

Christ's Kingdom and the Convicting Office of the Holy Spirit

Fourth Sunday After Easter (Third Sermon)

Sermon on John 16:5-15

Author: Dr. Martin Luther (1483-1546) Year: 1522

Text

⁵But now I go unto him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? ⁶But because I have spoken these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. ⁷Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you. ⁸And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹of sin, because they believe not on me; ¹⁰of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more; ¹¹of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged. ¹²I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. ¹³Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you. ¹⁵All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he taketh of mine, and shall declare it unto you. (John 16:5-15)

Sermon

This Sermon of Consolation in General

¹ The meaning of this Gospel we have often heard elsewhere, the only trouble is, its language is not altogether understood as having the meaning of things, with which we are familiar. Therefore we will expound it a little, in order that it may be seen that the same truth lies in these words as is contained in almost all the Gospels.

² It is a part of that beautiful discourse, Christ the Lord, delivered after the last supper he had with the disciples. His special object is to console, his beloved disciples in view of his departure, because he is now about to die and to leave them alone in danger and distress, in the hostility of the world, in persecution and death for his sake. And so with many words he announces to them that they would be put under the ban, and they who killed them would boast that they had offered unto God a service. It was a grievous and terrible thing for them to hear this, and on account of it they became very sorrowful, both because they were to lose their dear Lord and because they were to be left in such misery and distress. Therefore it was needful to console them against all this, as indeed Christ does

throughout these three Chapters of his last discourse with all diligence and faithfulness. And the sum of it is this: in view of the loss caused by his departure, he promises to send the Holy Spirit, who shall comfort and strengthen their hearts, and then first establish the kingdom of Christ and extend it throughout the world; and he tells them plainly what is to be the nature of his kingdom, wherein it is to consist, and what the Holy Spirit shall accomplish in the world through them.

³ Therefore he says to them first: I know and plainly see, beloved disciples, that you are in great fear and sorrow on account of what I have told you, that I am about to go away from you. But this shall be your comfort: I tell you the truth, it is much better for *you*, that I go away. My departure shall bring you abundant joy, for you shall have instead the comforting of the Holy Spirit, and in addition the power, that he will accomplish through you what I, now present with you, am not able to do. For I am required by this mission in the flesh to suffer and die, and so to make my journey to the Father, and afterwards to send the Holy Spirit, who will do through you much greater things than can be done now through me, and who will bestow upon you a great and excellent office and work, by which my kingdom shall be extended in the world.

Christ's Kingdom of which this Sermon Treats

⁴ So then he first shows them what is to be the nature of his kingdom on earth, in order to take away from them their old deeply-rooted delusion of an external worldly dominion and government over the Jewish people and the world generally in this life. For against this he says plainly enough and in many words, that he would go away, leave the world, and not be seen any more. But if he dies and leaves the world he cannot rule and govern after the manner of the world, externally and visibly, like a king and emperor on earth. He indicates this still more clearly by announcing to them in so many words both before and after this text, how they shall fare after his departure, namely, that they shall be hated, persecuted, put under the ban and even killed by their own people; moreover, that they shall weep and lament and have tribulation in the world, which on the contrary shall be merry and joyful. All this by no means agrees with the thought that they should have a worldly kingdom on earth, for which to hope; they must expect the very contrary. Nevertheless they are to know that he will have and preserve his kingdom in the world; wherefore he promises the Holy Spirit.

The Convicting Office of the Holy Spirit

⁵ What kind of a kingdom is it, and how is it governed? This he indicates in the words: "*The Holy Spirit will convict the world.*" It is not to be a government constituted and organized in worldly fashion by human wisdom, power and might, but a government of the Holy Spirit, or a spiritual kingdom, in which Christ rules invisibly and not with external, bodily power, through the Word alone, which the Holy Spirit will preach and thereby work in the hearts of men. For the Holy Spirit, he says, will convict the world. That does not mean to coerce with armor and weapons and worldly power, but to use an oral word or an office of preaching, called the Word of God, or of the Holy Spirit, sent by Christ. This Word is to pass through the world and to attack it, so that it can be called a convicting of the world, not only of a few, of one or two races and countries, but of both Jews and Gentiles, the learned, the wise and saints, who in their own government have the most beautiful and laudable organization.

⁶ For by "*world*" he does not mean the humble common folk, the populace, but that which in the world is best and most excellent, and in external government blameless; especially those who claim

to be holy above all others, like the Jews, who were called God's people and had the law of Moses, of whom Christ said before, that they hate him and his own without cause, as is written in their law.

⁷ Herewith Christ bestows upon his apostles power and authority, nay more, even command over the whole world. It is to be subject to their preaching and to hear the apostles. Although their office shall be despised in the world and have no reputation, because they are plain, ordinary people, and even apart from this they must be hated and oppressed and must suffer in the world, when with their convictions they run counter to it, till he strengthens and comforts them with the assurance that their office shall nevertheless have power, force and efficacy. Those in the world will be compelled to hear it and to allow it to have course, unsubverted and unforbidden, regardless of their raging and storming against it with persecution, ban and death, and all power and force not only of the world, but also of the whole kingdom of hell.

⁸ Therefore, says he, you have good reason not to be terrified and cast down, because I am going away from you bodily. For thereby I will give you something better than you have had while you were with me, and you shall accomplish much greater and more glorious things than can now be done; namely, the Holy Spirit shall effect through you far more gloriously and mightily what pertains to my kingdom than you now think. Then you will no longer, as now, seek and aspire to become lords upon earth and to have great kingdoms under you. For these are transitory things, which God does not care for, and which have always produced more rogues than good men. But he will set you in a government, where you shall judge all men's consciences; and what is highest in the world, namely its wisdom and holiness, shall be subject to you. You shall pronounce judgment upon it, convict and condemn, and nobody will be able to escape sin, death and hell, nor get to heaven, who does not hear and obey your word.

⁹ He shall also give you such comfort and courage, that you shall no longer be filled with terror and deadly fear, as now, at the world's threatening, fury and raging against your preaching; but you shall boldly go forward and convict regardless of what the world and the devil can do to prevent it by persecution, murder and all the violence of hell.

¹⁰ This is the province of the work, which the Holy Spirit is to begin in the kingdom of Christ. It is the teaching office of the apostles, which is to be of such a character that it must convict the world, as it finds it outside of Christ, and nobody is to be excepted, great, small, learned, wise, holy, of high or low condition, etc. This means in short, to bear the world's anger and to begin strife, and to be struck in the mouth for it. For the world, which rules on earth, will not and cannot endure its course to be disapproved; therefore persecution must arise, and one party must yield to the other, the weakest to the stronger. But, as the office of the apostles is to be only a teaching office, it cannot use worldly power and the world retains its external kingdom and power against the apostles. But, on the other hand, the apostles' office of conviction of the world shall likewise not be suppressed, because it is the office and work of the Holy Spirit, but shall overcome all and triumph; as Christ promised to them: *"I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand."* Luke 21:15.

¹¹ The Holy Spirit indeed convicted the world by preaching before from the beginning (for Christ ever rules, and is the same Christ *"yesterday and today, and for ever,"* Hebrews 13:8) through the holy fathers, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and John the Baptist, and this conviction was upheld by divine power. But now the true beginning is to be made, and Christ will institute a public conviction, which is to be extended not only over the Jewish people, but over the whole world

until the last day. This is to be much more efficacious and shall prevail, and hearts shall be pierced and wounded by it, even as is said in Acts 2:37 of the first sermon of St. Peter on the day of Pentecost, that they were pricked in their heart by the preaching of the apostles, and so were enlightened and converted from their blindness. But if they will not accept this preaching, it shall be efficacious to their condemnation, and they shall stumble, fall and plunge into eternal ruin. So it shall prove a power unto life and salvation to believers, and a preaching and power unto death to others, as St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:16.

¹² However, in respect of what shall the Holy Spirit convict, and concerning what shall he teach? This he tells us plainly in the words:

“And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

¹³ This certainly means biting off a good deal and assuming a big load: the poor beggars, the apostles, are to interfere in the world in this way and to reprove and convict everything it does. They must needs have strong backs and a good reserved force. For he shows here that this convicting is to be no farce, nor is it to be in respect of small, trifling matters, nor even of sovereignty, countries and property, but in respect of the highest thing, by which the world’s government exists, namely, the reputation of wisdom, righteousness, and its judgment or convicting, especially in the high matters, which concern the service of God and what is good in the sight of God.

¹⁴ For as to the earthly government of property and wealth, this does not concern the Holy Spirit and Christ. In regard to that he allows the world’s wisdom, law and order to stand as they are; for in this sphere it is commanded to the world to rule and to judge what is praiseworthy and what is punishable. Likewise he does not convict the offices and different classes in the world, which are God’s creation and order. But for this he convicts the world, that is, the people, who in their own government rule excellently, because with their reason and wisdom they also seek to interfere in God’s affairs and government, and presume to decide and judge, how God shall be served, and imagine that whatever they assert, must also be right and acceptable in the sight of God.

¹⁵ This is what the conviction of the Holy Spirit is directed against. It breaks in not piecemeal on certain works and actions, but reduces to nothing and condemns everything that reason and worldly wisdom propose. In short, he convicts and censures them in and for the very things they do not wish to be convicted in, but rather praised and lauded, as teaching and doing well and right.

He puts them to sin and shame with all their glory and openly charges them with knowing nothing of these things nor being able to teach how sin is to be known and gotten rid of, righteousness is to be attained and wrong is to be permitted. How much good is left now, when all this is laid low completely as by a thunderbolt? He himself explains the three particulars, and shows what each means and how each is to be preached. First he says:

“Of Sin, because they believe not on me.”

¹⁶ The world itself must confess that it understands none of the things, which Christ here says of these three thoughts. For whoever heard this before among the wise and learned of the earth, or by what understanding was it produced, and in what books is it written that sin is not to believe on this Jesus of Nazareth? Does not Moses himself and all the world call that sin, which is done contrary to the law, by commission or omission, by word or deed or even by thought? Well, the child is named, and the article concluded and fixed by the Holy Spirit, that this is the sin of the world that it does not

believe on Christ. Not that there is no sin against the law besides this; but that this is the real chief sin, which condemns the whole world even if it could be charged with no other sin.

¹⁷ Thus this preaching of conviction is now to begin, if people are to be brought to right knowledge and to salvation. And the first thing shall be this: it makes all men, learned, high and wise, sinners; and sinners for this reason, because they do not believe on Christ. Hence God's wrath is declared, and the judgment of condemnation and eternal death (for this is what convicting in respect of sin means) is pronounced upon those who in the sight of the world are irreproachable, who even strive with earnestness to live according to the law and the ten commandments. Such were Paul before his conversion, and Nicodemus at first, and many others of like character among the Jews, to whom St. Paul also bears witness that they had a zeal for God, and followed after righteousness, but did not attain to righteousness (Romans 9:31). So then this word "*sin*" briefly comprehends all life and conduct without and apart from faith in Christ.

¹⁸ Here you will say: How is this? Is it sin to live according to the ten commandments obediently, honorably and chastely, not to kill, not to break the marriage tie, not to steal, not to lie and deceive? Answer: Surely not. But that is not enough, and the ten commandments are not kept, if only they are not violated externally by works. For God's law demands not merely outward form and appearance, but goes to the heart and demands its perfect obedience. Therefore it also judges man not only by his outward walk and conduct, but by the depths of his heart. But the world does not understand and regard this; for it recognizes only public external sins, such as murder, adultery, robbery and what the jurists call and punish as sin. But it neither knows nor sees the true offenses and their root, such as contempt of God, inborn inward impurity of the heart, and disobedience to God's will: which things nevertheless are and remain in all men, who are not sanctified by Christ. For everybody, however pious he may be, if he will only confess it, finds in himself, what true saints earnestly lament, that even if he would gladly keep God's law, his flesh and blood, that is, his whole nature, including his heart and all his members, resist it; as St. Paul says in Romans 7:23: "*I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members.*" Much more is this true of those, who are without grace and the Holy Spirit, who live irreproachably outwardly, solely from the fear of punishment or on account of reputation and vain honor; but still would prefer to do the contrary, if they did not fear hell or disgrace and punishment. For the heart is ever hostile to the law and resists it with inward disobedience.

¹⁹ Now because this is the case, that no man fulfils the commandments of God and can be without sin before God, and therefore all men are under the wrath of God and sentenced to eternal condemnation by the law: God has found a remedy for this evil, and he resolved to send his Son into the world, in order that he might become a sacrifice for us and make satisfaction for our sins by the shedding of his blood and his death, and take away from us the wrath of God, which no creature could reconcile, and bring forgiveness of sins and moreover bestow upon us the Holy Spirit, so that we might obtain and receive all this, begin to become new men, and come out of sin and death to righteousness and eternal life.

²⁰ This he has now done and has commanded to preach it through the Gospel, and he demands of all men (as we heard in the Easter sermons) repentance, that is, true knowledge of sin and earnest dread of God's wrath, and faith, that in such repentance God will for the sake of his Son forgive their sins. He that believes this preaching, has by this faith forgiveness of sins and is in the grace of God: and although he has not satisfied the law, still the remaining sin is not imputed to him, but is included in the forgiveness. Together with this faith the Holy Spirit is also given, so that he acquires love and

delight to do the good and to resist sin. Therefore he is no longer condemned by the laws as a sinner, although he has not fulfilled it in every respect; but he is accepted by God through grace and forgiveness, and regarded as if he had no sins.

²¹ But on the other hand, he who has not faith, cannot be rid of sin nor escape the wrath of God. For he has no forgiveness and abides under condemnation, even if he is very zealous to live according to the law; for he cannot fulfill it. Besides, he does not accept Christ, who brings forgiveness and bestows upon believers his own fulfillment, and also gives power to begin to keep the law from the heart.

²² Therefore, whereinsoever this preaching is not accepted, there sin and condemnation must remain. Indeed, this unbelief then becomes the chief sin. For if faith in Christ were present, all sins would be forgiven; but now since they will not accept this Savior by faith, they are justly condemned in their sins. And it avails them nothing, that they do many works of the law and outward divine services, and judge according to reason, that, as they sinned by works, they will pay by works, that is to say, put away sin and merit God's favor. For in so doing they simply undertake to blot out sin by sin, indeed, to atone for great sins by little ones, or to do great sins in order to lay aside others. For in addition to the fact that they continue in disobedience and sins against God's commandments, and are so blind that they neither see nor regard it, but without repentance and fear of God's wrath have the presumption and pride to expect to please God by their own works and merits: above all this they proceed not only to despise this preaching of Christ, which admonishes to repentance and faith, but even to persecute it. This alone would be enough to bring eternal wrath and condemnation upon them, even if they had no other sins and fulfilled the whole law.

²³ Therefore the Holy Spirit rightly and justly convicts, as sinful and condemned, all who have not faith in Christ. For where this is wanting, other sins in abundance must follow: God is despised and hated, and the entire first table is treated with disobedience. For if one does not know God in Christ, he cannot trust him for any good thing, nor call upon him from the heart, nor know his word; but he is entangled in the devil's lies, persecutes and blasphemes true doctrines, and continues in obstinacy and hardening, even to the degree of slandering the Holy Spirit. In consequence of this he also disobeys the other commandments in his life and station, so that he does to nobody what he ought to do, and has in his heart no true love, kindness, gentleness, patience, no delight in chastity, righteousness, faithfulness and truth; but practices the contrary, except where he has reason to fear disgrace or punishment.

²⁴ Lo, how the dragon's tail of the devil and all hell must follow unbelief! The reason is, that he who does not believe in Christ, has already turned away from God and quite separated himself from him. Therefore he cannot have the Holy Spirit, nor originate good thoughts, nor have a true, hearty pleasure in living according to God's will; notwithstanding he may outwardly assume a different appearance, like a hypocrite, and act so as not to be rebuked or chastised. Just like a bad, ill-behaved servant, who is inimical to his master, and does what he hates to do, only because he is compelled, and as opportunity arises, does evil. Such are the beautiful, precious fruits, produced by this fountain and stem, if Christ is not accepted and heard as the Savior, presented to us by God in order to blot out our sin and to take from us God's wrath.

²⁵ Hence you see pictured here what the world is, nothing but a great company of wicked, stubborn people, who will not believe Christ, but despise God's Word, praise and accept the seduction of the devil, and defiantly run counter to all of God's commandments. They receive all the favors and

benefits of God only to repay him with ingratitude and blasphemy. And yet in all this they are unwilling to be convicted or reprov'd, but wish to be called excellent, pious and saintly people. Such were the Jews, who crucified Christ and persecuted his apostles, and yet wished to claim the glory of having done God great service. Therefore the Holy Spirit must resist this and strive with the world and ever exercise his office of conviction with divine power and might until the last day.

²⁶ For he has not begun to convict with the intention of ceasing and allowing his mouth to be closed. On the contrary he must continue his work of conviction in the devil's kingdom, because there is nothing good in it, and he must drive it altogether under God's wrath and condemnation, in spite of the rage and fury of the devil, if perhaps by this conviction some be brought to repentance and faith, which indeed is the object of this preaching. But the others, who will not be convicted, must at least be convinced and condemned by this preaching. For all flesh and blood must be convicted, either for salvation or for condemnation, and the sentence, which Christ commanded to be preached to all creatures, must stand: "*He that believeth shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.*" Let this be enough of the first point in the preaching of the Holy Spirit. The second is this:

"Of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more."

²⁷ Not only is the world convicted because it has sin, but also because it does not know how to become pious and what righteousness or piety is. But he is not speaking here of the righteousness, which philosophers and jurists discuss, which consists in observing civil or imperial laws and in doing what reason teaches; but of the righteousness, which is valid before God or which he regards as righteousness. Now what kind of righteousness is this, or wherein does it consist? This is it, says he, that "*I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more.*" This is strange and to the world ridiculous language. If the first particular was unusual and obscure, that this is the world's sin, that it does not believe on him; then this is far more strange and incomprehensible, that this alone is righteousness, that he goes to the Father and is seen no more.

²⁸ What shall the whole world say to this? They are all striving after righteousness and claiming to be pious before God, Jewish, Turkish and papistic saints, who stumble at this as an offensive, nay, foolish doctrine, just as if all good works, devotions, pious intentions, fine obedience, severe and strict life on the part of so many men are to be nothing before God? And why does he give such an odd and absurd definition, that being pious before God consists in this that he goes to the Father and yet is not seen? How does it fit together, being righteous by what one cannot see nor feel?

²⁹ Well, you learn here, that he concludes emphatically and vigorously, that alone is righteousness which he calls righteousness, and the world is convicted by it, because it does not possess it. It is as if he said: Of what use is it, for you to dispute much about good works, holy living and what you think is the way to righteousness? If you do not have this, that I go to the Father, it is all nothing and worth nothing before God. Even if you should seek and strive, think and study to death, and pursue after righteousness with all your powers, you will never think it out or attain to it. Another righteousness is necessary, different from what you understand and propose, where one is to take up the law, and be obedient to it and live according to it. Something far and high above all that is necessary, where there is no law, or commandment, or human work and life, but only what I do, namely, that "*I go to the Father*" etc.

³⁰ How now does it come to pass? Answer: In the first part of this discourse we heard that all men are convicted in respect of sin. From this it follows, as has been explained, that nobody fulfils the law or

the ten commandments. For if anybody fulfilled them, he would certainly not be convicted as a sinner, but by this obedience and fulfillment of the law he would be righteous, as St. Paul says in Galatians 3:21-22: *“If there had been a law given which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been by the law. But the scripture shut up all things under sin.”* Since no man can fulfill the law, we have no righteousness from the law of and in ourselves, with which we can stand before God against his wrath and judgment. But, if we are to come to God, we must have the righteousness of another, which God regards and accepts.

³¹ For the conviction in respect of sin extends over all human life on earth. Even saints and Christians must still suffer this conviction to pass upon their best life and work, and confess that they have sin, which would be wrong and worthy of condemnation, if it should be judged according to God’s commandment and before his tribunal; as also the prophet David, saintly and full of good works as he was, prays and confesses: *“Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight no man living is righteous, Psalm 143:2; and St. Paul (1 Corinthians 4:4): *”I know nothing against myself; yet I am not hereby justified.”* But that they are not condemned like the others, is due alone to this difference: they accept this conviction, confess and lament that they have sin, and believe on Christ and seek forgiveness of sins through him. In this way they have the righteousness of another, which is entirely the work, power and merit of Christ the Lord. He calls it: *“Going to the Father.”*

³² For these words: *“because I go to the Father,”* embraces the whole work of our redemption and salvation, for which God’s Son was sent from heaven, and which he performed for us and still performs until the end; namely, his passion, death and resurrection, and his whole reign in the church. For this going to the Father signifies nothing else than that he offers himself as a sacrifice by the shedding of his blood and his death in order to pay for sin; that afterwards he triumphs in his resurrection and brings into subjection to himself sin, death and hell, and seats himself alive at the right hand of the Father, where he reigns invisibly over all things in heaven and earth, and gathers and extends his church by the preaching of the Gospel; and that he intercedes for those, who believe, with the Father as an eternal mediator and high priest, because they still have weaknesses and sins remaining in them, and gives the power, and strength of the Holy Spirit to overcome sin, the devil and death.

³³ Lo, this now is the righteousness of Christians before God, that Christ goes to the Father, that is, suffers, and rises for us, and thereby reconciles us to the Father, so that for his sake we have forgiveness of sin and grace. It is not at all by our work or merit, but solely by his going, which he does for our sake. This is the righteousness of another, for which we have done nothing and have merited nothing, and are unable to merit anything, freely given and appropriated to us to be our righteousness, whereby we please God and are his dear children and heirs.

³⁴ But that this freely bestowed righteousness is in us, and that we can comfort ourselves with it as our treasure and chief possession, comes by faith alone. For it must be received and accepted by us. Now it cannot be apprehended otherwise than with the heart, which clings to the departure of Christ and firmly believes that for his sake it has forgiveness and redemption from sin and death. For this righteousness is not an external thing, which can be effected by human works, ordinances or exercises; but a lofty, hidden treasure, not to be seen with eyes nor comprehended by our senses: as he himself says: *“Ye behold me no more.”* It must simply be believed.

³⁵ Here now is abolished and cut off at one stroke all that the world is seeking, disputing and inquiring about without end, namely, how a man may become pious before God. Everybody says

something different; one teaches this, another that; and yet none has ever arrived at it, although they may have heard, learned and practiced every doctrine of the law and good works. One ought justly to ask this master Christ also and to be glad to hear what he says; as indeed everybody would wish to do, if this preaching were not at hand, and would gladly run to the ends of the earth for it. But, of course, everybody hopes that he will say something to the point, what should be done and something higher and better than all others have taught.

³⁶ But what does he say? Not a word about our doing and living: on the contrary he says, that all this is not the righteousness, which is valid before God. But if you wish to become pious and righteous before God, something else is necessary, something that neither you nor any man is and can do, namely this: "*I go to the Father.*" In other words, nobody will become righteous before God except by and on account of this, that I die and rise again. My departure alone is the cause, why God graciously accepts a man and counts him righteous, if he clings to Christ in faith.

³⁷ Therefore these words are to be carefully noted, in which Christ proves himself such an adventurous man in speaking against the understanding and ideas of all men, especially, of the wise and saintly, who all, if the discussion be concerning what it is to be pious and righteous, know nothing else to speak of than what they call *justitiam formaletto*, that is, such virtue as is in us or as we ourselves do, that is to say, our work and obedience.

³⁸ Again you say: What about the doctrine of good works? Shall this amount to nothing, or is it not a beautiful, praiseworthy thing, when a man endeavors to keep the commandments, and is obedient, chaste, honorable and truthful? Answer: Yes, surely; all this is to be done; it is also a good doctrine and life, provided it is left in the place where it belongs, and the two doctrines are kept distinct, how a man becomes pious and righteous before God, and how and to what end he is to do good works. For although it is necessary to teach the doctrine of good works, at the same time, nay, even before this also must be carefully taught (so that the doctrine of the Gospel and of faith be kept pure and unadulterated), that all our works, however good and holy they may be, are not the treasure and merit, by which we become acceptable to God and attain everlasting life. But it is this alone, that Christ goes to the Father and by his departure merits this for us, and gives and communicates to us his righteousness, innocence and merits; and so begins in us a kingdom that we, who believe in him, are redeemed by his power and Spirit from sin and death, and shall live with him forever. It must not be a righteousness that continues only here upon earth and then ceases; but a new righteousness, which endures forever in the life beyond with God, just as Christ lives and reigns above forever.

³⁹ For this reason I have often said, that in order to speak and judge correctly of these matters, a careful distinction must be made between a good man (what the philosophers call *bonum virum*) and a Christian. We also commend being a good man. There is nothing more praiseworthy on earth, and it is a gift of God just as well as sun and moon, corn and wine, and all creatures. But things must not be mixed and confused. Let a good man have his praise before the world, and let it be said: A good man is doubtless an excellent, precious man on earth, but for that reason he is not yet a Christian; for he may be a Turk or a heathen, as in ages past some were very famous. Indeed it cannot be otherwise than, that among so many wicked people, occasionally a good man should be found. But however good he may be, with such goodness he is and remains a child of Adam, that is, an earthly man under sin and death.

⁴⁰ But when you inquire about a Christian, you must go much higher; for he is another kind of a man. He is not a child of Adam, and has not father and mother upon earth; but he is a child of God, an heir

and nobleman in the kingdom of heaven. He is called a Christian because he clings with his heart to this Savior, who has ascended to the Father, and he believes that for his sake and through him he has God's grace, and everlasting salvation and life. This is neither achieved nor apprehended, attained nor learned by our life, virtue and work, from which we are called good men on earth; nor by righteousness according to the law and ten commandments. These, as has been said, are also necessary, and are found in every Christian; but they do not attain by far to this chief thing and this righteousness, of which Christ is speaking here and which he calls righteousness.

⁴¹ For, although a man has exercised himself in this during his whole life much and long, and has done everything that he was able to do; nevertheless he cannot thereby attain to certainty that God is pleased with it and is truly gracious to him. Hence in every such life the heart always remains uncertain and in doubt. All experienced consciences give evidence of this, and even the monks bear testimony to it in their books, in which they teach openly, that one must doubt, for no man can know whether he is in a state of grace, and it would be presumptuous in a high degree to make this boast with reference to one's self.

⁴² From this it must follow: because a man is in such doubt, he can have no true confidence in God, nor turn to him and call upon him from his heart; but he is timid and flees from God, and must at last fall into hatred of God and despair. For when the real struggle comes and he is to stand before the judgment, then he feels and sees, that with his life and works he cannot abide the wrath of God, but with it all must sink into the abyss.

⁴³ If now in such distress we are to be saved from despair and to prevail, we must have another foundation than our righteousness or that of the law, namely, this eternal righteousness of Christ, which stands there, where the devil cannot overthrow it and the judgment of God can bring no charge against it, that is, at the right hand of the Father. The devil can overthrow me, whenever he wills, with all my life and works by presenting God's judgment and wrath. All this can blow away as the wind blows a little feather. But when I direct him from myself and my works to the right hand of the Father, where Christ, my Lord, is seated, who bestows upon me his righteousness, for which he has gone to the Father, he will not overthrow him, nay, he will not even dare to attack him.

⁴⁴ Therefore Christ acts like a faithful, good Savior, when he draws all this from us and all men to himself alone, and grounds and builds our righteousness entirely on his departure to the Father. So we can know, where we are safe against every onset and assault of the devil and the gates of hell. For if it depended upon us and upon our worthiness, that we had made sufficient satisfaction and had done enough good works, our heart never would have rest and finally could not exist.

⁴⁵ From all this it is manifest what a shameful, cursed doctrine the monks and the whole papacy have hitherto taught, whereby they have misled the world. They not only taught no word of Christ and faith, but they even claimed with impudence, that their monkery is a much higher, nobler and more perfect life than that of ordinary Christians, which ought to be an abomination to all Christians to hear. For one may exalt and extol the life and piety of all men, the chastity of virgins, the discipline and asceticism of hermits, the laudable deeds and virtues of great, excellent and pious lords and rulers, and whatever may be described to pious people, as high as one pleases; it never can equal a Christian, that is, one who has this Lord, sitting at the right hand of God, and his righteousness. We will gladly let that also stand for what it is worth and praise it as a precious gift; but a Christian is to be extolled as a lord far and high above all that, as one that has this eternal possession and inheritance in the kingdom of heaven at the right hand of God with Christ, his brother.

⁴⁶ He that understands and knows how to distinguish this, can also teach and judge correctly of all life, and go safely in all matters and guard himself from error. For he judges and measures everything by this rule and standard, which Christ teaches here, that the righteousness of a Christian is not the righteousness that has grown in us, like the other called the righteousness of the law and of man, but it is a heavenly and divine righteousness without and above us.

⁴⁷ Therefore, if anybody comes and tries to make a fool of you, makes much ado and tells you wonders about great exceptional holiness, and directs you to live after the example of this or that great saint, in order thereby to please God and become a Christian, you can say to him: Dear sir, I grant all that is good and I also would like to be pious, do according to God's commandments, and keep myself from sin; but you shall never persuade me, that in this way I become a Christian or attain to greater and higher things. They also, who fasted, labored and suffered so much, did not become Christians by that. For this were to encroach upon my dear Lord Christ, so that he would have gone away in vain and human work would be placed on equality with his. But I wish to be called a Christian, as he taught me and all saints have had to do, if they wished to stand before God, because I cling to this Savior and, as St. Paul says in Philippians 3:9: "*Be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law,*" but his, which he gained for me by this departure, by which he overcame my sin and death, and which he announces and grants to me through the preaching of the Gospel. When you once have this, then go and do as many good works as you can; however, do it according to the commandment of God, for without this and before him you will be able to do nothing good, because you are still in unbelief, and have and know not Christ, and therefore are under sin with all that you do; as we have heard in the first part of this discourse.

⁴⁸ Behold, this is speaking according to the manner of Christ and with his words of righteousness, which he esteems righteousness. It is not an external human thing upon earth, but something incomprehensible and invisible in this life. It is not found in us men on earth, nor attained through men, but a new heavenly righteousness, which he alone has created and founded by his death and resurrection, and which we must apprehend in faith, because we do not see it, and which has for its goal an everlasting, unending life and being, where he rules in a new, heavenly state.

⁴⁹ For this life will not reach up to it, because it is altogether corrupted by sin and death, and finally shall be destroyed. Therefore the Son of God from heaven has founded this kingdom, which is not concerned with external, worldly affairs and government, as the Jews and the apostles imagined, nor with the poor, beggarly righteousness of this life. Its purpose is, on the contrary, to create a new, everlasting righteousness, by which all nature shall be transformed and renewed, and in it shall be no sin or death any more, but a purely perfect, divine work and life. This is the work, which he has begun by going to the Father and in his own person has already fully accomplished. This kingdom he is evermore promoting in this life by the preaching of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers until the last day. But in the life to come it shall be lived and found completely and perfectly in us.

⁵⁰ This is the meaning, he intends to say, of the words: "*I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more.*" I am not speaking of this temporal life and existence upon earth, which in this corrupt nature cannot be without sin and death. Therefore there can be no perfect righteousness and life in it. Nor shall my kingdom consist of this transitory nature. Things must become different and arrive at the pass, that you behold me no more, because I reign eternally outside of this bodily, visible existence, and I shall bring you thither, where purely new and perfect righteousness and eternal life exist. This kingdom I now begin in Christendom by the preaching and work of the Holy Spirit.

“Of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged.”

⁵¹ In the first two thoughts Christ spoke of doctrine and included the whole sum of the Gospel. First, that all human nature, power, doing and life are sin and under God’s wraths, because they do not believe in Christ. Secondly, that we become righteous, that is, we are redeemed from sin and death, and we please God and have eternal life, solely because Christ goes to the Father. Now follows the third, including both how the world conducts itself towards this preaching, and how contrariwise the Holy Spirit shall press forward with his preaching.

⁵² Of this he says, he will convict the world further in respect of judgment. This is also somewhat strange and obscure language in the ears of us, who are not accustomed to the Hebrew speech. The word “*judgment*” means nothing else than (as we also speak of it) the action and decision between two parties at variance, which is right or wrong; and it embraces at once both elements, which must always enter into a proceeding of judgment, favor and anger, or aid and punishment, on the one hand, that the innocent party be acquitted and helped to his rights; on the other, that the guilty be condemned and punished. However, the word is generally used for the latter element of judgment or the legal sentence, namely, for condemnation and its consequence or execution.

⁵³ In this sense Christ also uses it here, and he intends to indicate that when the Holy Spirit shall pursue the two themes of his preaching in the world and shall convict it in respect of sin and righteousness, the world will not receive it, nor be willing to be convicted of being in sin and without righteousness, nor be moved to allow the righteousness of Christ to be offered to it. But it will set itself against this teaching and convicting of the Holy Spirit, and condemn and persecute it. It will claim to be right in doing so and to be obliged not to suffer its wisdom and righteousness, which it considers divine gifts and service of God, to be reduced to nothing. Contrariwise the Holy Spirit must continue to convict in respect of this judgment and also press the sentence of condemnation, and tell the world that it with its judgment is condemned, together with its prince and head, the devil.

⁵⁴ Then arises the conflict and one judgment runs contrary to the other. For the world also sets up this teaching, not only because it does not proceed from its wisdom nor from the great, distinguished men of the world, but also because it is preached by poor, lowly people. It opens its mouth wide against it, and says: Why, what more is it than that some vagabond beggars wish to oppose established authority and by everybody, aye, was instituted by God himself? So it condemns, interdicts and curses both the doctrine and the preachers. Moreover it proceeds to shut up their mouths by threats of its power, resorts to severity and the sword, and will absolutely have its error and idolatry unassisted and unreprieved, nay, preserved and defended against God and Christ as wisdom and holiness, and the preaching of the Gospel uprooted and exterminated.

⁵⁵ But Christ says on the contrary, that the Holy Spirit shall retain the superior judgment and prevail with his convicting of this sentence of the world until the last day. But in consequence of this, Christians get into straits between door and hinge, and the cross and persecution begins. For, because the kingdom of Christ, as we have heard, is not of this world, but spiritual and at present invisible on earth, the power and might, which the world has upon earth, are directed against the church with condemning, persecuting, harassing, torturing, killing and murdering by sword, fire, water and every means. The world is also incited and strengthened by the bitter, fierce anger and hatred of the devil against Christ, who desires and seeks to blot out and exterminate the church. And so to the eyes of the world and also of Christians it looks as if, in consequence of this persecution, cruelty and murder,

practiced on the Christians who confess and maintain this preaching of the Holy Spirit, the church would altogether perish.

⁵⁶ In this part of discourse then Christ first prophesies, how this preaching shall be received by the world and what would happen to the apostles on account of it; namely, in the first place the world shall despise them, because they come along without any public authority and command from it and introduce a new doctrine in opposition to the regular government, priesthood and teaching office, instituted by God, and convict and reprove all it maintains as of no validity before God; in the next place, because they wish to continue and not to cease their preaching, the world will proceed and issue judgment against them and also execute it, as against people, who are neither sent by God nor preach God's word, but are the emissaries of the devil, and who, having been proved and declared to be blasphemers of God, disobedient and rebellious to God's law, God's people and God's service, are guilty of death and not worthy to live. So the Jews cried out against St. Paul (Acts 22:22): "*It is not fit that he should live,*" and they assign the reason (Acts 21:28): "*This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place.*"

⁵⁷ Secondly, Christ gives comfort against this hatred of judgment and persecution of the world. They are to know that he will nevertheless maintain his preaching and preserve his church against the anger and rage of the world by his divine power and strength. The devil and his kingdom shall be subdued by him and compelled to yield and not be able to execute against his church what in his fierce, mad wrath and hate he would like to do. Therefore, although Christians on account of this preaching must be exposed to the devil and the world, this word shall nevertheless remain undestroyed and finally triumph and hold the field, and make manifest to all the world its unjust judgment against the Gospel. In the end they shall be made to feel ashamed of themselves and to acknowledge of themselves, that they condemned and persecuted the Gospel unfairly and with injustice; just as the judges of Christ, aye, even his betrayer, in his passion had to bear witness to his innocence. The reason, he says, is this: this king Christ by going to the Father has overcome both the world and the devil; and now he causes this to be proclaimed that he is the Lord of all and has power and might to condemn and to punish, with everlasting hell fire, everything that opposes him, including the devil and his angels.

⁵⁸ This is what he says, that this conviction shall continue against the world that persecutes the Gospel, and finally prevail over it, so that its judgment and condemnation shall be overpowered, and in turn be condemned and put to shame; and not only the world, but also its God, the devil, who incites the world against Christ. For he is, says he, already judged, and the sentence of condemnation has already been pronounced upon him, and the only thing still wanting is its execution, that the punishment be inflicted upon him in eternal hell fire: just like a thief or murderer, sentenced by the judge, upon whom the wrath and judgment of blood has already passed and who has been given over to death, so that he only flees to be led away and to receive his due.

⁵⁹ So here this judgment proceeds by power and might of the Lord Christ, sitting at the right hand of the Father; and this judgment is publicly proclaimed by the office of preaching, that the prince of the world with all his adherents is already finally under condemnation, and shall accomplish nothing against Christ. He must let him remain the Lord, under whose feet he shall eternally lie and suffer his head to be trodden down. And Christ causes this to be preached in all the world, that whoever will not believe on the Lord, shall be condemned with the devil, however high, mighty, learned or holy he may be, regardless of how he dares to condemn this doctrine or to suppress and extirpate it, be his name Roman or Turkish emperor, king and lord over all.

⁶⁰ If now meanwhile the world goes its way and despises this judgment, which is already pronounced upon the devil and all his members, and makes a jest of it, because it does not see it come to pass visibly, just as it also condemns the first and second part of this preaching. Christ nevertheless ever proceeds and cheerfully allows himself to be despised. But at the same time he also shows the devil and the world that he is the Lord, who can break and restrain the wrath and raging of the devil, and hurl down his enemies, as Psalm 110:1 says of him, until he makes his enemies his footstool. For the ax is already laid at the tree, and already chains and bonds are thrown upon him, as 2 Peter 2:4, says, with which the devil is bound unto everlasting darkness in the fire of hell. Nobody shall believe this except the Christians, who take their Lord's Word for truth and know his power and kingdom; the others shall have no other reward than what they seek with their lord, the devil. Plunged into the abyss of hell in everlasting darkness, they must be overthrown and perish on account of their raging against Christ. This is the first division of this Gospel of the kingdom of Christ and the preaching of the Holy Spirit in the world. Now follows:

Teaching Office of the Holy Spirit

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth."

⁶¹ This part also belongs to the promise of the Holy Spirit and his office in the church. But he breaks off here, what he had begun to say of the doctrine and had summarily comprehended in few words concerning what the Holy Spirit shall preach; and he directs them to the truth, that the Holy Spirit himself shall come and teach them these things, so that they shall well understand them and experience them in their work. For it is not yet time, he will say, to speak much of the doctrine, because he is about to pronounce his farewell and to comfort them in view of his departure. Moreover, even if he should speak of it at great length, they are not yet prepared to comprehend and understand rightly, how it shall be in his future kingdom. For they are yet too deeply immersed in the thought and hope of an external, temporal kingdom and worldly glory, so that they cannot adapt themselves and take into their hearts, what he says to them of his spiritual kingdom and office, which he shall fulfill through the Holy Spirit. For they are able to think only in this way: If he is to be a king, he must be present himself, and win the world to himself either with his preaching and miracles, so that it will voluntarily render him obedience and accept him as lord, or if it is not willing of its own accord, compel it by external force and punishment. But if this, which he now says shall happen, and he goes away from them and is not seen any more, that is, dies, it is no longer to be hoped that he will be a king and execute such great things. Therefore they are, and until after his resurrection they remain, quite bewildered, so that they do not understand what he told them beforehand, and besides they already feel the misery, sorrow and persecution of the world, which he here announces to them.

⁶² This is what he says: *"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."* It is too heavy for you to bear, what has been said and still is to be said of this; for it is all quite contrary to your thoughts and hopes. For if you understood it, you would thereby take comfort and be of a joyful heart; as he also said before: *"If ye loved me, ye would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father."* But now what I tell you for your comfort about my glorification, ascent to heaven, and the glorious kingdom, which I will begin through you, only fills you with fear and sorrow. It is indeed true: *"Ye cannot bear them now."* Therefore I must reserve it, until the time comes, when what I tell

you now beforehand, shall come. He must teach it to you himself, and lead and guide you out of your present erroneous thoughts and misunderstandings into the truth and right knowledge.

⁶³ For, he says, his office shall be to glorify me, that is, to declare of me the revelation and testimony that I, raised out of suffering and death to glory, seated at the right hand of the Father, am Lord over all, and announce to all the world, that this was the counsel of the Father. Therefore the Holy Spirit shall be sent in order that the world may know this and so be brought to my kingdom. When now this takes place, and I am taken from you and the Holy Spirit comes, he himself shall doubtless teach much better than you now think and understand; and in your own experience shall be found what I have now spoken to you and, if I were to explain and elucidate it further, would have to speak much more fully. In this sense he also afterwards concludes this chapter, as we shall hear in the Gospel for next Sunday, and says: "*These things have I spoken unto you in dark sayings,*" that is, what I have hitherto told you of my passion, resurrection, and your sufferings and how in the midst of them you shall ask the Father in my name, all these are now strange, dark and hidden sayings, which you do not understand. But the time shall come, "*when I shall speak no more to you in dark sayings, but shall tell you plainly of the Father,*" namely, when I have ascended to heaven and shall send to you the Holy Spirit. Then you shall experience, what now is nothing but dark sayings to you, as I tell it to you. This is the true, simple meaning of the text: "*I have yet many things to say unto you.*"

⁶⁴ But these words have had to serve our papists and still must serve them, and allow themselves to be twisted and interpreted, in order to strengthen their frippery, and to be laid as foundation of what they pretend and exhort, that much more must be believed and kept than what the Gospel and the Scriptures teach, namely, what the fathers and the councils have said and ordained. For Christ has promised here that the Holy Spirit shall tell them much more than he has said, and guide them into all the truth. Just as if the apostles had very well understood, what Christ says to them here, whereas they themselves prove the contrary by the work of their unbelief in regard to his passion and resurrection. Or as if this were ever so easy to understand, that the Holy Spirit was not necessary, whereas until this day no pope understands anything of it, as I know from experience. For their art I have also learned; and by their books they give evidence enough, that they understand nothing of this. Therefore it is necessary to reply to these fools, in order to break down their tissue of lies.

⁶⁵ First you hear now that Christ says: "*I have yet many things to say unto you.*" Who are these "you"? Or to whom is he speaking? Without doubt the apostles, to whom he also says: "*Ye cannot bear them now;*" and "*The Holy Spirit shall guide you into all the truth.*" Therefore, unless Christ lied, this word must have been fulfilled at the time that the Holy Spirit came. He must have accomplished in them and through them all that the Lord here says, and have guided them into all the truth. How now will it be inferred from this that Christ did not tell all to the apostles, nor did the Holy Spirit, but left much untold, which the councils should teach and determine? Whereas, according to their claims, the contrary should follow, that the Holy Spirit has told all to the apostles; and Christ is pressing towards this conclusion, that he will explain all to the apostles and will introduce into the world through them, what they have learned from the Holy Spirit. How then does their juggling agree, that what is to be known, believed and done in the church, is only to be told, taught, decided and ordained after the apostles at the end of the world.

⁶⁶ Furthermore, if what the councils have taught and decided after the apostles is to be taken as truth, revealed anew by the Holy Spirit, the apostles themselves did not come into all the truth, much less they to whom they preached. And together with them the church would be deceived by Christ, when he promises them: The Holy Spirit shall guide you into all the truth.

⁶⁷ Secondly, Christ says plainly: *“I have yet many things to say unto you.”* He does not say: I have many other things to say unto you, and the Holy Spirit shall teach and explain to you other things than I have told you. This is their own addition, which they daub on the words of Christ, and so pervert them, that teaching many things (*multa*) is to mean teaching other things (*alia*). We would wish them well to the word *“many,”* if only they had the grace of the Holy Spirit to teach many things; but it is not to be endured, that under the guise of the word *“many”* they also wish to introduce and to have power to teach other things. For they impudently claim that the church by inspiration of the Holy Spirit appointed and ordained many things after the apostles, which must be observed; among others the article of one form in the Sacrament, celibacy of priests, and the like. This is not teaching more or further, but altogether different things, aye, contrary things against the clear ordinance and command of Christ, which they themselves must acknowledge is right. Nevertheless it is to be heresy and wrong to act contrary to their law according to the command of Christ; for the church, they say, has ordained differently. If you ask, on what ground, they answer: *“Christ says: *”I have yet many things to say unto you;”* indeed, even that which is contrary to his own Word and command.

⁶⁸ Truly, that would be a fine church, which could arrogate to itself the power, as the Antichristian church of the pope does, to teach contrary to Christ whatever it wished, and to change his ordinances, and then would prove and confirm it with this saying: *“I have yet many things to say unto you.”* Whereas he says distinctly of the Holy Spirit, and so puts limit and measure upon him, that the Holy Spirit shall glorify Christ and not speak from himself, but take and proclaim of his own, that is, of that which is the Word and command of Christ. Therefore the company that teaches otherwise, cannot be from the Holy Spirit, nor the church of Christ, but must be the sect of the hateful devil.

⁶⁹ For the Christian church and the Holy Spirit himself abide by that which Christ said and commanded. They may make more of it, that is, elucidate it in length and in breadth, but they do not make something different of it. For this saying *“many things”* consists in discussing one point in manifold ways and yet always saying one thing. For instance John the Evangelist wrote many more things than Christ said here; but yet always holds to the one thing, discussing thoroughly the article of faith on the person, office and kingdom of Christ, of which also Christ speaks, and his scope or main point always looks to this Lamb of God. Likewise St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans and almost throughout that to the Galatians treats of and enforces the righteousness of faith.

⁷⁰ Doubtless this is to preach much and to say more than Christ said in these few words but yet always one thing and not something different. For it is the quality of a good preacher, that he is able to take a subject and briefly comprehend it and sum it up in two or three words, and afterwards, if there is need, also to elucidate and explain it with sayings and examples and make out of a flower a whole meadow: just as a goldsmith is able to bend one piece of silver together solidly into a lump, and again beat it broad, crooked and curly, and into thin foil; and so it becomes a long or a short sermon, but always the same and not contradictory. For God’s Word is to dwell in us richly, says St. Paul (Colossians 3:16), so that we may be powerful in the Scriptures and able to prove the right doctrine by them. The Epistle to the Hebrews does this which for the most part speaks of the priesthood of Christ, and spins a long sermon out of the saying in the 110th Psalm 5:4: *“Thou art a priest forever,”* adducing many more sayings, texts and examples; and yet, viewed as a whole, it amounts to nothing more than this one point, that Christ is the only eternal priest. This indeed means that much more is said than David says in the psalm mentioned, but still nothing different. So since the beginning of Christianity much more has been taught and preached, through the Holy Spirit, than

Christ did, and more may be taught still every day and expounded most abundantly and in every manner, as more is revealed to one than another, or as it falls and is given to one to speak more copiously than another; but still in such a way, that when it is all finally brought together, it all refers to one Christ. And how many things can be adduced as illustrations from the whole Bible, aye, from all creatures, which all agree with the teaching of the Gospel, none of which Christ has taught or said, and yet it is the same doctrine!

⁷¹ St. Paul also speaks of this when he refers to the gift of prophecy or the interpretation of the Scriptures, and lays down a measure and rule by which it is to be governed: "*Whether prophecy, let us prophecy*", says he in Romans 12:6, "*according to the proportion of our faith,*" that is, in harmony and agreement with the doctrine of faith. For instance, if one wished to adduce the example of Abraham, who took his son Isaac upon the mountain to sacrifice him there, but left his servants and the ass below at the foot of the mountain; this example can be interpreted for and according to the faith, or against the faith. The Jewish preachers and teachers did the latter, when they set forth that whoever would allow himself to be sacrificed and killed in the same manner, he would do the loftiest work and would immediately ascend to heaven; wherefore kings, who desired to be distinguished saints, sacrificed and burned to God their own children alive. Similarly our monkish saints interpret it. If one wishes to come to God, he must leave servants and beasts below at the foot of the mountain, that is, put away the five senses and have nothing to do with outward, worldly affairs, but separated from all this, live in spiritual contemplation. This can be called interpreting and teaching not in proportion to and according to the faith, but against it. But you may interpret it in this way: Whoever wishes to come to God, must rise above human understanding and thoughts, so that he may have God's Word, to learn to know and apprehend God from it, and there offers before him by faith (if the conscience is to stand before God) the sacrifice, given for us as a sacrifice by God, Christ, the Son of God, and meanwhile lets the ass with the servants remain below, that is, what is of our own work and doing. In this way I have adduced this example. This is the same teaching that the Gospel contains everywhere, and is not against, but for the faith; although this also is not the real, sure interpretation of this history.

⁷² Our papistic asses, swine and simpletons will not regard this, but wish to persuade us to accept everything that is put forth and taught in the name of the church or the councils, as if the Holy Spirit taught it, irrespective of how it agrees and corresponds with the teaching of the Gospel; and all is to be confirmed by the saying: "*I have yet many things to say unto you.*" No, dear fellow, that will not pass, although he has more to say; you cannot for this reason say whatever you please, or what every monk has dreamed, or what every bold papist wishes to be observed. This I willingly grant you, that you may spread these words of Christ and be a copious preacher, and out of one word make a thousand, in order that it may become clear, bright and lucid, and everybody may understand it; but only in such a way that the one pure, uncorrupted doctrine remains. But if, contrary to this, you bring up and put forth a new doctrine, for instance, if anybody becomes a monk, he has a new baptism and becomes as pure as a young child, just baptized then not the Holy Spirit, but the devil teaches you to speak, and it is not teaching more, but something quite different from and contradictory to what Christ says. Therefore a Christian must be prudent in this matter and, as St. John teaches, be able to prove the spirits according to the Word of God, and be on his guard, lest he allows himself to be told another teaching, be it much or little, and led and guided upon another way.

⁷³ Thirdly, he says: "*Ye cannot bear them now.*" You observe here, that he is speaking of excellent, great things, which are too difficult for them, and for this reason alone he is unwilling to say more

about them now, because they are too imperfect and weak. He refers, of course, to the same things and none other, than he began to speak of, namely, his kingdom, how it should progress in the world; how he must die the most shameful death and become a curse, and yet be believed on as the Savior, the Son of God and the Lord over all. Furthermore, that they should be persecuted and killed by the world, and nevertheless the Gospel should prosper, and by it the whole Jewish people, their priesthood, temple, service of God and all their glory, should fall to the ground. At that time they were able to understand none of these things, even if he had preached to them for many years, until they were taught by the Holy Spirit through experience in their office of preaching.

⁷⁴ But tell me, in comparison with these things what is all that has been ordained and appointed later, after the apostles, by councils and popes? Is that such a difficult thing, that it cannot be understood or endured without special revelation and power of the Holy Spirit? How this or that order and monastic rule is to be kept; shall black or gray hoods be worn; on Friday no meat is to be eaten; only one form of the sacrament is to be used; should not the apostles have been able to understand and bear such things, which every unlearned, wicked rascal can well understand and do? Ah, they were much higher things, which the apostles could not bear, and a higher art than these good-for-nothing babblers dream of. I certainly think that what the apostles were not able to understand and bear, that you also will not be able to understand and bear with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. For the doctrine of faith is difficult to grasp and is not so easily learned, as inexperienced spirits dream; namely, that a man must go out of himself, out of his own life and works, and with his whole mind fasten to that, which he neither sees nor feels in himself, namely, that Christ goes to the Father. O, it is a difficult art, to despair thus of one's self, and to let go whatever one has of his good or bad life, and to cling to the Word of Christ alone and to give body and soul for it. What power of reason can search out or teach this, if the whole world be searched over? Only try it with earnestness and in the real conflict of conscience, and you will experience it. For the devil and our own nature, and so many sects and false doctrines fight against it too hard. Let this be said against the lies and asinine art of the papists, with which they defile and bedaub this beautiful text, in order to confirm their lies.

⁷⁵ But the meaning of this, that Christ calls the Holy Spirit "*the Spirit of truth*", belongs to the explanation of other Gospels, and is elsewhere fully expounded. But it is said here advisedly, "*The Spirit of truth*" and, "*He shall guide you into all the truth,*" that is, into the true, pure doctrine, which preaches of me and, as he afterwards says, shall glorify me. For he sees far ahead here, that the spirit of lies, the devil, will stir and put himself forward even in the church, and set forth his own with great plausibility and approval; and he would fain say: O, how many sects shall arise, all of whom shall boast wonderfully of great mind, and yet they will only seduce people away from Christ and the truth into error and perdition.

⁷⁶ Therefore he describes the Holy Spirit, and gives to him the true token, by which he can be known and tested: "*He shall glorify me; for he shall take of mine.*" It is he alone, who elucidates Christ, as he has made himself known through his word; so that it may be known, that whoever teaches anything different, and yet pretends to be a Christian and adorns himself with the name, is not of the Spirit of Christ. For he shall teach no other thing, but adhere to the same teaching of Christ, except that he spreads it more and makes it clearer and plainer; wherefore he says: "*He shall glorify me.*"

⁷⁷ Furthermore, when he says: "*He shall not speak from himself,*" he again distinguishes between the false and the true Spirit. For the others all come of themselves, and speak from themselves, what they have thought out. Now he says, this is not the quality of the Holy Spirit, but of the devil. "*When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof.*" John 8:44. Therefore

he wishes to say: If a spirit is heard, who speaks from himself, he is certainly a liar. But the Holy Spirit shall not speak from himself; but what he receives from me and as he shall hear me and the Father speak with each other.

⁷⁸ This is truly an incisive text for the article of the three persons in the divine Being, that the Son of God is the Word of the Father in eternity, whom no one hears speak except the Holy Spirit; and he not only hears, but also testifies and proclaims it in the world. And in short, it all tends to this, that it is God's purpose that the Holy Spirit shall teach and pursue only the article of Christ, how we become righteous before God for his sake. Therefore he concludes: "*He shall glorify me: for he shalt take of mine;*" that is, he shall indeed say more than I, and speak and explain more clearly: but he shall take of mine, and speak of me and not of men and their holiness and works. This is to be his true office and work, by which he shall be known, and which he shall carry on until this Christ is well known. When you have learned this, you may seek for another Holy Spirit; but I hope we shall all remain the disciples of this Master and Teacher until the last day.

History

The Elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise (1463-1525), requested that Martin Luther write a collection of sermons for each Sunday of the year for the benefit of ministers and the common people—those that have the Spirit—to exhort them in sound doctrine but also to convict the gainsayers who oppose the Word and true faith.

This sermon originates from what is commonly called Luther's *Church Postil* collection. He wrote most of the sermons between 1521 and 1527, then supervised editorial assistance with Stephan Roth (1492-1546) until 1535 and Caspar Creuziger (1504-1548) until 1544. During that entire period over seventy-five editions of the collection were published. Many more editions were published after Luther's death. This sermon can be found in the Erlangen Edition, 12:118; Walch Edition, 11:1193; and St. Louis Walch Edition 11:885. It was translated into English by Andrew George Voigt (1859-1933) and edited by John Nicholas Lenker (1858-1929) and published in 1907. Aside from his catechisms, Luther's postils were his most influential writings for believers.

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