without experiencing the great and terrible anguish of David. For although David really passed through these experiences, the bible does not say that everyone must pass through the same experiences and suffer in the same degree. As regards the sealing with the Holy Spirit, we read in Eph 1, 13: “In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.” The sealing presupposes faith, although it may be a very weak faith, a faith that is constantly struggling with anxieties and doubts. God does not grant to every one immediately boldness of faith and heroic courage. That this is the pure unadulterated truth can be seen in every record we have of people that were converted. Take, for instance, the first Pentecostal audience. We are told that these people were pricked in their hearts and asked the apostles: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter does not say to them: “Wait a while; first you must pass through a severe penitential struggle; you will have to wrestle with God and cry to Him for a long time until the Holy Spirit gives you the inward assurance that you have obtained grace and are saved.” No; the apostle merely says: “Repent and be baptized,” and immediately they received baptism. “Repent” means: “turn to your Lord Jesus, believe in Him, and as a seal of your faith receive Baptism, and everything will be right.” Of these newly converted people we are told further on: “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers.” Acts 2, 37, 38, 42 Hence they had become truly converted in a few moments.

The same observation meets us in the case of the Ethiopian treasurer. Philip merely says to him: "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest," namely, be baptized. When the treasurer answered: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," Philip was fully satisfied; for he knew what the treasurer meant by his confession, namely, that he believed in the Messiah, God and man. After he had been baptized, they parted and probably never saw each other again. Philip was not worried in the least whether the man was actually converted; he was quite certain of his conversion because he had declared: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Acts 8, 37ff.

The jailer at Philippi was in despair, not on account of his sins, but because he feared that he would be executed for allowing all his prisoners to escape. Paul arrested the jailer's hand as he was about to stab himself and cried: "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here." The jailer was thunderstruck. He recalled the thoughts that had stirred his heart during the night while he had heard the prisoners whom he had subjected to such cruel treatment praising and glorifying God. Convicted of the wickedness of his heart and the magnitude of his sin, he fell at the apostle's feet, crying: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul did not say to him: "That cannot be done tonight. We shall first have to give you instruction and ascertain the condition of your heart. We admit that you have been awakened, but you are far from being converted." No; he simply said: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house." Acts 16, 27 ff. The jailer believed and was filled with joy that he had become a believer. That is all that Paul and Silas did. They left him, and when they had been given their liberty, they proceeded on their journey.

Try to find a single instance in the Scriptures where a prophet, apostle, or any other saint pointed the people another way to conversion, telling them that they could not expect to be converted speedily and that they would have to pass through such and such experiences. They always preached in a manner so as to terrify their hearers, and as soon as their hearers realized that there was no refuge for them, as soon as they condemned themselves, and cried, "Is there no help for us?" they told them: "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and all will be well with you."

Fanatics declare that this is not the proper order of conversion. It is not the order of fanatics indeed, but it is God's order. As soon as the Gospel sounded in the ears of the persons aforementioned, it went through their hearts, and they became believers. We read that David, after receiving absolution, still had to suffer a great deal of anguish. But his penitential psalms are at the same time a confession of his assurance that God was gracious to him. It is sheer labor lost when a minister leads a person who has become alarmed over his sins a long way for months and years before that person can say, "Yes, I believe." Such a minister is a spiritual quack; he has not led that soul to Jesus, but to reliance on its own works. In a certain sense the Pietists have been guilty of this awful sin. It is just those ministers who are manifesting great zeal that are in danger of com-

mitting this great and grievous sin. They are sincere and well-intentioned, but they accomplish no more than tormenting souls. To every sinner who has become spiritually bankrupt and asks you: What must I do to be saved? You must say: "That is very simple: Believe in Jesus, your Savior, and all is well."

Consider that according to the Scriptures it is not at all difficult to be converted, but to remain in a converted state, that is difficult. Accordingly, it is a false interpretation to refer the words of the Savior: "Enter ye in at the strait gate", Matt 7, 13, to repentance. Repentance is not a strait gate through which a person has to squeeze. Repentance is something that God Himself must produce in a person. Any kind of repentance which man produces by his own effort is counterfeit and an abomination in the sight of God. We need not worry about our inability to produce repentance in ourselves. We must only apply to ourselves the keen Word of God, and we have the first part of repentance. After that an application of the unqualified Gospel will produce faith in us. All that a person has to do when he hears the Gospel is to accept it. *But this is immediately followed by an inward conflict. The error of false teachers in regard to this matter is that they place this conflict before conversion.* For such a conflict an unconverted person is not qualified. The conflict comes at a later stage, and it is severe. The narrow way is the cross which Christians have to bear, namely, that they have to mortify their own flesh, suffer ridicule, scorn, and ignominy heaped upon them by the world, fight against the devil, and renounce the world with its vanities, treasures, and pleasures. That is a task which causes many to fall away again soon after their conversion and to lose their faith. Wherever the Word of God is proclaimed with the manifestation of the Spirit and power of God, many more people are converted than we imagine. If we could look into the hearts of worshipers in a church where the Word is thus forcefully proclaimed and no works of men are mingled with the teaching of saving grace, we should observe many framing there solution by the grace of God to become Christians; for they are convinced that the preacher is right. But many suppress these sensations the moment they leave the church and seek to persuade themselves that they have been listening to a discourse of a fanatic. Such persons harden themselves Sunday after Sunday and get into almost dangerous condition, past conversion. The Savior Himself says that many "receive the Word with joy," Matt 13, 20, but smother the sprouting germ when tribulations arise. This does not necessarily refer to severe diabolical afflictions, but, in general, to tedium as regards spiritual affairs, sluggishness in prayer, negligence in hearing the Word of God, contempt which Christians have to suffer from worldly men, etc. All these things may dissipate the impressions which had been made on the Christians' hearts. In cases like these Pietists declare that there had been no conversion. But does not the Lord say: "For a while they *believe*"? Luke 8, 13. Hence this second class of hearers, who quickly accept the Gospel, begin to *believe*; however, they do not permit the Word to strike root in their hearts, but at the next temptation to which they are exposed they again surrender to the

world and their own flesh, and all they had gained is lost.

Beware, then, of the illusion that men may become secure if they are told how quickly they may be led to repentance and conversion. On the contrary, consider the greatness of God's mercy. After a person has been converted, he must be told that henceforth he will have to be engaged in daily struggles and must think of making spiritual progress day by day, exercising himself in love, patience, and meekness and wrestling with sin. That is a lesson for converted Christians, who begin to cooperate with divine grace in them. But by the utterly abominable teaching of fanatics these spiritual conflicts are placed before conversion, and God is robbed of the honor due Him.

Our Church declares in the *Formula of Concord*, Sol. Decl., Art II §87 (Mueller, p. 609; *Trigl. Conc.*, p. 913 f.): "The conversion of our corrupt will, which is nothing else than a resuscitation of it from spiritual death, is only and solely the work of God (just as also the resuscitation in the resurrection of the body must be ascribed to God alone), as has been fully set forth above and proved by manifest testimonies of Holy Scripture"

Again, the same confession states (Mueller, p. 591; *Trigl. Conc.*, p. 885): "In a word, it remains eternally true what the Son of God says, John 15, 5: 'Without Me ye can do nothing,' and Paul, Phil 2, 13: 'It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.' To all godly Christians who feel and experience in their hearts a small spark or longing for divine grace and eternal salvation this precious passage is very comforting; for they know that God has kindled in their hearts this beginning of true godliness and that he will further strengthen and help them in their great weakness to persevere in true faith unto the end."

Where there is a spark of longing for mercy, there is faith; for faith is nothing else than longing for mercy. A person in whom this takes place is not merely awakened in the false sense of the word, but he is converted. It is remarkable that in Phil 2, 12–13 the apostle says, first: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," and then continues: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling for the very reason that our heavenly Father must do everything that is necessary for our salvation. That is what the apostle tells people who have been converted. A person who is hardened, blind, dead, cannot work out his own salvation, but a converted person can, and actually does, work out his own salvation. If he fails to do it, he is again stricken with spiritual blindness and relapses into spiritual death.

Our opponents claim that God first awakens a person and in that act gives him the power to decide whether he will be converted or not. That is a rehash of a false doctrine of former times; it overlooks the fact that a person is either spiritually dead or spiritually alive. They claim that a person must first be given a liberated will, which means that he must be quickened before he is converted.

We can see from *Luther* in what condition those must be who are to be brought to

true faith. He says (St. L. Ed. XVIII, 1715): “To begin with, God has given a sure promise to those who have been humbled, *that is, to those who bewail their sin and despair of self-help*. However, no person can thoroughly humble himself until he knows that, regardless of his own strength, counsel, striving, willing, and working, his salvation depends wholly on the good pleasure, counsel, willing, and working of another, namely of God alone.”

Man must be reduced to this strait, that he is convinced of the necessity of his surrendering to God unconditionally because he cannot lift himself out of the mire of his sins. When he is in that condition, he is, in dogmatic terminology, the *materia* (the subject) that is to be converted. It is nothing but labor lost and means robbing God of His honor to urge men to rely on their own efforts towards conversion. That is frequently done by men who are quite serious about their Christianity.

Luther continues: “For as long as a person is convinced that he has some ability, even if it is altogether trifling, to work out his salvation, he continues to trust in himself and does not at all despair of his own efforts. Accordingly, he does not humble himself before God, and he selects a certain place, time, and work by which he hopes, or at least desires, ultimately to obtain salvation, but a person who entertains no doubt whatever that everything depends on the will of God, utterly despairs of his own effort, does not do any choosing, but expects God to *work* in him, *such a person is closest to divine grace* and salvation. Therefore these things are publicly taught for the sake of the elect, in order that they may be saved after having been humbled and crushed in the manner aforesaid. The rest resist this humbling; yea, they reject the teaching that a person must despair of his own efforts and demand that some ability be left them, even though it be quite paltry. These remain secretly proud and enemies of the grace of God. This, I say, is the one reason for teaching the godly who have been humbled to know, to pray for, and to accept the promise of mercy.”

Unless a person is reduced to this condition, it is useless to preach the Gospel to him. He is lost as long as he takes comfort in himself or thinks that he can help himself over his difficulties. Accordingly, a minister must first cause people to hear the thundering of the Law and immediately after that the Gospel. Otherwise many a precious soul may be led to despair and be lost. These souls would one day be demanded of the minister; for God will not suffer Himself to be mocked in this matter.