

The Working Of The Holy Ghost

[Delivered to the Arizona-California Lutheran Teachers' Conference

November 8, 1974]

Dr. Siegbert W. Becker

Men, prompted by the knowledge of the Law written in their hearts, and conscious of the righteous judgment of God on their wicked deeds, have throughout the ages known that not all is well between them and their Creator. St. Paul says that they know the judgment of God. So disturbing is this realization when men allow themselves to dwell on this uncomfortable thought, that throughout the course of the centuries they have looked for some way in which this wall of separation between God and men can be broken down.

Strangely enough, many of these efforts have taken this turn that men have tried to change the changeless God so that He might be the type of being with whom they can be at peace. When the heathen bows down to sticks and stones he does not do this because in his ignorance he does not know any better, but he does it just because he knows better. St. Paul tells us of these heathen who worship idols, "When they knew God they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imagination and their foolish heart was darkened and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible men, and to birds, and to four-footed beasts, and creeping things." The heathen, whose heart and conscience tell him that those who have done the things which he has done are worthy of death, but who still takes pleasure in doing these very things which he himself condemns and does not want to give them up, who wishes to remain what he is and is willing to surrender only what he will not miss anyway, proceeds instead to change God and to cut Him down to size, until He becomes the type of God whom man can handle with relative impunity.

The heathen, however, are not the only ones who take in hand this project of changing God so that men may find peace. The atheist finds rest from a disturbed conscience by whistling in the dark and changing the ever-living God into a non-existent, subjective, hypothesis. The liberal modernistic theologian reduces God to a being with whom man can live by refusing to proclaim some of the attributes of God while leaving others unchanged. They speak of God as being perfect, infinite love and ignore the fact that He is also infinite holiness and justice with a corresponding hatred of all that is evil. Such people say, for example, that in the Old Testament God is pictured as a God who, without regard for love or mercy, laid down the rule, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," but they forget that exactly the same principle was proclaimed by the Lord Jesus when He said, "Thou shalt not come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."

And because these men no longer look upon God as being perfectly holy and just, they imagine that a mere moral reformation on man's part is sufficient to satisfy God. No real radical change, no conversion and regeneration in the real sense, is needed by man. All that is necessary according to them is that man should allow the evolutionary urge toward the better to have full sway in his life and he will be at peace with the Infinite and his life will be in tune with Cosmic Reality, or some other similarly degrading name for God.

The Christian, however, who takes the revelation of God as we have it in the verbally inspired Scriptures at full face value, knows that the judgment of God cannot be adequately dealt with by closing one's eyes to its reality, either by denying the existence of God completely or by ignoring the righteousness of God and shouting loudly about the God of love who will never send anyone to hell. He knows that the only way in which man's dilemma can be solved is by a radical, thorough change in man. The need is not for a change in God, and certainly not for a revision of the picture of God drawn in the Bible, but what is needed is the conversion of man. To bring about this change, this conversion, is, under God, one of the primary functions of a Christian teacher.

The teacher who is concerned with the conversion of men will not have a proper understanding of the importance of his own work unless he realizes why this conversion of man is so very necessary. Moreover, the workman who deals with materials of any kind will not be an expert workman unless he understands the nature of the materials with which he works. That does not mean that without such a full understanding he will accomplish nothing, but rather that in times of stress and crisis when everything depends upon the decision which he makes, he will be at a loss as to what must be done next. The Christian teacher, whose first concern is for the souls of those whom he teaches, should also clearly understand the nature about the spiritual and psychological change which we call conversion, or to strengthen the convictions which have already been instilled in the hearts of these boys and girls by the Holy Ghost. Now, if you want to know what a child is, says the evolutionary psychologist, you must study what he was—and so he studies the psychology of animals. If you want to know what man is, you must study the child, says another. If you want to know what the child is, you must study the grown man, says another. And all of them are wrong. If you want to know what the child is, you must study the revelation of God. Man is as he is known to God.

When our catechism tells us that man is by nature spiritually blind, dead, and an enemy of God, it tells us something about the soul-life of man which it would take a modern psychologist three hundred pages of relatively small print to say in a much more complicated and seemingly more scholarly manner. These terms are extremely useful and yet we ought not to be satisfied if we have memorized them and taught our children to memorize them. We too often take for granted that what is clear to us is also very clear to the children. We ought to think through these terms so that we may understand very clearly what is meant by them and be able to present this matter in a very lucid way to our children.

When we say that man is spiritually blind we mean to call attention to the fact that he is incapable of seeing the way of salvation for what it is. Here we might think also of all those passages that speak of man as sitting in darkness, or of darkness covering the earth or gross darkness the people. The light of God's Word shines brightly for him, and yet he sees nothing but darkness. He is unable to know the things which God reveals to him in His Word. This does not mean that it is impossible for an unconverted man to understand what the Bible says. An unconverted man may actually have a better intellectual grasp of the doctrines of Scripture than one who has been converted. One of the finest and clearest summaries of the teaching of election as it is found in the letter of Paul to the Romans that I have ever seen is found in a book written by an avowed Modernist who would not for one moment admit that Paul's teaching on this subject is correct or of any significance for our time.

When we say that an unconverted man cannot understand the Word of God, we do not mean to say that he cannot understand the meaning of the words of Scripture, that the language of the Bible is without significance for him, that he cannot know what the Bible really says. He may understand the words very well and know exactly what the Bible means to say to him, and yet he cannot accept these things. God's own wisdom is offered to Him, but he can only regard it as foolishness. Some years ago a man who was writing a history of the churches of Sioux County in Iowa came to see me for some information that he needed. In the course of the conversation I discovered that the man, though he was a church member, was not a Christian. I spoke to him very seriously about sin and hell and also of the death of God's Son for our salvation. After a while he interrupted me with a statement that went something like this: "I certainly appreciate your interest in my soul, but I know all that. I know that the Bible teaches all those things, but I am an intelligent person and do you really think that I am fool enough to believe that God would actually send His Son, if He had a Son, into this world to die for the sins of men who are mere insignificant specks in the universe?" To this man this whole way of salvation as it is taught in the Bible was foolishness. Yet it is also evident that the teaching of Scripture concerning the way of salvation was very clear to him.

It often surprises us to hear a man speak in that way, and yet this is what we ought to expect, for this is exactly what the Scriptures tell us about the attitude of natural, unconverted man toward the truth of God. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. He does not accept them, for they are foolishness unto him. Neither can he know them. He may know about them. He may be able to say, "I know that the Bible says that Jesus the Son of God, died for my sins on the cross of Calvary," but he will add, "I don't see, however, how this can do me any good." He can never say, "I know that Jesus died for me." He has the exalted wisdom of God, revealed for his salvation before his very eyes, written in plain language, and yet he sees only foolishness, only something that a man would have to be a fool to believe.

And this attitude is found not only among open avowed unbelievers, but surprisingly enough we meet it all too often in the visible church. Some time ago, William Stevens, in the *Presbyterian Tribune* (Oct. 1951). wrote an article entitled, "Why Not A 'Holy' Bible?", in which he said, "Why not a really holy Bible? And is there any reason besides ancient superstition to prevent such a compilation from being published? Until something like that is achieved. The younger generation of educated people, the college boys and girls of yesterday and today, will continue to scoff at the vast amount of matter which is still presented as inspired of God but which insults their reason." He says further in the same article that we ought to omit from the Bible "all false author ships, the spurious passages, the begats, the burnt offerings, the butcheries, all the meaningless parts, all the fulminations and prophecies of doom obsolete for over 2000 years, and all the hymns of hate and vengeance. Of course, the old Bible will continue to be published as a monument of ancient literature which has woven itself into our own literature and tradition." Max Otto, In his "Science and the Moral Life" (Paper Ed. p. 143) says, "Occidental super naturalistic religion originated at a time when the modern scientific enterprise had not been heard of, and when the peoples of the earth lived in isolation from each other. Are we to suppose that this pre-scientific and insular religion is to serve men a who have become science minded and who must live, in a literal sense never true

in the past, in a world that is one vast neighborhood? ‘The old world is dead’, boldly announces the professor of philosophy. Very well. But he does not tell the whole story. The old world is dead, and the religion of the old world had to die with it.”

You will notice that both of these authors want to give the impression that educated, intelligent, science minded people of our time can no longer believe what the Scriptures say about unconverted man is true. The strange thing is not that men do not believe the Bible. The miracle is that there are actually people in the world who believe that Christ is both God and man, that God was born of a virgin, that God died on a cross, and that by His blood and death we are saved. Or just think of the tremendous difficulty for the human mind in the great difference between Law and Gospel. God hates men. God loves men. Once a man believes that, it is no trick at all to believe that the world was created in six days and that iron floated and that a man stayed alive for three days in the belly of a whale.

It is certainly strange that it is just the things that make God great that cause men to reject Him. In all other fields men always strive for something bigger and better, but God must be cut down to fit their idea of what He ought to be. They cannot abide the thought of a God who is so glorious in holiness that He can tolerate no sin, for this will mean that in their hearts the voice of conscience will not rest. Men in our time are actually ashamed of a God who is too supreme, a God for whom they cannot account and whom they cannot explain, a God fearful in praises, a God whose attributes are so marvelous and so far beyond all thought that man can finally only stand with trembling knees and silent lips before that glorious majesty. Men are ashamed, too, of a God that does wonders, a miracle working God. They are proud of a science that can make 2 bushels of corn grow where only 1 grew before, but ashamed of a God who can feed 5,000 men with five loaves and two fishes. They are proud of a science which after years of research is able to destroy a few particles of matter, but ashamed of a God who can create a whole universe in 6 days. Isaiah ridiculed the gods of the heathen because they could do so little. Modern man ridicules the true God because he can do so much.

We ought not to be deceived by the claim that the Gospel is out of date, as though intelligent, reasoning men, skilled in all the learning of modern times, have greater difficulty believing the Bible than our less advanced forefathers, It was Isaiah who lived long before the age of modern science who complained, “Who hath believed our report?” It was the apostle Paul who 2,000 years ago spoke of those who were ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. It was not a group of 20th century Chicago University graduates, but a group of first century Athenian citizens who laughed at Paul’s preaching of the resurrection. It is certainly not only the modern, scientific, educated man that Paul had in mind when he said that the Gospel of the cross is to them that perish foolishness. He said that the Gospel was foolishness to the Greeks, and it was the Greeks who had a monopoly on learning and culture in his day. As long as he remains unconverted, man, whether he be learned or unlearned whether he be a child or full grown, will always reject the Gospel as so much ridiculous nonsense, as an offense to his reason. An education or experience will only enable him to make his rejection more articulate and give it more scholarly cast. It is certainly not modern scientific education which prompts men to scoff at the Bible but it is rather the depraved, corrupt, blinded intellect of man which refuses to be subject to the Word of God.

This ought to be of deep significance in our approach to the teaching of religion. We sometimes ourselves contribute to the state of mind which judges the truth of religion by the reaction of learned men to that truth. One thing that Harry Emerson Fosdick said (Christian Century, Dec. 4, 1935) is certainly true, and true also of us, "We have at times gotten so low down that we talked as though the highest compliment that could be paid to God was that a few scientists believed in Him." If we quote the words of learned men as our authority for the truth of our religious views and urge acceptance of them on that basis, then we ought not to complain when the devil whom we have cast out comes back with seven other learned scholars more persuasive than himself.

Instead of relying upon the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, we sometimes appeal to human authorities. The discoveries of archaeology may be valuable in answering some of the critics, but we should not forget that archaeology also creates problems for the Bible-believing Christian. If we would only remember the words of St. Paul that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, we would realize that the rejection of the Gospel on the part of learned men is at least as good proof for its truth as is its acceptance on the part of other learned men.

Man cannot, as he is by nature, respond to the Word in a positive way, for he is spiritually dead. When this term is used in Scripture and in the Catechism it is not intended to denote a condition of deeper depravity than that which is found among those who are spiritually blind. Actually the same condition is described in both terms. They are both figurative expressions, intended to portray the total corruption and depravity of man which makes it absolutely impossible for him to accept the grace of God even when it is pressed upon him. Man lies there in his trespasses and sins and when the water from the wells of salvation is poured into his mouth he cannot swallow it, for he is dead. Perhaps one of the most impressive passages in the Bible teaching this particular truth is the 37th chapter of Ezekiel, which is probably more familiar to us from the Negro spiritual than from our Bible reading. In that chapter Ezekiel describes the vision in which he saw apostate, unfaithful Israel as a valley full of dry bones. With only these disjointed skeletons around him, the prophet was asked, "Can these bones live?" In this hopeless situation he could only answer, "O Lord God, thou knowest." And yet to these dry bones Ezekiel was commanded to preach the Word of the Lord and through this preaching the Spirit of God began to move these dry bones and by His power life was once more put into them. When we then say that man is by nature spiritually dead, as the Scriptures teach so clearly, we mean that there remains in him no power by which he is able to respond to the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, there is nothing in him which would either dispose him or enable him to accept the grace of God when it is offered to him.

These terms which we have in our catechism, which tell us that man is spiritually blind and dead, are not the only pictures that the Bible draws for us to depict the spiritual state of natural man. Exactly the same idea is conveyed when the Bible speaks of man as being asleep. The apostle calls upon men to accept the Gospel in the words, "Awake, thou that sleepest and arise from the dead." The epistle to the Romans speaks of the persistent unbelief of Israel as the "spirit of slumber." The Bible speaks of unconverted man as having a heart of stone, and thus gives us the same image of the nature of man as unresponsive to all spiritual good that we see before our mind's eye when we think of man as spiritually dead. It speaks of man as an unbroken, stubborn, stiff-necked heifer

that will not bow its neck under the yoke. It speaks of man as being a lost sheep, unable to find the way back home, gone astray in sin and unbelief, and we think of man as being blind, groping in the noonday of God's revelation just as though he were in the night of dark pagan ignorance. As we read what God has to say about man in his best state, we can have little hope left for man if he is left to his own devices to solve his own spiritual problems.

But perhaps the strongest term that the Bible uses in speaking of the natural spiritual condition of man is the third term that we use in our catechism. Man is by nature an enemy of God. Man is filled with hatred of God. His will is opposed to God's will. The carnal mind is enmity against God. This condition might very well be diagrammed for the children by drawing two arrows on the blackboard, pointing in opposite directions, labeling one "God's will" and the other "man's will." God's will is that man should be saved through Christ. Man's will is to be saved through himself. God's will is that man should be saved by grace. Man's will is that he may be saved by works. God wants man to be saved by what He has done for man. Man wants to be saved by what he has done for God. Every non-Christian religion holds to this natural view of salvation, for while these religions may differ as to what must be done by man, yet they are all agreed that man must do something to make himself acceptable in God's sight. And every time that a Christian Church introduces the idea of merit into the plan of salvation, it is by this very act returning once more to paganism. It was when the Roman Church definitely and officially damned the doctrine of justification by faith without works that it revealed itself as the Antichrist.

But in order to make the way of salvation by works workable, men must first reduce the requirements for salvation. There is indeed a way to be saved by works, but while it is a perfectly valid and God-given way, it is absolutely useless for man. For God's way of salvation by works is the way of absolute and complete perfection. Nothing less is required than that a man should love the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his mind and his neighbor as himself. It was the Lord Jesus who said, "This do, and thou shalt live." It may seem at first glance that man's way of salvation by works is the same as this way which is laid down by the Law of God. But while there is a similarity, it is only a superficial one. For in man's way the demands of God are reduced to a point where God no longer demands more than man can give. Such expressions as "God will be satisfied if we do the best we can" and "We will be saved if we act in conformity with our own best knowledge" ought to have no place in the vocabulary of a Christian teacher for they are simply not true. A similar thing is done when the demands of God are redefined so that the holiness which is required consists rather in compliance with, and obedience to, rules which have been laid down by men rather than in perfect obedience to the Law of God.

So ingrained in man's nature is this idea of salvation by works that man hates and rebels against the idea of salvation by grace alone and all that it implies. It is here that the natural enmity of man against God most often comes to the surface so that we can see it in all its ugliness. Man is so much an enemy of God and so blinded to his own condition that he refuses to confess that he hates God by nature. But if we will faithfully proclaim salvation by grace alone, we shall begin to experience the truth of God's characterization of man as an enemy. For the fact that man is saved by grace alone is a humbling and

humiliating doctrine from man's point of view. For if man must be saved by grace then it is very plain that he is unable to contribute anything of the slightest value in the process.

And the fact that this grace of God is made possible only by the suffering and death of God's own Son as well as His perfect obedience to the Law makes it very clear that God is not satisfied with anything less than perfect obedience to the Law and the total payment of the full penalty of sin. A God whom nothing less than this can propitiate, a God who is a jealous God and is not satisfied unless all His demands have been met, such a God is a Being whom natural man cannot abide. Such a God, who will visit every act of disobedience with eternal punishment in hell., a fact which is certainly emphasized also by the death of the Lord Jesus, as the Formula of Concord says (Epitome, V. 9). "The preaching of the suffering and death of Christ, the Son of God, is an earnest and terrible proclamation and declaration of God's wrath, whereby men are first led into the Law aright." Such a God is repulsive to natural man, for such a view of God robs man of every hope of salvation by their own efforts.

If we were to go to most men, however, and tell them, "You hate God," they would reject such a statement as ridiculous foolishness. They would point to the fact that they are anxious to please God, that they want to be with God in heaven, that they are active in church work as an evidence of the fact that they love the Lord. But if you ask them whether this God, whom they profess to love and serve, is a God who is perfect justice and who will punish sin eternally, they will tell you that such a God as that men have not believed in since the dark ages. If you insist that the true God is such a God who can not and will not be satisfied by the imperfect efforts of man, they will tell you that such a God they could never accept. They say that it is not fair, and we scarcely know how to answer them. It was only a few yews ago that one of the outstanding Protestant church papers in America said that the Lutherans worship a God whom every sensible person would have to hate since they still believe that God punishes people in hell. G. Bromley Oxnam's reference to such a God as a "dirty bully" may well be repeated as an example of the hatred against God which exists even in the highest circles in the visible Church. Oxnam, who is a bishop of the Methodist Church, and former president of the Federal Council of Churches, and past president of the W. C. C. wrote in his book, *Preaching in a Revolutionary Age*, (p. 79), "Hugh Walpole, in *Wintersmoon*, tells of a father and a son in church. The aged rector read from the Old Testament, and the boy learned of the terrible God who sent plagues upon the people and created fiery serpents to assail them. That night, when the father passed the boy's room, the boy called him and said, 'Father, you hate Jehovah. So do I. I loathe him, dirty bully.' We have long since rejected a conception of reconciliation associated historically with an ideal of a Deity that is loathesome. God, for us, cannot be thought of as an angry, awful, avenging Being, who because of Adam's sin must have His Shylockian pound of flesh. No wonder the honest boy, in justifiable repugnance, could say, 'Dirty bully'."

In the article from the *Presbyterian Tribune* referred to before, the author says of the delineation of the attributes of God in the Bible: "In the books which precede the prophets there is pictured a god so revolting as to be comparable only to Hitler and his Herrenvolk." The Methodist *Bible Lessons for Adults* for the second quarter of 1949, (p. 40), says that we "should shake ourselves loose from mystical, theological, sentimental notions that come out of the easy acceptance of the death of Christ as the guarantee of our own salvation without effort on our part." These instances will serve to show that Paul's

description of the carnal mind as enmity toward God is by no means out of date in our own time.

The various figurative expressions which are used in the Scriptures to describe the natural spiritual condition of man are the basis for the various terms which are used to describe the process by which a man is brought to faith. When we speak of man as being enlightened by the Holy Ghost, we proceed from the point of view which considers natural man as being spiritually blinded. Man is spiritually asleep, so he needs to be awakened. He is spiritually dead, and when he begins to believe we say that he is regenerated or born again or resurrected or quickened. He is an enemy of God with his will running contrary to God's will and therefore he needs to be turned or converted. All of these terms are simply different words for exactly the same thing and it will sometimes be very helpful to the children in our schools, especially in the upper grades, if we teach them to correlate these terms. This could be done with a chart which might be set up as follows:

Terms used to describe the natural
or
condition of man:

Asleep
Spiritually blind
Spiritually dead
Enemy of God
Gone astray, lost
A heart of stone
Old man
Stiff-necked

Terms used to describe the process
act by which man is brought to faith

Awakening
Enlightenment, recovery of sight
Resurrection, quickening,
regeneration, new birth
Turning, conversion
A heart of flesh
Renewed
Converted

As teachers, it is well for us to be fully aware of the complete depravity and corruption of man also in this matter, for it will keep us duly conscious in our teaching of the fact that here also we stand in need of the constant help of our God.

As we understand that the natural condition of man is one in which he cannot accept Christ and cannot believe the Bible teaching concerning salvation through His blood, that we are dealing with someone who hates God when we deal with the unbeliever, we might well ask the question which was asked by the disciples when Jesus spoke of the difficulty which rich men will experience in getting to heaven, "Lord, who then can be saved?" And the answer to our question will be the same as it was then, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Knowing the magnitude of the problem that faces us when we teach religion, we ought to realize that in our teaching we need the abiding presence of the Spirit of God, who alone can take the stony hearts of men and break them and lay them at the feet of Jesus for help and healing. It is only a miracle of God's grace that can bring about the acceptance of the truth of God in the hearts of men. In each case, not only in the case of the rich, we may say that it is a matter of a camel going through the eye of a needle. For all the scorn which he heaped upon miracles, David Hume spoke more truly than he knew, at least in part, when he said

of the Christian religion in his *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (p. 138), ‘Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity; and whoever is moved by faith to assent to it is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.’”

It is not the brilliance of our argument that will win men for Christ. Often we do not know how to answer their impertinent questions. And it is not necessary that we should answer every question and explain away every difficulty. Before such depravity as that of natural man we are helpless, and here, too, we must sing, ‘With might of ours can naught be done.’ All that we can do is to teach the Word of our God in season and out of season. And having taught it faithfully we can only pray that the Holy Spirit may use our teaching to do His blessed work in the hearts of those whom He has committed to our care. The teacher who has learned this lesson can always work on with confidence and hope even in the face of discouragement and disappointment. And as we look back and remember that we, too, were once in that state of complete separation from the spiritual blessings of God, without strength and without hope, and that God out of pure mercy and grace brought us to faith not because there was in us anything that caused us to respond to His offer of forgiveness but just because He was very good to us, we ought also to be filled with gratitude to this God who did not leave us to perish, but brought us to faith in the Lord Jesus.

This picture of natural man as we learn to see it from the Bible emphasizes once more the fact also that if anyone is saved it is God’s grace alone which is responsible. We sometimes wonder why it is that our teaching is not more effective, why it is so difficult to bring people to a full appreciation of the Gospel. We would think that when we offer the message of salvation to men they would jump at the chance offered to them. But if we know what natural man is we will know that it is not surprising that men reject and ignore the Gospel. The miracle is that there are people who believe it and accept it. And as you look over the boys and girls in your classrooms you ought to be grateful also for the many miracles that God has done in them.

But while it is true that in the final analysis the whole process of conversion to the faith and preservation in the faith is the work of the Holy Ghost with out any contribution on the part of man, yet the Holy Ghost does not do this work in a spiritual vacuum by a sort of vague, mystical spiritual influence, but He works through means. These means of grace which the Holy Ghost uses are, of course, the Word and the Sacraments. “Faith cometh by hearing” and faith is preserved by works effectually” also in those who believe. And as teachers of that Word you and I are tools and instruments in the hands of the Spirit, workers together with Him, as it were, in bringing men to faith and helping them to continue in the things which they have learned and to become more fully assured of their truth.

All that is expected of us is that we should be found faithful in teaching the Word. We begin with the preaching of the Law which is intended by God to arouse man to a consciousness of his own sinfulness. It is often said in our day that we ought to be careful not to arouse fear in the hearts of the children, and the reason which is given for such a statement is that we are to be teachers of the Gospel and not of the Law, that we are to be evangelical and not legalistic in our approach. But we are teachers of the Word and the Word contains both Law and Gospel. And if we teach the Law in such a way that men are

not made afraid then we are not teaching the Law as it was given by God. If we really say of all men what God says of them, if we really say of sin what God says of it, if we really say of hell what we have learned about it from the Bible, then the only result can be that man, if they believe what we say, are made afraid. Certainly the doctrine of hell and eternal damnation has absolutely no shred of comfort to offer to sinful men, and yet this doctrine is also in the Bible.

The advice which Dr. Walther gives to pastors in his Law and Gospel (p.82f) is good advice also for Christian teachers. After he had spoken of the fear inspiring spectacle at Mt. Sinai at the time of the giving of the Law, he says, "By this spectacle God has indicated to us how we are to preach the Law. True, we cannot reproduce the thunder and lightning of that day, except in a spiritual way. If we do, it will be a salutary sermon when the people sit in their pews and the preacher begins to preach the Law in its fullness and to expound it in its spiritual meaning. There may be many in the audience who will say to themselves, 'If that man is right, I am lost.'

"Some, indeed, may say: 'That is not the way for an evangelical minister to preach.' But it certainly is; he could not be an evangelical preacher if he did not preach the Law thus. The Law must precede the preaching of the Gospel, otherwise the latter will have no effect. First comes Moses, then Christ; or; first John the Baptist, the forerunner, then Christ. At first the people will exclaim, 'How terrible is all this!' But presently the preacher, with shining eyes, passes over to the Gospel, and then the hearts of the people are cheered. They see the object of the preacher's preceding remarks; he wanted to make them see how awfully contaminated with sins they were and how sorely they needed the Gospel.

"For your catechizing you must adopt the same method. When explaining the Law, do not mingle Gospel elements with your catechization, except in the conclusion. Even little children have to pass through these experiences of anguish and terror in the presence of the Law. The reason why so many imagine that they can pass for really good Christians is because their parents reared them to be self-righteous Pharisees; they never made them aware of the fact that they are poor, miserable sinners. A person may not have fallen into the most dreadful sins; but if he has been brought up properly, he says to himself when he hears the Law preached. 'Surely I am an awful sinner!' A Pharisee who hears the same sermon may not repeat that confession, though he may have fallen into far greater sins."

Dr. Walther also says (p. 81f): "God does not tell you to preach the Law in order thereby to make men godly. The Law makes no one godly; but when it begins to produce its proper effects, the person who is feeling its power begins to fume and rage against God. He hates the preacher who has shouted the Law into his heart, and he feels that he cannot slip off its coils. Where this has happened, you may hear people say: 'We shall never again go to that church. Why, that preacher strikes terror into my soul. I prefer to attend the services of the Rev. So-and-so. He makes you feel good. While listening to him, you discover what a good man you really are.' Alas! In eternity these people will wish to take revenge on the preacher that preached them into perdition.

There seems to be in our time a definite tendency toward softening the force of the Law. To do that is not to become more evangelical, rather it is to make the Gospel

without meaning. The preaching of the Law in all its sternness is of such great importance

because without it the teaching of the Gospel is a message without purpose. If you were walking on the sidewalk and suddenly a police car with its siren wailing were to drive up next to you in the street and one of the policemen would jump out, stand in the middle of the street and throw you a life preserver attached to a rope and shout, "Hang on, We'll pull you out," you would wonder whether these people are sane. It is just as ridiculous for men to hear the message of the Gospel from sin if they are still standing on the seemingly solid ground of their own righteousness. However, if you were drowning in a river, the same siren and the same police car and the same life preserver and the same message would be full of meaning and consolation and hope.

This is the same thought which the Savior expressed when He said, "They that be whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." There is no point in bringing the medicine of the Gospel to the soul that refuses to admit that it is sick. There is no use in bringing the Great Physician to bind up the heart that is not broken. He says Himself, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." The proclamation of the forgiveness of sins is without meaning to the person who, when he hears it, looks around to see whether there are perhaps some sinners in the crowd who need this forgiveness. They will sometimes even contribute money so that the Gospel might be preached to such unfortunate creatures.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that when Christian educators begin to tone down the severity of the Law they do not become better teachers of the Gospel. What they really begin to teach is neither Law nor Gospel, but a sort of watered down mixture of both which really bears only a superficial resemblance to God's Word. Instead of Law, we hear a few fine moral platitudes that all men can agree to, which is not a proclaiming of the Law of God; and instead of Gospel, a few sentimental, pious and vague thoughts about the love of God, which is certainly not a teaching of the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Many of us can look back over our own spiritual history and thank the Lord for the Christian teachers who made us conscious of our sins and frightened us with the Biblical teachings of the holiness and justice of God. Christian teaching will always be sin-conscious teaching. It can never be anything else than that so long as it is Biblically based and Scripturally orientated. This is certainly not the approach of modern psychology, but if we want to be guided by psychology rather than religion we ought to be honest and call our schools psychological schools and not religious and certainly not Christian or Lutheran schools.

What we are trying to accomplish by the teaching of the Law is to bring men to contrition, to bring them to sorrow for their sins. But we ought to understand that our purpose in bringing them to contrition is not to move God to make a different attitude toward them, but to prompt them to take a different attitude toward God. God is not coaxed into forgiving man by the fact that they have learned to weep over their sins. We ought never to say that God forgives us because we are sorry. That would be an indirect denial of the doctrine of salvation by grace without works. Judas was not forgiven, although he was very sorry. Sorrow over sin could never make up for our failure to do what we should have done. We sing:

“Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and Thou alone.”

Yet we catch ourselves sometimes speaking of sorrow as though it were a cause for forgiveness.

The function of contrition is rather to make men realize that by themselves they are lost, that left to their own efforts they can only be damned, that there is no hope for them in the way of salvation by their own works. When their sorrow, their contrition, has done this for them it has done all that it can do. It will certainly not make them love the Lord. Luther says that at a time like that a man wishes there were no God. And the more he wishes that, the more he realizes that he is not at peace with God, that he is a sinner whom nothing that he may do can make good and acceptable in God's sight. This is exactly the attitude that we should like to have result from our teaching of the Law. The unbelieving world, supported - by the way - by a large segment of the so-called Christian Church, will denounce such an approach as the approach of fear and terror. In their analysis they are correct, from the standpoint of Law, the Christian religion is a religion of fear. But in their foreviewed evaluation of the approach they are all wrong. William James, for example, in his *Varieties of Christian Experience* looks upon such an attitude of fear as one of the marks of a sick mind. But these same people will admit that fear serves a very useful purpose in the everyday situations of life. Why should it suddenly become unacceptable in the religious field? They are afraid to be afraid. But when a man knows the answer to all the fears that oppress of the Law be led to despair and be left in that condition. When through the Law the human heart he does not have to be afraid of fear.

Of course, we do not intend that men should by our teaching of the Law be led to despair and be left in that condition. When through the Law the Holy Ghost has broken the stony hearts of men, then the way has been prepared for the message of the Gospel. We can not see when the heart has been broken, for the person who gives the most hardened outward appearance may simply be putting on a bold front to cover up a terror-stricken conscience; the person who seems perfectly happy and content may be terrified by hidden fears, and the one who seems most deeply touched may simply be beginning the reaction which he knows the teacher would like to see. Therefore, here, too, the Christian teacher most simply do his work of teaching the Law and the Gospel faithfully side by side and then leave it to the Holy Ghost to make the application which is necessary for each individual heart.

But one thing we can do so as not to stand in the way of the comfort which the Holy Ghost can give through the Word. When we teach the Gospel we should be sure that we do preach the Gospel and not just a reasonable facsimile thereof, We are sometimes afraid to preach the Gospel because we are inclined to believe that if we make the way of salvation too easy we shall encourage people in their wickedness. We often treat the poor sinner in need of assurance as we would treat a tramp who comes to the door. We may feel sorry for the man, we may want to help him, it may be in our power to help him, but we feel that if we feed him without requiring anything at all in return from

him, we will simply encourage him in his laziness. The charge that we do just that by our doctrine of salvation by grace alone is made against the Lutheran Church repeatedly. But it is rather reassuring that St. Paul had to defend himself against the same charge, as he does several times in his letter to the Romans.

When we teach the Gospel, however, we ought to realize that the fact that some people may misuse the free offer of grace should not influence us in our proclamation of the unmerited mercy of God which bestows forgiveness and salvation as a free gift without any conditions attached. We will simply say what God wants us to say and leave the results to the Holy Spirit. And the Gospel message which a Christian teacher proclaims will be this, "Children, for Jesus' sake God has forgiven you all your sins." God has done more than provide forgiveness He has actually forgiven. Expressions like "God will forgive you if you are sorry", or "God will forgive you if you believe" may perhaps be correctly understood but they are certainly also subject to a great deal of misunderstanding.

That this is true will perhaps be made clear to us when we remember that the Bible teaches that God has forgiven the sins of all men. Paul tells us in Romans that the judgment of justification has been pronounced upon every man, that all the world has been declared righteous. One of the most comforting passages in the Bible is the one which tells us that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. When the apostle says that God did not impute the sin of the world unto them, he tells us plainly that God has actually forgiven the sins of the world. So often we are inclined to look at the forgiveness of sins as something that Christ made possible and that we can offer to men provided they first meet certain requirements. But Christ did not only make it possible for the sins of the world to be taken away, He actually took away the sins of the world. The forgiveness of sins is simply the act of God by which He acquitted the world, by which He has pronounced all men righteous.

If we understand this, many of the questions that are often asked about the forgiveness of sins will be answered immediately. We are often asked why it is necessary to go to communion when we have already received the forgiveness of sins in the confessional service. Or we are asked why, if the forgiveness of sins is complete, if we have really received the forgiveness for the sins of a life time at our baptism, it is necessary to be forgiven over and over again. God is simply repeating the same declaration over and over, through the Gospel He pronounces us righteous and innocent and not guilty day after day so that we may never forget it, so that our faith may be strengthened, and so that those who have as yet not believed it may be brought to faith where and when it pleases Him.

This is also made very clear by the word for atonement or propitiation which is used in the Old Testament. The Jews to this day celebrate Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. Kippur, atonement, comes from the Hebrew word "Kaphar" which may be related to and means the same as our English word "cover". Christ has made atonement for all sins, then, means that Christ has covered up all the sin of men in the sight of God. This is the declaration of the Gospel. It will be seen from this that just as sorrow is not a cause of our forgiveness, so also forgiveness does not have as one of its causes or conditions the faith of man. God justifies the ungodly, says the Bible.

This is one of the distinctive doctrines of pure Lutheranism. Dr. C. H. Little in his *Disputed Doctrines* calls justification "God's declaration of amnesty to the world of

sinners.” (p. 607 Dr. Koehler, under whom many of you studied your doctrine, says in the latest edition of his *Summary*: “By His vicarious active and passive obedience Christ paid for the sins of all men, and God, accepting this payment, has in his heart forgiven all sins of all men.” (p. 146) Dr. Pieper in *Christian Dogmatics* (p. 321, Vol. II) says: “Now then, if the Father raised Christ from the dead, He, by this glorious resurrection act, declared that the sins of the whole world are fully expiated, or atoned for, and that all mankind is now regarded as righteous before His divine tribunal.” Dr. Stoeckhardt in his *Roemerbrief* (p. 262) writes that “all are acquitted and absolved from all their transgressions.” Dr. Arndt makes the same statement in *The Abiding Word* (Vol. II, p. 243), when he says: “God speaks the great word: The human race is now justified, it possesses righteousness, the sins of all men are forgiven.” Dr. Walther writes in his *Law and Gospel* (p. 136): “In Christ He loves all sinners without exception. The sins of every sinner are cancelled. Every debt has been liquidated.”

If we clearly understand this it will certainly make a difference in the way that we teach the Gospel. We ought not to point the children to anything in themselves as the basis of their forgiveness, neither their sorrow, nor their prayers, nor their faith. The Lord Jesus in sending out His disciples told them that they were to preach forgiveness. The word which is used for “preach” simply means “to make an announcement”. Like a herald a Christian teacher is simply to step before his class and make the announcement from the King of kings that the sins of all men are forgiven. He is not only to teach something about forgiveness, but he is to proclaim God’s declaration of pardon to the world of sinners.

I find in my own teaching that when we get to this particular point of doctrine, many students experience a great deal of difficulty. They find it hard to give up the idea that God forgives us because we believe or because we pray or because we are sorry. But it is here that it really becomes clear whether we are really willing to forget all that we may do and trust solely and alone in the merits of Christ for our salvation. They will ask why faith or contrition are then at all necessary. We have seen why contrition is so very important. Unless the sinner is conscious of his sin and realizes its damning nature, he will not pay attention to the message of pardon. And, on the other hand, faith is so very important because when this declaration of pardon is made to man, there are only two things that can be done with it. He may either believe it and accept it, or reject it. As he is by nature he will always reject it, call God a liar, and remain at enmity with God. By his very unbelief he remains an enemy of God. Through all eternity he will never know the peace and rest of a cleansed conscience even though God on His part loves him and gave His Son to die for him and for Christ’s sake has declared him, too, to be not guilty. But when this same man is converted by the Holy Ghost, he believes the declaration, he sees God as his loving Father in Christ, and in that assurance he finds confidence of heart and peace of conscience and rest of soul. He is reconciled to God as God is reconciled to him. The message of forgiveness is proclaimed that it might so be accepted in faith. The forgiveness of sins is not a state to be achieved by our own efforts, it is rather a message to be believed.

It is this announcement of the full, free, perfect forgiveness of all sins through the merits of the, Lord Jesus that the Holy Ghost uses to call and invite men. If someone would walk up to us and say, “Here is a thousand dollar bill for you,” there would lie in that very statement an invitation to reach out our hand to take what is offered. The

Gospel promise is just such an invitation. And all that a Christian teacher is to do is to be God's instrument in extending this invitation. Over and over again, day after day, he is to make this announcement which is good news, 'glad tidings, Gospel, every time that it is heard in faith. It is rather humbling to realize that this is our whole part in this program, and yet, like John the Baptist, we ought to be satisfied to be only voices whom God uses to proclaim His message, "God has forgiven you for Jesus' sake."

If we realize how reassuring- this is for us in our own moments of doubt about our salvation, we will also understand why it is so important that we should teach our children in this way. As long as we believe that our forgiveness follows from our sorrow or even from our faith, we must often be in doubt. You know that many times we wonder whether we are really sorry, and there are certainly times when we wonder whether we have faith. Now, if God forgives only those who are sorry or those who believe, then every time I begin to doubt myself I must also begin to doubt God. This is really Calvinism and not Lutheranism. Calvinism teaches that God has forgiven only the believers, that Christ died only for the elect. Before I can know whether Christ died for me or whether I am forgiven, then I must first of all make sure that I am one of the elect, that I am a believer. That is why Christian experience is so important to a Calvinist. But if Christ has really died for all men, if all men's sins are really forgiven, then I can trust only and alone in the Word and promise of God and know that I am forgiven, that my sin is covered. This is the comfort that lies in the word of John, "Brethren, if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things."

Through this announcement of full and free forgiveness for all, the Holy Ghost works faith. He changes the evil heart and will of man so that he takes an entirely new and different attitude toward God and toward salvation. The heart which trusted in its own works and wanted to be saved by what it has done, having been brought to despair by the teaching of the Law, is by the power of the Holy Ghost operating through the Word that I am permitted by God's mercy to teach, brought to look to Christ and to be saved by what He has done for us. When this desire for salvation through the Lord Jesus has been kindled in the heart, the conversion of man has taken place. That is why the Lutheran Confessions speak of the first small spark of longing for divine grace as being faith. This, too, is very comforting to know that it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. The person who has the desire to be saved through the Lord Jesus is no longer blind, he is no longer dead, he is no longer opposed to God, his will no longer runs counter to the will of God. He is born again.

We might say just a few words in conclusion about the objections which are raised to this doctrine, It is said that such an approach as this makes it must too easy to be saved. But what is salvation by grace but at. easy salvation? This very objection is a remnant of the natural opposition of man's heart to salvation by grace alone. It is said, as has already been mentioned, that such a doctrine as this will make the sinner think that he can be saved no matter what he does. And that is correct. That is exactly what salvation by grace means. No matter what a man has been, here is forgiveness for him. "Do you mean to say, then," someone. will say, "that a Christian having found salvation in the blood of Jesus, can go out and live the way he pleases?" and we will say that it means exactly that. But we will say that it also means more.

How shall we which are dead to sin live any longer therein? Go out and live as you please, but be sure that what pleases God also pleases you, There are other Bible

passages which tell us that we should delight ourselves in the Lord. We will teach these passages also and know that as the Holy Ghost works faith through the Word so through that same Word He will also work in the hearts of men the desire to do what the Lord Jesus would want them to do. And those who give no evidence of a living faith we will remind that faith without works is dead.

Our business as teachers is simply to teach the Word, to bring men the particular Word that they need at any given time and place. When a person is self-righteous we teach him that all men are sinners deserving damnation and we will pray that the Holy Ghost will convince them of this. When they are frightened by the doctrine of hell, we proclaim forgiveness through the blood of Jesus and we will pray that the Holy Ghost will convince them of this. If they are careless in their personal living, we remind them of the words of God that speak of the need of sanctification and we will pray that the Holy Ghost will convince them of this. When they are confident of their own ability to take care of themselves, we tell them, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" and we will pray that the Holy Ghost will convince them of this. When they are afraid of falling away from the faith, we bring them the promise of Jesus, "No man shall pluck them out of My hand" and we will pray that the Holy Ghost will convince them of this. And because we usually do not know exactly what each individual needs we seek to teach them the whole counsel of God in a systematic way and when we have given them a good, solid Christian education we know that we have given them the Word by which they can answer their own spiritual problems as they arise. This is our work as Christian teachers. The rest we leave to the Holy Spirit.