

What Must our Present Day Preaching Emphasize More Than Anything if it is to Complete its Assignment?

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If this ever happens, the purpose of the Church is confused today. Roman Catholicism wants to subject the world outwardly to the Church in the name of the Gospel; then it would be of help to her for time and eternity. Calvinism wants to make the Church subject to the state in order to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth by outward devices. And now come the modernists, continuing along the same line; they want to save the world through “practical Christianity.”

It is with this spirit that we present day Christians especially have to deal. We have before our eyes examples like the “Federal Council of the Churches of Christ” and Stockholm’s World Congress For Practical Christianity”: specific exponents of today’s spirit of the times.

Today’s educated world is under the spell of the evolutionary world view. It has basically done away with the Bible as the inerrant Word of God and with Christ as God’s personal revelation of salvation to the sinner. In the long range, today’s educated world has moved the personal God and his heaven to a human field of view. It has lowered the view absolutely entirely to the earth—to this life. Today’s educated world no longer asks, “What Must I do to be saved?” It now asks merely, “What must I do to properly enjoy this life?” The result is enormous social poverty and moral ruin.

How is that to be remedied, or to be resisted, as the case may be? Here, say the Federal Council, those from the Stockholm Conference, and thousands within and outside of the Church—here lies the assignment of the Christian Church. People can be of different opinions concerning whatever else Jesus may have taught or been. But in one thing, all the world agrees: he was the greatest preacher and the most perfect example of the love of neighbor as there has been among those who believe in God’s fatherhood. That is the true picture of his character. To follow him in that is Christianity, true practical Christianity. To promote that in the world is the Church’s assignment; then we will get really moral people, true Christians. Then also will the economic and business circumstances so arrange themselves that everyone can scrape out of his existence a tolerable and happy life. And the Church must help with this mission practically and effectively.

We hardly need bother ourselves to prove that this description of the Church’s assignment is false. Our citizenship is in heaven; eternal life is our goal. Here on this earth we are visitors and strangers. That is what sin has done. Because of sin God has covered the earth with the curse and subjected our temporal life to the dominion of death. Sin and death rule now in this world, and no person can get them out of the world. A person can change economic and social institutions, but in so doing he cannot get rid of mankind’s poverty. And even if a person were able to give everyone perfect health and a million dollars, that would make life for himself and others just as miserable or more so than it is now. Sickness, pain, heartache, tears, suffering, agony, and death would destroy people after that good fortune just as they did before. No human institutions (though the socialists dream), no moral teaching, and no perfect example of love and self-sacrifice yanks sin out of people’s hearts. And where sin rules, there rule poverty, suffering, and death—the curse. No person, also no Federal Council and no World Congress, will change in that respect—not even just a little bit.

Furthermore, eternal death has a thousand times more to do with sin than does temporal suffering. Temporal suffering and physical death are only a forerunner of and a sermon on eternal death. The Word concerning these things—who is love himself, who gave his divine life by which we escape eternal damnation--does not let itself be erased: “And they will go away to eternal punishment.” This is the true need the true distress of the human race. Here the efforts of the philanthropists should begin if they want to bring about

something good. And if only they could free us from eternal death, we could in the end put up with temporal death and all its suffering. But eternal death they hush up or fib away. They leave us in the lurch, lulling to sleep our pounding conscience and crying heart with promises of temporal welfare. What we poor people on this earth need is redemption from God's anger and curse, which burns into deepest hell. What we need above all is salvation from sin's might and power in our innermost heart. If that is provided, then all this world's suffering changes into clear blessing and bliss.

But we already have redemption from curse and sin in Christ Jesus, a perfect redemption from all evil. To preach this and to make it the sinner's own—that is the Church's one great assignment. If the world accepts this preaching then it is helped—also for this life. But if the world rejects this preaching, then it is lost eternally and also temporally. No God will help the world out of that mess.

Our Preaching and Modern "Science"

We are to preach the gospel to the world. What does that mean? -- Before we go into the correct response here, it would be good for us to briefly battle certain theologians far and near—those who want to embrace the essential truth of the gospel, but believe they must make it palatable to the modern world.

Ever since von Hofmann, these theologians have had in their mouths this phrase: "to teach the old truth in a new way." What they mean by that comes out in their writings. They have long since given up hope that Scripture in its existing form might become accepted as God's Word in the educated world. Natural science and the scientific/historical/literary Bible critic have "proven" Scripture's inspiration to be an illusion. Whoever wants to preach the gospel successfully today must come to terms with the world on a scientific basis. He may teach nothing which contradicts the "sure results" of science. And he must be able to make his message plausible to reason. A person nowadays may not expect the educated world to believe in historical inaccuracies, scientific impossibilities, miracles contrary to nature, and the like. Nowadays people are "realists," who do not let themselves put up with fantasies; they want facts, and that is what we must offer them.

In this way divine truth should carefully be sifted out of the Bible with scientific means, and in this way the gospel is to be shaped so that it can be accepted with good conscience by the educated people of our time. Whoever wants to preach the gospel in its biblical form must at the same time disprove what is considered science today but contradicts the gospel. Otherwise he may not hope for any success.

Concerning this we must say that these modern advisors have placed before us a very time-consuming and thankless assignment. Certainly it cannot hurt for anyone who is at home in the area of so called "science" to battle (on scientific grounds) the "scientific" assertions which are opposed to the gospel of Christ and Holy Scripture. Of course, that would take a lot of time and effort, which, we need for better things; but it would not be very hard. What could be easier scientifically than to point out the fallacies of the modern Theory of Evolution? But we mustn't swat at every fly

Whoever wants to battle so called "science" must direct his argumentation neither against single assertions nor against entire theories. Rather, he must direct his argumentation against the real arsenal of all science which opposes the Bible. This is the falsehood concerning the unlimited capability of mankind's knowledge and the certainty of the results in his "scientific" investigation. We must demonstrate that people cannot know what they pretend to know with great confidence. We must point out the limits of human reason and all "scientific" perception (just as all human ability has its limits). We must make it clear that human reason is not the measure of all truth, and its ability to comprehend does not limit the realm of possibility. We must prove that human reason is entirely limited to human calculations by our sensory organs operating in time and space. Beyond that human reason knows nothing but can only fanaticize. We must prove that human reason is very tightly hemmed in; it can never establish by means of any scientific experience, even with an experiment carefully repeated a million times over, anything other than time-space phenomena. And these time-space phenomena permit us to come to the conclusion of absolute, universal validity only by means of false logic.

With this limitation of reason and all scientific experience, we must demonstrate something: that conclusion from like to like (as diverse as its application is in day to day life) cannot produce an unshakably

sure result. Therefore it is scientifically impermissible. In this way today's Theory of Evolution in its final stage rests entirely upon the conclusion that there is similarity between the earthworm and the elephant. And indeed the elephant does still have at both ends something of a wormlike appendage. The Theory of Evolution rests upon the conclusion which proceeds from the dove family's ability to vary. This is generalized to the common genealogy of all things. We must demand that evolutionism rule out the possibility of every other way for the origin of species before it may make the claim of being scientific fact.

Most of all, we must put our finger on this fact: that the sum of what science knows about universe compared to what it does not know is like one drop of water compared to the ocean—or, as Friedrich Paulsen has said more exactly, like one point compared to the unending (?) universe. Yes, it is true that we know less about the great big universe than a North Sea crab knows about the ocean—or even less than it knows about the Himalayan Mountains. With no telescope do we see to the end of the universe or beyond that, with no airplane do we fly there, with no “wireless” do we telegraph or telephone to that point. With all our much extolled knowledge, we always remain in our tiny pot and never see out over the rim.

Because of all this, every true and scientific (that is: exact, thorough, exhaustive) knowledge of the world is impossible for us. We would have to stand outside of the world, reach across it spatially and temporally, penetrate all its atoms and forces—penetrate their existence next to and within one another, their essence and all their relationships to all others—and we would have to know the universe's oneness; in short, we would have to be God in order to know the world fully. What is possible for us to know about the world with our very narrowly limited apparatus for knowledge—and properly, first of all, what we really do know about the world—is a pitiful patchwork. So every assertion which claims universal validity is false from the start and an intolerable presumption. Therefore it is against human reason's scientific capability to know (which is so confidently paraded around, but which of itself so empty) that we will have to direct our polemics. This will shut the mouths of the scientific babblers and clear away from Christianity the stumbling blocks which the other side lays in its way.

Our Preaching and the Human Heart

But all of that is in fact (we repeat it) only pitiful skirmishing. We can neither convert the world with that argumentation, nor do we save Christendom through it. The real enemy of the gospel is not mankind's formal ability to know, nor the content of his knowledge gathered by scientific experience. The real enemy of the gospel is the human heart—alienated from God through and through, hostile to God, unspiritual, fleshly. The human heart exalts itself over everything called God and over the worship of God, and it sees its salvation in sensual desire. Pride and sensuality are the two great evils, or if a person wishes, the one great evil of the human race. These are the real enemies which we have to overcome if we want to make Christians and keep them firm in faith.

To express it individually and graphically: we have to deal on the one hand with the Pharisee, and on the other hand with the tax collector and the prostitute. Behind every instance of godlessness is hidden either one or the other. But actually both are always present: it is only, that sometimes the former, sometimes the latter gains predominance in the heart. And we know that with respect to the gospel, pride is the worse of the two evils (Matthew 21:31, Matthew 23, and other places).

We find human pride, with its exaltation of self over God, not merely in the area of morality but also in self-righteousness. Here it is indeed very widespread, grown out very strongly, and very well established as in no other area of life. We all come to the world with a Pharisee's heart. And nothing develops by itself as easily and as strongly in the training of a person as this: the imagination that he basically is a good person. All introspection of natural mankind boils down to that. The murderer, adulterer, swindler, drunkard, or liar admits certain errors and weaknesses in himself. But that his heart is basically good—that notion he still does not let himself get rid of by way of his imprisonment.

Now among the truly honorable, among those who can say of themselves that they are not like other people, among those who are conscious of a true human goodness toward man and beast, among those who

have so many a charitable deed to record or like our boy scouts can hang out their tie as a sign of having done at least one good deed a day—among those people self-righteousness grows unconquerable. It is the core of every non-Christian religious system and philosophy of life, the innermost heart and the power of: humanism, the lodge system (which is very widespread), socialism, prohibition, and feminism. It thoroughly infests the whole modern education system and the offices of law, art, science, and politics—every area of life. And just as self-righteousness is the cause on earth of all envy; hatred, murder, all warfare, all conflict, and many other sins, so it is also the ultimate basis of all unbelief, all carnal security, and impenitence. Through these, self-righteousness is the ultimate basis of eternal damnation.

Indeed, let us make no mistake about it: every opposition to the gospel finally has its basis in self-righteousness. If we do not break down self-righteousness, then our preaching is in vain—then every other success with the sinner is only a sham success. With every other sort of sinner our Lord Christ would deal, but to the Pharisees he proclaimed the final judgment with these words: “You snakes, you brood of vipers, how will you escape being condemned to hell?” God dwells only among those who are of shattered heart. And if a person were in other respects as holy as the angel Gabriel, but if he were proud and self-righteous, he would have to go down to hell. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled.

With self-righteousness as the most common species of pride, a whole series of other species is linked together. There is the vanity of knowledge and ability, which makes an appearance in many varieties. Through the entire scientific world in a conscious way—and through the nonscientific educated world in an unconscious way—goes the following: the proud illusion of the: absolute, general acceptance and errorlessness of human reason’s basic laws, perceptions, and conclusions. This is the measuring stick and touchstone of all truth. Only what is clear to human reason is true, say the coarse rationalists.

The whole modern scientific world builds its scientific system on this “self-evident” principle. If there is a rational and personal God, then he must stand under the same principles of thought as we do. He must calculate, form ideas, systematize them, and draw conclusions exactly as we do, or we will declare him to be irrational. God must conform absolutely to humans: He must accommodate himself to our thinking: not only in general, but fully and at every point. Otherwise he confuses our ideas, systems, and conclusions, and he makes us fools—which we just simply cannot be. His revelation, his gospel, and his Scripture must also prove true to the principles of our reason, or we want to know nothing about them.

In this way reason turns into a god. It does so without even considering that all its perceptions are determined by a handful of biased sense organs, which are tailored only for human reasoning. So from the start, reason is limited to a narrowly bounded way of perceiving things. However, the perceiving power of the unending God gathers all things, all space, and all time into just one point, and God’s perceiving power goes beyond that one point unendingly. But such is the pride of the human heart To God, who does not respect the absolute supremacy of human reason, they turn their backs with absolute disdain.

Upon the “errorlessness” of human reason is based this fantasy: the errorlessness of “scientific” knowledge and ability. We have already pointed out that all human knowledge is necessarily patchwork, and that human knowledge actually a pitiful patchwork. That is even true concerning our spiritual knowledge. And from all of this it follows that human knowledge has only relative worth, and not absolute worth.

But even that does not affect the vanity of human wisdom. What human wisdom speaks must be spoken downward from heaven, and what it speaks must count on earth. How many secrets of nature has modern science already uncovered! How many inventions has it made! Today we are not only acquainted with some eighty elements; we also know for certain that there can be only a few more. Not only have we discovered in which combinations the different gases explode and become useful; not only can we mix and condense poison gases to annihilate large cities in a few hours; but we will also soon explode the atom (which has now fortunately been apprehended); we will blow up the earth and set the universe shaking. Steam, gases, telegraph, telephone, gramophone, radio, airplane, and seventy-mile canon—daily we gain more mastery over the forces of nature. Soon we will enter into alliance with Mars, and then mankind will play with the sun, the moon, and the stars.

Yes, “They puff themselves up like a fat belly; they simply do whatever they think.” “He shakes his fist at God and vaunts himself against the Almighty” (Job 15: 25). They have long since surpassed Pharaoh in his defiance: “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?” They have only a scornful smile for the idea of a personal God, who rules the world. And the plague is entirely universal. There is no little priest, no little professor, and no little teacher so small that a little pope is not stuck within him. Every instance of knowing, having, or being able to do something puffs them up Those are the human beings, with whom our preaching must deal.

Mankind’s other side is sensuality. A person’s body is bound to the earth. His senses are exclusively directed on material things; in his bodily state, a person is directed to the doings of the physical world. He draws out of this world his nourishment and health: his whole bodily welfare, without which his soul cannot be happy and prosperous. And that a person be prosperous also in the use of earthly things is indeed God’s will. In order to accomplish man’s earthly prosperity, God gave him woman to establish the highest form of earthly happiness: family life. Now to be sure, through sin the curse came directly upon the outward, bodily life of mankind. But in a direct way the curse, under grace, should become a blessing to sinful people: a means of discipline for the benefit of Christ and the salvation he brings. But just as mankind’s bodily state became the outward means to accomplish sin, so sin within mankind has now made bodily joy and sensual titillation his god. Sin began with doubting God; it became complete when mankind fell away from God and turned to the created being as the higher good which truly makes a person happy.

So sin is indeed not a mere deification of the bodily. It is inward unbelief and disobedience. This is aroused through the lie about the jealousy and unfaithfulness of God. And sin is transposed into outward deed by this: the deception of godlike prosperity which lies in the unbridled enjoyment of the earthly.

Because of this deception, Scripture calls mankind “flesh.” Inwardly a person is apart from God, his true happiness. He becomes empty and unstable. So people seek heaven on earth in thrills: in fleshly lust, visual lust, and haughty living—that is, in sexual lust, lust for luxury, and lust for money. This is what John (in the place just quoted—I John 2: 16) sets as the attitude of this world, which is opposed to doing the will of God. But in other places Scripture brings mankind’s whole sinful manner under this term “flesh.” Then Scripture is generalizing the expression “flesh” from its specific meaning. In this way “flesh” opposes the “spirit,” or the spiritual attitude.

This sensual attitude is what we must overcome with our preaching, along with pride. The sensual attitude is born with us and clings to us until the grave. And the world wades in this sensual swamp with delight until it is in over its head. It would take us too long to support that picture concretely, even if we would cite only the main examples. The world which has fallen away from God really has only three themes for its thinking, desiring, and doing; they are: making money, being showy, and having sexual enjoyment. In these alone does life consist for the world; in these alone lies the prosperity which it chases after. With these goals not only does the world stagger past us certain and carefree, but the world regrets only the following: that in its sensual activity, God has placed fences which it cannot climb over.

Now we know from God’s Word and from experience that the world will not be deterred in this hustle and bustle on its part. No talking, no preaching of morals, no coaxing and threatening, no suffering of punishment, no pointing back on history, and no science helps in this regard. Each civilized nation always follows the others into the pit with respect to these sins. Culture only serves to promote pride and the sins of the flesh. Which government has ever accomplished anything against the rich, who have gained their millions at the expense of the poor? Where would authority draw the line if it simply decided to hang all serious thieves or to imprison all murderers, adulterers, and whores? Where are the successes of science and “scientific” theology against the moral corruption of the German people, the French people, or any other people which has turned to unbelief? Education also trains people in immorality, and it places all knowledge and all ability in immorality’s service.

But even our preaching from the revealed Word of God can get neither the vanity nor the earthly attitude out of the world. It is the same today as it was at the time of the Deluge. In order to end the wickedness of those who do not let the Spirit of God chastise them, God must make his angry judgement and end the bodily life of humans. That is what he does through death. He ends wickedness through many a special judgment on this

person and that person—whether tyrant, blasphemer, sorcerer, adulterer, or perjurer (Malachi 3:5)--whom he suddenly carries off. Even today by sudden judgment God punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate him. He will make an end to the wickedness of the whole earth in his future appearance, and the gospel will bear no more fruit.

But we do not set aside the preaching of the Gospel on account of this. Even if we do not convert the world, we will indeed convert all the elect and bring together all the children of God scattered upon the earth (John 11: 52). Finally, it is for the sake of these that, we preach the Word: with it they are saved. But we preach to the others as a witness so that they have no excuse.

The Message of Our Preaching

If pride and sensuality are the two great sins of the world which our preaching must overcome, then the second question is this: What really is it in the gospel that we must set opposite these sins?

That is what we find, for example, briefly summarized in Isaiah 40: 6-8: “A voice says: ‘Preach!’ And he said: ‘What should I preach?’ ‘All flesh is hay, and all its goodness is like a flower on the field. The hay dries up; the flower fades; for the Lord’s Spirit blows into it. Yes, the people are hay. The hay dries up; the flower fades; but the Word of our God remains eternally.’”

That is, in regard to content, simply a twofold sermon: “All flesh is hay,” and “the Word of our God remains eternally.” If we do not overcome the world with this preaching, then the world remains in its sin—it has fallen into judgment.

Next we must note that we may not proceed with this preaching as we would with a human truth; gained by experience. If we would proceed in this way, we would make this preaching into nothing. Human wisdom and human philosophy of life do not convert, as well grounded as they might be. If any old, experienced person reads the proverbial wisdom of Solomon (in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) as simply human wisdom, he will agree with this wisdom. But these books are godly power for life only to those who acknowledge them as the truth, confirmed by God through his Holy Spirit -- for those who acknowledge them as God’s Word.

In our position, Scripture’s godly source and authority passes the content of our preaching (which is all too halting). The voice that the prophet hears is the voice of God, “our Lord.” God from heaven here commands the Church to preach. It is also God who replaces to the question of the Church, “What should I preach?” with this very answer: “All flesh is hay” We preachers, are the mouthpiece of the Church. We should know that we do not have anything from ourselves to preach.(what we hold to be saving) in order to convert sinners and plug the mouths of the babblers. But we have only what God orders to be preached.

God’s message is the preaching about all flesh existing as hay. It must be set against all the pride and the whole fleshly attitude of people for God’s sake—as God’s preaching. Yes, it also must be preached against the people who hear it as God’s preaching: “Thus says the Lord” is an essential part of our preaching to people: Our Christians and also the world should know that we are standing before them by the order of and in the name of the great God from heaven—that we are bringing them God’s Word and truth. Only in this way does our preaching have the authority and the godly power to smash the hardboiled hearts of men, born in sin. Only in this way does our preaching have the authority and the godly power to bring people to freedom and heal them again. Everything which wipes away the impression of our preaching’s godly authority weakens its godly effect—its power for conversion and power for salvation—by that much more.

The First Half of Our Message: “All Flesh Is Hay”

The content of our preaching (as just noted) is directed against human vanity and the earthly attitude. “All flesh” is all mankind in all its single individuals—destroyed by sin, fallen away from God, and directed toward the earthly. The many things Scripture collects under this term “flesh” is clear from passages like Genesis 6: 3,4,12, and 13 (but not Genesis 6: 17 and 19, or Genesis 7: 16 and others); John 3: 6; Romans 3: 10-18; and Romans 8: 1 and following. The term “flesh” includes people’s pride itself as well as everything

about which they pride themselves: people's lust and everything in which they seek their lust. "The flesh" is mankind itself with all its powers of body and soul, with all its knowledge and ability, with all its "righteousness" and virtue, with all its thinking, composing, striving, and doing.

The prophet continues in the second line: "and all his splendor." With these words the best and most beautiful, whatever is to be treasured most highly, is ascribed to mankind. It includes his highest thoughts, his most noble striving, his clearest virtues, his best works, and his greatest good; for it will compare with the flower of the field, the most splendid adornment of the meadow. But this flesh and its splendor is "hay," as Luther translated it (with the proper feeling for the Hebrew). For חציר is not זשא or ששב or דשא-עשב fresh, lush spring greenery as in Genesis 1:11-12 and elsewhere. Rather חציר ready for the sickle, destined to be hewn down, with the cutting becoming hay; or it is grass already cut down, and therefore it is already hay. חציר must be translated this way according to its etymology (גזל, גזז, חצץ) and, according to its other usage (see Proverbs 27:25 and other passages).- Here the meaning of חציר is clear from the words that follow: "The hay dries up; the flower fades." That is fully true only with grass which is already cut down—only with "hay". Therefore: all flesh is grass which has been cut down, and all its splendor is like the flower of the meadow which has been cut down.

The fact that the flower, like the grass, is also cut down comes from the following perfect tenses. The Hebrew perfect tense signifies the perfection or the completion of the action or condition (as the case may be). So either "the hay is in the process of drying up, and the flower is in the process of fading," or "they are dried up and faded;" or because two stative verbs are used here (נבל and זבש), we may take them in an adjectival sense: "the hay is dry; the flower is limp." And the fact that these words are to be understood in that final way, in the strongest sense, proceeds from the perfect tense of the following sentence. There we read: "For the Spirit of the Lord has blown upon it (and not as Luther translated: "blows into it"). The Spirit of the Lord's blowing into it or upon it has already happened. It is a completed fact, and the blowing has carried out its drying effect.

When we picture the Spirit of the Lord's blowing, we must realize that "Spirit" and "wind" are the same word (רוח) in Hebrew. So this picture is taken from the fierce east wind (the simoon or sirocco) blowing in the Holy Land. It blows over from the Arabian desert, and in a short time this wind singes everything green and causes it to wither. The Spirit's blowing has had the same effect upon all flesh and its splendor. These have already been mowed down, singed by the Spirit of God. They have faded and dried up in the face of total annihilation by fire.

We find what is to be understood by the singeing breath of God's Spirit in Scripture passages like Psalm 90: 5-9, Deuteronomy 32: 22, Nahum 1: 6, Jeremiah 15: 14, Jeremiah 17: 4 and others. The singeing breath of God's Spirit is the anger of God. In Psalm 90: 7 these words stand in a similar context as they do here people are like grass, which "soon becomes faded, is hewn down during the evening, and is dried up." And then we read the cause: "Your anger causes us to pass away like this, and your wrath causes us to go down so suddenly." And then the reason is stated: "For you place our misdeeds before you; you place our unrecognized sin in the light before your face. Therefore we go down all our days through your anger."

Here lies the great truth, which we cannot emphasize enough against the present day world and also against Christendom, as far as it is still flesh. "You place our misdeeds before you, and you place our unrecognized sin in the light before your face." That indeed is what the world does not believe. Instead, it talks itself into the very opposite with great energy. Half the philosophers and natural scientists in the world (as far as they have still really tolerated a God) have always dreamed up for themselves a God like this: one who has placed the world under fixed laws, but has otherwise abdicated it and left the destiny of people to their own free will. "It is just such a God that Aristotle, too, depicts for us, that is to say; one who drowns and lets all and sundry use and abuse his kindness and severity" (Luther, "Bondage of the Will," page 171 of volume 33, American Edition),

It is easy to recognize that this idea of a God who has abdicated the world is accepted among the humanists, the deists, and the rationalists. Out of deism free masons have also accepted this thought. And in our age of natural science, even Christians who have been “educated” no longer believe rightly in God’s direct ruling and guiding of things. They use nature’s fixed laws to build a separating wall between God and the world—a wall over which God no longer crosses here to us. The world now goes its way under the laws of nature alone, without God. He sits up there in heaven and does not trouble himself about those laws of nature. So he also takes no notice of people’s good or bad deeds. Much less does he take notice of the heart’s hidden thoughts and plans.

Scripture teaches the direct opposite. God’s omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence are no more passive than are his holiness, love, and faithfulness. Rather these are active characteristics which unhaltingly accomplish, work, preserve, destroy, order, test, judge, repay, forgive and retain, exercise patience and apprehend a person, just as it pleases God.

So to the world, which does not watch its step before God like this and which seems so sure of itself, we should preach that God is the spy on people (Job 7: 20, where Luther translates: “the guardian of people”). God watches over them step by step in all their thinking and composing, in every word and every movement God investigates and is acquainted with everything, as Psalm 33: 13 and Psalm 139: 1-16 state. But God spies not merely to get acquainted; rather he spies in order to act. What Paul writes in Romans 14: 7 and following: “For none of us lives to himself ...,” is also true in a different sense than the sense Paul uses there. We live absolutely entirely in God: in his presence, in his (pardon the term) moral consciousness; that is, we live within God’s holiness. Job in his discouragement complains that God is too strict with him, a mere human being. God accounts to Job the most insignificant things and brings him to account for them (Job 7: 14 and following, Job 14: 3, and Job 13: 25 and following). Just as wrong as Job’s murmuring is, so much so is his assertion right. God reacts immediately to all our doing. Even if we do not have this immediately before our eyes, we should not kid ourselves as though God had overlooked our actions or forgotten them. Look at a passage like Psalm 50: 21 or Isaiah 57: 11: “Is it because I have long been silent that you do not fear me?” These passages point out to us that God does have patience with us, but he still lets nothing go past unnoticed. In this category of passages belong Psalm 90: 4 and II Peter 3: 7 and following as well.

Now the effect of our sin upon God is rousing him to anger: “Your anger causes ..., and your wrath causes” Paul says in Romans 1: 18: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men.” Surely these expressions (anger, wrath, rage) are anthropopathies, since they are attributed to God. This is so also in Isaiah’s concrete painting of them (for example, in Isaiah 42: 13, 14). The opposing expressions (love, mercy, regret, and the like) are also anthropopathies if they are attributed to God. But they do indeed designate something very much real in God.

And so these expressions result in something much worse than anger, wrath, rage, and fury among men. Indeed, there is nothing more horrifying than the fact that God was there immediately after Adam’s sin. He spoke out the curse upon Adam and his wife, and the whole earth proclaims that he is carrying out the threat of death. Actually, it is the earth that unmercifully subjects all flesh to death. Human reason certainly cannot grasp about God “that you rage so very much.” But it is a fact all the same; it is divinely revealed truth. God is outraged over sin to such an extent that he has placed temporal and eternal death upon it.

God has also carried out the punishment of all who do not extract themselves from sin through laying hold of Christ’s grace. This punishment has already been prepared by God. God’s Spirit, his anger, has already blown on all flesh. God’s Spirit has hewn down all flesh like mowed grass and a torn flower—hewn it down from its life’s root through his curse. He has given all flesh over to a complete drying up and more than that; to eternal fire. A person brings into the world with him death and eternal damnation as his unescapable destiny. Upon all the knowledge which a person obtains for himself in life is stamped the word “foolishness.” Upon all a person’s ability is printed the word “powerlessness.” All his reason is unreasonableness; all his righteousness is unrighteousness; his virtue is blasphemy; his good works are clear sins; his noblest striving is enmity toward God. Yes, everything to a person’s gain is mold and slime; his showiness is shame; his highest desire is death

and destruction, temporally and eternally. This is the judgment of God concerning all flesh and its splendor: the breath of the Spirit of the Lord (Romans 3: 10 and following).

This judgment which God passed long ago continues to work unceasingly and unopposed on all that remains flesh. The anger of God mows down “flesh” unhaltingly in unquenchable temporal and eternal death, because it is an anger that burns into deepest hell (Deuteronomy 32: 22).

That is what we should preach to the proud world, sick with lust. That message about the hay drying and about the flower fading is not stated twice in vain. The message is true, even if all the world shouts “no” to it. That is what the world should hear as coming out of God’s mouth, whether the world hears it happily or curses it.

Even for Christendom, the people of God, this preaching counts: “Yes, the people are hay.” “People” means outward Israel -- Israel as it stands under the law. See the proof for this in my commentary on Isaiah II, page 41 and following (in the English translation). In God’s people of the Old and New Testaments, whatever stands under merely outward statutes, whatever works with the Church only outwardly—all merely outward splendor and beauty of the church—lies under the same judgment and breath of the Spirit as does all flesh, because it is flesh. And not only is that what the outer crowd, which names itself “Christian”, should hear as a judgment of damnation by God; true Christendom, the elect children of God, should hear it, too. With this message Christians learn to be afraid “before such wrath as yours,” to be humble, and to shove the world with its desires away from themselves.

And we must pay attention to one more thing in the words we have been speaking of. The words are not, “The Spirit of God;” rather we read, “the Spirit of the Lord,” and in the original text, “the Spirit of Jehovah blows upon it.” It is the Spirit from God, who has bound himself with a thousand oaths to eternal grace and faithfulness for the people of the Old and New Testaments. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Elohim is the God of all the world, the creator and preserver of all things -- of the worm as well as the human being. He loves and rages as others cannot. He is also known as El: the Strong, the Almighty. But he does not bless and curse, as far as he is Elohim or El. God’s grace and love, God’s anger and curse we can recognize only in the God who has revealed his heart to us in his Word as Jehovah.

God reveals his heart through Moses, the prophets, and the apostles of Christ Jesus. In Exodus 34: 6-7, God has preached that he is the unendingly kind-hearted and at the same time unendingly raging God. He has proclaimed through the mouth of Christ: “Whoever believes ... will be saved,” and at the same time: “but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” In the same hour God will say: “Come, you who are blessed!” and “Depart from me, you who are cursed.” And God will seal both with his words: “And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” God spoke the curse upon the sin of the first pair of humans, and exactly the same God first mentioned the defeat of the original sinner and his rule through the woman’s seed.

Now we know that no sin is established when our understanding disagrees with God’s understanding. No sin is established when our knowledge disagrees with God’s knowledge. And no sin is established when our power works in opposition to his. Rather this is sin: that our heart sets itself against the heart of God, that our will sets itself against the will of God: And the heart of God is holiness. “Holy, holy, holy!”—that means absolute moral perfection, a superabundance of it, and gleam and ray and fire. God’s holiness means God is holding dominion over his own essence, glowing through his own essence, and determining his effects. God’s holiness is picturesquely set down in the “Glory of the Lord,” the כבוד־יהוה (see Ezekiel 1, my Isaiah commentary—page 31 and following of the English translation, and other passages). The fiery heart of God reveals to us that our heart has sinned; it has turned eternal love into eternal anger for itself. The moth has flown into the light, and that has brought it to its death.

But we also know what and who is this light, the heart of God. “In HIM was life, and that life was the light of men The true light which gives light to every man was coming into the world From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.” Against this revealed, gracious heart of God, Adam and Eve sinned. They sinned against the God who had created all things for Jesus Christ’s sake—through him

and to him (Colossians 1: 16 and following). God did this so that when he became a human in form, he might dwell with them and wander among them as his people on a new earth and under a new heaven (Ezekiel 37: 27, II Corinthians 6: 16, John's Revelation 21:4). Against this God of love, goodness, and grace the human race (in its first parents) sinned. It has become "flesh" through that sin. For this sin we now stumble downward all our days. We do so through his love which has turned into anger.

That is the one half of the preaching commanded to us. Woe to us if we do not preach it, or even if we only break off its sharpest points. This is indeed the preaching of the Law in its full sharpness. It is always receding in outward Christendom. The pope and the sects have largely buried it under mere outward command and under a shallow teaching of morals. Behind these no anger glows. The world wants to know nothing of God's anger. The world dreams up for itself a God after its own fleshly heart

But even we stand in danger of forcing God's anger into the background all too much, due to the necessity and meaning of preaching grace. In our pulpits a person hears little of God's anger. But that has its basis in a false grasp of God's saving counsel and the economy of the new covenant. The command of Christ (Mark 16:15): "Preach the good news to all creation," does not preclude preaching God's anger. Rather it includes preaching God's anger and sets forth as the necessary counterpart to the good news. With his command the Lord has not withdrawn but rather he has confirmed the command given through the prophet Isaiah: "Preach, 'All flesh is hay'" Jesus himself, who is the Gospel incarnate, preached the Law and its curse more sharply than all the prophets, John the Baptist, and every one of his apostles. There is not a sharper preaching of the Law than the Lord preached to the Pharisees (Matthew 23). Its horrifying conclusion was: "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"

And this preaching must also be proclaimed properly to God's people of all times. Isaiah 58:1 says: "Shout it aloud do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins." This message counts for every preacher of the New Testament who wants to be a preparer of Christ's way like John the Baptist was. Christian preaching takes its content from the model of John's and Christ's preaching: Repent and Believe the Gospel! The words which sound like the apostle's (but are understood falsely and misused)--that the letter, the Law, kills and that the Word of grace alone has the power to conceive and bear faith--these words also change nothing concerning the Law. As true as the words above are, this is also true: that the seed of the Gospel cannot fasten a root and grow on a cement street (Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8). Before one can come to faith through the Gospel, he must first recognize his sin. And recognizing sin does not come through the Gospel, but rather through the Law alone. Recognizing sin does not come through preaching the love and grace of God, but rather through preaching his anger and his curse on all flesh. This preaching alone is the hammer that dashes rock to pieces (Jeremiah 23: 29). And only preaching God's anger can so thoroughly break, strike, and crush the heart which is proud and boiled in sin. Then the seed--the Word of grace--can find acceptance, take root, and grow in the heart (Psalm 34: 19, Psalm 51:19, Isaiah 57:15, Isaiah 66: 2, and other passages).

That is the Law's office and assignment, as Luther has established it so clearly and weightily in the Smalcald Articles, Part Three, Articles Two and Three. For that very purpose, God has revealed the Law. The Augustana, Article Twelve, describes the first part of repentance (namely regret) as "having sorrow and fear over sin." By those words it simply means *contritio assiva*: "the proper sorrow of heart, suffering and feeling of death," about which Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles, Section Three, Articles Three. It is brought about only through preaching God's anger.

To be sure, the Law alone works nothing but death of the soul: hardening or doubting. Therefore preaching it makes no sense if it stands alone. And the Gospel, if it is preached alone and of itself, also makes no sense. It can only strengthen people in fleshly assurance and unrepentance; and so destroy souls. It is also a poor excuse if a person wants pretty up his lack of Law preaching with this thought: that the Law is indeed written into people's hearts. That is true, but it is just as true that such recognition is very strongly blocked and darkened through natural pride and natural love of sin. So it does not even suffice for the basic recognition of sin and for the crushing of heart which is necessary for the Gospel's effectiveness. The preacher who wants to

preach only the anger of God makes God into a monster; which a person absolutely must flee; and whoever wants to preach only the Gospel makes God into a characterless subject, which a person can only scoff at.

However, binding together Law and Gospel—binding together the preaching of anger and the preaching of grace—reveals to us God in his true form. He is the God who rips hearts apart and heals again, the God who stakes down and binds up again, the true Savior who throws a person into hell in order to raise him into heaven. Just as the revealed anger of God stands in closet relationship to God’s grace (and vice versa), so the Law is related to the Gospel and the Gospel to the Law. If they are first preached in their proper relationship to one another, they constitute the Gospel in the wider sense, which converts the sinner and saves him. Let us see to it that we make no caricature out of our God and no pious babbling out of the Gospel.

The Second Half of Our Message: “The Word of Our God Remains Eternally”

The other great part of the preaching which the Lord commands us reads as follows: “But the Word of our God remains eternal.” In order to reiterate the first half of the preaching, “the hay dries up, the flower fades,” those words are placed here one more time. The word “but” signals the antithesis.

The word “our” God shows this is not a message about the anger of the Lord, who has breathed on all flesh and caused it to dry up and fade. In Scripture, wherever God is named our God, Your God (verse 9), my God, his God, or her God, it is a declaration of the name of God: Jehovah—as in Exodus 20: 2: “I am the Lord (Jehovah), your God.” Then “God” signifies the gracious God, who has revealed himself as the gracious one (Exodus 34: 6 and following). He has bound himself to eternal grace and faithfulness for his people. On account of this, Luther translated the name Jehovah as “Lord.” This is in accord with the New Testament, which always has *κύριος* in place of Jehovah. Luther explains the word “Lord” in his explanation to the Second Article: “I believe that Jesus Christ ... is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me ...”: “The Lord” is of course the eternal and unchangeable God, but at the same time he is the faithful Savior of poor sinners. So through the mouth of the prophet, God joins himself together with his people in this word: “our” God. He wants to strongly emphasize his grace.

What kind of a message might this be? Israel, “his” people—the believing bunch of all time—knows very well. It is the preaching of grace, standing in opposition to the curse. It is the promise of Christ Jesus: the Gospel, grasped in the strictest sense.

This message had indeed been present for a long time. It was there in the promise of the woman’s seed, even before God had spoken his message of anger upon people. Noah proclaimed this message to his descendants when he blessed Shem and Japheth (Genesis 9: 25-27). Then followed the promise of Abraham’s seed, repeated to the other patriarchs. The Gospel message became God’s covenant with Israel. It was multiplied and clarified under Moses through the promises of the Help and the Comfort of Israel (by words and types). Under David the Gospel message rose to the description of the one to come as David’s son and at the same time David’s Lord; his reign would have no end.

That Gospel message continued to Isaiah’s time—up to this message in Isaiah 40: 8. Isaiah preached the one to come as the virgin’s son, as Immanuel, as the extinguisher of sins, as the Savior of both Jews and heathen; and as the Prince of Peace. He would base his lordship upon the saving righteousness, he himself had readied. He would bring perfect salvation to all the partakers of his reign. In this way the “Word of our God,” the Gospel about Christ, developed itself up to the twelfth chapter of Isaiah. It unfolded itself further in God’s promise to overturn all enemies, all death, all suffering, and all tears. This “Word of our God” unfolded itself further in God’s promise to perfectly restore everything through sin-destroying splendor. God had intended this restoration for the human race from the very beginning (see Isaiah 25-28, 34-35, and especially Isaiah 35: 10).

And now the prophet has begun, in chapter 40, to picture the future realization of this Gospel promise within Israel and within the heathen world. Isaiah had begun picturing this realization of the promise by preaching jubilation: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins Prepare the way for the LORD The glory of the Lord will be

revealed, and all mankind together will see it.” That is certainly true. God is saying, “Just as all flesh has been condemned to drying up in time and in eternity through my Spirit, so also the message of my grace remains eternally standing. It is the promise that my servant will come. He will remove every curse and bring full salvation to its place.” That is the sense of the prophet’s brief message.

It is truly worth the effort to look more exactly at this “Word of our God” according to its content and its nature. This is so since we are to proclaim it to every creature as the only source of salvation. The educated world, the uneducated world, also the learned world, and even the unbelieving theological world have no notion of God’s Word at all! In their heads the Gospel always becomes moral teaching. Over and over again a person is forced to hear that the Sermon on the Mount is Christ’s central teaching and the content of the Gospel. They mention the ideal life, which Jesus has placed before us in his word and in his way of life: love, selflessness, kindness to neighbor (for which the American world of sects has recently coined the catchword “service”), humility, truthfulness, chastity, gentleness, and patience. They mention everything Paul means when he says, “If anything is excellent or praiseworthy” For them, these things may be the Gospel of Christ. They mention what Socrates and Plato have set down as virtue: purely striving toward the good and beautiful and doing this without considering reward or punishment, welfare or woe-doing this purely for the sake of good itself. They mention what makes up the *ἀγαθὸς ἀνὴρ*, the *δικαίτατος ἀνὴρ*. Jesus also taught this in his Gospel (perhaps in greater fullness), and he has modeled it for us through his way of life.

To others these things may be the Christian Gospel. In Popedom this Gospel changes into obeying the church and her status. In the kingdom of the Reformed sects, this Gospel pictures the strong impact of the true Gospel in the form of holiness. And the Reformed undermine this more and more with time, as we can see especially in Schleiermacher. Today’s modernism within Reformed churches is no longer acquainted with any other Gospel. The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ finds its inner oneness in this understanding of the Gospel. And Stockholm’s “Congress For Practical Christianity” seeks nothing else than to put this “Christian” Gospel into effect for the world’s common good. On this basis, it expects to improve the world’s economic relations.

We might also look away from Germany (the cradle of the Reformation Gospel) and Europe’s other “Lutheran” lands ...: Also among us, the epigon of Lutheranism in our own land, we already partially find a strong mixture of legalistic thoughts in the concept “the Word of our God.” We have great reason to test yourselves and see whether we still acknowledge and preach to our people the Gospel in all its purity. Those of us standing in particular danger of this are the ones who (whether forced by conditions or speedily of their own free will) go over into English. Whether by necessity or by free choice; they study the literature of the Reformed sects. With the fad of making congregations “American,” they drag the characteristic legalism of the Reformed outlook into the pure Gospel, which Scripture offers to us. And they are not aware of it.

But what is it, then, that the true Gospel of Christ teaches? -- We cannot and will not fully answer that here. We can only emphasize the two all-important points of the Gospel’s content: 1) it preaches (that is, it proclaims and effects) full salvation, turning all anger of God into grace—turning every curse of God into salvation and blessing, and 2) the Gospel preaches full salvation without any qualification placed on the sinner.

The Gospel, when we understand it in opposition to preaching anger, is not merely preaching the love with which God has embraced the whole godless world. It is not preaching, godly goodness, fairly kindheartedness, or the gracious attitude of God—although by this attitude, God does in every way give life and breath to all creatures and especially to us. By God’s gracious attitude, he scatters a thousand roses on our path, as we confess in Luther’s explanations to the First Article and the Fourth Petition. The Gospel is also not merely preaching the will of God—although according to this will, God does not want to lose even one person. Rather God wants everyone to repent, to hear his saving Word, to learn of and to believe on Christ, and to be saved.

But still more of what the Gospel is not! The Gospel is also not merely, this preaching: that our kindhearted God—rich in love and grace—wants to erase all our sins through his Son, wants to turn his anger into grace, wants to remove his curse, and wants to present us forgiveness of sins, life, salvation, and eternal splendor. All that belongs in with the Gospel, but it is only the introduction and preface to the Gospel’s real content. **The full Gospel—the innermost heart, core, and light of the Gospel—consists in this: preaching**

that God, entirely on his own, already has done and still daily does and effects everything which pertains to our complete salvation: The saving grace of God is not a mere (however intense) wanting on God's part. Rather God's saving grace is deed and reality. It is, as John expresses in a hendiadys, "grace and truth."

God's saving grace is grace which has become and is becoming actuality: it is reality. It is the full counterpart to the anger and curse of God. God's saving grace was not and is not merely feeling and wanting on God's part, rather it is deed and reality. The Spirit of God has blown on all flesh; it has given death and destruction a home. That is bitter, but all too certain, reality. We must experience it without ceasing. But grace in Christ, God's gracious attitude, the erasing of our sins, the changing of God's anger into effective grace, the removal of the curse, the forgiveness of sins, the imputation of Christ's merit, the gift of eternal life -- all that has happened: the complete redemption from sin and from all its consequences. It is complete and ready. It is deed and reality.

Indeed redemption is so complete that absolutely nothing more can be added to it. And as a complete deed of God, redemption works forward in the world just as omnipresently and almightily as does anger and the curse during its time. The Gospel is the preaching, the redemption, which works forward until the Last Day. In his time Doctor Walther preached Christ's resurrection from the dead "as the genuine absolution of the entire world of sinners." Young theologians (who do not understand and are not well-traveled in the Gospel) shout indignantly, "That was a falsifying of the Gospel!" But it was not at all so. Rather Walther's statement was proof that in him God had once again allowed a small ray of light upon the Church: acknowledging the fullness of grace in Christ. These words were proof that Walther had grasped the Gospel at its real core. God had given grasp of the Gospel in this measure to hardly another man before and next to Walther since Luther.

Now if we do not want to rob this Gospel of its essence and godly power, we must especially emphasize this: the reality and truth of grace is not an idle, dead treasure. It is not something God might have laid aside somewhere in heaven. It is not as though God might be waiting to see whether someone might make use of his grace. No, grace reaches "as widely as the heavens, and God's truth reaches as widely as the clouds move." Indeed, God's grace not only spans heaven and earth and fills up all creation; God's grace is also clear life; power, activity, industry, and conquering results. It removes from the earth every curse, all death, and, all damnation. In their place God's grace sets spiritual and eternal life. God's Servant has ascended to the right hand of power; he holds the reins of world power: Just as he is the Lamb strangled from the very beginning, so also he is the King set upon God's throne from the beginning.

So no more does the curse of God reign. Instead grace reigns, and it determines all doing and governing of God. At one time the Lord's Spirit was the Spirit of anger, which blew on all flesh and threw everything into death and destruction. But now there is nothing in all creation which the Spirit of grace might not have blown upon. The ruling king of heaven poured out that Spirit of grace on Pentecost. And that was only the clear beginning. Since then, the Spirit (promised through Joel) has poured himself out "upon all flesh" in greater or lesser measure. Just as nothing remains hidden in the sun's heat, so nothing is hidden from the "honor" (that is, from the splendor) of God's grace (Psalm 19).

And grace does not merely offer itself to the cursed as Gospel, fastened into the Word. Rather through godly power of love, grace makes itself an entrance into the heart, which the curse has dashed to pieces. In the heart, grace again works faith. It is faith which the mother, of all the living had allowed to depart from her heart in the first great temptation. And it is grace that filled the heart of Cain—a heart so struck by anxiety until then because Cain had to be a slave to the fear of death for his entire life: he had to wander around unsteadily and cursed upon the earth. Then God's grace filled Cain's heart with the peace of God which transcends all understanding. God's grace bows the proud heart, which despairs under the feeling of death and roars against God. God's grace brings the heart to childlike humility under the gracious Father, who has taken it into his family. God's grace fills the hungry and thirsty heart with all the groceries of grace. It rips the heart loose from the fake goods and fake joys of the world, in which the heart vainly involves itself. Yes, in the Word (the Gospel) grace makes out of cursed people: blessed people, out of godless people: pious people, out of sinners: saints, and out of children of death and hell: heirs of heavenly life.

And not only that Although grace does not remove all suffering on earth, it does remove earth's every curse for all who are personally redeemed from the curse through grace. Although grace does not prevent sin, it certainly did prevent sin's curse in the first Gospel promise. From then on, grace took the power away from sin and hindered sin's effect.

Matters would have been different if grace had not taken away sin's power. Considering the threat: "When you eat of it, you will surely die," the man would have otherwise had to choke to death on the apple when he first sinned: But that did not happen because grace intervened. It was not merely Elohim, but rather Jehovah-Elohim¹ (the gracious God) who went after Adam when he had fallen in sin and asked him: "Where are you?" Yes, God certainly spoke a curse upon the snake. But upon the people God only spoke in the form of a curse upon their earthly life: it would be shot through with pains and trouble, already would end in bodily death. Through faith the people themselves were already taken away from every curse by the message that the seed of the woman would replace all things. The curse, which she should have had to bear, God had already laid upon and lifted off of him who "redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3: 13). And "just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (Romans 5: 18).

So just as there is nothing damnable for those who are in Christ Jesus, so also there is no more anger and curse for them. For "through Christ Jesus the Law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8: 2). Anger, curse, death, and destruction did and do exist for the person who has fallen away from God. But these belong to him only as far as he remains fallen away and in sin. For the person who is in Christ Jesus (and that includes also Adam and Eve), the curse has only the outward form of a curse, death, and destruction. Actually the curse has turned into clear love, blessing, and salvation. In other words, it has turned into a means of discipline. It must serve to remind us of God's earnestness because sin still clings to us. It must serve to warn us and to admonish us ...; in brief, this form of the curse must serve for discipline in righteousness.

For those who love God; all things—even that which is in itself a curse—must serve for the best. This is because according to God's eternal purpose in Christ, believers are called with Christ into God's splendor; they are put in order; they are made righteous and splendid. God is not against believers, but rather for them. With Christ he has presented them everything—purely and absolutely everything—everything. Heaven and earth are ours; like Peter, Paul, and Apollos, God himself is ours. There is no more anything within us which can be accused or condemned, as long as Christ (our substitute) sits at God's right hand and conducts our affairs. So now nothing else can part us from God's fatherly love, placed here again in Christ (Romans 8: 28-39).

But we cannot preach that to all flesh, to all the world still lying in sin and in unbelief, can we? -- Yes, precisely to them. If this is the "Word of our God," the Gospel, then it stands Preach! Preach the Gospel to every creature. Preach that God reconciles the whole world to himself in Christ. Preach that Christ completely redeems the whole world from all anger and every curse, from death and hell. Indeed Christ has changed every curse into a blessing for the world. Preach that as long as time endures, anger is not angry, the curse does not curse, death does not cause death, damnation does not damn, and hell does not burn. Preach that heaven and earth still stand, that the sun, moon, and stars still shine, that the earth still produces its fruits, that the grass is still green, and the flowers still bloom, that the rain still falls, and the water still ripples, that the birds still sing,

¹ * We acknowledge that in the Pentateuch God is designated sometimes as Elohim, sometimes as Jehovah-Elohim, sometimes as Jehovah alone, and sometimes even differently. That has been pressed into service by the Bible critics 'to mark the departure of one source to another.' So Genesis 1 would stem from the Elohim source because in it (really the chapter reaches Genesis 2: 3) Elohim is God's exclusive designation. In Genesis 4: 1-24 Jehovah—the Lord—is used exclusively. For this reason the chapter is supposed to originate from another source, the Jehovah source. And from Genesis 2: 4 to the end of chapter 3 stands Jehovah-Elohim (with the exception of 3: 1-7, the dialogue between Satan and the woman). Therefore the critics see a third author, who would have worked into one another the Elohim source and the Jehovah source. The true basis for the use of these different names for God is this: that the names are matched by their content. Elohim is the God, who made heaven and earth; therefore in Genesis 1 we find only this name. Jehovah-Elohim designates the Creator God who in grace revealed himself to people. And Jehovah is this same God viewed apart from his creating characteristic.

spring still returns, and the air still wafts about: preach that this life still brings a thousands joys for your hearers.

Preach all this as proof for the following: that God is gracious and has removed every curse through Jesus Christ, their Savior. Only for those who ultimately do not want this grace (which is much mightier than any sin) does anger remain anger, curse remain curse, death remain death, damnation remain damnation, and hell remain hell. This is so because such people do not want grace, life, blessing, and salvation—which are accomplished facts. That is the preaching which God has commanded to us. That is the Word of our God, the Gospel in its full measure. If we do not preach it, then the stones will have to shout it out.

That brings us to the second point: the unconditional nature of the Gospel, the free nature of grace. Of course, that is really the same as the completeness of the Gospel. For what is really complete offers no more room for accidents or conditions. But we consider this special expression necessary when we consider the application of salvation, imparting salvation to each lost person.

All of us together concede that the acquisition of salvation came through Christ's suffering and dying, through no mere human doing. God's promise of Christ does not cry out: "If you sinners on earth do not carry on too wildly, I want to send you Christ and let your sins be paid off through him. God's promise has no conditional clause of that sort or another sort: it is an unconditional promise. It sounded out: "Christ is coming;" it sounds out now: "Christ has-come, he is there, and all has been brought to completion:"

But people maintain that it is entirely different with the imparting of grace to humans. That imparting of grace can always be conditioned the moral make-up of the person to be saved. God can give this grace--justification, conversion, salvation, and perseverance—to no person free and unconditionally; rather these always happen only on condition. So justification may happen only on the condition that the person believes. Conversion may happen only on the condition that natural man says "yes" to it—or at least that he does not strive all too strongly against conversion. Perseverance in faith can happen only on the condition that a believer be true in faith and in salvation up to his death. Therefore at every step in imparting salvation, grace may not be free grace, but rather conditioned grace.

On this account the correct form of preaching grace (the Gospel) would really be the following: "God has fully redeemed all sinners from the debt of sin through Christ. For his sake God offers you forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, entirely for free, and provided that you believe it. God also wants to convert you; if you do not strive a too strongly against conversion. God also wants to preserve you in faith to the end, provided that you continue in that faith.

As plausible as all this sounds, it is nevertheless very much false. It destroys the whole Gospel. Yes, these conditions basically make the Gospel a Law. They demand accomplishments from people that people cannot fulfill, since they are entirely dead spiritually. Yes indeed, by nature mankind can only strive against the grace working on it, as Scripture witnesses throughout. By this conditional understanding of the Gospel, no person can come to faith and be converted. A person either would have to clothe himself with a self-made faith and become a hypocrite, or he would have to doubt. And if he would doubt, a person might nevertheless be converted (though not because of doubt). He might be converted if the conditional "Gospel" puts him in constant doubt concerning the genuineness of his faith—and by that points him toward his standing of grace.

On the one hand, this false preaching of grace has its beginning and basis in misunderstanding certain passages of Scripture. Examples include passages like Mark 16: 15 in the translations of Luther and others. In these translations such passages seem to speak of faith, conversion, and other things as conditions—conditions of justification, conversion, and perseverance in the faith. But in the original text (which is translated: "He who then believes," "he who continues," and "he who overcomes", the participle usually stands there. So the original text reads: "the one who believes," "the one who continues," and "the one who overcomes" It is this way in Mark 16: 15, Romans 1: 16, and in many other passages. (I am not ready to say that a true conditional-sentence in this connection never comes up in all of Scripture; I cannot say for myself that I have searched all the passages. But even if such sentences do come up, it would change nothing about the unconditional nature of preaching grace.)

Wherever Scripture commands faith, conversion, not resisting, faithfulness, perseverance, salvation, crucifixion of the flesh, or anything else from people, there it is not legal commanding, rather it is evangelical commanding. All on his own, God himself works the fulfillment of these actions simply through this “commanding.” And this commanding is nothing but God attracting and rousing us to faith, to conversion, and to everything else.

On the other hand, an interest in reason lies behind the conditional understanding of the Gospel: A person wants to get behind the question: “Why are some saved and not others?” But in answering that question, we do not come up with the conditional Gospel—unless we also want to come up with the free will that Luther rightly and so energetically condemned.

To understand the proper form of the Gospel (the preaching of grace), we must hold completely that the Gospel really pertains only to doubting hearts: hearts which are struck to pieces by the Law or by preaching God’s anger. The Gospel does not pertain to those who still hope to become righteous through their own conduct. And this is what the Lord places before us (Matthew 11: 28 and following) in these words: “Come to me ...,” or (Matthew 9: 2): “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven,” or “Your sin is erased through Christ. God is reconciled. Anger and curse are removed. Your debt is forgiven. Heaven is open. It is all ready: come to the wedding! Indeed, be comforted and do not be afraid; simply believe it!” (Compare Isaiah 55: 1 and 2 and the whole chapter). Briefly: grace and forgiveness are unconditional, and they should be preached unconditionally. Only unconditionally can grace work faith in and convert a person struck to pieces.

And grace certainly does that. Grace is real, godly comfort for the one broken by the preaching of anger. It trickles into the heart of the terrified like heavenly balm. Grace works hope, faith, certainty, and conversion. Then grace works all that the Law orders but cannot beat out of people. So it is for this work that the Gospel needs attracting, rousing, admonishing, warning, threatening. These are for the sake of the flesh still clinging to a converted person. And the Gospel completes faith as it had begun it. The Gospel does everything—working everything entirely on its own: upon a believer and in him, and through a believer and with him. This happens according to the gracious God’s good pleasure. So the appropriation or imparting of all salvation, too, is absolutely entirely God’s work alone.

So we should preach grace as unconditional grace beside unconditional anger. God’s anger is a fact. It has hewn away all flesh and made it dry up. We are forced to experience that daily, Grace is also a fact. It has removed every curse and all anger: it has brought us to heaven again., Grace is greater than anger and the curse. It will work forward unendingly to the Last Day. Through the Gospel grace will create a new, godly, life among cursed sinners. For this “Word of our God remains eternally.” It stands firmer than heaven and earth. God will not do away with grace through a new message and replace it. Grace is the last Word of God for this world. The godless world—also today’s evolutionism, modernism, human knowledge, and human skill—will not dampen this message.

Therefore regarding the effectiveness of this preaching, we do not need to concern ourselves. Preaching God’s anger is godly power to strike hearts to pieces. It still finds a point of attachment in human hearts. This point of attachment lies in the natural knowledge of God and the natural knowledge of the Law. Every conscience is struck by God’s anger, because: every conscience must agree to it inside. People conduct any combat against God’s anger with a bad conscience—with the feeling of being overcome.

It is the same way with the effectiveness of the Gospel. To be sure, the Gospel finds no natural foothold in human hearts and no natural response there. To natural man the Gospel is much more foolish and annoying than the Law. And that is all the more so when he thinks it over and tries to grasp it. But the Gospel is godly wisdom and godly power, which is wiser and stronger than people’s wisdom power. It even overcomes the hearts of the “strong.” It laughs at all the proofs of reason and science, which raise themselves up against it (II Corinthians 10: 4 and following). From no one does the Gospel come back empty. A person can strive against the Gospel and hinder it, but no one can hinder its effectiveness at all. If the Gospel does not save you, then it certainly damns you. God’s grace is judgment upon the unbelieving world; the Gospel is the damnation of its scorners.

So like the sun, the Gospel goes out of its chambers like a bridegroom. Like a hero, it rejoices to run its course. The Gospel gathers in the elect of all places and times. It does not lose one before the Lord raises the elect to the eternal shelters on the Last Day.