

## **Working Group: Healthy Pastors of Smaller Congregations**

Facilitator: Brian Heller

- Read Walther's 20<sup>th</sup> Evening Lecture from *Law and Gospel* (below)
- Name a few challenges/blessings you have experienced of serving a small congregation
- How do you care for yourself? How do you deal with feeling like a failure, lonely, etc.?
- Walther notes that we should be unwilling to exchange our parish for a kingdom. How is your parish a kingdom?
- What does it look like, in a small congregation, to do all that you can to save every soul entrusted to you, as Walther states?
- In a small town or congregation, how do you establish people having that confidence in you that Walther talks about (i.e. how do you earn their trust being an 'outsider')?
- How do you turn a "dreary desert into a flourishing garden of God?" What does a flourishing garden of God look like in your community?
- Walther is harsh on ministers who want to keep a nice, comfortable parish by being careful not to make enemies and doing everything he can to make friends. Think about some difficulties with this in small towns/congregations where everyone is either related or knows each other well. How do you remain faithful in these circumstances?
- Walther emphasizes approaching God in prayer in all things. We all took vows to pray for our congregations at our ordinations and installations. How does the Holy Spirit empower and enable you to pray?

## TWENTIETH EVENING LECTURE.

(February 27, 1885.)

MY FRIENDS: —

When a place has been assigned to a Lutheran candidate of theology where he is to discharge the office of a Lutheran minister, that place ought to be to him the dearest, most beautiful, and most precious spot on earth. He should be unwilling to exchange it for a kingdom. Whether it is in a metropolis or in a small town, on a bleak prairie or in a clearing in the forest, in a flourishing settlement or in a desert, to him it should be a miniature paradise. Do not the blessed angels descend from heaven with great joy whenever the Father in heaven sends them to minister to those who are to be heirs of salvation? Why, then, should *we* poor sinners be unwilling to hurry after them with great joy to any place where we can lead other men, our fellow-sinners, to salvation?

However, though great be the joy of a young, newly called pastor on entering his parish, there should be in him an equally great earnestness and determination to do all he can to save every soul entrusted to him. Frequently it may seem to him that the majority, if not all members, of his congregation are still blind, dead, unconverted people. That observation must not make him morose or discourage him, but rather fill him with an ardent desire to rouse them out of spiritual death through the divine means of grace and make them living Christians. In spite of the devil he should take up his work in the power of faith. If he observes that some members of his new charge are even living in manifest shame and vice, he must not despair, but bear in mind that he has a powerful Word by which he can make an effort to liberate these slaves of sin. If he observes that his congregation is on a low level as regards the knowledge of salvation, that his people are still sadly ignorant of what the Gospel really is, he must cheerfully resolve to take up the task of instructing the poor, ignorant people with patience and zeal, until they will see the light. Or he may notice that there are people in his congregation who are sincere, but disposed by their Pietistic schooling to be legalistic, who, therefore, regard some things as sinful that are not sinful. In that case he must resolve to forego exercising his Christian liberty lest he offend souls that regard as

sin something that he feels free to do. On the other hand, he may discover in his congregation members of an Antinomian tendency, who are inclined to go too far in the exercise of their Christian liberty, because they are not accustomed to have the Law preached to them in its severity. In such a case he must not decide forthwith to oppose them with all his force and preach nothing but the sternest Law to them for a whole year. No, he must go after them gently and gradually make them see the stern demands of the Law. For the Apostle Paul says concerning himself: "I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some." I Cor. 9, 22. This statement he wants every servant of Christ to take to heart. Its import is that a minister must not be satisfied with merely proclaiming the truth; he must proclaim the truth so as to meet the needs of his people. He may have to defer saying many things until his people have gained confidence in him and his teaching and he knows that he may frankly tell them anything without fear of repelling them. Briefly, he must resolve to turn his congregation from a dreary desert into a flourishing garden of God.

Again, he may make the very cheering discovery that most of the members of his congregation are old, tried, believing, and active Christians and that there are only a few who make the impression of being unconverted. In that case he must resolve, before anything else, to bring the unconverted to Christ. Of course, he must make up his mind also in due time to give to those well-grounded in the truth the strong meat which they need.

A pitiful object is the young minister who enters upon his office with the thought that his days of hard labor and toil are over, that he has now entered a haven of rest and peace, which he decides to enjoy since now he is his own boss and need not take orders from any person in the world. Equally as pitiable as the attitude to the sacred office which I have just sketched is that of the minister who looks upon his office as his craft, or trade, and resolves to prepare for himself a nice, comfortable parish by being careful not to make enemies and doing everything to make all his people his friends. These unhappy individuals plan to employ spiritual assets for temporal profit. They are not true ministers of Christ, and on the Last Day He will say to them: "I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." Matt. 7, 23.

But blessed is the minister who starts his official work on the very first day with the determination to do everything that the grace of God will enable him to do in order that not a soul in his congregation shall be lost by his fault. Such a one resolves that by the grace of God he will do all he can, so that, when the day comes for him to put down his shepherd's staff, he may be able to say, as Christ said to His Father: Here I am and those that Thou gavest me, and none of them is lost. Even the blood of those who shall stand on the left side of the judgment-seat, he resolves, shall not be on his hands.

But now the question arises: What is the matter of chief concern to a minister who wants to attain this glorious object? He must approach the Lord with heartfelt prayer and earnest entreaties in behalf of his congregation and, when preaching the Word of God with great zeal publicly and privately, jointly or severally, rightly divide the Word of Truth. For that is what Paul demands 2 Tim. 2, 15, saying: "Study to show thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth."

During your present year at the Seminary this very thing, you know, is the subject of our study — the proper division of the Word of God, of Law and Gospel. These two are the cardinal doctrines of all the Holy Scriptures, which are made up of these two. Any passage of Scripture, yea, any historical fact recorded in Scripture can be classified as belonging either to the Law or to the Gospel. No one should be permitted to graduate from a school of theology who is unable to determine whether in any compound clause of Scripture the protasis is Law and the apodosis Gospel, or vice versa. It is your duty to become perfectly clear on this subject.

Many things might still be said in discussion of the ninth thesis, but we must not tarry at this thesis any longer if we wish to finish the series.

### **Thesis X.**

*In the sixth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when the preacher describes faith in a manner as if the mere inert acceptance of truths, even while a person is living in mortal sins, renders that person righteous in the sight of God and saves him; or as if faith makes a person righteous and saves him for the reason that it produces in him love and reformation of his mode of living.*

This evening we shall consider the first part of this thesis, which refers to a mingling of Law and Gospel that occurs chiefly in the Roman Church and which is the principal reason why that Church declines Luther and his doctrine. Luther, you know, taught that good works do not save a person, but only faith, without good works. From this rejection of good work, papists draw the inference that Luther must have been a wicked man because he taught that to get to heaven, man should only believe and need not do any good works. However, that is by no means Luther's doctrine. Luther taught the exact contrary. True, he did not say that, to be saved, a person must have faith and, in addition to that, good works, or love; but he did teach that those who would be saved must have a faith *that produces love spontaneously and is fruitful in good works*. That does not mean that faith saves on account of love which springs from it, but that the faith which the Holy Spirit creates and which cannot but do good works justifies because it clings to the gracious promises of Christ and because it lays hold of Christ. It is active in good works because it is genuine faith. The believer need not at all be exhorted to do good works; his faith does them automatically. The believer engages in good works, not from a sense of duty, in return for the forgiveness of his sins, but chiefly because he cannot help doing them. It is altogether impossible that genuine faith should not break forth from the believer's heart in works of love. But this is a matter of which papists have no inkling. They imagine a person may have true faith and yet live in mortal sin. Therefore they sneer at the teaching that faith saves and call it a "fine religion," meaning that it is the worst and most wicked religion that has ever been invented.

However, it never entered Luther's mind to teach a faith that believes what the Church believes, as the papists do. For they connect with the notion of faith the idea that it is a conviction that the teaching of their Church is right. Hence in their view any one who has that conviction has the true faith, although they add that such a person does not immediately enter heaven at his death. Among their members, people may be fornicators, adulterers, drunkards, thieves, and yet be good Christians.

Gal. 5, 6 we read: *In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love*. The inefficiency of a faith that fails to work by love is not due to a lack of love, but to the fact that it is not

real, honest faith. Love must not be added to faith but grow out of it. A fruitful tree does not produce fruit by somebody's order, but because, while there is vitality in it and it is not dried up, it must produce fruit spontaneously. Faith is such a tree; it proves its vitality by bearing fruit. It is withered when it fails to bring forth fruit. The sun, likewise, need not be told to shine, it will continue shining till judgment Day without any one's issuing orders to do it. Faith is such a sun.

Acts 15, 9 records an effect of the mission-work of the early Church thus: *God put no difference between us [the Jews] and them [the Gentiles], purifying their hearts by faith.* A person who claims to have a firm faith which he will never abandon, but who still has an impure heart, must be told that he is in great darkness; for he has no faith at all. You may regard all the doctrines that are preached in the Lutheran Church as true, but if your heart is still in its old condition, filled with the love of sin, if you still act contrary to your conscience, your whole faith is mere sham. Yours is not the faith of which the Holy Spirit speaks when He uses the word "faith" in the Scriptures; for that faith — the genuine article — purifies the heart.

Christ says, John 5, 44: *How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?* An awful verdict is pronounced in these words by the Savior on those who seek honor from men: they have no faith. It is one of the fruits of faith that from the moment it begins to grow up in the heart it gives all honor to God alone. When the believer does receive honors from men, he is inwardly convinced that he has not merited them and says to God: —Whate'er of good this life of mine

Has shown, is altogether Thine, thus returning to God any honor bestowed upon him. A person without faith, on finding himself lowered or despised, at once becomes depressed and morose because he is not getting what he seeks. There are preachers of this sort who enter their pulpit under the dominant influence of an ambitious passion and feel tickled when people who may be altogether unqualified to appraise them admire the wonderful delivery of such a young preacher and predict a great future for him. He likes that better than when one slips him a ten-dollar bill, although he will accept that too. But jesting aside! We are all haughty, proud, and ambitious, and this noxious vice can be driven from our hearts only by the

Holy Ghost. But we never become rid of it entirely; an evil root remains in the heart. A believer, when noticing this thing in himself, abominates it, reprobates himself, feels ashamed of himself, and asks God to deliver him from these abominable notions of pride.

The truth of this statement is beyond question; for the Savior's words are in the form of a rhetorical question and signify: You cannot believe; for these two, seeking honor of men and believing, are simply incompatible. The entrance of faith into the heart has the effect of making the believer humble in the presence of God and men. Lest we despair when listening in occasionally on our own heart, we must not forget that a poison-root of vanity remains in our heart; but as soon as it begins to stir up vain thoughts in us, we must fight it. A person who does not fight his vanity has no faith and is not a Christian.

We read in I John 5, 4 *Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* Accordingly, a person in his old nature and not born of God, a person who still loves the world and seeks his heart's satisfaction in its folly and vanity, has no faith; for faith overcomes the world.

Jas. 2, 1 the apostle says: *My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, WITH RESPECT OF PERSONS.* Preferring the rich, because of their wealth, to the poor means respecting people's person, and that is something which faith will not tolerate. The tendency to do this leaves the heart with the entrance of faith; for the believer views every one, not as far as his personality is concerned, but in his relation to God. To him a poor beggar, having been redeemed by the blood of the Son of God, is worth as much as a king or an emperor.

Such are the miracles which faith works in our hearts.

Now, to represent justifying and saving faith as the inert mental act of regarding certain matters as true, which can coexist with mortal sin, means to treat faith as a work which man can produce in himself and preserve in himself even while sinning. True faith is a treasure which only the Holy Spirit can bestow.

The Council of Trent, you know, was convened a few months before Luther's death for the purpose of healing the wounds which the Reformation had dealt the Papacy. The Council put its seal on all errors

which in the course of time had been adopted by the Roman Church, but presented them in a subtler manner than had been done by most of the theologians of that age. The Roman theologian Smets reproduces the following decree which the *Council of Trent* passed in its sixth session: “In defense of the divine Law, which excommunicates not only unbelievers, but also believers, namely, such as are fornicators, adulterers, pederasts, drunkards, robbers, and all who commit mortal sin, it must be firmly maintained that the Gospel, grace, righteousness, and the forgiveness of sin may be lost, not only by unbelief, by which faith itself is lost, but also by any other mortal sin, *although faith is not lost by such sin.*” The Council admits that a person who turns unbeliever loses faith. An egregious truth, indeed! It is inserted for the purpose of blinding and misleading men. It teaches that salvation may be forfeited while faith is not lost; which is quite correct when applied to the religion of *papists*; for the most depraved Catholic can be the best member of the Catholic Church. According to the religion of Rome there can be believing thieves, believing fornicators, believing adulterers and pederasts, believing misers, drunkards, blasphemers, and robbers. Observe that these unfortunate people have no conception of what faith is. If they had an inkling of it, they would see that wicked men cannot truly believe, cannot have a genuine faith. At the same time they would see that the Lutheran Church does not believe what they think it believes. Far from placing good works in the background, the doctrine of the Lutheran Church points to the true source from which good works must spring. For a person who by the Holy Spirit and the grace of God has obtained a living confidence in Christ cannot abide in sin. His faith changes and purifies his heart.

It is scarcely believable that from another angle the Calvinists have fallen into the same error. We read in the *Decrees of the Synod of Dort*, chap. V:3–8: “Because of the remnants of sin dwelling in them, moreover, because of the temptations of the world and Satan, the converted cannot abide in grace when left to their own natural resources. But God is faithful and mercifully confirms them in the grace bestowed on them and keeps them in the same until the end. However, although the power of God which confirms and keeps true believers in grace is too great to be overcome by their flesh, nevertheless the converted are not always urged and moved by God in such a manner that in certain, particular acts they do not depart



from the guidance of grace nor are seduced by the lusts of the flesh to obey them. For this reason they must continually watch and pray lest they be led into temptation. If they fail to do this, they *may not only by the flesh, the world, and Satan be hurried into grievous and awful sins*, but occasionally they *are* hurried into such sins by a just permissive providence of God. Instances of this kind are the *deplorable fall of David, Peter, and other saints*, which are recorded in Scripture. However, by such heinous sins they greatly offend against God, incur mortal guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt *the exercise of faith* [mark: only the exercise of faith, not faith itself], grossly violate their conscience, and occasionally lose the *consciousness* of their faith for a season; until they return to the right way by earnest repentance and God again makes His fatherly countenance to shine upon them. For because of His unalterable decree of predestination, God, who is rich in mercy, *does not entirely take His Holy Spirit away from His own in such deplorable instances, nor does He permit them to lapse to a point where they would fall from the grace of the adoption to sonship and from the state of being justified.* — For, in the first place, He preserves in them that imperishable seed of His out of which they were born again, so that it cannot be lost or driven out from them. Furthermore, He renews them certainly and effectually unto repentance by the Word and His Spirit, in order that in conformity with God they may heartily grieve over the sins they committed (by His permission), may with contrite heart pray for, and obtain by their faith, forgiveness in the blood of the Mediator, recover the feeling of the grace of God reconciled with them, worship His mercy by faith, and thereafter manifest greater zeal in working out their salvation with fear and trembling. Thus they obtain, not by their own merit and strength, but through the gracious compassion of God, this boon, that they *do not entirely fall from faith and grace nor remain in their fall till the end and be lost.*”

The first proof cited for this view is taken from I John 3, 9. “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin because he is born of God.” This does not mean that the converted cannot lose the seed. It means that, while the seed is in them, it has this effect that it keeps them from living in mortal sin.

The Calvinists, then, claim that, when David became an adulterer and even committed murder, he did not lose either his faith or the grace of God, but his faith merely withdrew somewhat, so that he could not exercise it. That was all. He did not fall from grace or lose his faith, they claim, so that he would have gone to perdition if he had died in that condition.

This is an awful doctrine. Men who believe it will not worry about repenting when they have committed such crimes as adultery and murder. When Cromwell, the miscreant, who sentenced his liege, the king, to death and instituted murderous and bloody trials throughout England, was at the point of death, he became alarmed. Summoning his chaplain, he asked him whether a person who had once been a believer could lose his faith, which the miserable chaplain negated. Cromwell thereupon concluded that all was well with him, because he knew that once upon a time he had been a believer. Remembering the profound impressions which the Word of God had made upon him at certain times in his life, he relied on the abominable comfort which his chaplain offered him, viz., that, since he had had faith once, he still had it. This instance shows the awful effect of this doctrine of the Calvinists.

Let me now present a testimony from our own Confessions, namely, from the *Smalcald Articles*, Part III, Art. III, §§ 42–45 (Mueller, p. 324; *Trigl. Conc.*, p. 491): “On the other hand, if certain sectarists would arise, some of whom are perhaps already extant and in the time of the insurrection [of the peasants] came to my own view, holding that those who had once received the Spirit or the forgiveness of sins or had become believers, even though they should afterwards sin, would still remain in the faith and such sin would not harm them, and [hence] crying thus: ‘Do whatever you please; if you believe, it all amounts to nothing; faith blots out all sins,’ etc., — they say, besides, that if any one sins after he has received faith and the Spirit, he never truly had the Spirit and faith: I have had before me many such insane men, and I fear that in some such a devil is still lurking. [Mark Luther says this view issues from the devil.]

“It is, accordingly, necessary to know and to teach that, when holy men, still having and feeling original sin, also daily repenting of and striving with it, happen to fall into manifest sins [that is, sins which do not remain hidden in the heart], as David into adultery, murder and blasphemy, that

then faith and the Holy Ghost has departed from them [they cast out faith and the Holy Ghost]. For the Holy Ghost does not permit sin to have dominion, to gain the upper hand, so as to be accomplished, but represses and restrains it, so that it must not do what it wishes. But if it does what it wishes, the Holy Ghost and faith are certainly not present. For St. John says, 1 Epistle. 3, 9: 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin. . . . and he cannot sin.' And yet it is also the truth when the same St. John says, I Epistle. 1, 8: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.' "

David had ceased to be a prophet enlightened by the Holy Spirit and a child of God when he fell into sin. Had he died in those days, he would have gone to perdition. Yea, that could have happened to him during the entire year before Nathan came to preach repentance to him; for David had pronounced the man who had committed the crime narrated by Nathan a doomed man, when Nathan told him, "Thou art the man," and showed him that he had uttered his own sentence: if he did not turn from his iniquity, he would go to hell and be damned.

The light of faith can be extinguished not only by gross sins, but by any wilful, intentional sin. Accordingly, defection from faith occurs far oftener than we imagine. Faith ceases not only in those who lead a life of shame, but also in such as permit themselves to be led astray against their better knowledge and the warning of their conscience. They plan to do a certain thing and carry out their purpose, although they know that it is contrary to God's Word. In such instances faith becomes extinct; however, the person caught in this snare promptly recovers his faith if he promptly arrests himself in his wrong-doing, as the instance of Peter shows. Peter did not harden himself. When the glance of Jesus met his eyes, he went out and wept bitterly. That glance made him repent of his sin, causing him to realize the enormity of his offense and the unspeakable greatness of his Lord's mercy. It seemed to say, "Poor Peter, repent!" and pierced his heart like a dagger. Happy the man who, after falling, rises at once, immediately, and does not delay his repentance, lest he arrive at a stage where his heart is hardened.

In conclusion I shall submit a testimony from Luther's writings. In 1536 a certain minister sent a commentary which he had written on the First

Epistle of John to the faculty at Wittenberg with the request that it be examined as to its fitness for publication. The commentary contained the error that the elect do not lose the Holy Spirit even when they lapse into conscious sinning and gross vices. Luther declared himself opposed to the publication of the commentary and wrote a theological opinion on the point under review, which was signed by the other members of the faculty. It is found in his works, (St. L. Ed. X, 1706 ff.) *Luther* says: "When a person sins against his conscience, that is, when he knowingly and intentionally acts contrary to God, as, for instance, an adulterer or any other criminal, who knowingly does wrong, he is, while consciously persisting in his intention, without repentance and faith and does not please God. For example, while a person keeps the wife of another man, it is manifest that he is void of repentance, faith, and holiness. For the faith by which we are made righteous must be associated with a good conscience. It is absolutely impossible for these two things to coexist in a person, viz., faith that trusts in God and a wicked purpose, or, as it is also called, an evil conscience. Faith and the worship of God are delicate affairs; a very slight wound inflicted on the conscience may drive out faith and prayer. Every tried Christian frequently is put through this experience.

"Accordingly, Paul joins two requisites of a Christian in 1 Tim. 1, 5, saying: 'Now, the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart and of a good conscience and of faith unfeigned'; again, in v. 19: 'Holding faith and a good conscience'; again, chap.3, 9 'Holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience,' etc. These and kindred passages, to be cited anon, serve notice that where there is not a good conscience, there is no faith and no holiness.

"Therefore, while only faith in our Savior Jesus Christ obtains the grace of justification, *i.e.*, while he who believes has forgiveness of his sins and is accepted with God, still he must drop his former evil intentions, so that there is in him the beginning of a good conscience. Now, where there is faith and a good conscience, there certainly is the Holy Spirit; and yet the justified do not rest their confidence on their own worthiness or good conscience, but on Christ. Hence we conclude from Christ's promise that we have been received into grace for His sake and may offer our prayers to God acceptably, as John says, 1 Ep. 3, 20 ff.: 'If our heart condemn us, ... we

have confidence toward God, and whatsoever we ask we receive of Him.’ Although there remains in the saints sin, inborn depravity, evil propensities; although they do not with full earnestness fear God and trust in Him, — which are indeed great sins and must not be regarded as trifling defects, — still these weaknesses are to be distinguished and placed far away from conscious and intentional sinning and wicked purposes, which make the conscience unclean. These latter sins do not coexist with holiness. In this connection we must not discuss predestination, but the wrath of God which is revealed in His Word, and then seek grace after our fall.

“The sins into which the elect fall take away their holiness and drive the Holy Spirit from them. This is quite evident, first, in Adam and Eve, who were elect, but miserably lost their holiness and the Holy Spirit nevertheless, so that by the discomfiture of these first men all their descendants have become feeble and sinful by nature. Had they not been raised up again, they would have remained damned forever. In the mean time they were verily under the wrath of God. These happenings are not sham events; for in clear terms St. Paul says, Rom. 5, 12: ‘By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin.’ Death plainly signifies damnation, and what that is everybody knows. Likewise, when David had slept with the wife of Uriah and had caused her godly husband to be slain, etc., he was under the wrath of God and had lost his holiness and the Holy Spirit until he was converted again. Many similar instances might be rehearsed.

“The truth of what I have stated is clearly established from the following passages: 1 John 3, 7 f.: ‘Let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil.’ For instance, when David permitted his heart to be set on fire with the flames of inordinate desire and lost his stability, he was urged on by the devil, who, after conquering him through the first sin, drove him to still greater sins, murder, etc. That the Holy Spirit had been driven out of David’s heart is evident from the words of Paul in I Cor. 6, 9 f.: ‘Adulterers shall not inherit the kingdom of God.’ He is speaking of adultery that is still continuing; while an adulterer persists in his purpose, he is not an heir of the kingdom of Christ. Consequently, he is not righteous and holy, nor has he the Holy Spirit. ‘Because of these things,’

says Paul in Eph. 5, 6, 'cometh the wrath of God on the children of disobedience.' In Rom. 8, 13 Paul introduces a distinction that must be made among sins; he says: 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.' Now, it is manifest that Paul in this passage preaches for saints and teaches them how they may remain holy, namely, by resisting their evil inclinations. On the other hand, he says: 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die'; that is, If you yield to your evil inclinations, you are again under the wrath of God; for that is what he means by dying. In Ezek. 33, 13 ff. we read, in effect: Whenever the righteous does evil, his righteousness shall not be remembered; and whenever the wicked turns and does good, his sins shall be forgotten. This is a clear text; it proves that the righteous, when falling into sin knowingly and intentionally, is no longer righteous. In Rev. 2, 14 the Holy Spirit reproves the church at Pergamos for tolerating false doctrine and fornication, of which things He says: 'I hate them.' Now, when God is angry with some one, that person is not holy and accepted with Him, etc. And among those who were rebuked at Pergamos there were, without doubt, elect and non-elect."

"On the ground of these and many other testimonies the Church has always taught with unanimity that, when a saint knowingly and purposely acts contrary to God's command, he is no longer a saint, but has lost the true faith and cast away the Holy Spirit. But if he turns again, God will keep the gracious oath which He has sworn, saying: 'As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.' Accordingly, for Christ's sake God takes those people who turn to Him back into His grace and rekindles in their hearts the true faith through the Gospel and His Holy Spirit. He has not commanded us to inquire first whether we have been predestinated, but it is sufficient for us to know that whosoever perseveres unto the end in repentance and faith is certainly elect and will be saved, as Christ says: 'He that persevereth unto the end, the same shall be saved!'"

How dare a person come before God with an evil conscience and praise Him in fulsome strains for the forgiveness of his sins? God will reject him together with his prayer. Such a person cares not for God, because he purposes to continue in his sin; how, then, can he engage in intimate

converse with God? It is impossible. Suppose some one were to come to you and acknowledge that he has treated you shamefully. But he wants to continue treating you that way; and yet he desires that you forgive him. Would you do it? Of course not. We would consider a person insane who would talk like this: "I want to be forgiven, but I want to continue doing for what I am asking forgiveness. As often as I meet you, I shall insult you; but I want you to forgive me." Now, that is just the way God is treated by men who want to take comfort in His mercy while continuing in sin.

Luther speaks of the impossibility of joining faith with an evil conscience. Conscience is a damaging witness, which makes us shut our mouth when we start to explain any intentional wrong-doing. We are all indeed poor sinners; but when we undertake to sin purposely, our conscience warns us that we are enemies of God and intend to remain such. It tells us when we start to call upon God that we do not mean to come to God at all. Faith is, in this respect, a very tender thing, which is easily wounded.

It is not the manifest enormity of their sin that casts such people out of their state of grace and puts out the heavenly light of their faith, but the attitude of their heart towards their sin. When I am suddenly overtaken by sin, God forgives me; He is not angry with me and does not charge that sin against me. Such acts do not extinguish faith. Or it may be that I am rushed into sin by my temperament. I do not want to sin, but I have been irritated to such an extent that, before I know it, I have sinned. That is not a mortal sin, which would take me out of the state of grace. But when a person persists in his sin against his conscience, though he knows it to be a sin, and continues sinning purposely for a long time, he no longer has faith and cannot truly pray to God; the Holy Spirit leaves his heart, for another spirit, the evil spirit, rules in it, whom the sinner has admitted into his heart. To him the Holy Spirit yields His place and departs.

A Christian can notice that, when he yields to sin in the very least, his trust in God is promptly diminished. He also feels that, if he does not turn back on the spot, sin will rule him and he will be unfit to believe. In such moments the Christian goes down on his knees and calls upon God with tears, — though that is not an essential part of repentance, — saying: "Thou knowest, Oh God, that I do not want to sin," as Peter declared to Christ:

“Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee.” John 21, 17. Peter could call upon the Lord as his witness. Having a good conscience, he could say to Christ: “Thou canst look into my heart; is it not so? Why, then, dost Thou ask me?” That is the language every Christian must be able to use when speaking to God: “My God, Thou knowest that I do not want to sin, and yet I am sinning. Thou knowest that I have become an enemy to sin.”

Hence the second requisite which Paul wants to see in every Christian is true love, love that proceeds from faith unfeigned. Faith unfeigned is not a painted, but a real, living, genuine faith of the heart.

Faith and good conscience must be companions. A person that has no good conscience certainly is without faith. Of such people the apostle says that they have “made shipwreck concerning faith,” I Tim. 1, 19; they have cast the precious treasure of faith overboard.

Even after our conversion we lack the true fear of God, and all our sins are great sins. Even the so-called sins of weakness of which the righteous cannot rid themselves must not be regarded as a paltry matter. Although they do not extinguish faith, they are no jest.

Luther’s rejection of the sinner’s appeal to predestination is meant as a warning to us not to reason ourselves into a state of security on the ground that we simply shall have to go to heaven because we are predestinate. The major of the syllogism is true: Whoever is predestinated will certainly go to heaven. But there is no evidence for the minor, viz., whether the party indulging in the above reasoning is predestinated. If a person lives in sin and continues that kind of life, this is a sign that he is not predestinated. Not as though God did not want to have him on any account, but because He foresaw that His grace would be misapplied by this or that wicked person.

Nobody can question that Adam and Eve were elect, and yet they fell, lost the image of God, the Holy Spirit, their holiness, in short, everything. But they repented and were thus restored to a state of grace.

As soon as faith is lost through some mortal sin, the grace of God is also lost, and such a person becomes a child of death and damnation. He may return to faith and ultimately be saved, but in the interval he was not a blessed, but an utterly miserable, lost creature.



A person with whom God is angry or whom He hates is not accepted with Him. There may have been elect persons in the congregation at Pergamos. But God hated also these elect persons and was angry with them because, for the time being, they had driven His grace, faith, and the Holy Spirit out of their hearts.