

*Day by Day*  
**WITH GOD**

**C. O. Rosenius**



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*Daily Devotions*

**C. O. Rosenius**

Luthersk Litteratur-Mission  
Box 39  
911 21 Vännäs  
Sweden  
info@llm.nu

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# Introduction

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Carl Olof Rosenius is a well-known name among Christians in Scandinavia. He was born on February 3, 1816 in the parish of Nysätra within the province of Västerbotten, Sweden; his father was a faithful clergyman. He became one of the leaders of the great revival during the nineteenth century. Today people still talk about the Rosenian revival. Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen was founded in 1856, which derived from him, its mission to publish and disseminate Bibles and literature.

In spite of his brief life — only 52 years — he managed to accomplish a lot. Besides giving sermons and pastoral care, he was an author and an editor of a magazine: *Pietisten* (The Pietist), which began in 1842. It had a circulation of 10,000 copies and was the most widely read magazine in the 1850's.

Rosenius is probably mostly known for his big book, *Betraktelser för Var Dag i Året* (in English: Day by Day With God) with devotions for every day of the year. Other writings in English are *A Faithful Guide to Peace With God* and *The Believer Free from the Law*. Various works of Rosenius have been translated into more than thirty languages. The common theme in his writings is the two truths of Christianity: the sinfulness of man and the grace of God.

But he was also well known as an author of hymns and songs, such as, Whereso'er I Roam, How Sure is My Foundation, O Precious Thought! Some Day the Mist Shall Vanish, With God and His Mercy, His Spirit and Word.

On February 24, 1868, Rosenius' earthly pilgrimage came to a close and was united with the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

May every reader be edified by these precious gems that reveal the redemptive work of Christ on behalf of sinners.

# January 1

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*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever* – Heb. 13:8.

So the apostle exclaims in the last chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews. It is surely a great consolation to the believer, at all the turns and changes of this present time, to know that Christ still lives and is the same yesterday, and today, and forever! Because of Him everything will eventually be put right, and all will be well! At the turn of the year what is more consoling or dearer to the Christian, for whom Christ is all, and in all, and what is a more suitable password or watchword for the New Year than this: *Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, and today, and forever!*

You who know Christ, and have always known that the Lord is good; you who have experienced, tasted, and seen how sweet the Lord is, how great He is in grace and mercy, how faithful and powerful to put right all that is wrong, just think and consider, that today and always, today as well as yesterday, this year as well as the one just elapsed; and also throughout eternity He is ever the same. He cannot possibly change. He is the “Father of eternities,” utterly unchangeable. He is the same at the turn of every time and season. It is only while we are down here, within us, in our feelings, thoughts, and sensations, that alterations and changes take place. In the midst of it all Christ remains unchanged, ever the same.

For instance, if we remember that He has forgiven our sins quite undeservedly, that He has made us righteous when we were quite ungodly, out of His sheer, free grace, and because of His own merit, then we know that He will do the same thing every day. If He has ever consoled us, when we were not worthy of being consoled, but in reality deserved punishment and casting away, then we realize that He still wants to console us equally undeservedly today. If we remember that He has redeemed us from distress, from sin and temptations, when we had not even the least power to set ourselves free from them, then we know that He both wants to and can do the same also today. If we can relate: At such a time I was lost, confused, and astonished, like a lost sheep, but He, the good Shepherd, sought me, moved me by His word, and brought me back, then surely we know also that in coming days He wants always to do the same. Because He is the same! “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” The last time has not yet come of His doing good to us! “He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). And the manner of His love toward those who belong to Him in the world, free, undeserved and from depths of His heart, is the love that will follow them to the end.

Nor does this consolation belong only to our own short and limited experience. No, ever since the creation of the world, throughout all the centuries, there has been the same experience of the grace and power of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever!” When we see how in the past He has

won sinners and has forgiven them very heinous and evil deeds, we know that He will do the same for us. When He said while on earth, to a notorious sinner crying at His feet: “Thy sins are forgiven. Go in peace” (Luke 7:48); when Saul, who was “a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious,” receives full pardon and apostleship; when David, after having enjoyed great grace, still falls into very evil deeds, yet again gets the promise of grace and forgiveness, then we know that the grace of Christ our Lord has no end, that He still wants to forgive all the transgressions of all seeking Him.

Yes, when we see how He never grew weary of the weakness of His disciples, but though He kept on punishing and correcting them, He never cast them away, we know also that He will never grow tired of us. And when we see how inclined He was to hear a prayer, so short, perhaps, that it consisted only of the touching of His garment, we know that He also now hears extremely short prayers.

In all this we should bear in mind that even today Christ is still the same: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever!” This is a great consolation and a fortress strong beyond description when times change, yes, and storms arise, and all grows dark around us. A Christian can still sing with joy even then: “I sit in His shadow with great delight! O Lord, Thou art my Strength, my Rock, my Fortress, and my Redeemer, my God, and my Consolation. Thou remainest ever the same, and thy years shall have no end.”

## January 2

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*And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals – Rev. 5:1.*

**S**o immense and glorious beyond measure is the consolation contained in these words, that if we would only have our eyes opened to see it, and were able in living faith to consider it a real truth, we would probably once and for all throw all our anxieties away from us, and say: “Now, I do not want anything else. Now God may do with me whatever He wants. Yes, now all wicked spirits and evil people may gladly do what they like to me. I do not fear anything.”

Let us look a little at the Bible words quoted. John sees a book in the right hand of Him that sits on the throne. And what does this book contain? As the first voice from the opened heaven said, it contains things which must be hereafter (Rev. 4:1). Mark now what the vision signifies! The book contains “things which must be hereafter,” viz., what will happen in future to the whole world, and most especially to the people of God on earth. That such a book rests in the right hand of Him that sits on the throne, does not only mean that God knows to the least detail all that will happen to us, for the way described in a book always lies open before the eyes; but also, as the book is expressly in His right hand, the acting hand, this indicates, firstly, that the great and almighty God leads and rules everything, and secondly, that He pays such careful attention to what will happen to us, that He has written it in a book, and we know that when a record is made of things being done, this means that very careful attention is being paid to them.

But now is it not truly “the things that will happen *hereafter*” that form the object of all our anxieties? Our hearts are usually full of anxiety and thoughts of what will happen to us in the future. The one who is fortunate enough not to be preyed on by the sorrows of the world which bring death, even the one who has become a believing Christian, has now a new world of anxieties concerning many more important things. On this side our own soul, our sins, temptations, fights, and dangers of falls and deviations. On that side the souls of our relatives and other people and how it will go for them. On this side the future of the church or what will happen in society. On that side a multitude of trivialities, which still often worry us very bitterly. Beside that, Christians have the anxiety of love, wanting everything to go well, and an enlightened eye to see the importance of things that others consider nothing. They are also always the butt of all the glowing darts of the devil, this restless enemy who tries to upset our peace by means of temptations, tribulations, and all sorts of false inspirations, so that the children of God often have no repose, either by day or night. To what should they resort then? On what should I lean my wearied head? Oh, that it had been granted to me to see what this incident contains for me! We think yet all that can meet us has been written in a



book which rests in the right hand of Him that sits on the throne. David himself saw it and for the consolation of his heart sang: “In Thy book all my members [‘days’ in Swedish] were written, . . . when as yet there was none of them” (Ps. 139:16). We still have the same faithful Father in heaven: and so graciously He takes care of everything regarding us, that He has it put down in a book that He Himself keeps in His right hand. Oh, were we but able to believe in and realize the graciousness and care God has for us, do you not think that we would have a blessed rest and peace for our poor hearts, and a deep peace and consolation for all the future days?

But here the “heathen” in our breast, our unbelieving dark heart and reason, come and say: “Well, the great historic events, or the things that will happen to the whole of the church, those are the things God has put down in His book. Not what concerns insignificant individual creatures like me.” And surely, it does seem too much to expect, and quite incomprehensible to our reason if we say that He has also put down in His book all that will happen to you and me! But what can we do, if the very great Lord, sitting on the throne Himself says that He is enough, not only for every individual human being and his least concerns, but also even for every bird on earth? (Matt. 10:29–31). What can we make of such a Lord? On one hand our reason says: “It is quite absurd, impossible!” On the other hand, all the visible creation stands full of innumerable witnesses against us and shouts with a thousand voices: “Look, what God has done! Look, what magnificent works! and look what detail!” And since He has made all these small things, it is probably equally easy for Him to watch over and take care of them. Oh, if we would but wake up from our miserable darkness of unbelief! We go on in the midst of the endless richness of the witnesses of the power and glory of God and still see nothing. It is the Lord Himself that says: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. Ye are of more value than many sparrows. The very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

## January 3

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*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son – John 3:16.*

**H**ere is God's eternal election of grace! God, the only wise, righteous, and merciful One, the Creator and Father above all that is called Father in heaven and on earth, in His eternal omniscience foresaw how His image, man, whom He had made a noble and free creature, with all his race, would fall from goodness. Had he been obedient and righteous man would have been able to remain in that goodness, but God foresaw how he would lose the image of God and fling himself into eternal death and condemnation, filled with the poison of the old serpent and sold under sin. It was then that God decided that before He let this important race out of His creating hand, He would Himself take care of its salvation, and give it a Mediator. And in the person of this Mediator both mankind and divinity would be indissolubly united. "He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). "One jot or one tittle could in no wise pass from the law" (Matt. 5:18). Equally impossible it was for fallen mankind to fulfill the law. It could no more manifest what it possessed no longer, that is, true righteousness and holiness. Therefore God's intent in the creation of man would either come to nought, and the son of His life, His image and child would be eternally lost, or God Himself would have to find a way out to save the human being He had made.

He did so! God had mercy upon us by His own free love "according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Eph. 1:5–6), and predestinated us unto the adoption of children (original salvation) by His own lovable Son. He, the eternal and independent Word, because of His mercy and love, willingly undertook to become the Brother and Captain of the Salvation of the human race. He undertook to become a man Himself and having taken flesh, to fulfill the law and to suffer death in order to win back what had been lost, to reinstate us in goodness again and to restore the image of God in us again by Himself. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). He became "the Son of man," to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). "As by the offense of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift was to come upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. 5:18). "As in Adam all had died, even so in Christ should all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22).

This was God's own free election of grace, and there was no other ground for it than God's own free, independent love. As Christ puts it: "For God so loved the world." No matter how much we seek, we cannot find any other reason for it than this: He loved, therefore He acted. We cannot go further. "He has chosen us in Christ ... according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:4–5). Nobody asked

Him. Nobody deserved it. It was the good pleasure of His will. Here we have a gold mine! Our salvation, the election of us in Christ, is God's own free decision and His own work. The Scripture says: God does everything for His own sake. He, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, has pleased to predestinate fallen mankind unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself. He has adopted us to be His own children by Jesus Christ "according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace." What can we say about that? When it pleases God to do something, who can then prevent Him? Who can resist His will? Therefore it is called an election of grace. Do you think it is far too much that you should be a child of God? You are quite unworthy of it. True! But what do you want to do? It is the good pleasure of God's own will. What do you want to say against the counsel of God's will? One time He decides to create worlds, as many as the sand. Another time He decides to create children for Himself on earth, and when they have fallen because of the temptations of the enemy, to restore them by a Savior. He decides by means of an expensive redemption to make them again His children, no matter how depraved and unworthy they are. What can we say about this? It is all the good, free pleasure of God's will. He does everything for His own sake. This is the enormous consolation of the election of grace.

Surely by this, I must see that God's grace and love are free and independent of us. As Paul says in Romans 9 as regards the election, when he mentions the twin children, Jacob and Esau, as examples: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth; it was said unto their mother, The elder shall serve the younger." So also here: Before we had been created, before the foundation of the world, when we had done neither any good nor evil, God chose us in Christ to be children and heirs of eternal bliss. Surely this election is a mighty thunder-peal from heaven bursting from before the face of God against the merit of all our works! Oh, that at that thunderclap we would at once wake up from our eternal imagination that God's grace could depend on us, on our piety and our works! "He hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world!" We are surely a bit late with our merits! Oh, what eternal grace!

## January 4

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*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God ... which were born ... of God – John 1:12–13.*

**A**t such a revelation of the Scripture regarding the children of God the hearts of all the faithful should dilate with joy and wonderment; and on the other hand, the rash and selfish, seizing upon the High Name, should become amazed and startled! The children of God, in the sense of the Scripture, have been born of God. They are wonders of the grace of God. They are new, spiritual creatures on earth, and they reveal that they partake of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). And such things are only brought about by true, living faith. Only by grace through faith we become children of God and saved, and that thought is so full of grace and so rich in consolation, that it makes one weep for joy. Should we not then understand and reflect upon what is meant here by a faith by which we are born of God? Or can perhaps, a self-made, imaginary faith, which could never bring about any birth of God, still save us? Anyone can take to himself the beautiful title of child of God. Many a man without the characteristic signs of the new birth fondles himself with the hope of being a true Christian. “Be not deceived! God is not mocked!” (Gal. 6:7). At the final issue it will not be a matter of how much understanding we have had in our heads, or how many words we have had in our mouths, but it will be a matter of whether there has been truth in our Christianity, whether we have been born of God. Oh, it would be terrible to have joked oneself through time with a self-taken comfort, instead of a faith worked by God. It would be terrible to have deceived oneself and others by an unfounded belief of thinking, without any power to mortify, recreate, and sanctify our hearts — a belief consisting only of knowledge and words, and some religious exercises, as praying, reading, and speaking, all of which have been self-created, in order to win the confidence of Christians, or something to that effect! Soon there will be an end to the playing! Soon the Great and Holy One will come, the One before whom we have played the saint. Then we shall hear the serious words: “It is done! Give an account!” and confronted with the serious face of death, when we shall stand unveiled and exposed before the eyes of the Holy One, how dreadful it will be then if all our lives we have been hypocrites! Simply because grace is so great and the place of a child in heaven is so glorious, it is also hazardous if there is not truth in our Christianity. Therefore, we need to mark well the words of the apostle in our text.

He said first: “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.” This receiving was explained by the addition: “them that believe on His name.” But look how he explains it. He adds that those who by faith were the sons of God, were also born of God. We must impress that point deeply on our

minds. Those who hope to “see the kingdom of God” and to live eternally with God as the children of God, must have been born of God. The divine life which before the Fall lived in the human being and which was expressly the image of God in him, and the loss of which God meant when He said: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” that divine life must now be restored in us by a new birth by the Spirit, so that we again become like the image of God. However, this image will not become perfect until we also become free from the hindering dress of our flesh. Christ expressly explained: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). The kingdom of God is given to us by sheer grace. That point stands firm eternally, but you are quite unfit to enjoy it. You cannot possibly live the life with God and the life in heaven, if you are not a partaker of the divine nature. The true God is a holy God. An unholy creature will be consumed and will agonize in His presence. There must be in man, a nature allied with God, a new man created according to God, before there can be eternal happiness in the company of God. “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7), and does not feel at home with Him even for only one day, how much less then for the whole of eternity? Christ says: “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. That which is born of flesh is flesh. Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, 6–7). And John says: “Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God.” And so also says Peter: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” And so even Paul says: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (Gal. 6:15).

Now whom should you believe in this great life-death question if not the Lord Himself? Why, Christ is love and mildness personified! Surely we must listen to both Christ and His apostles. When Christ and His apostles, as though by one mouth, testify that God has established such a way for the children of men, that they can be born again and become partakers of the nature of God if they are to enter into the kingdom of heaven, how then can we continue towards eternity, without making sure that something like that has happened to us?

## January 5

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*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God – Rom. 8:16.*

**W**hat a great and glorious fact it is to be a child of God, and to know that one is so, by the Spirit of adoption which gives us sweet intimacy with God! So speaks the apostle here, so all the Scriptures testify, so speaks the most blessed experience of all Christians made free. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.”

Let us ask ourselves how is it with us — with me — in this important respect? You that read this, are you so happy that you have the witness of the Spirit of God that you are a child of God? Maybe you are a Christian, you love the Word of God, there is nothing to blame in your life, but what about this? What about the heart? Have you become acquainted with God so intimately that you can cry “Abba\* [my own], Father!” This is the main thing! Make a special note of this! This is the greatest, the chief point of all our Christian life — that the heart enjoys intimacy with God through Christ, that we can converse with Him; that we are united with Him! This is the very heart and life of all Christianity — of all that it means to be a Christian. This is the restored paradise-life man lost because of the Fall, the intimacy through the Spirit of adoption of going about with God and speaking with Him, like a child with its father.

Now have *you* got this intimate Spirit of adoption? Do not leave the question before you have settled it thoroughly. This intimate Spirit of adoption is the very heart-point in the whole of the spiritual life, through which all good comes. Without it all is death and coldness, impotence and bondage. And what is the use of all spiritual things, if you do not come by faith in God to this peace, this intimate walking with Him. Christ has expressly declared that all other good things will not lead to salvation if we are not personally acquainted and united with Himself.

It is also this intimate relationship with the Savior that is the secret of power in the Christian faith both as regards doing and suffering. It is the source from which all truly holy, God-pleasing life springs. How weak, slavish, disinterested, heavy, and impotent is the Christian life in those who do not have this assurance of faith and intimacy with God! They have plenty of good intentions, good decision and resolutions, but these do not result in anything. They are all the time servants of the world; they sin in their hearts and are led by the devil according to his will. There is no spirit in them.

Sometimes even where a real faith has sprung up, but is still weak; where one hungers and thirsts, but has not yet been filled; or where, in an older Christian, faith has lost its evangelical confidence, and Christianity has become heavier and more legal, there impotence and bondage under sin always prevail, and the believer

becomes weak, slow, and lifeless in everything, profession becomes silent, prayer heavy and powerless, the heart cold and empty. For when the heart has no treasure, nothing to fill it with, and no Friend above all other friends, it soon thirsts for sin and vanity again. How much more is not this the case when the soul has not in any degree come into faith, but is still under the yoke of bondage to sin.

On the contrary, when the soul has come to a happy assurance before God of having been pardoned, and lives in intimate friendship with a personal Savior, what a life, what a delight, and what a power, what a joyous praising and professing, and what a speedy going out from the world and unrighteousness! Such things, Christ meant when He said: “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit” (John 15:4–5). And John says: “And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). And the prophet says: “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). Therefore, how important it is, in order to have power for sanctified living, for life in our profession, to forsake the world, for patience and strength in sufferings — how important and necessary it is, to have the assurance of God’s grace, and to be intimately united with the Savior! Yes, how necessary it is to keep this true confidence of a child, that the apostle calls the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry: “Abba [my own], Father!” (Rom. 8:15) — to keep it as a most precious jewel, as one’s eye or one’s heart. Should we not then stop and ask ourselves as before the face of God, everyone for himself: “Have I got this intimate Spirit of adoption? Have I got the witness that I am a child of God?”

\* “Abba” is an endearing term of intimacy addressed only to a person’s own father in much the same way as the Western form “Daddy.”

## January 6

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*But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful – Rom. 7:13.*

**T** rue improvement, that is, the result of the right and radical work of the law in the heart of a sinner, is so necessary that, without it, all spiritual efforts are in vain. All belief, and all godliness, yes, even Christ and His merits, are of no value to that soul. He who knows only his own works, sins in thought, word, and deed, simply by looking at them, and working and fighting with regard to them. True, he does not, by the demands of the law on the heart, sink into the unclean mire of nature and wallow there in distress. But the improvement that human being makes is the maimed improvement of a hypocrite. He is definitely converted, but only from being a child of this world, to his own righteousness. He becomes a Pharisee.

Again, the one who knows the wickedness of nature, the depravity and impurity of the heart, but yet flees only to watchfulness, prayer, fighting, self-denial, and godliness, hoping therein to find victory and having his eyes, his consolation, and hope fixed thereon only, he also becomes a Pharisee. If such an one, while the situation is still bad, and while he has not yet won the victory aimed at, but is still lying down in his misery and wretchedness, if such an one does not come to Christ, to the grace, consolation, and eternal bliss found only in Christ, then he will never become a true Christian. Either he will become a deceived work-saint finding consolation in his improvement and godliness, or he will become a tired-out bondman, abandoning everything, and falling back into his happy-go-lucky state, or remaining in despair and fear of damnation. Now we are not speaking of those who deliberately swear allegiance to some cherished sins. But we are speaking of those who are really trying to enter in at the straight gate, but are not able to do so. The fault with all these is that they never allow anyone to tell them — or rather, to fully explain to them, what true improvement is, or what is the right effect of the law, its proper purpose and intention. Oh, that these people would *want* to pay attention to the Word of God. Listen for once! The Scripture expressly says: “What things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). “Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20).

The law must necessarily exercise its natural effect in your heart, if the improvement is to be a true one. It is not that you should become more pious and holy by means of its demands and commands, nor that you should become so by another baptizing you with the Spirit and fire. No, by the law you should



become “guilty,” sinful, “exceeding sinful.” Nothing else helps if you wish to learn to receive Christ rightly, so that His new life will be kindled in your heart. “If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law” (Gal. 3:21). “If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2:21). The law certainly accomplishes its right task, if only it is allowed to come into the heart. If it only touches the surface, then you can become very pious, both in works and in imaginations, and thereby become a Pharisee, as has been said before. Paul was also in that condition before “the commandment came,” before the spiritual demands of the law penetrated into his heart. That way also are many religious people nowadays. They maintain the law in such a way and sense as if one could really become more pious and better by the keeping of it, if one only tries to work more seriously. They say also that no one should despair, but continue to fight, pray, and hope.

The right type of improvement, however, goes deeper. It stirs up the wickedness of my heart and does not make me better and better, but makes me realize how sinful I am, “exceeding sinful by the commandment,” so that I will be put to shame with all I do, and come to really hate myself and my improvement, and refuse to get any comfort in myself. Mark this! When Christ began His vocation of teaching, the first thing He did was to declare the spiritual requirements of the law to be so high, that no man would be able to fulfill them (cf. Matt. 5:21–48). And when a man thought that he had fulfilled all that the law demanded, Christ was not satisfied, but immediately hurried to give him a commandment that was too difficult for him: “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor” (Matt. 19:21). He did not help the man to find comfort in his piousness. Therefore when somebody says he wants to be converted, and to become pious and holy, one should reply: Yes, if first of all you will only admit yourself a sinner and ungodly, that is, if you will first come down and face your own wretchedness, and learn to know what a lost creature you are, altogether depraved and ungodly, then only can you truthfully believe on Him “that justifieth the ungodly” (Rom. 4:5), and then only can you become pious and holy.

# January 7

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*Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience* – Heb. 10:22.

What does it mean to have the heart sprinkled thus? How does it happen? In the figure given in Exodus 12, a bunch of hyssop was dipped into the blood of the slain lamb, and therewith both the lintel and the two side posts were struck. The hyssop bunch wherewith our hearts should be struck is the gospel, and this verily has been dipped into the blood of the Lamb of God. And when it is being preached, holy drops are sprinkled from it in all directions. From first to last the gospel speaks about salvation by the blood of Christ! The gospel says: The Lamb that was slain and has redeemed us to God by His blood is worthy to receive honor and glory (Rom. 5:8–9, 12). The gospel says: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Eph. 1:7). The gospel says: “The blood of Jesus Christ [the Son of God] cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). The gospel says: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isa. 1:18). By such witnesses our hearts become sprinkled with the blood of Christ from an evil conscience. Mark the words: *from an evil conscience!* We must be sprinkled with the blood of Christ so that we get an absolutely good conscience — get all our sins fully removed from our conscience by a sure and heartfelt confidence in God’s forgiveness for them. So that we, completely cleansed and reconciled with God, can again speak to Him as to a gracious and loving Father. This is the glorious freedom of the children of God, that no sin is imputed to them. The law does not judge them. They are not under the law, but under grace. And therefore they have peace with God, quite as if they never had any sin, but were perfectly righteous and holy. This faith also redeems us from the dominion of sin. When I, as a poor sinner, lay hold on the great, sure consolation that God no longer imputes iniquity to me, but has said to me: “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee” (Matt. 9:2), then how I triumph, rejoice, praise the grace of God, and curse my sin. Then also I do not want to have any higher wish for myself in the world than to be able to serve the Lord for all the days of my life.

But for this sprinkling, such a faith is needed that your conscience gets peace from your sins. The one who knows, hears, sings, and reads about the great redemption that has taken place in Christ, but still always bears his sins on his conscience and anxiously thinks of a way to become reconciled, thereby blasphemes the blood of Christ, as if it had not been mighty enough to take away his sins. The apostle says in verses 1 and 2, that when, in the case of the Levitical sacrifices, one always had an evil conscience left, and therefore always offered again, this showed that it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats was able to take away sins. “For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.” Mark the words! Now we are

giving the same witness about the precious blood of Christ when we go about with an evil conscience. Thereby we are saying that the blood of Christ has not been able to take away our sins. Why? Because otherwise we would have peace with God, and know our sins to have been taken away, know that we have been made clean!

Stop here for a moment and ask yourself: What do I believe? Has the blood of Christ really taken away, atoned for, and blotted out all my sins? Ask yourself: Has the blood of Christ done any more than the blood of bulls and of goats? Or do you want to say of the blood of Christ that it cannot take away sins? Paul makes the distinction between the blood of the Levitical sacrifices and the blood of Christ. Having said that the first mentioned could not take away sins, he adds as regards Christ: "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever," testifies: "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." And then follows: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." The apostle wants that there should be once for all a final decision, that the blood of Christ really *has* taken away our sins, and that we now are free.

Wake up then, dear soul, and think what you are doing when you keep on looking at yourself and considering the blood of Christ as nothing, as if it is not able to take away your sins! To be sure your sins may be dreadful, great, and many. But they can never be so great and many, that the blood of the Son of God is not a thousand times greater in its power to cleanse. Pray God for faith, and let your heart be sprinkled with the blood of Christ by the Gospel, until you become entirely free from an evil conscience, so that you fully trust in the value of the blood of Christ and by it can happily defy all your sins as well as death, the devil, and hell. Pray that you may not know anything more than Christ, Christ dead and risen for us, yes, *for us!*

# January 8

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*Made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law,  
that we might receive the adoption of sons – Gal. 4:4–5.*

Oh, the eternal love of God that loved the world to such an extent! We are given here the reason why the Son of God became a human being, what His great errand was, and the purpose of His arrival in the world! He was “made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” Oh, the black darkness of unbelief that will not allow us to accept this! Look at those who really believe that God has given us His Son to fulfill the law for us. I am not surprised that they love such a God and Savior. I am not surprised that they become fervent in spirit because of the high, heavenly delight and peace and love that fills them. I am not surprised that they are smitten with zeal against anything less that claims to make us righteous and holy. When God wanted to save fallen human beings and to redeem them from the judgment of the law, what was He to do? It had to happen so that not even one jot or tittle of divine righteousness would suffer (Matt. 5:18). And the apostle says that it happened by God’s own Son being made under the law. He that was the Lord of the law, made up His mind to become a servant and fulfill the law on our behalf. Oh, the matchless love of God!

Do you believe what the whole of the Scriptures testify, that only because of Christ’s having fulfilled the law, yes, only because of the righteousness of Christ we will become righteous? Then the only question remaining to check your assurance will be: “Can I be certain that Christ has fulfilled the law to the full satisfaction of the eternal Father?” You can certainly rest assured. Christ *has* fully kept the law. He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind. It was His meat to do the will of His Father. Equally completely He has also “loved His neighbor as Himself,” so much so, that He even forgot Himself and “poured out His soul unto death, was numbered with the transgressors; and bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12). “He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). Because He was made under the law, it also meant that He was able to take on Himself the judgment and curse of the law which overhangs sinners. It is written: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14–15). So He has done all for us. Praised and magnified be His name! He was the only One who could do it. “For this job we were by far too weak in the cuirass,” as Luther says, “we have been put out of the saddle.” Christ alone could do it.

But now everybody should make sure he gives Christ the glory for the work, i.e., should bear in mind and acknowledge that his Lord has done all well. Words cannot describe how deplorable it is, when the devil so deceives our senses that we live our time as if we did not know the real value of all Christ has done. We read, sing, and say that God has given us His own Son to be our Brother, our Fulfiller of the law, and our Lamb of the sin-offering, and yet all our thoughts and spiritual efforts declare our belief that in ourselves we should be unimpeachable fulfillers of the law in order to please God and be certain of His grace and friendship. By our lips only we praise the Mediator with many great and beautiful words, but then turn to works in order to reconcile ourselves with God.

There are many who all their lifetime have not had any real service and use for Christ. Let us then stop for a moment and think of what the Scriptures say about the use and service of this great gift, which God gave us when His Son was made under the law. The apostle says it was “to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:5). Have you never seen or heard these words? Should we not at once praise the divine love and acknowledge that what our great Fulfiller of the law has done is true and sufficient for us? The apostle here says, that He has not done it for Himself, but in order to redeem those who were under the law. Let everybody who wants to be a Christian stop for a moment to consider seriously what the sum and core of the Scriptures are *that Christ is the end of the law!* “Christ is the *end* of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 10:4), “that what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,” God did, “sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3).

## January 9

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*For there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God – Rom. 3:22–23.*

**H**ow should one properly understand these words? It is absurd to say that there is no difference! Our eyes tell us plainly that on the contrary the difference is rather great! One man lives freely in all sin, and the other leads a watchful life day by day. We reply, and ask you to mark well, what is being referred to here. These words are spoken only about the righteousness of man before God, about the “glory of God” with reference to the earning of our salvation. Regarding that matter only, all distinction ceases between greater and lesser sins. On the other hand, if it is a matter of the things depending on our works, namely, different degrees of eternal bliss or condemnation, then the Scripture says plainly that there *will be* a difference, when it speaks of “more tolerable” (Matt. 10:15) and more unbearable. On the other hand again, it says that “one star differeth from another star in glory” (1 Cor. 15:41). But as soon as it is a matter of righteousness and glory before God, as it is here, then at once there is “no difference”; then the works of no human being are enough; then we are all so far from righteousness, that all difference disappears.

Here is a parable: When we speak of the unevenness of the earth’s surface, we always say that there is a great distance between the peaks of the high mountains and the bottom of the vales. But as soon as we speak about the distance of our earth from the sun, we no longer take the unevenness of earth into account. Then we do not say: From the sun to the peaks of the mountains measures so and so, and from the sun to the bottom of the vales measures so and so. But we say: the distance is so enormous, that the unevenness of earth does not matter. “There is no difference.” Down here before men, there certainly is a great difference between sins and piety. But as the best man is so infinitely far away from righteousness, there will not be any difference before the Lord as regards his worthiness of heaven.

In a prison there is a number of death-prisoners — all of them bandits, murderers, and robbers — and these begin to dispute about who of them is the worthiest of a place of honor in the king’s palace. We would surely say: “All of you are worthy only of the place of execution. There is no difference!” In the same way when we speak about our precedence as regards righteousness before God, we are, all of us, great criminals, offending daily against the highest commandment of God. Even, the most serious and sanctified Christians must ask for forgiveness each day and feel that they are worthy only of the wrath of God, if He were to judge them according to His law!

There are people however, who think themselves somewhat better than others, and imagine that by the means of grace, by much prayer, faith, watchfulness, and

seriousness, they have come so far that they should not be likened to other more feeble Christians, but are an especially holy race in themselves. Alas! These have always been duped by the charmer. If, indeed, they are sober and vigilant, then they would surely feel the way the holy David felt when he prayed: “Enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified!” (Ps. 143:2). And speaking about unconverted people, even their best deeds are only sin and hypocrisy, as their hearts are not in a right relationship with the Lord in faith and love. No matter how great the difference between them externally — whether they are noble and honorable members of society with a high morality, conscientiously fulfilling their duties, and being even zealous for God (though not wisely, but for the sake of their own righteousness); or whether they are impudent mockers living freely in all sorts of sins and vices, both of them are under the judgment of the same God, and both of them need the same grace. It is equally available to both of them, and it is given to them equally freely, when they seek it at the feet of Christ.

## January 10

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*What part hath he that believeth with an infidel? ... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord – 2 Cor. 6:15, 17.*

If, because of special grace, Christ has chosen you out of the world and has called you to be His disciple and friend, to live with Him, to live in a blessed, holy union with Him, then follow Him seriously, sincerely, and faithfully. Neither He Himself, the Bridegroom of your soul, nor your own welfare, allows you a double existence, divided between God and the world, between Christ and Belial.

Therefore make your choice! You cannot possibly divide yourself. Separate is separate. Christ is Christ, and the world is the world. The friendship of God is one thing, and the friendship of the world another. They can never be joined. Therefore make your choice! Maybe it is too difficult to follow Jesus and lose the friendship of the world. Then do not at all bother yourself with it, but be with the world. It is much easier and more pleasant for the flesh. You will still have gained as much as you would if you divided yourself between them, in fact much more, because in the latter case you lose them both. By dividing yourself you cannot fully enjoy the world, and you cannot enjoy the friendship of God in time, also you will not be able to enjoy heavenly joy in eternity.

But how or where should we separate ourselves from the ungodly? Provided you have been born again and are thus already separate as regards the heart and ways of thinking; that you have other thoughts on spiritual matters and other desires in your heart than they have; that you love what they despise and that you despise and hate what they love, then it remains that you also separate yourself from them in everything that depends on your inner being and has an influence on it; that you separate yourself from their sinful being as regards words and deeds, and from all that is a cause of or a temptation to sin, no matter whether it is amusements, company, or anything else. As regards your speech, behavior, ways of acting, company, and amusements you can choose yourself, but you must separate yourself completely from the ungodly. For instance when you see and hear others stoop to seeing, hearing, and speaking about vain things only, you, being a disciple of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit, ought to let your heart be a closed garden, open only to the Beloved of your heart; and as Job you should make a covenant with your eyes (Job 31:1) that they do not look at vain things, and with your tongue that it does not participate in vain and mean chatter, but rather speaks about the rights and blessings of the Lord when there is opportunity, or speaks with your God in silence. When others, also wanting to be called Christians, freely and openly trample the commandments of God under foot, take His great and holy name in vain, or profane His Sabbath, you must do something special. That is, you should fear your God and love Him so much that you do not want to act contrary to His commandments. We are speaking



here of the going out from the world, and the sins mentioned do not include those which decent people of the world also consider as sin, such as disobedience, anger, hatred, unchastity, dishonesty, etc. But there are things considered innocent and defended by them. With regard to these let it be a rule never to judge the criminality or innocence of a deed according to the custom and judgment of the crowd, but according to the Word of God and the examples of Christ and the saints. So if there is a company or an amusement in itself seemingly quite harmless and innocent, yet contrary to the mind of the Spirit, so much so that you see that your Lord Christ would not participate with you in it and you could not invite Him to it, or do it yourself in His name; or if you feel that your inner man will lose more than benefit from it, then flee that company or that amusement. Here the words of the apostle apply: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11).

When company is mentioned here everybody should understand that it is not intended that you should go away from the ones to whom your earthly vocation binds you. It is necessary only to flee their sins. It refers to those situations when you can choose your company yourself. Then you must keep apart from those who are against your Lord. Some may question whether this is not hatred against human beings? Should one not love all human beings? Yes, but you should love them in the way your Lord did. It is true that He loved all and loved them so much that He gave His life for them, but He never became intimate with the enemies of His Father and His kingdom. You should do likewise! Love, devote yourself, do good to all, but do not think it is your duty to be intimate with the enemies of your Lord. That would be a confidence, an equality, which makes it necessary for you to call evil good, and good evil. Just think if now and then the disciples of Christ had gone out to the enemies of their Lord, to the scribes and the Pharisees, and had been in intimate friendship with them — would this have been faithfulness? Judas did this — and the result was that he betrayed his Lord into their hands. Perhaps you think they should not be considered the enemies of Christ. You may consider them to be good, decent people. Then make a test! If your company does not tolerate it when you speak well of your Lord, then you should know where you are, namely with His enemies. In that company you must either confess that you are a disciple of Christ with all your being, and thus hurt the company; or you must deny your Lord and hurt Him and your conscience by the shirking ambiguity and dissimulations which stem from compromise. The one going self-willingly to the “coal fire” of the enemies of Christ should reflect upon this.

# January 11

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*Lovest thou me?* – John 21:16.

**I**t is the Lord Himself that speaks here, the One who will judge in the last day, the One to whom you speak in prayer. Oh, that we could crawl on our knees, if necessary, to hear Him ask us Himself, what He wants first of all. First of all, He asks for your love. Wait, and hold back your reply until you have understood His meaning aright. Remember His first question is: “*Lovest thou Me?*” not: *Servest thou Me?* nor *Obeyest thou Me?* nor yet *Confessest thou Me?* But *Lovest thou?* Secondly, He does not say Mine, but Me. He does not say, *Lovest thou My powers and gifts?* No, but *Lovest thou Me* — Me, who am Myself a gift to you; Me, in My person, the whole of your consolation and eternal bliss?

As regards the first thing, you can know that you love Him when you serve and obey Him; because Jesus Himself says: “If a man love Me, he will keep My words... He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings” (John 14:23–24); and John says: “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:3). But do not interpret this too hastily. We shall soon see that it is not necessarily a fact that you love Jesus, even though in a certain way you serve and obey Him and do the works He commands you to. No! To “keep His commandments” means much more. By the words of Christ Himself we shall prove that we can be excellent servants of Christ, have a great spiritual enlightenment, be rich in most holy works, and have a great zeal for the sake of Christ, and still not love Him rightly. Because in the letter to “the angel of the church of Ephesus” the Lord says, that not only did this teacher have the usual Christian enlightenment, but he had also a fine, discerning eye — “thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.” Moreover He says that this teacher was not one of those having only knowledge, enlightenment, and words, but he also had power and zeal to do holy works. Yes, he labored so faithfully for the sake of Christ’s name that he suffered because of it. And thereby he had “patience.” Thirdly, the Lord says that this teacher was not only enlightened and an active preacher, but he even kept good discipline in his church and resisted false teach. Summarize this, and you will have a beautiful picture of a rather unusual servant of Christ. However, he had left his first love. And only because of that his whole condition was such that unless there was a change, the Lord would come unto him quickly and remove His candlestick out of its place. From this you see, that to “*keep His commandments*” means something more than to do certain works according to His commandments. And that even if you were such an excellent servant of Christ as was this one, the Lord would still have one question for you: *Lovest thou Me?*

You should pay special attention to the word Me, in the last sentence: “*Lovest thou Me.*” It is just here that the love of the bride differs from the love of a harlot.

Many have a certain amount of love for Christ, but only because of the excellent things He works in them and others. They have never, as lost sinners, been saved by Him. They have never been captivated by the fact of His love, or by what He is in Himself. As we said before, they love Him for the sake of His beautiful gifts. This is the love of a harlot. We are not speaking of people as heinous as Judas Iscariot, who followed Christ for the sake of the money bag. Nor of the sorcerer Simon who, for the same unclean desire, wanted to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit. No, we are speaking about the incomprehensibly fine and mysterious deceit of the nature of our own self-idolization which is founded on the charming words of the old serpent: "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Because ever since that day, in addition to sensual cravings, we have also had an equally Adamic self-holiness nature. And to it man resorts when he realizes the abomination of sin. When, like Simon above, he finds at the same time, that in the name of Jesus there are powers of a kind found nowhere else, that in Him are hid all treasures of wisdom and understanding, and power to practice all virtues and holy works, then, in order to obtain them, he becomes a disciple of Christ, loves and follows Him, prays to Him, and invokes Him. But all the time with his eyes fixed on these powers and gifts, and not because of what Christ has done, and is in His own person. What He is, and has done in His person can be acknowledged by one's reason and be praised by one's mouth. But the heart looks at the gifts. The entire look of the soul is fixed only on these, not on the Crucified One. Oh, that for the sake of the Lord and the salvation of our souls, we would become so honest that we would pay attention to the *object* of the heart to determine whether it is grace itself we seek, the grace of His atonement, the washing in the blood of Christ. It does not help that our heads and tongues are Christian. Just ponder on what holds the first and the last place in your heart!

## January 12

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*For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living* – Rom. 14:9.

**T**he blessed condition of the faithful who always belong to the Lord, no matter whether they live or die, is the fruit of the complete work of Christ's salvation — His death, His resurrection, and His eternal life as our High Priest and King. It was the very purpose of the whole of His atonement that He would redeem us from the power of sin, death, and the devil. He would earn the right for Himself to pardon, save, and own us as His subjects both in time and eternity. Yes, as is said in our verse, to be the Lord over us, not only while we live here on earth, but also in the eternal life after our death. That is the sense of the words: "Christ died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living." Here there is an obvious analogy, that Christ both died and revived, and that both the living and dead shall be under His domination.

Now we know that both His death and resurrection were required in order that any soul could be saved. We also know that the one who is saved and pardoned belongs to the Lord, first throughout his life on earth and also after his death. And all this because of the same work of atonement, the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the main thing. But the apostle also shows us how the head is first in all things, and then the members. Christ was first on earth to live and die, and then rise and live again eternally. We also have to go this way, and at each step we should belong utterly to the Lord, first during our life on earth, then in our death, and finally in the eternal life beyond. When the apostle says that Christ has earned the right to be Lord or prince over us, he thereby explains why the faithful nevermore should "live unto themselves," but should in all their ways of living consider themselves His possession and His servants. He is our rightful Lord, our Redeemer and Owner. Therefore He is also to reign over us, not only in this life, but also in our death, and throughout all eternity.

We early learned to understand and express our whole confession about Christ in the words: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is my Lord, who has redeemed, earned, and won me, a lost and damned human being, from all sins, from the power of death and the devil; in order that I shall be His own, come under His authority, live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and bliss, even as He has risen from death, and lives and reigns in eternity."\* This is exactly the sense of our text, and the sum of all the gospel of God. And this is now the basis of our holy relationship to Christ, and the heartfelt desire of all the faithful in everything to seek the pleasure of the Lord and the glory of His name, in short, to live unto Him.

The apostle says also: “And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15). As Christ has died in the place of all, none of those for whom He died may any longer consider himself as independent and separate from Him. They should always consider themselves members in Him, subjects belonging to Him, and hence under obligation to serve Him. For this reason He has died for all. May God open our eyes and understanding on this matter! If it is true that the Son of God has become man for our sake and has given His life for us with strong crying and tears, so that we should live by Him, and through Him receive eternal grace in spite of all our sins, and finally inherit the bliss of eternal life, how then can we not gladly give up the whole of our life for Him, for His glory, for His service and pleasure, in everything we do or say! No man has the right to live here on earth, if he does not live to Him who has redeemed us from eternal death and condemnation. It is a sad enough fact that the faithful, even when they have wholeheartedly and utterly consecrated themselves to the Lord, still cannot live perfectly to His service and glory. But how much more dreadful it is, when we do not even devote our life to His glory, but live to ourselves quite freely and intentionally! Surely that is an unblest life! About it Luther uttered the strong words: “Damned to the lowest hell is the life a man leads to himself.” And it is obvious to the eyes of all how the children of this world do indeed live such a damned life, quite free from any care about the glory and pleasure of the Lord, and following only their own pleasure in all their living — thoughts, words, and deeds. They are “denying the Lord that bought them” (2 Pet. 2:1), no matter if they do profess Him with their mouths. And indeed it cannot be otherwise with the spiritually dead.

If a man really lives to the Lord it is a wonder of His grace alone through the new birth. Those resisting the grace calling them to repentance and conversion, must then remain under the domination of their fallen nature and live only to themselves and for their own account. And those living for their own pleasure will also die in the same condition and will be self-condemned in death and the judgment. Only those who live “in the Lord,” yes, *only* those will also “die in the Lord.”

# January 13

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*To declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God – Rom. 3:25.*

**A** word by word translation according to the original text reads: “As a proof of His righteousness, in the passing by of the before-happened sins, in the patience of God.”\* What here is meant by the righteousness of God is immediately explained by the apostle in the following verse. There he says: “To declare at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” This means that He is righteous at the same time as He justifies the ones who believe. It is this righteousness of God that was to be proved by the fact that He gave His Son to be a mercy seat sprinkled with blood. Thus the righteousness of God is here His righteousness as a Judge, in other words, His justice.

It was on two particular points that the righteousness of God was explained and proved by Christ’s death of propitiation. The first point (v. 25) was the forbearance of God during the Old Testament, as the words of the apostle read: “the passing by of the before-happened sins in the patience of God.” The second point (v. 26) was that He also altogether pardons and justifies the sinners that believe in Christ.

As to the first point, it seems that the apostle wants to say: In past times God has left the sinner without a full punishment according to the law. Because if God had shown fully His punishing righteousness immediately, and had dealt with human beings according to their merits, then He would have exterminated them from the earth. He would not only have destroyed all Gentile peoples, but He would also have put an end to Israel. And thus also His plan of grace regarding all of mankind — deposited in His household with Israel — would have come to nought. During all the time preceding the sending of the Son, God seems to have forgotten to punish human beings according to their sins; and the whole world rested under the shadow of His patience. But when Christ was come, the time of this forbearance was to come to an end. And the foundation of this mercy was to be revealed when the divine justice claimed the full punishment for sins in the bloody death of the only begotten Son on the cross.

As to the second point the apostle says: “To declare, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Here something else than only forbearance is spoken of. Here the subject is the full grace that justifies the one who believes in Jesus. How divine righteousness or downright justice can justify sinners was to be shown by the hard and bloody death of Christ.

Oh, what words we have here to bring joy to the heart! The apostle says that the Lord God has put His Son to be a mercy seat by His own blood, in order to show the

justice wherein He justifies the ones who believe. He has given a lawful atonement in order that at one and the same time He “might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth.” If He had not arranged for a complete, lawful compensation for all our sins, then He would not have been able to justify sinners and still remain perfectly righteous. Because justice demanded sinners to be punished, not justified. But now that a legal atonement has taken place, He can at one and the same time “be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus”! May heaven rejoice, and the earth be glad! The pardoning of the sinner now stands together with divine justice itself. And if it were not so, I would not be able to hold out in the faith, even by the grace of God. I would always think that God must become tired by my endless sins. But now the great Lord God has arranged it so that justice itself demands our pardoning, because it would not be just to claim the same debt twice. If our sins have been paid for by the blood of Christ, then they will not be claimed from us, as long as God is just and does not reject the ransom He himself has determined for our sins!

Thus in the atonement of Christ the justice of God in the pardoning and justification of sinners has been exposed in shining light. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (John 1:18). In Him the greatest qualities of God, His infinite mercy and His perfect righteousness, have shined forth. He gave righteousness all that she could claim. So that justice now can assure every believing sinner, of grace and eternal bliss equally as of mercy. We shall now see that God is not only so gracious, but also so faithful and just, that He forgives sins. Instead of being satisfied with a small part of its claim, taken from the last assets of the destitute, justice has now turned to the rich Surety and received full compensation. And if we would bear in mind the greatness of the Person giving this compensation, we must say that divine justice has been magnified in the highest degree.

## January 14

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*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind* – Luke 10:27.

**T**his is the first and great commandment. And what can be more reasonable than that we should love God like that? Is it not true and right that every pulse-beat, every thought, every power, the whole of our mind and thinking faculty, body, soul, and life should all belong to Him, and every moment be devoted to Him? No time of our life should pass without our looking at Him with a thirsting, loving soul, asking for His will and pleasure, paying attention to His every hint. Verily, nothing less is right for beings created in the image of God. And all these things are contained in the words: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.”

The command that you shall love God with all your *heart*, expressly means that you shall, truly and without hypocrisy, *really* love Him, so that He is the chief Object for you, that which overshadows all others and from which everything springs. We know that the human being has been so fashioned that he can never love two objects equally much. As Jesus declared in Matthew 6:24, one of them will always be the chief object of your heart’s affections, the one you think of most, the one you thirst for and cling to most devotedly, the one who gives you most delight, and this object of your heart the Lord your God wants to be to you. This is meant by the words: “Thou shalt love ... thy God with all thy heart.” The rest of that command is only a further development of the first part or of those things which always accompany that first part.

When it is added “with all thy *soul*” it simply means that when you love God with all your heart, you also give up all your life for Him. So that your own welfare, glory, pleasure, yes, your very life are considered unimportant in comparison with Him. In the language of Scripture the word “*soul*” usually means the bodily life and all that takes place in our outer senses. Thus if either love of earthly things or of something of your own, wants to attract you, or if fear of sufferings wants to drive you away from the Lord, you must immediately let everything go and say: “May anything get lost or befall me. When I have Thee, O Lord, then I do not at all ask for heaven or earth.”

Moreover, it says “with all thy *strength*,” which means that each moment all your faculties are occupied with God, worshipping and serving Him; so that your thoughts are always in conversation with Him, your imagination, power, emotions always have God as their Subject and Object; so that your eyes see and your ears listen only to what belongs to God! So that all the time your tongue wants to speak of Him and your hands to do something to serve Him.



Finally it says: “Thou shalt love God with all thy *mind*” or actually “consideration” (understanding). To love with all my mind or understanding indicates a care of love, in order, on every occasion, to find the best way of pleasing and serving the beloved. In other words, it means that one pays attention to the taste and pleasure of the beloved, so that what pleases him always is the most right, best, and most pleasant to the loving one. Try to understand then, what it means to love God with all our mind! It is not to know any other rule for what is good, right, or sweet, than the pleasure of God. It means that if God wants, allows, or sends something, no matter how bitter it may be to me in itself, it will at once be dear and precious to me, only because the dear God wants it so. And finally, it shall be your own delight, because to love God with all one’s mind is exactly the contrary to doing something only because of a command or compulsion. Therefore if it is trying, if it feels difficult to you, when you shall do or suffer something for the sake of God, so that you must fight with some dislike in yourself, then you do not love God with all your *mind*. You shall love God so that no matter *what* He allows or sends you, you will always find it dear or precious for the sake of His pleasure, even if in itself it is a most bitter thing. For instance, if you are deprived of the dearest object you have on earth, or if the whole of your earthly happiness is destroyed, or if your good name and reputation is ruined fundamentally, etc. In themselves all such circumstances are bitter, but for the sake of the pleasure of your God they should be dear and pleasant to you, only because He wants it so. Such things are contained by the words: “Thou shalt love ... thy God with all thy *mind*.” For how can one love God with all one’s mind when one still does not love what pleases Him, but feels aversion to a commandment He has given or a suffering He sends? If you love God with all your *heart*, with all your *soul*, with all your *mind*, why, then surely all that is His pleasure must be dear to you, no matter whether it is sweet or bitter! Only if He wants it so.

## January 15

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*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him – 2 Cor. 5:21.*

O h, what a mighty word! The word here is not sin offering, but *sin*, “made to be *sin*.” And this means that He was so covered with the sins of all the world, that He could be called sheer sin. As Bishop Hersleb says of this text: “He was made to be *sin itself*, so that God did not consider Him anything else than sheer sin. So to say, God made Him to be a block of sin, a lump of sin ... in order that all God’s punishment, all wrath, all the cruelty of hell, all the right the devil had over us, because of sin, would be concentrated on Him as on a center; because all sins had been gathered in Him and their abode, room, and place was in Him.” Or as Luther says: “When the merciful Father threw the sins of all of us upon Him, He said: ‘You will be what all human beings have been and are, from the beginning of time to its end. You will be the sinner who took the apple in paradise. You will be David who committed adultery and murder. You will be Paul, who persecuted, blasphemed, and was injurious, etc. In brief, You will be what all human beings are, as if You alone had done the sins of all of them. Therefore now think of how You will pay and make good for them.’”

When thus the Mediator bare the sins of the world, all the curse of the law also came over Him, that is, all the wrath of God, the disgrace and agony that the sins of all the world deserved. This fight started in the garden, and it was so hard, that it pressed the unheard-of sweat of blood from the strong Hero under prayer and tears as if from a weak, fainting sinner. God’s law of imputing is no joke, but in deadly earnest. When God had once thrown the sin on Him, He could not even complain to God that He was innocent, but He had to stand before the Father as a great sinner and taste all the curse of the law. This was completed in the death on the cross which comprised all the curse of the law. Here, finally Death also had its battle with Life. Death is a mighty lord over all the world, because he overcomes kings and princes and all men. With all his power he now laid himself on Christ and wanted to overcome and devour Him too. It even seemed that he succeeded therein, when, with strong crying and tears the Lord gave up the ghost. But as in Him there was life eternal, so also, when He let Himself be overcome and killed, this eternal life turned back, overcame, and killed death. By this innocent death of Christ for the sins of the world, the whole of the great victory was won, and thereby the head of the serpent was bruised. The law had taken all its claim on mankind. Sin had been completely punished and atoned for. Death had been overcome by Life, and thereby the devil lost his prey. The accuser had been cast out and judged, and by the blood of the covenant the prisoners were sent forth out of the pit (Zech. 9:11). For now an eternal pardon, life, freedom, and righteousness, had been earned

for all, and angels and blessed multitudes sang the song of victory: “Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” (Rev. 5:13). This was the glorious victory of which it is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:54–57).

Thus by the glorious victory of Christ all the world has now been redeemed in Christ — as truly and as completely as it was fallen and lost in Adam. And undeservedly, it gets eternal life by Christ even as it had inherited sin and death by Adam. The Adamic inheritance is something we feel within ourselves and the world at each moment. But the inheritance from Christ we do not see and feel. It is only preached by the gospel and believed by us, but the Lord God sees Christ and His excellence. Therefore, as truly as you see the world sunk down in sin, so equally truly does God see all human beings completely atoned for, justified, and sanctified in Christ, yes, and as lovely as when in the beginning He saw everything that He had made and, behold, it was very good. If the world had not been restored thus before the eyes of God, then Christ would not have performed His office of atonement completely. Now, there remains nothing else for our salvation and eternal bliss than the commandment of the gospel: Kiss the Son! Come back, ye lost children. “Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isa. 1:18). “And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

## January 16

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*For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified* – 1 Cor. 2:2.

**Y**ou ask: Have the holy Scriptures given any distinguishing feature regarding the kingdom of Christ, by which “the right grace of God,” i.e., the only correct spirituality, differs from all false spirituality? Yes, is it possible that God foreseeing all the future differing opinions regarding the correct understanding of Christianity, and its main theme and secret, would not have given such a sign? Praise God, it is there, it is clearly and plainly stated. Those who have already come unto the truth and have eyes to see, find this everywhere in the Scriptures. It is so clear that they see that there is only one thing on which everything depends. They see that it is the characteristic feature, the secret and main theme of all true Christianity, even that Christ, Christ Himself has become “all, and in all” to their hearts, so that each one can truly say with Paul: “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:7–8). “I am crucified with Christ: ... but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God” (Gal. 2:20). “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.”\* Further, they see definitely the truth that “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. This life is in His Son” (1 John 5:12, 11). Such things the faithful see everywhere in the Scriptures. What is said here is nothing new to them. But still it is a delight to the hearts of many to see, not only what is the secret and distinguishing feature of Christianity, but also that the Spirit of the Lord has spoken of it as a distinguishing mark, as a serious matter, self-proving and a correction for all those who want to see it.

In the fourteenth chapter of the Revelation we read about the new song sung for the Lamb on mount Zion by the sealed crowd. There we read expressly the words: “and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth.” Here everyone can see that the Spirit of the Lord desires to put that song as a distinguishing mark for the people of Zion! But what did this song consist of, and what was it that nobody could learn except the sealed? John says that they sing before the Lamb: “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood” (Rev. 5:9). They sang about the merit of the Lamb and our redemption by His blood! Yes, somebody may say, who would not sing about that, and who does not know that it is the greatest thing in heaven and on earth? But ponder what the holy Scriptures mean when they say that they sing this and only this, and that no one else can learn that song, but the sealed! It is not enough that we know it, or acknowledge and sing it only with our mouths. The

Scriptures do not teach hypocrisy, and the one who does not want to deliberately deceive himself must pay attention to the sense of the Scriptures.

Let us reflect upon what it means that in this song they sang only about the merits of the Lamb, and not about all sorts of benefits from God. Surely, above everybody else that blessed multitude on mount Sion knew and acknowledged all the splendid deeds of God, the ones of creation and providence, as well as the especially dear gifts and praiseworthy works of the Spirit in human hearts. What can it mean then that in this song they sing only to the glory of the Lamb and His work of atonement: “Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood”? What else can it mean than only the same thing that Paul mentioned when he said that he wanted to know nothing else than Jesus Christ and Him crucified? Namely that this alone is the consolation, joy, treasure, and glory of the heart; that the offering of the Lamb as the atonement is the only object of the faith of the heart, of its hunger and thirst, its hope and satisfaction. And is it not expressly this that the entire Scriptures state as the distinguishing mark of right faith and spirituality, namely that we should not have our consolation in anything within us, not even in the works of the Spirit, not even in our faith, and much less in any fruits of faith such as the love and fear of God, but only in the offering of the body of Christ. As He Himself says: “My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed” (John 6:55). Therefore it is the right distinguishing mark of true Christians that the Lamb which is slain is their only consolation, that nothing shares the throne with this in their hearts, but that all their doings and their experience of the work of the Spirit, a work in itself so good and glorious, can never satisfy them, but only the Lamb that is slain and has redeemed us to God by His blood.

## January 17

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*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?* – Rom. 6:3.

**T**he apostle is saying here: Please do look back at what has made you Christians. Why, the fact that you have been baptized into Christ. Do you not know what this baptism means? Namely, that you have not only been washed and cleansed by the forgiveness of sins, but also that thereby your sinful flesh has been sentenced to lose its life and has been handed over to death. Your flesh should be completely drowned, so that the whole of your remaining life on earth shall be a perpetual mortifying of sinful flesh. Such was the covenant with Christ: We have been baptized into His death.

But it must not be only words and thoughts, but truth and reality. Let everybody who wants to be a Christian reflect upon this! If somebody professes himself to be a follower of Christ, but does not have the new mind that always wants to do the will of His Lord; still tenders allegiance to and defends one or another bosom sin if he is on an intimate footing with something flagrantly contrary to the command and will of God, then that person deceives himself with a dead imagined faith. When we become converted, we expressly revert to the covenant with Christ into which we were baptized. We were baptized into His death — and His death is the death of sin. If now somebody is a servant of greed for instance, so that the main thing in life is to win and collect earthly things; or if he is a servant of voluptuousness, fornication, or drunkenness, or a servant of sinful wrath, hatred, envying, lies, and evil speaking, or if he practices dishonesty in his transactions or work, etc., if such a person turns to religion, to the Word of God and the people of God, and now confesses his faith in grace, but remains in his previous relation to his bosom sin — then, listen again, that person deceives himself with a false and imagined faith. And all his religion, his going to church and the Holy Communion are only an abominable hypocrisy. The covenant with Christ is a *holy* covenant. “We were baptized into His death.”

The kingdom of Christ is surely full of sin and groaning. We are not speaking of that. You feel all evil in your old heart, in the lusts and desires of the flesh. Or you can forget yourself and fall. But it does not belong to the kingdom of Christ to remain in one's old relation to sin. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17). All the children of God have a holy mind revolting against sin. That you still can stand in an unprotesting and intimate relation to your greed, or your ambitiousness, your envy, or your fornication, your wrath, your craving for quarrel, your hatred — to stand in an unprotesting and intimate relation to something like that, to tender allegiance to it, and excuse it — that is a definite witness against you. To make an unhappy fall or forget oneself is not to break the union with Christ.

But to give sin freedom, to tender allegiance to it and defend it, that is to break the union. We were baptized into His death.

If you are truly to put sin to death, then you must have a spirit willing for it, even if it is bitter to the flesh. It is true that the human nature of Christ became sore amazed before the bitterness of death, yet His spirit was willing to take the cup from the hand of the Father. He also said of His faithful: “The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.” If the ready spirit has left your heart, then all fighting against sin is a deed of the law, and thus hypocrisy, because it does not come from the heart. But if you want to keep the ready spirit, then you must live in faith, in the blessed consolation and assurance that God forgives you all your sins. Furthermore, it is also necessary to know that no matter how it may go for you in the fight, whether you will succeed better or worse in fighting against sin, the covenant of grace is still always valid with God. And you live in that covenant as long as you live in this exercise of faith and wrap yourself up in the righteousness of Christ. This very exercise to believe in grace and put sin to death shall be the surest witness for you, that you still live in true grace — no matter how bad it often may look. And as long as your heart believes in such grace, you will always be encouraged to follow your faithful Savior and put your sinful flesh to death. But to the flesh this way will be bitter. That conclusion you can draw from the words: “baptized into His death,” because the death of Christ was a bitter death. He yielded up the ghost with strong crying. It will often become so bitter to you to crucify your flesh, that you also will have to weep, when, in distress and agony you invoke the Lord. It is important, however, not to get weary, but to bear well in mind that when you are a Christian and stand in covenant with God, you have a happiness beyond measure. You are on your way towards an eternal glory, therefore you may gladly suffer a bit for it. The crown will be a good reward for all honest champions who are steadfast to the end. The promise is sure and firm: “For if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim. 2:11–12).

## January 18

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*And when he [the Comforter] is come, he will reprove the world...  
Of sin, because they believe not on me — John 16:8–9.*

**M**ark these words: “Of sin, because they believe not on Me.” Here I see something remarkable! What does it mean, when the Lord wants to expose the sin of all the world, the sin for which the Spirit will judge her, that He mentions only this: “They believe not on Me”? Is it not that Christ here reveals that unbelief is the only condemning sin, that all sin against the ten commandments has been taken away, atoned for, and cannot condemn anybody who does not condemn himself by unbelief? “Of sin, because they believe not on Me!” Do we not also see this from His behavior towards all sinners? When all sorts of publicans and sinners, the dregs of all the ungodly people in the country, came to Him, did their sins ever form any obstacle to their pardoning? Were not all immediately made good as soon as they fled to Him? Where was then the law with its commandments and judgments? Where was their long, black list of sins? All the days of their life they had sinned against the commandments of God, and still I see that, as Paul says, He did not reproach them for their sins. There was merely grace, consolation, sweetness, and friendliness, as if for all their lifetime they had not done even one sin, so that the lawyers became bitter thereby and said: “He is a friend of publicans and sinners.” And what does He say about it Himself? He does not deny it, but confirms it and says, that these sinners were His lost sheep, pieces and sons, that He was the gracious Father running with extended arms to meet the lost son. O dear Savior! Are Ye not aware of his many and bad sins! No, he has no sins, no sins at all! My blood is shed for the remission of sins. The sin has been blotted out, the iniquity has been removed — atoned for — and eternal righteousness has been brought in (Dan. 9:24). God reconciled the world unto Himself in Christ and did not impute their trespasses unto them (2 Cor. 5:18–19). There is only one sin condemning the world: “Because they believe not on Me!” Do we not also see that Christ condemned the most serious saints of the law? He did not deny that their law was good, that they were not unrighteous, not thieves, not men committing adultery, that they did alms, etc. — and nevertheless they were condemned. Do we not also see that Paul gives the same testimony as regards many of his brethren, that they had zeal for God, that they sought righteousness, but he says, still they did not arrive at righteousness, because they did not seek it by faith, but by the works of the law. Oh, what a strange judgment! Those who were better are condemned, and those who were worse are saved. The one who wasted his inheritance with harlots gets the fatted calf, and the one who always served his father and never transgressed his commandment does not get even a kid (Luke 15). Should I not then see that here is a great secret? Shall I never wake up to see



what reconciliation means? Shall I never understand what happened in the death of Christ? This is the first thing we learn from the words of Christ: "Of sin, because they believe not on Me," namely that by the death of Christ all sin is atoned for, that it no longer brings the curse of the law, but condemnation comes only because of unbelief. No human being will be condemned because of sin, but only because of unbelief. This is the wonderful consolation we have from these words.

The second thing we learn from them is that a most pious, serious, and God-fearing human being can be condemned, if with all his pioussness he does not believe in Christ; if after a long life in a most serious attempt at improvement, a most deep repentance, most devout prayers, a most high pioussness, a most severe self-abnegation, a most indefatigable charity, and more beside, he must go to hell with all that, if he has not learned to count it all as loss in comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord (Phil. 3), and if he is not found in Him, and has all his righteousness and consolation only in Him. All that is within the human being does not matter anything to God, since His beloved Son gave His blood for the remission of sins. The consequence of this is that very pious people will be condemned when they do not "kiss the Son" (Ps. 2:12). The Holy Spirit will reprove the world only of this: "Of sin, because they believe not on Me!" He attacks hereby the very fine and holy people on the earth, and throws the very pious, serious, and holy people under condemnation, only because they do not give glory to the Lamb, but want to be their own saviors.

## January 19

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*He that believeth not the Son shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth on him – John 3:36.*

**I**t is part of human nature that we look at our own deeds, our piousness, or our sins, and judge the grace of God towards us according to that. But the Spirit comes and says: No, here is a Man called Jesus, the “woman’s seed,” whom the eternal Father made under the law in your place, to fulfill all God’s demands, to “taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). His precious blood has deprived both your sins and your virtues of their power and importance as regards the judgment of God. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12), except the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. This is the real reason why unbelief is the only condemning sin. Already its great size is terrible, and still it is not really the size, but the kind and what it consists of that condemns people.

We should bear well in mind what unbelief is. First of all, it is a contempt for the very great mercy of God, a mocking His very great tenderness, a trampling that very great gift of divine mercy, even the only begotten Son, under foot. Secondly, it is a throwing away of the only means of salvation given to us, a throwing away of the only sacrifice for our sins. In His fervent grace, God has had mercy on us in our misery and has given His only begotten Son for our salvation. He came and became our Brother and gave all He had: His righteousness, His life, and His blood, for our salvation. You know all this and still you are always so hard, cold, and indifferent to Him! You celebrate His birth at Christmas; you sing, read, and hear about the Child in the manger. You celebrate the feast of His suffering and death, and you read and hear about Him, sweating blood in the garden, being smitten and wearing a crown of thorns and getting His hands and feet pierced. You see Him hanging between thieves and hear His heart-rending cries of agony, etc. You know, confess, and sing that all this has happened for you and because of your sins. You go to the Lord’s supper and celebrate the remembrance of His death. And with all this you remain as dead and cold as ever in your heart. You do not love and embrace Him. You do not rejoice and praise Him, but go about with your soul and thoughts full of vanity, sin, and disobedience to this gracious Savior. Is it a wonder then that you must be condemned? Is it a wonder then that the wrath of God burns as from the deepest hell at such terrible ungratefulness for the ardent love and bitter torments of His beloved Son? — such cold contempt and trampling of the very great love of God! In a discourse regarding the sufferings of Christ, Luther says: “A human heart that is not softened or moved by this must be harder than stone, or iron and arms. Nevertheless the dear fine world goes her way forwards and does not take this to her heart, but is slothful, cold, ungrateful, and despises this great treasure. Because

of this, our Lord leaves her so that all the time she goes further and further from Him. And God our Lord does right when He says to the great, ungrateful world: If you do not want to have My great love, when I have sought you like a Father and with all My heart have given My beloved Son for you in such great torments; then I do not want you either. If you do not care about what I have done, then I do not care about you either. If you do not want to have My Son Jesus Christ, then take Barabbas instead, yes, the Devil himself!” When you are so cold, hard, and ungrateful and have no delight at all in Christ, but show Him only contempt for all His grace and love, do not be astonished that God lets you go your own way to destruction. The apostle says: “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy... Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant ... an unholy thing” (Heb. 10:28–29).

This is what unbelief already is in itself! It is the mother of all sins. The one who does not believe in Christ is turned away from God and separated from Him. He has no true love of God, nor confidence and delight in Him and His will, even though as a servant, because of fear he imagines punishment, and adjusts himself according to God’s Word, in the way hypocrites do and the “saints of works.” “And thus,” as Luther says, “the dragon’s tail and all hell follow with unbelief.” But still this is not the full reason why unbelief brings condemnation. The reason is, that it throws away the grace of God, and for the one who does not believe in Christ “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26), but he is naked in his sins to the judgment of God, as Paul says: “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt” (Rom. 4:4).

## January 20

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*And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue* – 2 Pet. 1:5.

When we reflect rightly upon all the precious promises God has given us, we may almost perish with grief at our terrible coldness and disobedience; in this we do not all the time think of how we may prove our faith with all diligence by a godly life. We have been given all that is necessary for life and godliness so that there is no need for us to be servants of sin because of our weakness. And we have most great and precious promises from God Himself, who cannot possibly lie, promises reaching out and even now bringing the assurance, that we are made participants in the nature of God, and in eternity will live with Him! For the short time remaining for us in the flesh should we not carefully seek to live only to Him who has given us all this, seek only to please Him and contribute to His praise? Let us therefore strive to add virtue to our faith. Oh, bear this in mind, you that are a pardoned child of God! Ask God for forgiveness for all your negligence, and for grace to start something better from now on.

When the apostle says to “add to your faith virtue,” the word “virtue” here means a holy zeal, power, and prompting to good. The apostle desired that our faith should not be a dead, inactive knowledge or only a slothful resting, but seeing we believe such glorious things as those comprised by the promises of God, we should also — in all our communications — behave in a way becoming to such an endowed and happy people as we are here on the earth. In this connection we often see something both deplorable and strange. There are souls that seem really to have come to a new spiritual life, but at the same time it seems as if they do not know that the grace they have received should be used in life for the mortifying of the “old man.” They so easily and completely overlook some bad habit or other, as if they did not know that every sin in the flesh must be crucified and mortified. If, however, these really have some spiritual life, such a symptom always proves a spiritual sleepiness and sloth, and it is specifically from that sloth that the apostle wants to wake us up, when he demands that in our faith there should be “virtue” — zeal, power, activity. He himself writes as to the purpose of his letter: “This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance” (2 Pet. 3:1). Oh, may everybody now reading this, take it to heart immediately and see whether there may not be some such condition in himself, some Christian duty that he still neglects, some sin that he has not yet utterly crucified. Because on these two points the power of godliness must be proved, namely, we should do all good possible in our vocation, and flee from and crucify sin in the flesh. Thus, you that believe and are pardoned, but still have a stubborn and sullen mind, please pay attention to it, mortify it, do not let it loose,

but follow the example of your Savior: “Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously” (1 Pet. 2:23). You that believe and are pardoned, but have some difficult desire of the flesh, be on your guard! Listen to the words of the apostle: “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). You that believe and are pardoned, but have your heart so full of earthly things, your farm, your merchandise, etc., that both first and last you want to think and speak of them, please note that this is a suspicious sign that you are not rightly sober and watching, and if you do not wake up, these thorns will choke the good seed within you, so that you will become a false Christian, earthly in your heart, and spiritual only in the mouth and by certain rules of piety. You that believe and own all the glorious things God has given us in Christ, can you see your neighbors going towards eternal condemnation, already lost in spiritual death and at ease, and yet do not do the least thing to awaken them? You can speak with them about everything else, and keep silence about their coming calamity. Oh, please wake up, ask God for such a sincere love, that it works inside you all the time, till you seek an opportunity and a way of serving your neighbors regarding their salvation. You that believe and are pardoned, but see your poor brother distressed, and having the means to help him, yet close your heart, how does the love of God remain in you? Mortify here your flesh that wants to keep everything for yourself and your family. From such examples you can realize what it means when we say that there is virtue, holy power, and zeal in faith. Now the apostle says: “giving all diligence.” Ask God for His Holy Spirit to believe and love in such a way that it appears in all your life! May God forgive us all our shortcomings — and so fill us with the joy and power of the great and precious promises He has given us, that a real improvement follows.

## January 21

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*While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word – Acts 10:44.*

**T**he Holy Ghost does not come unasked and take care of our souls. The means of grace — the Word — the Word and the sacraments are also needed for it! If you want to have the Spirit, His works and gifts in your heart, then go to the Word, the Word of the Spirit. Read it, listen to it, write it, speak and sing about it, and pray for the work of the Spirit. He will not remain away! There are souls here and there going about thinking, yes, sighing and praying for the Spirit and the work of the Spirit, but never getting it in truth and power, never coming to any faith, peace, love, assurance, and steadfastness. But all the time they remain in the same infirm working, sighing, and striving. And finally it is discovered that they do not use the Word, but only work within themselves. They only think and sigh, but do not use the Word. How then is it possible, for them to receive divine and spiritual life? In Galatians 3:4 the apostle plainly says, that the Spirit is only obtained by the hearing of faith. And in the Acts we read that while Peter spake, the Holy Spirit fell on them which heard the Word. What had they then done for that to happen? Absolutely nothing but listen. They sat quietly and only heard the Word. And then the Spirit came into their hearts, and there came repentance, faith, love, life, and power, making them completely new men.

The Word, the Word, use the Word! That is the whole art and secret regarding the origin, nourishing, growth, and maintenance of the spiritual life. It is not true, as some foolish people say, that, because such and such a Christian now *stands* so firmly and steadily in grace, he can therefore believe and live as he does. No, if he has a faith and a life which are the work of the Spirit, and not merely of nature, then it is not due to *his* steadfastness and strength, that he can believe and live so, but it is only the result of the fact that he nourishes his soul more diligently with the divine Word. If he neglects it, then the old nature will start to grow again and the truly spiritual life will die away. Yes, pay a visit to him one day, when he has neglected the Word for rather a long time, and you will find very little that is spiritual in him. If his faith and peace are still maintained without the Word, then they are not the work of the Spirit. In brief, it is only through the Word of God that the Spirit of God dwells and works in the human being. And note further, not all that read the Word of God get Spirit and life from it. Thousands use the Word, and still they do not get the Spirit. The thousands of scribes and Pharisees among us prove that. What is then required? It is required that, in addition to the use of the Word, we bear clearly this in mind, that it is still in the hand of God, whether we shall receive its power. It is required that we use the Word with a mind governed by this thought, that we may with humility, fear, obedience, and faith appropriate before

the face of the holy God, when and what He speaks. Remember this therefore, that it is in the hands of God and dependent on His free pleasure whether He gives you anything. He alone can give you the communion of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). “Not that we are even sufficient of ourselves to *think* anything as of ourselves” (2 Cor. 3:5), much less then to believe, to be vigilant, to walk worthily, to keep a right understanding of the truth, and its power on our hearts and consciences. No, all this is impossible, if the Holy Spirit does not work it out in us. Everything is in vain without the communion of the Holy Ghost.

It is most necessary for every Christian to think about and note such things, even if we are living in peace and quietness. So that with all our knowledge and the use of the Word we will not be found dead inwardly. How much more necessary this is, when, on the contrary, we live in the midst of a most dangerous Enemy country, yes, in a perpetual war. To this must be added the fact that this time especially is a very hazardous time, when both evil and good powers are moving strongly, when awakenings and aberrations, conversions and apostasies compete with one another. Therefore it is very necessary that we have open eyes, stick closely to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, keep strictly and diligently to the Word — and most especially keep the great, blessed main doctrine of Christ and His work clear, pure, firm, and sincere. It is necessary always to be quite poor in spirit and babe-like in faith, and never to let the new song become old, long, and worn out to us. It is necessary to be sincere to ourselves and to the Lord, to direct all our thoughts, words, and deeds according to His holy will, and to know that the Lord is near. It is necessary that we try to understand more and more our enemies and dangers, and the underground passages through which the cunning Enemy tries to destroy our spiritual and eternal life. Finally, it is necessary that we often pray, both alone and together, with and for one another; and first and last we should pray for the communion of the Holy Ghost. Yes, to such things Christ and the apostles exhort. And there is certainly a need for it.

## January 22

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*For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? – Luke 9:25.*

**I**t is surely an innocent thing to have a piece of ground, or a stock farm, or a wife. But when Christ wanted to name the obstacles keeping souls away from the kingdom of God, He mentioned these (Luke 14:18–24). To love one's father or mother is not only innocent, but has even been commanded. But "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37) and "cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27): cannot "enter into the kingdom of God." Now when man lives slothfully and at ease, how can he fear desires having as objects things so innocent? No, he only looks at the kind of object and thinks: "It is nothing evil that I seek! Have not also the holy had a piece of ground, a stock farm or a wife? Should not also I be allowed to seek such things?" etc. But he never stops to find out whether the seeking is idolatrous, self-willed, or selfish, whether the matter occupies his soul and heart so that God, His grace, and His pleasure become nothing against it and become too unimportant to satisfy and content his soul. No, the miserable man does not pay attention to that; he is not honest enough towards himself to look into it. Later it goes so far, that even if he feels that he is obviously caught and tightly fettered by a god, he can no longer offer resistance to it. He does not even want to be free from his love of it, and then? — then the situation is bad with regard to his life in grace.

But the devil does not use only the things in the world, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and suchlike to catch faithful souls, but uses also the people "of this world" (John 8:23), "the children of this world." These are the willing and faithful servants of the devil sometimes to frighten, prevent, or exhaust the faithful by means of enmity, threats, and persecution; sometimes to entice and attract them by promises, flattery, and friendly treatment. How many deplorable examples there are of this! There is, for instance, a craftsman: by the grace of God he has been called, awakened and pardoned, has left unrighteousness, vanity, and equality with the world, and now looks for the things above. But after some time he notices that his former acquaintances no more demand his services. His commerce and income decrease. Soon he can no longer hold on and wait upon the Lord, but begins to think that it is now quite necessary for him to win back the friendship of this world. He begins to conceal his Christianity, to make himself like the world, to draw himself away from Christians despised by the world, and to stick to the people the world puts up with and praises, yes, decent people of this world — in brief, he begins to act so that the children of this world will not suspect him of being anybody else than they, or of having any bad thoughts regarding the state of their souls. In small things he begins to give way, to please them, to participate in their



circles and beautiful worldly pleasures. And now the world is very friendly and happy in the hope of winning him back. Soon she will lead him where she wants. After a year or so he will both drink and play with the world and do anything his flesh likes. Such a deplorable fall into the net of this world does not happen only to craftsmen, but to people in all classes and circumstances. Here a merchant, there a student, here a maid, there a clergyman. They have come to Jesus, but cannot bear to see themselves being despised by the world, slighted, persecuted, or to see their good name and reputation, their income, bread, and promotion, suffering. They begin to try to win back the friendship of this world and to make themselves like her. But they do not wish anyone to think that any of them have a weakness for the world. No, that miserable fact must be disguised by talking about the *freedom* of a Christian, in fact, the duty of a Christian, not to distinguish himself from the world in order the better to serve her. But never does the moment come when this use, this service is made to the world along with a serious warning, because a man should always act so carefully and nicely that he does not hurt people and make them angry! The consequence of this is that the free, bold world rules more over the pious, the submissive child than the child does over her. And when the poor soul does not pay attention to this in time, when he does not break up and “go out and weep bitterly,” but continues to be “yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14), he by and by becomes a servant of that yoke of the world and popularity. The spiritual power of grace vanishes, the friendship with God comes to an end, because “the friendship of the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4). The union with the faithful is broken, as one thing always results from another. “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10). And as such a soul avoids the persons and books which preach the judgment of such a state, he goes more and more towards the hardening of his heart, which is the outcome of all apostasy.

# January 23

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*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain – Exod. 20:7.*

When dealing with the matter of how the name of God is being taken in vain among us, we come to a matter full of perturbing things, yes, so perturbing that we could begin to weep with both astonishment and fear. However, we want only to consider the most general way, the thoughtless way, of taking the name of God in vain, i.e., when a man thoughtlessly takes the name of God on his tongue. He does not mean anything evil by it. He hardly knows why he uses the great, holy names of God and Jesus Christ, either as a completely useless conversational stopgap, or to give expression to different passing feelings or emotions. There is hardly any of all the sins of the world that reveals such striking facts as this sin if we bear in mind how this sin is not considered a sin, and further, what this sin reveals of the mind of that man who practices it, and of the depths of Satan and his power and government over the children of this world.

In the whole of the law of God there is no commandment that the children of this world consider so unimportant as the second one. No sin is so feathery and unimportant to them as the taking of the name of God in vain. So that if somebody speaks of that sin as a grave sin, he is almost considered to be something of an idiot. But certainly the Lord our God is of another opinion, as He has not only placed this commandment next to the first one, but has also attached a dreadful threat to the second commandment: “for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.”

Think seriously what it means that a human being can be in the habit of taking the name of God on his tongue in this thoughtless way, without any meaning. What does this reveal regarding the mind of that person? It is a dreadful thing, and everybody realizes that it reveals nothing less than an ungodly mind — not only the thoughts of a sinful being, but something much more dreadful, a downright contempt for God, a dominating ungodliness that belongs to hell. The most dreadful lapses into sin cannot prove so much an ungodly mind, as the habit of taking the name of God thoughtlessly on the tongue. Yes, when a most dreadful fall into sin is considered alone or by itself it is never enough proof that the *mind* is ungodly, yet the habit mentioned above is in itself a definite proof of ungodliness.

We do not say that the opposite habit, namely, never to take the name of God in vain, proves that the mind is God-fearing, because such a pious habit can also be due only to education, or to some other legal or human motive. But on the contrary, freely practiced sin and contempt for a commandment of God are always a definite proof of ungodliness.

Furthermore, the second commandment reveals what the piousness of the natural human heart is like. God does not matter! His Word and Name are like

a light wind, and therefore the second commandment is quite unimportant! The fourth commandment of course, is important, because we like being honored by children and servants! The fifth commandment is important because it is terrible to kill or get killed! For similar reasons the sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments are important. But God, the name of God, the pleasure or prohibition of God, what does that matter? That is the piousness of the world. The old serpent, while duping the entire world, knows nevertheless how important it is to his kingdom, that the whole world takes the name of God thoughtlessly on the tongue, because he could not invent a stronger means to blunt the weapons of the Lord and the minds of men. If only men get thoroughly accustomed to taking the name of God in vain, and to hearing it taken in vain daily, then the same holy Name and Word will not easily move their minds. No doubt this deep plan is the reason why the whole mass of those who do not otherwise profess God and His Word, so diligently take the name of God in vain. Otherwise one can hardly understand the reason for it, because we know that in his flesh man has his natural temptations to other sins such as wrath, voluptuousness, theft, and unrighteousness. But what are the natural reasons for taking the name of God in vain? Are fleshy lusts satisfied by it? What then can be the reason that the world is so diligent to defy the commandment and threat of God in this respect?

Think of the reason given above. Yes, this is what the one that is called “the prince of this world” has discovered. He has his deep plan and scheme involved with it. May all Christians seeing this “depth of Satan” be especially zealous for the commandment, and warn, admonish, and punish where they can, as regards this so hardening practice of sin! And may all parents and school teachers watch over their children on this point and endeavor to make them as equally afraid of taking the name of God in vain, as of the devil and hell.

## January 24

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*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ – Rom. 5:1.*

**H**ere is the secret! Here is the deep, eternal foundation for the curious peace of the Christians! And here is revealed what is missing in hearts not having peace. The apostle does not say: Because we are such as we should be, so pious and good. No, he says: “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Listen, you seeking soul with good intentions. It is surely a rather beautiful thing, yes, more important and necessary than everything else in the world, that you practice your godliness seriously, that you pray diligently and devoutly, that you listen to and read the Word of God with diligence, that you fight seriously against evil and follow that which is good. But you still have no peace with God. You are not assured of His grace. No, you are restless and afraid, and there is surely ground for it. Actually you can be condemned in spite of all this piousness. Something much higher is needed so that you can stand before the holy God and escape the fire of judgment. Your conscience tells you that, too. Something more than the piousness of all the pious, than the holiness of all the holy is needed. Nothing less than the death of Christ the Son of God is required here, and that you have put on Christ by faith, that you have been justified by faith and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is necessary that your heart has such assurance that you can say with heartfelt meaning: “Christ has died for me, for me. On that I rely — not that I am pious, believing, and serious. But I trust in Christ who is pious, holy, and perfect. I put my confidence in the fact that Christ has both kept the law, and has suffered death, which is the wages of sin. This happened for me. It is also enough for all my sins. It is enough, enough eternally. In that I trust.”

Thus the reason why you have never had peace is that you have wanted to become righteous and saved in your own name, by your own strength. But if this had been possible, then Christ would have died in vain. It is plain that you have not yet experienced the right faith. There is a great difference between faith and faith. Maybe you have known the doctrine of Christ and reconciliation rather well, and have approved of it. And you think, that you surely had faith, as you did not doubt the doctrine. But your mind was such that you thought: “Surely all is right with the merits of Christ. There is nothing lacking in that. But the fault is with me. In me things must be put right.” And with both your eyes you have been turned away from Christ and inwards against yourself. How was it possible then that you could get peace? How could you then have the right faith? Now it is in fact true, that all is good concerning the atonement made by Christ, and that the fault is with you. But you did not understand that the fault with you was so great, that it could

not be put right by all the work you did on yourself. You did not understand that it can never be put right in any other way, except by your despair about yourself and all your self-improvement, and by seeking your salvation only in Christ. The reason why you have not got peace is that you have thought that you would have to put yourself right, before you could have peace. The reason is that you have not believed or understood how lost you are, and how all has been made perfect and put right in Christ. It is true that you have felt that you are a great sinner, but not that you are a completely lost sinner. With regard to Christ, you have believed that He has saved great sinners, but not such as you are. These are the most common reasons why seeking souls do not have peace. Others again are more at ease, yet still hold to something more important to them than the grace of God. They have gods and bosom sins, which they do not want to part with, and then it is a good thing that they do not have peace.

In order to have the peace of God it is required: first, that nothing is as important to you as the grace of God, and that you do not become satisfied until you have got assurance of that. Secondly, you need to learn to despair about yourself, that is, to despair of all undertakings, all doings and becomings, and that, just as you are, still an unworthy, lost sinner, you seek all your salvation in Christ alone. Thirdly, it is essential that you do not wait for the assurance in your feelings, or for an inner reply in your heart, but that you take the reply of God where He gives it — in the Word, only in the Word. If only a soul comes so far as to seek this above all, and sighs to himself, “Oh, if I could only have the grace of God, then I would not wish anything higher for myself on earth! Nor would I mind about anything I might suffer. Oh, if I could only believe in Christ alone and be found in Him! If I were only sure that His merits belong to me! And I want to believe in the Word. I do not want to wait for feelings. If I could only believe,” etc., then faith has surely already been kindled, and that soul will surely not remain without the assurance of grace. He will have peace. God will see to that.

# January 25

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*Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness – Rom. 6:18.*

**H**ere we are given the ground for making sure whose servants we are, either the servants of sin or the servants of righteousness. Each one of us must be either only the servant of sin, or only the servant of righteousness. The apostle does not know any third type of person, who would be the servant of both sin and righteousness. Christ also says expressly: “No servant can serve two masters” (Luke 16:13). It is important then for us to know whose servants we are. When we look at everything getting mixed up in our lives, then we always become confused and cannot understand anything but that we are the servants of two masters. Many indeed want to have it that way in order to be allowed to remain in their obscurity and dichotomy. On the other hand it is a source of the greatest alarm to honest souls when it appears to them that they are serving two masters. There are people who think otherwise, and who are partly pious so that they read and hear the Word of God, but have their hearts and minds fettered in the world, and in the service of the gods. Sometimes they want to serve God and realize that it must be good and well-pleasing to God to do so. Such want to “serve two masters.” On the other hand, the faithful will sigh with the anxious thought: “In truth I do not serve only God, but also sin. How can I know whose servant I am?” The whole reason why both the one and the other are in darkness on this matter is that they judge according to their own opinions and do not pay attention to the Word of God.

First of all, we should note that both Christ and the apostle declare plainly that we cannot be the servants of two masters at the same time. As was said a minute ago, it is true that it seems as if we are serving two masters, as both evil and good blend within us. In the servants of sin there is something of a good spirit, and the voice of conscience and of the calling of grace mixed in. On the other hand, the faithful feel much of the pressure of the evil spirit, and the influence of the flesh and of the world within them. Are we then the servants of two masters? No, the apostle says. The matter does not depend on what evil or good moves within you or occasionally makes you do an evil or a good deed. It depends on: “to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are” (Rom. 6:16). The very heart or mind always belongs only to one of two conflicting powers, as the Lord also says when He explains why nobody can serve two masters, “for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (Luke 16:13). That is what the Lord says! Mark this, it depends on “loving” or “hating,” “holding to” or “despising.” But as we often think that love and hatred

are alternating emotions, when the faithful sometimes feel that they love sin and despise God, then how shall we get all this clear?

We can easily understand that he is the servant of sin who freely and unblushingly lives his life in manifest works of the flesh, as greed, fornication, drunkenness, dishonesty, hatred, etc., and does not let himself be punished and admonished to repentance. As regards such people the word of Christ is clear: "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34). But when false Christians, going about with the Word of God and His people, make a concord between Christ and Belial, and want to serve both God and the world, or when weak Christians are fighting against heavy temptations and offensive infirmities, then the distinction becomes heavy.

Note carefully how the apostle speaks: "to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are." Everything depends on to whom you "yield yourselves," whom you "obey from the heart," to whom you tender allegiance with your whole mind, and not on the one you serve only occasionally or under compulsion. The fact that there are those whose spirit sincerely loves righteousness, but who still often feel the lusts of the flesh mightily, or are caught by them and fall, should not confuse us. As they are obedient from the heart, really love righteousness and devote their service to her, they verily are not the servants of sin. We must never forget the main rule: "to whom ye yield yourselves," "whom you obey from the heart," "his servants ye are." The entire life of the faithful is directed after Christ, no matter how sin prevents, defaces, and torments him.

Should the mind again become false, so that he again yields himself to serve sin, and no longer lives at the mercy-seat to obtain both forgiveness and power against evil; should he yield himself or give himself to serve sin, making a new compact with her to follow her lusts, then the unhappy thing has happened to which Peter refers: "for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Pet. 2:19). No one will admit that he has been overcome, who has suffered certain defeats in the fight, yet still continues to fight! That man only has been overcome who has surrendered and laid down his arms, as Peter again says of the man who has "turned from the holy commandment delivered unto" him (2 Pet. 2:21). But as long as a man still fights, not as a servant of the law, but with the eye of faith on Christ, he is not overcome; he has not yielded to serve sin. Everything depends on "*to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey.*"

## January 26

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*Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification.  
For even Christ pleased not himself – Rom. 15:2–3.*

Christ did not please Himself. Here is the great model for everything holy and good, and the dearest and mightiest motive for the hearts of the faithful — Christ and His example. If you are a Christian, if you possess the great grace of being united with Christ and having your life, your consolation, all your righteousness, all your hope in Him, and if He is your best Friend, then it must be both precious and important for you to walk “even as He walked” (1 John 2:6), to be and do as He was and did. And how did He do? The apostle says that He pleased not Himself. He did not look at His own benefit or His own pleasure, but He looked at our benefit, at the welfare of lost sinners, when He gave Himself for us. He did not seek His own glory. He was not satisfied with only Himself being wise, righteous, praised, and glorious, but preferred to cover Himself with shame, simply to make us also participants in His wisdom, righteousness, and glory.

The apostle puts this high and holy example before our eyes so that it will seize and induce us also to do as He, our dear Lord and Master did, not to please ourselves, but only to please our neighbor for his edification, and therefore to “bear the infirmities of the weak” (Rom. 15:1). When I am tempted to look at the faults, lack of wisdom, narrowness of outlook, and other infirmities of my neighbor and to think in self-esteem of my higher light; when I am tempted to be satisfied with myself and despise my brother, then this picture of Christ should immediately overcome me and make me afraid of such an attitude. The beautiful, holy picture of the humanity and love of Christ should make me wake up and hate myself so that I think: “Oh, what a Christian I am, capable of looking at my brother’s infirmities with self-esteem and contempt for him, when Christ our Lord, the eternal Perfection, Wisdom, and Goodness, did not please Himself nor despise us, foolish and abominable sinners though we are, but only did all He could to help us out of our misery!” Yes, may every Christian think of such things! You take offense at a brother’s imprudence or wrong life, and you are ready to despise or judge him and consider yourself better. But see how Christ dealt and still deals with us, what follies and faults He must see in us daily, and yet how He still takes care of us in His mercy. Think how Christ dealt with His weak disciples. Their lives were full of faults, lack of judgment, and other bad habits, and still we see that He never despised them or condemned them so long as they stuck to Him, but always bore with their infirmities. Their faults, indiscretions, and weaknesses were many. Once we see how they wanted to command fire to come down from heaven (Luke 9:54) and consume the despisers. Once how Peter wanted to discourage his Lord from taking on suffering, once how they disputed among themselves, who should be the



greatest (Mark 9:33–34) and how they all forsook Him (Mark 14:50) and how Peter denied Him so dreadfully. Once we see how they had quite forgotten the promise of His resurrection, yes, so fully that Thomas would not believe He was risen, except when he put his finger into the print of the nails (John 20:25). And what does the Lord do with such unwise and weak disciples? He does not condemn them, neither does He despise them so much that He quietly leaves them. No, He still takes care of them the way they need, speaks to them with extra love, punishes their bad habits graciously, corrects their lack of wisdom, and reminds them of the Word, saying, “O fools and slow of the heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things?” (Luke 24:25–26). He speaks in as friendly a manner to them as He would use when speaking to His dearest children and friends, who had not done anything against Him. He tries only to restore their faith and peace in order that they will become somewhat stronger.

May God give us all grace to strive somewhat more seriously after the love that the example of Christ wants to teach us! We should not believe our own spirit, but let Christ our Lord be our Master. We should follow Him in all things, including His mind in this respect. It is no great art to be able to see, judge, and remark upon the faults and unwisdom of other people. The unfaithful and the Pharisees can easily learn this art. But to show mercy, to “bear” the infirmities of the weak in humility and love, and to speak only to their edification, that is such a fine and high art that even faithful Christians who daily need and enjoy mercy, learn rather late that they also should show such mercy to weak brethren. Above all because we ourselves need mercy, and more so if we learn to realize somewhat more deeply our own sins and unworthiness, we shall see how, in spite of all this sin, grace much more abounds. Then we shall be quite melted by the great grace of God, and shall at last appreciate something of the merciful mind of Christ, and begin to learn this high wisdom regarding the treatment of weak brethren. However, when you see the mildness of Christ our Lord and how you yourself live of sheer mercy, do not forget that it is again His serious will, that you also shall show such mercy to others. It should be shown in the way the apostle here teaches us, so that we do not please ourselves, but please our neighbor for his good to edification. For “even Christ pleased not Himself.” He did not please or serve Himself. He pleased and served us and still lets His grace daily be great towards all our infirmities. May He Himself give us grace to be His followers also in this respect.

## January 27

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*Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you – Eph. 4:32.*

**W**e understand the full sense of those words of Luther: “The kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of forgiveness,” when we apply them to forgiveness between human beings as a condition for all Christians living together on earth. We know that the sum of the law is love. Paul says: “He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, . . . and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:8–10). Thus all Christian life is comprised in love. What is the condition for a continuous friendship between human beings? The same as the condition for a continuous friendship between God and man, namely continuous forgiving. We would gladly love our neighbors, and it would be so easy to do them good, and there would be a kingdom of heaven on earth, a kingdom of sheer peace and love between fellow-creatures, servants, and neighbors, if they only would not have their annoying faults and bad habits! But because of these faults we get tired in our love and cannot love them any longer. All at once it becomes a heavy task to do them good, whereas on the contrary it is always easy to do good to those we love. This mighty obstacle to love, the shortcomings and bad habits of our neighbor, would disappear for us immediately if we would only use the excellent remedy, forgiveness. This hindrance can never be removed in any other way. This is one of the reasons why Christ spoke so specifically and often of forgiveness and plainly said that heaven was like a king who forgave his servant ten thousand talents, but who expected him also to forgive his fellow-servant one hundred pence. And again when He taught us the prayer we should pray daily, He put in the same teaching and asked us to say: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12). From this everyone can see that Christ had quite a special zeal for forgiving. Yes, because in this fallen state forgiveness is the only ground for all good relations, first between God and man and then between men and men. This is the sum of the Word of God, and when John wanted to comprise all in a short text, he said: “And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment” (1 John 3:23). Thus one has peace both with God and the brethren, and this is heaven on earth, a paradise in this vale of tears.

On the contrary, what a hell on earth, what agonizing, gnawing pains, what dark hearts and faces, hatred, envy, and uneasiness exist where one does not practice the texts, where one does not believe and love, but digs about in one's own sins

and in the faults of others, and lives in unbelief and irreconcilableness! Such men are wretched victims of the devil! Even so, all could be put right by forgiveness. No matter what difficult fellowmen you have, no matter what grave injuries they have inflicted upon you, how they have lied about you, how they have insulted you, reckon whether your own sins against God are not one thousand times graver and more numerous. Christ says that all that a fellowman can have sinned against you is, in comparison with your debts before God, only as a hundred pennies against ten thousand talents. Now, however, God wants to forgive you all your debts; will you then not forgive your neighbor all his faults? If you do not want to do so, if you do not want to forgive and forget the hundred pennies, then claim them, count the faults of your neighbor, hate him, but — also take back your own debt of ten thousand talents before the Lord, and you will have to pay it back to the uttermost farthing. So the Lord judges. If you want to ask that your sins will be forgiven, you are allowed to pray thus and thus only! God, forgive me my trespasses, as I forgive my neighbor!

Do you then say: “I have so often forgiven my brother, but he never stops offending me. Must I never get tired of forgiving him?” Then the Lord replies: “I also have often forgiven you, but you still sin; must I also get tired of forgiving you?” One should notice the reply Peter got to the question: “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:21–22) — i.e., infinitely. First, for the consolation of your own heart, note here that Christ, to be sure, wants to forgive you, too, namely not seven times, but seventy times seven, or without count, because He certainly wants to do Himself what He teaches us to do. He certainly does not want to be inferior to us as regards forgiving! Does this not warm you up, so that you also want to forgive your brother without count? Because, here there will be no other way out, no other help than a continuous and infinite forgiving, and thus the whole kingdom of Christ remains a kingdom of forgiveness.

## January 28

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*And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made – Gen. 2:3.*

When we attempt to consider the intention of the Lord God with this, His first institution for human beings, we shall look into the unmeasured depths of the love and faithfulness of God to the children of men. We shall look at His high and eternal counsels concerning His image and heir, the human being. The human being was created to an eternal life in heaven. But here on earth he is to be brought up for that life. Therefore, the gracious Lord has wanted to separate a certain amount of his time — every seventh day — for his bringing up for eternity. “God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it,” so that His people would always, unto the end of the world, be called and awakened to worship Him and to prepare for eternal life. The life in God and with God is the only true life of the human spirit. It is the eternal life which will continue and be made perfect in heaven. This life is the mark set for the human being and cannot be reached or maintained if his mind sinks down into earthly matters. He is not then capable of living the heavenly life. Therefore the faithful care of God for this, his highest good, also separated the seventh day in order to arrange for him to have an always returning reason for awakening and nourishing the heavenly life. The sabbath days are days of eternity for the children of God here on earth. And those having no days of eternity, those who never in this life prepare for heaven, will never be able to live the heavenly life in eternity. The sabbath is both a preparation for, and a foretaste and figure of, eternal life, as is shown in Hebrews 4, where the apostle speaks of a rest that remaineth to the people of God. The word in the original text means sabbath rest, sabbath celebration.

But in addition to this great main purpose of the sabbath, our preparation for eternal life, we furthermore have some special benefits in this institution to thank the Lord for. God did not only in general enjoin this care upon us, but He also determined a certain amount of time to be used for our eternal good. Thereby He has not only come to our help against our fallen, earthly-minded nature, but He has specially thought of those of us under the authority of others, such as children, servants, and subordinates, and has looked after their right to nourish their souls with the Word of God. In His third commandment the Lord God forbids every father and housewife to keep their servants from the Word of God by the usual work of the week on the sabbath.

And what a benefit this is already! Because if the Lord God had not put this limit to the earthly mind and activities, all mankind and most especially servants and subordinates, with both body and soul, would probably have been completely suppressed in bondage in the service of Mammon. Let us praise the graciousness of

the heavenly Father who has done all things so well! On the other side, no doubt, with equal extremism, the misled and self-idolizing religiousness of a monk would have deviated from the right way by completely abandoning the earthly calling, in order to live exclusively and perpetually in spiritual exercises.

In the third commandment, in order to obviate both the one and the other wrong road, the Lord has given us the limits for the cares of both the heavenly and the earthly vocation. “Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God” (Exod. 20:9–10). This should not be understood to mean that one should not go about with the Lord and use His Word any more frequently than every seventh day. But on that day one should devote oneself exclusively to that, whereas on the other six days one should attend to the work of the temporal vocation. That the Lord does not want to forbid all spiritual communication with Himself and the Word on those six days is proved by the fact that He gave directions as to the daily offerings in the temple of Jerusalem, as well as to special feasts during the year. When we know that this law of ceremonies was a shadow-picture of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, then it is evident that the Lord wants to tell us by the ordinance of the *daily* offerings that we should approach Him in prayer and use the Word each day, although due to differing outer conditions the daily sabbath — while (*quiet time*) may be very different in each case. With His coming in the flesh and His own example Christ has sanctified all the days in the New Testament to holy communication. And to be sure a living Christian must be in daily communication with his God and also nourish his soul by His Word each day. But God partly wanted to free human beings from the difficulty of determining the time to be devoted exclusively to our spiritual life, and partly wanted to separate a time for it for those under the authority of others, and therefore He has expressly said to both servants and free, that every seventh day is a sabbath, a holy rest in the Lord. Praise the faithfulness of God for this gracious institution!

## January 29

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*Christ is all, and in all* – Col. 3:11.

With what a strong burst of thunder these words break over a lot of self-righteousness delusions! But also what a rich source of teaching they are, and comfort and consolation for the wretched in all kinds of distress and worries! Christ is all, and in all! This is the secret both of the righteousness and the sanctification of a Christian, his strength and his remaining in grace. It is also the secret of the curious peace, joy, and boldness we can see that some people have in the midst of the greatest weakness and wretchedness. Christ is all, and in all. It is easy to learn the words and meaning of that sentence. Many will think that there is no more to learn from it. But still it is on this very point we always run short when we are in distress or sorrow. *Christ is all, and in all.* That is also the description of what is meant by a true Christian as distinguished from all other kinds of pious people. A Christian is a human being to whom Christ has become all, and in all. Many are religious, but in their very hearts they consider other spiritual matters more important than Christ, therefore also their thoughts and words are concerned more with those things than with Christ. As Christ Himself says: “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: ... and ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life” (John 5:39–40). Also from the speech it is easily seen what is most important to the heart because of the words: “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). Such also will be able to read and hear this word and this remark without being honest enough to themselves: to realize their own situation. And although they are thus reminded and convinced of their hypocrisy and terrible self-delusion and know within themselves that it is true, they still are so stupid that not even then are they capable of being honest to themselves.

But there are others in another way needing the teaching that “Christ is all, and in all,” souls quite near the kingdom of God, and even some having real faith in Christ, but still not knowing what they possess in Him, which indeed probably no Christian completely knows. They make many sorrows for themselves, and even if these sorrows are such that cannot be fully escaped, they need not make their lives so heavy if only they would realize what they have in their Lord Christ. John says that these are people who believe on the name of the Son of God, but do not know that they have eternal life in Him.

One sighs: “I will never be able to remain in grace. I see how many have gone astray and how many and multifarious the dangers are! What may not happen to me, too — me, who am so terribly weak, with a flesh so inclined to sin, and a heart so fond of the world and so full of hypocrisy!” Another laments: “I will never become anything other than a servant of sin. I see evil, but cannot resist it. I have

tried to believe, pray, watch, and fight, and have thought that someday I would find true, thorough, lasting sanctification within myself. But no, I only grow more wicked!" A third sighs: "My sin is ever before me' (Ps. 51:3). I do not get any peace or assurance that I have the grace of God and forgiveness for the sins I have done. Because my conscience still always pricks me, and moreover I can never become what a Christian should be." A fourth says: "It is still worse with me. I cannot even know my sins and my condition, or how to repent and to fear because of them, but go about quite hard and dead, cold and nonchalant."

In all these distresses the main fault always is that the person forgets Christ, forgets and overlooks Christ so completely, that in all his thoughts he does not at all think of Christ, but makes Him nothing, and inwardly lives as if there were no Christ, no Savior, no righteousness sufficient before God, no almighty Helper, no gracious Shepherd; yes, as though we had been left to ourselves, as if everybody had to be his own savior, and everybody had to work by himself a righteousness valid before God, be his own shepherd, helper, strength, his all and in all. This terrible darkness of unbelief is the cause for all evil. Because everything would be remedied and put right if only Christ is allowed to be all and in all, as God has made Him "unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).

## January 30

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*God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? – Rom. 6:2.*

**T**hat we are dead to sin, is explained by the apostle in verses 3–11, and also that in baptism we have been consecrated to the communion and likeness of the death and life of Christ. “We have been planted together in the likeness of His death,” says the apostle. And that death was a sin-death. In His death Christ took leave of our sins, which He no more shall bear. So all the faithful, in baptism “planted together in the likeness of His death,” have left the old life in sin, that henceforth they should not serve sin.

If we understand these words the way those who know nothing of the new birth understand them, namely, that baptism is only a covenant, a promise, which obliges us to die to sin and live to God, then we have not yet understood the meaning of the apostle in the words: “dead to sin.” It is also true that this is a covenant, but thereby the full meaning has not been expressed. A wedding and its promises do not create a good husband, but in addition an inner work called love is needed. The ordination of a clergyman and the oath do not create a true shepherd of souls, but in addition a spirit caring for souls is needed. Neither do only baptism and the covenant ensure that one is “dead to sin,” if there is not a divine work additionally in the soul. Christ speaks of a new birth of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5). The apostle speaks about the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Tit. 3:5). Such words tell us the secret and the full meaning of the words: “we, that are dead to sin.” The apostle does not here speak of false Christians, of some unfaithful persons who have been baptized. But he means those “which receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness” (Rom. 5:17) in truth. In them there is divine life, a spirit not capable of enduring sin. And with them it becomes a truth and a reality that they are “dead to sin.”

This is the second glorious gift given to us with faith, namely the work of the Spirit in the soul, proving, that we are born of God (1 John 3:9) and have a new heart and mind, a new spirit not capable of living in sin. I can explain this best by giving my personal experience. I fought in vain under the law, in order to get a holy mind, but I have always experienced, that, to the same extent that sin was repressed outwardly, the inward wickedness grew. At last I despaired of all my own work, and was saved by faith at once, by sheer grace, and I saw myself free from sin and the judgments of the law, only because of Christ. And at the same time I got a quite new and before unknown, holy inclination and desire in my heart; I got a new, willing, holy mind, now sincerely loving the law of God and hating all the evil I felt within me. The worldly and sinful ways of living which had previously been my life and pleasure, now became a plague to me. It is of this wonderful work



in the soul that John speaks when he says, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.” And he cannot sin, because the seed of God remaineth in him. “He cannot sin,” says the apostle.

It is a most strange experience to find that, even if most dreadful temptations torment a Christian, or surprise him and cause him to fall, he still cannot remain in sin, as long as the seed of God remains in him. He cannot commit sin, that is, willingly, which Paul calls in our verse, to “live therein.” As said above, even if a Christian is overthrown by sin, he falls as into fire or water. And there no one can live, but always hurries to get out of it. It is the same with those who are “born of God.” A fall only brings about a new and increased fear of sin, so that the man begins to walk the good path again, only more actively and godly, as long as the seed of God remains in him.

When a Christian has peace from sin and walks the way of the commandments of God, then he feels all right. He is right in his life. But if sin overcomes him, then he becomes frightened, plagued, and uneasy, as if an enemy had assaulted him. From this we see that the right life for a Christian is holiness! And that then he is “dead to sin.” As the well-known words of Luther read: “It is impossible that the one suffering from sin (suffering from sinning against his God) is not a holy man. Because one devil does not cast out the other.” It is this divine work in the soul that brings about what even the world can see, and that makes it frightened, namely that those beginning to live by the power of the gospel of Christ leave the world and their entire life in sin, that they may walk quite another way through life.

The words of the apostle: “We that are dead to sin” are no doubt explained by this great and common phenomenon, that when we have rightly embraced grace, we also get a new mind, whereby we start a new life and leave the old one.

# January 31

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*And when he [the Comforter] is come, he will reprove the world ... of righteousness, because I go to my Father – John 16:8, 10.*

**W**hat is this? “Of righteousness, because I go to My Father?” The Spirit will convict the world of righteousness, and the explanation is: “because I go to My Father.” Everything here is mysterious and like a riddle. Therefore let us examine it even the more, that we may understand what our dear Lord meant. Even if I have seen these words explained before and think I have understood them so well that there is nothing more for me to seek therein, there may still be a depth of hidden treasures. I still want to behold the face of Christ when He says these words, and hear them from His own mouth. “Of righteousness, because I go to My Father.” What does this mean? Should somebody be convicted of righteousness? And how dark is the explanation the Lord adds: I go to My Father! Yet this addition actually throws light on the whole. What does it mean when Christ says that He goes to His Father? What else than His death of propitiation? Christ spoke these words at the moment when He went to His suffering; at the very moment when He took leave of His disciples on the last evening before His death of propitiation.

It is easy now to understand what the words mean: “I go to My Father.” Namely, I now go to complete the great errand for which I am come into the world. I now go to shed My blood for the remission of the sins of the world. As He said on the very same evening when He instituted the Holy Communion: This is My blood, which is shed for the remission of sins. With this blood I, as the true High Priest, now enter into the holy place not made with hands — into heaven itself. I go to reconcile all people with God, to earn an “eternal redemption” from sin and the curse, an “eternal righteousness” for all human beings. Yes, I go to be eternally before the eyes of God for them. In brief: I go to complete all that has been promised from the beginning of the world. To bruise the head of the serpent, to remedy the Fall of man, to restore the lost inheritance of righteousness and of adoption with the Father. Now we can see that the words: “of righteousness” and “because I go to My Father” belong together.

After all, this is the great main teaching of the whole of the Scripture. In the Old Testament Isaiah already said in plain words: “The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all... By His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:6, 11). Mark these words! Is this not what the Lord Himself says plainly: “He bare the sins of many”? He was wounded for our transgressions. Therefore “He shall justify many.” And in Daniel 9 the angel Gabriel says plainly, that when Christ is killed, and sin is covered and iniquity atoned for, the everlasting righteousness will be brought in. But how much more

clearly the sun of righteousness shines over the New Testament! There Paul says in plain words: “For He [God] hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). He “was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). What is all this other than what Christ says here: “Of righteousness, because I go to My Father.”

All these many and simple Bible texts tell us the same things as the Lord Christ says with His short and riddle-like words. Nevertheless, when we now see His meaning clearly, it is even more magnificent to hear Him Himself declare with solemn, triumphant tone: Of righteousness, because I go to My Father. I — I go to My Father — that will mean righteousness for all the world. That I, shed My blood for the world, that I, as a High Priest, go to My Father with My own blood, that will become the new and only righteousness valid for human beings before God! But what does righteousness mean? Righteousness means that everyone has done what he is obliged to do. And Christ says that the world will get such righteousness only by His going to His Father, Oh, God rich in grace! Oh, gracious counsel of salvation! Here we see what the dear Lord meant when on the same evening He said: “for their sakes I sanctify Myself.” Here we see as a truth, that Christ is the second Adam. “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19).

This is the great main teaching which we should never, never allow out of sight, namely that Christ was delivered to stand in our stead! He is ours with all He was, and did, and suffered on earth. He is our Mediator and Surety, our second Adam, who stood in our stead before the law and His Father. In our stead He stood the test in our name. In our stead He did and suffered that we should have done and suffered, yes, in our stead exactly as if we ourselves had done it. That is the core and golden treasure of the whole gospel; the great and holy mystery of our salvation. This is what shines forth in these precious words of Christ: “Of righteousness, because I go to My Father.”

## February 1

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*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice – Rom. 12:1.*

**B**y these words Paul has powerfully cast down the false pretension of those in the world who profess that they love and fear God; something that is never proved by their life, for with all their body and being they serve sin. With these words before us we can then reply: I cannot know that you believe in, fear, and love God, if you do not prove it by your body and its members also serving Him. All men want to declare that they are good, or that they fear and love God, yet we see them still serving sin and false gods freely and unrestrainedly. Then the apostle says: No, that is not called serving the Lord. You should present your *bodies* a living sacrifice unto Him and serve Him with every member. By these visible sacrifices it will be proved that you love Him.

Let us now look a bit more closely as to what happens when we present our bodies a living sacrifice unto God. Surely in the literal sense, thousands of Christians have presented their bodies a living sacrifice, when as martyrs their bodies have been burnt or otherwise tortured and killed for Christ's sake. But also when this is not the case, we still partly present our bodies a living sacrifice when we serve the Lord by its members and powers, and when for His sake we crucify our flesh with its lusts and desires. First of all, you offer your body to the Lord, when you use your members for His service; when with your tongue you speak what brings Him glory and good to your neighbors; when you profess His name, praise Him, and make Him known to others, and at all times speak what is good and true; or again, when you use your eyes and ears to learn things by means of which you can promote the glory of God and the good of your neighbors, and keep them from vain and useless things; or when your hands do what is good and right both in your vocation and in works of love towards your neighbor; or when your feet gladly go on the errands of the Lord and love. In short, we gladly for the sake of the Lord, and moved by His mercy, do and suffer what our vocation and love demand, and thus sanctify our body for the Lord.

But to this belongs a perpetual crucifying of one's flesh, because if you want to serve the Lord, then you must not do according to your own love of ease, your own glory, your own lusts, but you must all the time mortify them. When you see how you could win or keep the friendship, respect, and praise of the world, but for the sake of Christ must give up all such things, and, on the contrary, by zeal for His sake, draw down upon your contempt and abuse; or when, in your daily life, you stand up against and mortify the temptations to sin; when you are tempted to impatience and wrath, or to selfishness and dishonesty, or to unchastity and lewdness, or to pride and vanity, or to envy and slander and other such things,

then, at such a time, when you do not let such sins break out in your work and deeds, but mortify them with persistent prayer and watchfulness, by this also you present your body a living sacrifice, and the apostle also admonishes us to such an offering here by the mercies of God.

When, however, we actually stand up against our own powerful desires, we experience, that it is a painful offering, when the offering priest offers or gives himself as a sacrifice, as the Lord Christ Himself did. Luther remarks rightly here: “The title of the priesthood may be glorious and readily mentioned and praised by every man. But the offering itself becomes rare, and everybody dreads it. Because then it is the matter of life and property, honor, friends, and all that the world has, the way it was for Christ on the cross. Nobody wants to choose death instead of life, pain instead of pleasure, loss instead of gain, shame instead of honor, enemies instead of friends. But Christ did so on the cross, and we should follow after Him. Indeed, we should undertake all such things, not for ourselves or for our own benefit, but for the good of our neighbor, and to the praise and glory of God, for which also Christ offered His body.”

In order that we do not become weary, and shrink from such an offering, but always patiently and willingly continue therein, it certainly is necessary that we have strong motives, and in addition supernatural power and help. It is necessary to pray, to pray in earnest and with diligence. As to the motives, the greatest and most lasting is no doubt that by which the apostle here began his admonition, i.e., the eternal mercies of God. That which is at all times to support our desire and power to make such an offering is only our perpetual receiving of the mercies of God. This compels us to look diligently at what God has done for us. The first look is at what God did for all the world in His eternal mercies. When we were still His enemies, He delivered up His own Son. And the reason was: “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19). The second look tells us how, by the Son, He has made a kingdom of grace for us, in which sins will not at all be imputed to those believing in Him. The last look shows us how, after this short wretched life, He wants to bring us into His heaven, and give us all eternal bliss in accordance with His love and omnipotence. If from your heart you believe all this, then you can willingly become a martyr, and you will always be cheered and encouraged and inclined to continue making the offering.

## February 2

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*Be patient in all tribulation* – Syrach 2:4\*; cf. Rom. 12:12.

**T**his is a fruit of the hope of eternal bliss. The hope of eternal joy should always make us patient in all the afflictions of this present time. Present affliction will soon come to an end. It is not eternal. Be glad that by Christ you have been saved from eternal affliction, and are on your way towards eternal happiness. Yes, if you are a Christian, then you should bear this well in mind.

Here, however, is an admonition: Be patient in all affliction, tribulation, suffering. An admonition points to an obligation of ours before the Lord. Then, for the sake of the Lord, we should be patient in all tribulation, the more so, because it is the Lord God, our heavenly Father that sends us every suffering. If you believe this, then it will be a strong factor to still your impatience, if you are among those who love God. Do you believe in the words of the Lord Christ Himself: “the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matt. 10:30)? And again He says: “There shall not an hair of your head perish” without your Father. Do you believe also that all the suffering that the devil and other people inflict on you has been carefully measured by God? Such things are expressly taught by the Scripture. Look with what a carefulness the Lord God staked out how far Satan would be allowed to go with the plaguing of Job. And when the Arabs had killed the servants of Job, the Chaldeans had taken his camels, and the storm had thrown down the house over his sons, Job saw only the Lord in all this. He said: “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

Again, when David was fleeing before his son Absalom and was cursed by the wicked man Shimei, the sorrowful king said to his faithful Abishai: “Let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?” (2 Sam. 16:10). Also Jeremiah says: “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?” (Lam. 3:37). And so says the Lord: “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things” (Isa. 45:7).

Against whom shall we then complain and murmur in our impatience? “O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” (Rom. 9:20). “Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again?” (Rom. 11:35). If the Lord is too hard towards you, what is then your merit, your claim? If the Lord will contend with us, we will not be able to “answer Him one of a thousand” (Job 9:3). If the Lord should deal with us after our sins or reward us according to our iniquities, then we would be in the place of torment and not have even one drop of water. We should also think and say, “Innumerable people suffer much more than I do. Why should I undervalue suffering, when I deserve only the wrath of God, and yet as a believer, now hope for eternal joy?” “O God ... then please forgive us all

impatience! God forgive us and help us from now on to be patient in tribulation” (Rom. 12:12).

Besides, the fact that we would have nothing to complain of, if God dealt with us according to our sins, it should also be added, that God will never deal that way with us, when by faith in the Son we are now partakers in His grace. All that we suffer has been sent to us only by His utmost faithfulness and graciousness. One day in the light eternal we shall see the secret of all the strange ordinances of God with us. Then we will see that, in the cup of our affliction, there has not been even one drop more than was needed for our true and eternal welfare. Then we shall see that our most bitter experiences have been sent to us to bring us on a higher plane or to increase our joy and glory in eternity. Yes, who dares declare: “Lord, I will certainly come to heaven. Also if Thou dost not allow too many bitter things to come to me, I will surely mortify my flesh without such bitter experiences.”

Surely, when we know our great sloth, unfaithfulness, and weakness towards our flesh, we often pray that the Lord Himself will mortify it in us. But how can He do something like that without sending us suffering? We often pray that He will use what way He thinks best, if only He will perform His work in us, win our heart, increase our faith, our prayer, our zeal, and sanctify all our being. But when the Lord wants to hear and answer such a prayer, He must use many bitter means to accomplish it. Then we grumble and wail, as if this were something evil, and we do not remember that we ourselves prayed to Him for it.

In brief: when once we get eyes to see how by our suffering God promotes the glory of His name and our own welfare, how with the cross He comes to help our willing, but weak spirit against the flesh, yes, when once we are really able to experience the truth of the words; “the righteous will scarcely be saved” — then we shall not only be patient in affliction but will also be grateful for it, and say with Hezekiah: “All the days of my life I want to thank Thee for this affliction of my soul.”

## February 3

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*As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water – Zech. 9:11.*

**I**t is true that our sins, the thoughtlessness and ungodliness of our hearts, are something dreadful. But listen, you heavy-laden soul! It is possible to have everything changed, if you only learn to know Christ. In the midst of your greatest wretchedness you would have great delight. Your burdens are chiefly certain things you do not believe and understand. You do not believe that the sins of all the world and of yourself have already been taken away: at the moment when Christ died they were atoned for and blotted out. You do not believe that the sins of all the world and of yourself were atoned for so definitely on the cross, that never for a minute have they prevented your pardon. Ever since then, an eternal grace and righteousness have been waiting only for you to receive them. You do not believe that, with a reconciled heart burning with love, God has looked at you, at your false paths, the way one looks for a lost child. If you did believe it, then, filled with blessed humiliation and love, you would immediately run into His arms and exclaim, “Oh, my Lord and my God!”

Secondly, you do not believe that the blood of Christ is valid for all sins. You mean that it is valid for some outer and distant sins and for some moderate sins, but not for the inner sins or for the wickedness of your heart; not for the really grave and horrible sins, and certainly not for the remaining strong and mighty sins. The reason for all this is that you do not hold, in living faith, that the blood of the Son of God was shed for the remission of our sins. Because if you did believe that, then yourself would vanish from before your own eyes. You would completely forget yourself because of the astonishing grandeur of such an atonement. If anyone is able fully to grasp by faith, that the blood of the Son of God has been shed for us, then he would doubtless quite lose sight of himself and sink back in an eternal, blessed watching of the wonder of the atonement by the blood of Christ. May the Lord open our eyes and increase our faith!

Then wake up and look how great a crowd of evangelists, angels, prophets, and apostles, as if by one mouth, have witnessed to the fact that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to be an offering of atonement for the sins of all the world: and that this atonement was really to redeem sinners from their sins and the judgment of the law. Thus witnesses the prophet: “By the blood of Thy covenant I have sent forth Thy prisoners out of the pit.” Thus Christ witnessed on the night He went to His suffering: “For this is My blood ... which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28). So witnesses John: “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Thus witnesses the apostle Peter: “Ye know that ye were ... redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ,



as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18–19). And should we quote more of these scattered witnesses? Think, how for four thousand years, the whole of a long age, with an extensive service of offerings prescribed by God and full of innumerable sacrifices of blood, announced and illustrated to the world how once, in the fullness of time, a sacrifice of blood was made, to remove and atone for the sins of the world. You, poor human child bound by the law, what do you weigh against this great witness of the innumerable sacrifices of blood down through the ages, all of them calling out to you: “Not you, not you, can remedy the injury called the Fall of man! ‘Thou art weighed in the balances (by the Lord), and art found wanting” (Dan. 5:27). No, Zion! Only by the blood of the covenant can you send forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.

Now here let us draw a sound conclusion! If you have understood, that by all these witnesses God has announced to us that He has given His only begotten Son to be a sacrifice of blood for our sins, then have not they been well and truly atoned for? Have not the sins of all the world already been atoned for thus? Or is the blood of Christ not valid for all sins? Or has Christ shed His blood only for the faithful, and for some minor sins? As Luther says: “Verily, Christ has not shed His blood only for sins of thought and invention, but for right and real sins; and not only for small sins, but also for the great and grave ones. Not only for the former sins already overcome, but also for the ones still strong, mighty, and ruling.” Because, wherefrom would we otherwise get help against, and atonement for, these ruling and mighty sins? And where would we get power to overcome and mortify them, if by faith we could not first get the consolation and delight of forgiveness, which alone is our strength if we are to overcome mighty sins? We must first get forgiveness and peace and delight in the Holy Spirit before we can get power to bring sin under our dominion! May God preserve us so that we do not limit the power of the Blood of the Son of God! Can it not cleanse us “from *all* our sins”? (1 John 1:7). So says the Lord God: “Come now, and let us reason together, ... though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18).

## February 4

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*We know that we have passed from death unto life,  
because we love the brethren* – 1 John 3:14.

**Y**our conversion to the Lord and your faith in the grace of Christ should produce in you the fruit of a new, heartfelt love to all the children of God. Not only to a certain Christian who has done something good to you or who understands and appreciates you, or who has a natural amiability which attracts you, but in general to anyone you meet who loves or seeks Jesus, so that all these now form your new family, your sisters and brethren. Now if this new love is in you, you should know that this fact, much more than the most glorious deeds, proves that a new birth of the Spirit of God has taken place in your soul.

Perhaps you do not think that you can be a child of God, as the entirety of your Christianity seems to you far too imperfect, but all these shortcomings and this opinion of yours do not matter anything against the Word of God regarding this sign. On the contrary, if in fact you have been awakened from your old sleep in sin and you have been converted from your false paths to the path of godliness, to the Word of God, to prayer and repentance, but do not want to have anything to do with other seeking souls, but feel most happy alone, as you say, “with God and the Word,” this condition surely seem to be beautiful and spiritual.

But there is only one thing against it, and that is, that it is quite contrary to the main sign of the grace of God; and your repentance, no doubt, is false and self-made. If your repentance is the true work of the Spirit, then it would also have this sign of love to the brethren, and you would be so downhearted as regards yourself that you would think other seeking souls to be better than yourself. If the blood of the Lamb of God has become your only consolation and rejoicing, if you have been in the “strait gate” where both your sin and your own righteousness have been brought to nought by the blood of the Son of God, and your heart has been blessed by overflowing grace; in brief, if you live in such a state of repentance that yourself decreases and Christ increases, then in this great gift of love which all have in common, you will melt together with all the joint-heirs so that in fact you will become “of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32) with them in the way of the first Christians.

Further, if there are some certain brethren you like because they are of the same opinion as you on a certain particular matter, but it is not the new birth from God, nor the great grace in Christ that unites you, but something else, then this is not the true, distinguishing love, because John says expressly: “and everyone that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1). Thereby he lets us understand that true love to the brethren has its eyes upon the fact that they are born of God, and loves them expressly because of this. As he also immediately

adds: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments.” That is, we love them because of the dear Father we have in common. Anyone not paying attention to this fact, no doubt wants to be deceived, and indeed will be deceived.

On the other hand, how wonderful it is when you know within yourself that it is simply because of the work of grace in their hearts that you love the brethren. Yes, as a fruit of your poor, wretched repentance, it seems that spontaneously all the faithful have become your new family, and your beloved brethren seem so lovable to you, that you often think that only you are unworthy of their love! Oh, what a blessed state! In fact you may have a certain brother that you love most, as Christ also especially loved John. But beyond this, in all those seeking and loving the Savior there is something making them so dear to you that they are all your brethren, and their weal or woe is your own.

With “charity” you can wish, if it were possible, to help all men to the highest happiness you know, but with “brotherly kindness” (2 Pet. 1:7) you are in a special way united with those in union with the Savior. Such a love proves something: it proves that, no matter how bad your Christianity may otherwise appear, Christ nevertheless is your life, and in spite of all your shortcomings, the Spirit of Christ lives in your heart. But although that love has been born by the Spirit into our hearts and grows from our union with the Savior, it, as well as all the fruits of the Spirit, still needs good care.

Because of this, there are all the admonitions to love in the Scriptures. And as this love is such a characteristic fruit of the life in Christ, it is also always dependent on that life. As long as I live in a sound exercise of repentance and faith, I love the brethren. But when an earthly mind begins to gain ground in a Christian, so that he does not live in the daily exercise of the knowledge of sin and the embracing of grace, he also at once begins to become cold towards the brethren and to look more at their faults than at the grace dwelling in them.

## February 5

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*But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone — Rom. 9:31–32.*

Look at what election makes! God had chosen the way of faith, not the way of works. God had chosen “the son of the promise,” not “the son of the bondwoman.” When by works, piousness, and the service of God, somebody seeks to win His grace, it becomes too difficult for him — yes, quite impossible. God has chosen the children of faith. It is no use trying to fight against the election of God. Because what happens is this, that the one who has “followed after righteousness does not come to righteousness,” and the one who has not followed after it receives it, when he receives it “by faith.” The elder son who had always served the father and had never transgressed his commandment does not get a kid, and the one who had wasted his substance with harlots gets the fatted calf, when once he comes back ashamed, and receives grace as grace (Luke 15). “Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first” (Matt. 19:30).

It is true that such a strange ruling can move heaven and earth! There are those that have “borne the burden and heat of the day” (Matt. 20:12) and those that have mortified their bodies and forsaken the lusts of the world in a most serious way, and have taken pains and plagued themselves as regards keeping the commandments of God and doing good deeds, yet these at last will see publicans and harlots who have lived wildly and freely in sin, going “into the kingdom of God before them” (Matt. 21:31). These will enter into the liberty, peace, and joy of the gospel and faith, already rejoicing in the complete righteousness and the witness of adoption, the best garment and the ring, while those, so serious and exhausted as they are with their frequent service, are still without this righteousness and this witness.

One cannot wonder that such people are upset and get bitter and murmur against such a strange administration. But what does it help? In His counsel before the foundation of the world God had decided upon that. It is not easy to fight with the Lord, who “carries heaven and earth on the measurement of three fingers.” He is by far too great and mighty for us and has the keys to hell and death, “He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth” (Rev. 3:7). He will be gracious to whom He will be gracious (Exod. 33:19).

Who will be saved will not depend on the will or course of any man, but on the mercy of God. He chooses whom He wants, and now it has pleased Him to choose those believing in the Name of His only begotten Son and not those wanting to earn heaven themselves. This is the eternal election of God. He has chosen us in Christ, and only in Christ, before the foundation of the world. The one who does

not pay attention to the election, but works and spurns the Grace of God and bangs his head against the face of a rock wall, where there is no door, he will never get through.

After having followed after righteousness in the most serious way he must accept the reply of dismissal. Take what belongs to you, what you have earned yourself, and go. Although it sounds hard, nevertheless, the Scriptures say: “Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman” (Gal. 4:30). “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse” (Gal. 3:10).

God chose us in Christ and gave His Son in torments and death, to atone for our sins, and win salvation for us, since nothing else in heaven or on earth was valid for Him except the blood and obedience of His only begotten Son. His zeal for the glory of the Son burns as a great fire filling up all the world and devouring everything rising against it, even though it be the greatest holiness. Never come before God in your own name!

Never try to win His grace by anything else than by His beloved Son! Maybe you are serious in your godliness, you pray diligently and ardently, you repent of your sins bitterly, you watch, and fight against them, you do many good deeds. All this is good and beautiful. But do and be all this good and even more, and you will still be condemned. It does not help, so long as all this has not been reckoned as dung to you, and Christ, Christ alone, has become all your righteousness and consolation. Such things are the result of election.

## February 6

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*And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord's passover — Exod. 12:11.*

**T**he spiritual meaning of this Old Testament command referring to the eating of the passover is that anybody coming to Christ and receiving Him should immediately break away from his previous life in bondage under sin, the world, and vanity. He should at once say “goodbye” to the old self, and entering upon a completely new way, never look back again. As a pursued refugee he should haste as fast and as far away as possible from the service of sin and the devil. Nevermore should he attach importance to earthly matters, nor attempt to make a paradise for himself down here. But he should always be on the wing like one seeking his fatherland. The apostle says: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:1–3).

This is the true life of a Christian: to be dead to the past life, to be risen with Christ to a new life, and to have his treasure and fatherland where Christ is, in heaven; in brief always to follow in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham, of whom it is said: “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God” (Heb. 11:9–10). They had seen it “afar off, and were persuaded of them [the promises], and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country” (Heb. 11:13–14), i.e., the heavenly fatherland.

All our life should be like that. We should eat the Lamb in our traveling garment, as strangers and pilgrims all the time hastening to our fatherland. When he spots something brilliant by the side of the road — a gold mine or a beautiful possession, a true pilgrim must not sit down there and build and dwell there, but must continue his wandering restlessly until he has reached the Holy Land and the city of God. In the hostel he may only take night quarters and seek the necessary refreshment, but he must not remain there. All the life of a Christian should be like this. Let us bear this in mind and never forget that the Lamb must be eaten by us in our traveling clothes. But this is not enough. The children of Israel hastened headlong out of the country of bondage on the very night they had eaten the passover, yet within a few days had the armies of the oppressor upon their heels, and could not see anything but that they would perish because of the same Egyptians. So also the soul who in great grace has been chosen from the world to be a follower of

Christ, should never forget that from the very beginning he will be pursued and chased by all the old enemies.

Please never forget that you go through an enemy country, and carry your precious pearls in earthen vessels, surrounded by thousands lying in wait to deprive you of your jewels. Here is the old enemy of the soul who has sworn death unto us and who intends to perform his vow by power, cunning, or endless persistence.

First, there is the world trying to bring you back to its ways, sometimes by threats, and sometimes by charming invitations; and also from first to last there is your own false heart, the flesh, always fighting against the Spirit and never seeking the kingdom of God. Under such conditions would you be at rest and go to sleep? Rather it is necessary for us always to be fully armed, with our loins girded with the belt of truth, with our staff in our hands and shoes on our feet, like those in a hurry.

There is an endless inclination in the human heart to have delight and pleasure in something earthly. Also the heart of the faithful which always sought its joy in God sometimes wants to go astray to something else. It is a dangerous thing when a Christian begins to have much zeal and eagerness for earthly things, his business, his farm, his merchandise, or his stock. Then surely there is a danger that he will become so captivated by them that he will be prevented from attending the great supper of the Lord. In themselves these things are quite innocent; but the heart, what about your heart? It is surely a matter of the heart! Be honest! Where is your heart? There is your treasure. And “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). The zeal of your soul’s Bridegroom for your heart does not allow you to open it to anybody other than to Him. Delight thyself in the Lord (Ps. 37:4).

It is bitter to nature not to be allowed to think of any earthly delight and felicity, but always to be killed, say “goodbye,” hurry away! But what counts? This is the way, and to the spirit it is sweet. Therefore never let yourself be so fooled as to try to get a paradise here on earth! You must always be in traveling clothes if you are to belong to the people of the Crucified One, and go with Him to the heavenly fatherland.

## February 7

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*Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me* – 1 Cor. 11:24.

One of the strongest hindrances to the enjoyment of the Lord's supper, which worries many faithful hearts and deprives them of the consolation, comfort, and delight that the Holy Communion would bring, is that they think it to be some sort of a solemn offertory celebration whereby we should give God something good and should go up to the altar with some offerings well-pleasing to God, of piety, faith, prayer, and good works. They do not bear in mind that the Holy Communion is a means of grace by which, on the contrary, the Lord wants to give us, His poor, miserable, depressed children, the consolation, strength, and refreshment we need. Please note that like the Word of God, the Holy Communion is a means of grace. As you do not come to the Word to give or show God something good, but only to get something good from it, to get power and help for your feeble faith, to strengthen your imperfect repentance and prayer, so also you should come to the Lord's Holy Supper in the same way to seek help for all that is lacking.

You dread going to the Lord's table because you know that your daily life is so full of shortcomings. You are not living the way a true Christian should live. Either in your faith or in your life there is something morbid, there is some grave fault with your Christianity, and therefore you cannot go gladly to the Lord's table. What else is this than a complete forgetfulness of the real purpose of the Holy Communion, namely, that it is a remedy for all these morbidities and faults in our faith and life? If everything already is all right with your Christianity, your faith and life, then there would not be any need for you to come to this means of grace.

Christ with all His merit did not come to call the righteous, but sinners (Luke 5:32), as He also says: "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick" (Luke 5:31). Just think, if a sick person were to get the advice to go to the doctor and would reply, "I dare not go, because I am so badly ill. My blood is so bad. My eczema is so bad. I am in such a bad state I cannot see a doctor. I should get a bit better first!" Would we not be astonished at such foolishness and reply: "Is it not expressly for illness that one should see a doctor?" It is exactly the same way when due to spiritual shortcoming and morbidities one dreads to go to the Lord's Holy Supper. Let us never forget the great love of the gracious Savior, when He instituted this means of grace!

What did He Himself say about His blood when He gave the blessed cup? Of all the great and wonderful things that could have been said about this blood He mentions only this: "It is shed ... for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28). There we see His plan! It was as a deliverance from the plague of a remedy against that most pressing trouble of His children, even sin, that He instituted the table of grace. For



the remission of sins. It is sin, it is the consciousness of sins and unfaithfulness against my God, that deprives me of the comfort and freedom I should have before Him. It is as a remedy against this distress and misery that the Lord instituted this blessed celebration of the remembrance of His expiatory death. He has planted the Holy Communion tables as huts of rest along our way so that when during the wandering, we get tired, our soul gets weak and hungry, and we become distressed and wounded by our false steps, our staggering and falling, we can go in there and refresh ourselves with the Bread of Life, with the remembrance of Him, and the enjoyment of the Body which was broken and the Blood which was shed for the remission of our sins, and thereby again become assured that He is not angry with us.

The result of this is that, when we are specially weak, or in a spiritual insolvency, then is the right time to hurry to the table of grace, even as for the sake of the same shortcomings we hurry to the Word. Old teachers who have realized this described a worthy communicant in such a way that one wonders whether they were in their right mind! Luther says: "You should go to this table often, when you have the great need for it, that is, when you are troubled by numerous heavy sins." Doctor Svedberg's reply to the question when one should go to the Lord's supper is: "When the mind of bondage begins to take the place of the child's confidence in your heart!" These men have understood aright that the Holy Communion is a means of grace.

## February 8

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*When ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God – 1 Thess. 2:13.*

**M**ay the Lord have mercy upon the darkness of our fallen hearts and open our minds! There are those who never doubt for a moment that the Word is the Word of God, yet in action do not reckon it so, and cannot believe and bear in mind that it really *is* the Word of the great God.

What a noise and ado it would cause in the world, if men began to accept the Word of God to be what it actually is, even the Word of the living God, the words and judgments of the great, almighty Creator. What an alarm, and a running and crying, and a searching and asking for the way of salvation if men only began to accept the Word of God to be what it is, *the Word of God*. What a rejoicing and assurance of faith, what a jubilation and hymn singing, what a peace and strength in the Lord, if all awakened and believing souls would really accept the Word of God to be what it is, *the Word of God*. What a watchfulness and fear of God, what a prayer and fear of any deviation there would be if we would but accept the Word of God to be what it is, *even the Word of the living God Himself*.

Or you, who believe that you already accept it as the Word of God, how is it possible that you still can be so uncertain of the matters about which God Himself speaks? How is it possible that you can eat, drink, or sleep while you have not yet made reconciliation with God and received assurance of the forgiveness of your sins, assurance that at any moment you can die saved?

If you really accept the Word of God to be what it is, you will also believe what is said in the Holy Book about the only way to salvation, about the last judgment, about heaven and hell. Or you that go laboring and heavy laden under the yoke of bondage, if you but hear the witness of God about His Son and believe that it is the Word of God Himself that He has given His only begotten Son for our atonement, and if you but hear the Son of God bidding you so graciously, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden” (Matt. 11:28), how is it possible that you can still remain in the same infirm mind of bondage, if you really accept all this as the Word of God?

The fact that most people do not accept the Word of the holy and true God as indeed the Word of God, is first evident by the fact that it does not seize, move, and captivate their hearts, and second, by the fact that they do not regard it with as deep reverence as would follow if their hearts really believe and feel that it is God, God the Lord of heaven and earth, who speaks to them therein.

When only an earthly king or sovereign speaks to us, most especially if we are dependent on him and his words, with what keen attention and reverence do we not listen in order that not even one of his words will escape us! If his words

contain a dreadful judgment, for example the death sentence on us, what fear and agony seize our hearts! And why? Of course, because it is the decisive and final word of the king himself. But if his words contain some gracious promises for us, or our lives are given to us in outright pardon, exception from the death to which we had been sentenced, what inexpressible joy and gratitude flow through our hearts! And why? First of all, because it is the king himself that speaks, so I surely must rely on his word! And secondly, because his words contain a supreme grace and great gift for me.

Yes, when a king speaks to us, even if he does not promise us any tremendous grace nor pronounces any distressing judgment over us — we still revere and cherish his words, and keep them alive in our memory, maybe for all our lifetime, simply because they were the words of a great sovereign or king.

Now what would happen if we were to accept the Word of God to be what it is, even the Word of God? What is an earthly king in comparison with the very Lord and Creator, the King of all kings! If now the words of an earthly king can fill us with so much fear or joy — according to how his words affect us — how much more should the words of the Almighty God seize upon our hearts and fill them with fear or joy, if we but rightly accept His Word for what it is.

And if we can love, revere, and cherish the words of a king that way, even if the contents are rather unimportant, how much more should we not then love, revere, and cherish the Word of God in our hearts, if we really accept it as the Word of God!

When, on the contrary, we regard the Word thoughtlessly and sleepily and become neither frightened nor solaced by its contents, but go on our own way with all ease and unbelief, then the fault must no doubt be, that we do not accept the Word of God to be what it is, even the Word of the great God. Yes, this uncertain and doubting existence, this faltering and wavering between belief and unbelief, between fear and hope; or this cold, lukewarm, and careless life, is not all this a proof that you do not accept the Word of God for what it is, even the Word of the living God?

All Christians should pay careful attention to this point! Because here is the root of all spiritual laxity and half-heartedness in faith, in love, and in life, that we do not accept the Word of God as holy, and do not believe or reflect upon the fact it is the Word of God.

## February 9

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*Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ – Rom. 7:4.*

**A**s regards our freedom from the law it is necessary to bear the fact well in mind that this freedom only arises because we die or are killed. First, to the darkness of unbelief in all of us it is difficult and absurd, and empty words and deceit, that we can be quite free from the stipulations and judgments of the law. It always declares in the heart: “Free from the law? I cannot be that. I always feel its demands and judgments. If I were free from the law, I would be completely saved. No, that is too much.” Our unbelieving heart speaks like that.

Then the apostle comes and says: “Dear brethren, you are indeed as free as that from the judgments and stipulations of the law, when you are dead from it and united with the One that is Risen; yes, equally free as the ones already blessed in heaven, as free as if no law had ever been given to us on earth, whether one or ten commandments.” This freedom has come because we have died from the law and risen to be in a new relationship in a new world.

On the other hand there are lighthearted persons who too easily and quickly assimilate the consolation without truly possessing it. These can come in, in a fleshly mind, and say: “Look, we are free from the law, why should we care about the law? Nobody can fulfill it.” Then the apostle says: “No, wait, I do not mean that all people are free from the law; it depends on whether you have been killed. You must not absolve yourself.”

Not every woman is free from the law of her husband. Her becoming free depends on a death. Do you not know dear brethren, how it is with the law? “Know ye not, brethren (for I speak to them that know the law), how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man” (Rom. 7:1–3).

The first and real teaching we get here is, that it is only because of death that we come to freedom from the law. Here we learn how false and wrong it is to imagine that we have the grace by Christ when we have not “become dead to the law,” but still hope in our hearts that observation of the law will help us to righteousness and salvation. Many think it faith in Christ, when at certain moments they think of grace as a complement when our own righteousness is not enough. But it is nothing else than spiritual adultery! So long as the man lives, his wife is bound by

the law of her husband, so that with justice she is called criminal if she marries another man.

To mix up in the heart in this way two grounds of consolation contrary to one another, to try to be righteous by the law, and also to have grace by Christ, that is spiritual lasciviousness, and spiritual adultery. To do this is to break our alliance with the law, which we must fulfill on every point, if we want to become righteous by this means. Grace and freedom belong to quite another group of people, namely the ones who have become dead to the law and who seek all their righteousness only in the One that is Risen. The whole world is in darkness where none can understand that here are two quite different spiritual kingdoms with their different laws and rights, two covenants, two testaments, two different ways to righteousness and salvation, namely that of the law and that of grace; that of works and that of faith (cf. Rom. 4:4–5).

And in Gal. 3:10 the apostle speaks so strongly against the possibility of any grace for those on the way of works that he says: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law *to do them*.” That means that on this way we must fulfill all the law or be cursed. How sad then is this delusion to hope for grace while one still lives under the law. This is symbolized by the judgment pronounced over a wife mixing with another man while her husband still lives.

The second thing we should learn here is how perfectly free from the judgments of the law a human being is, who has become dead to the law and united with Christ. The apostle says here, that she is as free as the wife who has seen her husband die and be buried, is from the law of her husband. The marriage tie has been broken and brought to nought by the death of her husband, so that now she can marry another man freely and without sinning. As little as the dead and buried man has any right or power over his wife, so little do the stipulations and judgments of the law concern the Christian united with Christ by faith. The law can neither justify nor condemn such a Christian.

## February 10

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*That ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God – Rom. 7:4.*

When the believing soul is dead to the law, which was her first husband, and is partaker of the death of Christ, she also at once is in a genuine union with Him and partaker of His resurrection. Christ now is her lawful Husband, according to the parable of the apostle regarding the married state. So now is it by no means wrong that she considers herself free from the union and conditions of the previous husband, the law, because this latter union has been dissolved by death. The hearts of the faithful are often being pierced by these thoughts: Is it right, is it sure, that I shall be free from the conditions and judgments of the law? Can I live and die on that? Here in our text the apostle says that we may be quite safe, as the woman is quite free to take herself another man after the death of her previous husband. Thus by death we also have become lawfully free from the previous union with all its conditions and judgments.

From the covenant with Adam, that is the covenant of the law, the faithful have been transferred to the covenant with Christ, that is the covenant of grace. Christ is the Head and Husband of the church. And by this picture, the picture of the “bride” and the “bridegroom,” the husband and the wife, the relation between Christ and His faithful has often been illustrated in the Scriptures. As Adam was to have a wife taken from his rib, so also Christ was to have a bride produced by “His body.” Not only in the Song of Solomon and in the “Bride Song” in Ps. 45, but also in the New Testament, this “Bridegroom” is often spoken of, whereby the church is presented as the “bride” and the “Lamb’s wife.” When in Eph. 5 the apostle speaks of the man and the wife, he says finally, “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (v. 32).

But we shall again notice, that although, because of their genuine union with Christ, the faithful are no longer under the law as regards the conditions of life, they are still as the apostle says, “not without law to God, but under the law to Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21). Happy and willingly in love, they now take the law as if from His hand. They “delight in the law of God” (Rom. 7:22) and say from their hearts: “His commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3) when the heaviest burden has been taken away, the burden of sin and the curse. When Luther understood the difference between the law as a covenant and the law as only a rule for our lives, it brought about such a relief and joy in his mind, that it seemed to him as if he was walking in one of the streets of Paradise. Think then when I know that for all the sins, faults, and shortcomings still adhering to me, I have eternal grace and freedom from the judgments of the law, how dear must be His commands!

That we should bring forth fruit unto God. Here we again run against difficult heresy, as reason calls it, and of which Luther says, when explaining Gal. 2:19, that if reason were allowed to judge, there has not been any worse heretic on earth than the holy Paul, teaching us that we must become dead to the law in order to be able to bring forth fruit unto God! On the contrary, all the world knows that one must be completely subject to the law in order to bring forth fruit unto God and do truly good deeds; also that freedom from the law is the destruction of all holiness.

Yet here we see that the apostle Paul teaches us quite the contrary. He says that not until we have become dead to the law, can we bring forth fruit unto God. This is now a doctrine important beyond measure, a point to which all Christians, most especially the young and inexperienced, should pay careful attention. Namely, that no matter how absurd it seems to our reason, it is still absolutely necessary for true sanctification, that we should become dead to the law, that our consciences may become free from the judgments and authority of the law, so that we may live in the freedom of grace.

Upon this is based the fact, that all the good things we do while our conscience is still ruled by the law, we do not do to God but to ourselves. They are deeds of self-interest only, in order to escape evil and win a reward, and never true piousness or well-pleasing to God. The services done by a wife under compulsion, because demanded by a legal authority can never please the man, because, first of all, he wants to have her love.

All that we do while we are not yet free from the law and united with Christ in blessed faith, no matter how good and pious those works seem, they are only “dead works” (Heb. 9:14), brought about by self-love, self-flattery, self-righteousness, pride, and other fleshly reasons. And such motives make otherwise most excellent deeds into an abomination before God, because He looks at the heart and, first of all, wants to have its love and free delight. However, we cannot possibly look at the law with love and delight as long as it threatens and condemn us. It is when we are free from the judgments of the law, and are pardoned and saved by faith, that God and His law become sweet to us. Then we do the will of God with a heartfelt love and delight. This is to bring forth fruit unto God, and is surely the only true way of both salvation and sanctification.

## February 11

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*Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness* – Rom. 4:3.

We note first that the promise Abraham believed was the gospel of God about Christ. The words of the text: “He [Abraham] believed in the Lord” are found in Gen. 15:6. We, however, do not at first see anything there more than the promise about the numerous seed of Abraham. But what the promise comprised was known to Abraham, because of a preceding promise in Gen. 12:3. There God had declared, “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” In reality this was the promise of a Savior, the promise God had given our first parents in the day of the Fall of man; the promise of the woman’s holy seed that was to bruise the serpent’s head; the promise of a Redeemer who, born of a woman, was to make sin and the works of the devil come to nought. It was the promise in which, ever since righteous Abel, all the faithful had believed and become righteous. It was this promise that was so often repeated to Abraham, so that even if the main point, that very precious stone in the promises of God to Abraham, was not mentioned each time, it was still always comprised in these promises. This is the apostle’s own explanation as given in Gal. 3. And Christ declares exactly the object of Abraham’s eye of faith, the object over which he rejoiced in his faith. The Lord says: “Your father Abraham *rejoiced to see My day*: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56).

Secondly, if the apostle here had wanted to say that faith itself, as a well-pleasing virtue in man, had been counted unto Abraham for righteousness, then by so saying he would have immediately cut off the very nerve in the entirety of his doctrine of justification. It is actually his task at this place to show, that we are justified freely and without any worthiness on our part, only by the grace of God and “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). And in a following chapter he says plainly that it is only “by the obedience of one” (Rom. 5:19) that we will be made righteous. Righteousness is nothing less than the fulfillment of the law (Matt. 5:17). Faith itself does not bring this about. In itself faith is indeed the denying of our merits. Because the one believing in Christ confesses that he is unrighteous, lost, at a loss himself, he therefore embraces the “righteousness of God” (Rom. 1:17), that fulfillment of the law which has taken place in Christ.

Furthermore, faith must have a word of God to embrace. And what I get by faith depends on the contents of this word. If we do not bear this in mind, we will always misunderstand the words about faith and the righteousness of faith. Here is a parable. A lost son lives away in a foreign country, and there he is in want. His father promises him a big, beautiful property, if he will only come back and receive it. The son is in doubt for a long time and therefore remains away in his poverty.



But at long last he begins to believe in his father's word and hurries home to receive his property. At once he is rich and happy. Then he says: "For a long time I was in want. My unbelief was the reason for that. But when I believed in my father's word, I became rich and happy. My faith alone has made me rich."

If, however, somebody hears the man say such words and does not know or reflect upon the contents of the father's promise, he might understand the words to mean that this man had been rewarded because of his, i.e., the son's, confidence in his father's word. Then the one knowing the circumstances would reply: No, indeed! Pay attention to the contents of the promise he believed in. It was the promise that made him rich. The promise concerned a great property, of which the whole richness consists. His faith only made him come to enjoy it.

In the same way we should understand the words: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." That faith made him righteous depended on the contents of the promise he embraced by faith. The contents were Christ.

If we do not understand the words this way we must completely throw away the great main doctrine of the whole of the Scripture. We must throw away, mock, and despise all, that from the beginning of the world, God has announced to us about a Savior and an atonement in His blood, all that God has announced by angels and prophets, as well as all the symbols He has given us in the Levitical service of offerings and in all its sacrifices of blood. In brief, we must throw away the real contents of all the Scriptures, the doctrine about Christ, the obedience of Christ, the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Christ. All this would come to nought, if God could justify us merely because of the very virtue that we believe that He is truthful!

And the fact that the apostle did not here give any further explanation (the way he does in a later chapter) certainly will not prove any excuse before God for anybody who might want to find a cause for a new thought quite contrary to the main doctrine of the whole of the Scripture. It remains something that throughout all the Scriptures reveals the majestic grandeur of God, and shows that He does not always repeat what He has said, but demands that we remember the explanations He has given, and understand Him.

## February 12

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*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish* – Luke 13:3.

**Y**ou say, But after all, it says here: “Except ye repent, ye shall all perish.” This repentance does not mean the same thing as improvement, renewal, and sanctification, or the weeding out of evil, concerning which a man does not have power before he has been grafted into Christ and has the sanctifying Spirit. But we must know what this repentance means, namely remorse, contrition, sorrow over sin. I fear that with me it is not the way it should be. Too soon I am hardened and blinded. How then can I believe?

Reply: It is true that a repentance is required, which begins with a feeling of sin and then, during the attempts to improve, goes over into a knowledge of sin, spiritual poverty, or destitute of all one’s self-satisfaction. But in order to know if this repentance of yours is such as it should be, you must know and reflect upon its purpose. Because a thing accomplishing its purpose is such as it should be.

Now you ask: What is the purpose of repentance? The first and real purpose of repentance is not that by it you should become well-pleasing and pardoned before God. But the purpose of repentance is that you will be driven to Christ. As Paul testifies, “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24). Therefore, *if you* can still go for a time away from Christ, away in the world and at ease, without the assurance of your pardoning with God, then your *conviction of sin* is surely less than it should be.

If you can still seek your salvation in your own improvement by works, remorse, prayer, etc., then you do not yet know sin rightly. But as soon as you do not get any peace, cannot live in the world or continue in uncertainty about the grace of God, and again when you cannot get any consolation in yourself, in your own improvement, remorse, and prayer, but must, such as you are, flee only to the grace in Christ, then your repentance is right, because it accomplishes its purpose. And this purpose was to drive you to Christ. In Him you are saved and blessed — you are in the city of refuge. “He that hath the Son hath life” (1 John 5:12).

Thus you understand that if your knowledge of sin is right, you will not find repentance in yourself as you may wish to, because then you would get consolation from it. You would get consolation from something within you, and God’s will is that all such consolation should be taken away. True repentance is dissatisfaction with one’s own repentance. Yes, such a feeling of hardness, ease, a sense of the innermost and deepest depravity, that you must judge yourself, fundamentally, not in a passing feeling, but in full conviction as a hard, certain, ungodly, lost, and condemned man. Not until then does the blood of Christ alone get the glory for your salvation.

In brief, if you ask, how much feeling of sin is thus needed? This is the answer: Not much, only enough for you to realize that you cannot live outside Christ, that you cannot get peace before you are saved in Him. Neither more nor less is required. It is also an error to believe that sorrow over sin shall *first* take place before faith and that *then* there will come the time for faith, peace, joy, and sheer holiness. No! Only begin to believe in Christ, and then follow after Him in daily repentance, and you certainly will come to feel sin more than before.

One of the very finest and strongest shifts of the devil is as follows. There is a type of person who in general believes in all the Word of God and in addition seriously seeks its power in his heart and observance, but has a *grave* sin on his conscience. The devil inspires such to the following thoughts: "To be sure the gospel is true; and grace is great, and sins can be blotted out. So that in general sinners can obtain grace. But it is a bit different with you, because you know within yourself what you have done. If only this and that (referring to one of the sins against the fifth, sixth, or seventh commandments) had not been committed, then you could have obtained grace. But now you are a special exception!" Look! This "you are a special exception" is the most poisonous lie of the old serpent, who is a "liar" and a "murderer from the beginning."

Because the truth is that there is no exception, no special condition where the blood of Christ is not a rich and mighty atonement, when it is received with faith by a distressed sinner. This is exactly the chief content of the gospel — confirmed both with words and examples by the New and the Old Testament. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). Express examples of this are David, who had committed adultery and murder, and Manasseh, the thief on the cross, the woman who had committed great and many sins, Peter who denied his Lord, and many others.

Yes, it was for just such difficult conditions, where otherwise no one in heaven, or on earth could help, that the Son of God took flesh, shed His blood, and died, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

## February 13

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*Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God – Eph. 4:30.*

**H**ow does it happen that one grieves and drives away the Holy Spirit of God? It happens by all kinds of disobedience against Him. He wants something, He prompts you to something, and when you do not want to obey Him, then you grieve Him and drive Him away. He wants to work in you a feeling of sin, remorse, and a deep desire for repentance and reconciliation with God. When you turn yourself away from these important objects; when you do not heed His voice, but frustrate the holy impressions He works in you, and do not cry rather to maintain and increase them by means of the Word; when you do not fear to lose them, and do not sigh to God that He would rather increase them; then you despise and quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19).

He attacks and punishes a sin in you and bids you to abandon it. When you do not want to obey Him, but still want to tender allegiance to and keep your sin, then you grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Yes, and also, when in fact you do really want to abandon the sin, but not immediately; when you want to be converted to the Lord, but not yet; then there is a falseness in your spirit, a despising of the “time of thy visitation” (Luke 19:44), which can cause the Spirit of God to hide Himself from you.

Again when you want to be converted and to repent, but do not want to hear the voice of the Lord and follow the way He has prescribed, that as a lost sinner you should first believe and rejoice and then become strong in the Lord; when you do not want to hear this counsel of the will of God, but fight against the election; then you grieve His Holy Spirit.

And finally, when indeed you do want to follow this counsel of the Lord, but do not want to use the means God has given us for it, even His Holy Word; do not want to use your leisure time to read, hear, and think over it; then you tempt God and quench the Spirit. Mark well this last point: You want to repent and be converted, but only by your own work in your heart. You pray for the grace and help of the Spirit to accomplish it, but you do not use the means of the Spirit. In that way you will never get what you have asked for. God has never promised to answer such a prayer. No, God has given us His Word. There He wants to meet us. There He wants to dwell and work in us.

To have access to the Word, to Christian teachers or conversation with brethren of faith, but to despise these means of grace, and still to ask for faith and grace to repent, that is to tempt the Lord. It is as if somebody asks God to maintain his bodily life without wanting to eat what God has given us. That you are sinful and weak and cannot do all that the Spirit prompts you to, that will not drive Him away. He will surely do His own work.

It is hypocrisy and intentional disobedience that drives away the Spirit. But it is not only when the Spirit of God begins His work in the soul, that we are able to grieve Him. No, even Christians who have already been “made partakers of the Holy Ghost” (Heb. 6:4) are still and always in the same danger. It was particularly to the faithful in Ephesus who were already “sealed by the Holy Spirit” that Paul wrote the words: “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.” And what is it that can grieve the Spirit of God? All sin grieves the Holy Spirit of God, even the sin hidden deepest in your heart, such as proud thoughts, evil lusts, envy, falseness. But mark this point! It is only when one turns from God inwardly and begins to excuse the sin, and even render allegiance to it, that the Spirit of God is being driven away.

Where a man punishes himself for his sin, suffers, fights, sighs, and prays against it, there the Spirit is as a doctor in a hospital. He is surely surrounded on all sides by illnesses, infirmities, sores, and groaning. But still He is in His rightful place. There He has His real field of action. The Spirit of God can very well dwell in a sinner’s heart even though it is still full of illness, impurity, sores and abscesses, groaning and sighing. Were it not so, then no Christian would be able to keep the Spirit of God for even a single day. But what drives the Spirit away is explained by the Lord Himself when He says: “They do not let My Spirit punish them.”

Here is the main point. When a human being does not let the Spirit of God punish him but tenders allegiance to, excuses, and defends his evil — that is what grieves and provokes the Holy Spirit so that He must flee from him. “They do not let My Spirit punish them.” This does not happen only when a man stands up against the punishments of the Word openly and says, “I don’t care!” But it also happens when he bends and twists away from the Word and does not want to understand its obvious meaning, when it attacks his bosom sin, and when he does not seek in the Word for a means to escape that sin, but seeks rather a support to be able to keep it. Thus when a man does not intend to abandon or escape sin, but intends to remain therein, this is called the refusal to let the Spirit of God punish him.

Also when the spirit of bondage seeks to capture a man’s heart, if he then does not want to let the Word of the Gospel work concerning grace in Christ, but stubbornly follows reason and feeling, and makes constant objections to the gospel, and to the merciful Savior who offers that grace, then he grieves and provokes the Holy Spirit. In general, when a man does not listen to the holy promptings in his heart, when the Spirit urges a man to the use of the Word, or to private prayer, or to good works; and when He punishes him.

## February 14

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*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men* – Rom. 12:18.

**T**his verse deals with being accommodating and peaceable in all human matters, i.e., in all matters where it is not necessary for us to fight against men because of faithfulness to Christ or the welfare of souls. The apostle by no means urges that we should give way in matters of faith, and let the truth, the glory of Christ, and the welfare of souls be given up in order to have peace and friendship with all men. In fact, by the first words “if it be possible” the apostle had also indicated that there is a limitation to the admonition. It will not always be possible to keep peace with all men, if we are faithful to God and truth. This was David’s experience. He says: “I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war” (Ps. 120:7).

All the world fights against God and His kingdom. If then I want to be a faithful confessor of Christ, I shall necessarily get into disputes with men. This is explained very strongly and decisively by Christ in the words: “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34). “For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Luke 12:52–53). Therefore He said again, “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you” (Luke 6:26).

Here a falseness is revealed in the Christianity of those capable of adjusting themselves to all men so that they never get into dispute because of zeal for Christ. Such criticize the zeal of the faithful and indicate that if these would show more wisdom, humbleness, and meekness they would be able to please this world. May such people only reflect upon the fact that the Lord Christ, the perfect One, who was “meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29), could and would never please the world, nor have peace and friendship with the unbelievers. It is true that Christians may be lacking in wisdom, humbleness, and love, but if they are faithful to Christ they will never be able to please the world. That is contrary to the truth, “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” (James 4:4). Here we see always the inevitable reason for dispute.

But the apostle says furthermore: “*As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*” If it really is for Christ’s sake and because of the enmity of the world against the truth that you get into dispute, then do not worry. Oh, Christian, only see that there is within you no fleshly reason for the dispute. For instance, no self-will, unobligingness, love of faultfinding, etc., in your nature. It is a rather difficult art

to find such things in yourself, because of the inclination of self-conceit always to justify self and throw the blame on others. Still there is a test by means of which you can discover whether the grounds for your dispute with men is carnal, namely, you must seek to find out how much and what nature of love controls your speech. If you get into dispute by speech that has not been pressed forth by a yearning love for souls, and by prayer for blessing, but if it is a speech that flows easily from your lips, then you may readily suspect that there is a fleshly motive within you.

A zeal wanting to correct all you find wrong is not proof enough that you are driven by love. But if you also are in the habit of praying for those to whom you speak, and if you are in the habit of being afraid of your own lack of skill, that is a witness that you are driven by a holy motive. May God reveal the subtlety of our hearts to us! Many men are unhappy martyrs under a constant lack of peace with men, only because of a headstrong and evil temper and an unruly tongue. Therefore the apostle Peter says, as did also David: “For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile ... let him seek peace, and ensue it” (1 Pet. 3:10–11).

But no matter how peaceable, accommodating, and friendly we are, it still will not be possible always to be at peace with men. Not only because of their enmity towards Christ, but also because of many earthly things, men without peace will disturb us. For this fact therefore the apostle says: “As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Even if other men attack you, your property, your person, your reputation, you must still not fight yourself nor give cause for dispute, but you should leave your cause to your faithful and mighty Father who always attends to the humble and submissive.

The Lord Jesus Christ said: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). The one always trying to fight for his right, must suffer much, and lose much. Happy are the Christians who believe in the care of their heavenly Father, and leave Him to defend their cause! If I want to defend my cause myself, then God can justly leave it to me. And then it will always go wrong! If, on the other hand, I leave the matter to God, then it will be His. Then He will defend it, and will always do so in the best way.

## February 15

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*Having made known unto us the mystery of his will,  
according to his good pleasure – Eph. 1:9.*

All human judgment about God is always wrong and distorted, and this is proved by the spirit of all ages and nations. One man has imagined and described God in one way, another in another way. One man imagines that he pleases God with one thing, another with something else. It is pitiable to see how men have gone astray and have been running in darkness. The same thing happens to us as soon as we lose sight of God's Word. What does the eternal, heavenly Word say about the will and counsel of God with regard to our salvation and eternal bliss? Listen! "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

"For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:22–24). "By His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9:12).

"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). Thus read the holy words at which heaven and the world should bow and worship! Now let all the wise of the world, yes, angels and spirits, reason and feeling, say this or that. On the throne in heaven there sits One, the Judge of all that has been created. He speaks words which stand as firm as pillars of rocks in the eternity of all eternities.

The Word says that all flesh is depraved and lost, there is no difference, but it also says that the only begotten Son from the bosom of the Father once offered a sacrifice that pleased the Father, and that is valid eternally. The Word says that therefore we now become justified freely, through no deserving on our own part, by His grace through the redemption that has taken place in Christ Jesus. It says that even though your sins be as scarlet, they shall — by the blood of the sacrifice — be as white as snow — that even though they be as many as the sand in the sea, they shall all disappear. It was not a saint, nor an angel, but the great God Himself who had created thousands of worlds who took on Himself the flesh and blood of human beings and thereby blotted out their sins, in order "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Such should no longer be judged and considered according to his own worthiness, but according to the worthiness of this Mediator, and therefore in Him shall always be considered as righteous and as well-pleasing to God as He.

Such is the eternal decision of the great Majesty. Such is the sentence pronounced by Him. Against that, all our thoughts and opinions are only hay and stubble. What



does it now matter that a blind, weak, childish opinion says otherwise? Who are you that want to dispute with God? Oh, that we would be wise! Oh, that for once God would open and enlighten our eyes rightly, that we might be able to see this heavenly light and avail ourselves of it during our lifetime!

For instance, when I think that I have been more godly and spiritual and therefore more well-pleasing to God, then I should check myself immediately. Such thoughts are wrong and because God has said that all are unprofitable and that nobody at any moment can in himself be well-pleasing to God, nor become righteous by his own works. When at another moment I think that I have been so sinful that God cannot possibly be as gracious to me as before, then I should say again: Such thoughts are wrong!

The eternal judgment of the Word says that in myself I am worthy of condemnation at every moment, but also that my Surety is equally and continuously righteous. Thus at every moment I also am equally righteous and well-pleasing to God in Christ. If righteousness comes by works, then Christ is dead in vain (Gal. 2:21). But if I am more righteous and well-pleasing before God, when I have been more pious; and less righteous before God, when I have been less pious; then to be sure righteousness comes by works — and Christ is dead in vain! May God preserve me graciously from such blasphemy!

Sometimes I think that God must have got tired of me because of all my sins; that He cannot have pleasure in me now; that He is angry and has turned away because of this or that sin. Then I should say: This is not the picture of the true God, but of an abnormal God, a ghost created by my own thoughts. Because neither in heaven or on earth is there a God looking at my poor piousness or ungodliness and being more gracious or ungracious towards me because of it.

Nor does He love me sometimes more, sometimes less according to my works. The only, true God is the God always loving with an equally burning love. As for myself He has at all moments equally great reasons for wrath and condemnation, but in Christ He also has at all moments equally great reasons for pardoning and loving me. Therefore, at all moments God also has an equally strong and burning love, delight, and pleasure in me, and an equal care for me. God has been described like that in the eternal, heavenly Word. If I think otherwise, then it is only my mistake giving a false picture of God. And the reason for this is that the right image of God was lost to man by the Fall.

## February 16

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*For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power* – 1 Cor. 4:20.

**T**his is a serious text, and everybody is likely to admit in his conscience that this is true. The one who desires to stand saved before the throne of God should not thoughtlessly forget this truth, but should rather invoke the Spirit of God for grace to bear it in mind and to examine himself seriously.

That “the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” is so important, because, first of all, every human heart is a wicked and deceitful thing, full of falseness, lies, deceit, and hypocrisy because of which one is always in great danger of deceiving oneself with a seeming piousness, with a Christianity of the lips only, with knowledge and profession, but without possessing true life and power. Secondly, the text we are considering here is a word “in due season” (Matt. 24:45), meaning that the time in which we now live is such that at least in some places, the dear Christians should pay special attention to the fact that “the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.”

It is true that at all times and places, among the awakened there will always be some who will deceive themselves and content themselves only with a store of knowledge and intelligence and a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof (2 Tim. 3:5). But sometimes it happens that whole congregations content themselves with only words and knowledge. At such times and places it becomes specially necessary to remember that the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.

We do not want to hide from ourselves how things were in the congregation to which the apostle addressed these severe words. It was the congregation in Corinth. Paul had preached the gospel to them “not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:4). He had announced to them the counsel of God as regards our salvation, and they had received it simply and had been blessed with a simple faith. But soon such a spirit got a foothold there, that almost all their attention was paid only to the doctrine, not to the practice; no, to the doctrine, teachings, and teachers. It was a matter of Paul and Cephas and Apollos; so that “every one saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ” (1 Cor. 1:12).

It was obvious they thought less about the fact that it was so bad with their own inward condition, than with the application and power of the doctrine on their hearts and life. Therefore also quite terrible things happened among them without their becoming much worried: and in addition they were content with themselves, “puffed up,” strong and brave in very bad conditions. In the very chapter from which we have taken our text the apostle says: “Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us ... we are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised...

But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (vv. 8, 10, 19–20).

Now also where this picture does not completely fit us, it is still a fact that we too are richer in words than in power. Praise the Lord, we are rich in spiritual knowledge, in words and intelligence. We have more of spiritual knowledge than the greatest saints had formerly. Truly one can confess with Bishop Pontoppidan: “If I look at our ancestors, I think that they did more than they knew, but we know more than we do. They are like a fruitful Leah with weak eyes, but we a barren Rachel with a beautiful face.” Therefore what is now the most necessary thing is certainly the practice, the realization. “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.”

May the idea be far from us — the idea that some have had and still have, that what we have enough of is the preaching of faith and that what is lacking is the doctrine of sanctification; that faith has now been preached enough and that the shortcomings in our Christianity should now be remedied by the preaching of law and sanctification. No, it still is true that it is only the despised “foolish preaching,” the preaching of faith that gives the Spirit, life, power, and truth unto sanctification. Where the power and demonstration of godliness are missing, there faith and life in Christ are missing.

But the fault is that we do not take the word to heart to apply it, use it, and realize it right now, but only gather it in our brains in order to sort out the conceptions and get the doctrine clarified. In other words we spend all the time fabricating, polishing, and arranging the weapons, and let the enemy keep the country without using the weapons against him.

All of our attention is directed to doctrines and conceptions whereas the very things the Word calls for are forgotten: the heart’s repentance, faith, true confidence, joy, life, love, and acquaintanceship with God in Christ, leading to the true sanctification which springs therefrom. That is in some way forgotten. Yet hereby we are in danger of losing the doctrine, the true doctrine! And we are without the very thing needed most — the kingdom of God within us. “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.”

## February 17

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*For we walk by faith, not by sight* – 2 Cor. 5:7.

**T**he whole secret of the kingdom of Christ is that it is a kingdom of faith, a kingdom contrary to all reason, feeling, sight, and mind; invisible, strange, mysterious. The one who does not bear this in mind, will never remain strong in faith. We should remember that the kingdom of Christ is like Christ, that the bride should be like her bridegroom, that the characteristic feature of Christianity is that we become “like Christ.” John says: “As He is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17).

But how was Christ in this world? Is not the sum of all knowledge of Christ, the fact that in Him were combined the greatest contrasts: the lowest debasement and the highest elevation! The greatest accumulation of sin (the sin of all the world), and the greatest holiness (His own); the greatest shame and the greatest glory! “He was the most despised and disrespected, full of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3), but still the most glorious, the reflection of the glory of God and the exact image of His Being. He was the servant of all servants, but also the King of all kings and the Master of all masters. He was the poorest, but also the richest.

And as He was, so are we in this world. In the faithful also the greatest contrasts are combined; the lowest debasement (as a condemned sinner) and the greatest exaltation, loftiness, and glory (as a child of God Himself); the greatest distress because of sins, and the greatest righteousness and purity; the greatest poverty and the greatest wealth; the greatest weakness and the greatest strength. One thing we have in ourselves, the other, in Christ; one is the inheritance from Adam, the other the inheritance in Christ; one is felt in all our members, is felt by all our senses, the other is deeply hidden from both our reason and our senses, and must be believed only because of the truthfulness of God — except that Christ now and then meets us and lets us, like Thomas, see and feel the greatness of the glory of God.

It costs us enormously before we can put up with these extremes, these contrasts, and believe what we do not feel, believe in the hidden grace and righteousness, when we see and feel only the contrary. Those to whom Christianity is only a science or a study, I am sorry to say, know this art only too well! But when the kingdom of God in a human being has begun not only to be in word, but also in power, so that he really feels the sting of sin and really believes that his righteousness is only in Christ, he begins to feel then how great is his weakness, impurity, coldness; how weak is his faith, how dim and fearful.

Then we need indeed that splendid art, that great divine grace from on high that enables us to see and believe, in the midst of such wretchedness, that the friendship of God is unchanged, and to see the hidden righteousness, purity, and favor that we have in Christ before God; more particularly as this misery never lets up but

continues perpetually and even grows worse and worse! Humanly speaking, who can hold out at such times?

Oh, what a fight of faith! Because, even if I get quite rid of one or another outward sins, my inward corruption becomes to me more and more insufferable and depressing. I see even more clearly how deeply I have fallen in sin, the closer I approach to the footstool of Jesus. John says: "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). The nearer to the light a soul comes, the more she sees her own impurity. Moreover, God always holds grace back to the extent that faith grows and can be put to the test, or at times when the soul needs a deeper humiliation. Then she feels barren, dead, cold, and weak. There is distress, a powerlessness, a spiritual paralysis, a darkness, and a despair where the soul cannot think of anything else than that she is quite apostate, dead, forsaken by God, and left in a wrong attitude of mind.

Oh, what a hard fight and a high art is required to believe now, to penetrate these thick black clouds and see righteousness triumphant in the midst of sin; life victorious in the midst of death! And the great faithfulness and love of God smiling towards us when we feel abandoned! At such times we need really in earnest to close our eyes to anything we see and feel, and to look only at the Word of God. We need to believe in earnest that all our own righteousness is completely gone, and that God does not judge us even for a moment according to that, but looks only at the merit of His beloved Son. In His worth only are we pure and please God, and have been made well pleasing in Him.

## February 18

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*He [God] hath chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world – Eph. 1:4.*

**H**ere is something great and incorruptible, that cannot be upset by storms and changes in this present time! That which was from the beginning and is eternal and unchangeable! Oh, if we only could wrap this truth around our hearts, what a firm castle it would be against all storms and darts! What a mighty and imperturbable peace and joy! This life, even for a Christian, will be like a howling wilderness, joyless and deplorable, if he does not continually keep these great eternal facts before his eyes!

When now the apostle says that we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of this world, he thereby wants to remind us of the eternal, firm, and imperturbable truth of the grace of God towards us in Christ. He wants to say: What I now announce to you is nothing new, strange, or uncertain. It is extremely old. It is older than heaven and earth, because before the foundation of the world God had chosen us in His only begotten Son, and had decided, in the fullness of time, to send Him to us to be revealed in our nature, to become our Life and our Light.

Nothing is so unchangeable as the eternal counsel of God. What God has decided “according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:5) can never in eternity be changed. “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom. 11:29). Neither can any other power make God’s decision come to nought nor prevent it. He who has created millions of worlds and prescribed for them their unchangeable paths by His almighty Word, will He allow His eternal plan to be upset or prevented?

Although His adversary, the devil, betrayed man into sin and death, will God therefore let him remain in death eternally, without any hope or means of salvation? Never! The Life that was with the Father had to be revealed in flesh and become the Light, Salvation, and Hope of mankind. As “He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world,” therefore we should never forget the eternal counsel of God regarding mankind and “the immutability of His counsel” (Heb. 6:17), which stands forever, with all its richness in consolation and salvation, no matter what happens to us, and no matter what we see or feel in ourselves.

After all, God created man in His own image, to be His child and heir; and before the foundation of the world He laid the foundation for our salvation. He has chosen us in Christ. That is, in His eternal counsel He determined by Christ to remedy the Fall, to make Him our second Adam, our Mediator, and the Captain of our salvation. So that if anybody in his distress addresses himself to Christ and embraces Him with faith, he shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

When He had decided such things, He created man to be His child and the heir of His kingdom, though He clearly foresaw the Fall and all the sin and misery this would bring to mankind. He knew well also how it was to be remedied. The counsel of His will was not to come to nought. Therefore from the beginning also He prepared the mansions of heaven for man. Christ says that in the last day He will invite His faithful: “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).

Therefore He also prepared for him a paradise on earth with all royal riches and splendor. All this He did for mankind. And He filled the earth with everything necessary for his needs or pleasure and said: “I have given you” all this. “Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28–29).

To consider this the original intent of God for man can often prove a mighty consolation and joy to strengthen a sorrowful heart. It has solaced many a Christian in deep grief, when it has been given to him by the Spirit to think: “Why, after all, I am still a man! And God has surely great, eternal thoughts of grace for man in His heart. He has an unchangeable counsel for him and a definite Father’s heart! Besides He is my almighty Creator! I can never sink so deep that He cannot raise me up again, and, to the praise of His glorious grace, make something precious of me.”

When our first parents broke His commandment in such an unworthy way, in spite of the fact that they had all the necessary power to keep it, with what heartfelt kindness He had mercy upon the fallen children, sought them, and comforted them! And as He has given His only begotten Son to be our Brother and Savior, then He cannot be so indifferent about man. Rather, He must have a deep Father’s feeling for him. Who can measure the good such a great Father will still do to me? Such reflections over what has been from the beginning can give us exceeding joy and delight, when we receive grace to consider the fact more deeply.

## February 19

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*Whatever is not of faith is sin* – Rom. 14:23.

**F**aith, conscience, and a good inner relationship with God are the tender apples of the eye, the heart, and the source of life in the new creature! Many things are important in the spiritual life, such as love, humility, honesty, good deeds, but life stands alone and one alone is the heart in the body! It is faith, conscience, the inner consciousness of God's pleasure. Two things belong to this. First, that by means of the gospel and the grace in Christ we have become free from the Spirit of the bondage of the law, that we have received forgiveness for our sins and now live in an evangelical spirit of adoption, and that we have an intimate friendship with God.

This is the first condition and the source of all true piety, love, desire, and power to do good. If this intimate spirit of adoption is missing, then all that God loves is difficult, heavy, and impossible, and all our works are the forced and unwilling service of a servant. The consequence is, first, that these works do not please God, because He does not want to have any forced service, and "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse" (Gal. 3:10), and secondly, that I am powerless, that I cannot even get any power to do good, but that by the law sin becomes stronger and stronger. On the contrary when I have been assured of the friendship of God, when God says to me: "Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. 9:2) — oh, then I live, then I burn, then He and His yoke are sweet for me, and His burden light.

When my God says to me: You are Mine, then I go away with a blessed secret in my heart. I have a Friend, a treasure, a glory that is matchless. Then this "love of Christ constraineth me" (2 Cor. 5:14) to serve Him in everything, to live no longer unto myself, but unto Him who died for me and rose again. Here we find the heart and life engaged in true piety! Further, for this faith and consciousness of the pleasure of God, I need to know that my life and the things I will to do, indeed please God; that I live so and do them simply because they are according to the Word and will of God.

My shortcomings due to carnal weakness belong to the sins I daily include in the Lord's Prayer and for which I pray: "Forgive us our trespasses," and for these I believe there is an eternal and continuous forgiveness. But the life I lead knowingly and willingly as my own choice must be in accordance with the Word and will of God, otherwise it cannot stand together with faith and a good conscience.

The consciousness, which one could call faith in deeds, is really the faith of which the apostle speaks in our text: "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin." The heart must first be pardoned by justifying faith in Christ and live in friendship with God; then it must have its law of life in the will of God and do its deeds in the



knowledge that they are in accordance with the will of God; and everything that does not spring from this source is sin. Here we see how the first commandment is the source and condition for the fulfillment of all the other commandments. God is the God of the heart, and the heart believes in, loves, and fears God above all: this is the foundation of all Christian life.

It is not only right that we spend so many words on this subject because next to the great principle that we are justified by faith, this is the first and important point of teaching, viz., what comprises a right Christian life, or what we can do that is pleasing to God. All down the years the devil has used all his power to distort these two main points. If we look at the time of Christ, we find that it was chiefly on these two points that doctrine was distorted. The point in all that the Lord taught, was that first of all, no human being was himself righteous before God, but that all our righteousness before God was dependent on His own “going to the Father”; and then, that not merely outer works made any life pleasing to God, but that God wanted to have the heart.

The one who now really wants to be on good terms with God, to walk in His ways, and to lead a true Christian life should prove himself according to this paragraph! It is horrible what hypocrisy is practiced when one truly wants to lead a Christian life, but completely forgets to pay attention to the main condition with regard to it, i.e., to live in friendship with God, in belief in His favor. “Let us not tempt the Lord!” He knows what your situation is like. The Lord will judge according to your faith. What does it help you if you labor with devotion and Christian zeal, yet at last the Lord rejects it all as hypocrisy and sin? For “whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”

## February 20

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*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men — Matt. 5:13.*

O h, that all Christians who are truly born again would understand and consider the danger they face when and where Christianity meets with approval and peace, and the face of the world is religious and mild. Then there is a danger that the Christians will be lulled to sleep, resulting in lukewarmness and equality with the world, and loss of spiritual power. Such conditions already exist in some places to a smaller or greater degree, and it is sad to see how under such conditions the salt tends to lose its savor. Such make for themselves a moderate, respectable, and pleasant Christianity of their own — a Christianity centered around certain devotions and some beautiful works of humanity which the world can accept and praise, but which omits the necessity for the new birth of the heart, and repentance before God, not thinking it to be important! But listen to what Christ says: “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

When by pleasing men a Christian loses the power of the Spirit, so that he can no longer rebuke evil by words and example and uphold his profession of Christ; then he is no longer useful, but fit to be “trodden under foot of men.” He becomes so exceedingly flexible and adaptable to all men, that he lets everything please him, and at least by his silence, strengthens the sinful, godless ways of life which he should rather rebuke. Then the salt has lost its savor and the light is under the bushel. And the whole reason is that such a man wants to have peace and friendship with all men.

No, it is still deeper. There is already some lack in the spiritual life itself, in the knowledge of sin and in a faithful relationship to the Savior. If this is renewed and Christ becomes dearer to you, then the zeal of the Spirit becomes mightier than the friendship or hatred of all men. “Have salt in yourselves” (Mark 9:50), the Lord says, by which He speaks of the zeal of the true love that only the Spirit of God can work in a man. It does not refer to the salt of nature or the bitter salt of the vexed mind. You must willingly be tender, mild, and gentle in your admonitions, and be on your guard against all rude and unsuitable manners, when it is a matter of touching so delicate a thing as the self-esteem of others. It is best to concern yourself with these matters if your heart is ruled by a love and humility that is obvious in your entire being. But do not let carefulness and humility become a powerless flexibility which does nothing. This, only out of regard for human feeling and peace, allows the souls of your fellow creatures to go to hell, without your

having tried to warn them by even one word. Think of eternity! “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 19:19). “Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good” (Rom. 12:9). “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:6).

But it is not only by means of profession and benignant, brotherly admonition that we should prove the power and earnestness of Christianity, but also by our life. A Christianity which does not, like salt, make the eyes of the world smart, but can meet with her approval and be praised by her as just right, is doubtless Christianity without salt, power, and anointing. Christ our Lord says: “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!” (Luke 6:26). So also the apostle says: “the friendship of the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4).

Oh, stop and reflect upon such words! We cannot challenge the validity of them. They are the words of God. If only incidentally or in some isolated matter you are praised by the world, then it is something different, and that may happen to a Christian according to the words of the apostle: “By honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report” (2 Cor. 6:8). But if the real direction of your life and your wandering pleases the world, that is contrary to the words and example of Christ and His apostles. Please stop and consider this so that you will not be running in vain. Years pass by, and death often comes when one does not expect it. Then if your very way is not right, is it not something indescribably sad?

## February 21

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*Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises – 2 Pet. 1:4.*

**I**n the beginning the Lord created this peculiar race, man, after His own likeness, to be His children and heirs. And in spite of the deep Fall of mankind He has given man His greatest and most precious promises, so that nothing less is required than that we shall be “like Him,” “brethren” of His eternal Son and “joint-heirs” with Him of the eternal and unsurpassed glories of heaven. For this great purpose, on the very day of the Fall He gave to man the greatest promise of all time, the promise in which all the others are comprised as in a seed grain; the promise of a Savior, the woman’s seed that was to bruise the serpent’s head. That promise was continually renewed, first to the patriarchs and then to the prophets, and was painted before the eyes of the people of Israel by the innumerable bloody sacrifices in their divine service. These sacrifices portrayed only the great promise of a coming atonement.

The Old Testament is filled with these promises of this Savior. We can get a complete survey of these promises simply by recalling the names under which He was promised — the most important being, for instance, the woman’s Seed, the Breaker of the head of the serpent, the Blessing of Abraham, a Root of Jesse, the Son of David, the Redeemer, the Lord in Israel, the King of Zion, the great Prophet, the Consolation of all the Gentiles, a Witness to the people, a Teacher and Commander to the people, a Light to the Gentiles, the Lord’s Hand, the Anointed of the Lord, the Deliverer coming out of Zion, the Declarer of righteousness in the great congregation, the Rose of Sharon, etc. And as regards this promised Person it is expressly said, that “the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all,” that He “bears our sins,” that “He has given His life as an offering for sin,” that “by His stripes we are healed,” that “by the blood of the covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit” (Zech. 9:11), that He “led captivity captive” (Ps. 68:18), that He was a plague for death, and the destruction of the grave (Hos. 13:14), that “by His knowledge He should justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:11), etc.

“But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4–5). Then the angel announced His birth, His name, and His purpose to a virgin in Israel: “Thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). And when the great moment had come that He should finish His work, “the same night in which He was betrayed” He Himself said as regards His blood: that it was “shed ... for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28). Then a multitude of evangelists went out and

gave the same witness with tongues of fire: “The blood of Jesus Christ,” the Son of God, “cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

See now, from this great witness spring precious and great promises to every individual Christian believer. Everyone who, feeling downhearted and guilty before the law of God, invokes the name of Jesus in order to get forgiveness for his sins, receives the definite promises that “all his sins are cast into the depths of the sea” (Mic. 7:19) and will “never be remembered” (Isa. 43:25); that he is clean in the eyes of the Lord, so that God Himself calls him white as snow; that all his sin will be as far away from him as the “east is from the west” (Ps. 103:12), that the mercy of God is as greater than his sin as the heaven is higher than the earth (Ps. 103:11), that the believer has been made “accepted in the beloved” (Eph. 1:6), that we are no longer “under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14), that though “the law has been our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal. 3:24), we, now that faith is come, “are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal. 3:25), etc. All these can certainly be called “exceedingly great and precious promises” (2 Pet. 1:4).

Please notice that they are still called *promises*, in spite of the fact that we already have received the things promised. This is not only a Biblical way of speaking, but also has a meaning we should never forget, viz., that all this we have received is still so strange and secret to our feeling, our reason, and all our senses, that only by relying firmly on what the Lord says of it, can we keep our consolation when we cannot see and feel anything other than that we still have sin in us, and are under the law, so that before God we are abominable and awful instead of clean and comely. Therefore, if you want to remain strong in faith, you should be prepared to feel and see the contrary in your self all the time, and yet should most insistently keep your eyes fixed on what the great God has done and said. Otherwise you will soon be wallowing in your own wretchedness.

You must have the Word of God so impressed on you that you can see the sin in your self and still say: In God’s sight I have no sin. I am perfectly free, clean, and holy; all my sin is no sin before God who knows what the blood of Christ is worth; there is nothing to be condemned in those who are in Jesus Christ. Although I have no righteousness of myself, I am perfectly righteous in the eyes of God, who knows what the righteousness of Christ is worth. It is all based on the eternal Word of God regarding His Son.

## February 22

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*Now the end of the commandment is charity* – 1 Tim. 1:5.

**T**he greatest and most unhappy evil arising from a lighthearted and false knowledge of the law is that souls who otherwise do not despise God, but want to be apart from the world, and to be the children and followers of God still do not become anything more than work-saints, conceited and blind Pharisees, much more inaccessible to the Spirit of the Lord than the most ungodly sinners. As Christ said: “The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you” (Matt. 21:31).

This stupefying, captivating, and blinding work-holiness-Pharisaism arises because a human being is so false before the holy law of God, that he looks only at works, at how he should live, and does not pay attention to the heart, its love, purity, and holiness, which is the first and main thing God demands in His law. Instead he makes for himself a daily program of certain pious observations, of things which can be seen; for instance, he leaves certain obvious sinful habits, and begins to read the Word and pray daily. By this he is consoled, as if he had now done what he should, and as if God had only demanded so much of us — when in actual fact he has hardly noticed what God does demand in the first commandment, and much less has fulfilled it. In fact he does not at all care about the things that God demands of us first of all, and that form the first and greatest commandment. If then he goes and overlooks what is greatest in the law, it is utterly false before the face of God. In fact it is making a mock of God.

If a man in a certain sense can make such a difference between the commandments of God, he has thereby proved that in his piety he is not seeking for God, but only cares about certain works, and about himself, his own splendid qualities and holiness, but not about God, nor His will and commandments. These, he mocks at and despises. He is delighted because he has been able to leave this or that sinful practice. For instance, he used to swear or take the name of God in vain. Now he does that no longer. Before he used to profane the sabbath day by worldly work or pastimes; now he does so no more, but wants to devote all day to the Word of God. Before he lived in some unwholesome affluence of food, drink, or clothes, but now he has left that. Yes, maybe he lived in some vice, in fornication, in dishonesty in his business and work, but now by the grace of God he has left such sins. Is this not one victory after another? Is this not sanctification? Is this not a converted human being, a Christian? He does even more. Before he never bothered about the weal or woe of others; now he takes the distress of all the world to his heart and gives people both bodily and spiritual help. Are these not the fruits of the Spirit? Is this not that love which is the fulfillment of the law? And should not a soul having the witness of such

works be happy? Should he not have the right to believe in the merits of Christ, and take them to himself?

Yet at the same time he is acting falsely before God. He does not care about God's first and greatest commandment as regards the attitude of the heart. He does not care about what is commanded with regard to the love of God, the purity of the thoughts and desires, the purity from self-conceit, pleasure in itself, envy, hatred. He is a pious impostor not caring about these inward sins that he does not see. And why does he not see them? It is simply because of that sweet veil of outward holiness and good works that covers his inner being, so that he cannot see the godlessness prevailing there. Is this not acting falsely before the law of God, pretending not to notice how first of all God sees the heart; how every commandment of God first demands inward holiness and the realization that God is holy and zealous and does not allow Himself to be cheated by works, but wants to have the complete human being conformed to His mind, as He says: "Ye shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2).

It was because of this hypocrisy, this false playing with the law, that the Lord Christ always attacked the Pharisees, for instance when He said: "Ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess... Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity... Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:25, 27-28, 23). Oh, that we would wake up and reflect upon the zeal of the Lord Christ for the law and that in the light of this zeal God sees and judges *our* relationship to it!

## February 23

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*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy* – Exod. 20:8.

**T**he very fact that the Lord attaches special importance to the keeping holy of the sabbath day, proclaims that He does not simply say: Thou shalt keep the sabbath day holy; but tells us also to plan for it in advance. A less important matter can be undertaken at once, without any thoughts in advance. A matter one must think of in advance must be specially important and pressing.

The second obvious thing in this text is that we should arrange our temporal matters in advance so that it will be possible for us to have the sabbath day undisturbed for the proper sanctifying of it. Many lose the blessing of the sabbath, and the rest of the soul in God and His Word, only because they do not think before hand of liberating the sabbath from such work or such visits as prevent them and their house from keeping the sabbath holy. Many suffer from hindrances which they themselves could have removed if they had obeyed this command of God: *“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.”*

What should we then do to keep the sabbath day holy? How is it kept holy, and how is it profaned? Luther expresses this in a short, but comprehensive summary thus: “We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.” This, in the spirit of the New Testament, is what the sabbath day commandment demands. We should have a mind loving only the Word of God. Then we will no doubt keep the sabbath day holy in work and deed. First, it is rather difficult to prescribe the outer deed so that it suits every case and circumstance occurring. And secondly, the sabbath day is not kept holy even by means of most excellent devotions and most beautiful works, if these do not spring from the fear of God and love of God and His Word. Because without this love and this fear of God, they are nothing else than hypocrisy towards God. Fear of God and the Spirit of love must live in your heart. And then it will also tell you in every individual case what you should do or should not do, as regards the outward deed. The main thing is that we fear and love God so that we do not despise His Word, but keep it holy, gladly hear and learn it.

What the third commandment forbids us is to have a vain and ungodly mind despising the holy Word of God and therefore also seeking to do what it pleases on His day. Now if we glance at the world to see what it does in general in this matter, then we shall run into some conditions so dreadful and lawless, that we shall begin to cry out with grief and horror. We shall point out one such example. As regards the institution of the sabbath day, the first reference to it we find in the Scripture are these words, “And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it” (Gen. 2:3). Thus the seventh day is a day “blessed” by God. With a full heart we must also admit, that it became a day blessed above all other days in this present time, the day



on which God wants specially to meet mankind and shed forth a blessing over the human race; a blessing that only the eternal and endless praise sung by the blessed multitudes before the throne of God will be able rightly to assess; a blessing of a high, heavenly, and eternal kind, that will culminate only in never-ending eternal bliss. Furthermore it is said that God *sanctified* that day. It was to be the holiest of all the days, separated only for holy and heavenly things.

But what a strange and terrible thing it is, to think of what this day is in fact to the unfaithful and worldly. In both the things for which God sanctified the day we find the other extreme: a great curse instead of blessing, and of all our days it is the most unholy. Workdays could be called holy in comparison with the sabbath day in the way the world uses it. On workdays most of the children of this world quietly and decently do the work of their lawful vocations. But on the sabbath day they think they should go out and amuse themselves and that in ways that grant what the heart desires — namely sin, the satisfying of the flesh. Some indulge in graver lusts such as gluttony and drinking, playing cards and dancing, and nightly dissipations. Others indulge in finer ways, by laziness and pastimes, gossiping, joking, and thoughtless company, watching plays and games. In addition to this, things that would be innocent on other days, such as worldly work and worldly studies, become a sin on the sabbath day which has been sanctified by the Lord. Looking at all these things, it is truly summed up when Sunday is called Sindy!

The sabbath can become a curse also in a finer, spiritual, and hidden way. Even with those who keep the sabbath day in the outward sense, by regular attendance at church and an outward use of the Word, but without the demands of obedience and a holy fear of the Lord speaking to them from its pages, without repentance and obedience, such are cursed by what they hear so that it would have been better for them if they had done only worldly work on that day. You see, the only fruit they get from what they hear is an increased hardness of their hearts and blindness. Because the more a mind is trained to hear the Word of God in vain, the more it will become blunted and hardened. The one not wanting honestly before God to obey and follow His Word immediately will only become hardened by hearing it. In this way the day the Lord God blessed becomes a curse to the unrepentant and false mind.

## February 24

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*The Lord shall rejoice in his works – Ps. 104:31.*

**O**f course, everybody loves what he has made himself! Much more than the Lord, all the works of whom are sheer beauty and perfection. Think deeply over this fact, because it brings with it tremendous comfort! Will God not be satisfied with what He has made Himself? He must surely rejoice in His own works! But what and where are His works? Is it the devil in hell? God preserve us! In his present shape he is his own master. Are they the angels in heaven? Not even they! In the covenant of works they have themselves earned their gloriousness and gained their crowns as the result of a struggle. Are they then the self-righteous with their own merits and virtues? Never! Those are their own works, and they will themselves be responsible for them. Where then do we find the works of the Lord which are His delight?

Where a publican smites upon his breast saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” (Luke 18:13). Where a Bartimeus cries by the highway side: “Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!” Where a woman from Canaan speaks about the dogs and the crumbs, and a contrite and brokenhearted Mary Magdalene washes the feet of Jesus with her tears. Where a Paul exclaims happily: “I obtained mercy” (1 Tim. 1:13), and an Asaph: “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee” (Ps. 73:25). And when a Simon Peter begins to falter in his speech when he says: “Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee” (John 21:17).

Yes, there, where such things take place! Where stony hearts become changed into soft clay in His hand, and faces hard as steel into wax, so that He can impress His image thereon. Where souls who have never asked for the Lord now begin to thirst for the living God as the hart panteth after the fresh water. Where the righteous begin to coo like doves on the ruins of their righteousness; and the wise begin to consider their wisdom foolishness. Where poor sinners begin to weep at His feet, and condemned evildoers gladly dare to invoke Him as their Defender against the accuser.

There, there are His works! And where His works are, there is His delight. His delight, then, is among the children of men; and that among poor repenting sinners. In them He delights. On them He feasts His eyes. Does not a friend of nature delight in a beautiful landscape? Does not the one who has planted a vineyard rejoice at the sight of its blooming and fruitfulness? Even thus the Lord has His delight in the garden He has planted on earth with His blood of atonement and His Spirit.

Does not the new creation in a sinner delight his eye? He cannot look enough at it, because it is His work. He says to His dove: “Let me see thy countenance,” for “thy countenance is comely!” (Song of Sol. 2:14). “But,” you say, “this describes

*His* dove, the pious, lovable souls. In them He can have His delight. Not in me and those like me; because I am an abominable sinner!” What are you saying? Does God merely delight in your piousness? Can you please God by your own works? Have you thrown away the truth so full of comfort, that “the Lord shall rejoice in His works”! That we have been made well pleasing in His dear Son, and not in ourselves? But you say: “I find sheer sin and impurity within myself. Is this the work of the Lord?”

The very fact that you find sheer sin and impurity within yourself is the work of the Lord. The sin is not the work of the Lord, but the fact that you feel it within yourself. That is not the work of nature, nor of the devil. The inspiration declared by the serpent: “Ye shall be as gods,” has filled the whole of our human nature with self-idolatry. Therefore a contrite and sorrowful spirit is such a work of the Lord that God and His angels rejoice in it. It is the work of the Lord that brings lost sons and daughters into the arms of the Father; that drives the sinner to the mercy seat to wrap himself in the righteousness of Christ, “the best robe” (Luke 15:22). Here is the greatest delight and joy of the heart of God! The one who has put on Christ is holy and glorious before God, even if in himself, and in his own eyes he is a most abominable sinner.

## February 25

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*Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord – Col. 3:20.*

**T**his obedience to our parents and to those called by the names of father and mother stretches so far that it does not allow more than only one exception, viz., if obedience to one's parents comes in conflict with obedience to God. Because then the Word says: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), and "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37). With only this exception the Word says otherwise: "Children, obey your parents in all things: for it is well pleasing unto the Lord."

Likewise the servants are admonished to "obey in all things their masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: as to the Lord, and not unto men." With reference to the authorities it says likewise: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" (Rom. 13:1). "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by Him" (1 Pet. 2:13–14). Finally, with regard to teachers, the Word of God also has its admonitions and commands: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves" (Heb. 13:17).

We see therefore that there is a limit to obedience — a limit that obedience must not surmount, so that obedience to our parents, authorities, and teachers will not become disobedience to God, His Word, and our conscience. Because if our superiors are unworthy enough to demand obedience in matters where the revealed Word and the wakened conscience say No, then we must respectfully, but resolutely refuse to obey, whether our action be called disobedience or revolt or anything else.

But apart from that, we are commanded to unrestricted obedience. And there is not even one matter about which so many serious and hearty admonitions are given so plainly as about this obedience. To be sure this obedience may sometimes be rather trying when those having the right to command us misuse this right and give hard and unjust orders. Or when they show a lack of discernment, so that those obeying think that they understand things much better, though they now only are compelled to obey and act. But as long as the order is not contrary to the Word of God and the conscience, we are obliged to render willing obedience "not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward" (1 Pet. 2:18).

The only thing the obeying person has the right to do is to give his suggestions meekly and respectfully. But if these do not lead to any result, then we must obey, even if thereby we suffer injustice, or see that the same thing could be performed with much more wisdom and intelligence. The Lord has not commanded us in this

respect to subject the commands of our father or mother to a critical examination, but has commanded us to obey, to obey in all things.

The seeming hardness of this command of God will be transformed into sheer pleasure, and what is bitter into sheer sweetness, if we only bear in mind that in this way we are doing the will of the Lord, serving Him and not men; and that our obedience to capricious parents, hard masters, and unjust authorities is well pleasing to God. Is it not a fact that if we really want to know how we can serve the Lord and do what is well pleasing to Him, then we will even want to submit ourselves to the most difficult situations in order to be able to say: "Now I know that I have done something God Himself has commanded, and no doubt this is well pleasing to Him"?

Even a child or a servant in a humble sphere can please God every day, if such only obediently do what father or mother, master or mistress commands. Because about this the Lord has announced His definite will. So He wants to be obeyed, and He has declared His highest pleasure in such obedience. Therefore, as Luther says: "Even if you do such a small thing as sweep the floor or pick up a straw, out of obedience to your parents or masters, and do so in faith and love, then such deeds, that appear so small, are better and greater before God than if, without being commanded by God, you convert the whole world by performing miracles."

Our deeds should fully be judged according to the revealed Word of God, where He has made known His will, so that we may know whether they please Him or not. If, according to the Word, we can look at our obedience to our parents and those called by the names of father and mother, and then at the spirit, a willing spirit and conscience, this obedience would become easy and sweet, yes, it would become a beautiful divine service, no matter how trying it may often be to our flesh and blood. What can delight my mind more, or make my work sweeter, than to be able to say about it: "God Himself has commanded this. This is well pleasing to God. I know that for certain!"

## February 26

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*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness – Gen. 1:26.*

**T**he first noteworthy thing in this text is that the Lord says: “Let Us — let Us make man.” Here a consultation is intimated. “Let Us make man.” The Lord does not say: “I want to make man,” or “May the earth produce man,” but He says: “Let Us make man.” The multitude of all the other different creatures was created without any such consultation, but only by an almighty commandment. However, when God wanted to create man, then a counsel was held. But with whom did the Lord confer? No doubt all the three Persons of the Deity consulted with one another. The being that was to be created was not only to have an earthly and corruptible body, but also an immortal spirit. And this was to be taken from the Spirit of God Himself and to be fashioned for an eternal life with God in heaven. The Lord says: “Let Us make man in Our image.” When in His eternal foreknowledge God foresaw the Fall of man and all the depravity and misery this would bring about, He did not want to let this important being out of His creating hand before He had first held a counsel about him, and the Son, the eternal Word, had undertaken to save him.

The second noteworthy thing related to the creating of man is that man was created in quite a different way from all, even from the chief of the animals. When the animals were created God commanded: “Let the waters bring forth!” “Let the earth bring forth!” Thus it seems as if God did not act directly when they were created. But by His almighty Word He influenced some powers which had already been sent into Nature. But when man was to be created no such powers of Nature were allowed to participate. Then God worked alone and directly. It was a work where all the persons of the Deity united and said: “Let Us make man!” Thus man has been born neither of the water, nor of the earth as certain heathen peoples have declared. Man has been created by God in a special and direct way.

This fact becomes still more noteworthy when we look at the origin of the two constituents of man, body and soul. Of this it says in Gen. 2:7: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Note this first: God made man. It was thus the work of God Himself, and man became the most wonderful masterpiece on earth. And God made the body of man of earth to remind us forever that we are dust and worms of the earth. For this reason the first man also got the name Adam which means “of earth, earthy, the child of earth,” so that we might never forget how corruptible our body and time are, and that we should always seek what belongs to the soul and eternity. “And God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” What a high and noble origin! The soul, the immortal soul, the child of eternity created to live with God in this present time and also in eternity, has come so directly from

God, that the Scripture here says that God breathed life into man. Well may we exclaim with David: "I praise thee; for I am ... wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14). This is the reason why Paul could say: "We are the offspring of God" (Acts 17:29). By this we see how both the body and the soul, the child of earth and the child of eternity, are the special work of God.

In addition to this, here is now the third and most noteworthy thing. Namely, that God created man in His own image. The Spirit of the Lord has especially wanted to draw our attention to this by repeating it many times. The words read thus: "God said, Let Us make man in Our image. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him." Here is repeated by several different expressions the fact that man was to be the image of God. Even if in this present time we can never rightly understand this image of God, the fact already is noteworthy that man was created in the image of God, because this means something incomprehensibly great.

Because of this also the Son of God could come to earth and become man. He became our Brother and like us, and did not feel ashamed to call us brethren. He came to restore what had been destroyed by the Fall of man. Therefore, by Him we will also become partakers of the same glory for which we were intended in creation. By the new birth, the new creation, we become new creatures in Christ and partakers of the nature of God.

And the new man should daily be renewed in the knowledge and image of Him that has created him. But the image of God in us will never become fully restored until in the resurrection we receive new, pure, and immortal bodies and Christ becomes revealed in all those who believe. As John says: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

## February 27

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*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin – Rom. 4:8.*

**L**ook at these words: “the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin”! Is there such a man upon earth? Where is he? Have you seen such a man? Dare we confess that we do not really believe in the Word of God? Yet I should like to see a man so fortunate as to stand in such a relationship with God that God never imputes his sins to him. And who is so fortunate? It is he, says the apostle, “unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,” and “whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered.”

You say, But how would I know such a fortunate human being? What are his characteristic features, from which I could recognize him, so that perhaps I also could be, or become such a blessed person? The apostle says that such feels wicked in himself and therefore cannot apply himself to works, but only believes on “Him that justifieth the ungodly” (Rom. 4:5).

David also gives the same description of the blessed man to whom God does not impute his sins. He describes him as one from whom spiritual guile, by means of which a man conceals his sin from the Lord, is gone, and he now confesses his transgressions unto the Lord (Ps. 32:5). First it means that he is not a proud, unbroken human being, who can trust in his own deeds and remain away from the mercy seat; a man who plays such deceit before God that he presents Him his offerings of beautiful deeds, devotions, holy activities, prayers, etc. Yet at the same time he hides his sins either because he does not know of any sin great enough to alarm him, or is deliberately avoiding the matter in order to be able to stay in sin.

It seems to have been thus with David at the time when he hid his iniquity before the Lord, and then called doing so, “guile in the spirit.” Usually the first step in “confessing unto the Lord” is taken when this guile has been driven out. But, this confessing also includes confidence in the grace of God, because the one who does not believe in the grace of God flees from God, and hides his sins. He does not come to Christ to confess them. Christ explains this when He said to poor sinners and sinful women who had come to Him in agony: “Thy faith hath saved thee” (Luke 7:50). There is always faith in that heart that cannot remain away from the mercy seat.

Is this your story? Does this describe you that read this? Then you are that blessed man to whom God does not impute any sin. No matter how poor, sinful, and unworthy you may be, you are now in continual grace and friendship with God. You are a child of grace that He will never judge according to the law, to whom He will never impute your sins. It is true that He sees them, but He says: I do not impute them to you because you believe in My beloved Son, and I have made Him to be a Mercy Seat.



It is an important and serious fact in the great divine truth that the faithful are a people to whom God does not impute any sin. If then you still feel much sin in yourself, please do not forget how this text reads. It does not say: "Blessed is the man with whom God does not find any sin," but "Blessed is the man to whom God will not impute sin." It does not say: "Blessed are those who have not committed any iniquities," but "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven."

In this matter one must have a firm faith which clings steadily to the promise, and does not let itself be led astray by appearances or feelings. The most miserable experience of sin, and the most dreadful storms of inward distress or outward scourging cannot make this divine truth come to nought, that God forgives and does not impute sin, but keeps His faithful ones by His eternal peace. Look at the experiences of the man whose words the apostle has quoted here.

Look at the history of David. What great grace and what miserable experiences! Look at his high calling to be a symbol for, and an ancestor of Christ; a little shepherd boy appointed to be the king and prophet of Israel. Look at God's testimony of him (1 Sam. 13:14) and at the overflowing of his heart in the Psalms. What great grace and what a burning heart for the Lord! And still, what dreadful siftings by the devil, what dreadful outbreaks of sin, falls, and transgressions, and what remorse and fear before God. Then what scourging and bitter humiliations, and again what repentance and weeping before the Lord. "Because of my sins," he says. And even so, no complete rejection by God. "God is angry," says David in Ps. 7 and in Ps. 103: He will not "keep His anger forever," but "as far as heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards them that fear Him."

## February 28

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*Thou shalt not kill* – Exod. 20:13.

If we pay proper attention to the explanation of the Lord Christ in Matt. 5 regarding this commandment, we shall find that the look and the thoughts of God are somewhat deeper than ours; that God looks at our inward being; that the great Creator and Father of Spirits has our spirit, our heart, our innermost thoughts before His eyes. By the word “not kill” He means much more than thou shalt not deprive a human being of his life.

He does not only look at your hand, but at yourself, the whole of your being, your heart, your emotions, your tongue, your look, your most secret motives, yes, at your love or lack of love, when He says: “*Thou shalt not kill.*” And what does the word *thou* mean? Certainly not your hand, your tongue or a certain limb. But more certainly your whole being, and first of all, your soul. Because if I say: “You shall not do this, or that,” I do not speak to your hand, but to your entire person. Yes, even if I were to say: “Your hand shall not do this and that,” I still would not really be speaking to your hand but to yourself, to your soul, to your intellect, and to your heart, which rule over your hand. Because the hand is only a servant of the soul, intellect, and will.

From this we can understand, that God looks at the inward being. Therefore the words “Thou shalt not kill” mean exactly the same as if He were to say: “All that is within you shall not kill.” And as many ways of killing as one can invent, whether by one’s hand, tongue, heart, or by signs and gestures, by angry glances, or by ears not wanting to hear the truth, all this is meant by the words to kill; because your heart and everything within you is so involved that before the eyes of God you are a murderer.

In order then to summarize what is forbidden in the fifth commandment, we first understand the deed itself to be manslaughter, that no man as a man has the right to shorten the lifetime of any human being. No man as a man! On the other hand if the authorities sentence an evildoer to death, then it is not the deed of a man, but of God, who in His law has expressly given command concerning the killing of human beings, and moreover has ordained the powers (authorities) in order that they shall not bear the sword in vain. The power is “the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom. 13:14).

God also forbids even the very smallest beginning of manslaughter, even if the deed is not carried out completely. Because the anger of the heart, an anger that usually cannot be concealed, but which reveals itself at least by a dark face, or bitter words and gestures, is not only sinful before God, but is also the beginnings of manslaughter. In short, anything a bitter, hating, envious, revengeful, and unloving

mind will ever think, speak, or do against its neighbor, is sin against the fifth commandment. It is manslaughter before God.

Take, for example, a father who punishes his child in unrestrained anger. He is, of course, the right person to punish him. But we are speaking of the father who does not punish out of love, or desire and care for the good of the child, but punishes in anger with a vexed mind, and in unrestrained rage. At the moment of punishing he does not think of the injury that can be caused to the body and soul of his child. He is only seeking to satisfy his passion. Does not such a father stand indicted as the murderer of his child?

Or again, there is an impatient mother who sooner or later, pours out the passion of her heart on her child, with continuous unplanned cursing and punishment for both great and small offenses. And she does not realize that her anger is like a consuming fire by which she destroys both the spiritual and bodily vitality of the child. What is such a mother before God? We speak about a mother ruled only by her unrestrained anger. She is nothing better than the murderer of her child.

Here is a man who, because of his wild, unrestrained wrath, is in frenzied rage against his wife, towards whom he should show all tender affection and mildness, forbearance, and compassion. There is a resentful wife, who by bitter, pricking words, by a cold and unloving attitude plagues her husband day and night. And there is an avaricious and merciless master who drives his servants far in excess of their strength, etc. What is all this before God? Not only before God, but also in work and deed, it is nothing less than murder in the making. And all this anger, this merciless bitterness towards one's neighbors, how can it please the longsuffering, merciful Lord?

To these deeds which are the beginnings of manslaughter also belong the means by which we deprive our neighbor of his livelihood, or when we refuse to help him, when he is in danger of losing his life. The Scripture says that the one who deprives somebody of his livelihood kills him; and also includes the fact that if you see your neighbor have need, and shut your bowels of compassion from him, and do not give him what he needs for his life, then you do your part towards murdering him. Because if all were to act the same way as you do, then the distressed man would actually be murdered; and you will then have participated in manslaughter as surely as the one who sees his neighbor in distress in fire and water and does not try to save him.

## February 29

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*For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection* – Rom. 6:5.

**L**iterally: “grown together to the likeness of His death and resurrection.” These words are best explained by the parable in which Christ likens Himself to a corn of wheat which has to be put into the earth and die before it brings forth fruit (John 12:24). So also all our own capability and qualifications must die and be buried before we can get a new, heavenly life, and become a corn that the heavenly Harvestman approves of and gathers into His barns. As long as the human being himself still exists and can do something, everything he does — even his greatest piety — is “born of flesh” and is abominable to God. When it is at its best, it is infected with the vice of self-idolization, and the abominations of poisoned human nature. Therefore, all our own power and ability, wisdom and activity must be cast down and crushed, before God can reveal His power in us. Not until the sinner lies there completely lost, guilty, condemned, powerless, and at his wit’s end, and in this lost position hears the voice of the Son of God regarding His sheer mercy and grace, not until then does true life begin in him.

Law-keepers do not understand anything of the secret. It is darkness and foolishness to them, because they insist that if a man only exerts himself seriously enough, he becomes holy. And the words of Christ: “Without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5), they throw behind them. Or they understand them only to mean that one must pray. But the Lord does not say: “If you do not pray to Me.” No, He says: “If you abide not in Me, as the branch abides in the vine, you cannot do anything. Abide in Me.”

Certainly, prayer is required here, but any amount of praying does not bring true sanctification, if it does not also happen — as the Scriptures teach — that you are dead, powerless, and lost in yourself, and have life only in Christ, “grown together to the likeness of His death and resurrection.” It must be according to this rule: “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24).

True sanctification has certainly begun in your heart when you have had the experience that makes you say: Although I had sought both righteousness and sanctification so earnestly in myself, I have been put to shame by whatever I have done, till at last I have found both my righteousness and sanctification in Another, in my Lord Christ only. I intended to do much, I fought and prayed, I made resolutions, but became more and more unhappy, sinful and condemned, until I despaired of all I did and was lying there lost. Then the Lord came and made me alive. I was saved only by His grace, but I often fell back again into the old fancy that my own power and capability are of value.

I felt that it was up to me to sanctify myself, so I began with works. I wanted to believe, pray, and fight, and even felt that I had some power to do it by myself. Then I again found myself powerless and lost. I could not believe, nor pray, nor even think anything other than God Himself worked in me each moment. And when I was thus cast down again, and again became powerless and dead, then the Lord came again with His gospel and brought me back to the stronghold from which I had gone astray — back to His grace alone. And then I again got delight and power to do good.

Remember, when you have experienced something like that, and have thus found both your righteousness and sanctification only in Christ, so that you feel that you depend on Him in everything and at every moment, only then is there truth in the mortifying of your old man. Then not only will his outbursts be repressed, but the inner man also will be abased, and the very heart and life of the old man, the deep, endless selfishness, the imagination of some power and capability of your own, will be mortified. It is this deep selfishness and imagination that are the very life and heart of the old man. From this source a dreadful flood of sin springs forth in all the powers of nature, sins such as pride, godlessness, ease, unbelief, coldness, disobedience, self-will, voluptuousness, wrath, impatience, falseness, lies, and other sins and abominations.

If now all this seed of the serpent is to be attacked and mortified, then certainly, first of all, the deep selfishness, the imagined power of our own, must be cast down; and this not only once at our conversion, but throughout all our life in daily repentance. As we were put to shame the first time by the law, we must also be ever cast down and humiliated in the future, as soon as we want to be, to become, or to be capable of becoming something. Thus we shall never get consolation and happiness in ourselves nor in anything within us, but only in the Lord Christ Himself.

We should not remain lying in our wretchedness or remain in bondage and powerlessness. The new man (for to be spiritually minded is life and peace [Rom. 8:6]) should be fed and maintained continually. It is equally necessary, that we should always be consoled and uplifted in our consciences and become happy and blessed in grace by the gospel. In this way there will always be a true and living sanctification by the Spirit, not a self-made, dead, and superficial one.

# March 1

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*Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? – Rom. 2:4.*

**N**ow here is a word that should awaken all men to reason. Who can express all that lies in these words: “the riches of [God’s] goodness and forbearance and longsuffering”? Here is an entire world of God’s benefactions and mercies, or rather, the basic text-proofs of His mercy, once and for all made clear in the light of eternity. What a terrible mountain weight these proofs will be to the soul who has not yet allowed itself to be moved to repentance! Goodness is the mind of love, by which a man desires continually to serve others even if unknown and unworthy. That man whom goodness makes the object of compassion, can be a very unworthy object for love: because goodness wants only to do good, and does not reckon by the worthiness or unworthiness of the object. God’s goodness is a quality by means of which He “maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45). God’s goodness is the inexhaustible wellspring from whence all His benefactions toward us perpetually flow.

Forbearance demands that He also puts up with ingratitude and other evils, and does not quickly become angry. Longsuffering is forbearance practiced over a long time. The longsuffering of God indicates that He is very slow in making up His mind to wrath and punishment. This was proved towards the Jews in that for many generations He showed forbearance to them, which proved itself in that every day and moment He put up with their ingratitude and sins. His longsuffering refers to the fact that for a long time, yes, throughout millenniums, He continued to put up with them, and the sins the people persisted in for so long could not exhaust His patience, of which the Lord Himself says: “All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient ... people” (Rom. 10:21).

The apostle says that God not only has or shows goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, but also that He is rich in these qualities. He says: “the *riches* of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering.” These words indicate the grandeur, extent, and abundance of the goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering that God cherishes in His heart. How rich He is in these virtues He also proves well when He, the Almighty, who does not need us, created beings, but who is infinitely elevated above us, still toils and works with us, unrighteous, ungrateful, and stubborn human beings though we be, only that He may be permitted to do good to us. Yes, the riches of God’s goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering are so great, that the human intellect cannot understand them.

This is best proved by the fact that often man is inclined to doubt whether there is indeed a God who hates sin, seeing that for so long He allows the wickedness of human beings to go unpunished. Such doubts only arise because man is not capable of understanding the grandeur of God's forbearance and longsuffering. We should however bear in mind that as great and rich as God has proved Himself in His creation, His omnipotence and wisdom, so great and rich He is also in His grace and mercy. Look up at the sky: can you count the stars, those great celestial spheres? Can you measure the water in the sea or count the drops in a big river? As great as God is in His creation, so great and rich He is also in His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering. This is the reason why, in His righteous punishment He has not yet crushed a world so full of sin and ingratitude.

What shall we do then when God is so great in His grace and mercy? Shall we the more daringly defy Him, and the more sin against Him? May the Lord God preserve us graciously! The apostle asks: "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Despisest thou? This happens when you recompense His goodness by a life continuing in sin; when you so thoughtlessly forget all the good you receive from God and that it must not stop you in the course, but bring you to repentance.

If God's goodness and mildness were moderate, it might be a moderate danger also for a man to despise Him thus. But to despise a very mild and gracious being will no doubt lead to a very dreadful end. What then is God's real meaning and will, when He shows us such great mildness? The apostle says: "To call you to repentance."

It is your repentance God aims at with His goodness and longsuffering, yes, repentance — a change in your mind so that you repent that you have sinned so much against so gracious a God; that you have despised Him for so long — so much so that you return from your sins and false paths, seek grace and reconciliation with Him, and hereafter become His own for all the rest of your life. This is repentance. When this does not happen, what are you doing? The apostle says: You are despising God and His great goodness, and you do not understand; your mind is so darkened, enchanted, and distorted that you cannot bear in mind or know that God's mildness is calling you to repentance.

## March 2

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*Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe – Rom. 3:22.*

**T**hese words give the reply to an important question. When souls seeking grace have heard much about God's saving righteousness, they usually have one more question pressing upon their heart, i.e., how, when, and whereby shall I become a participant in this righteousness of God? The whole world has been redeemed, but still all men do not become blessed. How shall I know that I am a participant of God's righteousness? Here we have the reply, and it is the very same reply that all the Scripture contains. It says: "The righteousness of God ... is by faith of Jesus Christ." It is a sure faith in Jesus Christ that is called the faith of Jesus Christ. And the righteousness of God, the apostle says, comes unto all and upon all them that believe.

This is God's reply. You may think or feel what you like in your own heart, God's Word still says "them that believe" — "by faith" — "through faith" — "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," etc. Then another question becomes important, i.e., what is faith? What is meant by the faith of Jesus Christ? Never do you get a surer reply to that question, never a surer description of saving faith than when you pay attention to the places in the Bible where Christ Himself acknowledges the faith of a human being as saving faith. In all the places where Jesus says: "Thy faith hath saved thee" (Luke 7:50) or something like that, there you may see what saving faith is, when you look at what the men were like who received this witness.

And with all these you will always find one and the same thing. The person witnessed to was a sinner who, with all he had tried according to the law, had not been able to become righteous and find peace. On the contrary, he had only become more and more unhappy and frustrated. But now, having heard the gospel of Christ, he came to Him and sought undeserved grace. The witness of the law and the prophets about Christ were known to the people. Then John the Baptist came and pointed at the Lamb of God.

Finally Christ and His apostles appeared and preached the gospel. But all this was not regarded by those who were trusting in their own righteousness. Only destituted and frustrated sinners were drawn to Christ. And now it happened as John says: "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John 1:12). And by such a faith these now became new men, completely changed as regards their hearts, inclination, mind, and all powers. "They were born of God" (1 John 3:9), so that throughout all their lives they clung to Christ and were His followers. Such things you see throughout Scripture. From this you know what saving faith is. It is not only the knowledge of God, Christ, and the gospel. It is not only that you consider



it true and speak about it, but because you have been distressed over your sins, and downhearted because all your efforts to improve by your feeble remorse, prayer, godliness, etc., have been in vain, you are now captivated by the gospel of Christ and the righteousness of God in Him. Now you can no longer do without it, but have a heart that continually hungers and thirsts after this grace.

When you can really believe in and assimilate it, you get a heartfelt consolation, joy, love, and desire for the law of God, an intimate Spirit of adoption, which now cries Abba, my own dear Father; and when you cannot quite believe that you have the grace of God, you are again downhearted and hunger and thirst after it. If you are like that inwardly, you are quite a different man to all the unbelievers. Such is saving faith. And although you now delight in the law of God, and all sin is a pain to you, so that you would gladly be holy in everything, your results may still vary a lot on this point, so that sometimes you scream with agony in your spirit and are ready to despair, and sometimes you feel quite cold and dead.

With all this changing you are still always righteous in Christ with the righteousness of God, only because of faith in Christ. Therefore our righteousness in Him is called here the *faith of Jesus Christ*, and in chapter 4:11 the *righteousness of faith*. This righteousness is never called the righteousness of any other gift of grace, for instance, the righteousness of improvement, the righteousness of humbleness, the righteousness of love, no, but only “the righteousness of faith.”

Thereby it has been announced that righteousness does not consist in any of the fruits of the Spirit, but is the righteousness of God’s Son Himself. And this righteousness we can only receive through faith. It does not consist of faith itself, but as we receive it through faith, it is called “the righteousness of faith.”

## March 3

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*I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works – Rev. 2:23.*

**H**ow can one escape the idea conveyed by certain places in the Holy Writ that salvation comes from our works? The reply is that all the difficulty arises because one does not pay careful enough attention to the words. The Scripture does not at any place say that we become righteous or saved because of works, but this is what it denies everywhere. But that we shall be judged according to our works, is taught by the Scripture everywhere (Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 18:30; Matt. 16:27; 25:34–45; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12).

Although in His omniscience God knows the hearts of all men (Acts 1:24), He still has prescribed the order that our innermost being shall be proved and certified by our works. Abraham, the father of believers, was made an explicit example in this respect. “Abraham believed God” (Rom. 4:3) as regards the blessed seed, “and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” Now he was righteous before God and a friend of God, but this had also to be proved by outward action, and when he now obeyed the Word of God, the angel of the Lord said: “Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me” (Gen. 22:12). By this the apostle James declares that Abraham was justified by works (James 2:21), i.e., was proved justified, declared righteous. So it will be also in the last judgment.

In court there must also be witnesses, and our works will serve to that end. They shall bear witness of the grace which has worked in the faithful, or of the ungodliness which dwells in the unfaithful. Christ says: “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.” “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:16–17, 20). The good deeds do not make the human being good, but they prove that he is good. He is not good because he does good deeds, but he does good deeds because he is good. And God must first make man’s heart good, before he can do something He considers good.

When Christ will judge us according to our works, He will not look at the outer form or size of the deed, but at its real inward goodness: i.e., at the source and motive. That is a fact that the world does not want to understand, but that the Lord Christ so often and zealously pointed out. In Matt. 6:1 He says that if you do your alms before men, to be seen of them, then you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Why? Note how the Lord looks at the motive! The deed is the same, i.e., the doing of alms, which the Lord will mention in the last day, but it has been rejected only because it had not been done from the right motive. In Matt. 10:42 He says: “And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a

cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.”

A cup of cold water is a very small alms, but only for the reason that it has been given “in the name of a disciple,” i.e., for Christ’s sake, the Lord declares that the deed will not be unrewarded, no matter how small it was in itself. In Mark 9:41 Christ expresses it even more clearly: “For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in My name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.”

Now that we have understood the fact itself, we may take a somewhat closer look at the words. The Lord says that He will give unto every one of us according to our works. God has, so to say, received evil or good from human beings, and such as He has received, He has entered to their account in order that in the day of His righteous judgment, He may return it to each one, even as we have seen Christ explain it. Furthermore He says: everyone — God will give to everyone. Here on the earth many think that in some way they are hidden among the multitude so that God will not follow them so closely with His eyes. But God is so great that He even knows every bird. He is capable of watching everyone equally carefully as if he were the only human being on the earth.

In the last judgment everyone will — denuded and exposed — be placed before the eyes of the Judge and be judged according to his deeds. And those who are themselves responsible for their sins, i.e., those who are under the law and will be judged according to it, to them not even an idle word shall be remitted, as Christ declares: “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36). However, the faithful will get a different eternal portion according to their works, as we see from the parable of Jesus about the talents in Matt. 25:14–30 and in other places in the Bible. This also is contained in the statement that He will give unto everyone according to his works.

## March 4

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*His ... grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus  
before the world began* – 2 Tim. 1:9.

**T**he apostle says that the grace of God has been given us in Christ Jesus. “God is love,” but not such a love as could connive at sin, or remit anything of the demands of His holy righteousness. Therefore He found a remedy satisfying both His righteousness and His mercy, namely a Man in whom we would be holy and unimpeachable before the law. “What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God [did], sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3). “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13), that the blessing might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ (v. 14) — that we should inherit the blessing.

From this we see that our eternal election of grace is not based on any indulgent love on the part of God, because iniquity had to be atoned for, transgression had to be taken away, sin had to be covered, and eternal righteousness had to be brought in. It was not based on any deserving, virtue, or worthiness on our own part, because as the Scriptures say, we were lying in our own blood when the merciful Lord came to us and had mercy upon us. That mercy was based only on Christ, the “Image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of every creature” (Col. 1:15), God’s eternal and only begotten Son according to the Spirit, but according to the flesh the Son of David, the Son of man, the woman’s Seed, the second Adam.

It cost Him, the great Mediator between God and men, a great deal to break down the middle wall of partition, to make reconciliation for sin, to satisfy the righteousness of God, to win back the forfeited right of a child to a squandered inheritance. It cost the beloved Lord so much, when for more than thirty years He was a bond slave for our sake to redeem us from the power of the devil and grant us a righteousness that for all the years of our life would be valid for all our daily sins and impurities; it cost Him “strong crying and tears” (Heb. 5:7), sweat and blood — but by it He won a redemption that is eternally valid in the eyes of God.

Though by the eternal counsel of God He had been made to be sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21), and the Lord had “laid on Him the iniquity of us all,” He had not obtained even the least remission of the endless list of our debts, but had to pay them all. Therefore the apostle also says: He “took the handwriting and nailed it to His cross” (Col. 2:14). There our sins and all the curse of the law remained! And even as our sins had been made the sins of Christ, so also His merits, His righteousness and virtues became ours. He is the Lord our righteousness. God now sees entire mankind as it were enclosed in Christ and therefore atoned for in Him, righteous

in Christ, holy, unimpeachable, and blessed in Christ. But the Lamb had been slain since the beginning of the world, i.e., in the eyes of God.

This is the ground on which ever since the beginning God has acted towards His human children as a Reconciled God, a gracious and benignant Father who has sought His lost sons with heartfelt mercy, and has embraced them with love, as soon as they have wanted to come back to Him. The Lord our God declared Himself to Moses when, to see the glory of God, he was hidden in the cleft rock on the mountain side: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exod. 34:6–7).

This is the general election of grace in Christ comprising all mankind on this earth; because, according to God’s intent, nobody is excluded; God wants to have all human beings saved. Solemnly He Himself professes: “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezek. 33:11). God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). He is the Savior of all human beings.

Therefore Christ commanded His apostles: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Thus there is no difference; there is no special individual; no special people or kindred on the earth has been chosen, but this election is general, comprising all kindreds and all people, Jews, Gentiles, Turks, Christians, Catholics, Lutherans, in short all people, wicked and good, faithful and unfaithful, godless and pious, poor and rich, high and low, men and women — in one word the whole of mankind — “all who are under the heaven.” So reads the proclamation of the eternal election of grace: “And in Thy seed, which is Christ, shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” (Acts 3:25).

## March 5

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*Who [Christ] of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption – 1 Cor. 1:30.*

**A**mong the many instructions regarding the eating of the passover at the time of the Old Covenant, there was also one saying, that the passover had to be eaten completely, and nothing was allowed to be left to the following day. If something was left it had to be burned. What a decree! The lamb had to be eaten completely. Do you understand this? Do you understand what the Lord wants to tell you by this? You must not take of Christ only what pleases you. You must receive Him completely, as much as God has given of Him to you, to wisdom and righteousness, to sanctification and redemption.

It is no use for us ourselves to select, think, or decide anything as to the way of salvation. It has already been prescribed by God. The only thing we have got to do is to listen and obey. The one not wanting to eat the passover may leave it, but the one wanting to eat it should do it as prescribed — and the Lamb must not be cut up in pieces. It must be eaten whole.

Some people cut the Lamb up to pieces: in other words they take Christ only as wisdom, as a prophet, and enjoy His splendid teachings, but nothing more. They do not themselves really need to benefit from Him as to Himself, neither are they plagued by their sins so that they feel the need to receive His propitiation to righteousness. They do not need Him as a High Priest — neither may He become their King and rule over them, nor be with them to sanctification or redemption.

These are the ones who philosophize about Christianity and have everything only in their heads, in clear, well-arranged conceptions and insights, but who never start to apply them to themselves, i.e., their own hearts and lives. Oh, how terribly they trifle with the Holy One! It is unto such, only brain-Christians, that the Lord will one day say: “If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth” (John 9:41).

Others take Christ only as an Example, and for sanctification, and mean that by this He will become our Righteousness. These want only to have Christ as a King. They only make an ado about the imitation of Christ, about what they themselves should do and become, about humbleness, prayer, self-denial, etc. Because of this they have a great form of godliness as if they were the most serious Christians. But under all this a deep, endless distortion of the real value of serious godliness is concealed, so that because of this they never feel themselves to be really wretched and lost sinners who only through faith in the propitiation of the blood of Christ have their life and consolation.

Even if with their brains they confess the doctrine of faith quite correctly, their hearts are still occupied with what they themselves do and should do. This also is

“the song in their mouths,” the first and the last for them — not the song the saved sing on Mount Zion: “The Lamb that was slain and has redeemed us to God by His blood,” but “the Lamb that is our Example and has sanctified us by His Spirit.” This shows that the real treasure and consolation of their hearts consists of what has been worked in them, not what the Lamb Himself has acquired for us with His blood. And what should be said of this? We must say: It is true that your seriousness and godliness are good and laudable things! Only what a pity it is that you do not go a little deeper, so that you become ashamed of all this, and as utterly poor, lost sinners learn that all this is only wretchedness before God, for whom only one thing is valid: the Lamb that was slain and has redeemed us to God by His blood.

Thirdly, there are also some who want to have Christ as atonement but not as sanctification. These are the fleshly wanderers with the tiny flock of Christians; those who gladly hear that no sins condemn us and no good deeds save us; those who do not want to hear anything about the mortifying of the flesh and the imitation of Christ, but murmur and complain that by such teaching we burden their conscience with law. “They take,” as Luther says, “only the form of the gospel,” and they can speak much of grace and faith, but in their daily lives there is no spirit of the fear of the Lord in them, but they live quite freely in their sins and iniquities. They are branches in Christ which do not bear fruit, and are not purged, bent, and pruned, but may grow freely in the form they prefer. Christ is no rule for them.

What should one say to them? Yes, your zeal for the gospel and the freedom of conscience is excellent, but why do you not love instruction? Are not also the words of admonition from Christ and the apostles? “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Listen, the Lamb must not be cut up to pieces, it must be eaten whole. But all these go wrong because they think more than listen, and they do not pay careful attention to the Word. Therefore, please note: the Lamb must be eaten whole.

## March 6

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*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep* – John 10:11.

**T**hese words are so old and well-known, and we have heard them so often! Who would want to consider them now again? Many probably will doze off during the discourse! And yet it is exactly this subject that above any other subject can make an ice-cold heart burn and a dead person live, if only the Spirit of God opens their senses. Oh, please stop a little while and think over what the Lord Christ Himself says here: “I give My life for the sheep.” Perhaps you have no peace, no joy, you are cold and unhappy, you have no warm and gracious heart on which to lean your uneasy head. But here we can tell you in truth, how you can get a warm, happy, and peaceful heart. Then how does it happen?

Listen! If you can only get your eyes fixed on the face of your Savior when He says: “I am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.” If you will only get this into your heart, then surely it will become all warm in there. Yes, you will get an inexpressible peace and joy. Pray God for the mercy that will give you a quiet, considering spirit and opened senses when you listen to the Lord speaking these words. Think over who it is that is speaking. Bear seriously in mind that it is the One to whom you speak in your prayer; yes, it is your Savior.

Look at Him then and listen as He says: “I am the good Shepherd: and I give My life for the sheep.” Do you not notice a deep and hearty graciousness with Him, when He speaks so? Or do you still mean, that He really can be so cold and indifferent about you as your unbelieving and cold heart judges? Then take these words with you into your prayer, and when you have the most pressing and grieving worries in your heart, and want to lament over them to your Savior; when you think that you do not feel any love from Him, then try to recall the picture of Him and look at His face when He says: “I am the good Shepherd — I give My life for the sheep.”

And so far it is only His Word that you have looked at. Then look at Him in the very deed mentioned here: His voluntary suffering, His bitter death — and thereby let these words, “I give My life for the sheep,” be before you all the time explaining to your soul all you see. Behold, how of His own free will He goes forward towards the power of darkness, seeking him in the garden, and how He says: “If . . . ye seek Me, let these go their way” (John 18:8). “I give My life for the sheep,” and how He quietly a lamb being brought to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7) — goes out to the place of execution and there lets His hands and feet be nailed through and allows Himself to be hung on the tree of the cross.

And when you see Him in the earnest of death, then listen to His own declaration: “I give My life for the sheep.” Dare you still distrust His love to the sheep? Dare you still rather trust your dark, lying heart and the devil that says, “He is indifferent



about you, He does not mind about your distress, He expects you to overcome your evil yourself. He expects the sheep to defend itself against the wolf,” etc. Oh, please be afraid at such inspirations of darkness, and for once let your Savior be the One He is, the eternal and mysterious Graciousness that could not even bear that the people in the wilderness should hunger or that a man should have a withered hand. How much less then can He bear that your soul should be in distress and danger without doing anything about it, when after all He is come into the world expressly for the salvation of souls? When I realize how all the Person of Christ and His errand to the world is only one great proof of an inconceivable love and graciousness to poor mankind, and when I see how He Himself wanted us to consider it to be so when He said: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13), why, to be sure, then I have reason for the conclusion that all I myself experience, see, feel, and think cannot possibly be equally as certain as what Christ proves by giving His life. He may then try me in the most strange and troubling way He can, and leave me to the devil and all evil for as long as He pleases; yet I still have a presentiment that hidden in Him there is still a heart bleeding with an ardent love, and that while I am still in the day of grace, yet nevertheless judge myself, while also fleeing to His mercy, He cannot possibly leave me. No, as truly as this faithful Lord cannot lie, already there is joy in His heart over a sheep won back. Briefly: by means of this great proof of the love of Christ — the giving out of His entire Person and life — you should come to such a faith, that He may then do with you whatever He wants, and this will only let the great proof be even more valid. In this way we should benefit from what He says: “The good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep,” namely, that no matter what presses, threatens, frightens, and torments our heart, we still have a sincere confidence in His love and faithfulness as a Shepherd and flee only to Him, who so heartily desires to, and can so easily help in all things.

## March 7

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*For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry* – Heb. 10:37.

**O**h, that we would take more to our hearts what the Word teaches about the coming of the Lord and the hope of eternal bliss for all Christians! No Christian is perfect here. Nobody has done everything perfectly right. All of us need to be taught and corrected. It is true that “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection.” The one daily worried over his sins and shortcomings, feeling them deeply, and his keenest suffering on earth being because of them, will daily cling to the Savior and the Word of the Gospel because all the time he needs to be consoled, strengthened, and enlivened thereby! He is surely a pardoned child of God, and even if he finds himself very cold, and filled with a sense of punishment by the doctrine of the blessed hope, let him but appropriate the glorious teaching to himself, and he will surely have a great blessing from it.

The apostle Paul declares that the hope of salvation is an important weapon. He says: “But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8). Faith and love are important, and so also is hope. The hope of the glorious coming of Christ is awakening, consoling, purifying, and enlivening. John says: “Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). By means of the great truth that time is short, Paul wants to lift up the minds of the Christians above this perishing world so that they should be on their guard against the foolishness of becoming attached to something earthly, no matter whether it is sweet or evil. He says: “But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; ... for the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Cor. 7:29–31).

Mark it, O man, the time is short! If something joyful happens to you, be moderately happy: it will last so short a time and you will soon leave it. If something sad happens to you, do not mourn too much: it will not last for long. Time is short. If you marry a woman, if you get a farm, let your mind be as though you are leaving it immediately. All the time the “stupid flesh” wants to raise its head and try to make a paradise for itself down here — it is foolishness — life will not last for long! Oh, that some Christians, who are so busy in this world with their farms, their merchandise, their buildings — oh, that they would stop in time, before the last spark of spiritual life has been extinguished and the spirit of godliness has completely departed from them! Let the hand work — but tell yourself honestly — where is

the heart? Do not lie to your soul! Where is your heart? In heaven from whence you await the Savior? Or with your earthly goods? Be honest!

But the blessed hope is specially intended to be a great comfort. You who often are very near to succumbing by the way because of endless, tiring shortcomings, sins, and unbelief which never allow you to have even one day fully happy and free from clouds; and you who are daily tormented and alarmed by the dimness of your faith, and the incredible wickedness, hardness, and coldness of your heart; and you who are troubled with a difficult temptation, a messenger of the devil — never forget it will last only for a short time. “For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Heb. 10:37). “Lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28)! The heavy, thick fog of unbelief will not press down upon your souls forever! This evil flesh with its lusts, this wicked heart with its coldness, falseness, lightheartedness, hardness, and wickedness will not fetter your spirits eternally. There are some whom God has equipped with certain gifts for the service of souls and who therefore, as soldiers of Christ, are being most attacked and tormented — outwardly by the world by means of lies and shame, and inwardly by the devil by means of incomprehensible temptations, so that they can hardly open their hearts to anybody in this world. May these particularly never forget the hope of salvation which should be their “helmet.” May they never forget that it is now only the matter of a short time. Soon the Lord will give affliction to those causing distress to you, but to you that are sorrowful He will give unfading glory, “when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” (2 Thess. 1:7). Paul exclaims: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor. 15:19). The best and the most glorious thing still remains to come! We shall see the King face to face and then be with Him forever! Should we believe Christ when He speaks of present grace, and not believe Him when He speaks of the glories to come? May God preserve us! May all Christians bear this also in mind! May we only be ready and watching, and have oil in our lamps when the cry is made: “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!” (Matt. 25:6).

## March 8

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*And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest – Luke 22:24.*

**H**ere we can see how Christ deals with certain disciples who had sinned in a very unworthy way. Surely it was most unworthy to quarrel about who was the greatest! Even only a thought in that direction is an ugly sin! But here the thought also comes to fruit in the form of a deed, a quarrel about it. Were such things becoming for the disciples of Jesus? Should Christians do things like that? May God preserve us! But what did the Lord do? Was He satisfied with their quarrel? May God preserve us from such a thought!

No, the Lord punishes them. He says: “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.” And in order to make them even more contrite, He points out to them His own example by saying: “For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth.” In this way He showed His anger with them, and they well deserved it.

But look what the Lord had in His heart! What does it seem like to us? In the midst of the serious words of punishment over their sin, He began to speak about the seats of glory in heaven, and how they would sit with Him in His kingdom on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Oh, what do I see? What do I hear? The gentle Savior! I imagined that because of our unworthy sins we might lose Thy love and the rights of a child, or that at least for a while, or a day, we might be excluded from Thy grace! But no! Here I see something else. In the midst of the punishment He still speaks about their seats in heaven. The grace, the adoption, was a completely separate matter which could not be shaken. It stood on another and firmer foundation. That they were the children of God and would be with Christ in heaven eternally, was a matter already decided and not depending on their poor, unsteady piety. Christ wanted to punish, correct, and admonish them — but that was all He wanted. See here the mind of Christ, the mild, faithful Savior! The devil, on the contrary, aims his point at our very life, and wants to condemn us immediately, when we have sinned. Christ does not do thus.

Now what should we learn from all this? Should we learn from it that it is not dangerous to sin against God? Because Christ showed such a great and changeless grace with regard to those sins of His disciples, should we also gladly quarrel about which of us is the greatest and suchlike things? Yet there are some people who dare to say that such lessons can be drawn, when the examples quoted here are cited.

Such scoffers have already been plainly marked by the Spirit of the Lord (Rom. 3:8), and the apostle adds, that their “damnation is just.”

The evangelists have certainly not written down these examples of the infirmity of the disciples and the grace of Christ so that they should be passed over in silence, but, on the contrary, so that they should be considered — not as examples of the sins of certain unbelievers, but as examples of the infirmities of the faithful. After all, we must let the judgment of Christ be valid, when before His death He says plainly to these same disciples: “You are branches in Me”; “I in them and they in Me”; “Ye are clean,” etc. That these same disciples received quite another power on the great day of Pentecost did not make them Christians and friends of Christ, but apostles who now were endued with such power from on high (Luke 24:49) as no one has had since. However not even thereafter were they free from faults.

It is very necessary, if you want to keep the truth of the gospel pure, not to think that grace depends on various degrees of piety and power, because, if so, you have already made a mistake regarding faith itself. If we think that grace depends on our sanctification, then we immediately have another foundation for our faith than the one which is laid (1 Cor. 3:11). But if grace does not depend on degrees of sanctification, then it is right that the evangelists have described the pardoning of the weakest disciples as an example of the love of Christ. Now you can understand what lessons we should draw from these examples, namely, not that sin does not matter, not that we should imitate the infirmities of the disciples, not that everybody is a Christian who is like them in their infirmities, but that the grace of Christ is so great, and cannot be changed or shaken by His friends’ infirmities, as we have already seen. You should learn the true value of reconciliation in Christ and the forgiveness of sins so that your poor faith becomes strengthened. And then the strengthened faith will bring about an increased love and power for all good things. You will experience that “the love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Cor. 5:14), provided you are a living member in Him.

If, on the other hand, this has the opposite effect on you, so that you now want to sin freely, because grace is so great, then this is a sign that you are dead. This sign is as sure as that the branch that lives in the trunk of a fruit tree gets thereby more abundant sap and fruits by the warmth of the sun, whereas the branch, the leaves of which are dried up by the same sun, can rightly be considered as not having a living union with the trunk.

## March 9

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*But the word of the Lord endureth forever* – 1 Pet. 1:25.

Paul makes us understand what power and importance a word or promise has that has been given by a person who cannot break his word, when he tells us that the one who longs to have Christ with all His gifts does not need to say: “Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above): or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what saith it [the Scripture]? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth” (Rom. 10:6–8), when you believe in your heart and confess “the word of faith” (Rom. 10:8) with your mouth. Note this! He says: “The word is nigh thee.” He means that there you have all you desire to have, at the very moment you embrace the Word. Paul means that a word from God is quite as much as having the thing itself in our hand. As far as human things are concerned, we know that a reliable promise has importance and meaning, but where heavenly things are concerned, where we have God Himself as the Surety, then we are not wise enough to trust His word.

We want to illustrate this further by means of a parable concerning a very well-known fact: Even if I do not own one shilling in real coins, I am still quite satisfied if I have enough of a certain kind of paper-money that we call notes, on which it says a few words which make us safe, i.e., the words: “the bank of the kingdom pays this note” by so much. Then we are so sure that we do not even bother to exchange these notes against real coins, but throughout all our life we can hide and value them as if they were coins, yes, so much so that we could call them coins and most people would not know anything other than that they were money, because in all our transactions they are equal in worth to real coins. What is it now that gives these papers such value? Only some words, only a promise, namely that at request they are redeemed by real coins. Now Paul meant that the word and promise of God should also have such importance, when he said: “Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above).” That is not necessary, he says, for the word is nigh thee. You have Christ, heaven, and eternal bliss, if you only keep the Word in your heart and rely on it. Our heavenly King has issued notes on earth, namely in His Word. Oh, that for once we would become so wise that we would be able to rely as much on the word God has given us in the great Book of notes, the Bible, as we rely on the word of a king here on earth! God will certainly not break these His own declarations, when we want to exchange them against their promised reality, that is, when we want to have heaven itself and eternal bliss.

May this picture also remind us of the importance and meaning of each word and promise of God! We will never be able to remain in faith, in real confidence in all the inexpressible glory that the Word promises us, if we do not impress

deeply on our soul what it means, that God Himself has said it! Why, the fact that God Himself has given us promises is something so great that only because of its magnificence we cannot understand it intellectually. Nor can anything be surer than a thing promised by God Himself. Would God be able to break His word or promise? God? How incomprehensibly corrupt are our mental powers, when we cannot rightly hold such things in our minds!

The apostle says that God has not only pronounced the great promise in Christ, but He has also confirmed it with His holy oath. He says: “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath,” and “because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself,” “that by two immutable things [the promise and the oath], in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Heb. 6:13, 17–18). Oh, our great God, so rich in grace! Thou hast even confirmed Thy word by Thy holy oath, and still we do not believe! Help us, help us because of the darkness and unbelief of our wretched hearts! Great, good God, forgive and help us!

## March 10

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*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all – Isa. 53:6.*

What really is meant by these words, what the problem really is, where we really went astray and turned everyone to his own way, I learn from the remedy God made for this going astray, viz.: “The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Then I realize that it is a matter of our sin and salvation. It is a matter of the way to heaven. Ponder then, what the Spirit of the Lord states to be our main error in this matter, viz., that everyone had turned to his own way. Everyone looks at some doing of his own. One thinks: If only I could be really serious in my godliness, rightly love and fear God, then I could hope for grace. But the prophet says this is going astray. It is not enough. You are too corrupt; you are quite lost in spite of all you do. Another thinks: If only I could in reality feel deeply and bitterly repent of my sin, seriously watch and fight against it in reality, then I could hope for grace. But that is to “go astray,” says the prophet. It is all in vain whatever you do. Help outside ourselves is needed.

But if you want to know what is valid, then listen: “The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” — only that will be accepted. The Lord looked with mercy on our miserable toiling in the mire of sin, and He had mercy upon us and gave us a Man to bear the sins of us all: “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). Because of the great law of counting that all the sins of the whole world were laid on one Man; the Lord judged that the sins of us all were to be His, so that He was to pay and smart for them. Our sins are no more ours, but His.

And so that we may be even more safe the prophet says that it is not we who have laid our sins on Him, but the Lord — “the Lord laid.” It is the Lord’s own deed and pleasure, and of course He must have planned and will be satisfied with what He has done Himself! As John says: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Mark those words: the Lamb of God! It is the Lamb God has ordained for our atonement, the only sacrifice God demands for our sins. Therefore, Jesus also says that the Father loved Him because He laid down His life. What can be safer? After all God must be content with His own will. You miserable, sinful, parched, and distressed soul, please take note that it is God’s own work that saves you. It is the Father Himself that has given this atonement. Who can then accuse you of your sin? God in heaven, who is your Lord and whom you fear so much, has Himself laid your sin, not on you, but on Christ, to protect you against all the threats of the law. If the man with pangs of conscience does not have part in this atonement, and with it salvation and consolation, who will then enjoy these things? Because atonement cannot have been given for certain righteous persons,



but only for the reprehensible. Oh, what an eternal, inconceivable love! Sinners with pangs of conscience will now have peace! Thanks and praise to the Lord!

If only you can believe this, which is the great main doctrine throughout the Word of God, then calculate how much you weigh against this atonement, how much all your dreadful corruption, your wickedness and death weigh against the death of God's own Son! Do you not discover that all men are but nothing against the Son of God? The Lord has compared Himself to a good Shepherd, and has said that "the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Please meditate upon this parable. Imagine a sheep to have moral guilt and by its wickedness to have caused itself to be sentenced to death. However, this sheep has a strange and tender shepherd that is ready even to give his life for the poor sheep. Just imagine a human being giving his life for the atonement of a sheep! Do you not think that would be a price far beyond the worth of a sheep? Would not that sheep be well atoned for?

But is not the death of God's eternal Son for human beings an equally great, no, an infinitely greater atonement for us? Are you not lost in the immeasurable grandeur of such an atonement? Such that all your sins, no matter how great they are in themselves, are brought to nought by it. And this is expressly what the Father intended and wanted, that our sins would come to nought, in order that we should have peace. If you are thus able to have your peace in Christ alone, then you have understood Him correctly; then you have understood what eternal life means — and this good Shepherd will surely know what to do with your grievous wretchedness. It is He who will take care also of these. Before Him you are but a miserable sheep. He wants to do everything Himself. The sheep should hear only the voice of the Shepherd. Only hear and your soul shall live. May God increase our faith.

# March 11

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*Jesus saith to him, Follow me – John 21:19.*

**H**ere the great Lord is asking wretched Peter to do Him a service. He wants him to become a shepherd as He Himself was, and reckons him to be His servant and fellow worker. The same grace He gives to all His friends, though in many different ways, professions, and vocations. All of us are asked to become followers and servants of Christ; to do and be the same to others as He is towards us. To all who love Him He says: Follow Me! As also Paul says: “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us” (Eph. 5:1–2). Christ says to us: “I am come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). In other words: What I have, you also will have; if you lack something I will also lack the same. There you have My righteousness, life, and eternal bliss, so that no sin shall condemn you, no evil can overcome you, but you will be quite safe for eternity. As long as I am righteous and live, so long also you will be righteous and live for My sake. Then He also wants us to say, with the same love, to our neighbor: “Look, my dear brother! I have got my Lord and all grace and salvation in Him. Let me now also serve you, as He has served me. You take what I have, as I have got what He had. I no longer want to call mine either myself or anything I have, but to be altogether at the service of you and all people, only for the sake of my dear Lord who has done and daily does so much for me.” To act like that is the mark of a follower of Christ, and “not henceforth to live unto ourselves, but unto Him which died for us and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15). And after all, this is our lifelong task, if we are Christians.

But, oh, just think what happens in reality, and that everything is not right when this truth is mere head knowledge. It must be practiced daily in work and deed. And when we know what mountains of hindrance may come in the way, then we hardly know whether it is worth saying even one word in the matter. There seems to be no one who really believes that Christ loves and serves us as we described a moment ago, and also that He is interested in our poor service and has pleasure in it. And there are few who even care about these things or try to take them to heart. Who really believes that Christ has a definite pleasure in our poor deeds? Surely only poor, blinded souls living in a false faith, who think that the value of the deeds themselves is so great before God, that He will love them merely because of their deeds. It is true that such believe so, and it is terrible because the devil supports such a belief. But a man must have the right light about the great wretchedness and unworthiness of our own good deeds; he must get eyes to see that no deed in itself is unimpeachable, pure, and pleasing before God, but that we must either have forgiveness for our best deeds, or be condemned for them. He must know

that the deeds please God, not because of their own value, but only (1) because, for the sake of His Son, God finds pleasure in our persons, and because we are well-pleasing to Him He also allows our little deed of love to please Him, and (2) because He commanded the deed, i.e., because it pleases Him to bid us to do a deed for Him, so the deed has value for the sake of Him who commanded it.

If a man understands this truth and still does not want to believe and rejoice in the favor of serving Him, but still goes about looking only at the nature of the service, then it is of little importance in itself that man cannot believe that one pleases Christ with it. This is the pain always cleaving to the right doctrine regarding such deeds, so that in despair of the possibility of doing anything, such a man wants to cease speaking about the matter. Oh, what sad and black disbelief and darkness of a blinded heart! It really is such sad disbelief, such heathenism in the heart that prevents the faithful from doing good with delight and diligence. Yet so much they love their Savior, that if they would only really believe that He wants them to serve Him, they would run to it with great delight, even if it were far away. If He Himself would come in visible form into their houses and ask them for food or clothes, they certainly would not spare any pains to satisfy Him, but would give Him the best they have. But when instead He sends a poor man, needing food, clothes, or money, they are rather cautious! Could we imagine Jesus standing there by that poor man's side, looking at us and saying: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (Matt. 25:40), what a delight we would then have in giving or lending according to the need! But when we do not really believe in anything, we have neither delight nor inclination to do good.

## March 12

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*And the serpent said unto the woman, ... for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil — Gen. 3:4–5.*

**M**ark these words! The deceitful ambiguity and subtlety of the serpent. Here is the devil dressed in white. He seems rather splendid, transformed into an angel of light. He does not say to Adam and Eve: “You should not at all heed what God says!” On the contrary, he expressly calls God as a witness to what he had said, and takes God’s own words as the foundation for it. He only makes an explanation of the name that God Himself had given the tree. In the prohibition God had called it “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9). The devil now wanted to explain what that meant. “God has admitted,” says he, “by the very name of the tree, that by means of it one gets the knowledge of good and evil, a knowledge that God Himself has. Thus, when you eat thereof also ‘ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.’ All these are excellent matters: to be like God Himself, wise and enlightened like Him — why that cannot be anything evil! Now when God knows such things, it is surely impossible that He, your gracious and good Father, can have forbidden you to eat of that tree!” Some have so understood the depths of Satan here (Rev. 2:24). Others understand that hereby the devil wanted to insinuate that God was grudging, i.e., that He did not wish them to become so happy and glorious — so therefore they should not believe so definitely and firmly in God’s love and benignity towards them. Both opinions go well together, and Eve could draw only this conclusion: “If God knows that our eyes will be opened if we eat of this fruit, then He cannot have forbidden us to eat of it. We must have misunderstood His word. For how can such a commandment agree with His goodness and love? If on the other hand He really has forbidden us to eat thereof, then we cannot draw any other conclusion from it than that He is grudging towards us.” See now the depths of Satan! These reveal themselves as even more terrible, when one bears in mind that in his deep falsehood he mixes truths which he only distorts and obscures by means of ambiguous expressions. He promises for instance that their eyes will be opened. By this could be understood that they would get extraordinary wisdom and insight, but himself no doubt only meant the sad experience they would get from sin and its punishment.

That which is, on the whole, the most prominent thing as regards this temptation, and which has so deeply marked all the children of Adam, that still today it is the real wellspring of all spiritual depravity, all the most mighty temptations and deepest falls — is the serpent’s inspiration to pride, self-idolization, and independence. Even in the very first words of the serpent: “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden?” there is the thought: “You, the most glorious creatures

of God, you, the rulers over all the earth, should you be under a restraint! Should you not have all freedom?” But when the audacity of the tempter had increased, he says plainly: “And you shall be as God, or gods.” This clearly infers: “You shall be as God — not through any grace or gift of God, but through your own knowledge of good and evil, by a step of your own, by a deed of your own.” That lie went deep into the human being, and left such marks on the children of Adam that still today they stand out all the time. Undeniably it is also significant that the serpent called forth a craving for knowledge which specially contributed to this great and terrible fall. Luther says: “It is in reality the unnatural poison of the devil, that man wants to be wiser than God has commanded him to be.” First, there is in general, nothing that has made people so mad in spiritual matters, so mightily hostile towards God and His ways as conceited wisdom. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:22), even if they really possessed a very great store of knowledge. The apostle says that “knowledge puffeth up” (1 Cor. 8:1). Thus great richness in intellect and knowledge becomes a very mighty temptation to self-idolization and self-wisdom. And thereby the human being is immediately further away than anybody else from God’s wisdom. “For God resisteth the proud” (1 Pet. 5:5), and hides His light from the wise and prudent. But when God resists a person, then he is done, then he falls from one foolishness to another. “Then he gets such wisdom,” says Luther, “that he considers sin, righteousness, and uttermost foolishness to be the highest wisdom. Because the devil is in the habit of carrying things so far, that the farther a person gets from the Word, the more learned and wise he considers himself.”

## March 13

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*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new – 2 Cor. 5:17.*

**T**he first creation had been ruined by the Fall. The things that were a delight and pleasure to the heart of God when He looked at all He had done, underwent such sad destruction, that the Lord, in the way people do, spoke of regret at His having made human beings. But then God gave us the eternal “Word,” “the beginning of the creation of God,” that He should make a new creation on the earth — the new man — created in His image, as in the first creation, in true righteousness and holiness — created in Christ Jesus to good deeds, for which God had originally made us.

“If any man be in Christ,” says the apostle. What this means and how this happens, we have often taken up, viz., that the Spirit so punishes all that is in us, sin, unbelief, self-righteousness, that at last we do not find peace anywhere else than in Christ and His righteousness. When chased and driven by the continual punishing of the Spirit, at last the soul must wholly wrap itself up in the righteousness of Christ and have its all, both its righteousness and its strength, only in Him. Then it can be said that he is in Christ. And then the apostle says that he is also a new creature — old things are passed away. This is a truth visible in experience. Every Christian testifies that at the same time as he received life in Christ, and light and peace in His righteousness, he became quite a new being, a new heart and mind came into him, so that now he saw everything in a different way. He had a new intellect in all spiritual matters, new sight and hearing, a new delight in his heart, new joys and new sorrows, new perspectives and new aspirations, in short: he had a new life — an entirely new world for him. This also manifests itself in the form of a new tongue, a new speaking, and a new way of life.

And as to the old one still left with me I am now in a new position regarding it. The sin, the lusts, that earlier were my pleasure, are now my pain and alarm. The spiritual and heavenly things, that earlier seemed boring and strange to me, are now my life and my delight. I have got a new mind, although after the Adamic Fall, the flesh always remains as it has been. This new inner man is the strongest proof of a new birth, because the word “birth” points to a change in the very inward being. And Christ says: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). And John says: “The sons of God ... which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12–13). By this new birth of God, this new creation, the lost image of God is restored in the human being, viz., in the mind and spirit of the faithful. But as we still live in the flesh, which is full of sin and fights against the Spirit, this new likeness is not yet apparent and perfect. The new human being created according to God in true

righteousness and holiness will one day be redeemed from this body of death, when Christ appears and when “we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2).

Here everybody should search himself. The apostle says distinctly: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” If you think yourself a convert and faithful, but you have not got this new mind and heart; if you have not become a new creature in your inner man, then you do not yet know what right faith and salvation in Christ mean. The entire Holy Writ testifies everywhere, that true faith means a new mind and a new heart, friendship and acquaintance with God, delight in His law and victory over the world. As equally impossible as fire without heat, so is faith and the new birth by the Spirit of God if without life and power. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” The apostle speaks in short and simple words, but distinctly and categorically.

Do not fly past the searching truth! Stop and be honest with yourself! All the Word of God must be respected and thought over seriously. It is better to discover today the falseness of your spirit, than to stand deceived when it is too late. You can know within yourself whether by your faith you have come to the said inner change. It does not matter how many and grave your sins and infirmities still are, if you as well, have this new mind — first that Christ Himself has become your Alpha and Omega, your first and your last, your only consolation, your daily need, so that you want to hear above all something of Him and His worth; and secondly, that in consequence of this you have a new love for, and delight in, the law of God and His ways, whereby also your sins will become your worst torment. No matter how grave your sins and shortcomings are, still this new being is the surest proof that you are born of God. The foolish virgins may well be religious, love the Word in general, and do certain good deeds, but you do not find in them, that their delight and life is in Christ and His grace, nor that they want to hear and speak especially of Christ and the forgiveness of sins.

## March 14

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*I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins* — Isa. 43:25.

**L**isten! Here is the mind of God! Now, all of you that are thirsty, come here to get water. And you that have no money, yes, both sinners and saints, listen, when the Lord Himself speaks and tells us how He judges and acts in the great matter of our pardon. What can be surer than what the Lord Himself says! And here we hear Him explain most plainly that neither one sacrifice nor the other, neither inward nor outward piety softens Him to show grace. Neither one shortcoming nor the other, whether an inward or outward shortcoming, destroys His grace, but both merits and debts are swallowed up by one fact only: “Thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied Me with thine iniquities” (Isa. 43:24). And then what happens? He answers, “I blot out thy transgressions *for Mine own sake*” — notice “*for Mine own sake*,” not for your sake — “and will not remember thy sins.” Oh, what sweet words of honey to poor sinners! God, full of grace, open our eyes and hearts that we may taste and see how sweet it is!

But in order to be able to feel the power of these sweet words, it is especially necessary to understand the fact that all that is listed by the Lord before (vv. 22–24) as not contributing to His grace are the most important parts of the divine service, viz., piety and good deeds commanded to the children of Israel by the Lord. First He speaks of the heart: “thou hast not called upon Me” (Isa. 42:22) — which comprises all the heart’s desire for the Lord, and then all invocation and praying. Thereafter He lists the things that belonged to the divine service such as all sorts of sacrifices, meat offerings, burnt offerings, incense, etc. All this corresponds to what we in the New Testament call godliness, such as prayer, devotion, divine service, works of charity, and all sorts of good deeds. When we know that God Himself had commanded this divine service to Israel and that the people of Israel attended to their divine service with great care and zeal, what does it mean, when the Lord here speaks of it as if He would reject it, yes, as if He wanted to deny that they had offered Him any sacrifices, when at the same time He acknowledges that they had done “work with incense and meat offerings”? Does He now disapprove of what He Himself had commanded? Certainly not! He says: “I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before Me” (Ps. 50:8).

Here it is only a matter of what moved Him to grace and to grant forgiveness of their sins, as it states here plainly: “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions *for Mine own sake*,” and again in verse 26, “Let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified [or made righteous].” That is the point here. And as soon as this point is involved, then the zeal of the Lord burns as fire



against all human merit and worthiness. Then He repeats many times: “Not you, not you — thou hast not called upon Me, thou hast not worked for Me. I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions *for Mine own sake.*”

In the same way He also spoke in the days of His flesh. First, as He says here: “Thou hast not called upon Me, thou hast not worked for Me, I have not had delight in your work; but on the contrary I have worked for you”; and secondly, that for this reason He also forgives sins and says: “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions *for Mine own sake,*” so He also says in John 15:16: “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you”; and in Matt. 20:28: “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many”; and in John 17:19: “and for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth”; and in Matt. 26:28: “My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins,” and again in John 6:57: “So he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.” Everywhere we recognize the same voice, and everything is to the same purpose, namely what the Lord here says: “Not you, not you” — “thou hast not worked for Me, but thou hast made Me serve with thy sins; I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake; because I live, ye shall live also.” The point is that we cannot do anything other than sin, and must, as completely lost, be given all by grace, by Him only who has worked for us, given His life and His blood for us, and who says: “He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me” (John 6:57). “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions *for Mine own sake.*”

## March 15

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*Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities* – Isa. 43:24.

**H**ere is the great primary reason why neither our sins nor our piety are worth anything as regards our pardon. In the Red Sea of the blood of Christ both our sins and our merits have been drowned. Since God delivered up His own Son (Rom. 8:32) for the atonement of our sins, His zeal does not burn so ardently for anything other than the glory of His Son. After God heard the distress and crying of His Son from the earth, He does not stand it when any sinner wants to make himself worthy of heaven. Therefore please notice the words: “Thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins.” “To serve!” — “to serve!” — listen! He has worked. It cost the dear Lord work to save us from our sins. If you want to see what the words mean: “Thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins,” you must see it in Gethsemane and at Golgotha. The holy law of God is no joking matter. That the wretched earthy being, man, dares despise and oppress the law of his Almighty Creator; that he accepts His numerous blessings, but treads down His will and commandments; that he does not love Him above all, but despises Him, and worships other gods; that he does not fear Him above all, but lightly sins against Him; that he does not trust in Him, but in himself and others; that he does not love his neighbor as himself, but only thinks of his own advantage; and then lives in all sorts of sins and vices, disobedience, anger, hatred, fornication, unrighteousness, lies and cheating, etc. To our happy-go-lucky nature all this may seem rather unimportant, but not to the holy God. God judges otherwise. That I see from the tormented Christ. I see it when God’s own Son bears our sins. He, the Strong One, begins to be so sorrowful and sore amazed and very heavy, that His sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Oh, you thoughtless man! When you hear that crying out there in the dark night in the garden, and find that it comes from the majestic Person ruling the weather by His mere words, casting out devils, raising the dead, surely you should stop for a while and ask what it means when such a person is sorrowful, sore amazed, and very heavy, and cries and calls out in His loneliness. Do not pass by this sight so indifferently. It concerns you, it is your Savior, it is the One you invoke in prayer, in death, the One you meet in the judgment. And if you ask Him why He is sweating that way, the reply is: “Thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins.” If again with the prophet you ask: “Wherefore art Thou red in Thine apparel, and Thy garments like him that treadeth in the winevat?” then He replies: “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with Me” (Isa. 63:2–3). “Thou hast not worked for Me. I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake” (Isa. 43). If you then see your Savior so scourged, wounded, and bruised that one could count His bones, the

prophet says: “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5). If finally you see Him suffer the punishment of the curse on a tree, the apostle says to you: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree” (Gal. 3:13). This is well known to you; you have known it all for a long time; but does your heart suffer? Has this sight awakened you? If the Spirit of God may open your eyes and glorify the tormented Christ to you, the whole matter of your salvation has quite another aspect. You will become both contrite and comforted, yes, “poor but nevertheless blessed” — and the words will get a new power and meaning: “Thou hast not worked for Me, but thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins; I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions *for Mine own sake.*”

But woe to the one who sees his Savior in torment and anguish, yet still desires to remain in his thoughtless life, in the service of sin and the world! Woe to the one who wants to remain undisturbed in his sinful life, when his Savior is sweating blood for his sins, is being scourged for his lusts, and is dying on the cross with strong crying and tears for his atonement! And what will happen to the free, unblushing world, when one day this blood is laid at her door? What will happen to you who have always known and celebrated the Passion and death of Christ, but have never desired to be completely united with Him, to become His own, to come and live under Him in His kingdom. You come time after time to the remembrance of His death, receive His body and blood, but then go away again to your lusts and thoughtless company! What will happen to you? If the transgressors of the law of Moses could not escape but had to die without mercy, “of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing?” (Heb. 10:29).

## March 16

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*My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning* – Ps. 130:6.

**T**here are characteristic features of the children of God. First, that they have received the Spirit of Adoption, whereby they cry Abba, dear Father! and secondly, that if they cannot speak in this familiar way with Him — and such weakness and impotence does often befall them — there is a sighing and a waiting for the Lord in their hearts. The Savior, His grace and presence, are the vital requirements of their souls, so that this waiting for the Lord is the vital breath of the new man. And the Lord does not let His friends wait and ask for Him in vain. He Himself says: “He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father ... and We will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:21, 23). But do not think that you will always see and feel that He is near. On the contrary, it is definitely a chief feature in His dealing with us, that He conceals Himself and lets us feel and see all evil, such as sin, impotence, and the awful attacks of the devil. At such a time we think that the Savior is a thousand miles away, and only evil spirits have us in their power, together with the wickedness of ourselves and the world. Then the daughter of Zion sighs: “The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me” (Isa. 49:14). Then the bride goes in the darkness of the night, and seeks the one her soul loves. Then Mary stands at the empty sepulcher and weeps because her Lord is lost. This is the “little while” of which the Lord says: “A little while, and ye shall not see Me; ... ye shall weep and lament” (John 16:17, 20). Please note this and never forget it, that it is part of God’s dealing with us, that He conceals Himself so, and that it will not at all seem to you that it is only concealment for a short while, but always as an abandonment and a just consequence of sin or unfaithfulness committed. If it did not seem like that to you, it would not be any real trial. But now the intention is that it should cause a serious exercise of your faith, your prayer, and your waiting for the Lord. But as surely as God Himself declares to Zion: “In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee” (Isa. 54:8), and as impossible as it was that Christ would remain away from Mary weeping at the sepulcher, or from the two disciples going to Emmaus and considering Him lost forever, so impossible is it that any soul now can wait for the Lord, and invoke Him day and night, shall come to shame.

No, that is quite contrary to the whole Being of God. It is true that God leads His faithful in a mysterious way, but always with eternal faithfulness. And no matter how your sins or state, when your soul still waits for the Lord, even if you cannot force even one prayer from your lips, but your sorrowful heart only in impotence and with unspeakable sighs waits for the Lord, it is impossible for Him to remain

hidden. Look at the assurance of Christ our Lord Himself when He speaks of the widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18, or of the one whose neighbor came to him at midnight when the door was closed, and asked him to lend him three loaves in Luke 11. By these parables Christ Himself wants to make us realize that it is impossible for His heart to refuse to help a distressed soul. But it requires some time to believe His words, because part of the trial is that it should be felt and seem as if all were in vain. And the purpose of the trial is that we should exercise faith.

But even after we have this exercise in faith by lacking sensitivity towards spiritual things — neither sorrow nor solace, nor sin nor grace, but a silent stillness and dryness in the soul make us fear that our spiritual life has died and that we are in the serenity of death. To sincere and watchful souls this stillness, emptiness, and impotence may prove a most difficult trial. But this very fear of a secret death is both the strongest proof and also the remedy against the danger concerned. Those who never fear with regard to themselves have in fact every reason for fear.

But now, no matter how mysteriously the Lord leads us, He still cannot remain concealed forever. “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength” (Isa. 40:31), and also now and then may see His gloriousness so that they are filled with an unspeakable, blessed wonderment at the living and present God that is so mysterious, but still so faithful. When during a long trial, at last they have begun to believe that they have been completely forgotten by the Lord, He gives them, quite unexpectedly, such a wonderful proof of His grace that they exclaim like Daniel might have done, if he had food sent to him in the den of the lions: “My Lord my God, why! Thou still thinkest of me! I thought Thou hadst forgotten me!” Oh, how the tired soul then tastes the sweetness of God, yes, something of “the powers of the world to come” (Heb. 6:5) till, with Daniel, he wants to thank God for his distress.

## March 17

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*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ – 1 Pet. 2:5.*

Let us remember well that it certainly gives heartfelt pleasure to the Lord our God, when a child of God, because of love and gratitude to God for His great mercy, offers Him his body, his willing service, and the denial of fleshly lusts. If it is not done in faith and love, but in order to present a reward to God, then it is only a Cain's offering, not pleasing to God, because "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6). But if we offer something in faith in Christ, in gratitude to God for His great mercy, then it always pleases Him, even when in itself, it is no more than a "cup of cold water" (Matt. 10:42). This should very much encourage and rouse us to such an offering. But here our deeply embarrassing unbelief forms a hindrance to us. When at last we have experienced and learned that no worthiness of our own can stand before God, that sin adheres to everything we do, then we also come to think that nothing will suffice to please God, not even what we do out of faith and love to His glory and for the benefit of our neighbors. This makes us slothful and unwilling to do His service, and this opinion is a very harmful and hindering error. Although by our own deeds we cannot become reconciled to God and earn heaven, because our deeds in themselves are not blameless and perfect in the eyes of God, it is still an equally important and imperturbable truth, that when we first become sanctified and well-pleasing to God by the sacrifice of Christ, then also all our endeavors in love are well-pleasing to Him. The Lord our God is a mild Father, rich in love, and with great pleasure He looks at what His children seek to do for Him in love. When now in spite of all his distress because of sin, a child of God, in gratitude for His great mercy, willingly seeks to serve Him, such service meets with His greatest pleasure, and all that is impure and imperfect which still adheres to our service is so covered by the righteousness of Christ that God never looks at such shortcomings.

Nevertheless, it is not only the shortcomings, but the smallness of our deeds that prevents us from believing in God's pleasure in them. We always seek the grand and brilliant things. If we could do some great deeds, convert masses of people, become missionaries or martyrs, then we could believe that it pleases God. We do not remember that the pleasure of God only depends on whether in faith and love we do what He has commanded us to do, and also that His commandments and words have attached most people to the smallest yet most needed deeds in the house or society. The Lord Christ says that in the last day, publicly in front of mankind and angels He will praise such deeds that every Christian can do, even the ones in the lowest class, and He says that He will look with the same pleasure at the deeds we have done to our poor neighbors for His sake as though we had

done them to Him personally. He will say: “For I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in,” etc. “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me” (Matt. 25:35, 40).

How could the Lord profess more strongly His pleasure in the deeds we have done for His sake? What is the reason, then, that we still do not believe that such a service of love pleases God? We think, yes feel, that it is displeasing to Him when we do not serve Him, but serve sin. Why then should it not be well-pleasing to Him when we, on the contrary, flee sin and serve Him in love? Here again we see how the enemy has distorted our thoughts.

Let us therefore often and deeply think of these words regarding the sacrifices of love. They are well-pleasing to God. May God help us to believe it! Then from our hearts’ satisfaction we will say: Oh, if it is well-pleasing to God that I now give this poor brother a gift or a loan, what a pleasure it is to me to do so! If Christ looks at it as if I did it to Him, what a happiness it is then for me! If it is well-pleasing to God that in my otherwise heavy and toilsome vocation I am patient, faithful, and zealous, what a pleasure it is to me to be so! If it is well-pleasing to God that in the case of contrariness or loss I am submissive and patient or friendly, meek, mild, and humble towards my fellowmen, that I do not recompense evil, but preferably give a “soft answer [that] turneth away wrath” (Prov. 15:1), what a pleasure it is for me to do so! If it is well-pleasing to God that I now renounce and suffocate my desire for this or that, what a pleasure for me to do so! If it is well-pleasing to God that I speak a word of consolation, warning, or admonition to my neighbor, or that I cover his faults and weaknesses and do not slander him, if all such things really are well-pleasing to God, what a pleasure for me to do them! In this way we will be strengthened and encouraged to do all good, if we really believe what Christ our Lord and the apostle have told us about the fact that such sacrifices are well-pleasing to God.

# March 18

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*Be of one mind* – 2 Cor. 13:11.

**T**he apostle here admonishes us to concord and humility with regard to our human life together. But if anybody thinks that a subject like concord and humility in ordinary and earthly things is not an important enough theme for an apostle's admonition, nor a matter for true Christians to meditate upon, then we shall soon experience the opposite in life. We shall find that only because of the lack of humility and concord, we shall bring ourselves and others into difficult temptations and cause the name of Christ to be blasphemed. Not even Christ our Lord has considered it as too unimportant to speak of humility and gentleness. For instance, in His Sermon on the Mount He says: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5); and in Luke 14, He teaches us that we should not even choose the best place at the supper table. We should bear in mind that true Christianity wants to make its children skilled and happy in everything, wants to bring us down to earth, that we do not only spend time in high contemplation, and then in daily life forget all we have learned, but on that plane also should think of "what is good, what is true, what is sweet, what is lovable."

With this admonition the apostle wants to say: in his life a Christian should not be self-willed and egotistic so that he wants to have everything according to his own ideas, but he should also let the intellect, opinion, and manners of others play their part, when it is not contrary to the Word and will of God. Here the apostle is speaking against a very strong inclination in the nature of us all, viz., self-will and self-sufficiency. We find this even in small children! As soon as they begin to talk, the inclination for quarrelling and stubbornness appears. We also see how, throughout life, everywhere it happens according to the old saying: "There are as many opinions as there are heads!" Everybody always thinks his intellect and method the best. Now if we follow this nature of ours and always want to fight for our own opinion, the consequence must be continuous fight and discord. It is obviously grace and wisdom if a Christian draws instruction from these things early, and learns to give way to others, distrusting rather his own opinion or intellect, than always fighting for them.

This is the general teaching the apostle seeks to give us here. But if the said inclination for self-will is as deeply rooted in our nature as we have discovered, then we should always be prepared for it to push itself also in spiritual matters. Therefore it is important that now, rather than later, we allow the many admonitions to spiritual harmony in the letters of the apostles to be impressed upon us. With regard to this spiritual harmony our apostle teaches us that even if we cannot have the same mind on every matter — which indeed is not easy, "for we know in part and we prophesy in part" (1 Cor. 13:9), we should, however, "endeavor to keep



the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3), i.e., to hold fast the unity brought about by the Spirit as a firm bond of peace, placidity, and love, seeing we have the greatest and most important things in common; and that in Christ we are “one body, and one Spirit” (Eph. 4:4). In fact this concord in the spirit and in speaking is so important that if anyone thinks that he has a better intellect than all others, and because of this occasions anxiety and discord among those who are already saved and united in Christ, he thereby causes much more evil than if he had forever kept his light to himself alone.

From Rom. 14 we learn that even if it was the real truth for which we had fought, but in so doing had turned away souls from their simple faith in Christ, then we have done something concerning which the apostle says that we have “destroyed them, for whom Christ died” (Rom. 14:15) and that “through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish” (1 Cor. 8:11). Therefore spiritual concord and the establishing of souls in simple faith in Christ are so important that sooner than disturb these, it is better that all your life you should keep silent and “have thy faith to thyself before God” (Rom. 14:22). The dangers involved by the disturbance of unity are far greater and more mysterious than we think, and this is the reason why the apostles have given so many and serious admonitions such as these. “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you” (1 Cor. 1:10), and again: “Be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2 Cor. 13:11).

## March 19

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*And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world – 1 John 4:14.*

In this verse note first the height and depth of divine Love! John says that “the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.” And again, “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him” (1 John 4:9). And again: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (v. 10). As proof that the sending of the Son was a work only of the love of God and was the highest proof of that love, the Lord Himself says: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). And what other reason can be found here than the love of God Himself? An old teacher says: “After having racked my brains for a long time in order, on the basis of all our knowledge of God and man, to penetrate to the utmost reason why God loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son for it, I, at long last, have come to this conclusion only: God loved, therefore He loved.” As a mother cannot give any other motive why, day and night, she nurses and carries her sick child with indefatigable love, except that it is a law in her heart, maternal love compelling her so to do, even so we cannot find any other reason why God gave His Son. His heart towards mankind was the heart of a father towards his child, even though that child is fallen and spoilt. In him He still recognizes the child He, in the beginning, created after His image and to inherit all His good. God loved His fallen child. This was the motive.

“God sent His Son.” This immediately tells us that the Son existed before He was sent into the world. Christ was the Son of God in the literal sense of the word. The Son He had to be, if His sending was to be the revelation of the endless love of God towards man. For all the prophets and angels God has sent for the benefit of men, Christ never has stated this as the proof of the great love of God. Only of the sending of the only begotten Son He says: “For God so loved the world.” When, in Rom. 8:3, the apostle calls Christ not only the Son of God, but God’s own Son, he thereby distinguishes Christ from all who are in some particular sense called the sons of God, and makes us understand that He is the Son of God in the real sense. The angels are called the sons of God because of their creation and their high status. Israel (the people) is called the son of God because of the fatherly love and care by means of which God embraced that people. The faithful are called the sons of God because of their new birth and fellowship with Christ. But nobody other than Christ is called “His own Son” or, as in John 1:18, “the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father.” “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16) is a text seemingly so

irrational to our poor reason, that even people otherwise believing in the Word of God, are here confused and tempted to take the expression “the Son of God” in some non-literal sense.

Therefore bear well in mind the things said. And moreover, add the innumerable witnesses of the entire Scriptures showing, (1) as stated in Heb. 1, that the Father gives His only begotten Son such names and titles as none of the angels have been given: But “unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?” (v. 5) and again, “Sit on My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool” (v. 13); (2) that to Him is given divine worship: “And let all the angels of God worship Him” (v. 6); (3) that to Him is given an eternal kingdom, when it is said to the Son: “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever” (v. 8); and (4) finally, that to Him is given the very work of creation, even as John says about the “Word” that “was made flesh” (John 1:14): that “all things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3). Yes, and add this, that He was “before the world was created”; as He Himself says in John 17:5: “And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.” Such things had already been said by prophecy, when for instance, in Micah 5:2 it is said: “Out of Bethlehem ... shall He come forth, ... whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.” Let us praise the mysterious counsel of the Eternal Father with serene worship. Indeed, He has sent His Son into the world.

## March 20

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*I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet — Rom. 7:7.*

First of all we notice the words: “I had not known sin, but by the law.” This is a general fact of which the apostle has said already in Rom. 3:20: “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” But here he also teaches us how and when we learn to know sin by the law. This is an important matter, because on the one hand we notice that, although the law of God is known to us all, not all of us are sensitive to sin, for all the world is asleep and at ease in all its sin; and on the other hand we should bear in mind that the one who does not learn to know his sin cannot seek salvation from it, but will finally “die in his sins” (John 8:21). With all knowledge and wisdom and belief in the Word of God, it is impossible that anyone can rightly receive Christ without feeling sin so keenly that he is “killed by the law.” Not until then can he come to life in Christ and become a new creature, born of God. This is what the whole tenor of Scripture teaches.

Thus it is important for me to know how and when I learn aright to know my sin. The first thing the apostle says of this is that it does not happen until you learn to know lust, and it only happens that way. He says: “I had not known sin, but for the law, for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.” Thus in this connection he says, that he could not know sin, when he did not know lust. But what he means by “know lust” is also indicated by his own explanation, namely, that first of all, it means that we know lust as sin, because he says: “I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.” From this we learn that first, he means knowledge of the fact that lust in itself is already sin, and he learned this by the law which says: “Thou shalt not covet.” Secondly, from the verse following we notice that he also means a deeper knowledge of the power of lust over us — which we get by bitter experience, because there he gives an additional explanation: “But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.”

We now see that we know sin only when we know lust. But we can ask: When and by what means do we learn to know lust? From our childhood we have all learned the commandment: “Thou shalt not covet.” We often hear and read it, and yet everybody is still asleep with regard to the criminality of lust. Many look at the law in order to see their sins in it as in a spiritual mirror, and still they do not get thereby any strong consciousness of their sins. How and where does one get that consciousness? The apostle says that it appears in a way quite different from any self-appointed and human investigation of the law. He says: “For I was alive without the law once — and then without the law sin was dead — but when the commandment came, sin revived” (Rom. 7:8–9). Does this mean that Paul had

lived without the law? It does not mean that he did not possess, know, and keep the law. From his childhood he had been instructed in the law, and in his unconverted state he was such a zealous member of the strictest religious party of his time, that “touching the righteousness which is in the law,” he was “blameless” (Phil. 3:6). What does it mean then, that he had once lived without the law, and that “the commandment came” at that time? Nothing else than that the law had not been alive in his conscience, but had been asleep in his service of deeds, that he had not seen, nor apprehended the commandment: “Thou shalt not covet.” And thus that “the commandment came,” means that when the law came to life and power in his conscience he was awakened from his sleep in sin, and became aware of the holy zeal and eyes of God, which chased and exhausted him, no matter what he did. In that way he becomes conscious of sin by the law. A great and merciful work of God is required for this. It is required that God visits you and awakens you from your sleep in sin. Otherwise, in spite of all your attention to the law, you can never learn to know your sins.

Thus the apostle confesses here that only the holy law reaching its commandments to the very heart and saying: “Thou shalt not covet,” opened his eyes to see this otherwise hidden evil, lust. And then the man thought himself blameless, soon found himself an abominable sinner. Because when the law, the commandments, and threats of the great and almighty God now forced themselves upon his inward being; when the Saul so content with his service of deeds, noticed that the great God looked into his heart and said: “You must not have the least little bit of lust towards evil” — oh, was not that the ruination of all his righteousness? He was not free from sinful thoughts and lusts, and even when he wanted to make himself free from this inward evil; wanted to resist and dismiss all wicked thoughts, and in his heart be holy before the eyes of God, then there came a new and more difficult distress than he had ever known before: he found that evil thoughts and lusts did not allow themselves to be driven out, but became the more difficult, the more he learned to know them, and the more he fought against them.

## March 21

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*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us – 1 John 5:14.*

**I**t is a harmful abuse when in prayer we go beyond the Word. Many pray and believe such things as God has never promised. Now this is to tempt the Lord and to deceive oneself. Examples of this are: When a man asks God for his daily bread, but does not want to work; when a man asks God to maintain his spiritual life, but does not want to study the Word of God; when a man asks for the grace of God to sanctification, while he still is under the law; and for power to manifest the fruits of faith, when he as yet has no faith, nor has yet been even grafted into Christ; or when a man asks for a blessed end, while in this world he has never walked the way leading to life; or when a man prays unconditionally in matters where it is uncertain what the all-wise God thinks most needful for him. All that is to “tempt the Lord” (Exod. 17:2) and deceive oneself. Faith and prayer must always have a promise of God on which to be based, otherwise they are in vain.

Others again have promises and statements of God regarding things they desire, but do not claim these promises nor meditate upon them; nor take God at His Word, but go away without either faith or prayer. Or they pray without believing in the Word, and thus pray to the winds, and therefore with coldness and disinclination. At times this even happens to the faithful.

The first thing necessary for correct prayer is that it is not a venture of your own, but that you put the commandment and statement of God before you and say to the Lord: “Thou hast commanded me to pray. I am doing only what Thou hast asked me to do,” or with David: “When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek” (Ps. 27:8). “I am doing only what Thou Thyself hast asked me to do.” The second thing necessary is that you do not come before God with only your own thoughts, namely, the conclusions of your own wicked, lying heart with regard to Him, His heart, and His reply to you, but that you arm yourself with His own words, bear them in mind, and stress them so that you can say: “I am praying only for what Thou Thyself hast asked me to pray for. Do as Thou Thyself hast said, yes, do only according to Thy own nature and desire. Thou hast said that Thou art gracious, merciful, almighty, and the God of truth, and that Thou wilt rejoice to do good to us (Jer. 32:41) and that Thou wilt wait that Thou mayest be gracious unto us (Isa. 30:18). Please do according to Thy own nature, delight, and heart.” But your own reasoning and feelings, as well as the devil, will all the time try to deprive your heart of such a picture of God, if you give them even the least little opportunity to speak. Therefore a hard fight is often needed if we shall remain faithful to the Word. Keep your eyes fixed on the Word

without at all looking askance, and think thus: “If what is said about the Lord is not true, it does not matter what happens to me.”

The third thing needed for praying aright is that you do not come before God with your own worthiness or in your own name, but that you set before yourself “the Mediator in whom God is well pleased.” And the fourth thing necessary is that, if possible, you word your prayer in such a way that your request will not be resting on you and your own worthiness, but on God and His glory, so that not your faith, but the faithfulness of God; not faith in your own prayer, but the truth of the promises of God, will stand the test. All this happens when we take God at His Word, or as David puts it: “When Thou saidst...”

This has been the art of the old champions of faith, when in prayer they have fought with God, as we see from many of their experiences. When Jacob, the patriarch, was in agony and fear because of his brother Esau and his hosts, and prayed to the Lord for help, he said: “O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee... Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau” (Gen. 32:9, 11). First he says: “Thou art the God of my father Abraham and the Lord of my father Isaac” — as if he wanted thereby to remind God of the promises He had given these fathers, namely, that their descendants would be very numerous, and that the fulfillment of the same promises depended on the saving of Jacob and his children. If they were put to death, how would the promise be accomplished? In his reference to the names of Abraham and Isaac there is also the thought: “Even if I am unworthy, remember that I am the son of Thy servants Abraham and Isaac, whom Ye love.” Furthermore he added: “Thou, Lord, who said unto me, ‘Return unto thy country, I will deal well with thee,’ Ye hast Thyself commanded me to undertake this journey, and promised that Thou wilt take care of me Thyself. Thou hast promised to ‘deal well with me.’ Now, Lord, it is a matter of the truth of Thy words; because if Esau puts us to death, what about the fulfillment of the promise: ‘I will deal well with thee?’” It was as if he had wanted to say: “It does not matter so much if I perish; but — what about Thy promise, Thy truth, Thy name, and Thy glory!”

## March 22

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*For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings* – Heb. 2:10.

**I**t was as the Captain of our salvation that Christ was made perfect. This happened by two exercises quite new to the Son of God: the obedience and suffering of Jesus. We see this from the words of the apostle: “It became Him, ... to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” And again: though He was the Son of God, “yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:8). Note this! The Son of God “learned obedience.” It was something quite new to the Lord, being the Lord and Lawmaker of all creatures, Himself to be an obedient servant — to be under the law He had given us. It is as if He Himself was astonished at it, when in the prophetic Psalm He says: “Many, O Lord my God, are Thy wonderful works ... and Thy thoughts ... sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; mine ears hast Thou opened: ... Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:5–8).

Notice, “Mine ears hast thou opened.” This indicates how He was “made under the law” (Gal. 4:4), was made to obey, because it is the task of a servant to hear, merely to hear and obey. As this was quite a new exercise to the Son of God, we understand why the apostle says, that He learned obedience. But to learn obedience, to exercise obedience to the law of God which was given to us human beings, and to do this as his real vocation, was a thing the Son of God never needed for Himself, but which He did as the Captain of our salvation. He did it as the second Adam, who now in the place of the whole of mankind was to stand the test of obedience, in the same way as the first Adam also was put to a test of his obedience, but fell. “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19).

Oh, what a glorious comfort, when we are convicted of our daily and endless disobedience — because all our deep misery in sin is because of disobedience to the commandments of God. Oh, what a glorious comfort to know then that God has given us One who was to be completely obedient in our place, with the obedience that we ought to render, but never rightly do so. “By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” It is the obedience of Christ that is the real fulfillment of the law, which, given and imputed to us, is the righteousness wherewith we rightly stand before God, and is the righteousness the law demanded of us, but had not been able to bring about. As Paul says: “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God [did], sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3).



It was not enough that our sins were blotted out by means of blood. The law also had to be fulfilled. And it pleased the merciful Father to give us a Substitute, a new Adam who was to stand the test, One for all, and all in Him. Therefore, although He was the Son of God, He still learned “obedience.” “And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb. 5:9).

Thus He is, through suffering and obedience, a perfect Captain of our salvation. When He was still a child in the manger, He was not yet the perfect Captain of our salvation. Had He returned to heaven immediately from the manger, His visit from the heights would not have been unto salvation for us. He had first to be prepared to be the Man for our salvation, and our hope, to be the Captain of our salvation. It was absolutely necessary that He first — in storm and distress — should fulfill all righteousness for us and in our place, and fulfill our obligations. It was unavoidably necessary that He should endure all the curse rightly belonging to us; yes, that He Himself should be made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). He had to fight, suffer, bleed, and be forsaken by God. He had to die. Through all these depths He had to go, if He was to become a sufficient Savior for us.

And even this was not all that had to happen to Him for this great purpose. He also had to rise again, as the Prince of life, and ascend to heaven with our flesh and blood and be “set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb. 8:1), that He might be able to send us His Spirit and prepare for Himself a willing people on earth. And not until then, when He had heard the roarings of the deeps, had drunk from the brooks of Belial, had thrown Himself into the abyss of the curse of death, had broken the seal of the sepulcher, had broken through the clouds, and had sat down on the throne of the Majesty — not until then, had He been fully “made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). Not until then did He stand there — before God and the world — as the perfected Savior and High Priest for His multitude of sinners.

## March 23

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*I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me – Exod. 20:2–3.*

**T**his is the Lord's own introduction to His holy law. The Lord here causes us to understand, who He is that speaks, and on what grounds He bids, commands, and so judges. "I am the Lord." It is this "I am the Lord," that is the real ground for the eternal importance and eternally binding power of His holy law. I am the Lord, I am Jehovah, who eternally is and remains the original Source for all beings and all power.

Let us reflect upon the following things: From whence has the man come who is to obey this law? What is man? He is surely the work of God's hands, His created child! Has He then not the power and right to command him as He wants, to restrict his freedom and give laws to him? This is the first thing He reminds us by this word, and let us meditate deeply upon it. Surely the ground for all disobedience and all contempt for the law of God is that we do not bear in mind who the Lord is who has given us the law, and what we are before Him. Yes, if we were able to see or understand who He is that speaks in the holy law, then we would rather faint and die than dare to do anything against Him. We are not saying that thereby we have power to resist sin. No, it is not so easy for us after the Fall of man, to do what is right, simply because we are so commanded. Rather we would still faint and despair, if God Himself did not have mercy upon us and save us.

Apart from God's law we would be able to be at ease and unbroken with all our sins. But think of what it means that He has given human beings a law; He who is the great Creator of heaven and earth, the One who in the beginning created all out of nothing, the One who created the sun, the moon, and the stars, and the earth with all that is thereupon, and created man in His own image, to be His child and heir, equipped with powers to hear and understand His will. He, the high and highly exalted (Ps. 97:9), has given to human beings, commandments and laws. Should we then dare to defy and despise Him? What dreadful depravity is in all our powers, that we cannot even bear this in mind. Surely we should also reflect upon the fact that God can crush us at any moment, the way one kills a fly. We are so completely in His hands that our life and all our welfare in time and eternity depend on Him. We have not even one single breath in our own power, and God has innumerable ways and means of punishing those who provoke His wrath. This we can see on all sides, how He sends an evil, a sudden death to one man, a dreadful illness to another, foolishness to a third, and to a fourth, infatuation and audacity which bring him into sin and shame. It is true what Luther says, that

“God has snares and traps on all sides for His despisers, so that they cannot escape Him anywhere.”

And finally, He also is the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Yes, if He does not want to take care of our poor souls when we die and bring them to heaven, then we shall be lost eternally. Yet we would dare to despise and defy Him! On the other hand, let us also reflect upon how much good God can do to us, if He is gracious towards us. How much grace and blessing in time, and how much joy and eternal bliss throughout all eternity, will He not give to His friends! Yet we would dare to despise and defy Him! Think what would happen if He should take His Holy Spirit away from you and leave you to the darkness of nature, the lusts of the flesh, and the power of the devil? Let us therefore pray over this word: “I am the Lord!” Let us have this word written on our soul in great, flaming letters, that it may stand before our eyes all the days of our life.

There is still something more to be learned by the name by which God here announces Himself to the people, namely Jehovah, because Jehovah means the eternally existing, unchangeable One. By this name He causes us to understand that in time no jot nor tittle can pass from the law. It is correct to note that the real foundation for the holy law of God is no free, temporary will of God, but, on the contrary, is plainly the nature of His own being. If somebody asks, why we should be holy, then God replies: “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16). He does not say: “because I want you to be so,” but He says: “because I am holy.” As the ground for the holy law lies in God’s own being, then we can understand why it cannot possibly ever be changed, because in that case God Himself would have to be changed. It can never therefore, either in time or in eternity, become lawful to do what God has forbidden in His law: to have other gods, to take the name of God in vain, to despise His Word or to despise one’s neighbor; to be envious of him, hate him, or lie about him. Such things can never become innocent or lawful even on only one occasion, or for any reason, such as the weakness of our fallen nature; but will always be displeasing to God. The law of God has told us that such are contrary to His holy mind, and His mind can never change. This is something more that we have to reflect upon, when we read the words: *I am Jehovah*.

## March 24

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*But the very hairs of your head are all numbered* – Matt. 10:30.

**D**o you think that this is too much for you to believe? Then open your eyes and look around you. Or are you so blind that you do not see what even mere reason usually sees, that all that has been created on earth, has been created for man — that there is not a stone, nor a tree, nor a straw which has not been intended for the service of man. Yes, even all the animals also have been created for man, and he takes them all into his service. Does not all this tell you that God cares for the human being — that he is a special object of His heart? Then please begin to look at creation, if you are such an unbeliever that you can make your Savior a liar when He says that the very hairs of our heads are numbered. He has Himself referred us to creation (cf. Matt. 6). Can you open your eyes enough to see that in all creation God has had man as the object of it all? Then is not this a great witness to you as to what man is to the heart of God and how in all He sends him, He first of all looks at his most important good, his eternal bliss.

Now look at your most bitter experiences in this light, and maybe you will find sheer divine love and faithfulness in all that has happened to you. Maybe you have lost all your possessions, and perhaps you and your family have got into great trouble. You have lost the most gracious friend you had on earth, a friend you could not live without. Or you have at the same time lost your dearest expectations, the expectations you had cherished in your heart with deep feeling and for a long time. The loss is bitter. But look at it in the light of eternity, and you will see that not the smallest part of all these bitter things happened to you without the highest intention of love on the part of God, namely, the salvation of your immortal soul. This is something so great and so difficult to your old man, the flesh, that such deep wounds have to be cut in him.

Or maybe you have experienced something even more bitter. For instance, if by the great grace of God towards you, the highest desire of your heart is that from now on all your life should be to the glory of God and to the blessing of many souls; yet, because of unexpected temptations you have been brought into such deep distress over sin, that you have, or think you have, become a downright offense and shame to the gospel. And you feel you would sooner be dead a thousand times than experience anything like that. Then quiet your heart! God lets even His dearest children experience things so inexpressibly bitter. His most faithful disciple who had gladly wanted to die for his Lord and finally did so, first had to weep bitterly over a most terrible denial. The most highly favored among women, chosen to be the mother of the very Son of God, the virgin who once sang so enraptured: “from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed” (Luke 1:48) once had the dear Child so completely out of her sight, that He was lost for three days. In the bitter

worry of her heart she must have condemned herself as the greatest sinner, who was now the cause of the Savior of the whole world being lost; so much so that she wanted to keep to herself the fact that she was the mother of the Son of God.

It is the deep depravity of our heart and its inclination for self-idolization and other sins that should be burnt out by means of such bitter experiences. Therefore let us only revere God and His high and gracious intention to bring us to eternal bliss in heaven. Let us revere His high desire that, with everything He allows or sends us, it is to purge, to try us, and to confirm us in grace, kill our old man, the flesh, sanctify our mind, and increase our faith, prayer, humbleness, and seriousness. It is also to make us bored with the seductive life on earth, and to make us long for heaven. When we understand that God has such high and gracious intentions with regard to everything He sends us, then let us humbly and gratefully praise Him for everything that happens to us, and never forget the golden word which stands and falls with the Lord Christ Himself: “the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

And if you consider yourself by far too unworthy of a grace so greatly beyond measure, then listen to what is said so solemnly in Rev. 5:1–6 about the unworthiness of all creatures before God. There it is written: “And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.” Yet John should not weep over this, because there was One who was worthy. One of the elders in heaven said: “Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book.” And then John saw “a Lamb as it had been slain.”

Oh, that *that* sight would so enter our very being that it would always remain before our inner vision. Then we would never forget that only the Lamb that was slain is worthy. And that for us! Because, surely the Lamb was not slain for Himself, but for us — and it is because of this Lamb that we are of so much value before God that the very hairs of our head are all numbered, and there shall not an hair of our head perish without His will.

## March 25

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*Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace – Heb. 13:9.*

**H**ow important and necessary is this admonition! We know what Satan has in his mind. He is well aware that nothing can do us harm, as long as Christ is precious and important, and is all and in all to us. And that on the other hand, nothing can help us, if faith in Christ is lost. Only Christ is capable of “destroy[ing] the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8), and only He is “a plague for death and a destruction for the grave” (Hos. 13:14). If I can only stick to Christ and the pure, wholesome Word, then everything will go right, and even if it does not always go right and well with my life, nevertheless I am sure to be raised again. But if the old serpent can lure us away from Christ and the true knowledge of Him, then he has won; then he has us in his hands, helpless and without defense.

We shall always find that all the efforts, power, and cunning of the devil aim at luring us away from Christ and putting something else before our eyes, even if it be only sheer holiness, piety, and good deeds. This is only that Christ should not be the Object of a simple hunger of faith or confidence. Therefore, also the great apostle says: “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3). The danger certainly is not a distant one. In addition to these continuous efforts of the devil there is also in all human nature, on one hand, a dreadful ingratitude and forgetfulness of the blessings of God and the distress from which He has redeemed us; and, on the other hand, an enormous desire for novelties, so that a man always soon gets bored with what he has, and wants to have something new. He always loves change. In this way Christ and His gospel appear foolishness and a rock of offense to all reason.

Therefore let us make sure we are always on the true way and in the right mind, that which is greatest in heaven and to God may also be utmost to us! In the eyes of God nothing is preeminent and valid except the Son offered for us. This should also be the only excellent and precious thing to us. If we have a taste for something else, it is not a good sign, and we ought to regret this before God, and ask Him for the right taste and mind. We should also know and remember that there is no sin on earth so terrible, no sin that must rouse the wrath of God so much, as ingratitude for and contempt of His great blessings. No blessing of God is greater than the one by which He gave us His only begotten Son and in Him eternal life, whereas we deserved only to get the just wages of our sins eternally. “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation” (Heb. 2:3). More so, once we have seen the gloriousness of God in the gospel of Christ, and have become the children of God by faith, and have tasted how sweet the Lord is, it would be a horrible ingratitude,

if were we now to consider the same grace and gospel to be a trifling thing of no taste to us. This would be what Jesus called “to have left one’s first love.” Paul also writes about the first love among the Galatians, who had at first appreciated the gospel so much that they had received him who preached it “as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.” And he adds: “Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? For I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me” (Gal 4:15). So much they had appreciated the gospel then! But when they were captivated by a “strange doctrine” and did not obey the truth, but desired “to be under the law” (Gal. 4:21), then he said sadly that Christ had become of no effect to them. His sacrifice was now of less value to them than justification by the law, and they were fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4). Is it not terrible that according to the words of Christ Himself such things can come to pass; that the first love can be lost, while one still goes on working and suffering for the name of Christ, is on one’s guard against false spirits, and has sharp eyes to discern them; separation being by a silent inward dying, rather than by the practice of true repentance and faith. The memorable words of Christ in Rev. 2:2–5 proclaim this.

Finally we should also notice, that if Christ is always to be dear and precious to us, the All and in all to our heart, and the new Song which never becomes old or long to us, it is necessary, that not only the right doctrine, but also that the right life should be maintained. We should be in continuous practice of our faith, daily living in repentance before God, in the knowledge of sin and of an awakened conscience. We shall want to be daily assured of the forgiveness of our sins, of grace and friendship with God. Christ will always be necessary, dear, and indispensable to us. The words of the gospel will be a continuous need, tasty and clear to us, and we shall gladly hear, read, and speak about Christ.

## March 26

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*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law,  
being made a curse for us – Gal. 3:13.*

If only these words could find room in our hearts, what a kingdom of heaven, of unspeakable solace, of eternal and imperturbable consolation, there would be, so that we would defy all the powers of hell, and in all our most miserable weakness triumph and rejoice in the Lord! Please reflect upon these words. What a picture we see here! Christ became a curse! That Christ, God's own Son, became a curse, is a strange and hard speech, but a strong and mighty consolation, if one can bear it in mind. Please note that Christ has borne the curse of the law. But this was something so great, that the apostle says that He became a curse, became a sheer curse altogether. He was not only laden with the curse, but so covered with it, that He could be called altogether a curse. Now, this seems too strange, but what else is it than what John says: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), which is sung over our heads each time we bow them at Jesus' Holy Communion table to receive His body and blood which He Himself declares were "shed ... for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28). The same thing is said in Isa. 53:6, 12: "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "He bare the sin of many." Thus it is a text we can never reflect upon and think about enough, that Christ was made a curse.

The second word very much worth thinking about is this: for us, for us, *for us!* The whole emphasis of this text lies on these short words: *for us!* For Himself Christ certainly did not need to be made a curse. The whole of His being was quite innocent, holy, and righteous. But the reason why He became a curse was that He had taken our sins upon Himself. Why, according to the law every murderer had to be hanged on a tree (Deut. 21:22–23), and therefore according to the law, Christ also had to hang on a tree, because He had taken upon Himself the sins of a sinner and murderer. And not only of one, but the sins of all sinners and murderers together, because before God we are all sinners and murderers. Therefore before God He had to be what we are, namely a sinner, a murderer, and an evildoer, as it is written: "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). In this way, before God, Christ was made the greatest sinner, the like of whom was not to be found on earth, because being a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, before God He is not now a person who is innocent and free from sin, as is the Son of God in His gloriousness. He is a sinner forsaken by God for a little while, bearing and having on His back the sins of Paul, "who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious" (1 Tim. 1:13); the sins of Peter, who denied his Lord; the sins of David, who committed adultery and murder; yes, and my sins and yours, and the sins of the whole world. Because all the sins that I, you, and we



all together have done and still daily do, have all been laid on Christ, the Lamb of God, with such power and such divine earnest as if Christ Himself had committed them. So in reality they are reckoned as the sins of Christ. Verily, either our sins must be Christ's own sins, or we must be eternally lost!

Christ has indeed had our sins laid on Him as truly as if He had done them Himself, and on the other hand all that He did and suffered was as completely in our place as if we had borne it ourselves. This was what Paul meant when he said: "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). And again: "because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead" (v. 14). From this we can see what the word "for us" means, when he says: "Christ was made a curse for us." Because of God's unspeakable mercy and because of the Father's eternal counsel of propitiation, Christ has made a very gracious exchange with us. What we had — i.e., sin, curse, and death — He took upon Himself. And what He had and we had not — i.e., righteousness, life, and salvation, He gave us. It certainly cost the dear Lord a great deal of strong crying and tears, and sweat and blood, when He was made a curse, but it still had to happen, and He went gloriously through it.

Now the apostle says that Christ really has redeemed us from the curse of the law. He does not say, that He will redeem us, for instance, when we have become sufficiently pious, faithful, and sanctified. No, but He "*has redeemed us.*" That happened on the day and during the hours when He was made a curse for us. Here we see the reason why the greatest sinners and the most sinful women, when they come to Jesus to seek grace, and to become His own for the rest of their lives, at once obtained grace and were received as if no law had existed, as if they had never sinned. Here is the reason why, when we come to Jesus in the same way, we an become righteous and saved immediately, as soon as we receive by faith the great, eternal gift of righteousness which has acceptance before God, and stands ready waiting for us.

## March 27

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*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? – Heb. 2:3.*

**G**od is love, and no tongue of man or angel can describe the love of God in a worthy way. But who reflects upon the fact that the greater the grace is, the greater the danger also is, especially if the great grace is neglected, despised, and misused? Who reflects upon the fact, that alongside the endless love of God, there is an equally endless righteousness and holiness in the being of God! And that only because grace is so great, the zeal of God, and the just judgment of God over those who do not care about, seek, appreciate, and receive His great grace, is the more terrible. Jesus says: “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for sin” (John 15:22). And immediately after the apostle had described the great grace and gloriousness the world had received in those days when the only begotten Son had come and spoken to us, he says: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” The blood of Christ necessarily shall and must be to us for life and salvation, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, or it will come over us in judgment and the curse, as over the unfaithful Jews! “The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this” (2 Kings 19:31). “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy,” says the apostle. “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing?” (Heb. 10:28–29). But to tread “under foot” the Son of God means only to care so little for Him, that we ignore Him, that we do not seek Him, do not pay homage to Him and embrace Him, that we do not become His own, His disciple, friend, and follower. Because what we care so little about that we do not bend down to pick up from the earth, that we tread on. Not all the Jews over whom God’s terrible judgment of revenge came, had abused or tortured Christ, nay, some had even wept over His sufferings; yet all got the same judgment, only because they did not receive Him so that they might become His disciples.

But what does the holy, zealous God do to the man who despises His love, His Son, and the voice of His Spirit? He does not do anything more terrible than to leave him to himself. He is abandoned by the Spirit of the Lord. He is no more awakened, disturbed, made contrite, and enlightened by the Spirit, but is allowed to go his own way, to follow his own counsel, and do his own pleasure, without correction, without fear, without anxiety for his soul. Indeed, he may become quite at ease in his sins. Then his mind and thoughts become so blinded and distorted, that he uses everything to his own destruction and damage, and all that God has given him to be a blessing, becomes a curse for him. What has been given for enlightenment becomes an infatuation to him. What has been given for awakening hardens him.

What has been given to be a solace and eternal bliss results in eternal anguish and condemnation for him. The zeal of the Lord of hosts does this!

“Oh, it is a quality of God, a way of acting,” an old man of the Spirit says, “at which my heart becomes frightened and because of which I have cried myself hoarse, and still have not been heard enough.” It is the quality, the way, of which David says: “With the pure Thou wilt shew Thyself pure; and with the froward Thou wilt shew Thyself unsavory” (2 Sam. 22:27). With the pure, i.e., the ones to whom, having a pure intention when they approach you, you can speak in a plain, open, and understandable way, and can instruct and lead them graciously. But with the froward Thou showest Thyself froward. Thou disappointest them and makest them blind. If somebody thinks this is to speak too hard of God, he should read the explanation given by the mild Savior Himself in Matt. 13:10–15 and 11:25 where He plainly says that He spoke in parables. “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath,” and “Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” And in 2 Thess. 2:10–12 the apostle says equally plainly: “Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness.”

So terribly God can punish His despisers. It is difficult to fight with God. It is dreadful to fall into the hands of the living God. We had better keep on the right side of Him who has all power in heaven and on earth. The ones seeking, loving, and following Him will be embraced with grace, endless mercy, goodness, and faithfulness during all their lifetime. But those who side with another shall have much sorrow.

# March 28

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*I ... know my sheep, and am known of mine* – John 10:14.

One almost cannot believe what a great secret there is in these words. They tell us there is some special relationship between the Shepherd and the sheep, and that everything depends on that. What can it be? We begin to get a presentiment of something when, at the great decisive moment when He goes to His atoning work, we hear this Lord solemnly declare: “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Listen to what the Lord Christ declares to be eternal life! Only the knowledge of God and the Savior! And again, when He speaks of the finest self-delusion in spiritual matters, the delusion of one’s own piety, power, and spirituality, by means of which many will be able to say on the last day: “Have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works?” (Matt. 7:22), He says plainly that He will turn them away with the words: “I never knew you: depart from Me.” The same words are used in the judgment and eternal dismissal of the virgins coming to the marriage carrying their lamps in order to meet the bridegroom, but having no oil. The Lord will only make this remark: “Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.” Think what an extraordinary word this “know” must be!

The same word of judgment He uses, when He explains why those trying to enter in the strait gate could not do so, those who were saying: “We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets” (Luke 13:26). The same word of judgment sounded against them: “I know you not whence you are.” Oh, should not everyone reading this and seeing how Christ, the deciding Judge, has been so specially zealous to stress this, should they not note that here is a secret which is important beyond measure? To the faithful this is nothing unexpected and extraordinary. On the contrary, to them it is a delightful confirmation that they have understood Him correctly. But to those wondering why the Lord does not say instead: “You have offended against My law,” or: “You have not been serious enough in your repentance and sanctification”; yes, to those wondering why the Lord does not present a well-staked out order of grace and say: “You have offended against this or that”; to those who have wanted to have it like that; it is incomprehensible to hear Him say only one thing: “I knew you not.” Even such must see, that in the great test at the last judgment in Matt. 25, where so many works are stated, still the stress is laid upon this: “You have done it to Me! It is for My sake you have done so and so to the least of these My brethren.” Thus Christ and an intimate acquaintance with Himself have been the source from which these works have come. Christ, Christ and not their own holiness has been the Object of their eye, and their zeal for sanctification. Those who notice that Christ has taken special care to point this

fact out to us, should they not once, for the sake of Christ and the eternal good of their immortal souls, stop and let it be said to them by the Lord, with the keys in His hand, that when He shuts, no man shall open! Should we not stop at His words and really take them to our hearts? After tens of years of holy zeal for God and His kingdom, many serious and pious men have awakened at last to see this fact, and have been plucked out of the fire as brands, because they have at last come to see the secret of the Kingdom of God. They have come to see a great and holy Person, bloody, with pierced hands and feet, and then have for the rest of their life, found delight and wisdom only in Him and in His death, so that afterwards they have considered their highest holiness to be only rubbish and meanness in comparison with Him and His death. That mind follows when a man gets to know Christ correctly. And only those knowing Christ that way, with regard to the kind of knowledge, if not with regard to the degree, only those are His sheep.

“If once and for all you want to know and be able distinctly to characterize what a Christian is,” says Luther, “or why a man is called a Christian, then you should not do so according to the law of Moses, or by comparison with the lives and holiness of the greatest saints, but you should look only at these words of Christ: ‘I know My sheep, and am known of Mine.’ So that you say: ‘A Christian is not the one who leads only a severe and hard life, like the most serious monks and eremites, because Jews also and Turks can do such things, and some of them lead a life which is even much more severe.’ In other words, all that can happen in and by us does not make anybody a Christian. What then? The only thing is that we know this Man, love Him, and consider Him for what He wants to be considered, namely, that He is the Good Shepherd who has given His life for the sheep, and who knows them. Such a knowledge is not anything else than the faith that comes by hearing the gospel.”

## March 29

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*For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ – Phil. 3:20.*

In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians Paul says: “We are everywhere pressed, but we do not fear; we are suppressed, but we do not perish; as those who die, and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet, always rejoicing.” What riddles these are! Is he not a peculiar and mysterious being who expresses himself like this! A Christian is indeed such a strange being, suppressed and yet triumphant, sorrowful and yet rejoicing, poor and yet very rich, sinful and yet absolutely righteous, wretched and yet glorious, a pilgrim on earth, but with a heavenly lifestyle! The world also has delight and pleasure, but only as long as the “flower of the grass” (James 1:10) does not fade, only as long as earthly prosperity lasts. When it has come to an end, then the delight is gone, too. But for Paul the sun does not rise until the evening, and when it becomes dark down here, then he rises to the light of the Paradise up there. He has a double life: he is a pilgrim on earth, but his life is in heaven. He belongs to a higher order of things, and with his heart he lives on this higher plane, in his true fatherland. “Our conversation,” he says, or literally, “Our citizenship, is in heaven.” *It is*, he says, *not: it will be*. And thereby he indicates it as something already present. Paul means something quite different from what the world means by the hope of “a life to come.” Paul already knows that he is a citizen of heaven, while he lives here on earth. And what a felicity, what a treasure such a knowledge is. No human thought has been able to measure it.

But from where did Paul get this implicit faith of his? One might well ask that. Yes, Paul knew Christ! That is the whole secret! In the gloom of this life upon the earth Paul saw a Man who gave him this certainty, a high, mysterious Man who said: “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world” (John 16:28). When He says: “In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2), they asked for the way there, and He gave them the following reply: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” And when they said to Him: “Shew us the Father!” He replied: “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.” And because of a sign of His omnipotence the blind got their sight, the deaf began to hear, the dumb to speak, and the dead rose from their graves. He cast out devils, He forgave sins, He commanded the powers of nature, and at last broke the bounds of death Himself, and rose from the grave with a glorified body.

When Paul had learned to know such a Lord and Savior he could say those words so full of consolation: “Our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven.” He knew that by Christ he had obtained the right of adoption with God (which right had been lost because of the Fall) and the citizenship in heaven. What are the consequences

of this? The consequence is that all who have the same faith in and acquaintance with the Savior as Paul had, have all of them the same grace and citizenship in heaven as he had, because they have been redeemed by the blood of the same Son of God, and therefore also have the same solacing certainty in this respect as he had. In fact, you may not see and feel the gloriousness of this heavenly citizenship in yourself. It is deeply hidden and covered by all the wretchedness of this life. But our "life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3), and thus it is certain and well founded. If it is night down here, up there is eternal light and clarity. If the way is rugged and full of thorns, we are pilgrims on our way home. There are friends who know us, and there is our Great Friend above all other friends. This is no poetry, but most serious truth, founded on the words and works of Christ, and His entering into the holiest for us.

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God," says the apostle (Eph. 2:19). And this without regard to the person. There is no difference, for all have sinned. But everybody believing in Christ, in whom we were all chosen before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4); everybody believing in Christ, i.e., everyone judging and punishing himself, but having his only solace in "Him that justifieth the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5); all such human beings, the sinful woman as well as the Virgin Mary, the thief as well as Paul, are equally chosen, justified, and well-pleasing to God; only in Christ. With equal certainty all of these are fellow citizens with the holy, and belonging to the household of God.

## March 30

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*Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope – Zech. 9:12.*

☞ How can I turn to the stronghold, or begin to believe in Christ while I am still so full of sin and so hard, careless, and ungodly?” Many a soul in bondage asks thus.

You are all the time turned into yourself. And if somebody tells you: “You do not believe the Word of God, you make God a liar,” then you say: “Well, I believe in the Word about Christ. To be sure I believe that His atonement is enough and that His love is great. But the fault is with me, the hardness of my heart, my terrible love of ease and hypocrisy, my dreadful love of sin, etc.” By your words it is obvious that you turn straight away from the stronghold to yourself. You do not believe in the witness of God by which He has testified of His Son, that He will save us as those who are lost. You sincerely desire to make yourself in a better shape. You do not believe and care about what Christ says, that you must first have been grafted into Him by faith. That you must first — as an ungodly person — be justified and pardoned, and filled with the peace and joy of faith. Not until then can you even begin to bear fruit.

“Turn to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope.” We repeat it once more! All of your misery is because you do not immediately turn to the stronghold, but in thousands of other directions, and think and try and wait and hope, yes, hope in anything else but Christ. You are caught in a waiting for something extraordinary that of itself should take place within your heart, a redemption that should happen there, the redemption from a certain sin, from evil thoughts and hardness, lightheartedness and powerlessness. And the redemption that happened in Christ stands in the dim background.

Yes, that is the fault! And innumerable and quite endless are the conditions and reservations which you then ponder over, and because of which you still lie captive. But that the Son of God died for us, and that everything has its answer in Him; that for all sinners the source of grace flows fuller than the river of sin, that is nothing to your soul! That you pass over hastily! Oh, wake up and reflect upon this unique and eternally great and valid fact, that all the sins of the world already have been blotted out, that God already has become reconciled and appeased, and that He is burning with sheer love, longing to be allowed to give you grace as grace. Please remember that all the persistent words that God speaks, and that demand something of you, are the words of the law, and have only one purpose: “that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” Remember that all those persistent words have only been said to the free, happy-go-lucky despisers of God, despisers who do not care about heaven; and to the hypocrites at ease and the self-righteous Pharisees who think that they can



earn heaven by themselves. But these persistent words have not been said to the poor sinners who punish and judge themselves, who gladly want to have both improvement and faith, repentance and prayer, but who never find these things within themselves the way they want it. These have been promised sheer grace, sheer love and forgiveness! “Turn to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope,” says the Lord, “even today do I declare that I will render double unto you.” “Even today”! Yes, today He announces the same grace to you! Also today He proclaims the opening of the prison to them that are bound! (Isa. 61:1). When in these days we hear so much preached about the sufferings of Christ, and follow Him along His *via dolorosa*; when we see Him sweating blood in the garden, and hear Him cry out on the cross regarding the atonement-suffering as prophesied in the Scripture: “It is finished”; yes, when because of the same atonement, we see Him pardon even the thief immediately, and promise him all of the blessed fruit of His death, with the sweet declaration: “Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43), should we not at once let our wailing in unbelief come to an end, and at once run into His arms? In all this should we not see His arms held out towards us all, and hear the words from His mouth that I want to announce today: “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. And ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

Yes, once more, ye prisoners of hope, you that have a hope, why do you hold back from turning to the stronghold? Can you yourselves become worthier, or God more gracious? No, turn today to the true stronghold; take the great, important step of asking Him to give you a complete pardon, and to take you up into His covenant of utterly undeserved grace, because of His blood! Oh, take the great step today, and know that no poor sinner has ever taken that step in vain. Do not think of a long prayer. Look how the thief prayed and immediately got the reply so full of consolation: “Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.”

But there is one thing you should be on your guard against, and that equally as much as against death, namely, seeking the reply in your own heart, in your feeling. Look for the reply in the Word of God Himself! Take that reply from the promise of God Himself: “Even today do I declare it [namely redemption], and I will render double up to thee.” That is called grace upon grace. Praise God!

## March 31

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*In whom we have redemption through his blood,  
the forgiveness of sins – Eph. 1:7.*

If somebody were to ask: “When all are not blessed, how then can I know that God has forgiven my sins, and has given to me His grace?” the reply is: You must start with faith in God and His Word, hearing, believing, and embracing the grace that all, even the unfaithful also have in Christ. Thereby you will get a grace that everybody does not have. “What grace is it that all have, even also the unfaithful?” It is a propitiated God, the forgiveness of sins, ready and waiting for those who will only come and receive it. “What then is it that all do not possess?” It is a heart that is reconciled to God, a faith that receives the forgiveness of sins, and lives in God. “Where is this written?” In 2 Cor. 5:19–20 it says: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation... We pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” In Rom. 5:10 it says: “For ... when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.” In Col. 1:14 it is written: “In whom [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” In Zech. 3:9: “Behold the stone [Christ]... I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.” In Gal. 3:13 it says: “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.” That is how the Scriptures speak. Here it is plainly written: that in Christ God reconciled to Himself not only the faithful, but all the world; and that propitiation means that He does not impute their trespasses to them. This happened in Christ, and not in our conversion. He now asks men to allow themselves to be reconciled to God — this is all that is yet to happen. Here it is said that we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, not by our repentance, improvement, our earnestness, our prayers or faith. All these are not needed for our reconciliation, what is needed is only that we should receive the grace already existing. What is more, it says here: “When we were enemies.” Here it says, that the redemption which happened by the blood of Christ, was the same as the forgiveness of sins; yes, that our sins were taken away in one day, when the precious stone, “the head stone of the corner,” was cut. Here it is said that by Christ we were redeemed from the curse of the law in that day, at the moment, when He was made a curse for us, which happened when He hung on the tree. Oh, what a terrible thing it is that the world does not know what has happened; that she does not know the history of mankind; that she does not know that mankind has been redeemed, bought, and won from all sin; from the power of death and the devil as surely as the fact that it had once fallen into sin.

Remember that this forgiveness of sins, this redemption belongs to every human being, pious or not pious, faithful or unfaithful. Whatever you may be, at least your sins have been taken away, blotted out, forgiven, and thrown into the depths of the sea. This happened when Christ died. If you are condemned, it will not be because of your sins, but because of your unbelief, because you remain away from God. If, on the other hand, you want to come to God, become His own, and experience His grace, then there is nothing to hinder you. You are welcome any moment. As the Lord Himself says: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). There is no exception, for "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). Whosoever wants, even "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow" (Isa. 1:18).

Those are the words of the great merciful Lord Himself. Then there is no exception, and the reason is that atonement has been made for all sin. The whole world has been reconciled. When somebody is in distress because of his sins and cannot get certainty with regard to forgiveness, the fault is that he does not believe God, does not consider God truthful, does not want to pay heed to what Christ has done or what God says in His Word. In fact, he makes God a liar, which is rather terrible. But if somebody wants to take God at His Word, but only cannot get it into his heart, then God will give him more of the gift of faith, and he will thus get the witness in himself, that all his sins really have been taken away, that he is dressed in the complete merits of Christ, and that he is a beloved child of God.

# April 1

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*The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger,  
and plenteous in mercy – Ps. 103:8.*

**R**eading this, some poor soul may sigh: “Oh, I am a wretched man! God is only gracious towards His *friends*. They may be consoled by a verse like this, but not I! I have been cast away from His face. I see and feel that He is angry with me! Why? I see that He does not want to hear my prayer! Why? I feel His threat in my heart. I seek Him in the Word and do not get any consolation or power at all from it. I seek Him in prayer, but I do not get any gracious reply, only threats and fear. The Lord has forsaken me!” Poor soul! Who has painted God to you in such a way? The devil and your own lying heart have done it. You have quite a false picture of God; rather, the picture of the devil before your eyes! Look how the Word of God presents the disposition of God’s heart.

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will He keep His anger forever.” It is true that the Lord may contend with you for some time and show Himself wrathful. It is true that at such a time of wrath He can hide His face from you and hide Himself for a long time. But it is impossible that He can chide that way until eternity, and continue to be angry forever. Note the difference.

All the Word of God, from the beginning of the Bible to its end, and all His works with the children of Israel, show definitely that the Lord has never forsaken anybody forever, other than despisers living at ease, despisers who are all the time rebellious. He has never forsaken those who are in earnest, who have let themselves be punished, who have invoked the Lord in their distress and have wanted to be His children. Sirach says: “Look at the generations of old, and see; did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded? Or did any abide in His fear, and was forsaken? Or whom did He ever despise, that called upon Him? For the Lord is full of compassion and mercy, longsuffering, and very pitiful, and forgiveth sins, and saveth in time of affliction. Woe be to fearful hearts” (Ecclesiasticus 2:10–12, Apocrypha). Yes, woe unto him that wants to believe his own heart and feeling! Woe unto him that does not rather though in direct opposition to feeling, believe God!

Listen to what God Himself says: “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend forever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before Me, and the souls which I have made” (Isa. 57:15–16). Is this the very Word of God Himself? Then believe it! Do not make God a liar! As this verse says: He does contend with us, but not forever. He argued with the woman of Canaan a long time, and even called her a

dog. But when she continued to believe, and penetrated the black cloud and looked at His heart, which according to His good reputation should have been sheer love, yes, and took Him at His Word, saying: "Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table!" (Matt. 15:27), then He could no longer restrain Himself. His heart glowed with love, and He exclaimed: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt!" There you can see what His heart is like even when He chides! There you see what His highest delight is, namely, that we continue to believe in Him. We see clearly that it was a delight, a pleasure to Him that the woman believed like that, because He says to her: "O woman, great is thy faith!" Do not you also want to give Him this pleasure? Then even when He hides Himself, continue to believe?

Oh, do not let the devil distort the picture of God to you! This is the true picture: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy." *Merciful*, means that God is a Being that feels compassion in all our distress, and is not capable of allowing us to invoke Him without being helped. As Jesus said: "Shall not God avenge His own elect?" (Luke 18:7). He will surely hear the distress and prayer of His children day and night, and help them.

*Gracious*, means that He does not deal with us after our sins, but according to His covenant of peace in Christ. *Patient*, means that He is slow to anger, and waits that He may be gracious.

Many thousands of thoughts and pictures of God spring up in our hearts. But this is the only true picture. As soon as any other picture of God appears to your heart, such as that He wants to deal with you after your sins or that He does not care about you, but has forsaken you, then say immediately: No, this is a totally wrong picture, a false and distorted one. Or like this: This is not the image of God, but of the devil. The true God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

## April 2

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*O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory* – Ps. 108:1.

Some may ask: How did David get such a heart? By what means did the Lord become so dear to his heart?

It is only the forgiveness of sins, and the assurance of such, that can make a human heart really happy, warm, and burning. Even if a man believes all that the Scriptures say about Christ and believes so firmly in it that he could die a thousand times for that belief, yet does not know his own sins, but goes about content and self-satisfied, then all his belief does not result in joy or life in God, but all his godliness consists only of knowledge and pious observations.

If on the other hand, a man knows only his sins so that his flesh and heart fail, but does not have the assurance of faith concerning forgiveness, he continues cold and dead, even if he were to work himself to death in order to fill his heart with love and delight. Two things are always needed, two things united by the Scriptures: repentance and faith: i.e., an abundance of sin and an abundance of grace. Then, oh, what newness of life, what joy, what peace, what fervency of spirit, what delight in and power to do everything holy. Then in spite of my great unworthiness, I get the assurance of the great God: “Your sins are forgiven, you will receive mercy against them all, and you will already be living on earth in a kingdom where no sin will be imputed to you, but in My eyes you will be well-pleasing to Me all the time!” Listen to this, all of you! — it has often been said, but it must often be repeated, as it is often forgotten; listen! this is the one and only way to salvation and holiness, to righteousness before God and a joyous and warm heart, willing and capable to good deeds.

When a man has been awakened from the terrible sleep of sin, and has begun to seek salvation, or when a Christian wakes up to see his negligence, coldness of mind, and sins, and sinks down into a mind of bondage, then it is usually a great concern to him that he cannot love God the way he should, and the way he sees that David and other children of God have loved Him. Then he gets frightened, and prays, and works, in order to love, and make his heart warm. But he cannot; he still remains as cold as before. He prays for love, but still feels the same coldness. He fights against his idolatrous love for other things or persons who have become more precious to him than God, but still he loves them. He is unhappy about this, and rightly so, because he does not love God.

Then he not only understands, but at last realizes with the new sight that the Spirit gives him, that Christ has come to help really lost sinners, that He came to do just that for us, that the law could not do in us — take note! *what* the law could not do. That means that He has loved God in our place, that He has been pure, holy,

and righteous in the place of the unrighteous, that all is finished, all is ready now, in all our wretchedness, unworthiness, and impropriety, no matter how cold or warm we are, no matter how hard or contrite we are, we still are always righteous, holy, and well-pleasing in Him. When in the light of faith, the soul sees this and becomes consoled, is made free and assured of pardon, oh, then he loves, then he can love, then he cannot be without loving a God and Father so gracious beyond measure. Then there is a new life in his heart, a new delight, peace, and love, and a sincere delight in the commandments and ways of the Savior. Then he cannot but praise God out of a brimful heart. Then he can sing with David: “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord ... who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases” (Ps. 103:1–3).

In this way a man gets such a heart as David had. To be religious, wise, pious, and charitable without having gone this way, this dark, miserable, wretched way, through distress of sins to pardon in Christ, is nothing but deceit. It may create more “respectable” individuals than the rest of the world, but not Christians who have “put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27), because without having been distressed because of his sins, a man cannot truly put on Christ. It may be all right to be such a religious and virtuous man for the present, but when the king comes in to see the wedding guests, then that man will be without a wedding garment, and therefore, after all his piety, he will be “cast into outer darkness” (Matt. 22:12–13). No, each one must go the way of David and the sinful woman! What? Should a man then sin in order to be saved? Oh, no, there certainly are enough sins from earlier days. There is no lack of sins against us. The fault is that we do not know them. And you certainly will know more sin than you can bear, if only you have the grace to revere God, if only the “fear of God” comes “before your eyes” (Rom. 3:18), if only the holiness of God is allowed to shine into your conscience and heart so that its impurity, coldness, hypocrisy, and pride, become great sins to you. When thus the heart itself is attacked, then it is true that distress becomes harder to bear, but also grace becomes true, and great, and abundant; the heart is born again, and the man becomes a true Christian.

## April 3

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*For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive* — 1 Cor. 15:21–22.

**W**e should never forget that Christ came to restore all that we lost in Adam. Christ came to set right all that was destroyed by Adam, or by the Fall of man. Now it was not only sin and condemnation that, through Adam, came to all men, but also death in all its senses, including the bodily death, i.e., the annihilation of the bodily part of man. Therefore, Christ also came to restore this, so that through Him we get the whole being of man, the way he was before the Fall into sin, comprised in a beautiful, healthy, and immortal body. As mentioned a moment ago, Christ came to restore all that was lost through the Fall of man. By the grace of God you that read this, probably cheerfully believe what the apostle says in Rom. 5: “As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ... even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life... For the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offenses unto justification... For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (vv. 12, 18, 16, 19). But if we believe this magnificent gospel, then we must also believe what the apostle says here about the restoration of our bodies. “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” We must not pick the work of Christ to pieces. His restoration work was complete. He was to disarm all our enemies: sin, the devil, death, and condemnation. But at this time all is invisible and absurd to our reason; because in order to train our faith, He has left the outward form of all this evil with us.

When I become a child of God, I still cannot see that sin has been taken away, because I must still see and feel its life and power in my flesh, so that I may utterly despair, and realize that I am an abomination to God. This must be so till I have the divine conviction that is called faith deeply impressed upon my heart, that Christ has condemned the sin in my flesh, so that sin is no more able to condemn me before God. With this faith I can say in full truth: “In spite of all my sin there is no sin before God, who knows what the precious blood of Jesus is worth. Before God I am quite free from sin and quite righteous and pure — only because of the atonement by the blood of Christ, only because I am in Christ.” At the same time when I see and feel how the devil storms in me and in all men, then it seems absurd to me that he has been overcome by Christ. But as Christ has said it, I must believe it after all, and say: “All the devil’s fury will not hurt me as long as I remain only in Christ. On the contrary, he will only be at my service by driving me to, and training me in, faith and prayer.” In the same way, when death puts my body in the earth,



so that it molders away and becomes dust, it seems equally absurd to me, that after all, this body will rise from the dead and live in eternity. But as Christ has said: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25), then I must say gladly: "Christ will not become a liar as regards that word!"

Oh, inconceivable wonder! Sin will not be counted as sin, the devil will not hurt me, death will not hold me, because Christ is my complete Savior. As Luther says: "Verily, if Christ has performed His task aright (to restore what was lost), and makes His apostles preach so, then His promise will not be anything uncertain. Therefore, let us, undismayed, dare to take Him at His word, and depart this life relying on the promise that, even though we have been dead and putrefied for a long time, when the delightful trumpet begins to sound at last, and to say (as Christ said to Lazarus): "Peter, Paul, come out!" then in the twinkling of an eye, we shall shoot out of the earth like sparks, more beautiful than heaven, with a whole body and all the sections joined, no matter whether we have been burnt to ashes, or have been eaten away in water. Praise the great Lord who Himself will do it, and who Himself has said it in Isa. 26:19: "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead."

## April 4

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*For the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation — John 5:28–29.*

**I**t is hard to describe what great harm, slackness, weakness, and looseness in the whole of Christianity comes from the fact that some do not rightly meditate on, and believe in, the resurrection of the dead. But our enemy, the devil, knows well what he achieves, when he draws a cover over the important end to temporal existence, even the resurrection to eternal life or to eternal damnation! Usually by this means all spiritual matters first become less important. It no longer seems so important to be always certain about the friendship of our God. We still can eat and drink and sleep, although we do not know whether we will go to heaven or to hell. When the last home has been definitely put aside, and has become something uncertain and dim to the soul, it is no longer so important to care about the Word, and prayer to God, or to reconcile ourselves with an adversary, or to say an awakening word to our neighbor.

When it is a matter of doing or suffering something for the sake of Christ, maybe giving up the comforts and pleasures of life in order to follow Christ; or when it is a matter of making a sacrifice that costs the heart much, or a painful self-denial, it is chiefly in such cases that our power languishes. This happens when we do not believe firmly in the great and blessed end of earthly life and do not see it continually before the eye of the heart. The apostle calls the hope of salvation a helmet, because as the helmet made the soldier dash forward more daringly in the fight, and made him less afraid of blows with the sword, a firm hope of salvation also makes us not care so much about what can happen to us in time because we follow Christ, but it makes our eyes look only for His pleasure, as we know that after the fight there are such wonderful things waiting for us, that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

So it is also necessary for us to be well armed with this helmet of salvation, when our way through this life is dark and howling, when a Christian begins to feel less often the presence and sweetness of his Savior, and is sometimes attacked by boredom and impatience. The general desire for happiness makes him pine for some joy to be felt, which he misses. Maybe he has hoped to become happier in this life, but he finds himself disappointed of all earthy felicity. He finds that, as someone has said, all the happiness of his life has been spoiled. And then it often happens that such a Christian even feels unhappy, when he has no other joy on this earth than “only God”! If he would only intensely believe in or would really

feel the friendship with and presence of his God, then he certainly would not feel unhappy, but rather, beyond measure rich and blessed. But when all this is missing, and when also he may be pressed by a cross that will follow him through all his life and makes all his world dark, then everything often grows black to him, and he becomes weak and wretched.

Oh, what a solace and power it would be then, if he would get eyes spiritual enough to look into the hidden but faithful counsel of the Strange One! Then he would see that his happiness and joy certainly have not been spoiled, but have only been preserved to another time or another world, where he will succeed better. By the mere certain consciousness of this he would become so content with his strange God and His household, that he would not even wish anything more than God Himself, and he would feel the highest joy and greatest riches with “only God.”

We have a good example of this in Ps. 73. There Asaph first confesses how he had felt envious at the prosperity and happiness of the wicked, whereas he and the righteous were plagued and chastened so much that he says: “I had almost said of the ungodly: Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.” But note how he came out from this temptation! He says: “When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end... How they are brought into desolation as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors... Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (vv. 13, 16–17, 19, 24).

This made his heart so content with only God that he now exclaims: “There is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever” (vv. 25–26). These are the results when we go into the sanctuary of God and look into the secret of the household of God, and see what is hidden under the cover of this present life — namely the great, eternal unhappiness hidden under the precious clothes and delicate life of the rich man, and, on the contrary, the great, eternal happiness covered by the rags and sores of Lazarus.

## April 5

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*But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting...  
To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember  
his commandments to do them — Ps. 103:17–18.*

**T**his passage is a precious outburst of a Christian's inner conversation, which first and last is: "Think of the commandments of the Lord and do according to them." These verses express this perpetual, sincere wish and sigh in the heart of the faithful to be able to do the will of the Lord. A Christian often cannot think anything higher of his spiritual life. He often thinks that there is nothing more than to think of the commandments of God and to do them. This is the "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matt. 5:6) of which Christ speaks, when also the righteousness of life is understood thereby.

In this life a true Christian can never completely fill these demands. The commandments of the Lord with their demands as to the inner man, are always higher than he can attain to. He always remains sighing in the spirit: "Oh, if one could be better! Oh, if I could be and do as the Lord loves!" This wishing and sighing are, as it were, the breath and heartbeat of the new man. But what is really the secret? It is nothing else than Christ in us, the Spirit of God dwelling in the heart, a partaking of the nature of God. It is this pure Holy Spirit, that always fights against the flesh in us, so that, even when we are at our weakest, yes, even when we fall and forget ourselves, we can never remain in sin.

Now here is a text by which to prove oneself. It says: "Remember His commandments to do them." Thousands can understand, think of, and speak about the commandments of the Lord, but they themselves never begin to do them. Oh, it is no difficult art to think and speak of good works, and demand them of others. So many are zealous for the law where others are concerned. And for them, they think that it is never stressed severely enough. But as for themselves, they will not move the burden with one of their fingers, says Christ. To such people the Lord again says: "What hast thou to do to declare My statutes, or that thou shouldest take My covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction [for your own part], and castest My words behind thee" (Ps. 50:16–17). Here honesty and truth are needed. "God is not mocked" (Gal. 6:7).

Also for a faithful Christian there is a great danger to misuse the doctrine of our weakness, so that when he has received consolation and peace in Christ, he gives up the thought of such matters as being difficult for him. Oh, that will not do. We should always think of the commandments of the Lord and do them, even when we have got our full righteousness and peace in Christ. The power you have not yet got, you can still get. What seems impossible to you, is easy to the Lord. At the same time as Paul speaks about his weakness, he also speaks about the power of

God in spite of the weakness: “When I am in the weak. Therefore, when you are happy in your weakness, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). God is mighty God, and having assurance of the forgiveness of your sins, then you should, most intimately and seriously, lay the matter which is too difficult for you upon the heart of your gracious Savior, and ask for His power to enable you to do what He demands. Say with Augustine: “Bid me, Lord, what Thou wantest. But give me Thyself what Thou commandest. O Lord, Thou knowest that I myself am capable of nothing.”

But even if you never get all that you ask for in this way, even if you can never do all the good things you would like to, it is still necessary that you think of the commandments of the Lord and pray for them, so that by such an exercise you may always be kept in a living appreciation of your own weakness. This will work in you the wholesome humiliation God aims at when He leaves us to ourselves and to Satan. The mere knowledge of our weakness does not work this humiliation. Nothing can be more deplorable than when an otherwise faithful soul falls into such a spiritual laziness, that he no longer thinks that he must obey the commandments of the Lord, or becomes humiliated and bowed down by his shortcomings. Pay careful attention to this! When a man speaks about his great importance and shortcomings, but at the same time is unbroken, nay, rather, is pleased with himself and proud, oh, what a hurtful sight this is, and how disgusting is such a voice! Such things spring from ease and laziness. Therefore, in everything it is most important to think of doing the will of God.

For instance, it is true that we cannot pray the way we should. We are often absentminded, slow, and cold in our prayers. It is also true that the one in such trouble should still believe in Christ and should not despair and give room for unbelief. But should I therefore never bother my flesh with praying? God forbid! To be sure, I ought to pray as I can, and ask God for grace to be able to pray better! Similarly in other cases where my weakness is too great for me. Perhaps I cannot be so mild, meek, humble, loving, chaste, and patient as I should be. I cannot witness for Christ or sacrifice my own good for my neighbor as I should, but because of that weakness I should not forget these precious things. I should still think of the commandments of the Lord and seek to do them. And I should all the time pray to God for more and more power to do them. In fact, this is the rightful exercise of all the faithful. It is their new nature. It is the work of the Spirit Himself in them. On our part, we should see that we are always dutiful and obedient to the Spirit, and do not again relax and go to sleep.

## April 6

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*Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them – Ezek. 37:26.*

When, due to Adam's breaking the covenant with God, all of mankind became not only guilty of eternal punishment, but also quite incapable of ever redeeming itself, and of ever fulfilling the law of God, there was terrible distress. But as God, in His foreknowledge, had foreseen this misery and, in His great mercy, had felt compassion for mankind, He had also taken steps before the foundation of the world was laid, before the first human life was allowed to enter the world, to put this misery right. In His eternal heavenly counsel He had decided to save mankind by giving His Son.

With Him, He now made a new covenant, which as regards us human beings, was a covenant of grace and peace, but which in itself was the same covenant of law that God had made with Adam, but which was broken and could not be fulfilled by fallen man. It was the same covenant of law concerning which every man still has a dim feeling left in his conscience, and which, for the humiliation of mankind, was engraved with strong and explicit words in stone on Mount Sinai. Because the Scriptures say: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God [did], sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3), in this covenant the Son undertook to unite human nature with His eternal divinity, become a true man and the second Adam of mankind, and as such to represent mankind and reconcile them and restore them in the same way as the first Adam represented them as regards their fall and ruin. All this He did at a time determined by the Father.

Consequently Christ undertook, in the place of all men, first to fulfill the requirements of the law, and secondly, to undergo the punishment they, by trespassing against the law, had made themselves guilty of. In a word, He undertook to be "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). Such things the Son undertook. On the other hand, as Paul says in Gal. 3:16–19, the promise was made to Him as regards a testament (will) and an inheritance in favor of man; i.e., on their behalf He obtained assurance of all the eternal bliss originally intended for and promised to them, but lost because of the fall of man. This is included in the testament and inheritance. Or to use the words of David: He has "received gifts for men" (Ps. 68:18), which gifts He will distribute among them as their Lord and King. For that purpose men were to become His property, to be kept and guarded in Him for their eternal bliss. Besides, they should themselves be the reward of His work.

All this is called a covenant in the Scriptures, so that by it is meant, on one hand, the act in itself that was decided upon in the counsel of God, and on the other, the

persons who made the covenant with each other. As regards the treasures of grace hereby earned for men, i.e., the forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness, peace with God, adoption, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, power to sanctification, victory over all spiritual enemies, etc., as well as how these treasures will be received as by right of inheritance, it is called a testament. Again we find the everlasting testament mentioned in Heb. 13:20. "The covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law ... cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect" (Gal. 3:17). The testament was in force both before and after the death of the testator, and because of the certainty of it, has been considered by God as if it had happened at the beginning of the world.

Therefore these testaments of God with Adam and Christ should not be mixed up with what we generally call the Old and New Testament which are also called the old and the new covenant. By the Old Testament, namely, the special, symbolical, and preparatory household of law is meant, which household God kept with His people before the birth of Christ and the time of the duration of this household. By the New Testament is meant the household of grace entering with the arrival of Christ and accomplished atonement. This household and time Christ Himself likened to a wedding beginning with the arrival of the bridegroom, who had been awaited for such a long time.

Thus the eternal covenant with Christ was the same both during the Old and the New Testament periods. After the Fall, to Adam and Eve the same covenant of grace was announced as to us, namely, that the woman's seed was to bruise the serpent's head. Abraham was justified by faith as well as we, so that in the Scriptures the faith and justification of Abraham often are even put before us as examples. Abraham "believed God [as regards the promise of Christ], and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3). So also David had the same faith, in that "blessed is the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works" (Rom. 4:6).

## April 7

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*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden ... and ye shall find rest unto your souls – Matt. 11:28–29.*

When these sweet tidings come to unhappy, poor, sick, and confined souls, these souls, despairing of their sins and the quality of repentance already attained, begin to become aware of what the gospel really contains and promises them. The promise is that all they have sought to find in themselves so anxiously and fruitlessly, all they have tried to gain by improvement, repentance, prayer, and striving, has already been earned and gained for them by Another. Furthermore, He has given and promised them all this without expecting any thanks from them or worthiness on their part; yes, they have been assured of all that by an eternal testament.

When they begin to become aware of something like that, it is not without fruit. It has an absolute intense drawing effect on their hearts and kindles a true, living, and saving faith in them. There begins a wondering, an asking, a delight and hope, an increased sorrow and repentance, a certainty and rejoicing, all because of the same life-giving gospel, all because of the same faith. Someone begins to wonder, begins to ask: Does it indeed have this meaning? Then may I also come? There is a reaching out for Christ, and a hunger and thirst after His righteousness fill the heart.

Another seems as if he were even more sorrowful than before. The heart, dried and hardened under the law, begins to melt under the great love of God, so that there comes a new sorrow, but accompanied with hope, and a sincere longing to become a participant in this love and grace. A third seems as if he is pulled straight from great distress to the highest joy and assurance. The ways of the Holy Spirit are different with different souls and in different circumstances. But all, who in their distress have perceived so much of the gospel that their wretched, depressed hearts, and their eyes turned inward on themselves and their own righteousness, have now been drawn to another goal: these have now been turned towards the Crucified One, have now been turned away from their own righteousness to His righteousness, from their obedience to His obedience, from their repentance to His agony, from their own prayers to His prayer, etc., so that all their hope of salvation, all their longing and yearning are now placed on Him. In all these a saving faith has already been kindled, namely, the faith that Christ so often praised in those who came to Him to seek grace and help. Take for instance the sick woman (Matt. 9) who came up to Jesus and touched His garment in order to be healed from her disease and who became whole at that very moment, and to whom Jesus said: “Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole.” And again the sinful woman who washed the feet of Christ with her tears in the house of Simon,



till Jesus told her that her sins were forgiven and said: "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Of these examples Luther says: "They had heard the good report (the gospel), that Jesus was the Man who helped and consoled all, and they had believed in this report, and therefore came to Him, driven by their distress. Had they not believed, they would not have come." But please note that this faith of theirs had only manifested itself in a seeking, coming, and invoking of the name of the Lord, and still Jesus said that it was a real faith, a saving faith. With regard to their faith He said plainly: "Thy faith hath saved thee" (Luke 7:50).

There was such a coming, hungering and thirsting, striving and seeking faith also in the father of the child with the dumb spirit, when he cried out with tears: "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Such faith manifested itself also in the bride in the Song of Solomon, when in the night she went about the city and sought the One whom her soul loved and asked the watchmen: "Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?" (Song of Sol. 3:3). And in Jacob, the patriarch, when he exclaimed, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26).

This seeking, invoking, hungering, and thirsting faith is really saving faith, as it embraces Jesus, and despairs of all man's efforts, and seeks salvation only in Him. Sooner or later this faith is followed by another degree of faith, a finding, an assurance, a reply, so that the bride now says: "I found Him whom my soul loveth" (Song of Sol. 3:4). "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" (Song of Sol. 6:3).

The cover falls at last from my eyes. They are opened, and I now see what I could not see before, how everything is finished and brought to perfection in Christ. Now, what do I still want and wait for? All my sins and impurities, all my coldness and sloth and hardness, all have been dearly enough atoned for, paid, blotted out, yes, and cast into the depths of the sea. Only because of my unbelief have I gone about so unhappy. Yes, and now I can say: "If one died for all, then were all dead" (2 Cor. 5:14). I am dead and raised in Christ.

This is the full certainty of faith. This is always accompanied by peace, a blessed peace, the peace of God, yes, peace in the conscience from fretting sins, because they have all been blotted out and forgiven, and there is now an intimate friendship with God. Of this peace the apostle says: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1).

## April 8

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*Our Father which art in heaven* – Matt. 6:9.

**N**o Christian should go further in the Lord's Prayer before he has carefully thought whether, with the confidence of a child, he really means what he says by the word: Father! namely, that God is his gracious and benignant Father, and he the beloved child of God. Because the consolation and power of the whole prayer depends on a really heartfelt belief in this word: Father! Can you call God your Father with all your heart? Do you in your heart believe that you are the beloved child of God, and do you reflect upon what this means? Then you will also pray the rest of the precious prayer with blessed confidence.

But here we find again all sorts of shortcomings in otherwise God-fearing souls. First of all, the souls who have not yet arrived at the freedom of faith but are serving by works, souls who still in some way consider themselves the children of God, not in the great, real sense of the word as Christ spoke it, but only in the sense that they are not of the world, but of the religious group, and belong to those who seek and love God. In this superficial sense anyone can easily speak of being "children of God." But to know that one belongs to the religious group is not at all the same as to believe that "God is our true Father, and we His true children," because what the word stands for, you will see from the words of Christ with regard to our relationship with Him.

Continue to think of what it means, and may God give us right now opened eyes to see it. After the finished work of atonement on the day of His resurrection, the Lord began to talk like this: "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John 20:17). Do you notice here, what it means to be a child of God? Here the Lord first says: "brethren," but that is not enough. In order that nobody will overlook what "brother" meant He adds: "My Father and your Father, my God and your God." With this the Lord Christ plainly indicated the meaning of the word "brother," and there the word "child of God" gets such a meaning that the angels in heaven can cover their faces when they hear it. Child of God! This was the great thing God thought of in the beginning, when He created man, and as anybody can see who uses his eyes, He created everything on earth for that man. Man, a child of God! That was the great fact by which the eternal Son of God could become a human child, and before all others could prove that the disciples were His brethren. Here, alas, we must confess that our hearts are far too narrow to be able rightly to embrace something so great.

There is an essential difference between the faith of one and the faith of another on this matter. The one can never marvel enough at the height and depth, breadth and length of this gloriousness, can never seem to get enough of it into his heart

as he apprehends and believes it, even though it is already his greatest delight on earth. Whereas the other finds it easy to believe as much as he desires, but does not marvel at, nor rejoice in it. He has not yet seen what it really means to be a child of God. This is the first discrepancy in the belief in the word: Our Father.

The second is, that even faithful men and women who have for some time been blessed in this glorious adoption, again sink down in their own wretchedness, and begin to look at themselves, and lose the proper confidence of a child of God. Some say the Lord's Prayer with a certain carelessness, so that they do not meditate upon what they say when uttering the word: "Our Father," and so can easily pass over it. But because of this they are dry and downhearted while they repeat the prayer. Others obviously have a conscience in bonds, because they have fallen rather seriously into sin, or have sunk in mighty temptations, and have become enmeshed in bonds of sin which now meet them in the prayer and say with a terrifying voice: "Do *you* want to pray to God, do *you* want to call God your Father, you that have done so and so, you that know such and such about yourself"? This makes it very difficult indeed to be able to say: "Our Father" with the proper confidence. Let everybody remember this, that no matter what class he belongs to, it is important beyond all description that he does not continue to say: "Our Father," without believing and meaning it.

This is the one point on which spiritual life itself depends, namely, that we have in God, the true confidence of a child, and are able to mean what we say when we invoke Him as our Father. If conscience is either again caught under the yoke of bondage so that the man is frightened to approach the heavenly Father in this prayer, or if it again dozes off to sleep so that the man thoughtlessly says: "Our Father" without meaning what he says, then, in either case, the result is spiritual death. Spiritual life is the intimate life of a child with God, as the apostle says: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father! The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:15–16).

## April 9

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*Thy kingdom come* – Matt. 6:10.

**I**n this prayer we pray that Christ may become mightier and mightier within us, and cast down all the spiritual enemies in our soul, that His kingdom that is inside us, the work of the Holy Spirit, the right fear of God, faith, love, and sanctification, might increase more and more in our hearts. But at this point we often experience a tremendous, overwhelming fight against the feeling that, in fact, everything seems to be going completely the opposite way, so that all that is evil gains predominance, and all that is good diminishes. What then can I console myself with? Surely in such a case, nothing else in heaven or on earth helps, but this one thing, that at last you allow our Lord God to be what He is on His throne, namely, a truthful, faithful, and almighty God capable of getting the upper hand even over such strong, evil powers as your own terrible heart! Stop and think! We are even allowed to pray to God contrary to the dictates of our own hearts! He has never said that of ourselves we can have a good heart or make it good, that we can overcome it ourselves. On the contrary, He has said, that He alone can create a new heart in us. And moreover, this almighty and faithful God has said, that His kingdom, which is within the heart, will be so protected under His mighty hand — if only we seek His help — that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). Again, He has not said, that these powers of the bottomless pit will not harass us, but that they will not overcome us — which indicates a real life-and-death fight. All the Word of God also witnesses that the kingdom of Christ within us will be attacked from inside and outside by all the powers of the bottomless pit, as soon as we have fled from its principality. Our flesh is full of all possible sin, our heart always is a wicked and deceitful thing, the devil is diligent and cunning in attacking us on all sides, to put into our hearts all foolish and sinful desires and to pervert our thoughts of God. All such things the Lord has left on earth to fight against His kingdom. By the power and persistence of this fight we will often be brought to the uttermost depths, so that we cannot possibly see how we can help losing all our hope and consolation or how the Lord alone will be God, and the only Savior. But hallelujah! What has He Himself taught us to do in such distress? Nothing other than call upon Him, continue to use the Word, and know that He alone can give the Spirit. And He has declared that these prayers will never be in vain.

That those who ask for the Holy Spirit contrary to the corruption of their own hearts, and seek for the kingdom of God in their souls will not be ashamed, is declared by the Lord in an extremely powerful way in a parable in Luke 11:11–13. Oh, what a gentle Savior! He says: “If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being

evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" This parable is capable of blasting all our mountains of disbelief and casting them into the sea. Apply it now to this prayer that concerns us. You are asking for help against the power of sin and Satan, you are asking for the Holy Spirit, which Jesus especially mentions the Father will "give to them that ask him." The Lord Himself has taught us to flee to Him in all distress and has said: "without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5); "call upon Me in the day of trouble" (Ps. 50:15); "ask, and ye shall receive" (John 16:24), etc. When as a poor distressed soul you come and do simply as the Lord has said, bewail your impotence before Him and ask for salvation, can you imagine that the Lord will not grant your request, but that your wicked heart and the devil will still be allowed to prevail and cause your eternal ruin? Do you infer that when the child asks for bread, the father would give him a stone, that when the soul asks for a new and humble heart, asks for the Holy Spirit in order to have faith, salvation, and eternal bliss, he would still be handed over to eternal distress? This would indeed be to give a stone instead of bread, yes, even serpents and scorpions! Is it possible that the good God does such things? When the power of darkness surrounds us, our heart may feel, as it were, serpents and scorpions. Since the Fall we still have the generation of the old viper. It is true that Satan was allowed to sift Peter, and to strike Paul on the cheek. But you will be making God a devil, if you believe that your distress can be to your everlasting destruction, that, although you bewail your evil before your heavenly Father, He still allows it to rule over you to your everlasting destruction, quite contrary to His own assurance, and thereby mocks your faith in the latter. Remember that He Himself asked you to pray, but when you do so, not to let you have what He has promised, but to give instead the scorpions of everlasting destruction, would be a cruel mockery of your confidence in His Word. Oh, please learn once for all, that God can never leave, completely, and to its everlasting destruction, a soul who flees to the Savior's name. But learn also that "God leads His children strangely" (Rom. 11:33) and that this prayer regarding the kingdom of God would not be needed if we already had that kingdom, and could enjoy it without being disturbed, i.e., if the kingdom of darkness did not continually surround us and harass us.

## April 10

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*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect* – Phil. 3:12.

**D**octor Swibelius says: “By nature the law is known to some extent. But the gospel is a secret hid to all reason.” Doctor Luther says: “The Gospel is the most difficult art and the highest wisdom of the Christian. They may remain schoolboys all the days of their life. But still the gospel has the bad fault that nothing seems to be easier and sooner taught than this. As soon as somebody has heard it or read a bit about it, he at once thinks himself a master or doctor of it and now wants to hear something else, something new.” Such persons thinking that they have learned everything, should recognize themselves by the following points: They do not often think of the gospel, how they can learn more and more to know God and the One He has sent; and learn to know the great mysteries of the atonement. They do not look for an opportunity to be able to hear or read about these things. They do not pray to God for the light of the Spirit on these truths. But on the contrary, when there is something truly evangelical being spoken, they wait with a certain impatience for it to come to an end, in order to get something else.

Such people are also in the habit of thinking and saying: “Surely I know what I ought to believe. Surely I know the grace of God. It has been given once and for all. Everything about it is good. But let us look at what we should do and be. There we have enough to think about. There are always shortcomings in us. Let us hear something about these things,” etc. And so, they obviously never come to the right doing, the right delight and power, because they never learn to know what they chiefly lack, namely life itself, true repentance, and true faith. They do not feel how completely lost we are and our works. They have never rightly despaired of themselves. Neither have they experienced what faith is, nor what faith and grace work in us, because then they would not say that they have had enough of that kind for themselves; they would rather think, as the Word and experience teach, that if I could only really know God and His grace, what a delight in, and power to do good would follow. As John says: “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8). He wants to say that if they really know God, they would certainly love, yes, become burning in love and godliness. Because God is such a great and burning love, that nobody can know Him without being kindled to love by Him. And love is the mother of all good works. “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10).

In brief, those thinking that they have understood the gospel enough, have not yet learned the first letters. As the apostle says: “If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Cor. 8:2). This is especially

applicable with regard to the knowledge of the gospel. The gospel contains such things that the one seeing what it contains is not capable of believing it. The one who can easily believe it certainly does not see what it contains. It is true that he thinks that he sees what it contains. He thinks this so decidedly that he would want to swear a thousand oaths upon it. But all his life denies it. Luther says with truth, that the one who can rightly both understand and believe what the gospel contains “can no longer live here on earth, but will die of a joy great beyond measure.” Truly, he would not be so cold and stiff and unspiritual as these who are so full of mere learning. It certainly would not be so difficult to follow Christ, to love, serve, and profess Christ, to suffer and to deny himself, if a man could believe rightly what the gospel contains.

This is the main reason why many are always being taught, yet never come to the knowledge of the truth. Jesus said: “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him” (Matt. 11:27). When the Son does not want to reveal the truth of the gospel to a man, then all is in vain for him. Earlier, Christ had said about those to whom He did not want to reveal certain things: “Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent” (Matt. 11:25); that is, those who are not babes in their own eyes, but think that by mere learning they will be able to pick up the gospel. Many read and hear the gospel in the same way as some worldly science, without bowing to God. But it has pleased Him to hide the truth from such men. “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight.”

Paul was probably a master in explaining and interpreting the gospel clearly and richly. But he did not think it enough for the people only to listen to his sermons and to read his epistles. He knew that everything depended on whether God revealed the truth and gave the “spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Eph. 1:17). He therefore invoked God continually for his churches.

There are people who never need to pray or bow to God, and who neither diligently nor anxiously seek in the Word of God for the knowledge of the gospel, but know it all in advance! Yet most great saints and champions of the faith, in spite of all their studies and prayers, have confessed that they had not yet understood it fully, but were still striving thereafter. How can we explain this? How otherwise than that these who think they have been fully taught and who say they understand everything, have been charmed by the devil, and are blind and dead, and need first of all to learn the first letters! May they consider this before it is too late!

## April 11

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*Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy – Lev. 19:2.*

All that the Word of God tells us we should be and do belongs to the law. So does all that the Word of God demands of us, no matter whether it is inward qualities, or outward deeds. The law of God demands the whole of man, to the most innermost part of his being, his heart, thoughts, and desires. The commandments do not say: Your hand, your foot, your tongue shall do this, or shall not do that. But they say: You! You! That is, they speak to the whole man.

Take for example only the first commandment. Does it not demand all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength (Mark 12:30)? Think what this comprises, that above all we shall fear and love God and have all confidence and trust in Him! That I shall fear God above all, means that I must not be at ease in a fleshly sense, nor hard and indifferent as to God and my soul. Neither must I be thoughtless and sin. But I should be so afraid of acting contrary to the will of God, that I would suffer anything, even death itself, rather than sin against my God.

To fear God above all, means that I watch and fight against sin, with earnestness, zeal, and power. Not that I watch, pray, and fight one moment, and thoughtlessly follow temptation the next, but that I watch, pray, and fight all the time, etc.!

That I shall love God above all, means that I must not be cold towards my God, nor slow and listless with regard to prayer and the Word of God. But with the highest delight and joy I should move about with God. That I shall love God above all, means that I shall like best to think of Him, speak about Him, and because of love to Him, gladly do all He commands me to, and gladly suffer all He allows to befall, because a man does such things for the one he truly loves.

To have all confidence and trust in God demands a true faith and confidence in Him, and forbids all confidence in myself and all created beings. It forbids all presumptuousness and self-conceit. It also forbids all despair, sorrow of unbelief and doubts. In brief, if you go through all the commandments of God, then they do not demand one or other deed, nor one or other limb, the hand, the foot, or the tongue, but they demand the whole human being. Therefore, in Matt. 5, Christ explains that the one who is angry with his neighbor is considered as a murderer before God. And the one merely looking at a woman with unclean lust will be judged as an adulterer by God.

From all this we see first that the law of God does not demand only works. It does not say only how we shall do things. But above all it demands our inner man, a good inner condition and good inner qualities. It says how we should *be*. Thus we find also that the Word of God that deals with our state of mind and our qualities belongs to the law. For instance, if I am punished for coldness, hardness,



light-heartedness, pride, self-conceit, slowness to read the Word and pray, etc., then I am punished by the law. But this is not enough. We also find that particularly the inner man, the very condition of the heart, the mind, and the inclinations, is the greatest and chief thing God demands above everything else. Even if I live very piously as regards outer deeds, do a lot of good, and abstain from all evil, yet if with it I have thoughts and lusts contrary thereto, desires to sin and disinclination for good, then before God I am considered and judged as are those who practice the same sin in deed, unblushingly and openly.

So it is that when I am in a condition where I do good only under compulsion, because of the threats or promises of the law, I cannot do even one deed that is good before God. God is like that. So is His holy law, because the law of God is nothing else than the holiness of God, and the nature and will of God expressed in words. As He is, He wants us also to be. What He Himself loves, He wants us also to love. What He Himself hates, He wants us also to hate. He cannot be satisfied when we hate and despise what He loves, and love what He hates. As impossible as it is that He Himself can agree and associate with sin and the devil, so impossible it also is that He can allow us to associate with them. Therefore He puts Himself as an Example for us, and demands us to be as holy and perfect as He Himself is, when He says: "Be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy." And Christ again says: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Oh, the poor fools who say: "God cannot demand more of us than we are capable of," when His clear words are the ones quoted above! And in this way, or if God did not demand more of us than we, fallen sinners, are capable of, then "every mouth would not be stopped, and all the world would not become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19). Yes, then indeed Christ is dead in vain for us! (Gal. 2:21).

*But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested – Rom. 3:21.*

**H**ere is the rock of salvation on which alone our souls are eternally secure, and apart from which are eternally lost. It is also the “rock of offense” (Rom. 9:33), against which all the storms and waves of unbelief of all time have raised themselves. The righteousness of God spoken of here is, at one and the same time, both the greatest wonder of the grace of God that has ever been revealed to us from heaven, and also the strangest secret our thoughts have ever known. So that even if I can learn and hold everything else, I can still never believe and hold rightly what I learn about this righteousness of God. It is so entirely a heavenly revelation and so contrary to all our nature, particularly to our deeply seated imagination of a capability of our own, that not only do the really unfaithful fight against it with all their power, but also many otherwise enlightened and well-intentioned men have more or less dim and false opinions concerning this matter. This does not arise because of any uncertainty or ambiguity in the words of the Scripture as regards this righteousness of God. But the reason is that the matter is something quite contrary to our nature, our thoughts and opinions.

This righteousness of God differs in essence from any other righteousness which has ever been or can be. It differs from the righteousness of men and angels as regards its Originator, because it is the very “righteousness of God” (2 Pet. 1:1); not the righteousness of created beings, but of the Creator. “I, the Lord create it,” says the Lord, in particular reference to the righteousness that was to bring with it eternal bliss. It is a divine and absolutely perfect righteousness, because it is the work of Jehovah Himself, and that in exactly the same sense in which the world is the work of God. The Father has brought it forth in the same way as He created the world through the Son. Peter says: “Them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1). Here Christ is called “God and our Savior”; and the righteousness on which our precious faith is based is called “the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.”

It was “in the days of His flesh” (Heb. 5:7) that the Son of God earned this righteousness for us. Before He came into this world He was not a member or subject in the kingdom of God. He was its Head. He worked, in the “form of God,” i.e., as the Creator and Governor of the world, but now in the “form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). Before this time His perfect holiness could not be called “obedience.” One could say rather, that the law agreed with Him, than that He agreed with the law. His divine holiness proved itself in the institution of the law, not in obedience to it. But in His “form of a servant” He put Himself under the law He had instituted for us, and entered into the new exercise, new to Him as the Son of God, and He “learned obedience” (Heb. 5:8).

Thus His righteousness or obedience is the obedience of the most glorious Person who could be made under the law, the great Lord Himself. He is “over all, God blessed forever” (Rom. 9:5). It was the righteousness of Immanuel, “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). And this obedience of the Son of God in our nature has much more glorified and satisfied the law than the obedience of all created beings would have been able to do. He also now did much more honor to the law, than all the transgressions of the world had dishonored it. When others obey the law, they earn glory to themselves by this obedience. When the Son of God obeyed the law, it was, on the contrary, the law that was honored.

But what also gives this high value to the obedience of Christ is that it was according to the will and ordinance of the eternal Father. He had been chosen and anointed by the Father for this ministry. The Lord had been sent by the Lord. On this we can read the following words worth thinking over in the book of the prophet Zechariah: “And ye shall know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me. Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord ... and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent Me unto thee” (Zech. 2:9–11).

But besides all the places in the Old Testament where the Father speaks about the sending of the Son, setting Him upon the holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2:6), and such things, Christ always spoke the words: “the Father,” “the will of Him that sent Me,” “the Father’s will which hath sent Me” (John 6); “therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, ... this commandment have I received of My Father” (John 10:17–18). He explained that everything He did was obedience to His Father’s will.

Let us bear in mind that the greatest and most wonderful work of God that any thought can understand, was that the Son of God became man. This had only one purpose: that by His doing and suffering, the law was to be fulfilled so that sinners could be saved and the law still keep its full honor. When we understand this we can never have too exalted an idea about the value of this obedience of Christ in the eyes of God.

## April 13

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*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ – Gal. 3:27.*

**T**he apostle says that we have been baptized into Christ. Although Christ has ordained that baptism is in (or into) the name of all the divine Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it is still called a baptism particularly into Christ. The reason is known to us. Only in Him there is salvation and eternal bliss. Only He is the Way. He is the Door. Nobody comes unto the Father, but by Christ (John 14:6). The Father has made Christ the Captain of our salvation, our High Priest, Prophet, and King. To Him the Father refers all flesh, when He says: “Kiss the Son” (Ps. 2:12) and “hear Him” (Mark 9:7). Into Him shall we be baptized. With Him shall we be united because in Him is life. And the word “into” (baptized into Christ) expresses the intimate union and partaking with Christ in all His good, that baptism contains. This union and partaking are expressed still more plainly by the word “planted,” planted in Him (Rom. 6:5); because a baptized and believing man is no longer to be considered as a separate person, but entirely as a part of Christ, a member of His body (Eph. 5:30). So that, what concerns the member, also concerns the Head. And what the Head owns, also the member owns.

But is this true? Maybe we speak words too glorious here? Is it true that baptism contains such an intimate union with Christ, a downright “planting” into Him? Is it sure that this was the apostle’s meaning as regards baptism? Then look how he speaks here: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Notice the word “put on” — “put on Christ,” wrapped up in Him. This no doubt speaks about the same intimate union with Christ as the word “planted,” grafted in. That is, that we become one with the whole of His Person, we have the same worth, and become equally well-pleasing to the Father as He is.

All this seems far too great and strange to us. But the reason is only the abominable unbelief in our hearts and the mighty influence of the devil, who does not want to let us enjoy any great consolation that could cause damage to his kingdom. We should, however, bear in mind, that all that the great God, rich in love, has done for us human beings is immeasurably greater and higher than all our thoughts and senses. Without doubt He has created us to be His children and heirs of all of His kingdom! He has given the only begotten Son, first to be our Brother, our gracious Kinsman and then our Savior, our Atoner and Defender. He has given us, and daily gives us, His Holy Spirit, who performs a wonderful work in our hearts. This we cannot deny. Would it then be unlike Him, or be too much for His love, to give us also such a means of uniting us with Christ as baptism? This is an outer and visible act whereby the individual human being is made partaker of all His grace, and is taken up and consecrated in His covenant of grace?

When we see how the apostles explain baptism, namely that thereby we “put on” Christ, that thereby we are “planted” in Him, that thereby we are “made clean” and “blessed,” then we should be astonished that this dear institution of the grace of God is as despised as it often is. This contempt for baptism comes from the same source which made the Jews despise Christ, namely, because the form is so humble and modest. Christ was born in a manger. He was poorer than the foxes and the birds of the air. He was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). And finally He died at the place of execution. Therefore “He was despised, and we esteemed him not,” says the prophet on behalf of the Jews. It is the same with baptism. We only look at the water, as Luther says: “with the same eyes as a cow, knowing that it is for drinking.” But we forget completely that to this water God has attached His holy promise. We act in the same way as the Syrian captain, Naaman, when the prophet Elisha, said: “Go, and wash in Jordan ... and thou shalt be clean” (2 Kings 5:10). Then Naaman looked at the quality of the water itself and remarked that the water of Jordan could not be better than that of the river he had in Damascus. And he forgot altogether that it was only to the water of Jordan that the promise was attached.

How excellent and important is Luther’s remark on baptism, which we have already read as children: “In fact the water does not work, but the Word of God, which is with and in the water, and the faith embracing the Word united with the water, and trusting in it. Because without the Word of God it is only water and no baptism. But with the Word of God it is baptism, a water of life rich in grace and a sign of the washing of regeneration (Tit. 3:5) in the Holy Spirit.” Plainly therefore the wisdom of God has attached our salvation and eternal bliss to the most humble means, in order that we may be put to a test to find out whether we want to take heed to His Word, or on the contrary, look rather at size and appearance. This method of God to try us with very small and trifling things is like a sieve separating all that is large from good wheat. It is like a strait gate through which only those enter into His kingdom who are rightly small and faithful babes. Therefore He has said as regards small children: “for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14): “Things which were despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not” in order “to confound, the things which are mighty” (1 Cor. 1:27–28).

Let us well beware of that “most injurious beast,” namely reason, in spiritual matters (Luther). Take care not to so forget yourself that as regards baptism you will stop with your eyes on the water, and forget that the great God, rich in grace, has attached His promise of eternal life and bliss to this institution (Mark 16:16).

## April 14

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*Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof – Rom. 6:12.*

First, let us again note the position of the saints. The apostle has clearly taught that those justified by faith have also been sanctified in their spirit. They stand in an intimate union with Christ and are “dead indeed to sin” (Rom. 6:11). Yet he thinks such admonitions are still necessary for them: “Let not sin therefore reign, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” It is like that with the saints: “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41). And the devil is “a roaring lion” (1 Pet. 5:8) “having great wrath” (Rev. 12:12). Therefore as God does not perform His sanctifying work in us with an irresistible omnipotence, but works as on spiritual beings with the Word and the promptings of the Spirit, nobody should be careless to despise the admonition, and consider himself safe against all danger. No, as long as we are on earth, we shall continue to be put to the test. We should listen to, consider, and obey the will of the Lord, and shall surely be delivered, no matter how weak we are. When we cry out of the depths that we are perishing and cannot fulfill the will of God, He will attend to us Himself, if only we obediently hear His voice. If we do not, then we will, enchanted, lulled to sleep, and thoughtless, despise the admonition and fall into the snares of sin and the devil. In brief: These gracious admonitions fully agree with what the apostle has explained about our sanctified spirit and our union with Christ, and should be counted among the external means God uses for the perfecting of sanctification.

Is not this admonition clear, enlightening, and wholesome? The apostle says: “Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies so that you obey it.” From this we gather this thought: If things are so bad that you cannot be quite free from sin, do not, anyway, let it rule over you, so that you serve sin with work and deed. That sin dwells in you, that you still feel evil lusts, is already an offense against the holy law of God. And if God judged you according to it, you would be condemned for the mere desire to sin. But as in this life we cannot be quite free from sin, but perfect purity belongs to the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth only righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13), you can still use the grace given to you to offer resistance to sin. Do not let it reign in your mortal bodies, so that the wicked will to sin becomes dead. But still walk according to the Spirit, even though you feel the temptations of the flesh.

Here are some examples of this. Maybe somebody has insulted you in words or deeds, and anger wants to raise itself up in your heart. Then do not agree to anger and give it freedom, so that you burst out in wicked words and gestures. But follow the good advice of David: “Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own

heart upon your bed, and be still” (Ps. 4:4). “Be still” in prayer to the Lord for His grace and power. Pray the Lord’s prayer, and especially this: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Maintain that attitude until evil passes away.

Or again, if the lust to greed wants to deceive you to some dishonesty in your work; or if the lust to unchastity wants to compel you to immodest words, gestures, or deeds; or the lust to pride wants to make you go beyond your status or condition, with regard to clothes or otherwise, then briefly, watch and pray against all possible lusts and temptations to sin. Use all possible means of grace to mortify them, so that you do not follow after sin and serve it.

Surely even the first sinful lust has been forbidden and condemned by God. Therefore sin also ought to be mortified at its very first movement. However, as all sin does not come to an end, while we live in this body of sin and death, sin must still be checked, suppressed more and more, and mortified, so that it may not be mighty or reign. Luther says: “Sin has not been forgiven so that we should sleep at ease or do what the flesh desires. But on the contrary, sin has obviously been forgiven that it should be subdued and mortified, so that it should no more be the master, but the servant, and that it should not be able to cause damage to us. But *you* shall be the master and say to the flesh: You are full of impurity and wickedness, envy, hatred, revengefulness, and evil lust. But for a while you shall and must lie bound and subject to the Spirit against your will. Impurity, you have nothing to do here. Because the Spirit is Master in this house, He will also have the upper hand and keep you with your lusts in check. Yes, He will crucify and suppress you.”

Maybe we cannot always use such courageous language. But when the fight becomes really hard, we shall probably soon have to invoke the Lord with tears and prayers, knowing that we are lost if He draws back His hand. Yes, that we can do and have no more temptation at all than He allows us. But by Him we shall still overcome sin so that we shall not serve sin, but continue always to walk after the Spirit.

## April 15

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*Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit* — John 15:2.

**H**ere Christ speaks about those branches in Him, which do not bear fruit. These will be taken away, yes, be thrown away, dried, and burned. These are dreadful words uttered by the gentle Lord, more particularly as He calls them *branches in Him!* What does He mean by this? When He calls them *branches in Him*, the meaning certainly cannot be that somebody can really and rightly be and remain in Him, in faith, and still not bear fruit, but be cast away. Because immediately thereafter He says: “He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.” But by the words *branches in Me*, the Lord wants to state finally and sharply how great the likeness between sons and bastards can be. He wants to show how much religiousness, profession, and outward communication with Him and with true Christians a man can have, and still be without true life, sap, and power from Him, which latter must prove itself by fruit. Thus both the contents and the way of speaking are the same here as when the Lord spoke of the virgins going forth to meet the Bridegroom, where half of them were foolish, without oil, and eternally shut out of His presence. The same thing He said to the angel of the church in Sardis: “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (Rev. 3:1).

Let us now look at the words of the Lord Christ. About the true and good branches, the ones bearing fruit, He says that the husbandman purges them, i.e., cuts, prunes, and bends them, takes away what hinders their growth, and does not let them grow as they please. On the other hand, the branches not bearing any fruit escape the knife of the husbandman. They are left in peace, unrebuked, and unpurged, because after all they will only be burned. Thus their characteristic features are: (1) that they do not bear fruit, (2) that they are not pruned and purged by the husbandman, but are free and allowed to grow as they want. After such words of Christ Himself should not each one stop awhile and examine his state; yes, examine himself with fear and honesty? It is not true that the knife of the husbandman does not prune the bastard branches, but only the good ones? That those that should fear, fear nothing, and those that should not fear, are afraid. It is a terrible sign in many a man, that he cannot possibly fear for himself, nor examine himself seriously even for a minute; but will be so sure of and satisfied with himself, because of his calm feelings, his old piety and religiosity, that the words of Christ will go past him as a light breeze. Oh, that in spite of all, the happy moment will come for someone at least, when it will be given to him to see what he is still lacking, that he may awake from his secret death and false spirituality!



You hope that you are a Christian, that you stand in faith, and have the grace of God. Maybe you have such peace in your feelings, such confidence during prayer, such a love for the Word of God, so many proofs of God's love, that you cannot possibly think anything other than that you are in His grace. Yes, maybe you think frankly: "Why, I have been among Christians for a long time! I have left the world. Yes, I have suffered scoffing because of my godliness. To be sure, I have fought for the sake of Christ. I have certain religious activities. Everybody knows that I am a Christian," etc. These are all good things. Thousands cannot say such things. But my dear friend! Even this does not prove that you are a living and true Christian. The likeness between the true and the bastard branches, between the wise and the foolish virgins, is really so great, that with all this you may be deceived.

Therefore examine yourself the way the Scripture teaches. The Word of Christ in this verse and all the Word of God, insist continually that faith shall prove its genuineness by the fruits originating from that faith. A Christian is certainly weak and full of shortcomings, and grace is certainly great, undeserved, and overflowing. That is not the question. But there are still certain results and fruits produced by faith, the Spirit, and the new birth, even in the weakest children of grace. It is these fruits and results that are important. Here you may perhaps think of some good deeds you practice, some sins you have forsaken, some spiritual powers you possess, some religious activities you have, and then you will say that surely this is a proof of the reality of your faith. But search the Scriptures to see if they also agree that this is enough. In Matt. 7:22-23 the Lord says: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

## April 16

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*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith – 1 John 5:4.*

**I**n the entire eleventh chapter of the letter to the Hebrews the emphasis is the same. It shows us what, by faith, the heroes of old have been capable of, and what they have accomplished and suffered. There the apostle refers us in the end to the examples of the martyrs who first left all they held dear in life for the sake of Christ; they forsook what they owned, their houses and homes, father, mother, brethren, and friends, and thereafter left life itself, all by faith. This is called overcoming the world, because its prince, the devil, with all his inspirations; the world, the unfaithful with threats and promises, and the flesh with its sore sensitiveness to delight and distress, all joined together to persuade them to turn from the Lord, and to be unfaithful to Him. But they overcame it all.

And the power to victory, the power that overcome the world, was their *faith*. Thus the meaning of the words is this: A man that has been born again, and is faithful, is a servant under bondage to nothing. He can forsake and suffer. He is the servant of no sin or lust of the world, nor even of innocent things. That he is in no bondage, does not mean that evil cannot cleave to him; neither does it mean that at a bad moment he cannot be caught and overthrown by it. But it does mean that he does not remain in sin. He does not commit sin as something one must continue with, that one cannot do without or abandon, the way a servant must go under the same yoke to the same work each morning. So also sin and the world rule over their servants, even though these sometimes suffer because of it, and weep and wail.

Where there is no faith, there is no power to victory and no redemption. Such always remain in the same bondage, as regards some certain sin — particularly as regards some certain bosom sin. A man can leave many outer sins without the powers of grace. But whoever is born of God, is the servant of no sin, even if it is always a temptation cleaving to him, a temptation against which he has got to fight, watch, and pray daily. But that man is a servant under sin who does not even fight and pray against it, but even excuses and defends it.

The born-again soul is not even the servant of innocent things. For example, it is an innocent thing, yea, a good thing, a thing even prescribed in the Word, that a child loves his father and mother. But Christ says that one who is a servant of that love, the one who cannot forsake his father and mother for His sake when it becomes necessary, cannot be His disciple. It was an innocent thing to have a farm, a stock-farm, a wife, etc., but when such things dominated the mind so that those men could not come to the wedding and to the Lord's supper, that they could not follow Jesus, then it was unto death. As has already been said, faith and the new

birth do not prevent the feelings, weakness, and fight of nature from manifesting themselves. But the result is, that when necessary a man will overcome them, and still remain in the Lord, as Asaph says: “My heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins... Nevertheless I am continually with Thee... My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever” (Ps. 73:21, 23, 26). This is called “overcoming the world.”

On the contrary, it may happen that though I am religious, devout, and godly, when a bosom sin of mine, or a thing, in itself innocent but dear to me, is attacked, I cannot stand the test and leave that thing, and have my treasure and everything only in the Lord. Instead, I follow where the temptation draws me, look for a better name and colors for my deviation or weakness, and thus am overcome. In such a case the true God is not the God and treasure of my heart, and I do not possess the overcoming power of the new birth and faith. “Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.” This victory is the characteristic feature of Christians, the thing by which they are known, and which declares that they are born of God. This distinguishes them from the false children, who only skim the surface of the Word of God, but who have never experienced its power, and the result is only a monstrosity, where there is no true godly life and power.

A man cannot be born of God and still remain in the old, dead, and worldly manner of life, lying in sins according to the pleasure of the devil, and living as he was before, but he will have to stand up against the devil and all of his kingdom. Therefore, “if you do not overcome the world, but let yourself be overcome, you may glory in the faith and Christ, but your own work witnesses against you, that you are not a child of God” (Luther). You want to be a Christian, but at the same time want also to be on a good footing with the world, or even only with some worldly people. This is not possible without your making yourself like them, so you do so to such an extent that you are loved and honored by people who do not ask for your Lord and who do not love and honor Him. What does this witness to? Certainly not so much to a denial such as that of Peter, by means of which he never really became the friend of the world, for he went out and wept bitterly, and both before and afterwards, was an obvious disciple of Christ. It bears witness rather to a continuous, dominating, and prevailing equality of status with the world, and unfaithfulness to the Lord. It bears witness that the new birth and the power of faith are missing in you. “The friendship of the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4). Neither Christ, nor any faithful disciple of His, no matter how lovable, mild, wise, and careful they were, knew the art of being at one and the same time, the friends of God and the world.

## April 17

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*What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them – Mark 11:24.*

**I**n order to be able to pray in faith it is necessary, not only with our mouth to repeat God's promises to hear our prayer, but also and above all to ponder them in our heart, and to think particularly of the following things with every word of promise:

First, the qualities of the One who gave the promise. Such as His *mercy*, that it is an incomparable mercy, an eternal and unchangeable mercy. That at this moment it is the same, just as warm and burning as when the promise was given. Then, the *power* of the One who gave the promise, that it is a divine omnipotence. That with "God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). That the right hand of the Lord can change everything (Dan. 4:33, Exod. 15:6). That He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20).

And finally, the *truthfulness* of the One who gave the promise. That it is impossible that God would lie. That, He is "God, and not man" (Hos. 11:9). Yes, in order to assure us the more, He has confirmed His promises by an oath, as the apostle says: "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath" (Heb. 6:17). These three qualities of God, His burning love, His divine omnipotence, and His eternal truthfulness are, as a man of the Spirit says, the threefold rope that God has hung down to us from heaven, by His Word, so that whosoever grasps and clings to it will always be saved and lifted up, even if "the waters are come in unto his soul" (Ps. 69:1). Yes, by means of that rope he will at last even be lifted up to heaven.

Secondly, the prayer of faith should embrace, envisage, and point out the person and work of our Mediator, Christ, and His merits. We should bear in mind how God loves and esteems His Son, and all that He has done and earned. Therefore we too should point this out to God in prayer. This is what is called praying in the name of Christ. And Jesus said: " whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you" (John 16:23). When Moses prayed, he said: "Repent of this evil against Thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Thy servants" (Exod. 32:12–13). We should say: "Here is the One who is more than Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Think of Thy Servant Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, our Lord and Surety. And for His sake be gracious to us. Do not look at us, but at Thy Son. In us there is sheer infirmity. Our worthiness is in Him, as you know. As Thy beloved Son has taken us up, redeemed, earned, and won us, and as Thou lovest Thy Son and His work, be gracious to us for His sake! Not for our sake, Lord. No, not for our sake, but for the sake of Thy Son, in whom Thou hast all Thy delight, be gracious to us and do to us as Thou hast said."

Thirdly, the prayer of faith should insist on the glory of the name of God. Say with David: "In the grave who shall give Thee thanks?" (Ps. 6:5). "If, on the contrary, Thou savest such a great and unworthy sinner as I am, then Thy praise will be great in eternity. Because the greater the sin Thou forgivest, the greater Thou provest Thy mercy. And the greater the distress and wretchedness are, from which Thou deliverest, the greater Thy goodness and power. And as Thy grace is, so will also Thy praise and name be." And what would not God do for His great name? Therefore also David prayed like this: "For Thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity" (Ps. 25:11). In this way we refer to the glory of God, when we face Him with His Word. And what would He not do when it is the matter of His glory? "He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). But this is also the thing most well-pleasing to Him that we can do. Because the more we take God at His Word, and believe Him, the more we give glory to Him, as it is written: Abraham "was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom. 4:20).

Now it only remains to apply and use this, to reflect upon which and what sort of promises have been given to us. And then in all possible needs and troubles to remind God of them with a childlike faith, and to pray: "Do as Thou hast said!" But who can count all the gracious words by which our heavenly Father wants to express His loving heart towards us, and by which He wants to draw to Himself His shy, human children, who have run away? For such a purpose He has definitely commanded us to come to Him in all distress, with prayer and invocation, and at the same time has given us most definite promises and assurances that He will hear us.

He says Himself: "I will rejoice over them to do them good" (Jer. 32:41). He commands: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me" (Ps. 50:15). "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. 7:7). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you" (John 16:23). "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:19).

## April 18

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*Thou shalt not commit adultery* – Exod. 20:14.

**T**he Lord Christ has explained this commandment (Matt. 5:27–28, 31–32). Is this not wonderful grace? After all we must listen to Him, if we want to be saved. The Jews had dealt with the sixth commandment as they had with the fifth. They looked only at the heinous deed, which here was adultery. The sixth commandment actually reads: “Thou shalt not break marriage.” They considered it nothing that their hearts were full of unlawful lusts and desires, if only they could abstain from the full practice of them in work and deed. Then the Lord Christ came with this impossibly high definition: “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:28).

In the light of this definition we shall look at this commandment. But let us first look to see if it does mean, if it does actually read: “Thou shalt not break marriage,” when the deep, spiritual meaning shows that marriage is broken even by a mere unclean desire, which comprises all the moments and manifestations of the unclean lust, both inside and outside marriage. This is shown by many places in the Scriptures. By this fact, it is evident that there is deep instruction with regard to this commandment, and by this we are brought back to its real foundation. The first thought of God expressed in the creation of man and the first ordinance of God was regarding human existence and propagation on earth. Immediately God created a man and a woman, in fact, even before the woman had been created, He decided about the holy order of marriage. The creation of man and the multiplication of mankind were two thoughts God connected with one another. So we find the institution of marriage, the foundation for the sixth commandment, in the first chapter of the Bible, in the history of creation: “Male and female created He them.” And God blessed them, and God said unto them: “Be fruitful, and multiply.” And in the second chapter is added: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

When we reflect on this fact, that marriage is a holy institution by the Lord God at the very outset of creation, we can understand how important the sixth commandment is and what a dreadful outrage it is against the majestic authority of God, to break marriage in any way. The man who breaks marriage, upsets and destroys a most holy and important condition on earth. He tears to pieces most holy ties made by God Himself. He defiles and violates a most pure, tender, and precious relation between two human beings. As a dastard he infringes upon the right and order of God in a criminal way. Besides he makes unhappiness out of happiness, and a curse out of blessing. The welfare of mankind rests on marriage both for the present, and often also for eternity.

But is this done only by the man who breaks his own marriage, or somebody else's in the ordinary sense of the word? Has the sixth commandment been spoken only to those already inside marriage? No, according to the explanation of the Word of God, this commandment comprises all human beings without exception. Because when the Lord God created mankind as male and female and instituted the order of marriage, He also drew up a holy boundary between the two sexes. This boundary line has been instituted by God, and is therefore equally holy and irrevocable as marriage itself. Whosoever breaks through this limit set by God, no matter whether it is in thought, word, or deed, he offends against the sixth commandment.

And in this sense the holy God also says to all unmarried men and women, and to all young men and virgins: "Thou shalt not break marriage." That this commandment has such a far-reaching meaning is clear from the definition Christ has given, when He says, that whosoever only looks on a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Maybe you consider yourself righteous in the face of this commandment, when, because of fear of the judgment of God, or maybe fear only of shame and dishonor and other injurious consequences, you have abstained from the practice of your desire. But the Lord Christ says here that you already stand as an adulterer before God. He says that you have already committed adultery. Take an example: Somebody is so minded towards you that he wishes he could murder you, but abstains from the deed because of the dreadful consequences. Would you then think him any better than a murderer who has already committed the bloody deed? No, you would say rightly: The difference is only that my enemy is afraid of losing his head. On the other hand, the murderer who has completed the deed, has only been more daring and reckless. But in soul and heart they are equally wicked. So it is here also. The disreputable adulterer has not been as afraid as you are of shame and other punishments. This is the difference between you and him, if you have abstained from carrying out your desire only because of fear. Not only before God, but even in reality in your heart, you have committed adultery as often as you have had the desire to do so. In these words the Lord Christ Himself has explained this commandment.

## April 19

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*Thou shalt not steal* – Exod. 20:15.

Let us see what the seventh commandment of God means! What is meant by theft and stealing? By this every way of depriving our neighbor of his property is covered, no matter whether it happens in a secret or a visible way, by force or by cunning, in the shape of a crime, or in the name of law and justice.

To steal, to be a thief, is something so heinous and abominable, that after all, most people boast that they are free from that sin. Even if we can succeed in convincing otherwise decent people of this world of criminality against the other commandments, they still lift up their heads when they come to the seventh commandment. They mean that they are righteous on that point. It is a fact, after all, that they have never stolen. They have not stretched out their hands after the property of others. How dreadfully hard, on our part also, to call respectable people thieves!

If theft were only the fact of breaking the locks of others, and in this heinous way taking their money and possessions, then no doubt most people would be righteous when confronted by this commandment. But what a different appearance it gets when we look at it in the light of the definition of Christ with regard to the commandments! What a crushing discovery it is, if by such a definition you find that you, too, are a thief! Let a man begin to see and reflect before God, upon the fact that every way of making gain at the expense of a neighbor is theft, whether this happens by a transaction considered advantageous, or by what is so significantly called a “dirt cheap” price (“robber price” in Swedish), or by the seller claiming and getting too much for his goods, or by careless work in day labor, etc. He will then see the truth in the words of Luther, that “there is no other branch of trade in the world that is so common as theft,” that this “is so widespread and common a vice, but also so slighted and so little noticed, that if one could hang all those who are thieves, who do not want to be called so, then the world would become empty, and there would not be enough hangmen and gallows.”

We do not speak about the heart now, nor of how the eyes of God look at you as a thief; even while you have not yet obviously reduced your neighbor’s property, but still have lust to it, and are kept away from it only by fear and cautiousness. But we speak of theft in work and deed. We again repeat and ask everybody seriously to consider what it means that every way of reducing a neighbor’s property is theft in the deed itself. A man does not steal only when he plunders chests and pockets, but also when in the market or in the shops he demands too much for an article or gives too little. He also steals when in the workshop he does poor or deceptive work, but takes full payment. Or when the servants in a house do not serve faithfully, or let food go bad. In a word, when a man is not anxious about what is best for his master



or his family. Or if at times of financial stress, a man demands an unreasonably high interest on his money, because the man in need is embarrassed, etc. In such a way, you can soon deprive your neighbor of ten, twenty, fifty, or a hundred dollars, and you still go free. Whereas many have been in prison or in the pillory because of much less; because they have used only another method of stealing!

But every commandment does not only *forbid* something. It also *commands* something. This is also the case with the seventh commandment. It does not only say that we should not steal, but also that we should see that the goods and trade of our neighbor are increased and protected (Exod. 23:4, 5). When we bear in mind that as seriously as the Lord God forbids evil He also demands good from us, then this part of the commandment will become all the more intrusive for us, and make sinners also of those who have not become so by the former part. For this to happen it is necessary not to look at the appearance of the deed itself, but to realize that God Himself matters something to us. The world and our reason say like this: “When I do not take anything from anybody else, then I may use freely and as I please what belongs to me.” But there is another law in the kingdom of Christ. It says like this: “Not only shall you do nothing evil to your neighbor, but on the contrary you shall do all good to him with the gifts and means God has endowed you with”; “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 19:19).

The one who does not do anything evil still sins much when he does not do the good he can and should do. And God has given us our temporal good not only to serve ourselves, but also that we should do good to our neighbors with it as the Lord’s stewards who do not have any right to do what they please with the gifts He has endowed them with. But they should use them as His holy intentions of love demand. This is the ground for a whole chain of duties unknown to the outside world. Let us therefore seek rather to weigh our relation to the seventh commandment on the golden balance of the great law of love. We will then be shocked to see how almost all our deeds, our eating and drinking, our work and our rest, our abstinence and our generosity, are all infected and soaked with sin against this commandment to “Love thy neighbor as thyself” (Lev. 19:18).

## April 20

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*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor* – Exod. 20:16.

**T**his is a commandment that almost no man cares about, and concerning which it is always difficult to know the right way to speak so that people may become aware of its importance. The fifth, sixth, and seventh commandments have the advantage that the offenses against them are dealt with by worldly authorities, and are denounced by almost everybody in the world. But merely moving that small member, the tongue, even if to disparage a neighbor, how much does that matter? Generally, it is only the matter of a few words with a friend in confidence! The man who breaks the locks of other people, and takes away money, and is then punished with prison; the one who sheds human blood and is then beheaded at the place of execution, such men can truly be considered great criminals. But the man who merely speaks, merely moves his tongue in an intimate conversation, even though he thereby steals from his neighbor what is to him more precious than money, yes, often more precious even than his life, namely his good name and reputation, that man is not counted as a great criminal. Nor is he punished in the pillory or at the place of execution. “Oh, to be sure it was only a few words — only a light breeze going over the tongue.” People talk of it like that. But the Holy Scripture calls it otherwise. There the thief and the slanderer are compared to each other. The wise man speaks thus: “Be not called a whisperer, and lie not in wait with thy tongue: for a foul shame is upon the thief, and an evil condemnation upon the double tongue” (Ecclesiasticus 5:14). And again: “A thief is better than a man that is accustomed to lie: but they both shall have destruction to heritage” (Ecclesiasticus 20:25).

Now let us look at the commandment quoted above, and see what the Lord God wanted and intended when He bade: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” Here we again see Divine benignity towards man. When among the first of the commandments tabulated God laid a general foundation for wholesome order between men on earth, it was particularly four precious treasures that the gracious Father wanted particularly to hedge about and defend for man, namely, first, his bodily life; secondly, the sanctity of marriage; thirdly, our earthly possessions; and finally, our good name and reputation. Usually this last is dearer to us than any earthly things, yes, even dearer than our lives. But as precious as you yourself hold this treasure, your good name and reputation, and do not suffer the least infringement of its rights, so dear do others also consider their honor and respect. Therefore this commandment has been as seriously spoken to you as to anybody else. So that here as well as in all the other commandments everybody has been included. And no man has been exempted from the binding force of any commandment.

No matter who you are, you must take this commandment to yourself: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” It is the serious will of our Lord God, that as unwillingly as we would spoil or reduce our neighbor’s possessions and money, so we should also be towards his reputation, goodness, and honesty. So that everybody may keep his honor in the eyes of his wife, children, servants and neighbor. May everybody ponder over this.

What does this commandment contain? First it contains that, not only in court, but also in all your conversation, you should be most seriously scrupulous regarding your words and intimations about your neighbors. So that you will not unnecessarily give cause for wrong thoughts about him. Furthermore also, generally you should put away all false and untruthful attitudes, and most strenuously strive after the pure truth in your conversation.

First of all, this commandment becomes violated in court, when somebody accuses his neighbor falsely; or when the accused tries to conceal the truth by untruthful evasions; or when a witness says something false, something too much or too little in a matter; or when knowingly and willingly, a solicitor defends a false statement; or a judge pronounces a wrong sentence knowingly and willingly.

But secondly, outside court, in ordinary life, this happens when a man discredits his neighbor falsely, either thoughtlessly or wickedly by inventing things himself, or by repeating and spreading false rumors about him. Or when, by silence, or by a questionable expression and a shrug of his shoulders, he intimates something evil about the other, which he either does not know for sure, or does not feel obliged to intimate according to the law of love. Sometimes such things may happen almost imperceptibly, by merely giving his words or actions a certain truth which makes the interpretation false. This can happen so imperceptibly that only the all-seeing God can notice it. Such things are called to “belie a neighbor falsely and discredit him.”

But when, furthermore, we bear in mind how the Lord Christ has explained the law to us, namely that He actually demands us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to do only the things to others that we would like them to do to us, then we find the truth of Luther’s explanation of this commandment. He says that we should fear and love God so that we do not believe our neighbor falsely and discredit him, but also so that we do not betray and slander him. Yes, on the contrary, we should “excuse him, think and speak well of him, and interpret all to the best.”

## April 21

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*We know that we are of the truth* – 1 John 3:19.

**T**he man who wants to be a Christian, but does not seek the assurance of the forgiveness of his sins, but rests content with always being uncertain about his pardon, surely is not properly awake! Either he is a hypocrite completely asleep, or he is at least a slumbering Christian. This lies at the root of the matter. A bride satisfied with not being sure of her bridegroom's heart has no true love. Therefore it is a characteristic indication of impenitence, as well as one of the more remarkable excuses of the unrepentant, that they downright deny the possibility and reality of the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, and declare that it is sheer presumption, spiritual pride, and imagination. Luther says: "When the Cain-type saints hear this confession (that a Christian praises his assurance of his pardon), then they cross themselves and offer resistance with hands and feet and say: 'May God preserve me from such presumption that says that I am a child of God. No, I want to humble myself and admit that I am only a poor sinner. And God will reward the humble!'"

But the Scripture says: "We *know* that we have passed from death unto life" (1 John 3:14). "We *know* that we are of the truth." "Hereby *know* we that we dwell in Him, and He in us" (1 John 4:13). "We *know* that we are of God" (1 John 5:19). "We *know* that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may *know* Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 5:20). This says, that we *know* — we *know* that we are the children of God, have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. "Therefore," Luther again says, "we should exert ourselves that we may radically, root and all, pull up the most injurious error into which all the world has been allured, namely, the thought that man cannot *know* whether he is inside grace or outside it." This delusion does not come from the intellect, but from the heart. It does not arise because of obscurity, because all Scripture speaks so clearly about this. The reason for the delusion is to be found in the impenitent heart. Therefore, those who themselves do not possess or seek this assurance of the grace of God, want to deny its possibility. And even if a man does not deny assurance, it is nevertheless, as said before, not a good sign, when he does not seek it quickly, but is satisfied with his uncertainty. It is quite another thing that a person who seeks assurance does not always get it at once. Therefore, he should not despair. But to refuse or delay to seek the assurance of the grace of God, is always a sign of indifference.

Secondly, if a soul is honest, and hungers and thirsts after righteousness, it is still a great lack in his Christianity if he is uncertain about his pardon. It is true that he may indeed have grace. What Luther says is true that "the forgiveness of sins is twofold: partly a secret forgiveness with God, partly a forgiveness known

and revealed to the soul.” It is true that Christ had forgiven the sinful woman lying at His feet, and had told Simon so before He turned to her with the words: “Thy sins are forgiven” (Luke 7:48). Thus it is true that a soul thirsting after grace has the forgiveness of his sins before he himself knows or believes it. Because “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matt. 5:6). But it is never complete until the soul also has the assurance of his pardon. Not until this happens will there be a true kingdom of God in the heart. “For the kingdom of God is ... righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17). Not until this happens can he ever have power and love, and thank and praise his God aright, or walk rightly before Him. In fact, a man has the same righteousness by a weak faith, as by a strong one, but not the same sanctification. Because sanctification, the power, and the fruits of the Spirit always depend on the assurance and strength of faith. “For the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). How important it is, therefore, that all honest souls receive the full assurance of their pardon!

Let the man who desires this blessed assurance of faith pay careful attention to the right way thereto. The only way to assurance in the faith is to take God at His Word. With the faith of his heart a man must repeat what God has promised beforehand. One of the fathers of the church has said: “How safe and certain I am but only when I repeat what my God has promised before.” Paul testifies that “faith cometh by hearing” (Rom. 10:17). The right faith and assurance arise, and I become consoled, happy, and certain about the grace of God, only by the things Christ has done and God has declared, and I get this consolation before I consider myself worthy of being allowed to believe. That is, while I still feel that too much is lacking in me, yes, when even I do not intend to believe, as Christ says about the lost son who was “yet a great way off” when his father surprised him with his grace and mercy. When a man has thus obtained consolation in Christ and the Word, then and not until then can he also find the effects and qualities of faith in himself. John says: “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself” (1 John 5:10). But the first and real assurance of faith must always arise from the Word, before all the qualities and fruits of faith.

## April 22

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*And as they did eat, Jesus took bread and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body – Mark 14:22.*

**T**he first thing a Christian has to remember if he ever wants to have any true light, any joy and fruit from the Holy Communion, yes, if he does not want to draw down death upon himself, is that nobody should come to partake with only natural sight. Neither should anybody come to partake with only reason. Something else is required: namely spiritual sight and senses. It is demanded that all the time we keep our eyes firmly on the Word of God. Here the dear, divine gift called faith is required. Yes, here the grace of God is required. If I come only with natural sight, such as even the animals have, to the Holy Communion table, or to a discourse on the Holy Communion, and try to see whatever there may be to see, then I will find only ceremonies and bread and wine, nothing divine, nothing heavenly and glorious. Again, if I want only to consider and judge the contents and value of the sacraments according to my reason — then instead of becoming an edified and warmed-up Christian, I will, on the contrary, become a cold despiser, a heretic, and a mocker of the sacrament. Oh, it is a sign, a stumbling block, and a snare for the fall of many in Israel, that many stumble at it, be ensnared and caught!

But this is what not only the people of this world, but also the true Christians must bear in mind throughout all their lifetime. Because even if hundreds of times you have seen in faith, and tasted the glory and sweetness of the Lord at His table of grace, the devil will still as many times seek again to deprive you of this bliss, this heaven on earth. And that he does only by leading you, when you are a bit more at ease, quite quietly, silently, and beautifully into the investigations of reason, so that this high secret of God will be subjected to the decision of reason and the natural senses. And if he can only occupy us with this, so that we try to calculate and understand how this can happen, how this and that is possible, then he has soon won and deprived us of all gain. Therefore Christians should remember that the Holy Communion is a wonder. It is one of the many high mysterious wonders which the poor human reason will never be capable of grasping and understanding in this present time. We must only believe in these things on the basis of the words of the Almighty and Truthful One. Yes, the Holy Communion is one of the greatest of God's high secrets, and it is not without a reason that the elders call it "the secret of secrets." Just imagine that fallen, darkened, deceitful human reason could even hope to understand and judge! God forbid!

The first instruction we draw as to this subject is that there never will be any need for us to bother ourselves with trying to understand it. No, we should stand only on the omnipotence and truthfulness of the God who has announced it to us. As soon as our reason wants to start counting how the things said by Christ

are possible, we should at once understand that it is a moment of temptation. We should understand that the devil is present, the subtle old serpent that beguiled Eve through his subtlety, and we should immediately invoke the name and help of God as against a violent death, or as against hell itself. If you do not want to do this, but prefer to go into the investigations of your reason, then do so, and become a heretic!

For those harassed with doubts about the contents of the sacrament, it would again be very wholesome if they first consider the Originator well. Who is He? He is your Creator and your Savior. He is the High One that will remain forever. He is the Almighty God, the First and the Last. He is the One that is, that was, and that shall come. God was the Word, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us... All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:13, 3). Lift up your eyes and look at His works! Look at the sun, the stars! Look at the whole of creation! All this has been made by this Lord. And He upholds all things by the Word of His power, and has by Himself purged our sins (Heb. 1:3). Think! Is anything impossible to Him? Or is anything even difficult to Him? What can be easier to the Almighty than to do what He wants? You cannot understand how He can give us His body and blood. Your poor reason shrinks back from it. But do you understand how He could create everything out of nothing? What do we understand? And what cannot the Almighty do? Furthermore: Would He say something and not do it? Can He, the Holy One, lie? Do you want to blaspheme your Creator, your gracious Savior in that way? He has made thousands of wonders in creation, wonders that we do not understand. Then He became man and did thousands of wonders on earth. And because these were visible we believe in them, though we do not understand them. Finally, He desired to make a very gracious wonder which is not visible, but must be believed on the basis of His Word. Then we began to make objection to it, make Him a liar, and say: At last He has said something that cannot be true, when He said: This is My body, etc. Oh, Lord, preserve us! Into such a blasphemy God allows proud spirits to fall, as a punishment for their presumption.

*I am crucified with Christ* – Gal. 2:20.

**N**ot only has everything belonging to the flesh been sentenced to death, but also by the union with Christ, it has really been crucified. For instance, here is a man saying he has been converted and is faithful. In some ways he has begun to live differently, uses the Word, and carries out certain Christian works. But he also approves of certain carnality, greed, or pride, or sensuality, or hatred, or something like that. In fact, he knows that it is sin, but he is proud of his freedom and continues in his bosom sin, yes, even defends it and swears allegiance to it. Such a man deceives himself and lies against his soul, when he speaks about his faith and peace. Again if somebody has become a true Christian and has really begun in the Spirit but no longer loves and practices the crucifying of his flesh, but has again given freedom to his lusts, and again approves of and defends a sin, then he has ended in the flesh. Faith, peace with God, and a good conscience cannot remain companions of even one sin freely practiced and approved. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom. 8:13). By these words the apostle pronounces a definite judgment, and shows that the mortifying of the flesh is no light matter, nor are we free to either practice it or not. No, if we want to keep our life, and not be lost eternally we must necessarily and definitely mortify the flesh. Yes, as soon as we have come to Christ we must, without delay, take leave of the old living in sin, and begin a new life according to Christ, and nevermore turn back to the service of sin.

It is rather striking to see how in a Christian there is real proof that the old man is crucified with Christ. A Christian has come into a situation where his old man must be mortified, as long as the Spirit dwells and works in him, no matter what happens to him during his daily walk, and whether it goes better with him or worse. When Peter followed faithfully after his Master, then the old Adam in him was put to death every day. He was more and more transformed from his old self to the likeness of his Lord Christ. But when one day he became puffed up with presumptuousness, and was therefore left to be sifted by Satan, he fell and denied his Savior. Then he wept bitterly, wept like a child having tasted the birch. Then his self-conceit and presumptuousness were mortified. Later, in front of the council in Jerusalem he stood firm by the truth, professed Christ, and was beaten. That day, he died to the world. Yes, then even his flesh was put to death. But when afterwards in Antioch he again dissimulated, he was sharply rebuked by Paul. No matter how it went with dear Peter, he had to be chastened and mortified. As long as a Christian is honest and follows after his Savior, flesh must be mortified; because the situation is really that sin itself is his greatest suffering.



If I am rich and therefore become tempted to make a paradise for myself on earth, begin to fatten my flesh, and lead a worldly life, then I will get heavy stripes by the Spirit. I get frightened by riches and a life of luxury, and suffer more at the thought of it, than I would if I was poor. If on the other hand, I begin to tender allegiance to and follow after the flesh, and spend my days in sensuousness, then the result becomes spiritual death itself. If I am poor and suffer bodily want, but stick to the Lord, then I die to the world every day. If I am active and gifted in spiritual matters, have years and experience in grace; light and knowledge more than other brethren, and therefore want to enjoy honor and esteem; alas! that is poison itself! The spirit feels it. And now I get as frightened as I am at the thought of hell. If I am faithful and watch in prayer and fight against sin, want to renounce both sin and glory, yet desire seriously in secret and in reality to be first; in fact I know it myself, I am glad about it, and have a secret contentment in my serious ambition; alas! alas! that is hell itself. I am frightened at the thought.

If, on the contrary, I give myself more freedom, fleshly freedom, because doing good seems to make me so puffed up that I despise watchfulness and prayer and good works; if therefore I give my flesh freedom, I will jump straight out of the frying pan into the fire! Then I will quite decidedly feel my guilt and judgment! But if again because of punishment I become rebellious against the gospel, turn all consolation away from me, and say: I am no Christian, I cannot accept grace; then the flesh is in a rage again by unbelief. Again I do not have any peace, until I allow myself be chastised to a humble receiving of grace as sheer grace. Thus we see, that no matter what happens for a Christian, he must be mortified. This is what it means to be crucified with Christ.

You say: "What is this? Shall I then be punished and chastised from every side? What shall I do then? Shall I be allowed to have no rest and peace in anything?" The reply is: Yes, but on only one point, in the Lord! "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:31). The one who wants to have peace and joy, must have it in the Lord — in the Lord Himself, in His righteousness, goodness, and faithfulness. All other delight and boasting are punished by the Spirit as well as by the revealed Word. "Well, in that case I would prefer to die at once!" — yes, that's what happens when a man is crucified. This is what it means to crucify life. If I am quiet on the cross, then I suffer and die. But if I am not still, but wriggle and tear myself, then I suffer the more. We had better be still, submit ourselves to the Spirit, look at Jesus, and seek those things which are above! May the Lord endow us with that! Amen.

## April 24

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*I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love* – Rev. 2:4.

I see, first of all, in this verse, that Christ longs to have my love! Oh, what great grace! He cares about our love so much that He longs for it. He does not want to have us only as servants, but also as friends. He is not content if He gets only our works, but He wants also to be loved by us. Christ does not want to have only our service, but the very love of our hearts. Secondly, I see in this verse, that many a man can be one of the best Christians in everything belonging to the outward demonstration of Christianity, and yet its true life, core, and main point may be missing from his heart. And many who are now reading this, hereby pronounce sentence upon themselves. They will be found in the same state as the teacher in Ephesus, who had everything belonging to godliness except one thing, his first love. But can such a person believe and suspect that lack in himself, and examine himself? He is an enlightened Christian, a brother among the brethren He has been truly born of God, so that Christ can bear witness of his first love, and all the time he has continued to prove his godliness by works. Yes, he does not only lead a pious life and do ordinary good deeds for their own sake, but he also works for Christ's sake, and works so that he is subject to persecution for it. And therein he is so steadfast and faithful, that he does not faint, but continues and has patience. And all this in such spiritual enlightenment, that he can distinguish false apostles from the true ones, and he hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which the Lord Himself also hates, etc. Would not such a person be confident that everything is right with him? But Christ says something more here. In spite of all these good qualities, Christ can still say to him: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

If this first love and its works have now died out in you, you are in a most dangerous condition. For the sake of the faint and easily frightened hearts of the faithful it should be mentioned here that we must make a sharp distinction between the first love and the first sensations. Remember that beside the love that must have appeared in the returned son when his father embraced him so undeservedly and with such a burning heart, Christ says that there was also a festival of rejoicing, and the fatted calf was eaten, with music and dancing. This festival and such a life could not go on every day. The son had to participate in ordinary work, and eat everyday food. This symbolizes how God generally deals with His children. First, there is a sweet time of blessed feelings, when John may lie on Jesus' breast, and Mary Magdalene may touch Him, and gaze on His sweet face. At that time the children of the bridechamber cannot fast. But when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, then they shall fast. Then John may no longer lie on Jesus' breast.

Then Mary may no longer touch Him. All Christians must experience this. The words of Luther come true: "When faith increases, feelings decrease." The latter may well be separated from the first love. But what does love consist of then? Let everybody pay sharp attention to what love really consists of, from what it arose, and on what it depends. It arose only because many sins were forgiven! It really consists of the Savior becoming indispensable because of the battle with distressing sins, and the Savior also becoming sweet and precious because of the remission of sins. This is the main thing. The Savior is indispensable and precious, and where sin abounds, grace does much more abound (Rom. 5:20). A man can no longer hold anything else in heaven or on earth so precious as the Savior from whom all this grace comes. And this love is stronger the more indispensable and precious the Savior is to me, even if my sensations are weaker. Remember this, and you can then distinguish between the first love and the first sensation. The love is stronger, when the Savior is more precious to me, even if my sensations are less. This is not understood by those whose entire Christianity consists only of occasional feelings, not of real things; but it is understood by those to whom sin, and also grace, are a great reality.

When we think of the context in which the words of Christ to this teacher in Ephesus are set, do we not see that the Lord is trying to say: "Your deeds, your work for My name's sake, your suffering and your patience, your light and your gift to distinguish between the spirits; yes and more: the well-being of My church, the promotion of My kingdom, the purity of My doctrine, all this is precious and important to you. It is only I, as your Atoner and Defender, that am now less important to you. It is only I and My deeds, I Myself in the blood-drenched garment of My atonement, who am not so indispensable and precious to you as during the first days of our union. You need not now, as then, lie at My feet as a sinner praying for the fruit of My deeds, the merits of My blood, and forgiveness for your sins. Now your own good deeds, your beautiful Christianity, your useful activities, are enough for you." All these things Christ meant when He listed the merits of this man so much in detail, and added: "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

## April 25

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*Stand fast therefore ... and be not entangled again  
with the yoke of bondage – Gal. 5:1.*

**M**any, even sincere Christians, are still so ignorant of the real essence of the spiritual life, that they do not think this admonition very important, but feel that hereby the good apostle is only revealing a particular care for the peace and well-being of the Galatians. Because even today a preacher of the gospel is often judged like that. They do not understand that their spiritual life is in danger, if their conscience becomes drawn down into the yoke of bondage under the law, and is held by that yoke. May God awaken all such people from their error! The apostle is of an even stronger opinion in this matter. He makes this admonition so intensely important that he says, that if you lose the freedom of your conscience and become taken up with the law, so that you begin to seek your righteousness by your own works, or begin to wait for life and sanctification by the law, then you are the son of the bondwoman, and after all your service you will be cast out.

Our whole nature is strongly inclined towards self-righteousness, self-importance in spiritual matters, and the self-idolization with which the serpent filled man at the Fall. Because of this nothing is so foolish to human reason, and so killing to the carnal heart as the fact that we are quite incapable of all goodness and completely lost, and that all we have is by grace, and gifted by Christ. When we realize this, everybody should understand that the danger of being caught up by the law is not so small as the ignorant think. Add to this that our enemy well knows that, with all he can otherwise do to us, he still has not achieved anything essential, so long as we remain in faith. Spiritual death comes in, when he has succeeded in turning us from the love of Christ to our own works under the bondage of the law and unbelief, so that the life in the Son of God ceases. Yes, death comes even if we otherwise maintain a most beautiful life. We can surely say that the uttermost aim of all the temptations of the devil is that he may take us away from our adoption by God, from “the liberty, wherewith Christ hath made us free” (Gal. 5:1) and bring us again under bondage and disbelief. Not without reason does the apostle use the word “take captive.” Here is a hunter waiting to take us captive! And if we again get caught under the yoke of bondage, then we are also in bonds under sin in the inner being, yes, under the devil and death.

In a very simple way the devil can bring less experienced Christians into this bondage by merely pointing out to them that they are still sinners, and that God hates and condemns sin. Here he has two truths, by means of which he still turns us away from the right truth. First, if we are truly born again and have a holy and willing spirit, the old heart is filled with all the taint of sin that the fall of Adam

brought about, and that taint moves about in infinite directions, in thoughts, feelings, desires, words, and actions, in slowness to good, coldness towards God and our neighbors, disinclination to the Word and prayer, sinful emotions, etc. Secondly, there is the Word of God condemning all this. And still I cannot get rid of it. How will it then be possible for me to believe that I am in perpetual grace and friendship with God? The temptation to despair and unbelief becomes specially strong, when the devil points out to me God's own words which seem to condemn me. First, the whole Bible contains a lot of terrible threats towards those who are careless, godless, and hypocrites. As the world is full of such people, the Word of God must contain much for them! But a soul poor in spirit and chastised by the Spirit feels all evil within him, and says: "Yes, I, even I, am careless. I, even I, am godless and hypocritical, because there are all these things in the old heart." This the devil then uses to murder and destroy my poor faith. Secondly, every Christian has to respect, revere, and honor the commandments of the law. And I should not only know, but also fulfill the will of God. However, in spite of all grace has worked in me, I cannot find that I fulfill the commandments of God. Then at once the judgment of the law comes over my conscience. Oh, what grace and wisdom are required at such a time, rather, what a miracle of God, what a mighty gift of His help, if we are to remain steadfast in our faith in the grace of God!

Here it will be necessary to look deeply and profoundly into the meaning of the covenant of the grace of God. All these judgments and threats will only befall those without Christ; or affect only sin and the outer man; but they will not at all disturb grace so long as I am in Christ. By His law God may want to punish and correct what is wrong in my life! He may also want to pursue and mortify my sins by outer punishment and plagues. But at the same time I am in eternal grace. He is only angry with my enemy, sin, which my spirit also hates. But He is not angry with me. In Christ I am quite free from all wrath and all the judgments and threats of the law. I have a perpetual forgiveness and am already written in heaven as His child and heir. How necessary it is to consider this difference deeply and profoundly, to let the commandments and threats of the law befall only sin, but not the confidence in our adoption. How necessary it is to keep our confidence in eternal grace by Christ! This is true freedom from the law.

## April 26

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*He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all* — John 13:10.

Usually people have understood this verse to be words that have been uttered with regard to baptism. Others, on the other hand, understand by this verse the washing by faith in the blood of the Lamb. But the meaning is the same, because with us the washing in the blood of the Lamb first gives evidence in baptism. It always happens both by faith and baptism, even as the eating of the body of Christ happens in the sacrament, and only this by faith. Anyway, it is the matter of a “spiritual” washing here, a “spiritual” purity, as the Lord says: “but not all. For He knew who should betray Him.” Judas was the only one of the disciples that was not clean. All this became even more clear, when Jesus again said the very same evening: “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3). This points to the faith which embraces His speech or the Word, because without faith nobody becomes clean through the Word. And this faith with everything accompanying it, was lacking in Judas. We should consider the words of Christ. He says: “He that is washed is clean every whit: and ye are clean.” And this is said by Him, though, with His all-seeing eyes, He at once saw through all the infirmity which was still left in His disciples, and which He so often had to punish. And He said it to the very same disciples who would sin so deplorably even the very same evening, and whose weaknesses and falling into sin during the evening, He foretold at the same moment, and thus was well aware of.

In this we see that before God there is another purity than the poor travesty in us. Let us now see what “imputed” righteousness is, what the righteousness of Christ, and the righteousness of faith mean. This is the righteousness of God which has been manifested without the law. This righteousness and purity — though invisible to us, are still no dream or imagination, no mere words and prospects. But in the eyes of God this righteousness and this purity are a great reality and truth. Christ Himself will judge in the last day, and He sees purity where all people see sheer impurity. He says to the weak disciples: “Ye are clean. You, you, that stand here before Me, you are quite clean.” And everyone that has been washed, that believes and is baptized, is quite clean in the eyes of God, in the judgment of God, although the feet (that is the walking, our lower, our earthly righteousness) often become unclean and need special washing, and need to be improved daily by repentance and faith. But again let us note that, in spite of all the imperfection and shortcoming, Christ still says that His disciples are quite clean. Let us for once learn to understand that there is an earnest (a pledge) in the atonement of Christ and the imputing of His righteousness. That in the eyes of God it is not nothingness, not dust and shadow as it is to the blind eyes of our reason. Let us learn that it is

true what the apostle says about Christ and the church, not only that He has made her clean by the washing of water by the word, but also made her to be a bride, glorious, “not having spot, nor wrinkle, or any such thing” (Eph. 5:26–27). Yes; let us learn that it is true what Luther said, that “the one who does not want to confess that he is holy and righteous, but instead all the time complains that he is a poor sinner, behaves as if he wants to say: I do not believe that Christ has died for me, neither that I am baptized, nor that the blood of Christ has cleansed me, or can cleanse me. I do not believe that even one word of the testimony of Christ in the Scriptures is true.”

With His blood Christ has indeed taken away the sins of us all! And not only that, when by His blood and suffering He first took away the guilt of sin and its punishment, He also earned and gave us His own perfect righteousness, and in baptism He put on us publicly the robe of salvation. He has not only made us free from sin, but also righteous and holy before God. Instead of our sin He has put His righteousness, so that before God we may be, not only free from sin, but also righteous, which is a still higher degree of eternal bliss. With His bloodstained robe Christ has merited the white robe of righteousness for us. This has been illustrated in a glorious way in many places in the Scriptures. In Rev. 19 the Son of God is described as One sitting on a white horse and being “clothed with a vesture dipped in blood.” But He also has armies with Him. And those riders who have traversed the vale of tears with their Commander in all sorts of battles and tribulations, also sit on white horses. But their garment is not red. They are clothed in white — “in fine linen, white and clean.” And in verse 8 it reads, “for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” And this righteousness they have received by the washing in the blood of the Captain of their salvation, Jesus Christ.

## April 27

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*As much as they would* – John 6:11.

When Jesus saw a company of more than five thousand men in the desert, He turned to Philip, the poor and perplexed disciple, with the great question of how such a multitude should be fed. Jesus said: “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” But what does John write afterwards about that question? “And this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do.” Should we not pay attention to such an example where the Lord posed such a baffling question to a poor, perplexed disciple!

The Lord does not now speak to us directly to try and prove us. He does so by the experiences sent to us. By these we get the same question in our heart as Philip did, as if the challenge was a serious pledge that we should take care of a crowd that we could not support. But John says that the Lord does this to “prove” us, “for He Himself knows what He will do.” But then it often happens with us the same way it happened with Philip and Andrew, that we do not understand the intention of the Lord, but begin in full earnest to count the assets and do not believe that there is any other way out. We do not believe that we have more than we can see with our eyes. Philip thought and calculated rather correctly! “Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.” Presumably he knew that there was no more in their store, which was administered by Judas. Andrew also wanted to participate in the worry and remarked something still more foolish: “There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes,” but he adds, “what are they among so many?” Then the disciples were at their wits’ end.

But was it so with the Lord? No, until now His hour had not come. He said: “Make the men sit down.” And then He did not serve out as much as they had, but as much as He wanted. That is what happens with all the trials of the children of God. As often as they calculate their assets, at the moment of trial they must always come to the conclusion: “But what are they among so many?” But we must also learn the secret of the statement that the Lord served out as much as He wanted. If you want to accept it, then this statement surely expresses the whole secret of all our bodily trials! Namely, that the Lord allots everyone exactly as much as He wants of earthly, good things. It costs God absolutely as much to make us rich as to keep us in a poorer style! In His hand He has all of creation, and as easily He could allow all earthly riches to rain down upon us, as He once allowed quails to fall down over the murmuring Israelites, so that there were quails two cubits high upon the face of the earth. But the result would not be more wholesome to our souls, than was this superabundance to the bodies of those men. “The people lusted. And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of



the Lord was kindled against the people.” They ate and were punished by death for their lust. Therefore even today the place is called “graves of lust” (Num. 11). Let us not murmur and lust as they lusted and were slain. Does not superfluity bring along mighty temptations? Look, what dreadful words the Lord speaks of the rich: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25). “But woe unto you that are rich! For ye have received your consolation” (Luke 6:24). O God! Lead us not into temptation! The happiness of a Christian is not to have any special possessions on earth. “And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1 Tim. 6:8).

The Lord has allowed us to pray for only so much, namely our daily bread, our real need. May God preserve all Christians from an independent position in which they no longer need God. How happy, on the contrary, it is to live eating our Father’s bread as children! He will never be a merciless Father. Do you mean that He wants to disappoint the confidence of such children as rely on His Word and ask everything of Him? He Himself says that we, being evil, still cannot be so evil, that we would give our child a stone when he asks bread, or a serpent, when he asks fish. When the great, faithful God Himself has taught us to ask our daily bread of Him, and we believe these words of His and do exactly as He has bidden us, and ask Him for it, shall we now think that He still will not give it to us in some way or other? With His wisdom and goodness He Himself wants to determine the method, the time, and the measure. But truly He will always give us our daily bread.

## April 28

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*And lead us not into temptation* – Matt. 6:13.

If I have rightly prayed: “Forgive us our debts,” and really have the assurance that everything has been forgiven, and that God is now satisfied with me for the sake of His beloved Son, then it will necessarily be the first and most sincere care of my heart, that I may not again sin against my gracious Father. Thus my heart starts praying: “And lead us not into temptation! Help me, O God, that I will not again sin against Thee.” The man who is desirous only of escaping the punishment for sin, and who does not worry at all about how to escape sin itself, has herein enough proof of a false spirit.

Yes, it is customary with all honest souls, even before they fully believe, that they are more anxious to escape sin, than to be forgiven. Often among awakened souls there is such confusion that in their hearts they place the sixth petition before the fifth. They want first to be delivered from the power of evil and then to ask for forgiveness. And it is the same with the faithful, more particularly when their spirit is more legal than evangelical, that they think ten times of how to escape sin, to once of forgiveness. Now this cannot be right, because after all, it is the forgiveness of sins and the gospel that must fill our whole heart if we are to get any pure zeal and power to overcome sin.

From this generally known inclination of all honest souls we also get a stronger evidence of what a false, sleeping, and fleshly spirit there is when a man does not worry at all about how to escape sin. We can never say, that the honest mind brings with it a flesh that no longer loves sin, but we refer to this distinguishing work of the Lord in the soul, even the holy and willing spirit, that makes me afraid of the sinful lusts of my own flesh, so that I begin to cry: “Lord, help me against sin! Lead me not into temptation! Help me against the temptation of my own evil flesh, of the devil and the world!” May everybody who really wants to go to heaven honestly examine himself before the face of God, to see whether he really dreads temptation, and wants to escape sin! The Lord sees it. The Lord knows the secrets of men. He knows whether you that read this are really anxious to escape your sin, or whether you want only to escape the punishment.

Oh, what a terrible darkness of the heart, what an enchantment of the old serpent, when a man does not dread falseness before the eyes of the great God, which are as a flame of fire, who tries the reins and the heart, and is “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). He knows what you mean, whether you really think of how to escape sin, or whether you want to retain it. What is the use of prayer and of piety if you are so dishonest before God, that even your prayer is hypocrisy?

It is also part of this hypocrisy, when a man wants to escape many sins, but makes an exception of a certain one, his real bosom sin; or when a man wants to escape outward sins as the Pharisees did, but does not worry about sin hidden in the heart; or when one flees from the sins that cause trouble, but lives at ease in the ones that give a certain enjoyment to the soul, and a sense of power, such as self-satisfaction and spiritual pride, e.g., contentment in spiritual intelligence, gifts or gravity. This is the most poisonous evil and quite contrary to grace.

A great hypocrisy is practiced with the sixth petition when one prays first: "Lead us not into temptation," and then deliberately goes into foreseen temptation. For instance, you know that in certain company, at a certain place, with certain persons, that a certain temptation waits for you, but still you deliberately go there and maybe pray at the doorstep: "Lead me not into temptation." This is either to "tempt the Lord" with levity, and if so, will serve to draw down upon you the just punishment of really falling into the temptation; or it is the consequence of an already present temptation, which draws you to its object with great power. You already know how wretched you are and what in fact you have to do at that time is to pray for power to escape out of it. If you have no power to escape, you will have even less power required to resist evil. This is said with regard to deliberately entering the place of temptation.

It is quite another thing with those who because of their vocation, have to go about with the world and wicked company. This worries and distresses many pious souls nowadays. These should often say this prayer with fear and consolation, and should realize that "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Pet. 2:9). They should bear in mind that their brethren in the world have the same tribulation, even if the kind of temptation may be different, because the man who is less tempted by the world, is usually the more tempted by his flesh and by the devil.

Yes, everybody, in a different way according to a different spiritual age and experience, will have so much temptation that he will "scarcely be saved" (1 Pet. 4:18), so that all his own power will be brought to nought, and he will learn to invoke the only Almighty God in earnest.

*Call upon me in the day of trouble: I wilt deliver thee,  
and thou shalt glorify me – Ps. 50:15.*

**S**omebody may ask: “But have we really any grounds for real certainty that He hears us?” This matter is rather important. Yes, we have such grounds, so much so, that if we would only open our eyes, we would start screaming with sheer delight at such things as we shall see. The best way of expressing it may be to say, that the only thing really needed here is that God gives us grace, and opens our eyes the way He did to Elisha’s servant when he was frightened by the many enemies who compassed them. Everything was helped only by Elisha praying: “Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see” (2 Kings 6:17), and at once he saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha. So we also would be full of consolation in our prayer, if only we had our eyes opened to see the grounds we have to know that God hears our prayer. We want only to point out three of the most important.

The first important ground is that it is the Lord our God Himself who has told us to “Call on Him in the day of trouble,” and has declared: “I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” If God had never said anything about prayer, then we could now never have known whether He really wanted to hear us or not, but would have remained in everlasting uncertainty. Now there is no need for us to be in uncertainty. It is the commandment of God Himself that we should flee to Him, and it is His own declaration that He will hear us. Stop and think: Can something be uncertain when God Himself has said it? Who is God? Do you believe in God? Can one rely on God? Can God break even one of His promises? Is not one word of God more certain than all you can see with your eyes? Ask God for opened senses, so that you may realize what it means, that God Himself has asked us to pray. At last you will find, that there is nothing in all your prayers that can induce the great God to give you something, but only His own Word and promise. God does everything only for His own sake. To use the excellent words of Luther: “If God had not asked us to pray and promised to hear us, then nobody would be able to get the least little thing with all his prayers. Therefore, please note, not that prayer is good and right, that it is devout, persuasive, and longs for temporal or eternal good, but that it is standing and relying firmly upon the promises of God. Prayer will be heard (no matter how small and unworthy it may be in itself) for the sake of the truth and assurance of God. The Word and promise of God make your prayer good, not your devotion. And, obviously faith in the promises of God is the right devotion, without which all other devotion is sheer deceit.” What a sure ground exists for our consolation in prayer, if, instead of groping after our own feelings, we would only keep our eyes fixed on the promises of God.

The second ground for our certainty with regard to the hearing of prayer tells us that He is capable of doing everything. This is expressed in the powerful words at the end of the Lord's Prayer: "For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever" (Matt. 6:13). These words should not only be a praising of God, but also a mighty assurance for us, namely, that our Father is a mighty Lord and King, easily capable of doing all that we ask Him for, even if it seems impossible to us. We need this assurance because it is one of the greatest obstacles to faith in prayer if we think that anything is impossible to God. It is the heathen attitude in our heart that does not want to believe that God can do any more than we can. After we have sought help in vain in our own power, and in that of other people, we feel that our matter definitely cannot be helped. At such a time there is the need for a God who is capable of doing something more than we or others can do. But have we got such a Helper? In the Lord's Prayer Christ teaches us to declare that our heavenly Father is such an one. "For Thine is the kingdom," i.e., Thou art almighty and an absolute King over all the things Thou hast created. Thou canst command all powers both in nature and in the kingdom of spirits. Therefore Thou canst put everything right and give everything necessary for our deliverance.

The third ground for our certainty with regard to the hearing of our prayer, or better still the first and the last ground, after all, lies in our Savior, the whole fact of God giving Him for us, His merits, His prayer for us, His faithfulness, His whole Person. This above all should make us assured that all we pray in His name really will be given to us. Here immediately the mighty obstacle to our faith, even our unworthiness, is demolished. It is only Christ that is well pleasing to God. Christ said: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you" (John 16:23). And we know what it is to pray in the name of Jesus, namely, to ask for every thing on the account of Jesus, on the mercy of Jesus, on the endless worth of His accomplishment and suffering for us. In Him is "yes" and "amen" to all the promises of God. If you ask in the name of Jesus, then the least sigh cannot be in vain, then the greatest unworthiness on your part cannot be an obstacle to the hearing of your prayer. Everything is "yes" and "amen" in Him. O God, open our eyes and increase our faith!

## April 30

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*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven* – Matt. 5:16.

Oh, what a beautiful and delightful sight — a sight able to delight both heaven and earth — when a Christian, burning with zeal for the way of faith and for the glory of the Lamb, burns with zeal against the merit of works before God, and yet at the same time, is a most charitable man, rich in good works and diligent in the service of the Lord! Oh, this true blending of works and faith can quite kill Satan, so much it grieves him. There is nothing so capable of destroying his kingdom, nothing witnesses so strongly and clearly to the truth of the gospel, nothing seizes men's minds and convinces them so mightily, as just this very juxtaposition of zeal against the merit of works, and the richness of proven works.

If I have only one of the two things, if I have only zeal for the way of faith and against the merit of works before God, but do not do good works myself, then all will judge: “That is a very comfortable way to salvation; merely to believe, and no need to *do* any good!” But if you have the witness of all your fellowmen and neighbors, that there is nobody more willing and happy to do good works than yourself, who so much scoffs at and runs down works when they are a matter of righteousness before God — then you will “stop the mouth of foolish and unwise people.” Then all honest souls will have to think: “No, it is not because of his own love of ease that he speaks against the merit of works, for he proves otherwise by his deeds.”

Therefore those are very precious Christians who join these two things very closely. They have zeal only for the merit of the Lamb, but at the same time themselves are rich in good works. May we pray to God, that we will be able to keep such Christians long on the earth! It is by such persons that the kingdom of Christ and the glory of the gospel are most powerfully promoted. On the contrary, what a scoffing there is at the Christian name, when a Christian professing the faith lives in a spiritually slothful and fruitless way. He gives room for the scoffer by his bad habits. Then those hearing his beautiful profession, but also seeing his bad life, will turn around with contempt and say: “If your beautiful profession does not mean any more than this, I can also be a Christian,” etc. Then that soul has his strongest support for his unwillingness and contempt for the word about repentance and conversion. And that support he has got through *you*, through a Christian, who on the contrary should have served to awaken him.

Oh, what a terrible thing it will be for the conscience, when your time of testing comes to an end, when there are no more opportunities to do anything better, and you are asked to give an account of your stewardship; “for thou mayest be no longer

my steward” (Luke 16:2). Oh, what heartbreaking agony, when you remember how much you have heard of, believed in, and professed about the love of Christ and His suffering, but have not lived to Him and His glory, but to yourself, according to the pleasure of the flesh. Then you will think of how those who lived with you during the time of grace, received so little edification from you, simply because of your bad life. Yes, then you will say with grief: Oh, my children! My servants! It is true that they have heard good words from me, but they have also seen bad deeds from me! Therefore, they took so little to their hearts of all the good things they heard. My servants have left my house with the impression: “Those speaking much about God are hypocrites” — and thus they have learned to despise the Word. May God save all the faithful in time!

It is true, that nobody escapes the reproaches of conscience, nor the glowing darts of Satan. Nobody is perfect, and the blind world, least of all, will do justice to us, but will scoff at even the best life, as it also said so many evil things even about the Lord of glory. But all of us are conscious of the difference between the weakness of the flesh, on one hand, for which I repent and which I fight to improve; and, on the other hand, the bad habits allowed to freely rule, and from my real life.

It is because of such people the gospel is scoffed at. Because, if I myself weep and openly punish my faults, I have thereby given God the glory, and saved the gospel from being scoffed at because of them. But please note what was said a moment ago about the connection between zeal for faith and the proving of good deeds. If, on the contrary, you with your good deeds speak of such first and last, so that your works and your following of Christ are A to Z in all your conversation, then we have reason to fear that these are the consolation of your heart and the secret basis of your faith, “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). No! The song must be of the Lamb — “The Lamb that was slain and has redeemed us to God with His blood.” The works must spring from this love for Christ. Then Christ gets all the glory, and *His* name will be glorified and kept holy, not ours.

# May 1

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*And the work of righteousness shall be peace – Isa. 32:17.*

Luther says: “A truly good conscience has peace, when God is near, but fears when God seems far away.” The faithful are comforted when Christ appears. Not until then are the unfaithful really frightened. The faithful says: “Only when I can believe that all is true that is written about Christ, do I have comfort.” The unfaithful obviously dreads the thought that everything is true that the Scriptures contain about Christ. Please pay careful attention to this sign! It is a remarkable witness to your true situation with regard to God and your sins. It witnesses whether you have become reconciled to the Judge, whether you are in the habit of sitting at the mercy seat and confessing your sins there, and seeking reconciliation, or whether, on the contrary, you keep away from God and do not speak with Him about your sins.

It was not all right with David when he kept away from God and did not confess his sin to Him. On the contrary, when he confessed his sins and was forgiven, then he had such a peace, that he could sing with heartfelt joy: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven” (Ps. 32:1). He did not have the comfort that he did not know of any other sin in himself. On the contrary, he says that all the saints should confess their sins, so that “surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto” them (Ps. 32:6). By this he lets us understand, that the peace of the saints is not in the fact, that they do not know of any evil within themselves, but only in the fact that they confess their sins and are forgiven.

Thus peace of conscience certainly depends on the forgiveness of sins. On the contrary, a terrible dread of God bears witness to an unreconciled state. But still we should not understand that all dread of God bears witness to such a state. As can readily be seen from the psalms of David and the history of all the saints, God can also worry and frighten His holy ones so that they do not feel anything other than that God is angry with them, till they tremble and cry out of the agony of their heart. But notice the difference. This is something temporary and transitory. Their real life is peace and confidence in God, as the apostle says: “to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). And again: “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry: Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15). But partly from difficult afflictions from God, partly from the still adhering sin and weakness in faith, it still results that the saints fear now and then. Such things do not mean anything bad, when their life as a whole is reconciled and faithful. On the contrary, it would be a suspicious sign, if faith and peace were never shaken by such things as those mentioned a moment ago. The history of the saints proves this.



But it is altogether different when the real life of a man is to go far away from God and shudder at the thought of judgment. Such things bear witness of a false, unreconciled spirit. This is the reason why the “wicked are like the troubled sea... There is no peace to the wicked” (Isa. 57:20–21). It is true that most of them are so fast asleep and charmed by a false peace that, as Job says, “they take the timbrel and harp and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave” (Job 21:12–13). But others are aware of their unreconciled state and have a secret foreboding of what is waiting for them.

Such a man can also try to quiet his uneasiness by works of charity, or devotions, etc. But the thought of the coming judgment and eternity always make him uneasy again. He can never be sure that he has done enough to be saved. He always fears that something is still lacking. He thinks of a future when everything will be better; or sometimes he tries to reduce the requirements of God and adjust them to his state and life, so that he dares to hope for a gracious judgment. His soul floats on the waves of the stormy sea, up and down, and it is as God says: “They have no peace.” When suddenly punishments from God, or death and eternity, or the presence of the Lord, open the eyes of such, then they dread. It is that way with most people. They seem to have peace, but only as long as they do not perceive anything of God. In a moment their peace comes to an end, namely, when they are conscious that the Lord is near. This is always an unhappy state.

May everybody face up to himself and ask himself before God: “Have I peace with God? Have I sought and found reconciliation? Can I meet the Judge at this very moment? In general, have I more peace, when God seems close to me, and, on the contrary, do I suffer, when I miss His presence? Or is it a condition of my peace, that I can forget God?” The answers to such questions bear witness to the condition of the conscience.

## May 2

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*We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience* – Rom. 5:3.

**W**e should pay careful attention to the word “knowing.” It depends exactly on this “knowing” whether a man will be able to glory in tribulation. No man is “joyful in tribulation” (2 Cor. 7:4), if he does not know anything about it, if he does not know anything more than is seen and felt. Tribulation itself is nothing consoling. And Christians are not made of stone, so that they do not feel the sorrowful experiences of pain. The psalms of David especially bear witness to the sensitiveness of the saints to suffering. If I then judge according to what is seen and felt during suffering, then I certainly could not glory in tribulation. Then I would always have to remain in depression and despair.

Therefore, it is necessary that we know something — that we know at least partly what tribulation means, and partly also what it works in us. Some Christians become quite downhearted and inconsolable at a temporal adversity or accident. It really looks as if they do not know anything more about tribulation than what they see and feel. It should not be that way with us. Christians should be a people seeing something beyond what they see with their eyes; a people knowing something simply because their Father says so. If we do not see anything consoling in suffering, then we do not believe in our heavenly Father’s word about it. Let us reflect a bit upon what the Lord God says about suffering. First, the Lord Christ says expressly that nothing can happen to us — that not even a hair can fall from our heads — without our Father. Each suffering, each adversity, great or small, has thus been sent by the gracious and wise Father. Can anything be more consoling?

And what does He say more about the purpose or meaning of all the bitter things He sends us? In the text the apostle describes what suffering works. But we want first to see what it means, what the mind and purpose of God are, when He chastises us. Thus says the Lord about it: “For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth” (Prov. 3:12). Let us remember that word well! So also the apostle says: “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons” (Heb. 12:7). Yes, the apostle makes this sign of the adoption so important that he still adds words worth thinking over: “But if ye be without chastisement, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” What an inexhaustible source of consolation we can have in all suffering, if only we are able to hold these two truths: first, that everything befalling us, evil or good, great or small, has been sent to us by our Father; and secondly, that everything chastising us, casting us down, frightening us, and worrying us who live by faith in Christ, bears witness to God’s fatherly care for us. It is a sign of our adoption, and of an upbringing to prepare us for heaven. If you are still unconverted, then your plagues are due only to your own great wickedness. And then there is something

still worse waiting for you, if you do not repent. But if you have sought the grace of conversion and righteousness by faith, then you shall know, that there is only a fatherly benignity in all your suffering. Is it not a rich source of consolation to know such things?

Then we have a rich source of consolation also in the wholesome effects of suffering. It is of these that the apostle says that “tribulation worketh patience,” in our text. The word “patience” should not be understood only as a quiet submission to suffering. The word in the original text, first of all, means steadfastness, perseverance, that is, in all that is good — ripeness and firmness in Christianity, and endurance to the end. Such things are worked by suffering in Christians. On the other hand, suffering causes the world to lose its principles and murmur against God and curse Him. And tribulation causes those who have only superficially received the word with joy, but have no root, to depart from the faith. But those truly rooted in Christ always become more steadfast, profound, and serious in their godliness, because of tribulation.

What the apostle aims at here can often be seen in a crowd of awakened and believing souls. Also with a true life of the Spirit in his heart a young, untried Christian still is often rather unsteady and uncertain. Sensuousness and the world take him far from the right way. Then true Christian fellowmen become worried and ask: How will this end? But before one expects it, God comes with help and attaches a heavy weight to the light and unsteady soul. A long-time affliction, a bitter loss for all his life, a continuous ill-health or poverty. Or a humiliating and persistent temptation. And from now on the soul so unsteady and uncertain before, becomes much more godly and more steady. He now searches the Word more deeply, fights more seriously in prayer, and becomes more and more afraid to trust his own heart, etc.

Tribulation works steadfastness. But thereby it also works especially patience. Here for instance, is a person for whom everything once went well. He was full of pretensions and impatience, and at the least adversity he complained and murmured against both God and men. But through a long time of suffering that very person gets such a patient and contented mind that finally both God and men are almost too good to him! But in order always to follow the way of God, patience in a higher sense is also needed. If we wish to always have patience with all the trials of the spiritual fight, and the strange household of God, then we need a special patience. As also the Lord Christ says: “In your patience possess ye your souls” (Luke 21:19).

## May 3

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*Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him – Rom. 5:9.*

**H**ere we have mighty words which, as if by the power of a lever, can roll away the greatest stones from the hearts of believers. The apostle says: “If God had such a love for us when we were still sinners, without atonement and without justification, that He gave His only begotten Son of His own free will to go to death for us, how much more shall we now be saved by Him from wrath, when we have been justified by His blood.” This is surely a mighty conclusion, clear and consoling beyond measure! And besides it is just the consolation that all the faithful specially need. After all, what chiefly worries all awakened souls who know their sin, is their fear that God will again be angry with them and allow accidents to befall them, and in the end condemn them.

To such it is surely consoling beyond measure that the apostle meets first such worries, and with great boldness asks: “When, because of the love of His own heart towards man, God has done so much, when we were without atonement and without righteousness, even to giving His only beloved Son to a bloody death for us — is it possible that now that we have become righteous by the blood of His Son, He could revoke this grace and begin to judge and deal with us according to our merits and according to the law? Wherefore then has He given His Son to die for us?” Christ says: “For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). After all, when God gave His Son, the meaning and counsel of God was that we should be saved through Him, and thus no more be judged according to the law when we believe in Him. It is quite impossible that God would now act in a way contrary to the love of His own heart and contrary to His eternal counsel of salvation in Christ. It is only in our heart that such thoughts about the wrath of God arise, and they are put there by the old Liar. In the heart of God there must be eternal grace towards those who believe in His Son.

It is not enough that God loved us so much when we had no atonement, that He gave His life for us. Because of this much less can He do without love now that we have been reconciled. The apostle remarks here that we that believe now stand in quite another light in the sight of God, namely as *justified*. The apostle says: “When God loved us so much, when we were sinners, that He gave His Son for us, much more shall we now be saved from wrath through Him, as we have been justified by His blood.” Note what the apostle says: “We are now righteous.” Will God not love us now, He who loved us when we were sinners as shown above? We are now righteous, i.e., not sinners, but unimpeachable before the law and perfect. How have we become so? The apostle says: “We have been justified by His blood.”

First, it has not happened by any piety or work on our part. Neither has it happened only by mildness on the part of God, in that He would thereby remit something of His rights. No, the apostle says, but it has happened by the blood of Christ. Here “blood” was required, and nothing less than the blood of the Son of God. In verse 1 the apostle used the words “justified by faith,” and here he says: “justified by the blood of Christ.” Thus we see from his own words that it is not faith itself, as a virtue, that is justifying, but only its object, the atonement by the blood of Christ which faith embraces. Nothing less is sufficient.

May no one permit himself the thought regarding the perfect Being of God, that He would call a man righteous though he is not so, i.e., that He would allow a jot and a tittle to pass from His holy laws and justify a man apart from that which the law loves and demands to be rightly fulfilled for him. No, the holy judgments of God are as equally holy and irrevocable as His love. The words “by His blood” remind us seriously of what an infinite evil sin is. They also remind us of the severe justice of God and His decision to perform His first judgment: “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17). If Christ had not shed His blood and entered into the Holiest with it, then He would not have “obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12) for sinners. As the “life is in the blood,” the blood of Christ is as valid as His death, wherewith His work of atonement was finished. Therefore all the Scriptures describe the “blood of Christ,” “the blood of the Lamb,” as our atonement.

If thus the great Mediator and High Priest has perfected all for us according to the law, then let us rejoice and praise and give glory to Him by really and sincerely believing and professing that we then are righteous according to the law. This is not with any imagined and fancied righteousness, but in full measure according to the requirements of the law in the meaning of the word “righteous.” “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

## May 4

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*My blood ... is shed ... for the remission of sins* – Matt. 26:28.

**F**rom these holy words we see that both sins and good deeds have been drowned, have become dead, and have vanished in the Red Sea of the blood of Christ. We see that even very great sins have then lost their power to condemn us, and even the very great merits of piety and good deeds have lost their power to justify us. I want to be silent about my merits, when the Son of God Himself has had to suffer death in order to save me. It is now clear that no sins prevent, and no good deeds promote my pardoning and righteousness before God. It is clear that before God there is nothing to prevent a greatly fallen sinner from coming at any moment to receive in Christ the grace and righteousness earned for him on the great day of atonement, and waiting for him ever since. We see that in his distress and embarrassment because of his sin and unworthiness, there is no need for him to become other than he is, in order to come to Jesus. Everything is ready, everything has been made perfect. We see that he may come any moment he wants, and that he may come as he is, as sinful and unworthy as he is, as learned or ignorant as he is, as cold or warm as he is, as hard or moved as he is, as zealous or careless as he is, as clean or unclean as he is, to receive all that he lacks, as a gift in Christ.

If it were not so, but if he had first to possess some good qualities and virtues making God more benevolent towards him, then surely grace and righteousness would not be by Christ alone, not “without works” (Rom. 4:6), not perfect “without the law” (Rom. 3:21) as the Scripture says. As for repentance, remorse, and faith, they are never needed to make the heart of God more willing to give grace. They are only needed for the heart of the sinner himself so that he will want to have grace. And when it is his greatest distress, his greatest need, his only consolation to be allowed to come to Christ, then there is repentance enough, remorse enough, and faith enough for him already to be pardoned in Christ. Pay good attention to the words: *greatest* distress, his *greatest* need, his *only* consolation. May no one deceive himself!

But furthermore, it is clear that as long as we remain in Christ, i.e., as long as Christ with His atonement, Christ with His merits, Christ with His grace and friendship, is the need or consolation of our heart, we are always in one and the same unchangeable grace and righteousness before God; at all times equally in that righteousness both at the moment of piety and at the moment of weakness, when we get grace to do something good, and when we happen to fall into some infirmity and sin. If it were not so, but if we were more righteous and pardoned before God at the moment when we are more pious and decent, and less righteous at the moment when we are less pious, why, then surely righteousness would be

of works, or at least partly of works and only partly by Christ! And surely that would be to speak scoffingly against Him who has washed us from our sins in His own blood (Rev. 1:5), and against the holy Scripture which denies so clearly this salvation by works. The holy Scripture so often repeats the words “by grace,” “by Jesus Christ,” “through His blood,” “by faith,” “not of yourselves,” “not according to our works,” “without the law,” etc.

In brief: if it is true that we become and remain righteous only by Christ, without the law, without any contribution from works, then surely the natural consequence of this is that we must be so at every moment, as long as we remain in Christ by faith. Because nothing else changes, nothing else is better at one moment and worse at another, than we ourselves and our works, the inner and the outer ones. The righteousness of Christ does not change. If the righteousness of Christ is now our righteousness before God, then the righteousness we have before God cannot change.

But our deeds are not only those of the hand and tongue. But all the deeds of a human being with a body and soul belong to that list, and chiefly the basic deeds which the first commandment in the law deals with, viz., the deeds of the soul, heart, thoughts, and inclinations, such as love, coldness, remorse, hardness, prayer, good thoughts, evil thoughts, etc. All of them belong to the title: *our deeds*. But if our righteousness can consist of them, then it cannot consist of the righteousness of Christ. If on the other hand it consists only of the righteousness of Christ — why, then it does not consist of these deeds! As also the apostle Paul remarks: “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:6). But this he cuts off quite briefly: “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2:21).

## May 5

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*While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept* – Matt. 25:5.

**T**hese words of Christ about the ten virgins, both the wise and the foolish, we see come true before our eyes each day in the inconceivable sleepiness and lukewarmness generally prevailing in Christendom. The world is spiritually dead, at ease, and blinded. Year after year the hypocrite deceives himself, with a false Christianity and a false hope. The awakened and the Christians become forgetful, sleepy, and negligent. They stop halfway or return altogether to spiritual death. And the reason is that the Bridegroom tarries. Time becomes long and tedious. Nothing remarkable or exceptional takes place. Today is as yesterday and one year like the other. There are no signs of the coming of the Lord. The ungodly thrive and rejoice in prosperity. They seem happy, safe, and glad. The one who fears the Lord and seeks the invisible things is called a fool. He often has unhappiness and adversities. Thousands of captivating things happen before his eyes and ears, and the heart is being enticed towards the earth. All speak in favor of the world. Few or more meet us with a warning, awakening, or consoling word. The Word of God is neglected; prayer, profession, and persecution fail to appear. This is the evil day and the power of darkness when a Christian becomes sleepy, cold, and slumbering. And if he sleeps long, the oil he once had can dry away during that sleep, and he feels safe, becomes blinded, and is spiritually dead.

The sleepiness and coldness into which also living Christians fall reveal to themselves that the spiritual and heavenly things presently become trifling and unimportant to them, and the earthly things great and important. This is revealed in the fact that a Christian sometimes becomes rather satisfied with himself and feels safe. He has no trouble with his sins, no fight between the Spirit and the flesh, no fear of the enemy, no suspicion with regard to himself. Peter was that way when he declared: “Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended” (Matt. 26:33), and some hours later he denied his Lord. David was that way when he went up on the roof and cast wanton glances at a woman without fearing any danger. A man is that way when he is not anxious to increase more and more in what is good, when the grace in Christ does not delight the heart, when prayer and the Word have lost their taste. And so on. What characterizes an honest spirit, and distinguishes a living Christian from a dead one, is that the former soon becomes worried by this self-satisfaction and, soon gets an awakening glance from the Lord, and goes out and weeps bitterly. Or if the state of ease goes so far that God must use outward means such as punishment and chastisement, or a threatening Nathan, he accepts it to his benefit, takes the warning or the punishment to his heart, confesses his sin and sleepiness, and wants to become better.



On the contrary, it is a sign that sleep and ease have become spiritual death and blindness, or it is a sign of a false Christian, when the man still remains content and safe, and does not let himself be warned. Either like Judas Iscariot, he continues in a sin he is conscious of, denies, hides, and defends, or like the foolish virgins, he appears like the wise virgins outwardly, but the life and experience of grace are missing in the hidden depth of his heart, and he allows it to be like that in silence for the present, until the door is shut. Oh, what a dreadful condition when a man is no more capable of examining himself seriously, no more capable of stopping and thinking over extremely serious matters, no more capable of fearing with regard to himself, or of suspecting himself! But human nature is like that, a dreadful consequence of the death that was to be the wages of the fall into sin — “thou shalt surely die!” (Gen. 2:17). And what is written in Rom. 3:18 comes true: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” They hear, they read, they believe that thousands of others are deceived, are deceived by their own supposings, and get into trouble — but they themselves do not fear that they also can be deceived. They read and hear the characteristic signs of their condition, and do not heed them, but turn hastily to trifling matters.

Here we see the truth of the words of Luther: “The one who does not fear for himself, has reason to fear.” He may dread. If a man is not able to fear or suspect himself; if he lives in a secret and cherished sin and does not consider it dangerous, does not think the sin worth considering, or is satisfied with himself in his piety, those are terrible signs of a secret, spiritual death. They are a prelude of eternal misery. It is surely a characteristic sign of the true, wakening Christian that he has a fearing spirit. Yes, such even fear when there is no danger. They suspect themselves. They are afraid of deceiving themselves. They are dissatisfied with themselves. And when they feel sleepy and forgetful, they are most worried especially by that. The spirit of fear also shows the right watchfulness, and makes the sheep stick closely to the Shepherd. It makes the chicken all the time remain under the wings of the hen. It makes the faithful seek and put on the righteousness of Christ daily. And therefore they are every moment in safeguard so that wrath will not befall them. They are in safeguard from all that shall come. They are clothed upon and prepared to stand before the Son of Man at any moment.

## May 6

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*I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation* – Heb. 13:22.

**A**s long as a man remains a humble and obedient disciple of the Word of God, desirous of hearing and following all the will and advice of God for our eternal bliss, the Holy Spirit will accomplish in him the good work He has begun, and in the future will reveal what may still be hidden, and correct what is wrong. But a condition that does not readily allow itself to be helped begins when a man simply makes it a principle not to take to heart what includes a punishment and exhortation, but makes his own choice from the Word of God, and does not want to hear or care about what attacks the flesh and sin.

It is certainly true that one should use discernment, so that at the same time as a man embraces Christ, he does not also embrace the curse and judgment of the law in his conscience. Because these never come together. The man who has Christ, the one who seeks or believes his righteousness is only in Him, is free from all the curse of the law, and should always keep it like that, because otherwise he mocks and despises the blood of Christ, and all the promises of God. But this only concerns the matter of how we stand before God.

On the contrary, as regards our life down here on earth, we can never get enough of admonitions, punishments, and encouragements. And it is necessary for us to take heed to them and to mend our ways in practice and deeds, if we want to be Christians.

There are people who want to be free as regards their flesh and self-life, and also make it a principle to choose for themselves only the Word that sounds sweet and well, and to shun the Word that attacks and disturbs them in their sins. The consequence is that they are impatient to hear the words of wholesome admonition, and consider it a teaching of the law which they as believers should shun. They are impatient when they hear brotherly punishment and warning, turn themselves against it, and begin to defend themselves and their sin. Maybe they go and sit down at a lax, inactive, and dormant well of spiritual teaching, where one can be at the same time godlier than the world, and yet be on rather good terms with the world, and be like her in daily life.

There is such a form of religiousness, and those who go that way are completely lost, unless there is a pronounced wonder of God's grace. Because all the time they fortify themselves with the principle they have adopted, viz., not to care about the Word that wants to correct them. They shun the only means that would help them. They shun wholesome teaching. They do not take pains to make a closer investigation. This is the broad false path that has always been able to receive many of those who have successfully avoided some other false path, i.e., that of trying to make themselves righteous under the law — yes, including many of those who

had really come to the life of faith, but many more of those who had never really been converted. At the time of the apostles how much they warned against these two false paths! How strongly and loudly Luther complains of the very same paths. “Look,” he says, “how people now everywhere take such a foolish attitude towards the gospel, that I almost no longer know whether I should go on preaching or not. I would have gone back long ago, if I had not known that it had gone the same way in the days of Christ. Because as soon as one preaches that salvation is not because of our life or our deeds, but the gift of God, then nobody wants to do anything good, lead a chaste life, or be obedient — and, moreover, such say that we forbid good deeds. On the other hand, when one preaches a chaste and quiet life, then the whole world immediately wants to cast itself upon it, and build a ladder to heaven by means of it. God cannot stand this. A heinous life is no good, and I also find fault with an honorable life. Yes, those who look only at an honorable and beautiful life, for them it would be better if they were harlots and villains and fallen sinners. And still God does not want us to lead a bad life. How should we then behave? You must see that you remain on the middle course and neither turn to the left nor to the right side, but lead a quiet, beautiful, and pious life before the world. However, it must be without making any fuss about it, and without considering it any better than if you were asleep or awake, as I do not say that I want to deserve heaven because of that. Thus all decent and chaste life should be led freely, so that nobody says: Because of this and that deed I want to become saved. I should like to have disciples well aware of what a Christian life is, but one never finds anyone like-minded. Because one crowd wants to be too godless and another too holy. Well, the one who can understand it, he may understand it. We can do no more than put it into the ears. God must help it into the heart.”

## May 7

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*And that he [Christ] died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again – 2 Cor. 5:15.*

**T**hese words say that we first have been partakers of the merits of the death of Christ. So that His own death at Golgotha some two thousand years ago has become our own, exactly as though we ourselves had been there and had undergone our deserved death. But the words also say that at the same time we have been consecrated to following after His death. So that as soon as we have become Christians, as soon as we have become partakers of the merits of Christ, and all the advantages and treasures of His kingdom, we have at the same moment been consecrated to death from sin. We are obliged immediately to take leave of our previous life in sin, our previous service in unrighteousness. We are obliged to crucify our flesh daily, and more and more die to sin, and live to God, in the way that Christ, by the death on the cross, took leave of the sins He had borne. And as Christ then gave Himself to God in an eternally valid sacrifice of atonement, so also we shall now give ourselves to God to be a sacrifice of thanks, well pleasing to Him. And all this because Christ has died for us, and because we believe in Him and have put on His righteousness.

Maybe this is too small a motive for you to mortify your flesh seriously. Maybe it is a small thing to you that Christ died for you; that you are now not under the law, but under grace; that you now are free from sin. Maybe you are more happy in the service of sin, because then you escape this bitter mortifying, and it is not necessary for you all the time to deny yourself and follow Christ to the cross. Look, nobody compels you against your will to serve Christ, and surely it is more peaceful for the flesh to live in sin. In Luke 14 Jesus says, think it over closely before you join My company. Don't do like the man who began to build a house without having counted the costs, and who, after many days' work and much sacrifice, had to abandon it. Or like the man who went out to war and did not consider the strength of the enemy.

Sin gives many pleasures for the flesh, but it would not be right to keep silent about the wages of sin. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Thus when the gifts of Christ seem trifling to us, we should consider the contrary thereof. We should think of what it means not to belong to Christ, not to be under grace but under the law. We should think of what it means not to be free from sin, but at the moment of death to be still without a Mediator, to be in one's sins under the curse of the law, and in the judgment be compelled to receive the wages of sins that is death, the eternal death in deep hell. Such are the conditions of sin. If we bear them well in mind, then we would much rather be crucified with Christ for

a short while here, and die to sin, and live with Him in Paradise forever, than have our delight in sin for a short time here, and then have to endure eternal suffering. By the great grace of God, by the solace of the Spirit, and by the consolation of the Word we have already gained on earth much more than we have renounced. By the sprinkling of the blood of Christ we have here and now a good conscience which is a “daily feast” (Prov. 15:15).

Yes, you are one of these happy souls. You have not only been baptized into Christ, but you have also been awakened to faith. You have the sure hope that you are one of the true believers. You know that you have become free from sin, and that you are now not under the law, but under grace. So that none of all the wicked things still adhering to you will be imputed to you. The law will not condemn you. God will not be angry with you. However, if you have not obtained such a faith and such a peace, but are still worried as to how you will get rid of your guilt, and be reconciled to the gracious God, then you do not belong here. You cannot die to sin and live to God. No, you must first come to the freedom of faith.

But, if, as said a moment ago, you have been made free from your sins and bondage by faith, so that you now rejoice in the knowledge of how mightily, sufficiently, and completely that matter has been attended to by Christ, and you have tasted how sweet the Lord is, if you have experienced the witness of His Spirit as to your adoption and you have the Holy Spirit in your heart, then it also must be your delight to die with Christ, to be crucified with Him, to give yourself altogether to Him. And you must also feel it as an obligation for you to be no more your own, no more to follow your own flesh, your own mind, your own will, your own lusts and desires. Now, for all the days of your life, you must renounce all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and lead a godly, righteous, and chaste life in this world. Yes, you must feel obliged to live to Him that lived and died for you. Because “He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.”

## May 8

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*Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you* – John 15:3.

Let us here look a little at the deep, secret reason why Christ could call His disciples clean, the very same weak disciples whose history is so bestrewn with shortcomings and faults, yes, even with rather grave sins. Note how in the same evening that He both prophesied and experienced their falls and sins, He could call them clean twice. Once His words were: “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” His words had worked the faith that embraces Christ, His purity, and His merits. The second time His words were: “He that is washed [by faith in the blood of the Lamb] is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For He knew who should betray Him; therefore said He, Ye are not all clean” (John 13:10–11).

This remark proves that Christ spoke of a spiritual purity. Because both as regards the bodily and the Levitical (priestly) purity Judas was as equally pure as the other disciples. But Christ here speaks of the hidden, the imputed purity put on by faith. He says: “Ye are clean,” and that on the very evening when they had sinned so badly. And this was spoken by the One whose “eyes are as a flame of fire” (Rev. 19:12), the One who will judge at the last day. If He had looked at the righteousness dwelling in the disciples, then He would not have said: “Ye are clean.” No, it was the *washing* and His *speech* that had made them clean, that is, not before their own eyes or any human eye, but before Him alone who can rightly see and value the righteousness of Christ. Oh, what a powerful proof of the righteousness which is eternal and equal at all moments!

But, why, God is eternally and irreconcilably against all sin! And He loves righteousness. How can He then consider me as equally righteous and well pleasing when I happen to err and sin, as when I do His will? Reply: God has indeed a holy and eternal anger against all sin. But does that mean that we shall never acknowledge and praise the wonderful counsel of atonement? Why, all this wrath He turned against the only Son! He poured it out on Him. He laid all the guilt and punishment of sin upon Him. “The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He [the Son] was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him” (Isa. 53). If I were not dressed in His righteousness, then the least sin would be enough to condemn me. But it is with His eyes upon the righteousness of Christ that the apostle says: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). And when God visits the sins of His children, with whom He is most particular, then it does not happen because of anger, or in order to require the guilt of a sin. But it is done because of love in order to weaken and kill the root and desires of sin. Therefore

He said of the children of His Son: “If His children forsake My law ... and keep not My commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from Him” (Ps. 89:31–34).

About this also Luther says in his explanation as regards the fifty-first psalm, that sin must be considered in two ways: first, as forgiven because of the righteousness of Christ, wherewith we have been clothed by faith and because of which the sins still left are not imputed to us; and second, as still dwelling with us and being the object for daily washing whereby the Holy Spirit weakens and mortifies the sin in us. “Because,” he says, “as also Augustine speaks about it, the depravation or the illness (i.e., the sin) which is inborn in us, remains even in the saints, moves in the flesh, and is never altogether killed and removed. But it has been forgiven and is not imputed to the faithful to condemn them. Because as the grace and mercy of God rule over us, sin cannot condemn us or make God angry. Nevertheless, even with the pious, holy, and righteous, something is still left of sin, such as lust, evil concupiscence, and other vices. And David also here prays that he might be cleansed from them. Therefore it is true both that a Christian is no sinner, and that all Christians are sinners.”

But it is rather a difficult art rightly to understand and embrace this high, heavenly, great, and most consoling secret. Namely, that grace and righteousness are so independent of works, that in Christ we are at all moments equally righteous and pardoned. Yes, that “in Christ the thief on the cross is equally as holy as Peter. And that nothing depends thereupon that Peter and Paul have done greater deeds than the thief, you, and I” (Luther). It is rather a difficult art rightly to understand and embrace this secret of the gospel. Yes, if God Himself does not give us the light of the Spirit and open our eyes and senses, then it is quite impossible. Because by nature we are all “fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25).

# May 9

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*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ – Gal. 3:24.*

**H**ere we see the purpose of the knowledge of sin through the law, and the proof of its honesty. The purpose was not that God would be able to forgive sin. For that purpose another Man had to know and hate it, and thereby He sweated the unexampled sweat of blood. Neither was the purpose that by the knowledge of sin it would be burnt out and overcome. For that the Spirit was required, the Spirit that comes by the preaching of faith. It is true that the knowledge of sin can teach you to drop a good deal of outer sin, and levity and lightheartedness abate and become weaker. But the real depravity grows to the same degree inwardly.

No, the purpose was that you would be driven to Christ, that you would not get any peace or rest anywhere else than in the city of refuge, Christ Himself. And therefore the sign indicating that you know your sins rightly, will be that this purpose has been attained. Namely that you no longer hope to win grace by any work of your own, but that you now seek only the grace of atonement in Christ. If you still can remain as before in the world and sin, then you have not even been awakened. Then you have not even been driven to yourself and your own improvement. And then you do not at all know sin. But even if you have been awakened, but have stopped at yourself, at your own repentance, remorse, and prayer, and have your hope, your consolation, and your rest there, then you do not know rightly the depravity of sin. You are still outside Christ, and as equally lost as a sinner at ease. It is here that the false, Cain-type knowledge of sin reveals itself.

There are many awakened and religious people who know and confess much sin. Yes, sometimes they feel that they are condemned outright. But in spite of all this they still manage to live one day after the other in the same condition. And this is possible. Maybe they are not quite content, but they can bear it, anyway. They can eat and drink, work and sleep, yes, smile and joke, though they know that they do not have the grace of God, and maybe even confess freely that they are the children of condemnation. If they hear the free, undeserved grace of God being praised or offered to them, then they offer resistance hastily, and because of a strange humbleness they decline to receive it in their present condition. Thereby they say or mean: “No, no, I am not so presumptuous. My sins are too grave for me to profit by grace offered so freely. Only those who do not know as much sin as I can do that.” And then they have a secret contentment. Or they think that their situation is better than that of these believers who, they feel, cannot have their knowledge of sin. These have a strange form of knowledge of sin. It is hard to believe what is in fact the reality, that there is still a deep contentment with themselves. There is a proud spirit which has made consolation out of the very



pangs of conscience. Thereby Christ and the merits of His blood, and the free, great grace of Christ, are still shut out.

Even if these were to torment themselves to death with their sins, they would still remain away from the city of refuge, from the only thing valid before God. And in such a way they will die in their sins. With pertinent features, these have been sketched in the history of Cain, who also said before God: "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13). He really had a pricking and dreading conscience, an uneasy spirit that trembled at a shaking leaf. He was unfamiliar to God and unhappy every day. But notice, he was nevertheless capable of going away to the land of Nod, on the east of Eden, and of building a city and having wife and children. It was not too difficult to him that God was angry with him. He was capable of bearing that. He did not need to fall down before God in order to obtain assurance of His grace.

Mark here the difference between an uneasy conscience and the awakening of the Spirit; between the sin-distress caused by the very sin and conscience and the distress caused by the Holy Spirit through the Word. The former can often be found with even the most ungodly after certain outbreaks of sin, but leaves them equally unchanged. Because all that is of man, of human power, such as that of the conscience, can never lift him up again. The Spirit is needed for that. The awakening and sin-distress that is the work of the Spirit always drives man to repentance and faith, and works complete change. Therefore the token of a true feeling of sin will always be, as mentioned before, that it works a change, a rise, a fleeing. Or that man cannot remain where he is, but seeks salvation. And finally that he cannot seek it in himself, but in Christ, and that he cannot rest, before he has received grace in Him, and assurance of it. And this grace and assurance work peace, love, and a new, willing heart towards God and what is good. This was the purpose of the distress of the knowledge of sin, not that thereby God would want to give grace, but that we would want to receive grace.

## May 10

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*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you* — John 16:23.

**M**any think: “What does it matter whether I pray? My prayer is so weak, unskillful, and unworthy that God cannot hear me!” May God preserve you from basing your faith in prayer, on the skillfulness or worthiness of your own prayer. You do so when you doubt that God hears you because your prayer is so unworthy. Should you then pray in your own name? Has Christ not given you permission to go to the Father in His name, and ask on His account, on His deposited value of meritorious labor, suffering, and intercessions, strong crying and tears, life and blood? Has He not said more or less like this: “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name; but ask now in My name. And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you.” Therefore, in spite of the devil’s inspiration about your unworthiness, say: “I do not at all need the worthiness of my own prayer. I have a written instruction from the great Lord, the only begotten Son of God. He has commanded me to go to the Father in His name and has said: ‘Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you.’” And remember, when this written instruction equipped with the name of Jesus is presented to the Father — then your prayer has sufficient power and importance. As often as we pray: “by Thy Son Jesus Christ, our Lord” we should realize this.

God also attaches very much importance to His commandment and our obedience thereto. Now He Himself has commanded you to pray. You then do only what He Himself has commanded you to, and your prayer has power and value for the sake of His commandment. Because if God were to look at the person, then no man would be able to come before Him. On this subject we read the following words of Luther in one of our symbolic books: “Therefore you must say like this: My prayers are not inferior to, more unholy, or less well pleasing to God than have been the prayers of Paul and of the very holiest saints. And why? I gladly admit, that as regards their persons, they have led a holier life. But they are not holier, if we look at the commandment about prayer. Because I am confident that God does not attach value to the prayer because of the person, but because of His Word and the obedience we show Him.” Now I have the same commandment and the same merits of Christ as the saints had. Therefore, as God looks only at that, I should not consider my prayer less important and holy than theirs.

Here only faith is needed, the precious gift of faith. Most especially when the thing you pray for seems quite impossible, and when God tarries of it, for a long time in the hearing. When the thing you pray for seems impossible to you, then look thoroughly into the matter whether anything can be impossible to God. You can make this investigation from the holy pages of the Bible — such as from the

description of how Israel was brought out from Egypt, how they walked over the sea, how Daniel was in the lions' den, and the three men in the burning furnace, and from what is said in Dan. 2; or about all the wonders of Christ in the New Testament. But you can also look into all the wonders in the firmament and in the flower-field. They say whether anything can be impossible to God! When He tarries, then think of all the saints having lain in the same furnace of trial, and understand that it is part of the bringing up God is giving you. You need this as an exercise of your faith, prayer, humility, patience.

But if you cannot believe that your God is so good, then think of the widow in Luke 18. Jesus says that in her distress she had turned to a difficult man, a judge, who feared not God, neither regarded man. Therefore, for some time he did not want to help her. But finally he said to himself: "Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me [with her requests], I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." And the Lord said: "Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?" What a strange disposition of the heart! Just think, that only in order to make us believe, Jesus Christ used such a parable about His Father so rich in love! Should we not be ashamed and tremble at our unbelief! Surely God must have a better heart than this judge. And also the judge was not invincible. Would God then let us cry to Him day and night in vain? Jesus says: "Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?"

May God then give every Christian more diligence and faith in prayer! Then the work of God in him and around him would grow more. Those who have become more diligent in prayer have always grown noticeably in grace and wisdom, in gifts and powers. If you see a Christian richer and more fruitbearing therein — then know that he has knelt many times before his God. Therefore, we also know that the old-time saints were excellent prayers — such as David, Daniel, and others. About the evangelist John it is said that the skin on his knees was equally thick as under his feet, because he had been lying so much on his knees. And PrE4torius says: "I have not spoken to any man so much as I have spoken to God."

# May 11

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*What lack I yet?* – Matt. 19:20.

**M**any are religious without even having been awakened, much less being Christians. Many have been awakened and converted in some way — that is, they have been turned from the ordinary, free, godless being of the world to a serious exercise of godliness. But they still are not true Christians. That is, they have not been made free and blessed in Christ.

Many also believe and profess that Christ is our righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption, as they know that Christ shall be all this, and that one must believe and profess this, in order to be a whole Christian. But in the midst of that faith and profession, their heart still quietly has its consolation and life in something else — such as in the seriousness of their repentance, in remorse, prayer, and fighting. Because when these saints are the way they should be, then they are so consoled and trusting, in Christ. But if there are shortcomings in their faith, then they cannot be consoled with only Christ. In fact, then He does not matter a bit. There is then a sneaking serpent of self-righteousness, a false faith, which does not really have its consolation, the whole of its consolation, in Christ.

As a beautiful and pertinent expression for these truths we read the following in 1 Kings 19:11–13: “And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out.”

In this majestic picture the prophet did not only see a picture and an interpretation of his own guidance, but also of God’s general way of dealing within the kingdom of grace on earth. You see, the storm, the earthquake, and the fire formed a pertinent picture of the law, its time and effects. On the other hand the still, small voice gives a beautiful picture of the gospel and its time. This picture is true first in broad outline and outwardly. It illustrates the different times and ways of government between the Old and the New Testaments. Then the picture is true in detail, in the individual inner man of us all. Also there is an Old Testament time with its laws, compulsions, service of many offerings, and waiting, which preceded the coming and gracious revelation of Christ. An Old Testament time which was longer with some, and shorter with others.

You see, in many a soul, some kind of a storm of spiritual discoveries, insights, intentions, spiritual words, and undertakings arises. So that also in himself he begins to storm against others in the name of the Lord. He begins to “rend the mountains, and break in pieces the rocks.” And there is much intention, but little sense and thought, little personal experience. He has not even been really awakened himself, because he has

much consolation in himself, and great expectations as to the success of his repentance. It is only a wind, a great, strong wind. “But the Lord was not in the wind.”

But further. He advances. He becomes really awakened. In his inner man there is an earthquake — there is an earthquake in his heart. He gets to see, that with all his storm, he is not really, and does not really, do what the Word contains. He becomes terrified. He sets seriously about how to do and become what he should, but it does not result in anything. There is no power. There is only the destruction of an earthquake, for “the Lord was not in the earthquake.” On the contrary it becomes worse and worse. Because “when the commandment comes, sin revives and works in him all manner of concupiscence” (Rom. 7:8–9), and sin becomes mightier than before. From this a fire arises — a tormenting fire of agony, and a burning fire of efforts. But all is equally in vain, because “the Lord was not in the fire.” Now his courage sinks. All attempts are fruitless. All expectations have been disappointed. All has been lost. And now the substance that burned begins to become consumed — namely the self-righteous I — I must! I shall! I should! “And I died,” says Paul.

And, now the still, small voice — the solacing, peace-giving, and saving voice of the gospel — very well serves this turn of the despairing heart. Now it tastes good to hear about a quite undeserved grace over the human child that is quite lost and lying in their blood. Now that all consolation is gone, now if ever the right consolation gets room in the heart. Now the storming thoughts, pangs, and desires become stilled. There is now new life, rejoicing, peace, love, singleness of mind, intimacy with the Lord, mild eyes, happy words, new spiritual powers. There is now the Lord. There one hides his face in a blessed sense of shame at such an unexpected help, such an undeserved grace, and says: “I never expected that! I did not understand that it should turn that way! That I would get grace, sheer grace, when I was at my unworthiest.” One becomes silent with a blessed sense of shame at the great grace. As it says in Ezek. 16:63: “Thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God.”

When, at the still, small voice, Elijah apprehended the presence of the Lord, then “he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave.” As if in order to express his submission to the will of the Lord: “Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth!” (1 Sam. 3:9). Not until now does one become a Christian, and skilled to hold the office of the New Testament, not in the letter but in the Spirit. Now also the tongue of the dumb man is loosened to praise and rightly to profess Christ. This order is also expressed by David: “I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted” (Ps. 116:10).

## May 12

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*And be not conformed to this world* – Rom. 12:2.

**T**he expression for “this world” in the original text really means “this time,” namely the whole of the time of life upon earth, as opposed to that of the coming world. But as the time or the spirit of the time depends on and consists of the spirit and being of the human world, so here is also expressly meant that world, i.e., the great, ruling mass of people and their vain and evil existence — the mass leading its life according to the fallen nature and according to the “spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), in “the darkness of this world” (Eph. 6:12), the mighty evil spirit of which is called “the prince of this world.” This world always is evil, contrary to God, seductive, and dangerous. Therefore, in Gal. 1:4 the apostle also calls her “this present evil world.” Thus we cannot follow nor conform to this world, if we want to sacrifice ourselves (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 5:2) to God and do His will. The one who wants to be a true Christian and a follower of his Lord throughout his life must leave the ordinary existence of this world altogether, and as regards the way of thinking, speaking, and living here on earth he must enter upon quite a new way. Such things the apostle means when he admonishes: “And be not conformed to this world.”

But if we shall follow this admonition, then it is required that we “give ourselves as a sacrifice.” Because then it will often be bitter beyond measure to be so alone and strange that one gets the whole world against oneself: father, mother, sisters, brothers, and many well-meaning or respected persons. Then do not let yourself be cast down or confused. The Lord Christ and all His followers have gone this way before you. Yes, many thousands have become martyrs because they could not conform to this world. Therefore you should think like this: Although I see my neighbors and old friends, yes, my family, go quite another way and thereby have the respect and friendship of all the world, I still prefer to follow Christ and His friends. Then I have a much better company than the one I forsake. I have God and the good angels with me, yes, all the saints from the beginning of this world. God help me only to be faithful to the end!

Also when you see many praising themselves for being Christians, and at the same time capable of being on an intimate footing with the enemies of Christ, and, maybe, participating with them in many useless things, e.g., in pastimes on the Sabbath day, or you see them otherwise waste many hours of the precious time of grace with vain chatting or vain reading, then you who really want to follow Christ should think it over, whether He and His disciples also did anything like that. Then you should prefer to follow the example of these holy ones. When you see many who want to be Christians always silent about Christ and the danger the souls of the unconverted are in, then you should think it over, whether it is

according to the love and the example of Christ, and always have your rule of conduct therein only.

Thus you should learn — both in greater and in smaller things, not to “be conformed to this world.” Note carefully, however, that this only concerns things meaning sin, contrary to the wonderful words of God or the law of love. On the other hand as regards all other things we should be like other people. We should keep our natural manners, and we should not make ourselves odd by put on or imitated manners, or by useless peculiarities. Sometimes the spirit of pride also tempts pious souls to do like the hypocrites, put on some special appearance, or some distinguishing peculiarity in manners. It is true that such things also could be among those in this world, to which we are called not to conform, but it is not what the apostle means here. On the contrary such things are harmful foolishness only, *giving “place to the devil”* (Eph. 4:27).

In His manners also Christ was “made in the likeness of men ... and was found in fashion as a man” (Phil. 2:7–8), except for sin. If you have got a sound Christian mind, you should be His follower also in this respect. You should always think about what is to the benefit of your neighbor, because that is the great rule for all our outward life. But by faith and confession, by zeal for the glory of the Lord and the weal of souls, yes, also by watchfulness as regards yourself, you will always be peculiar to the world. You should not worry about that. Why, as strangers and pilgrims on earth striving after our right fatherland — heaven — we shall always seem to be fools to the world, which on the contrary has its home and its all on earth. But expressly in the essential things related to the sake of God, the weal of ourselves and others, we should not conform to this world. This is what the apostle here impresses upon our hearts.

## May 13

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*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think – Rom. 12:3.*

**T**he apostle wrote the whole of the letter where these words are found to “all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints” (Rom. 1:7). Yet he adds here specially: “every man that is among you.” Thus we see a clear aim to reach every Christian, which tells us that everyone needs this warning so that no one will think himself exempt from the temptation to proud imagination. Besides it indicates that this temptation is very injurious, as the apostle does not want even one man to escape this admonition.

To think of oneself too highly, to have too great ideas about one’s gifts and powers, and thus to be enchanted by the spirit of pride — that is the dangerous evil thing of which the apostle here warns us. And in order to see even more closely what he is aiming at here, we must pay attention to the connection between this verse and the following ones (4–8). There the apostle deals with the difference between the spiritual gifts, and their correct use in the church. He says, that all the faithful are one body, and mutually the members of one another; and these members have many gifts. The apostle means by this, that because of different gifts we should not become divided, or exalt ourselves and despise others. But we should remain in the unity of the Spirit, in humbleness and love.

Even if we have understood the admonition of the apostle we do not gain thereby the humility of which he speaks. To gain this the definite mercy of God is required, if a man is to be able to escape thoughts too high about himself. Yes, the definite mercy of God is required so that he shall not become totally unhappy because of the strong and dangerous inclination to pride. That temptation is so intrusive in all human nature, and so manifold in its manifestations, and finally, so destroying of all that is good, that a Christian, having understood this, can dread losing his life. He can do nothing but cry and pray: “God, have mercy on us!” because no man is free from that inclination. No, it lies in our very nature. We find it in even small children. They begin early to boast and glory in front of each another: “I am better than you in doing this or that!” and so on.

We know that in the beginning, the fallen angel himself infected man with self-conceit and pride. The fallen angel said: “Ye shall be as gods.” We also find that this nature forces itself on men, so that hardly any Christian is allowed to remain quiet in a humble position, but everybody wants to climb upwards. Even where we cannot see any natural reason, as in the case of people with poor gifts and distinctions, and even of those called ill-treated by Fortune — strange imaginations of pride still often appear. It is rather interesting to see this as a proof of how deeply this inclination lies in human nature, even if it becomes evident in very different ways.



If by the Word and Spirit of God you cannot be kept in humbleness, poverty, and fear, but begin to have, and keep, high ideas about yourself, that you are more enlightened, wiser, more faithful, serious, pious, capable, and skilled than others, then be certain that your pride will be brought down. You will fall into all sorts of foolishness, or into sin and shame. No watchfulness or strength of your own will be help against this. The Lord Christ says plainly: “Many that are first shall be last” (Matt. 19:30). And again He says: “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased” (Matt. 23:12). And Peter tells us how this happens: “For God resisteth the proud” (1 Pet. 5:5). When God resists you, then you need not hope or try to arrive safely. Do what you like, you will still be brought down.

If you think you are more enlightened and wiser than all the rest, then you will fall into delusions and foolishnesses more than anybody else. If you think yourself more pious and stronger than others, then you will fall into more sin and shame than they. How many a promising young man or virgin has been destroyed for all his or her life because of pride! How many a pardoned Christian has fallen into very great foolishnesses only because he was captivated by flattery and self-conceit! From all experiences of both great and small this is so evident, that all the world has learned to say: “Pride goeth before a fall!” Here nothing else will help you, to allow yourself to be warned in time. You must begin continually to invoke and pray to the great, almighty God that He will have mercy on you and make you humble and poor in spirit. And He will rejoice to hear that prayer. If by the Word and the Spirit you cannot get a humble mind, the Lord certainly will have other means. He may send you a deeply humiliating experience. However, consider even this a great grace, if you can only still remain in the faith. Because all is gracious in comparison to being allowed to continue in your pride, and being found among the last and least. “God, be gracious to us! God, let any evil thing rather befall us, than the judgment of pride and hardening.”

## May 14

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*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins – 1 John 1:9.*

**F**rom the words of David in Ps. 32:3, 5 we can learn of what this confession of sin is comprised. They read: “When I kept silence [about what I had done, my grave sin], my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long... I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” Here we learn that this confession is made unto the Lord. “I will confess unto the Lord,” says David. And from this we see that the “keeping silence” had also been a keeping silence before the Lord. “But what does it mean?” somebody may ask. How can one keep silent before the Lord? Everything is exposed and visible to His eyes! Yet, we understand this keeping silence from experience. In the mouth of David it really means to take my sin, my burdened and pricking conscience to a distance from God, until the feeling of sin becomes cooler of itself, before I want to go to the mercy seat, fall down before God, confess the sin, and seek forgiveness and absolution.

But the word can also be used about all the dead, unrepentant crowd. All the world goes about and keeps silence about its sin before the Lord, and therefore it is unblest. It does not know its sin, and therefore it cannot confess it rightly. Therefore the word “confess” comprises repentance, learning to know one’s sin, one’s impending curse, and seeking grace in Christ. This is all that is required in order to become participant of the forgiveness earned by Christ. There must arise a mighty famine in the land where the lost son dwells, in order that he may learn to think of his father’s house and the grave sin he did when he abandoned his father, and went out and wasted his inheritance. Not until then does he make up his mind: “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee; and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants” (Luke 15:8–9).

That is the way Christ Himself put the words together when He wanted to give a picture of conversion. From these words we see something about right confession. The lost son did not mention any special sin, but he only said: “I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” He did not say: “This and that sin is worthy of your displeasure,” but “I, altogether, am unworthy to be called your son anymore.”

What should we learn from this? It is not true repentance when a man only knows and confesses one or other sin, but has many other good points with which he is self-satisfied. He must feel altogether condemned, or worthy of condemnation. Furthermore, the lost son did not remain where he was, but he really began to go to his father. It is a false confession of your sins, if you can remain where you are,

away from God, in the world and sin. Note also that the lost son said: “Make me as one of thy hired servants.” This was his self-righteousness and unbelief. He meant that he could not get back the whole right of a child to sheer grace. He thought that he would first have to earn that right, by working for his father. This still always happens to those repenting. But note also that the father did not pay any attention to this well-intended, but mistaken idea. The Bible says: “But when he [the son] was yet a great way off [had not yet had time to say even one prayer, to shed even one tear, to do even one service], his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”

Oh, the matchless, divine forgiving! Had not the father had reason for saying: “Go away, you unworthy, you depraved son! You have wasted your inheritance! You have thrown away your right to be a child!” But no, he did not utter even one word of reproach for the sins of his son. Neither did he demand the least little compensation. But he immediately arranged for him to be dressed in the best robe, and for a ring to be put on his hand and shoes on his feet. And the father arranged a feast of rejoicing because of his return. In that way Christ Himself has described the divine forgiving. In that way He wants to be known and considered. The father’s heart was unchangeably gracious and forgiving, even while the fallen son was away and sinning in the most dreadful way. His heart did not become reconciled by his son’s return. It was reconciled before. But the son having gone away did not benefit from it until he came back. From this we learn that God is reconciled also towards the ungodly, unfaithful, unconverted. Christ has taken away their sins also in one day. They too, have a grace and forgiveness which have been earned for them. For them also the best robe, the clearly shining silk of the righteousness of Christ, has been ready for a long time, and waiting for them to receive it.

Here we can also learn at what time the blessed hour comes, when a poor sinner really receives grace, forgiveness and adoption. Namely at his first, serious return to the Lord, i.e., the first time he despairs of himself and all his own doings, such as his own remorse, prayer, and improvement, and turns the eyes of his distressed, hungering, and thirsting soul to the crucified One. But much more it happens when for the first time he understands his salvation and eternal bliss in Christ, the first time he gets to see what he has not seen before in the gospel — how everything is ready, enough, and more than enough, in Christ.

## May 15

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*The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart:  
that is, the word of faith, which we preach – Rom. 10:8.*

**L**ook well at this text! Here is the secret of faith. Here is true wisdom. “The word is nigh thee.” The one who wants to find God and Christ should stick only to the Word. It is there God wants to meet us. There you find Christ. There is no need for you to go about and seek Him in dim feelings or unknown spaces, neither in the height nor in the depth. You have Him quite near, in the Word — in the Word of faith. If you embrace the Word of faith in your heart, then you have Christ in your heart. Then you have got all that the words contain and promise. There is no need for you to float here and there with your thoughts and say: “If I could only know what God in heaven thinks about me and wants to do with me! If I could only know whether my name is written in the book of life or not! Oh, if God would only reveal Himself to me in some way and speak to me!” Do not say anything like that in your heart. The Lord has already done what you wish. He has already revealed Himself and given us the word valid for us all, for every one of us. Be sure of this, that He does not make any difference between persons, but that the laws of grace announced by Him are equally valid for all.

In earthly conditions we understand rather well how a public law is valid. When I know the laws of society, there is no need for me to say: “Oh, that I could only be allowed to speak to the king, and hear whether I can expect his royal protection.” No, I know beforehand, whom he is gracious towards and protects. Namely those acting in accordance with the laws of the kingdom. It is also that way with the Word of God. It is only weakness in our belief in the Word of God, when we do not know what God thinks about us. He has already told us in the Word. I see that I am under the judgment of condemnation, if I do not want to kiss the Son, but want rather to live freely with the world, and do as I like, and as my flesh desires in sin and levity.

If, on the other hand, I want to try to earn the grace of God by my own righteousness according to the law, then I know, that the condition is: “Fulfill all, and then you will live.” But if I sin even the least little bit, then I am under the curse. If on the contrary, I have been judged by the law, I am at my wits’ end and downhearted, but now seek my salvation only in the Son, and His atonement, and can no more be without Him and His gospel. Then I know that I have already been clothed in His righteousness and written in the book of life, no matter how bad things may seem, or how I may feel in my heart. How do I know all this? I know it from the Word of God Himself. Whom should I believe if not God Himself? And He has declared this to us everywhere.

We should impress what we learn very seriously on our hearts. Because otherwise it is an art difficult beyond measure always to remain in faith during all the manifold tribulation our heart must suffer in this world. The flesh is full of sin. The conscience is full of legalism. With God-fearing souls the feeling is sometimes like an open wound. And God with His grace is often deeply hidden and very strange. Here then our enemy, the devil, has rich opportunities and means to harass us as long as we are on earth. Then it is necessary to have a stronghold in our distress. Not to depend on what we are, find or feel in ourselves, but to stick firmly to the eternal Word of the great God. About this dear art Luther speaks the following words so full of instruction: “It is one thing to feel and another to believe. Therefore we must leave the feeling, and downright catch the Word by the hearing, exactly as it reads. And we must, so to say, write it in our hearts and stick to it, even if it does not at all seem that my sins have been taken from me, but I still feel them with me.”

But it only happens that thereby faith sticks perseveringly to the Word of God, and thinks: The great Lord God, the Creator of heaven and earth declares: “As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezek. 33:11). Which lost sinner would not rely on that word and flee to Him and live? By a great many explicit words and expressive figures from the beginning of the world, the great Lord God has revealed His eternal counsel, that He wanted, by His only begotten Son, to remedy the Fall, remove sin, and fulfill the law. A great crowd of evangelists, and the powers of the Holy Spirit on earth, witness that all this has been performed. And the Lord Himself declares: “I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore” (Rev. 1:17–18) — “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely” (Rev. 21:6). Which lost sinner would not rely on such words and go up to the mercy seat full of confidence? Which harassed Christian would not rest his tired heart on such words in spite of all his temptations and infirmities? The Word, the Word of God Himself, “is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart,” when you embrace it by faith. There you have Christ and all salvation, only in and with the Word.

## May 16

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*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places – Eph. 6:12.*

If we consider and summarize what the apostle here indicates about our enemy, we get a rather terrible picture of him, as being at the same time very mighty, very cunning and smart, and also an invisible enemy, who can be quite close to us without our suspecting it. First we want to look at the last mentioned thing. When the apostle says: “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers,” the meaning is not, that we have not got to fight against our own evil flesh, or inborn depravity. It means, according to Paul’s way of speaking, that in this fight we do not, as in ordinary ways, have any visible bodies to aim our weapons at, so that we could hit them with a sword, but that our enemies are spirits, whom we cannot kill, and invisible enemies, who can be quite close to us without our seeing them, or fearing their presence the least little bit. This, of course, is a rather precarious circumstance.

Secondly, he lets us understand, that our enemies are not weak and ignominious ghosts, but on the contrary, very mighty and considerable, when he calls them principalities and powers, or authorities. These words make us understand that the devil has a real empire with special orders and constitutions, so that some evil over-angels, as princes and authorities, rule over the other devils. Moreover, he calls them rulers of this world, which certainly is a rather terrible name. So also has Christ Himself called the devil the prince of this world, and Paul even calls him the god of this world, which names clearly announce, what we also in part can see with our eyes, that the devil fully rules over all unconverted mankind, so that kings and emperors are under his power and government, as small, weak slaves, or faithful and obedient subjects.

We also know that our enemy is of high descent, namely a fallen angel, and that he has a terrible courage when he dares fight against the Mighty God. In the days when Christ was flesh he went so far in haughtiness that he was even bold enough to ask the Lord Himself to fall down and worship him. Then we can understand what a power he has over poor man, when Christ symbolizes the man and the devil by a house and its owner, when He speaks of a strongly armed man, who defends his house; so that to the devil the man is only as a house for its owner. So also his strength, no less than his ardor to destroy us, is symbolized by the picture of the apostle Peter, when he calls him a lion, a lion roaring with hunger, and walking about seeking whom it may devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

It is true that all these are such terrible indications of our enemy, that a man can well dread living on the earth. And this at least is sure, that those who do not stick

to the Lord in the fear of God, must no doubt be in, or will get into, the hands of the devil. This at least is sure, that if the Lord only leaves us to ourselves, then we are lost; then at any moment the devil can throw us into a most awful depth of sins and follies, and thereafter into the abyss of hell. But we also know, that if we do not sleep at ease, or believe in our own strength, but have become small children and weak sheep before the Lord, the fight will not depend on our own strength, nor on the devil's power, but the Lord Himself will fight for us and carry us in His arms, and protect us as His lambs. If for a single hour only the Lord were to give the devil full freedom over us, within that very hour he would tear us to pieces and throw us into hell. Thus each moment of our life when this does not happen, is a witness of the faithful, gracious, and mighty presence of God. Oh, that we would bear this in mind!

So the fight is a spiritual fight. It does not depend on our power and strength. Therefore the most terrible quality of the devil is his cunning, his manifold cunning and schemes, by means of which he can deceive and charm us, so that we do not seek the strength of the Lord, but willingly surrender to the enemy. Therefore also the Scripture has spoken most of this quality of his. In the last book of the Bible he is called the old serpent, which deceives the whole world, and in it so many clever, learned, and enlightened men. But maybe there is no word more indicative of this enemy's dreadful richness of cunning and schemes than the one from the mouth of Christ: "the depths of Satan," and when the apostle says that the devil also is transformed into an angel of light. May God preserve all men! Certainly no human intellect, no culture, and no watchfulness are enough against "the depths of Satan," if God Himself does not preserve our spirit with His enlightenment. Against "the depths of Satan" I want only to put "the depths of God," and "the Watchman of Israel who shall neither slumber nor sleep."

## May 17

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*And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace* – Eph. 6:15.

All soldiers of Christ have been called to participate in the great matter their Lord has at heart, namely, that the gospel of peace will be spread on the earth. The Lord Christ says: “He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad” (Matt. 12:30). And Peter writes, not to clergymen, but to Christians in general: “Ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). But if you become a zealous and faithful witness to your Savior, you thereby expose yourself to many disagreeable things and troubles. Yes, you get all the kingdom of the devil against you. Inwardly glowing shots become much more numerous and more difficult, and outwardly the enmity and bitterness of his faithful servant, the world, looks for all possible opportunities to accuse you.

Then understand how necessary this text is: “Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” Mark those words: “the feet shod”! It is necessary for the soldier to have his feet shod when he is to dash forward through a roadless terrain, full of sharp thorns and stones and poisonous snakes. In the same way we must be well armed against all the bitter experiences and temptations to impatience that accumulate on our way, if we want really and faithfully to have zeal for the gospel of Christ. It is as if we had to push our way forward through a thick forest of thorns where many sharp things and poisonous animals will wound, tear, and sting us, if we are not well armed.

With what then shall we cover our feet? With what shall we be shod? The apostle says: with the preparation of the gospel of peace, or willingness toward the gospel of peace. The willingness consists first of an inner willingness, a heartfelt inclination and love which expressly originate from the gospel of peace. Here the secret lies. Trained Christians know it from their experience. All possible admonitions, expostulations, requests, or grounds for consolation have absolutely no power to bring us to a living confession of the gospel, if we have not ourselves become warm, enlivened, and willing in the spirit by the same gospel. If the heart is still cold and dead, then a man always finds some excuse for his spiritual numbness. Or he may make many resolutions, but they do not result in anything after all, provided that no outer calling gets him in motion. But when my own heart has become warmed up and saved by grace, when the Lord has spoken to me, and assured me of the forgiveness of my sins and His friendship, then I get an inner prompting so that I cannot keep silent. Then it happens with me exactly as David says: “I believed, therefore have I spoken” (Ps. 116:10). And again: “I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart” (Ps. 119:32).



But the word “preparation” gives us to understand, that the man is prepared. And the covering of the feet making him less sensitive to the sharp things knocked against indicates patience. The reference to our spiritual footwear means that we arm ourselves so that we have a persistent patience, that we reconcile ourselves seriously with the thought that we shall suffer, and even want to suffer with Christ. As Peter says: “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind” (1 Pet. 4:1), wanting to suffer for His sake. Because if we have not armed ourselves with that mind, then it happens with us, as we often see in others, that souls begin the spiritual fight with great delight and boldness. But when the fight becomes a bit more serious, so that it really becomes a matter of suffering something, then they turn away hastily. Then they change their tone and course, and that only in order to escape the suffering. Such people are no use in this fight. Because the one who wants to be a true Christian, the one who wants to belong to the party of the crucified and despised One, and is seriously anxious for His sake and the gospel, that man must, as Luther says, “expect all possible resistance, assault, wicked intrigues, contempt, ingratitude, scorn, and revilement, though he does good to all.” Therefore we must be so fit that we can suffer evil, and bear most undeserved bitter things and thus break ourselves, through patience.

But in order to be fit like that it is required first that you are on an intimate footing with your God and know Him as your reconciled, gracious Father. Secondly, it is necessary that you impress the dear truth deeply on yourself, that He will take care of you in everything and watch in the most fatherly way over all that happens to you. So that there shall not an hair fall from your head without His faithful will. It is true, that many repeat this with their mouth, but there are few who believe in it seriously. Moreover, we should not despise the old well-known words of our Lord: “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you... Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:10, 12). Shall then also we, unworthy as we are, be allowed to participate in this glory of the prophets? God, help us to wake up!

## May 18

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*Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah... She [the city of God] shall not be moved* — Ps. 46:3, 5.

**T**his is a happy and triumphant song! A bold heart running with its God over the walls and swinging itself over all heights, and over both mountains and abysses! Here is no sign of timidity. And nevertheless the happy psalm was written at a time when “the waters roared” and when there was distress, as can be seen from verse 3. How can one be so happy and bold at such times? Note, how the royal singer speaks! “God is our refuge and strength” (v. 1). So says the Psalm. “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” That is the way it ends. It is only necessary that such conditions should become true and living to our heart. It is only necessary that our eyes should be opened, that we should get a small opening in the thick cloud concealing the great glory of God from our eyes. And we shall sing and run, all of us, with the same delight as David. When Elisha’s servant exclaimed concerning the host of horses and chariots which compassed the city: “Alas, my master! how shall we do?” Elisha said: “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.” But thereby the trembling servant was not fully consoled. What did Elisha then do further? Elisha prayed and said: “Lord, open his eyes that he may see” (2 Kings 6:15–17). And the Lord opened the eyes of the servant and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha. Now that servant was not afraid anymore. Here then is all that is needed: “Lord, open our eyes, that we may see!”

We should understand that by this city of God is meant the true church, and no outward church, which can comprise the inhabitants of the whole of a country, such as all those baptized into Christ. But here the holy, universal church, the “communion of saints” is meant. And it consists of living members of Christ within all churches and congregations which have the Word of Christ, which is the only necessary seed to the kingdom of God. And therefore they are spread all over the world. These living members of Christ are dispersed here and there! This is the bride, the Lamb’s wife. For a short time she lives here in a hostile, foreign country — far from her rightful home, the palace of her Bridegroom. This is the body of Christ which still has much to suffer on earth and waits for its redemption. This is the church of the Lord, the flock of the good Shepherd and His “sheep.” This is the “holy temple of lively stones built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone.” These are fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God (Eph. 2), among whom the Lord lives and rules as a Father in His house. This is the planting and “garden” where He enjoys Himself among the roses. In brief, it is “the city of the living God,

the heavenly Jerusalem, the church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven” (Heb. 12:22–23). It is of this city that David here sings so joyously and boldly: “Though the waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake. She [the city of God] shall not be moved.”

But is there really cover for these sweet words? Or are they maybe only words? And what is then the characteristic feature of the people of God, of those God Himself recognizes as His own? To all honest souls this question becomes the most intrusive one. And to it we reply: To this living body of Christ everybody belongs that in a more or less difficult distress of sins, and after a more or less difficult seeking for salvation, at last has found his only consolation, life, salvation, and eternal bliss in the Savior, and only in the Savior. So that He, only He, is the whole Object of the longing and peace of his heart. So that it is the greatest sorrow to his heart when He is missing, and the greatest rejoicing when He is near. This is the characteristic feature of the bride. And in this respect, namely, that Christ is indispensable, first and last to atonement and righteousness, but also to sanctification and redemption, in this respect all Christians are alike. Is it not remarkable that in all countries and at all times, among all peoples and races and tongues, where one finds Christians, they are still all so very much alike on this heart-point, though their national characters and customs are so different. In some other respects they can be quite different, such as in gifts and callings as well as in some individual opinions. But there is one thing where they are all alike. And that is Christ, only Christ, is their Life.

These are they who form the people of God, called the city of God in our text. A strange city, indeed! Small and humble, and still so great and glorious; great as regards its extent, even the whole of the world stretching from pole to pole; and glorious beyond measure as regards its inner being and its final destiny. Nevertheless, one day we will see the scattered gathered together. And then we shall see the bride in the fullness of her splendor and adornment.

*Go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God – John 20:17.*

**T**hese were the first words the risen Savior spoke after having accomplished His great work. And from the words we notice an obvious anxiety to draw attention to the word “brother.” He uses many words to express this when He says: “My Father, and your Father; ... My God and your God.” Besides we also bear in mind that before His death Christ was not in the habit of addressing His disciples with the name “brethren.” It is true that He had called them “friends” before and had shown them all love. And in general words He had declared that “whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and My sister, and mother” (Mark 3:35). But He still had not distinctly addressed them with the name “brethren.” It is not until the great work of atonement had been accomplished, when the Fall of man had been remedied, the head of the serpent had been bruised, iniquity reconciled, and everlasting righteousness brought in restoring to men the original right of a child with God, it is not until then that He begins to use the name “brethren” and says: “My Father, and your Father; My God and your God.” This surely is important! To make sure we should stop and reflect upon it!

And that this was the first thing the Lord said after His resurrection gets a new significance when we bear in mind, that this was exactly the great object for the atonement of Christ, namely to restore the right as a child with God which we had lost in the Fall. All that otherwise was performed, such as the atonement for our sins, the removal of the curse of the law, and the bringing in of the everlasting righteousness, all those are only parts of only one great work, namely, the restoration of our lost right as a child. This is the main thing! Man was created in the beginning to be a child and heir of God. And when this his right as a child was lost in the Fall, “the woman’s seed” was to restore that right. In our adoption by God all eternal bliss unites. Because if we are sons, then we are also heirs of God. Thus it was the restoration of this relationship that was the aim and summary of all that Christ came to accomplish as our second Adam.

The one who understood this could, after the finished atonement of Christ, have asked of himself: Has our right as a child now been restored with God? Have we now been brought back to that relation to God which we lost in the Fall? And now the Lord Christ Himself comes in this passage and says so. It is the first thing He says after His resurrection. And He is especially anxious that we shall notice what He says: “My brethren; My Father, and your Father; My God and your God. My and your — My and your!” The one who does not apprehend something great and divine here, must have completely blinded senses. Oh, how extraordinary! Christ Himself, the Lord of heaven, the eternal Son of God, came first and became

a man like us, and has now accomplished the work of redemption, and He says about His poor, weak disciples: “My brethren — My ... brethren — My Father, and your Father!” That way the Lord has broken down the dividing line. Thus God and man have been united again. Thus what was lost has been restored: the right as a child with God. Thus the Son of God has become, as the apostle says, the Firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29). Notice: “the Firstborn among many brethren.” What do I hear? What do I hear? Even if we have considered this wonderful, brotherly salutation many times, we have still hardly made the smallest beginning. Here is a depth and height surpassing all our ability to understand. The gift is by far too great and our hearts by far too narrow. Scanning from depth to depth the eternal counsel of God, even the seraph does not see any wonder of grace greater and more blessed than this.

But somebody may still say: Surely, it was the disciples, those nearest and most faithful to Jesus, those who had followed Him for more than three years, who were pious and holy, surely it was them He called “brethren.” How does this concern us? Then we want to answer: Have you not yet understood that this brotherhood with Christ is the same thing as our adoption by God? And this was the chiefest aim of the atonement of Christ. To be sure, this did not happen only for a few friends, but for *all* the world.

This certainly seems by far too absurd, that we, poor sinners, shall be the brethren of Christ. But what does the Scripture say? And has Christ ever had respect of persons? God, the Creator and Savior of all men, does not look according to the person, but according to man himself as man. Not even was the mother of Christ Himself allowed to have any preference, but all that is called a human being was equal before Him. It is only the human being that is so dear to His eyes, and not this and that person. With only this difference, that the faithful are lying in His bosom and are His delight and rejoicing, whereas the unfaithful are children of sorrow far away from His lap. Thus this brotherhood does not only concern the first disciples, but also all of us who believe in Him, by their testimony. Oh, what indescribable glory! Oh, what an eternal source for rejoicing! Each and every one of us who have begun to believe in Him by the testimony of the disciples has the same share as they in this glorious promise of His: “My brethren; My Father and your Father; My God and your God!”

## May 20

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*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away – Rev. 21:4.*

When all that belongs to the former things, i.e., to the first period, our worm-period on earth, things such as tears, weeping, crying, pain, and death are passed away, then there will be only rejoicing and a “sweet being on the right hand of God in eternity.” Then I shall never more weep, nor be afraid and suffer because of the power of sin in me, the temptations and tribulations of the devil or the wickedness, contempt, lies, and revilings of the world. Think what that means. I shall never more suffer from sinful thoughts or desires; I shall always be holy, clean, free, and spiritual; there will be waves of infinite feelings of eternal bliss in my heart; I shall have a heart capable of loving God wholly and perfectly; a heart knowing no greater bliss than in the holy and wonderful things I shall then behold and enjoy; there will never more be any need for me to say to myself that I ought to love God, but I shall have a heart not capable of anything else than loving Him and all that belongs to Him the way a warm lover has such a heart himself that he loves and has his happiness therein. Oh, what a blessed time that will be when sin no more adheres to us! We shall no more have to fight against this rebellious heart which all the time wants to drag us away from God. We shall no more be oppressed by deep depravity, neither shall we be oppressed by any slowness or coldness, or by anger, or by impatience, or by pride, or by shyness of professing Christ. No more stumbling, no more grieving of the Spirit, no more sinful words or deeds will wound our conscience. We shall rest from all that forever. Furthermore, we shall no longer feel any doubt as to the love of God. We shall no longer use words like these: “How can I know that my heart is honest before God, that my conversion is true, that my faith is living? I am afraid that all I do is hypocrisy and that God is angry with me.” No, all this belonged to the former things, or the life on earth. All this will now be changed into praise. We shall never more fear any displeasure of God. No pain in our hearts, no hell will be mixed anymore with heaven. Here it often happens that the faithful feel that the wrath of God lies on them, and that He has “afflicted them with all His waves” (Ps. 88:7). But when these former things are passed away, then they will completely “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8). And they will hear Him say: “I hid My face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee” (Isa. 54:8).

We say it once more: “Think, what a blessed sabbath rest and repose, when we will no more feel the temptations of the flesh and the devil! What a pain it is for a Christian merely to feel temptation to all that is evil. One minute there are these

terrible and blasphemous thoughts about God, about Christ and about certain holy truths. The next minute again comes the temptation to turn to things of the present, to play with sin, to seek some joy in the lusts of the flesh, which are ready to catch fire like gunpowder as soon as a spark falls on them. We are in perpetual danger. Every sense, every limb in us, every created being can become a temptation to us. We can hardly open our eyes without envying those above us or despising those lower than we are. How soon we forget ourselves with our tongue, and most especially with our heart! If we have a good intellect, how soon we are puffed up! If we have the right to command, how soon we misuse our power! If we are subordinates, how soon we murmur at the preferences of others and criticize them: that is the way of our hearts in this world. Think what will be when we become quite free from all this evil! And that forever, yes, forever, “for the former things are passed away.”

But all this has now been spoken childishly, and only about the evil things we shall escape, because we have experiences of this evil. But who can say anything about the good things that we shall receive? They are what “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man” (1 Cor. 2:9). Just think, when the almighty God sets about doing that which will really delight His children that have come home, what will He do then? He can create an infinite, eternal bliss. If it were required He could create such hearts in us as feel an unspeakable joy of themselves. Why, we often feel how sorrow and joy only depend on the mood of the heart itself, so that a joyous heart rejoices without any special reason! What then, when first all circumstances are the most blissful, and then furthermore the heart is so healthy, and joyous, yes, as drunk with rejoicing as only the almighty Creator can make it! We understand that only when the time comes that God *wants* to create an eternal bliss, then He *can* do inexpressible things. And secondly we understand that He that is love personified must indeed *want* to do so, even as we, though evil, could still want to create heavens. O God, please drive away the thick darkness in our soul. Do we not have inexpressible things to look forward to, as truly as Thou hast said it Thyself?

## May 21

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*I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth – Ps. 34:1.*

So says the champion David. And no doubt it should be that way with a Christian who possesses all the riches of Christ. So that he is always glad and grateful in such happiness. As also the apostle says: “Rejoice evermore... In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess. 5:16, 18). First, it is surely the cheapest and most blissful duty of the children of God to begin the heavenly life here in this present time, namely, by praising and magnifying our God; by rejoicing, loving, and praising their heavenly Father for all that He is in Himself, and for all He has done, is doing, and will do towards them. Who can count all the themes for praising God? But it is no less important to reflect upon the fact in time that ingratitude is a sin bringing with it a great number of unhappy consequences. “Ingratitude is the drying weather by which all the sources of God’s grace dry up.” And ingratitude is a kind of bewitchment of the human mind so that it does not see the good things it possesses. So that even if that man is actually the happiest being on earth, he will go as an unhappy creature through life, and be the martyr of a perpetual displeasure, a burden to himself, and a denier of the glory of God. It is certain, that the one who possesses the least on this earth still has great reasons for praising, thanking, and magnifying our God perpetually. Because merely to be allowed to see or know something about the glorious works and being of God, should fill us with His praise. “The whole earth is full of His goodness. Heaven and earth are full of His glory.” The least happy person has great reasons for praising God, if only for what He is in Himself.

Much more then, if you also are among those who have experienced His great grace and mercy in their own heart, who have been pardoned with the great calling to the kingdom of Christ, who have been blessed with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, so that you have learned to know yourself and your Savior, and have become a child of God. And in addition you may enjoy quite a lot of visible blessings from God, spiritual and bodily. You may have the Word of God and daily bread, yes, all that is necessary for the journey through life. How should you not then thank and love our God! If on the contrary you now forget all this, go uncontented and impatient, and look at small annoyances, then this is an ingratitude that cannot readily remain unpunished. A Christian should be a happy and grateful human being.

If we now have understood that ingratitude is a very dangerous and destructive sin, then there is still one question left: How shall we get such hearts as rightly esteem the good things that God gives, and thank and praise Him for these? Well, here nothing else will help than doing what the apostle says: “Awake!” Here



nothing else helps than that we truly get God before our eyes. This is the right way. Most dead and ungrateful hearts of men have become full of magnifying and praising God, when they have at last had their eyes opened to see God, and the good things He has done and daily does to us. Therefore, when David wanted rightly to awaken his soul to praise God he said: “and forget not — forget not all His benefits” (Ps. 103:2). If He has not done anything good to you, then there is no need for you to thank Him. Yet surely we should praise and worship God only for what He is in Himself, even if He has not done anything good to us. Because we are often attracted by a great personage even if we have not experienced anything good from him! But the right gratitude to God does not captivate a human heart, before it has itself experienced a very great grace from Him — namely the great grace that fully melts and recreates the human being. Therefore, we can never in earnest exhort anybody else to praise God, than those who have experienced the great mercy that they have been saved from the power of death and the devil, and have been born again by the Spirit of God. The dead do not praise Thee, O Lord. And except a man be born again, he cannot even in this present time see the kingdom of God. He is blind and dead. He does not see the great glory of God. To try to bring such a person to a heartfelt joy and gratitude would be as if to try to make snow and ice become warm.

But as it is a vain attempt to work on the very heart to make it warm and grateful when we have not experienced the goodness of God, so on the other hand it is very easy to be grateful when we taste and see how sweet the Lord is. Yes, then it would, on the contrary, be difficult were we not allowed to thank and praise Him. It was not difficult for the children of Israel to praise and magnify God, when they had gone through the Red Sea and had seen their enemies buried in its waves. Oh, no, then it was very easy. There was an irresistible need in their hearts then to be allowed to exclaim in magnifying and praising the Lord. Listen, how they then sang only about what the *Lord* had done, what the *Lord* was, what the *Lord* had shown them. The whole secret of a grateful and magnifying heart is that *it sees the Lord*.

## May 22

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*... Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love – Eph. 4:1–2.*

**Y**ou that are a child of God — walk worthy of your great vocation! You see others, yes, even those who want to be Christians who, nevertheless, leave all their senses open to all vanity; you see them listen to, look at, and speak about many useless things. Then you that have been called to the blessed conversation with the Savior and have the Holy Spirit in your heart should, on the contrary, care about what pleases this high company of yours. Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, says the apostle. And again: the temple of God is holy! You should guard your heart's temple so that all worldly things will not be allowed to enter into it. You see others plunge their dear souls into many and great plans in order to obtain earthly gain to make a paradise here for themselves. Then you that have been called to the kingdom and great glory of God should on the contrary have your treasure and your paradise in heaven. You should “set your affections on things above” (Col. 3:2). And only because of the will and commandments of the Lord should you attend to earthly things with your limbs. But while doing so, your heart should set its affection on the things that cannot be seen. You see others who also want to be Christians, but still “live unto themselves” so that they can see their fellow men on their way to perdition in the darkness of unbelief and sin. And still they hardly warn them by even one word. They are kept back by a will to please men, sloth, and love of ease. Then on the contrary, you that now have your life and your salvation in the death of Christ, should bear in mind that “He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves” (2 Cor. 5:15); and that therefore He “hath made us kings and priests unto God” (Rev. 1:6), that we should all the time gather with Him by means of serious prayer, and profession of the Word.

Furthermore, take here the examples that the apostle himself quotes. He says: “With all lowliness and meekness, forbearing one another in love.” Also in this we should be followers of God, as lovable children; so that we no more walk like those that live in the vanity of their mind. Yes, even if they want to be Christians, they show a proud and stouthearted exterior, always wanting to be the first, wisest, and strongest. Then you, on the contrary, should remember that you have been called to a kingdom of which the Lord especially declared: “Whosoever wants to be the greatest there, shall be as the least, and whosoever is the chiefest shall be the servant of all. But those who consider themselves and want to be considered as the chiefest, will be the last.” Yes, may we never forget that among all the bad habits Christ punished in His disciples, there was none about which He warned them with

such dreadful words, as pride. For this He often warned them, and that at the least sign of it. When they asked: “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He cut off their imaginations with such dreadful words that He said that they would not at all enter into the kingdom of heaven, except they were converted from that mind, and humbled themselves as little children.

When another time the disciples rejoiced at their power to cast out evil spirits, the Lord said: “Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). So delicate is this point. So dangerous is this contentment with one’s own preferences and distinctions. But that our names are written in heaven by grace, that is a good thing we have in common with the very weakest children of grace. At that we are allowed to rejoice. When Peter said: “Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended” (Matt. 26:33), Satan was immediately allowed to sift him as wheat. Then the same Peter wrote: “Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5).

Furthermore, you see others also who want to be Christians and who are capable of behaving in a mild and friendly way among strangers, but are still being tyrants in their own houses, quarrelsome and hard towards their fellow men. Then you, on the contrary, should remember your vocation to be the follower of Him that was “meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29). Train yourself seriously in a heartfelt mercifulness, mildness, and meekness. So that your flesh will not be allowed to have freedom. And, if you cannot repress every outbreak of an irascible temper, you must nevertheless therein be distinguished from the ungodly by again confessing your fault, being ready to friendship, and not letting the sun go down upon your wrath.

Even if you really have difficult fellow men, remember, that it is your true vocation as a Christian to overcome evil with good, and to “wash their feet,” as the apostle says here: “forbearing one another in love.” Our teacher Luther writes: “Even if your husband, your servant, your master and mistress really have an annoying fault, put up with them — and use yourself, use your greater grace to their service and edification. But know that you have been called to bear your neighbor’s burdens, most especially as there is no doubt some fault with you that others must put up with.” Look at the things to which we have been called; and in this way we should in all possible cases bear in mind our high and blessed vocation, the vocation of being a Christian and a child of God, and walk worthy of that vocation. May God give us more and more grace to walk in this way.

## May 23

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*Abide in me... Continue ye in my love* — John 15:4, 9.

**N**otice this: Abide in Me! Continue ye in My love! There must be something very important in these words, as the Lord Himself repeats them so often. No less than ten times one after another does the Lord use the word about abiding in Him in John 15. This should cause everyone to reflect upon the earnestness and zeal with which our Savior wants to impress this matter upon us, and how important beyond measure it must be as He so often repeats the same word. If so, it must also be very important for us to understand what the Lord means. Then pay attention to how He speaks, and reflect upon the fact that He does not say: “Abide in My service, abide in the imitation of Me, or abide in prayer to Me.” No, He speaks about a much more intimate relationship, when He says: “Abide in Me.” “If ye abide in Me.” In this present time probably nobody will be able fully to penetrate or explain the deep contents of this expression. But we realize that it speaks about a most intimate union with Him, such as He also expressed by the picture of the branches of a tree. But what we can perceive of this union and how it arises, is intimated by the Lord in the explanatory additions: “If My words abide in you — continue ye in My love.” We abide in Christ, when we continue in His love, and have His Word, not only in our head and mouth, but in our heart, so that it is our real consolation.

Your abiding in Christ and His abiding in you are often a very great mystery. But ask yourself as to whether you live by the word of Christ and the love of Christ. If so, then you do live in Christ and Christ in you. In the following way you can easily know within yourself whether you have consolation in Christ: if you are in the habit of worrying because of your sins and your wretchedness, and then get your consolation only by the word about the love of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the blood of Christ; or if your heart has consolation in itself, or in something you do. Pay good attention as to whether your consolation lies in hearing or in doing. Then you know whether you live by faith. When you can never be consoled by any of your own work, but only by hearing the gospel, then you know that your consolation comes by faith. This is so important a point that the one who does not want to be deceived must necessarily pay attention to it. If you have a heart that depends and lives on the word about Christ, as the substance of spiritual food, then you abide in Him and He in you. Then you also feel how your heart is sincerely drawn to Him, how it hungers and thirsts after Him, and gets consolation and life only in Him and His love.

What does it mean that we live of the love of Christ, and that Christ lives in us by faith — that has been gloriously described by Paul in Gal. 2:19–20: “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ:

nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Here is the right life and right power of sanctification. This is called: “Abide in Me — continue ye in My love.” Mark how the apostle speaks: “For I through the law am dead to the law — I now live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me.” Here, you poor soul, is what you are lacking, when you are a servant of sin, when you can indeed be frightened, yes, in despair because of sin, but still cannot detest and hate it, because sin is mighty in all your senses and limbs. The fault is, that you are not dead to the law. You are not free and blessed in the love of Christ, but you are inwardly tied up by the law and bond-minded. How is it then possible that you could have life and power and a holy will? “If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law” (Gal. 3:21). No, the letter kills. The law only makes sin revive and “work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death” (Rom. 7:5).

If you want to have life and power to sanctification, then you must be “dead to the law” and live only in the love of Christ. The apostle said: “I through the law am dead to the law.” First, the law itself killed me, my self-activity and imagination, when it roused all sin in me, “deceived me, and by it slew me” (Rom. 7:11) — “and I died.” I was done for; I could not do, feel, think, or undertake anything more. I could not move a finger for my salvation. I was lost. I was dead. Then there came another law, the law of faith, and said: “Believe in the Lord Jesus!” The gospel announced to me all the merits of Christ, His death and His love, and all for me. Then my spirit revived. And now, separated from my old man, I became united with the One that rose from the dead. And “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” It is life itself in my life, that the Son of God has loved me and given Himself for me. This is called: “Continue ye in My love.”

## May 24

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*He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom – Isa. 40:11.*

What a comfort it is when, aware of the darkness, falseness, and unsteadiness of one's own heart; the cruel intentions, cunning, and persistence of the devil; and finally the confusing variety of winds of doctrines, one begins to feel insecure and trembling at the possibility of being led astray and finally lost, what a comfort it is, when the Lord says that He Himself wants to be our Shepherd. Think what a comfort it is to a miserable sinner feeling his wretched impotence in everything, when he knows that Christ considers sinners only as sheep. We are not worth more than that. We are only sheep for whom He is the good Shepherd, who would rather lay down His life, than see the sheep perish. What a comfort it is when one looks with worry also at the dangers of the others of the "little flock" (Luke 12:32), and sees how little leads the sheep astray. What a comfort it is that He, unto whom all power is given in heaven and in earth (Matt. 28:18), is the Shepherd of the sheep. He will feed them. And what a secure rule it is for all the undershepherds, the small servants as Isaiah calls them, who inwardly and outwardly are attacked by the question: "Do you show the sheep the right way? Do you treat the sheep the right way?" What a comfort to possess this safe rule, this decisive example of the Lord Himself who says: "I am the good Shepherd" (John 10:11). To this Supreme Shepherd we must all together and individually bow, and to Him we must conform, otherwise we certainly are not good shepherds. "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:9).

The first thing worth thinking of as especially delighting a poor sinner is that we see here how God only considers the human beings as sheep, lost and important sheep, certainly not capable of fending for themselves or of guarding themselves against the wolf, but entirely dependent on a shepherd. So the Lord has described men everywhere, and all the time He works to break down and deprive us of the imagination lying so deeply in our nature, that we ourselves have light and power to help ourselves; that of ourselves we should understand and are capable of doing something. Against this deep, endless fancy the Word says on the contrary: "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Ps. 14:2-3). The apostle says we are all quite "unprofitable" (Rom. 3:12) and "not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves" (2 Cor. 3:5), but God must work in us "both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Such an incapability is shown by the picture of a sheep. Of all animals the sheep are the most exposed,

defenseless, and stupid. They have no teeth with which to defend themselves against the wolf. And moreover they are notorious for such a lack of sagacity, that they have become a proverb because of it, so that a very poorly gifted person is called a sheep. Similarly, in spiritual things, we are all curiously foolish. Otherwise the most clever men are the greatest fools as far as their own souls are concerned, and the most enlightened Christians are always deceived by the “depths of Satan,” if the Lord leaves them alone. And even when we most clearly see what we should do, we are nevertheless so impotent that we often have to cry and wail: “I am sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I” (Rom. 7:14–15). Oh, please reflect upon this once more, you that rack your heart for something to do of yourself for your salvation! You are not worth very much; you are only a sheep. Fall down in front of the Lord and confess with David: “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant” (Ps. 119:176). Confess that you are capable of nothing, not even of thinking anything. Ask for all only as for a gift from the Lord. If it pleases Him to give you something, you have it; if He does not give it, then all is in vain. You are only a weak and defenseless sheep.

But now see further, what an unspeakable comfort it is that the Lord Christ Himself says, that He is in the same relation to us as a shepherd to the sheep. Now, it is the task of a shepherd to take care of the sheep, and not to expect that the sheep themselves will be able to defend themselves; or to be on their guard themselves against the wolf; or to overcome him themselves. It is up to the shepherd to do all this, and that regardless of whether the sheep are worthy of it or not. It belongs to the vocation of the shepherd. Remember when the Lord Jesus Himself says: “I am the good shepherd,” He allows me to consider Him a good shepherd, and to expect exactly the deeds of a shepherd from Him. Whom should I believe if not the Lord Himself?

## May 25

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*Ye are the light of the world* – Matt. 5:14.

When the Lord says that *He* is the Light of the world, and in another place to His disciples: “*Ye are the light of the world,*” these words do not at all contradict one another. The disciples of Christ are the light of the world equally as certainly as He was Himself. In the respect that He was the atonement for the sins of the world, He stands alone. There He reigns without any rival. He trod the winepress alone. But in the respect that He revealed the qualities of God by His example, He holds the same place as His faithful should hold. Every saved sinner can and must announce the holiness and love of God the way Jesus Himself did on earth.

Therein God, the Most High, has revealed a proof of His wisdom, that He appoints His faithful to be the light of the world. Many qualities of God can be seen in the works of creation, and still infinitely more clearly have they been expressed to us in His revealed words. But there are only a few thinking minds that study the book of Nature. And also those who seriously study the holy Word of God are comparatively few in number. But the conversation and behavior of the faithful is the book that all men read. The life of the Christians is evident to all those surrounding them. No deep study is needed in order to be able to scrutinize their words and deeds. No, both the learned and the unlearned watch their life closely. And innumerable men would never have thought of studying the revealed Word of God, if their attention had not been turned to God because they had seen His Being revealed in the life of His children. When the children of this world see what the disciples of Christ have become by faith in the gospel, they are often inducted to listen to and study this gospel, and also finally to receive it themselves.

The duty of the universal church of Christ is also the duty of each individual congregation and of each member thereof. Every Christian congregation has been ordained as a light of the world, to show the holiness and love of God and thus to help to attract sinners to the Savior. If a congregation does not thus show any light of the world — any light in clear contrast to the evil, darkened world around — then it is not worthy of being called a congregation of Christ. Let us, however, bear well in mind that as each congregation is made up of individual members, the state of the whole depends on that of the individual members. Each member has been called to be a light of the world — an “epistle of Christ written by the Spirit of the living God and known and read of all men” (2 Cor. 3:2–3). If a member of the church of Christ is no such light, no such living epistle from the God of love and holiness, then he forfeits his right to belong to it. He only brings injury and shame to the church. And his influence is also very injurious for the world around.



Beloved brethren and sisters, is it that way with any of us? We do not pose this question in order that somebody should look around and attack others with his judgment. But we want each person calling himself a disciple of Christ to ask himself: “Is it that way with me?” We ask every one of you to look into it honestly, to see what there is in you, just in yourself — in your intentions, or words, or deeds — that can hinder the kingdom of Christ and the glory of His Name. May everybody calling himself a disciple of Christ earnestly ask himself this question: “What is there in me that can give some cause for scoffing and prevent sinners from being converted? Am I the reason in some way for a soul to despise the Word and consider all living Christianity hypocrisy?” Yes, may every disciple of Jesus pose such questions to himself! May every Christian look into it at this very moment to see what in him hinders the kingdom of Christ. And do not postpone for a minute to seek correction and help against this state. It may smart, it may cause pain, but it is better now than later. Let us never forget that a branch not bearing fruit will be cut off and be cast into the fire.

This has not been spoken to those who daily punish and judge themselves. Those should now, on the contrary, look away from themselves and wrap themselves up in Christ, so that their soul may, by His grace, get the rest and strength necessary for sanctification. But we speak of those who confess the gospel, but are nevertheless still lighthearted and careless. Of such people Luther says: “Here we should not look at their mouth, but at their life.” Yes, here it is not the matter of whether you can speak beautifully, but also whether you have any demonstration of the Spirit and of power. It is easy to glory of God and Christ. But from this it shall be seen that your faith is true and honest — namely, if it also brings with it the Holy Spirit in your heart, that attacks, ties, and crucifies your old man, and makes you humble in spirit and rich in love. You will surely never become satisfied with your sanctification and power in this present time, provided that you are awake, and have not been lulled to sleep by the charmer, in the imaginations of self-holiness. You will surely always feel more of your sin than of your holiness. But others will bear witness, and at lighter times you will yourself also testify with the apostle: “His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:10), because most excellent fruits of the Spirit have accompanied your faith, though not to the extent you would have wished.

## May 26

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*And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? – Gen. 18:22–23.*

Let us go to the plains of Mamre and listen to the remarkable conversation there between Abraham and his wonderful guests, when they look out towards Sodom which now was to be destroyed (Gen. 18:16–33). The whole of this scene in itself is already so precious that it can delight the hearts of all the faithful, no matter whether one sees the mildness of the heavenly Father, or the trusting and zealous behavior of the faithful servant. At the same time it shows us what all the faithful have to do at similar times. It gives us an opportunity to look into the heart of a faithful friend of God, just at a time when a godless people was to be visited with the punishment of the Lord. And still more attractive and faith-strengthening is the glance we get into the merciful heart of the heavenly Father, and the high value He attaches to His faithful, when, because of only ten righteous, he wants to save the whole of a town full of godless despisers.

Anyone reading the story as a whole in the Bible also sees how the heavenly Father condescends to the position of His servants, conceals His majesty, and clothes His divine Being in a human form and His thoughts in human ways of speaking, so that one feels that one sees and hears only a human being. All this He does only to remove all fear from His servant, and to draw his confidence fully to Himself. He also succeeds therein. We see how the faith of Abraham is being more and more kindled by the kindness of God, so that he goes further, step by step, in his prayer, even though more and more embarrassed at his boldness. When Abraham heard that the Lord wanted to spare Sodom if there were fifty righteous, he nevertheless immediately realized that also on this condition the threatened cities were still subject to the wrath of God. Therefore, he considered it extremely necessary to continue to reduce the number. And when he finally stopped at the number of ten and received assurance that his prayer had been heard, he thought that it would be an infringement on the righteousness of the Most High if there should be a further reduction. He thought that if there would not be even ten righteous, the Lord would not be able to hold back His righteous judgment. Therefore, early in the next morning the patriarch returned uneasily to the same place where he had spoken with the Lord; and now he is worried to see the smoke rise from the valley as if from an oven. He had received such a deep impression of the righteousness of God, that he knew that the following morning was to give him the decisive information.

The Lord stood with His servant on a height from which one could have looked over Sodom and its neighborhood. So also every faithful man has an eye that has been lifted above human circumstances by the light of the Spirit. In the great, upsetting news of the world only the faithful see the thoughts of the Almighty. They see that it is

only the truth and judgments of God that are revealed herein. The Lord told Abraham what He wanted to do with Sodom and Gomorrah. Also to us He reveals His plans by His Word. We know that when a people has come to the point where it no longer pays attention to the voice of the Lord, but impudently treads under foot both His commandments and His mercy, then the cry of sin rises to heaven, and calls down the burning zeal of the Almighty in great outward visitations.

We now see what we should do. The pardoned one who stands before God in the intimate spirit of adoption, and is thus capable of speaking with Him like a child with his father, should now use this grace, come forward before the Lord, and “stand before the Lord” like Abraham, making intercession for those threatened by His visitations. Yes, as the apostle admonishes us, let us say prayers and make intercession for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority, for the whole of the church of Christ, and for those nearest to us. God wants to do great things, but preferably as a reply to the prayers of His children, in order that His grace may become known and praised. Therefore, we should ask much of Him. We see how six times the pious patriarch humbly prayed for grace to be allowed to ask for something more. And not even once was his prayer in vain. God gave him a gracious reply each time. And as often as we pray for mercy on sinners, we are assured that our prayer is well-pleasing to God. Because it then agrees so well with His own heart. It is true that the prayers of the faithful do not cause the judgments of God and the laws of His kingdom of grace to come to nought. The one who deliberately resists the Spirit of the Lord, cannot be saved even by the intercession and tears of Christ Himself, as we see from the impenitent Jews. But intercession makes God do something special for those subject to the prayers of His beloved friends. Yes, here we see that the Lord was willing to forgive all those threatened cities, if there had only been ten righteous men in them.

Here is now the second thing we should learn from this Bible verse, and it is a thing glorious beyond measure that shines forth from the heart of God. Look how precious even one righteous man is to the eyes of God, i.e., a soul justified by faith in the blood of Christ, having the forgiveness of his sins, and striving after sanctification. Because of a few such Christians the Lord wants to spare the whole of a city full of ungodly men. Thus the Lord Christ must surely have a dear treasure on earth in all His faithful scattered here. Surely this should utterly draw and bend us to His feet. And next to the intercession made by our great High Priest there is certainly nothing so decisive for the Lord’s ways with the people as His glance at the few righteous and their intercessions.

## May 27

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*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently – 1 Pet. 1:22*

**A**s love to the children of God is a fruit and sign of the new birth, then the admonition to this love does not concern just anybody, but only born again Christians. One should never undertake to admonish him that was born only “after the flesh” to love “him that was born after the Spirit” (Gal. 4:29). It will always be a work in vain to try to abolish the old enmity between the serpent’s seed and the woman’s seed. It concerns the faithful only, when the Lord Christ and the apostles admonish them to “love one another”! Although love was born by the Spirit into our hearts and grows from our union with our Savior, it still, as well as the other fruits of the Spirit, needs care and attention. Therefore, there are all these admonitions and encouragements to love, in the Scripture; and it is a great loss and great danger, if you lose your love to the brethren.

There are, however, many things that seek to cool this love. Our sworn enemy, well aware of what he has won if he gets you separated from the brethren, always intrigues against the love between Christian brethren. And in our own hearts he finds many means to do so. But as this love is such a distinguishing fruit of the life in Christ, it always depends on that life. As long as I live in the sound practice of repentance and faith, I also love the brethren. Therefore, the first, most usual, and most essential reason for a cooling love lies in a weakening of the life of grace. When an earthly mind begins to get predominance in a Christian, so that he no longer lives in the daily practice of repentance and faith, of knowledge of sin, and the embracing of grace, then at the same time he also begins to become cold to the brethren, and to look more at their faults, than at the grace dwelling in them. Also this way the words of the Lord come true: “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matt. 24:12). Moreover, there is also much lack of wisdom and other bad habits in the brethren, and this can repel and cool down our love.

Finally, in addition there sometimes come different opinions which separate the brethren. The differences certainly concern only less essential matters, because as regards the great main thing, all the faithful all over the world agree. Nevertheless these secondary opinions can cause fatal wounds to love. This happens in two ways: First, when I do not understand that a brother can be an equally honest and pardoned Christian as I am, although he does not understand all the points in the Word of God the way I do; in other words, when I do not understand that there are also faithful children of God among those who have other opinions on certain matters. The consequence is that I begin to condemn all those of another opinion

than I in some respect, and such a condemnation must always put out love. It is different, if I only stand up against the false opinion or punish a fault or an unwise behavior on the part of my brother, the way Christ punished Peter when he used his sword, and another time called him "Satan" (adversary). Such punishment can always be given together with love. But to condemn the one altogether, who still has his only consolation in the blood of Christ as his all in all, that is quite contrary to love and quenches it.

Secondly, this happens when secondary things become so great and important to me, that they take the first place in my heart, which is proved by the fact, that all those of my opinion in the matter, even if they do not live in Christ, still become dearer to me than the friends of Jesus who are not of the same opinion as I. Oh, what a suspicious sign! What a dreadful thing it is when a matter that is so superficial that the enemies of Christ can embrace it warmly, becomes so important to me, that I meet them with more love and delight, simply because they promote that special secondary matter, than I greet my sisters and brethren in Christ who have an equally precious faith as I, in the righteousness "which our God and Savior Jesus Christ gives." What is this, that a man who is the enemy of my Lord, who has never got it into his head to seek his reconciliation and peace in the blood of the Lamb, who has never lain at the feet of Christ as a lost sinner, but who treads under foot the Son of God, and counts the blood of the covenant an unholy thing (Heb. 10:29), that such a man is dearer to me than a friend in Christ who has his all in all in the death and pain of the Lamb, and who is a child of God and my eternal brother, is this not a suspicious and dreadful thing? Does it not bear witness that the secondary matter which has been the reason for this has become more important to me than the Savior, because the brethren who hold it are dearer to me than the brethren in Christ?

As love to the children of God can thus be cooled down by so many different things, how important it is to watch oneself carefully and to think of the great reasons we have to love our sisters and brethren in grace!

## May 28

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*That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life... That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you – 1 John 1:1, 3.*

**T**hink what a victorious consolation and strength it was for John, that he could testify that way! What a triumphant certainty is expressed hereby! I do not announce anything uncertain, but I announce what I have seen with my eyes, heard with my ears, and touched with my hands. John was the happy disciple who had been lying on the breast of Jesus. He had walked, rested, and been awake with Him. He had been standing at His cross, and had been present when He ascended to heaven. We do not wonder then, that John could do and suffer all with rejoicing. In his gospel he has also made reference to his own seeing: “and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In the same way also Peter has triumphed and certified his testimony by his own seeing: “For,” he says, “we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16). Praise the Lord!

But you say: “What certainty do we have, who have not seen it with our eyes?” Praise the Lord! “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself” (1 John 5:10); he has seen and beheld! God has not left Himself without witness. The one who does not believe the witness of God will be punished well by blindness. That man does not see anything. He does not see what is written even when right in front of him. This is proved by the unfaithful Jews who had Christ and all His deeds before their eyes, as much as had John and Peter, and still did not see anything. But the one who believes in the Son of God sees “the Urim and the Thummim” in Him. He sees light and perfection. He also is in daily conversation with Christ. Then would he not know Him? The one who believes in the Son of God sees glorious things, first, in himself and the story of his own soul, namely a new creation, no less wonderful than the first creation. Then outside himself he sees incessant confirmations of the Word of God. Doesn't he see them, for instance in this remainder of old Israel, the Jews, who live amongst us? Doesn't he see them in the pitifulness of the doctrines of the idols of the heathen? Doesn't he see them in the fact that the word about the crucified One did not stop at His death, but spread out through all countries? What does he need more to prove the resurrection of Christ? What does he need more to know who that Lord was? Is all this not a seeing? We thank and praise Thee, O Lord! We have seen, we have beheld! Nevertheless not all, but only those to whom “Thou wilt manifest Thyself” It is true that we must humble ourselves under the mighty hand of the Lord and

beg for that grace, beg for spiritual sight, for the light. Because this only comes from above, from the Father of light.

The second thing that John teaches us here is that we must be in a daily conversation with these heavenly objects of the Word of life. He intimates his own daily conversation by the many, repeated words: "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life." The second necessary condition in order to have a consolation and joy from Christ which is victorious over everything, is that we do not only hear and see, but that we keep on again and again hearing and seeing and beholding, and again beholding, and living with these things, these our heavenly riches. Here is the secret of having power and consolation in one's heart, namely the seeing, the beholding, the perpetual seeing and beholding of our cause for rejoicing. Now we touch a point on which it all depends.

Here is the reason why there is so little peace and rejoicing in our hearts. We behold everything else thousands of times, but not the thing that gives us life and peace. Yes, in the midst of a diligent hearing and reading, one can still have the eye of one's soul turned only upon oneself, occupied with the wretchedness; but one cannot be absorbed in the vast glory of Christ, in the eternal election of God, in our heavenly riches. How then does the Word of God help? The things our soul beholds and with which we live, such things fill our heart. It is a deplorable infirmity with some Christians that they look so little at the great and glorious things that should fill them with peace and rejoicing. On the contrary, they sink the whole of their soul into such as fills them with all evil, and pain, and uneasiness. One gets the strongest impressions from the things one looks at most. May God help us! This is so important and necessary that everything is in vain if we do not conform to the Word here. We should also help one another to this, by admonitions and encouragements, so that we begin to live more diligently with our great riches in Christ. There is no other way to get joy and strength in one's heart. Luther only worked daily with the Word and learning. But still he had no other advice than the one every simple maid has. In order to meet the need of his own soul he every day considered the articles of faith, and the ten commandments of God, and some well-known texts concerning Christ. These he thought about thousands of times. No Christian has yet invented any other method of obtaining and keeping spiritual power in his heart. May God help us to carry out this point!

*If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth* – 1 John 1:6.

**T**he great matter on which the weight of this text rests is what it means to walk in darkness. Here we should be very careful so that we do not express it ourselves, but seek the meaning of the Lord Himself, the explanation of the Word itself, so that we will neither be made sorry unnecessarily, nor be comforted falsely.

Praise God! It has all been explained in the Word. Christ says: “For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (John 3:20). Note this! “Lest his deeds should be reproved.” Do you not think that to walk in darkness is when a man avoids the punishing Word, does not want to appear in person before God, that is Light, and allow his sin to be punished, nor will he confess it; and seek a settlement and reconciliation. Instead, he goes about, and keeps away, saying with Judas: “Master, is it I?” Compare this now with verse 8: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” And, on the contrary, verse 9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful.” In brief, if we say that we have fellowship with God, but still walk in darkness, then we are not honest before God, and are not before the mercy seat with our sin. In other words: when we do not want to let our sin fall under judgment, when we do not want to confess it before God nor want to give it up in order to have it both forgiven and mortified, then we want to remain undisturbed with our sin, and draw over us a cover of excuses and hypocrisy in order to be allowed to keep our sin in peace, unpunished, and not removed.

The real ground for this walking in darkness is a sleeping, disobedient, and impenitent spirit that considers God nothing. When, in His Word, God reveals to us His will and His counsel about our eternal bliss, and speaks to us, both about the new birth of our heart and the sanctification of our life, and we still can live in a condition that does not agree with this Word — then we see that the root and ground for this are hardness and contempt for God. Some people lead a very pious outward life, far apart from the world by devotions, Christian activity, and beautiful words and deeds, but nevertheless walk in darkness, because they do not live before the mercy seat in “the Holiest of all,” in the repentance that is before God and the faith that is in our Lord Jesus Christ. They do not know about any birth of the Spirit. They despise the Word about the inner relation of the heart, and thus mock the Almighty. But God is Light. His eyes see it. He certainly notices it. And He does not let Himself be mocked. Maybe you do not know yourself about any birth-work of the Spirit in your soul, any distress for sin, and any judgment because of which you have fought before the mercy seat. Maybe you have not, till now, experienced any redemption from judgment, because of the sweet tidings of the Lord, nor any assurance of forgiveness and thereby new life in your heart. Then you mock God.



Maybe you started on a new way of yourself, when you realized that this was necessary. Maybe you began with devotions, prayers, and good deeds, and have gone on in that way without ever having sunk down in an overwhelming and overflowing sin. Because of this you do not know the “grace that did much more abound” in the midst of your embarrassment. Rather, your improvement and consolation have kept pace with one another, so that your consolation has been based on your improvement. And with this you go forward and still hope for a good end. This is called mocking the Lord, and despising His Word.

You know that the Scripture teaches quite another way, that through the abundance of our sins and the grace of God, we enter the strait gate of the new birth. And you know that Christ expressly said: “Except a man be born again — born again! — he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). But you do not fear, you hope that you will still see the kingdom of God. You hear some faithful men speak about the work of the new birth in their hearts, about distress over sin, about faith and witness, about peace and rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, all from their own vivid experience. And from all this you can see with your own eyes that it is a great reality. But then you are dumb as long as that subject is discussed, until they come to the works, activities, and outer conditions. There you feel at home, but not in the inner conditions of repentance and faith. You still hope that everything will go well with you, and that you will be allowed to see the kingdom of God! You surely see what the Lord says about this, but you do not want to understand it. You do not want to look into the matter, but go hastily past it. This is what is called walking in darkness as regards one’s inner man, and not wanting to come forth into the light.

But manifold are the works of the devil to our perdition. There are also some confessors among us who have really experienced, and are capable of describing, with a lot of right words, many of these inward things, their awakening and the kindling of their faith, their clear witness, etc. And they understand enough to speak about both the law and the gospel, both faith and sanctification. And in spite of all that, they now walk in darkness, which is proved by the fact that they freely do the deeds of darkness and do not want to deny themselves sin. They do not let themselves be punished, but excuse and defend their habits. It is this that John quotes as a characteristic feature of the ones who walk in darkness, when he takes hate as an example and says: “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now . . . and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:9, 11).

## May 30

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*If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me* — John 21:22.

**T**he Lord had prepared Peter for his coming martyrdom, and said: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.” Then John adds that Peter turned around, looked at the disciple whom Jesus loved, and asked: “Lord, and what shall this man do?” Then Jesus said to him: “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou Me.” The instructive point in this text is to see how hastily and seriously the Lord pulls Peter back from looking another way, and sharpens his attention only on his own vocation. Christ lets him understand that all weight lies in the will of the One calling him — “If I will,” He says. Here is the most important word in the Scripture with regard to our deeds. Here is the word that makes a man’s deed great, important, and precious: God’s “I will.” Here is the word that causes even a most small and insignificant deed, such as the sweeping of a floor, to be more precious and holy before God, than if I were to build a great temple, or go out and convert the heathen. That is, if the first deed has been commanded to me by God, and the latter consists of deeds I have chosen of myself.

Oh, that we could get our eyes opened to see this fact, because there is nothing that so paralyzes the zeal of otherwise willing and faithful souls for good deeds, as is the impossibility for them to get rid of their old inclination to look at the value and appearance of the deed itself. And if it is small, they immediately think the deed less holy and less pleasing to God. They quite forget the will and commandment of the great God, and that this alone gives a deed its value. Now, however, ever since the beginning of the world, ever since the first test given to man, God has wanted to sharpen our attention to the fact that to Him a very small deed is as equally valid as a very great deed. He has wanted to point out to us that it only depends on His Word, and that He only seeks our obedience — faith, love, and obedience. He bound the greatest test of all time to the small deed: not to eat of a certain tree in paradise. For once note this and understand! Surely, to us human beings there is a great difference between deeds. For instance, immeasurably more good things are ministered to men by the service of a faithful shepherd of souls, or a missionary, than by the service of a craftsman or maid. But to God one service is equally as well-pleasing as the other, when it has been done only out of faith and obedience to His Word.

Our Lord God has a great kingdom on earth — the whole of mankind with its both worldly and spiritual government. And in this kingdom there are many kinds

of needs. And many kinds of servants and many kinds of services are required there, but all of them are necessary for the good of the whole kingdom. Kings and subjects are required, people that command and people that obey, teachers and pupils, parents and children, masters and servants. And all of them have different vocations, duties, and occupations. And these different vocations, duties, and occupations are all of them equally precious to God, because He has prescribed them. Moreover, they are also all of them needful and necessary for us. This is what Paul illustrates with the picture of the different members of a body, when he says: "All members have not the same office" (Rom. 12:4). "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him" (1 Cor. 12:17–19). "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us" (Rom. 12:5–6), and different vocations.

Now God has given His special ordinances for each of these different states, such as children and parents, man and wife, masters and servants. And as now every human being must necessarily belong to one of these states, also every individual has his or her commandments from the Lord. Through these commandments of God to each state, everyone doing the deeds God has ordained for his state, can be equally certain that he does a service to God, as if the Lord had paid him a separate visit and asked for this service. And surely, then we would be extremely happy only to be allowed to do Him a service. Maybe there is, for instance, a maid thinking that her status is so humble and that she never gets any opportunity to do good deeds. But if she could bear this well in mind, then she would have the great joy in her heart that with all her simple household work, she does only good deeds, and is allowed to serve God perpetually; because her status and work have been equally as ordained by God as the deeds of a bishop or a missionary. If, on the contrary, you neglect what God has ordained for your state, and instead do a deed that is very great in itself, then it has no value before God. And your negligence of the deed commanded to you is a great sin.

## May 31

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*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me* – John 10:27.

See what Christ says here about His sheep: “They hear My voice, and they follow Me.” These are the first and characteristic fruits of a true knowledge of Christ. When a poor, lost sheep rightly learns to know its good, faithful Shepherd, learns that He has given His life for its life, and now feels, loves, and attends to it the way it needs, then it becomes a delight and a vital necessity for that sheep to be allowed to follow such a good Shepherd. It is impossible to know Him without loving Him. And it is impossible to love Him without wanting to follow Him. If He has not begun to captivate your heart so that you would gladly leave everything in order to be allowed to be His friend and follower, then you have not yet learned to know Him rightly.

Let us explain this. It is true that faith and the knowledge of Christ have many degrees and can grow constantly. But, a weak faith cannot bring with it the same love and power to sanctification as a strong faith. Therefore, we can very easily go wrong if we always want to recognize ourselves or others by the power in the life. Pontoppidan has said with much reflection and wisdom: “that justifying faith is the only never-failing, distinctive feature of the state of grace in man.” Luther has said the same thing in the following words: “A Christian cannot be judged and recognized by anything else than by his conscience (i.e., the inward relation of the soul both to God and to sin), because true Christians can fall, and false ones can play the saints, and lead a very beautiful life.”

But when Christ says: “My sheep hear My voice,” He has thereby expressed two important fruits and distinctive features of faith. First, they get a sure ear for the Shepherd’s voice, so that, though they can be very simple and ignorant otherwise, they still have a sure, fine discernment in that respect, so that they distinguish the voice of the good Shepherd from other voices. And secondly, the words: “hear My voice” exactly describe what is so characteristic of the faithful: that, even if they cannot always do in work and deed what they want and should, they still have an obedient mind, a “willing spirit,” sincerely wanting to be able to do so. They judge themselves because of their shortcomings, and from the depth of their hearts they sigh for grace and power to be able to be and do what the Lord loves. This shows a heartfelt dutifulness or obedience. What the Lord speaks in His Word concerns them. They revere and obey it, and do not have any higher desire than to be able to do according to it. There is only one distress that they all complain about, and that is, there is a law in their members, warring against the law of their mind, so that they cannot always do what they want. As a proof of their obedient mind and pure spirit it is remarkable to note, that if there is a certain sin adhering to them with particular power, it is just this sin that is so much an object of all their prayers

that they almost do not pray for anything else with such an ardor, as they pray for help against, and deliverance from, this sin. And at such times they consider all the other sins of their neighbors to be nothing compared to this sin. They think that only their sin is really difficult and worthy of punishment. Oh, what good children of God! It is quite the other way round with the hypocrite and the Pharisee. He only thinks the sins of others to be grave and worthy of punishment. But he has an extraordinary indulgence with regard to his own sins. It is obvious, that a holy spirit accompanies a living faith!

But from the words: “they follow Me” you will also note, that, if a man embraces and honors the gospel in a way that his life as a whole still remains as it was before, that he remains in the same relation to the world and to his bosom sins, and does not become so changed, that, with the whole of his attitude, and the whole of his future, he becomes a disciple and follower of Christ, then that human being has only deceived himself with a self-made faith. No matter who you are that reads these words of Jesus: “they follow Me,” stop and think of this! You have been deceived by a false and self-made faith, if you have not become a follower of Christ. Living faith is “the power of God in us which changes us, and makes us born again of God, so that we become quite other beings with regard to our heart, our inclination, our mind, and all our powers, and that the power of God is accompanied by the Holy Spirit” (Luther). So also the apostle Paul says: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17). Yes, he comes as if into a new world, and begins a new life. This is the great proof that faith is living, when you have first looked into it carefully to see whether it is true, i.e., if its object is the atonement of Christ and the forgiveness of sins, and not your own holiness. Because the imitation of Christ and true sanctification must spring from the forgiveness of our sins, and not from our own desire for self-righteousness. We must first, annihilated and pardoned, be so captivated by Christ and His grace, that we follow Him only for His sake, so that it is truth in our heart when we confess: “the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Cor. 5:14). But when this love of Christ compels us, then, verily, a new life also follows, in a new creature that now follows his Savior with true delight through life.

# June 1

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*And everyone that loveth is born of God – 1 John 4:7.*

**I**t is impossible to make snow and ice to be warm and still to remain as snow and ice. It is equally fruitless to force oneself to love God rightly, and to love one's neighbor rightly, before the heart has been changed, before one has got a new heart which itself goes out in love. Love is a free thing, a thing of the heart. Love cannot be forced. No matter how you force yourself to speak and live, you still cannot force your heart to love what it does not want to love. Therefore, it is foolishness to preach about love to a heart who has not been born again. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). All the love a man thinks he has for God before the new birth, is imagined, selfish, and limited. You love God only when He does and speaks what pleases you. But when He puts you to a test, or bids you do something you do not want to do, then you murmur against Him and accuse His commandments of being severe. Neither do you love your neighbor as yourself, but you are always more anxious for your own benefit than for his.

That is the way all human hearts are by nature. Yes, all without exception. If you then ask how you can get a new heart, a heart that loves rightly, then take note of this: you will never get true love to God before *He* first shows you His so great love that your heart is melted by the warmth of His love. You cannot begin by presenting Him with your love. But begin by receiving love from Him. As the apostle John says: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us" (1 John 4:10). And Jesus says: "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). But now there is no love of God which could so melt and change all your being as the love which comprises and saves all your being — the love which means life itself for time and eternity, namely, your pardon with God, the forgiveness of your sins, and your blessed adoption to be a child of God. The Lord Himself spoke about this in the house of Simon, the Pharisee. A notorious, sinful woman comes in, falls down at His feet, washes them with her tears, wipes them with her hair. The Pharisees are astonished hereby, but Christ explains the matter thus: "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore which of them will love him most?" The reply was: "He, to whom he forgave most." And Jesus added: "Thou hast rightly judged... Her sins which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much" (Luke 7:41–43, 47). See here the meaning of the words of the apostle: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). The more of law in the conscience, the more the sins storm within and are felt. The more sin is felt, the greater grace becomes, when all these sins are being forgiven. And the more grace you get, the greater your love, your joy, and

your gratitude become. This is the order of the ruling of the New Testament, that God — who commanded us to love our enemies and heap coals of fire on their heads by benefactions — Himself does the same to us. He melts and overcomes us by the glowing coals of overflowing grace. And now, not until now, do you begin to return His love. Now your heart becomes changed so that you can love all human beings with an entirely new love. Because the love of God has been poured into your heart by the Holy Spirit you have received.

This love to the neighbor is twofold, charity and brotherly kindness. With charity you love all human beings and do good to them wherever you can and in all their needs. This love does not presuppose any confidence, any friendship, because it does not demand anything from the object than that it is a human being. About this love Jesus said: “Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,” etc. It is important to observe this, if you want to be a Christian, so that you do not only love those who are your friends and do good to you — those whom people call lovable. It should not be like that, if you want to be a Christian! You are supposed only to think whether they have the same human blood as you, or whether they are descended from the same Father in heaven and the same ancestor on earth as you are, and whether they have been redeemed by the same blood as you. When you see a person needing help, it would then be a great encouragement for you to love him, if you would think: This is my brother, my sister! Because, according to the flesh, we are, all of us, brethren!

The second kind of Christian love is brotherly love. Brotherly love makes all the children of God in the world become united in a blessed, sincere, and intimate circle of brethren and sisters one of another. This brotherhood does not know any limits because of the different confessions of different churches, different forms and places, different status and conditions of living, but it looks at something else, something present wherever Christ is preached, namely the children of God, born of God. Because the foundation of this brotherly love is only this: “Everyone that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1). And here is the reason why Christ stated plainly that this love is the mark of His true “disciples” when He said: “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). Because hypocrites can imitate everything else, except brotherly love, because brotherly love looks at those who are born of God.

## June 2

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*My delights were with the sons of men* – Prov. 8:31.

**I**t is our main delusion, instilled in man by the serpent at the time of the Fall, that we do not consider God a helper and Savior, but a hard judge, a lord, demanding only our service. The mind of the Lord is otherwise. His only desire is to do good to us. Therefore He wants to live among the human children here on earth. Here He has a large, endless hospital, full of wretched people, groaning and in distress, and here it is His delight to be. “This is My rest,” He says, “here I want to live, here it pleases Me well.” One day, when Jesus was hungry and sent His followers into a town to buy food, there meanwhile came out a poor woman from the town, a woman of Samaria burdened with sins. Jesus speaks with her. Her conscience is awakened. She understands “who it is that saith to her: Give Me to drink” (John 4:10). Pricked in her conscience, but happy in hope, she runs to call the men of Samaria to Jesus. Then the disciples came with the food and said: “Master, eat!” But now there was no need for Him to eat. His hunger had been appeased. He had found some poor sinners to save, and therefore He says: “I have meat to eat that ye know not of.” See here the heart of the Savior! See His delight among the children of men. It is His meat. His rest, His delight to do good to them. Therefore it is His delight to live among the children of men. And this delight of His is nothing occasional and temporary, but a deeply founded, eternal affection in His Being towards mankind. Ever since the beginning of the world one century has proclaimed it to the next, and one millennium to the one following.

The foundation is deep. God made man in His image. God created him to be His child, His company, and His delight. And when He created man, the lord of this earth, it did not happen in haste, as with the other creatures, by means of an almighty “Let there be!” But for the sake of man He became a real Creator. He made and formed his body of the dust of the ground with much diligence and care, then breathed into him the life spirit of His own holy Being, “and man became a living soul.” Hardly are the human beings there, before the beloved Savior is also there with them, and walks with them among the trees of the garden. Yes, then, you think, it was probably all right. It was nothing special. But, if somebody told you, that it was not until and because of our fall, our sin, and our distress, that His desire to live among us became really strong and warm, would you really be able to believe it, and see that it is really so? Now the eternal depth of His divine mercy towards us began to cry out in Him. The “son of His life” had fallen into the hands of the enemy. His heart could not bear that. God is love, and He has delight in life.

If we could go for a walk through the days of the old covenant, then we would see with our eyes, how the beloved Savior has gone in and out with His poor sinners, and has built Himself huts in the midst of dust and ashes. We would then go to the



desert where He pays a visit to Hagar, the Egyptian bondwoman from the house of Abraham, and speaks so friendly to her. We would go to the plain of Mamre, to Bethel, and from there to Peniel, and to Horeb, where the Lord shows Himself in the burning bush. Then we see the wonderful pillar of cloud and fire, and also see therein His face. Just think, to dress oneself in clouds for the day and in shining fire for the night, for a period of forty years, and that in order to be a Guide, and a Shelter against the heat of the sun, and a Shield, and a Light in the darkness, for a stubborn people! Certainly He must have great delight in human beings. We would go on to Ophrah, where Gideon sees the dear Savior sitting under an oak, and then to Jerusalem and the temple, where He dwells over the mercy seat.

But why this long journey? We have Him nearer now. God has taken flesh. What do we see in the manger in Bethlehem at Christmas? A child. Yes, a child, and the very same one that has said: "My delights are with the sons of men." God in flesh, God in the manger, God in swaddling-clothes, God at a mother's breast. Here one's thoughts grow stiff. Here one's knees quiver. Here the heart becomes amazed. The wonder is too great for weak human beings. Good that our eyes are vague! Good that we behold it only from far away and understand hardly a thousandth part of it! Otherwise it would take away our lives, it would choke us, we would not be able to stand it.

The way in which He was with Israel and moved about among them, was to Him no real living with the sons of men. To Him it still was too distant a relationship, too cold a friendship. He, God, and they poor sinners — that abyss was still too wide! Like joins better unto like. Then He Himself became a human child, our Kinsman, and our Brother. This we say as if it were nothing! Yet the seraphs have been sitting for two thousand years on their heights looking down into this abyss of love, and cannot reach its bottom, and cannot cease to be amazed with holy wonderment, and cannot cease to take the theme for all their songs of hallelujah from this deep well. The Word was with God, and God was the Word; and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (John 1). Oh, eternal wonder of grace!

What drove Him to this? Simply nothing other than the fact that He had delight in human beings and not only in angels. "My delights are with the sons of men." But from where did He get that delight? From His own heart. And here we are at the end. Farther we cannot see. That much God loved the world. He loved therefore He loved. We can go no further.

## June 3

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*And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day – Gen. 3:8.*

What could the dear Lord want in the garden now? For what business does He come to those fallen human beings on the day of the Fall of man? It is true that He punished sin. He did not excuse it. His judgment could not be changed. Nevertheless He had some “thoughts of peace” to reveal to those frightened children. What He really came to announce to them was the means of salvation. When punishing sin He only manifested what He had said and threatened before, and what they already had experienced and understood deeply enough. Therefore His errand now was chiefly another. It was something new and unknown to them, that He wanted to announce, since He speaks of “a woman’s Seed that would bruise the head of the serpent,” take revenge for the injury they had suffered, and remedy and restore what was lost due to the serpent’s cunning and their fall into sin. This was the real errand of the merciful Father, when on the day of the Fall, as the sun began to sink, He came into the garden. His merciful heart could not bear to know that His lost children would lie through the night, over behind the trees, in agony and fright, and think of His wrath, and that they would die without having a single beam of hope and consolation. Therefore on that same day, He went to see them immediately in their shame and fear. He who bade us: “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,” here Himself gives the first proof of His forgiving heart. Christ has also revealed that God has such a heart that He cannot bear that even in any form of distress His children should lie helpless and without consolation, and cry to Him “night and day.” If He could not have patience with that, says Christ, would He then have patience when His most beloved, but fallen children were lying hopeless and in despair and agony because of His word?

Here I see that God’s grace and love are a love quite undeserved, free, and pre-determined, quite independent of us. Here was the greatest criminality, and no sign of any repentance, remorse, or prayer. At the moment of temptation Adam and Eve were quite capable of standing up against evil. They had a light and pure intellect, a pure heart, and a free will — thus their temptation was only outward. Still they offended against their Father’s commandment; and when they had fallen, they did not seek God in order to confess their sin and ask Him to forgive them. No, on the contrary, they flee away from God, and hide behind the trees of the garden. And when the Lord speaks to them, there is only self-defense, an explaining away, and a bitter aversion to God Himself, who is blamed as guilty of the Fall, when Adam says: “The woman whom Thou gavest me, beguiled me.” So depraved were their hearts now. All this was known to God. And still, although their criminality and

wickedness were so great, the merciful Father had such love, that He came to seek them in order to become reconciled with them and solace them.

Oh, here I see the divine heart. Here I see that the love of God is an outgoing love, a seeking love, quite independent of the state of the sinner. The judgment of severe justice could not be revoked — the wages of sin was death. But the divine mercy had found a way by which at the same time to satisfy justice, and save the sinner. A Seed of the woman was to come and make up for the Fall, a Seed which had been foreseen before the beginning of the world. Therefore mercy was free to pour itself out on the fallen. Therefore God comes to the garden on the day of the Fall and runs after the lost son.

The “son of His life” had fallen. Therefore my heart breaks because of him, says the Lord, I must have mercy upon him. Surely this should touch us deeply, this first great proof of the undeserved grace of God. Instead we go and weigh and measure the degrees of our sins and of our repentance, remorse, and prayer, and by it we judge of the grace of God towards us. Oh, how deep a fall! What dreadful consequences of the fall in our soul, that is so tied up in darkness and unbelief! You say: “My sin is so wrong, so without excuse. I knew the will of God, but I did just the contrary.” Poor soul! You were compelled; you are not free. You have been sold under sin. Adam was free and still sinned. He, too, knew the will of God, but did exactly the contrary; and still the merciful Father runs after His lost son. Thus the love of God is quite free, undeserved, and independent of the sinner, because it is based on the merit and prayer of another, “the Seed of woman,” “the Man of the Lord,” “The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

He who does not believe in Him; who does not stop at the voice of the Lord, and refuses to become reconciled with God, but remains away, he is indeed away from God, and will be away eternally. But he who believes in Him, and allows that he should both be punished for his sins, and also be restored by the Seed of woman, he shall not be lost, but has eternal life, even though he may feel all the evil in his heart that we find in Adam, yes, even if the whole Fall and all the poison of the serpent churns within him.

## June 4

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*We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God – Acts 14:22.*

**T**his is the way by which all the children of God have had to go through this life. And worse temptations have always been united with increasing age and grace, and increased faith and gifts. Here on earth the Lord permits Satan to sift His faithful as wheat, so that a David and a Peter fall into most heinous sins. Here He suffers wicked people, accidents, and long-time tribulations to destroy the whole of the temporal welfare of a believer, as happened to Job. Here He gives His friend Abraham an order to offer the wonder-child, the son of the promise, Isaac, who was the most precious delight and wonderment of his father's heart. Here the most beloved son of Israel, Joseph, with all his hopes and revelations may be sold and taken away as a bond-slave to a foreign country. Here God lets a Paul several times pray for deliverance from the devil and meet with a refusal. Here He lets a John, "the friend of the Bridegroom," "the greatest that was born of women," next to the Son of God, sit forlorn in the prison of Herod and finally be deceitfully killed — just for fun — without even, like other martyrs, getting an opportunity to praise the power of God with his faith and fearlessness in front of a crowd of onlookers. It was only said: "Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger" (Matt. 14:8). Here one must confess, that faith without seeing is needed, for John was the apple of the eyes of God, the darling of His heart, and the closest friend of His Son on the earth, embraced with a special love by God, that could not be seen at the time. Indeed, the love of God was deeply hidden. But God is in the habit of acting in this way with those He loves most, has endowed most, and wants to glorify most. Towards them He takes an attitude as if He did not at all want to know of them, letting all sorts of distresses and sorrows befall them, allowing their sins and infirmities to frighten them and the world and the devil to harass them. And when they flee to God, their only Comfort and Helper, then for a long time He pretends not to hear them, but evil only grows worse and worse. Then the beloved children of God wail with alarm and wonder whether, because of their sins, God has forsaken them deservedly, and forever. Even the man after God's heart can be heard to complain bitterly: "I am cut off from before thine eyes." Jeremiah wails: "He turneth His hand against me all the day... He hath compassed me with gall and travail... He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out... He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone; he hath made my paths crooked. Also when I cry and shout, He shutteth out my prayer" (Lam. 3). And Daniel, who had got the witness through the angel of God, that he was well-pleasing, when he had spent six days and six nights in the lions' den; when finally God sends him food, he exclaims with astonishment at God not having forgotten him: "Thou hast indeed remembered me, O God!" (Bel.

38, Apocrypha). What further examples do we need? Why, the precursor in all, the only lovable Son of God, calls out in His deepest distress: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? I cry, but My help is far away.” When all the holy of God have cried out like this even though they have been in the highest possible favor of God, should not also we prepare for the same to happen to us? The one whose faith is not put to the test and tempted, verily has no living faith. “If ye be without chastisement, . . . then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Heb. 12:8). At least every true Christian should be harassed by his own sins, so that he finds it difficult to believe the grace of God. Then both the devil and the world will harass him on all sides, so that he will not have much peace on earth. As Pretorius very strongly says: “Each Christian must first have a devil, then a Judas, then a Caiaphas and a Pilate and let himself be well beaten so that blood is drawn. When one tempter goes away, two others must come instead, and when they are finished, four must come, each one worse than the other, and so on until tribulation is accomplished. The holier a Christian, the greater the martyr. A pious Christian must taste all that is bitter in the world, and often he does not have any consoler.”

And the reason for this curious rule is that the Lord God has not found any better means of mortifying our old Adam. In order to choke the Adamitic mind in us, which always wants to see, understand, keep an account with the Lord, and judge of His judgment; in order to produce and exercise in us what really is named faith, the Lord has left with us on the earth all evil that sprang from the Fall of Adam, the whole of the deluge, all the inner depravity, and the host of evil spirits and their influence on our minds, together with the darkness and suffering resulting from this, and tormenting a heart that wants to be holy and pure, spiritual and heavenly. When it is added that the heart of an awakened soul is the most sensitive and timid thing on the earth like an open wound, where a grain of sand and a breath of wind cause pain, then one can easily imagine, how the life of a Christian must be filled with bitterness, troubles, and tribulations, which like thick and black clouds surround the souls of the faithful.

## June 5

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*Thou shalt have no other gods before me* – Exod. 20:3.

**T**o some extent we probably understand what the first commandment demands. If God the Lord were satisfied with only our intellect and knowledge, then all would be right with us. But on the contrary it is something quite different the holy God wants to have of us, namely that we should *do* according to it — not only know, understand, and speak thereof, but really *do* what He bids us to. And in order to show us that He could not tolerate that this His first commandment should be forgotten and held in contempt, but that He would seriously watch for obedience to it, He attached to this commandment both a dreadful threat and a splendid promise. Because it is just to this commandment that He adds: “For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.”

Although these words can be applied to all the commandments, yet everyone should note from this serious threat, what a holy zeal the Lord has for His first commandment, and we should take it into our hearts in order to act upon it in truth. After all, we do not want to bear and endure the wrath of God. So it becomes a matter of doing and not only of knowing the will of our Lord.

The Lord Jesus said thus to the lawyer, when he had read the first and great commandment: “This do, and thou shalt live” (Luke 10:28). It really is trifling with the great God, and, is a most terrible hypocrisy and humbug before His eyes, if you are content only with hearing, reading, understanding, and judging His words, and then go away and forget the observance of them. So listen once more to what He says: “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.” Who should do so, if not yourself, you that hear His voice, you that read and understand His commandment? Or do you think only others should take it to themselves? Why are you an exception? And the Lord does not say, that you can or may do His commandment if it pleases you. But He says: Thou shalt! Thou shalt! You are not free to do or not as you may choose, but you shall do His commandment or you will have His righteous wrath and judgment fall upon you. He has the right of divine majesty to bid and command us.

Neither does He say, that you should abandon some gods, but can keep one or two; but He says: “Thou shalt have *no* other gods before Me.” Maybe you have no human being as your god, but perhaps your money comes before Him. Maybe you have not money or mammon, but you may have some personal merit, skill, learning, or other gifts of your own. Maybe you have not even got these as gods, but you may have some particular grace as regards spiritual matters, a particular

enlightenment, wisdom, strength, or godliness, which is your abominable god. The Lord sees it, and the Lord shall judge each one without respect of persons. There is an eternal and divine earnest in the commandment: “Thou shalt have *no* other gods before Me.” And now think of the word *love* — “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.” Here also “love” means love. If you are cold towards God Himself, so that first and last your most heartfelt desire is other than to be with Him, to speak to Him and about Him (“for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” [Matt. 12:34]), if your thoughts and words occupy themselves more with other things, no matter if they are the most beautiful deeds, then it is not God Himself that you love most. If in addition you find His commandments difficult, so that you must force yourself to do what pleases Him; or if you are discontented with His will when He takes away your gods from you, forbids your sins, or sends you suffering, contempt, or losses, then you do not love Him with all your mind. You love yourself more than the great God and His pleasure. You are worshipping the most abominable god, yourself. And you should know therefore, that according to the holy law of the Lord, you are condemned to hell and rightly belong to the devil. If, on the other hand, you are faithful in observing this, the greatest commandment of God, and with this all the others, then you should know that God is gracious beyond measure towards you, that you please Him in all your being, and will enjoy all His good for time and eternity. The law teaches these things.

And here the thoughts of all men must be revealed! If, when you consider such commandments of God, you can still remain indifferent, and only a listener and reader, leaving it to others to take it to their hearts, while you yourself go away and live in futile carelessness, then it is a sure sign that you are a lighthearted despiser of God, and consider God and His holy law nothing! Or you are a pious and religious person saying with the mind only: This is more than can be observed by any human being. Then you go away and live without caring about the will and commandment of God, with your supposed spiritual poverty. But it is a poverty that does not at all break you, trouble you, and chastise you, but one with which you can live at ease and self-satisfied. Or you may be one of those who say: This is right! Christians *should* be like that! This and that they *should* do! But you do not take any part yourself in the painful effort demonstrated and therefore have not noticed either, how fully lost you are with all your holiness. But you skip hastily over the test with regard to your own heart. If so, you should realize that you are a blinded hypocrite — just like the lawyer who was capable of reciting the first and greatest commandment correctly, but still wanted “to justify himself” (Luke 10:29).

## June 6

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*Honor thy father and mother; ... that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth* – Eph. 6:2–3.

All temporal welfare is united with the observance of the fourth commandment, and surely this can partly be considered as a natural consequence of natural reasons. Equally as certain temporal unhappiness, restlessness, and anguish, and, often too early a death is a natural consequence of disobedience to this commandment. Where nobody wants to obey or subject himself, but everybody wants to rule and force his own will, there must always come quarrels, conflicts, mutual enmity, and all the evil brought along by the same. Think of a house where the children rise up against the parents, and the servants against the master and mistress, and no longer want to obey. What a wretched state of things there will be, conflicts and fights, yes, discord and destruction of the whole house. It is the same when all over a country the spirit of rebellion rises against the authorities. The consequence is that one tries to do away with another! Where a man, on the contrary, humbly subordinates himself to the Lord's ordinances through parents and authorities, and everybody only thinks of how he should do his duty at the place and in the position where God has put him, there all blessing, comfort, and peace must flourish. Thus we can see some natural reasons why earthly bliss depends on the observance of the fourth commandment.

But a person not seeing anything more in this than natural things must be darker than a heathen. Here a God lives among us, and knows and leads the ways of His created beings so carefully that no bird will even fall on the ground without His will. Where this God has given a commandment, and attached a certain promise to it, a promise that always carries a corresponding threat, it is no more only a matter of natural consequences. It is a decision of God and a judgment of God namely that earthly blessing will be given to those rightly honoring their father and mother, and, on the other hand, a special curse will follow the transgressor of this commandment. Even the one only a little acquainted with this world, has seen examples and proofs to the effect that there is something not natural, something curious, some mysterious guidance of the fates of men. If somebody's temporal welfare is in relation to his inborn talents, or to other natural sources, then one does not find anything curious in it, though even there, is also the government of God. There is, for instance, a man with poor gifts and without any natural capability to prepare earthly bliss for himself, but who because of an especial blessing or a divine ordinance has become especially happy here in this life. On the other hand, there are powerful and highly gifted natures with great capabilities to earn a fortune, but they are all the time either pursued by accidents and adversities, or all the good things they have just melt away without any visible reasons, so that one



does not know how it happens. Then every man begins to see something strange therein, and speaks about the blessing or curse of God. How often it is not already manifest to the eyes of men, that the ground both in the first and in the last case was in the relation of each of the persons to his parents. So that we see that either the promise of the fourth commandment, or the judgment of God comes true, because this commandment connects our earthly welfare with our relation to our parents. An enlightened teacher has said: "Quietly and without ado, but mightily and wonderfully there goes an incomprehensible something through the fates of men. Often it seems to vanish. But suddenly it lights up again. It is not human. It is something supernatural. It is the blessing of parents."

Yes, how often have we not seen a downright literal fulfillment of these words of Scripture: "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it" (Prov. 30:17). Namely, when a refractory and wicked son either has come under the discipline of the laws of war as a soldier and has died, on the battlefield; or when he has died at the place of execution because of his continued and developed wickedness. Because it often goes as Luther says: "A child who does not want to hear the gracious voice of parents and teachers, will hear the executioner. And he speaks so sharply that the head is separated from the body." The one, who in impudent lightheartedness despises the advice of his benignant parents, teachers, or of other people with experience of life, will certainly not be too difficult for the almighty God to rule over, though then in a somewhat harder way. God wants to have the power over men. But now He has put parents, masters, authorities, and teachers to be His guardians over us. If we do not want to hear Him through these, then hard distress will teach us. Whether it pleases you or not, He will certainly carry out His Word. If you show obedience and reverence to the ones He has put over you, then He will give you a rich reward of all good things. But if you do not want to hear Him herein, He will always find you and send accidents, death, and curses over you. "If you despise the Word and commandments of God, as if they had been spoken by a fool," says Luther, "then let us also see if you are a man capable of being without the kindness of God. It would, anyway, be better for you to have a gracious God with peace and blessing than to have His disgrace and curse."

## June 7

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*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps – Jer. 10:23.*

When we hear such words we have only two alternatives. Either to wake up to see that God is so much greater than all our thoughts, that we cannot understand Him in His power and care for us, and that we are small, blind creatures when it is a matter of understanding God. Yes, either we shall wake up to see this, or we must throw away all the Word of God. Not even is this enough, but we must also be such fools as not even to see what all the visible creation shows, that God is mighty to take care of His smallest creatures. We must be such fools as those of whom David says: “The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God” (Ps. 14:1).

Here somebody will probably make an objection: “It is true that everything happening to us has been sent by a faithful God, but only as long as it does not concern those things that depend on man’s own freedom. If by my self-will and other sinful inclinations, I have brought myself into unhappiness, then I have only myself to blame, and cannot console myself with the guidance of God.” Reply: In itself this is correct, but it often becomes wrongly understood. It is true that God has given us a certain freedom. And thereby we can make ourselves unhappy for time and eternity, namely, when we resist His Spirit continuously and intentionally. But here you should notice two things. The first thing is: Even if you have brought yourself into unhappiness because of sin and foolishness, but have now repented, and from now on want to follow the advice of the Lord, then the grace and fatherly benignity of God are so great, that He will turn all your evil into good, and all the consequences of your foolishness to your service. Because “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28). God does not keep His wrath forever. He is such a gracious God and Father that even if we have defied Him for a long time, if we at last repent, He will be as gracious to us as if we had never sinned.

It was because of great self-will that Israel got kings. But the Lord still did not abandon them, but He did as much good as ever to them, though they had to suffer more. In his unbelief Paul had been an enemy and persecutor of Christ. But nevertheless Christ made him the greatest apostle. And even of his great sin itself He made two good things. Firstly, a great means of crushing for the apostle himself, and secondly, a mighty means of consolation for others. Here we see what was said before: that God can turn our greatest faults and foolishnesses to our service, if we only come to repentance. Yes, Luther remarks, that the Lord God must also show the same goodness to His saints when they make false steps. His excellent words read thus: “It is the work and art of God, that He can make evil things good, things that we have ruined and neglected. Truly I have myself often

performed many things in an unwise and foolish way. And then I have become greatly frightened, for I could not see how I could be loosed or get away from such things as had been ruined because of my foolishness. Then God has found such a way to repair what I had damaged, that all has become well again. And so God rules all His saints, that they can err and do foolishly, but that, nevertheless, all must end well for them. Or at least it must pass without too great an injury. God is an almighty Creator who makes all out of nothing. Therefore He can even make good out of evil.” Oh, God is a faithful and gracious Father. This is the first thing that should be noticed.

But the second thing is: There may be somebody who fears that he still resists the will of God in some way. He has a spirit sighing with alarm: “God have mercy upon me! Mortify Thou my self-will, and bring me to the way of Thy will. Use any bitter thing Thou want, only make me rightly obedient to Thee.” That man has every right to console himself with the gracious guidance of God. Because when someone complains with alarm of the resistance of his heart to the will of God, and prays for the almighty help of God against it, that is nothing other than the hard fight of the flesh against the Spirit. When the mind is on God’s side, the matter is at once in the hands of God. No man becomes unhappy because of a resistance of the flesh that only drives us more and more to God. If we have the power of ourselves to tear the ties and to overcome the flesh, then the Word of God would be false, which says that we do not have the power to do this. It may well be that by much suffering you will only be plagued and mortified till your mighty self-will grows faint and you surrender to the will of God. Then you begin in earnest to flee all that God forbids in His Word. If, on the contrary, you begin to seek “the counsel of the ungodly,” and excuse and defend the sin, to disguise your entrance upon “the way of sinners” (Ps. 1:1), then you are fallen. You are planning within yourself to follow the way of sin. And then your resistance to the Spirit is intentional. In that case you should not console yourself with the guidance of God, but go on your own way to calamity.

## June 8

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*Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you – Matt. 5:44.*

From these words, note the attitude of the Lord Christ, and how the Christians should be like-minded: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you.” May every Christian reflect upon how high a goal the Lord here puts before us. So that we at least may know what holiness is, and that we may not walk through our life in the darkness of our wicked nature. The Lord Christ does not only punish those who hate their enemies, who speak bad of them, or do something evil to them. But also He does not want to consider those to be pious who neglect to *love* them, and to do good to them. Because when He says: “Love your enemies,” then “love” really means to love, it means to have a heart burning with mercy, and sincerely wishing them all good.

Secondly, He also wants this love to prove itself by benign words and intercessions, when He says: “Bless them that curse you.” When hatred and enmity cannot be practiced in any other way, then it usually shows itself by words. A man may try to disparage his enemy in every possible way, to spoil his reputation and to say all kinds of evil things about him. But here the Lord Christ says that, on the contrary, you should speak well and not wish anything evil. You should bless them that curse you. Yes, listen to how Paul expresses the same thing as Christ has said to us here: “Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not” (Rom. 12:14). Oh, my God, how far we are from Thy mind and Thy judgments! “Bless them which persecute us!” Oh, Lord God, do not condemn us! And the apostle repeats twice the word bless. Thereby he gives us to understand how necessary it is to take that admonition to our hearts and observe it. But when we should thus love, bless, and speak well about our enemies, about “them which persecute us,” who are those we should hate and speak bad about? It will seem here as if such things would not at all belong to a holy mind, a follower of Jesus. He should not hate, speak bad about, or curse anybody.

But here someone may say: Do we not read in the Scripture that also holy men, yes, Christ Himself and His apostles, have spoken hard words against the enemies? Is that called to love and bless them? Reply: The hard and punishing words the saints have spoken in the name of the Lord have been the punishment and curse of the holy God, not of any man. What is done *ex officio*, such as when a judge pronounces a death sentence, or the executioner executes a man, or when a teacher punishes someone by the words of God and in the mind of Christ, all such is the punishment of God. And what God does is right and holy. But here Christ speaks of what we, only as human beings, should do against those who are hostile towards

us. He does not speak of what an office does, but of what the individual does. And then He says only: Love, bless, speak well, do good.

To the proving of such a love also belongs what the Lord says in verse 42: “Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.” Even if it is your enemy that is in distress, hasten to help him: “Do good to them that hate you.” And the Lord gives two persuasive reasons why we should love our enemies and do good to them. First that, in this way, we are like our heavenly Father — as good children. He says: “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45). The Lord mentions the sun and the rain here, as the two main means through which all the fruit and blessing of the earth are being given to us. And thereby He has comprised all the infinite richness of all the gifts and blessings of God on earth. And He gives them constantly to His enemies as equally as to His children and friends. Such is the way of the heart of God. We also should be likeminded.

The second reason the Lord gives here is that in the opposite case we are not like Him, but like even very ungodly men. He says: “For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?” When those who otherwise want to be considered as good and pious people are so false in their love that they only love and serve *their own friends*, surely they should wake up at these words of Christ. Even wicked people, thieves or robbers, are not so far gone that they do not keep friendship within their band. Christ says that even the devils have this affinity; otherwise their kingdom would soon be destroyed (Luke 11). See now your standard of piety when you are friendly and benignant only towards your friends. You are as pious as thieves and robbers, yes, as the devils, too.

## June 9

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*For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us – 1 Cor. 5:7.*

**T**he children of Israel sighed under hard, unbearable bondage. From Egypt there came a continuous invocation to the Lord with regard to their distress and groaning, and nobody could deliver them from it. Pharaoh and his armies were too mighty for them. The final peak of this distress of bondage, however, was not reached until Moses appeared. But when Moses began to bid them to go out from the country of bondage, and said to Pharaoh: “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let My people go!” (Exod. 5:1) — then the bondage and tyranny became quite dreadful. The people cried and wailed most miserably and complained of Moses having vexed the king to increased cruelty by these words, so greatly did they despair of their deliverance from bondage. And at that very moment, the hour of the Lord came. How did their deliverance happen? It only happened because of the wonder of the omnipotence of God. On a dark, terrible night the Lord took revenge upon the oppressors of His people when He slew all that was firstborn in Egypt, and it was the blood of the passover that saved the oppressed from the sword of the righteous Revenger.

Is not this a beautiful picture of the deliverance of the whole world by Jesus Christ? Have we not also a great redemption to celebrate? The one described above is only a weak shadow of the great redemption that happened at the death of Christ. Let us ponder this! Because of the Fall of man the whole world had come into the devil’s power. The image of God was lost, and also his free will! The human being became a slave under the Pharaoh of the abyss, governed and driven according to his will by the lusts and delusions which were the “sheriffs and magistrates” he put over us. Under this bondage all mankind sighed. However, they did not fully realize their distress, till the law came and spoke more explicitly of the requirements of God than did the conscience. Not until then the stings of conscience began to become strong on the earth. No jot and no tittle of the holy law of God could be given up, and the irrevocable judgment of the law was that those who sinned had to die, and there was none that was righteous, not even one. Here was an inexpressible and widespread distress. Then the great, merciful God had mercy. He could not allow His image and child, the human being He had created, be eternally lost. “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law” (Gal. 4:4–5). These were they of whom the Spirit of prophecy had already sung so joyously: “They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest... For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian” (Isa. 9:3–4). “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given” (Isa. 9:6). Note here how the Spirit of the Lord looks back

at Israel's distress in bondage in Egypt, when He speaks of "the yoke of his burden, the staff of his shoulder, and the rod of his oppressor." And here He also speaks of the redemption work of Christ for the whole world. How does it read in the New Testament? In Heb. 2:14–15 the apostle says: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." In Gal. 3:13 the apostle says: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." And furthermore in Eph. 1:7: "In whom [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." Thus the Spirit of the Lord has expressly mentioned the bondage and the oppressors from which Christ has redeemed us. He mentions sin, the curse of the law, and the devil. At last the Lord also addresses the last enemy, Death, and says: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death! I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction" (Hos. 13:14).

Oh, this is a magnificent, majestic threat against our enemy! Oh, eternal, praiseworthy love! Oh, eternal, mighty comfort for our poor sinful hearts! Here now is our passover, our great, eternal redemption! The sin of all the world, the godlessness and bondage in sin of all the human beings from Adam to the last man in the world, were laid on the pure Lamb of God, and the unbearable burden pressed Him so that He sweated blood. He wails and prays, He sighs like the lamb on the slaughtering-block, but He goes faithfully through it all. All the curse of the law, all its threats and punishments for sin are collected upon Him, so that He became a curse in our place, but thereby He also redeemed us from the curse of the law, in order that we should "inherit blessing." "Before Thee, people shall rejoice, for Thou hast broken the yoke of our burdens, the staff of our shoulders, and the rod of our oppressor." At last also Death, the wages of sin, came and attacked and killed Eternal Life, but was thereby swallowed by the victory. Thus He laid down "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered us who through fear of death were all our lifetime subject to bondage." This is now our Easter delight, and this is our song of victory: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? ... But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55, 57).

## June 10

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*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us . . . to look for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ – Tit. 2:11–13.*

☾☾ The coming of the Lord draweth nigh,” says James. What then can be the reason why the thought of the coming of the Lord occupies us so little? In spite of much less outer reason for it, this thought was so lively, present, and common with the first Christians. What can the reason be that at such signs of the times as those of our days, it now is so strange to us? It has vanished almost entirely from our circles, our hearts, our discussions and spiritual discourses. We do not deny that we rather commonly stick to the doctrine about the coming of the Lord as an article of faith. But from this it does not follow that we also have the coming of Christ as our hope. We do not ask: Do you believe that the Lord shall come? But: Do you live in this hope, in a real expectancy of His coming? And not many among us can reply, “yes” to this question! If it were so that all believers were walking in the hope and waiting for the coming of our glorified Lord, then this hope would reveal itself more in our sermons, in our Christian discussions, in our daily life. Then all sorts of creeds, and often unbiblical doctrines of the future of the church and the state of the dead, would not be able to creep in among us.

But we revert to the matter: What can the reason be why the thought of the coming of the Lord is so strange to us, yes, almost unwelcome, when it was so lively, dear, and present to the hearts of the first Christians? It definitely is not a good sign. Every hope presupposes a wish. And every wish has its root in what we love. If we really desire and long for the coming of the Lord, when all dimness in the faith, all weakness, all sin, all unfaithfulness against our dear Savior will come to an end, and we shall own Him the way we have been owned by Him, see Him as He is, and become like Him, if we desire more this revelation of Him, then we would also seek, and joyously take hold of all the existing reasons for the blessed hope of this desired day. Thus if we wished to be more spiritually-minded, if we loved our Savior more, and were more desirous of what love always desires, namely, to become wholly united with Him, that all distance and all uncertainty might cease, then we would also live more in the hope of that day. We therefore also always find a great difference between Christians in this respect. There are people who take the Word of God to their hearts more earnestly, and live in a more attentive exercise of repentance before God, and the faith that is in our Lord Jesus Christ. So that the spirit of the fear of God all the time watches over all their being. Sin therefore must not be unpunished, but is painfully felt, and the grace in Christ is also dearer and more important. Because of sin, however, it is often clouded and hidden from their eyes. To them the blessed hope and the glorious coming of our



Lord Christ are a dear theme, a living hope. With a heartfelt longing they look forward to the day when the heavy fog enveloping their faith here, will be dispelled by the great glory of the Lord. They look forward to the day when they will see their Friend and Savior. Here they have believed in Him. They have spoken with Him, and they have been accompanied by Him, though they have not seen Him. They look forward to the day when they will at last enjoy forever what they had sought in vain here, namely a perfect clarity, a full assurance, the perceptible presence of the Savior. In addition they will then be free from the evil flesh forever, the flesh that brought along so much sin, weakness, and tribulation. They will be eternally free from the flaming shots of the evil enemy.

If we were more dead to the world and present things, and had our life and our joy only in God, then surely this would be a blessed hope to our hearts. But where the heart is divided, where it is taken up by other things, even if they are innocent and good in themselves, there this longing for the heavenly Bridegroom cannot find entrance, and that life cannot be rightly wholesome and sound, as it does not agree with the word and the mind of the first Christians. “Our conversation is in heaven,” says Paul, “from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself” (Phil. 3:20–21). And he admonishes us: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid — yes hid — with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3:1–4).

Oh, that we would take this doctrine of Christ and His apostles as regards the coming of the Lord, and the hope of salvation for the Christians more to our hearts!

## June 11

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*As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me* – John 6:57.

**T**he essential thing, yes, the very being of the new man, the reason why we also are called Christians, is that Christ has become the life and vital need of our hearts. Christ, the crucified One, the Taker away of our sins, the Savior, the Friend above other friends. Yes, to put it plainly, that in His atonement the Savior is the most necessary and sweetest thing to us, bears witness that we are Christians, that we have eaten of the Bread of Life and are hungering the more; that we have drunk of the water of Life, and thirst the more for it. When a Christian thinks of what especially distinguishes his new life and is the greatest thing therein, then it is this: that he has become acquainted and united with his Savior, that Christ has become the Object of all his life, his Alpha and Omega, his first and his last. In his new life Christ is the sun lighting up and shedding its rays upon all. Everything moves around this. Christ found is his joy, and Christ lost is his sorrow. In brief: Christ is his life. A Christian is recognized by that.

Here especially two things should be noted. First, that it has now become a new nature for us to be anxious to have the friendship of God. Before we were quite indifferent about God and His grace, and we had only earthly needs and wishes: What shall we eat? What shall we drink? But now our perpetual main question is: Am I a child of God? Do I have the friendship of God? This is, so to say, the breath or the heartbeats of the new man. But note, this must downright be your new nature; not an occasional care, but a nature continuing all through your life. First and last you must be anxious to have the friendship of your God. There may be great variations in your comfort, your peace, your power, etc. Also this very anxiety for the friendship of God can be interrupted by a temporary diversion. But soon you will wake up with yet more anxiety. It is something especially characteristic for the new man that he still in general has this anxiety, and it affects us most deeply. It certainly is not flesh and blood, but is contrary to our nature.

The second thing is that, in your anxiety for the grace of God, nothing has become your solace, other than Christ, Christ, the blood of His atonement and the Word of His gospel. There you have your refuge, your life, your food, and your contentment. It was this that Christ spoke most about: “He that eateth Me” (John 6:57). “Him that cometh to Me” (John 6:37). “If a man keep My saying” (John 8:51). “He that believeth in Me” (John 11:25). There are strong, emphatic words about this main point when Christ says: “He that eateth Me.” “I am the Bread of Life: My flesh is meat indeed.” “Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life” (John 6:54). Such words show plainly that Christ is the vital need of the faithful, the condition of their life, their all and in all.

You may have become religious, and you may have church matters at heart, but that does not yet prove that you are a Christian. Note how Christ speaks: “He that eateth Me” — Me — the one having his vital need only in Christ, His grace, and His atonement. Neither is it a proof of a true Christianity that you worship Christ as your Teacher or Example. A Christian Pharisee at ease can do that. No, this is the matter of whether, in His atoning death, He has become your daily Shield against sin. This alone characterizes a Christian. This is what the Revelation mentions as the sign and the shibboleth song which distinguished the sealed, because no man could learn that song but these. And the song was: “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood” (Rev. 5:9). This is so often repeated by Luther in his explanation of Gal. 4:6, where he describes the signs of the dwelling of the Spirit of God in our hearts. He says: “The one gladly hearing, speaking, thinking, and writing about Christ should know that such things certainly do not happen because of a human will or reason.” Yes, this is so essential and distinguishing a feature of the new man, that if I only find this with a man, I say immediately: “He is a Christian!” quite the same way as I say: “It is a man!” immediately I see a human body in front of me, and hear it speak a human language. If now such a Christian has an offensive fault, a bad habit then I say: “It is a defect, an illness, but — he is a Christian.” Because it is impossible that somebody can, in the accepted way, have his vital need, his solace, and his life in Christ, and still not be a friend of Christ, a Christian. This is how essential it is!

## June 12

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*All flesh is grass* – Isa. 40:6.

Everything man is false, weak, wavering, uncertain, flighty — such as reason, feeling, thought, and thinking. For instance, one minute I see God in all that comes before my eyes, and the next I think that there is no God in the world. One minute I think that God is sheer overflowing grace and love, the next that He is weary, ungracious, and has turned away from me, and is angry. One minute I think that I am rather a passable Christian, and the next that I am quite a hopeless sinner. In brief: my thinking, my feeling, all is like a reed shaken with the wind. Everything is wavering, uncertain, false, flighty, lying. As the prophet says: “All flesh is grass.” Thus I see finally that nothing of what I myself think is worthy of any attention. Lord, what shall I then console myself with? Yes, I know, there is one thing that is certain and imperturbable eternally. In heaven there is a Judge sitting on His throne — the great, holy God! He has spoken and sent down an eternally imperturbable Word from heaven, and its judgments stand firm as the mountains. Yes, even if heaven and earth pass away, no letter of His Word will be changed.

What does now the eternal Word say about us, about our worthiness or unworthiness, or about what we look like to the eyes of God? It says: “The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Ps. 14:2–3). “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10).

We now add to this that God is so holy, that to Him even the heavens are not clean. He even finds impurity with His angels and foolishness with His saints. Thus we see that no man can stand before Him. We see that all together are worthy of eternal condemnation and are equal therein. We see that Judas and John are worthy of the same condemnation. We see that Peter and the sorcerer Simon, the virgin Mary, and the harlot have equally deserved one and the same hell. You say: “Oh, how dreadful and unreasonable! Yes, see how our reason makes objections, when we rightly pronounce the contents of the words: “There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:22–24).

Before men there is a difference, but not before God. To be sure there is a distance between the bottom of a vale and the top of a mountain here on earth. But when we look at the distance of both of them from the sun, then this distance vanishes. It is not taken into account. Because the distance is so great that, about both of them, we

only say: The distance is immense. So also to us there is a difference between one man and another, one hour and another. But to God it is not so. All that is called man, even a most faithful and pious Christian, is only an impure earthworm. His best deeds are infected with the poison of the old serpent. His faith, love, prayer, and praising are his best works, and have been worked by the Spirit of God. But still they have been contaminated by the impurity of the vessel. His faith has been mixed with slag, self-righteousness, and unbelief. His love is small, limited, and negligent. His prayer and praising are cold, weak, and unworthy of the great Majesty. These perpetual shortcomings would be sufficient to condemn a man. And in addition he all the time falls into sin, and makes himself unclean while walking. He can never be so vigilant, that he will not become infected with ungodliness here and there. All the earth is covered by unrighteousness as if by a surging flood of sin — such as idol-worship, unbelief, sorrow, and despair. The taking of the name of God in vain, swearing and ungodly speaking, Sabbath-breaking, disobedience, wrath, hatred, quarrels, fornication, looseness, impurity, greed, theft, fraud, falseness, lying, and slandering. And where all this does not break forth in deed, the heart still boils with evil desires, thoughts, and inward movements, which are sheer impurity to the eyes of the Holy One.

The state of fallen mankind is like that! How then can a man stand before God? O man, what are you going to pay your debts with? You cannot reply to Him one against thousand. Even if you have been a faithful Christian for a long time, even if you have experienced much and accomplished much, it does not count for anything. Woe to you, if God looks on you with His holy eyes! An old, pious servant of God knew this, and therefore prayed: “And enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified” (Ps. 143:2). To God no living man is righteous. That is the judgment of the Word. Look how contrary this is to our thinking and feeling. Men keep telling us that we are more worthy of grace when we are a bit more pious. Or that it is then easier for God to forgive us. But on the contrary, when we have sinned, we think that it will be more difficult for God to forgive us. In that way grace and righteousness would, at least to some extent, be of our works, of our worthiness. But we now see that the Scripture denies this. Therefore, remember that you are equally worthy and equally unworthy at all moments. Such is the judgment of the heavenly, eternal Word.

## June 13

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*Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ – Phil. 3:9.*

When Paul says: “If one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Cor. 5:14), he says at the same time: “If one has fulfilled the law for all, then they have all fulfilled the law.” The reason being, the apostle says plainly, that Christ was made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law! One has fulfilled the law for all. If I then want to be a Christian, to believe in and honor the Son, aright, then surely I must say definitely: “I have perfectly fulfilled the law. I am quite free from guilt. But certainly, not in myself, certainly not in my own person; but through my Surety, Mediator, and Representative, Christ. I would deserve to be thrown away in outer darkness at once, if I did not do Him this honor for all His labor, that I consider myself perfectly righteous only in Him. Because if I did not believe and confess so, why, it would be as if I said either that He had not rightly performed the task He had taken on, and had not kept the law perfectly and undergone the punishment for our sins, or, that it did not really happen for us, but that He needed it for Himself! What a confession would that be for a Christian.

Imagine that there is an unhappy servant who has destroyed the property of the king, and has been thrown into prison because of his great debt. But out of great mercy and heartfelt compassion the son of the king intercedes for the unhappy man, pays all the debt, and furthermore undergoes the punishment in prison which had been inflicted on the servant. And the king has accepted this. How then would it be possible that this debt would ever again be claimed from the servant? And what would the poor servant do? Would he not fall down before the son of the king with heartfelt joy and gratitude and say: “You have done everything well. It is enough, and all is made eternally right by what you have done!” Would it not be a sin, and a shame above all other sin, if he still thought and said: “Yes, but I have not myself, in my own person, undergone my punishment, and paid my debt by my own means. How can I then be safe, so that I do not remain in prison?” Would this not be to say: “Who knows if one can rely on what the king and his son have said and done?”

The Word says plainly: “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God [did], sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3)! And again: “Made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law” (Gal. 4:4–5). It plainly says, that God sent His Son to do what the law could not do! “Made under the law.” Then He was in our prison “to redeem them that were under the law.” It certainly is no dream or fiction, but the eternal, divine truth that ever since the foundation of the world all the Scripture has revealed as the

sum of all, that God gave us His Son to be our Mediator and Savior. He Himself says about the law: “I am come to fulfill” it (Matt. 5:17). “I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth” (John 17:19). “Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me), to do Thy will, O God” (Heb. 10:7) — “by which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:10). What do we want to do about this? Surely it is by far too much that God Himself gives us the fulfillment of all the law. God has been by far too great, strange, and inconceivable for us in everything. What else should we do than only to accept it as children, and thank Him for it? And with our heart’s joy and love in return use the glorious freedom and sincerely, gladly, and willingly, like children, love and serve our gracious Father, and do the good things we get grace for. But first as last we should know, that our righteousness before God consists of the works of Another. Therefore this righteousness remains and is undiminished even though we ourselves may be at our most wretched. And because of it our sins are not imputed to us.

“But,” you say, “what shall we do when the law punishes us because of our sin?” Reply: We should at once agree because there is nothing good in our flesh. But we should also refer the law to Christ, because He alone is our Righteousness. We should say: “There is the Man who, in my place, has fulfilled all that I should have done. Go to Him. He is my Surety. He was made under the law and certainly has not sinned.” But maybe the law again says: “Nevertheless, you should also be pious yourself and do good.” Then reply: “It is true. And when it is the matter of my life, and I am among men who have need, then remind me. Then I will be glad to listen to you. But when it is now the matter of my righteousness before God, then my deeds are not valid, but those of Another. Then neither my piety nor my sin matters anything; because I would certainly be lost, if I were to be judged according to them. I have the piety, holiness, and purity of Another. I have the love and good deeds of Another, the Son of God, who was made under the law. On this point I gladly admit to being a great sinner in myself, and do not want to be called anything else, so that Christ alone may be my Righteousness. Here I say with Paul: “Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ” (Phil. 3:9).

## June 14

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*All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits* – Prov. 16:2.

**H**ow many and varied are the ideas about the way to salvation! And everybody thinks he knows the right one. As the Scripture says: “All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes.” We know that nobody seems to be safer than the dead, blind world which, least of all, looks for the truth. In a light mood and with a confident and decisive tone one says: “Do only right to everybody, and good to as many as you can. And be certain that God will not demand more. God is mild and just.” Another says: “There is nothing on my conscience. I go to confession and lead an orderly life, and I believe that Christ has suffered and died. If there are shortcomings — and nobody is perfect — God will forgive them.” A third says: “God has seen my prayers and tears when I have been alone. That is my consolation.” A fourth: “My heart tells me that God is gracious towards me. His gracious acts of providence regarding me, tell me so. Yes, in a private way (e.g., in a dream) He has told me so Himself. There is no need for me to look into the matter anymore,” etc.

But a fifth, a more serious soul says: “More is needed here. A radical awakening, a true repentance, faith, and sanctification — that is the way.” But also as regards the serious, Christ says: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24). And Paul says: “I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge” (Rom. 10:2). Then one has his all and in all, his psalm and his song in the order of grace mentioned above, so that Christ and all His merit are as nothing against it. Another only speaks about faith. A third only about works. A fourth puts all salvation in contrition and the feeling of condemnation. A fifth only speaks about self-denial, self-effort, prayer, being dead to the world and his own will. A sixth says: “The greatest of these is charity (1 Cor. 13:13), prayer, humbleness, and love — that is the way.” A seventh says: “The demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that is my thing. Lord, have I not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?” (Matt. 7:22).

Such and still more numerous are the different opinions and the supposed ways to salvation. In the midst of Christendom they cross one another. To be sure they contain many precious things, virtues, and exercises. And no Christian should despise them, but strive after them in earnest. Yes, they are such things as are found only in true Christians in reality. But the distinguishing thing of a true Christian, the thing that also proves that these virtues are genuine and the works of the Spirit, still does not rest in these confessions. All this spirituality can be equally far from the true one as Sibboleth deviated from Shibboleth (Judg. 12:6). With all this good



one can still get the following reply on the great day of the Lord. "I know you not. Depart from Me!" Only look at Matt. 7:22–23. There the Lord Himself says: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, ... and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

Maybe somebody asks here: Has then the holy Scripture given any distinguishing mark of the kingdom of Christ whereby true spirituality differs from all the false ways? Reply: Yes, praise God! Those who have already come to the truth and have eyes to see, find this everywhere in the Scripture. They see that there is only one thing on which everything depends. They see that it is the characteristic feature, secret, and main thing of all true Christianity that Christ, Christ, has become the all and in all of the heart. They quite decidedly see it like this: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12). Because life is in the Son of God. Everybody should now use this to examine his own spirituality. And the one who has come to the light should thank God! Surely then, he must also understand much as regards other kinds of spirituality. He must thereby not only be wise and careful in his love, but zealous of love in his carefulness. Many of those who have not yet come to the truth and the life will, nevertheless, come there one day, and so, especially if all the faithful seek to enlighten them with love and wisdom. In conclusion: Some have zeal for and insist upon contrition and seriousness as their most important thing. Others again love and humbleness. Others self-denial and crucifying the flesh, etc. All this is good. All these things are precious. But still they are not life. They are only preparatory things. From the blessed, sealed multitude singing praise before the throne of the Lamb, somebody can still come forth and say: "I have worked to achieve all this good. But when I worked most I noticed that the eyes of God were as flames of fire. To Him not even the heavens were clean. I noticed that the judgment of God went much higher than that of men, 'and I died' (Rom. 7:9). But Christ became my Life, and He is now my Psalm and my Salvation. In comparison with Him I have counted everything as filth, and consider it impurity. The Lord has given me a new song in my mouth: 'Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood. Thou art worthy to receive glory and honor and power forever and ever. Amen.'"

## June 15

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*Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it – Heb. 4:1.*

**H**ere somebody may say: That is exactly what I fear. Well, at present I have grace to believe. But how shall I be able to stand to the end? One sees how many can fall away and be lost! Here you have the reply. Christ says: “I am the good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine... My sheep hear My voice... They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand” (John 10:14, 27–28). These words show that nobody needs to despair as to his standing. Nobody needs to be lost. Nobody can be plucked out of the hand of the good Shepherd. Nobody can be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And the Scripture does not go further with regard to its assurances to this effect.

Many are not content with being all the time dependent upon Christ, and want to have assurance that they can never fall away. But the Scripture does not give any such assurance. Instead it proves the contrary and warns everybody of the danger. Thus we are always left in fear as regards ourselves and in reliance on the Lord alone. And this is most wholesome for us. This is also what the Scripture insists upon in plain words: “Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Pet. 1:17). “Rejoice with trembling” (Ps. 2:11). “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest any of you should seem to come short of it.” “O fear the Lord, ye His saints: for there is no want to them that fear Him” (Ps. 34:9).

What is now our consolation in the Lord? It is that Christ, the Son of God, has given His life for us and is our Shepherd. He has such love and faithfulness, that He has taken flesh for our sake. He has become “like unto His brethren” (Heb. 2:17). He has been “in all points tempted like as we are,” and He has given His life for the sheep. Then what should we not expect from Him? When, in addition, He is an almighty God, which enemy can then do any damage to the sheep lying on His shoulders, hearing His voice, and sticking to Him? It is our consolation that He, the good Shepherd, will Himself feed His sheep. That is, He will all the time maintain our faith by the Word of the gospel. He will still strengthen and enliven the consolation and joy in Him, the love, patience, and hope. He will seek the lost sheep and bring back the sheep gone astray. So that, when we also have gone astray from the right way, He still will not leave us. But He will go after the sheep that is away, cry, and call it back. And if it again only begins to listen to His voice, He will lay it on His shoulders with joy. Moreover, He will bind up that which is broken. That is, He will comfort and solace the souls severely handled by Satan, and restore their peace and health. Christ will strengthen the weak and gather the lambs not capable of following the flock. He will gather them with His arm and carry them in His bosom. In brief, He will attend to all the sheep the way they need.

But should not the sheep themselves do anything about the matter? About them the Lord says only this: “My sheep hear My voice.” First of all, this is quite the same thing as: “They trust in Me. They have no other hope than what is in Me,” because we care about the voice of the one who is our hope at the moment of distress. Secondly, it means to hear the voice of the Shepherd, to pay attention to it, to revere and pay heed to it, and to distinguish it from strange voices. And this is all that is needed, because all that the good Shepherd does to preserve us He does by means of His voice. When we then care only about His voice, then everything will be remedied. All the cunning attacks of Satan, all the temptations of the flesh, all the seductions of the world, all our weakness, unbelief, coldness, pride — in brief, all that is evil is remedied only by His voice. No Christian is so strong, so learned in God, so believing, so steady in his Christianity that he cannot be attacked by any possible evil thing. Everything depends upon whether he still has such a mind that he lets the Word of Truth matter more than his own thoughts, opinions, and feelings, and thus lets himself be corrected, punished, consoled. This is called hearing the voice of the Shepherd. Then everything can be helped.

We see that the disciples of the Savior had never come to such a perfect intellect, faith, watchfulness, and strength that they could lead themselves, believe, and walk as they should. No, there were daily greater or smaller shortcomings. But the reason they were still kept and grew in grace was only that they were close to the Shepherd, that they still listened to His voice, and that they let themselves be corrected daily by Him. They let themselves be warned, punished, and consoled. Thereby everything was put right again. And then they always learnt more and more what they needed to learn. On the other hand, what was the reason why the poor Judas was lost? Nothing other than that he did not hear the voice of the Shepherd. When the devil suggested evil to his heart, he did not care about the warnings of the Lord. And when his conscience awoke with fright, he did not let the words of grace console him. Had he only cared about the voice of his gracious Shepherd, then everything would have been remedied. Therefore, as long as we still hear the voice of the Shepherd, love the word about Christ, and use it seriously to get power for faith, love, and the fear of God, listen to the faithful Friend accompanying us though He is invisible, and speaking to our hearts, so long no hostile power will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Because the Lord is greater than all. And He has declared solemnly: “They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.”

## June 16

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*He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself* – 1 John 5:10.

**S**omebody may question whether any man can really know here in this present time that he is a child of God, or whether he can and should seek full assurance thereof. This is usually one of the excuses of the unwilling. It is stated by those who are still feeling most happy in darkness, in uncertainty. But all the Scripture bears witness that all the old faithful have got the witness by faith that they have pleased God. Only by such faith it has been possible for them to die with joy at the stake. And the apostles say plainly: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:16). “He that believeth hath the witness in himself.” “He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar” (1 John 5:10). Note the last thing! The Lord cries plainly: “Let him that is athirst come” (Rev. 22:17). “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isa. 1:18).

When I am still all the time uncertain about the forgiveness of my sins, what is it other than to make God a liar? Or in some way to say: I do not know whether one can rely on what the Lord says. And is that a confession becoming for a Christian? “Therefore,” Luther says, “we should from day to day aspire to get from doubt to assurance. And we should take pains to pull up — by the root and all — the very injurious delusion by which all the world has been allured. And that is the thought that man cannot know if he is inside or outside grace. Because if we doubt the grace of God towards us, and do not think it certain that God has pleasure in us for the sake of Christ, then we deny that Christ has redeemed us. Then we overthrow all His works, and the benefactions He has ever shown us.” Verily, the one who is satisfied without assurance of the treasure, does not attach much value to it! It is quite another thing that we should seek assurance in the Word, and not in the feelings.

But now the peace and assurance of a Christian do not consist of the fact that he considers himself pious and faithful, and is satisfied with himself. No, on the contrary, there is nobody who feels more sin within himself than a very deeply believing Christian. But his consolation and glory is that Christ has suffered death for us sinners, and that he is righteous by faith, i.e., by grace. On this foundation we should by right have a perpetual and imperturbable peace! We should say: “In myself I am worthy all the time of condemnation. But in Christ I am clean and righteous all the time, yes, well-pleasing and lovable to God. I only rely on what is valid for all, for very great sinners. Because, verily, Christ has reconciled all the world by His death, and not only the faithful. To be sure, my sins are dreadful, many, and grave, so that I had well deserved never to be allowed to have a happy moment. But what shall I do, when Christ, nevertheless, was gracious and took

my sins on Himself and suffered death for me, a sinner? Then I dare not despair. Then I dare not be without believing and rejoicing.

After all, I certainly have not been baptized to myself, so that I shall stand in my own righteousness. But I have been baptized into Christ, so that I shall have put on Him and His righteousness. If God wants to impute our sins, who then would be able to stand? Why, we cannot reply to Him one against thousand! But as all the gospel of God testifies that God plainly gave His Son for our atonement, then I dare not make it a lie. It is true I feel something else in my heart and conscience. There I do not feel righteousness, but on the contrary sin and wretchedness. But when God Himself in His Word says that the very sin and wretchedness I feel have been blotted out, paid, forgiven — then I, nevertheless, want to let God be greater than my heart, and be a God that does not lie. What God has done and said is much more certain than what I, a poor man, see or feel.

Now He has not only reconciled me unto Himself in the death of Christ and assured me of this in His Word, but in the sacraments. He has also given me a seal and testament to all the treasure of salvation and eternal bliss. In baptism He has made especially my person participant of all the merit of Christ. And in an eternal, imperturbable testament He has secured it for me. Even if I have gone away from my treasure in sin and unbelief, the treasure still has not gone away. Still the covenant remains with God. Shall our unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid (Rom. 3:3–4). Even if I have fallen from the ark, the ark still has not broken down. I still have my security in the same ark. The ark, baptism, testament, and grace of God do not fall and waver because of my falling. But they stand firm forever. Thus my consolation and peace stand on what is with God, not on what is with me. My glory reads like this: The blood of Christ is worth more than my sins. The Word of God is worth more than my thoughts and feelings. The covenant of baptism, the testament is valid with God, though I have been away therefrom for a long time. Against the blood of Christ all my sins are only as small sparks against the great, wide ocean. Against the Word of God all my contradictions, thinkings, and feelings are only like dust against a great mountain. On the firmness of the same fountain I want both to live and to die confidently.

## June 17

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*But my people would not hearken to my voice... So I gave them up unto their own heart's lust: and they walked in their own counsels* – Ps. 81:11–12.

**H**ere we see what the result is when we do not know the time of our visitation, but resist and grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Then the good, gracious Spirit must depart. And what else can the merciful God do? Out of an eternal, incomprehensible love, He has sent us His only Son. He has come to us, become our Brother and our Mediator. He has taken our sins and obligations upon Himself. He has been the Servant of His servants. He has fulfilled the law for us. And He has atoned for our iniquities by bitter suffering and death and restored our right as children and our inheritance in heaven. He sends us His Word and His Holy Spirit, and they seek us lovingly. They knock at our hearts and bid us to the great supper of grace. When all this is in vain, when we continually despise both His warnings and His grace, love our “farm” and our “merchandise” more than all the grace of God, love the friendship of the world more than the friendship of God, and therefore continually resist and grieve His Holy Spirit, what can He then do other than leave us to the counsel of our own will and say: “If you do not want to follow Me, then you will follow the devil, and your own lusts.” And then He leaves the man to himself.

And immediately he becomes dead and blinded, so that no word of God moves him. But quite at ease he continues in his sins, believes the lie, and falls into all sorts of delusions, in sin and shame. Now the Word says: “But My people would not hearken to My voice... So I gave them up unto their own heart's lust: and they walked in their own counsels.” They will sin and the Word will not touch them. The apostle also says: “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imagination, and their foolish heart was darkened... Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves” (Rom. 1:21–23). “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.” That way a human being becomes “blinded.” And think what this means! All spiritual capability to perceive ceases. He becomes quite indifferent and cold, inaccessible to any Word of God. The mind becomes light and careless. Neither the sweet calling of grace nor the darts of the law can upset this terrible death-slumber. He no longer feels any remorse at the past. Neither does he feel any worry for the future.

A dead body does not feel a glowing coal put on its breast. No drop of rain can penetrate into a hard rock, even if water is flowing over it from all the windows of heaven. It is like that with the human being whose heart has been blinded. If he is in church, he is not moved even by very strong truths, though all the others may see the “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” therein (1 Cor. 2:4). He can

be present at baptisms and holy communions. But it does not work any solemn sentiment in him. Equally little is he moved by a funeral. Spread out the great glories of heaven to him; they do not attract him. Show him the anguish of the condemned; he will not become frightened. Take him to Golgotha and put Christ before his eyes, Christ who bled and died for sinners; he will still be equally stern, cold as ice, and hard as stone. Friends may beg him; he does not care about it. Teachers may warn him; it does not touch him a bit. He is like a stone. A stone can be blasted to pieces, but it does not melt. It does not become soft. It is like that with the one who is blinded. In such the word comes true: "Woe also to them when I depart from them!" (Hos. 9:12). Oh, my God, gladly would I become poor, yes, even a beggar. Gladly would I fall ill and become blind and deaf. Only do not let me become spiritually blinded! "Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11).

Do you still fear with regard to yourself? Can the Word of God still induce you to care about repentance, to desire to believe and to be a child of God? Then you have proof enough in yourself that you have not been left in a wrong mind. But watch out for the devil saying: "You know within yourself that you have sins. They follow you all the time. Therefore you must have been abandoned by God." No, the fact that sin persecutes us does not prove anything. That is the hardship and complaint of all the faithful, as long as they are in the flesh. Allow only the Spirit to punish you. Seek redemption and keep close to the mercy seat. Listen to the gospel and try, quite contrary to all reason and feeling, to believe in the eternally purifying blood. If you do so, then the Spirit still dwells in you as in its right repair shop. The whole of His office is only to nurse infirm sinners. If you have become quite free from every sin, then He would not have anything to do in you anymore. The kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of sinners. Therefore, do not let yourself be led astray! Only those who do not allow the Spirit of God to punish them will be forsaken by Him. And may God preserve us graciously from that! God, God, do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me! Do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me!

## June 18

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*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – 2 Pet. 3:18.*

Someone may say: “Well, I have begun to believe, but I still feel such an infinite weakness on one point or other. How shall I come to more power and growth in sanctification?” Oh, how deplorable that one could be dependent on Christ in all things! Yes, that is what the old Adam really thinks, but what does it help to think like that? To an exhausted, humiliated, mortified child of grace dependence on Christ is still a most glorious consolation. And this we all probably admit. Many have also experienced it. They have experienced that the very same thing that was quite impossible to them at a time when they most seriously worked and struggled with it, became infinitely easy to them at another time when the Lord gave faith, peace, rejoicing, and power. Then things went as if of themselves. Still we continually forget this. The old, perpetual selfishness in us always raises its serpent’s head again, and we want to try and be capable of doing something ourselves. We say: “Why, I should — I should *do* this and that! I cannot believe that I am so weak.” We do not want to believe that we are not capable of anything at all, except what is evil. And this often causes an inexpressible anguish, tribulation, darkness, and delusions. Most especially if, in addition, we have quite another picture of a Christian before than the one described by the Scripture. And if we dream of quite another way and power than God has promised, namely a smooth, permanent power, so to say, handed over to give us faith, peace, and strength; and if we have such an imagined picture of a Christian in our minds, and still have never found anything corresponding in ourselves, then we soon get into confusion. Then we soon murmur and deny all the grace we have received, and all the work of the Spirit. Our confusion and despair are also doubled when in prayer we, without noticing it, prescribe time and measure to God. We think: “Why, God has promised to hear prayer! And what I pray for now must necessarily be His own will. To be sure He cannot want me to be so weak and sinful, like a bonds slave of the devil. When He does not seem to hear me, I feel that He has fully abandoned me!” Then one easily falls into some foolishness, so that one either denies the Lord, or despairs.

Then it would be good to bear well in mind how the Lord leads His children by strange paths. For instance Paul prayed three times for deliverance from the attacks of the devil. But the reply he got was: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). And let us remember the instruction the apostle drew from this. “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that — note this! — the power of Christ may rest upon me. For when I am weak, then am I strong.” Note again: “When I am weak, then am I strong.” That is the secret of the strength of a Christian! It is as if the apostle



wanted to say: The only thing preventing my being strong is that I am too strong in myself. The more I feel my own weakness, the more of the power of God I get, and the easier it is for God to do with me what He wants. At another place the apostle tells us about an equally difficult distress. He says: “We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death and doth deliver” (2 Cor. 1:8–10).

In this way God must be allowed to become our only Hope, so that we have no other consolation than Himself who can wake the dead. The human being seems very pitiable when he has no other hope than God. He thinks it nothing to have his hope in God! That is the kind of beasts we are. Therefore, we need this exercise, if true faith and strength are ever to be worked in us. It is said about Abraham that, when he went to offer Isaac, he “believed even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.” He “against hope believed in hope” (Rom. 4:17–18). And in Deut. 8:16–18 we have this remarkable explanation as regards the intention of God: “That He might humble thee, and that He might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; and thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is He that giveth thee power.”

In brief: The sooner we come to a thorough despairing of all power in ourselves, the sooner it becomes better with us. Then we fall into the hand of the Lord, and His mercy is great. Then we say to the Lord Christ: “Lord, Thou seest and knowest that I cannot do anything! Thou seest and knowest that I must sooner go to hell a thousand times than I can believe or live any better of myself. If Thou leave me then I dash from sin to sin, from doubt to doubt, from foolishness to foolishness. I only have my hope in Thee, and because Thou hast said: ‘Without Me ye can do nothing!’ (John 15:5) and ‘I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you’ (Isa. 46:4).” Then we may also soon experience it, because when Christ only has been allowed to become our All, then the redemption, peace, and power we have longed for come back. Then we stop in a blessed wonderment at the Lord and say: How easily it goes now, and before it was quite impossible to me! I realize that all depends on whether God gives the power.

## June 19

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*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee* – Isa. 49:15.

**T**he sorrowful Zion, the flock of those faithful to the Lord, had so pitifully lamented in the verse before: “The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.” To this the Lord replies so that when the lamentation of Zion is like that of a man going alone in a forest and speaking to himself, going alone and bewailing his distress to the mountains and the trees in the forest, then the reply of the Lord is as the echo in the mountains. Zion hears a voice, but does not see the speaker. Now we know that an echo replies to the last, and not to the first word! So it is also here. Zion has said: “The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.” He caught the last word: “What do you say? Forgotten me! Can a woman forget her child?” He does not reply to the first word: “forsaken me.” Because it is possible, that the Lord can forsake — or more correctly, pretend to forsake — His children for a while. He hides His face from them, and hides Himself at the time of distress. But it is downright impossible that He would be able to forget them even for a moment. Thus the Lord does not wonder at the first thing Zion says: “The Lord hath forsaken me.” But He cannot suffer that Zion should say also: “My Lord hath forgotten me.” That is too hard a speech. He wants to turn that accusation away from Himself. “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands.”

Thus by these words the Lord announces well enough that He neither can nor wants to forget His Zion. He *cannot*. Equally little as a mother can forget her child, equally little He can do so. And even if *she* were able to, *He* still would not want to do so. Even if she were able to forget him, I still do not want to forget you. He also shows us the reason why He as little wants to as He can, and as little can as He wants to. Because He says: “I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands.” How can I then, how would I then, want to forget you? In other places He shows that He has a father’s love. But that is not enough. He has more. He has a more tender love. He has a mother’s love. “Can a woman forget her sucking child?” Yes, He shows that He has a love that is greater than a mother’s love. “Yea, they may forget [He thinks it is possible that a woman here and there might be able to do so], yet will I not forget thee.” He shows that His love is matchless and unique, as it is greater than a mother’s love.

This is now the deepest foundation for all the goodness, grace, and mercy with which the Lord God has proved mankind ever since the creation; namely the especial love of His own Being — a love that no human being has yet been able to

understand, as nobody has experienced anything resembling this love. Like the whole rest of the Being of God, it is immeasurable, endless, and incomprehensible. Out of this love in His high Being God created man, so preciously equipped and so richly surrounded by everything he might need. All nature speaks about this. Out of this love He sent His Son to be man's Savior, when He had drawn upon Himself a just condemnation because of an offense against the Creator. As Christ says: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Because of this love, He does not only receive very great sinners, but He also seeks them Himself. As Christ says: the father ran to meet his unworthy, depraved son, fell on his neck, and kissed him. And said: "And let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again" (Luke 15:20, 23-24). It is this divine love that speaks here: "Can a woman forget her sucking child?" But who can understand or pronounce this love? Regarding it John could not express himself otherwise than that God was love itself. God is love. This was now the first ground why God at least can never forget us or stop thinking of us.

The second thing to which the loving God draws the attention of His poor Zion, is that the child originates from the life of its mother. He says: the son of her womb. The meaning had been fully expressed only by the word "child." This addition "the son of her womb" was only to remind us of a thing very intimately connected with the mother's heart. But by it all, the Lord wants to express His own heart and relation to the human being. And He cannot point out a thing in the picture that does not correspond to the thing illustrated by the picture. Thus we find a very remarkable reminder rich in comfort. Man is the son of the life of the great God rich in love. Where has man come from? Where have we come from? Where are we from? This curious mankind, man on earth, from where has he come? Is not man the son of the life of God? This is now the basic reason why God cannot forget us completely.

## June 20

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*Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth — 1 Cor. 5:8.*

**H**ere we learn that the holy Passover, Christ, must not be eaten together with the leaven of malice and wickedness, and this at the risk of your soul being extirpated from the Israel of the Lord. What is this? It sounds dreadful! It does not sound rightly evangelical! Does it have ground and application in the sweet doctrine of grace in the New Testament? Certainly! Let us wake up! Many read the words of the apostle about the purging out of the leaven with lightheartedness, as if it does not concern us, but concerns only the children of Israel in Egypt. No, this is a text for each and every one of us.

What does it mean then? Simply that the one who wants to celebrate Easter — the one who wants to receive Christ for salvation, should do it with honesty, and should not come before the face of God with falseness. It is really this falseness in spiritual matters that causes a soul to be destroyed from the Israel of God, the way Ananias and Sapphira were destroyed in the New Testament when they wanted to play the saint, and lie to the Spirit of the Lord. The leaven of wickedness and malice then, is not really the deep depravity in sin, and the impurity inherent in flesh and blood (no matter whether I want it or not), which adheres to, plagues, and alarms every sincere Christian. But the leaven really is the false mind whereby one wants to mix up faith and the service of sin, Christ and Belial, God and the world, light and darkness.

This we find first from the very words of the original text. The apostle's word for wickedness really means, that I do not only have a wicked nature, but that I also "commit sin," and live in unrighteousness and vices. But malice is really a falsity that distorts both the doctrine and the way of living by all sorts of evil cunning and secret and poisoned moves. This is shown still more clearly by the words expressing the contrary position, namely, "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Luther explain these words like this: "Sincerity is when one lives and acts in a right and Christian way, out of a pious heart and good intentions, with regard to every man. It is when a man does not think of doing wrong or damage to anybody, but acts the way he wants others to deal with him. Truth is when a man does not go about with falseness, and guile, and deceit, but teaches and lives honestly and correctly according to the Word of God."

But it is particularly from the context and reason for these words that the meaning of the apostle is revealed most clearly. The quotation comes from 1 Cor. 5. There the apostle had remarked on and punished, the frightful condition in the Corinthian church. They did not count only those who were obviously

bound under vices among their members. There was fornication among them, of so coarse a kind, that one of them even had his father's wife. But this was not all. Note this well. In addition they were puffed up. They boasted of their spiritual light and their apostles. They were at ease and did not worry about anything, as if everything was well, as the apostle remarks in the following verse. He says: "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you." About this condition he adds in verses 6-7: "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven." This is the context.

Thus the "leaven of malice and wickedness" is the false mind whereby a human being wants to be saved, wants to be a Christian, wants to celebrate Easter, to receive Christ and go with the people of God to the Promised Land, but wants also to take his old bosom sins with him on the way. He tenders allegiance to, hides, and defends them, and he does not intend to leave them. This is celebrating Easter with the leaven of malice and wickedness. Then the apostle says: No, he that wants to receive our Passover should purge out the old leaven. The Jews looked for and swept out all the leavened bread, and at the risk of losing their souls they were forbidden to eat it together with the Passover. So also he that wants to receive Christ and be partaker of His great redemption must take the matter seriously. He must honestly seek redemption from all sins and unrighteousnesses. He must not seek permission to sin, but only forgiveness and deliverance from it.

This is what the same apostle also says about the second act of Easter, the sprinkling of the blood. He says: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22). Mark it: a true heart. That is a heart that is seeking in earnest to become altogether the property of the Lord, and that wants to give up all that displeases Him.

## June 21

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*And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die – Gen. 2:16–17.*

What here is very much worthwhile thinking about, and is full of instruction, is the fact that God attached His prohibition to such a small and insignificant deed. Here, once and for all, we see and learn how the great and holy God judges! When He wanted to put man to the greatest and most important test, He chose the least deed one can think of on earth. And this test was to stretch its consequences over the entire world. The breaking of the commandment was to bring along all kinds of death — bodily, spiritual, and eternal. And that was attached to such a small deed as the eating of the fruit of a certain tree in the midst of the paradise richness of trees and fruits. Surely, by this first commandment, God has given mankind an eternal lesson showing us that His eyes look on the heart and obedience, not on the size of the deed. He has given us a serious lesson showing us that He wants to be an omnipotent Lord over His creatures. He demands obedience, only obedience, when He commands something.

Had He for instance said to Adam: Thou shalt not kill thy wife, or: Thou shalt not torture the animals, then his reason would immediately have seen a ground therein. Then man's reason would have approved of and supported God's commandment. And then only because of the sense in the commandment his reason would have observed. Thus the very obedience — the thing called pure obedience to the commandment of God — would never have come to the test. Then man would immediately have attached importance to the value of the deeds, and he would altogether have overlooked the thing God really wanted to have — obedience. But now God chose a very small deed in order that reason would not find any cause, or lead, or support; in order that the commandment might demand a pure obedience. Now our reason would say: Can God sentence us to death because of such a small deed? The whole of Paradise is full of trees and fruits, and we should only enjoy them. For whom should this sweet tree be kept? Thus reason here had no cause. Here only obedience was needed, and that was exactly what the Lord wanted to teach us from the beginning. Words cannot express what a manifold and infinite amount of evil is brought about by the inclination to look at the value of the deeds, and not at the words and commandments of God. This inclination is the ground for all ease and all hypocrisy.

God says: "Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal." And one can consider them important commandments. But when He says: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain," or "Thou shalt not be angry

with thy brother, or misrepresent his words and deeds by a false account,” then one thinks that they are only small and trifling commandments, which one can keep or break according to one’s own pleasure. When a man thus forgets the holy will and commandments of the great God, and looks only at the deed, then he can live quite at ease with a most dreadfully sinful inward being provided that he is pious outwardly and in certain respects. That is the way *all* men act by nature.

But it is not only with regard to the commandments of God, it is also in matters of belief, that the same inclination to look only at the deed, and not at the words of the great God, does us so much injury. In baptism God receives a child and to his account sets Christ with all His merits. But to reason this is a great foolishness, because reason only looks at the water and the ceremony where a man full of infirmities, i.e., the clergyman, officiates. When the child has become two years old and shows the nature of Adam, then one cannot think that it is holy before God, nor that the angels of God rejoice over it. Or if an older person has come to faith in the Son of God and has been baptized today, he will tomorrow feel that “the taint of the flesh was not put away,” but that he was only clean and holy before God because of the righteousness of Christ which he had put on. But now he does not see this righteousness, but only what he has got from Adam, only his own sin and impurity. And then at once he is ready to let his courage sink and think: I have still not become clean.

In such a case it seems that the words of Christ do not matter anything at all: “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet [the walking], but is clean every whit [to God]” (John 13:10). It is as good as to say: If I could only be pious and holy; but I have only the righteousness of Christ, and that is nothing. Why is this? Only because the merits of Christ are not my own deeds and are not seen or felt, but have only been promised to me by God. It is nothing to me that God says so. If I myself had done something glorious, then it would be something to rely on! In this way all that Christ has done, suffered, and said is nothing. It is all nothing when set against my own deeds. Nature is like that. Therefore it is necessary to be on one’s guard and note how most great things are hidden under a very trifling exterior, when the Lord says something. Such things He wants to teach all the world once and for all, when a great test is attached to a very small deed, such as the eating of the fruit of a tree. Think how such a small deed spread sin, death, and the curse over an entire world only because of the Word of the Lord. Henceforth nobody should look at the value of the deeds, but only at the Word of the Lord.

*In returning and rest shall ye be saved* – Isa. 30:15.

**W**hat deplorable distress and harm there is when all human beings do not know what they have in Christ, and what has happened in His death! It is true that most people are lighthearted despisers of God's grace — at ease and asleep. They are certainly condemned. One day they will see “whom they have pierced,” whom they have despised. But you, that know your sin and your judgment by the law, and would gladly come back to God, but are not capable of doing so, and dare not come because of your great shortcomings, please listen, listen! It is nothing to wonder at that the law and conscience condemn you, because there is no lack of sin in your life. You cannot do what you should. You cannot even repent enough. You cannot pray, love, watch, and fight. No, all that the law demands is lacking in you. And what the law forbids, that abounds. But listen: Christ has taken all this miserable, indefensible, condemnable wretchedness on Himself. “For He hath made Him [Christ] to be sin for us — for us — made to be sin, He who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13).

What more can He do? Is this not enough? Man, who condemns you now? God does not condemn you. Because He is perfectly satisfied with what Christ has done, and asks you to come at once. The Savior does not condemn you, because He has given His blood and life in order to save you. He says: “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). The Spirit does not condemn you. Because He only declares Christ to souls, and calls and invites them to the wedding. Who does condemn you then? It is unbelief that condemns you. The devil and your wicked heart inspire you with unbelief and condemn you. They say that what Christ has done is not enough. Be frightened at your unbelief. You have been commanded to believe. You are threatened with death if you do not believe. Then pray God for faith and do not let Him go until He has impressed it upon your heart: what Christ has done and suffered is enough, eternally enough. And the one in his wretchedness who has his all and sufficiency in Christ is saved. He has faith, he is a Christian. He knows Christ and has eternal life.

“Well,” says many a man, “I do know all this about Christ. I also believe that it is true. But it does not give my heart any power. It does not work the life, consolation, peace, joy, and power it should.” Many a man laments like that. And it is true: faith is something every man has not got. Many have a knowledge of Christ, a historical faith. But they have never tasted the sweetness and power that the true, living, assimilated faith brings along. By this lamenting, others again only express a thirsting for feelings and sweet perceptions of the grace, love, and presence of



the Savior. They have a real faith. That is, they have their only consolation and treasure in Christ. They have their all and in all in Him. By faith they also have a new mind. And they know how to distinguish between the time when they were under the law, and the present time under grace. But they also remember the sweet feelings they had at the beginning, and now they thirst for them again. These should reflect upon the fact that all the Scripture only speaks about faith, faith in Christ, and never about feelings. The Scripture speaks about faith in the very Word, the way it reads. It speaks about sticking to it. No matter whether the feeling is sweet or bitter, they should bear in mind that they should still conform to the will of their good Savior, and be content even if it pleases Him to hide Himself and try their faith, the way He did with the woman of Canaan. They should remember also how dear it was to Him that she still believed. So that He had a heartfelt delight therein and exclaimed: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt" (Matt. 15:28). And then she was also allowed to taste and see how sweet He was. Let us also give this joy to our Savior! He has no greater delight from us than that we believe in Him.

But it is quite necessary to really believe. That is, it is quite necessary that, in all our worries about ourselves, in all our wretchedness, sin, and tribulations we really have our consolation, our stronghold, our righteousness and peace in Christ. And in order that we might get this power from the Word, in order that God, who has the gift of faith in His hand, might be able to give us a real and living faith, it is most particularly necessary that we quietly and simply pay attention to a certain paragraph in the Word of God, a certain pithy word about Christ, and quietly, deeply, and seriously consider it. Because faith comes by hearing. Many only waste the grace of God, by all the time turning their thoughts here and there, no matter whether the objects are spiritual or natural, and cannot keep their eyes fixed on the crucified One even for a moment. They do not want to believe what the Scripture witness everywhere that all, all would be remedied by faith. Therefore, they have such manifold anxieties, that the Word never gets time to sink down in their hearts and to work the life and power of faith. A roaring ocean cannot become warmed up even by the hottest sunbeams, whereas a calm surface easily receives its light and warmth. It is the same also with the heart.

## June 23

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*And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him: Where art thou? – Gen. 3:9.*

**T**his is the first example of God calling to a sinner on earth. This is the first time a sinner is awakened to repentance. The Lord begins by making him contrite. Because as Luther remarks, the words “Where art thou?” contain the voice of the law to the conscience, or the meaning and purpose of the law. This is to convince the sinner of his fallen and unhappy situation. Because nothing created is invisible to the Lord, but everything is naked and revealed to His eyes. And still the Lord calls: “Adam, where art thou?” By this He wants to say: “I have come to ask how you are. Come forth now and reply before Me, what you have become. Where is now the glorious image of God, the image which was to have dominion over the earth? Do you think that I do not see you? You hide away from My face. But where do you want to go?” The Lord’s question contained such things. Therefore, Adam immediately came forth and began to explain himself.

Every sinner will perceive this calling voice of God, this cry: “Where art thou?” This first example concerns all the periods of the world, and all the children of Adam. First, it is a fatherly call to the faithful when they have forgotten themselves. When they have sinned, even small children often early hear this voice in their heart: “What have you done?” as long as the voice of the good Spirit has not been drowned, and their ears have not been deafened by the roaring of vanity and lusts. But this endless calling “Where art thou?” is especially something that all faithful Christians feel every day. When they have for instance lost their temper, sinned, and forgotten themselves, then there is at once an uneasy calling: “Where art thou? What have you done?” Or when they have happened to mingle with the children of vanity. Or when, because of fear of men or a will to please men, they have participated in vain speaking, and in some way, in word or deed, denied their Lord, they immediately get a penetrating glance from the Savior the way He looked on Peter. And the glance asks their hearts: “Where art thou? Oh, what have you done?” All this is the knocking of the Friend, whereby He prompts us to repentance. It is an experience that cannot be paid for by all the gold of the world! Woe, woe to the Christian who no longer gets those glances, those calls in his heart!

Secondly, this is a call of awakening to the spiritually dead, the ones living without God in the world. In the midst of the garden of sin, vanity, and worldly pleasures there often is a call in their heart: “Where art thou? It is not all right with you. You need repentance, conversion.” When they have once been converted to the Lord, they confess that they have perceived that call for a long time, and have been sought by the Lord. They confess that this often disturbed their delight in sin. Most especially “in the cool of the day,” when the pleasure has come to an end,

when they come to loneliness, or to the rest of the night, there is a call in their heart: “Where art thou?” Or they hear the Word, in a sermon or a confession, or when, at the Holy Communion table, they are about to enter before the face of God, then there is often a call about their sins, about the repentance they have not shown, about the necessity of conversion. “Where art thou? Time runs away. When will you repent?” And the one who has come back to God in a full conversion, should know that he still must sometime come forth before the face of God, no matter whether he wants to or not. Yes, sometime, sooner or later, in this present time, or, in eternity, each human being will hear the call so that it will pierce his very marrow: “Where art thou? What have you done?” It is impossible that any sinner can escape the almighty, holy God. Therefore, do not be unsure! God may well delay the punishment in silence, as if He does not at all see your sins. But sometime you will hear His voice.

And, as we have said before, this concerns all the epochs of the world and all the children of Adam. Everyone must come forth before the Lord and settle his sins in this present time, or they will surely meet him in eternity. The matter is as follows: we are all sinners; therein there is no difference. If we would be judged according to that, then no flesh can be saved. The difference is only that some keep away from God, and then remain away forever. They do not come to seek and receive grace, Christ says: “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). If, on the other hand, we come to the light, and have our sins settled with God, then everything becomes all right, even if we were the most terrible sinners. As the Lord says — and, oh, that we could take the words to our heart — “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18). In Matt. 18 Christ also says that a king took account of his servants, and one owed him ten thousand talents. But when he came forth he nevertheless immediately had all his debt forgiven when he fell down and worshipped his master. In that way the Lord wants to deal with us, when He calls us to take account of us.

## June 24

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*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart – Heb. 4:12.*

A sharp knife does a great deal of good when it is used well. But if it is badly used, it causes an equally great damage. It is like that also with the Word of God. It is the savor of life unto life, or the savor of death unto death. The Word of God always has an effect, if it goes through your senses. Either its own good effect, rich in blessing, or an opposite effect. It is like the sun. To all the beings of the day, the light of the sun is a means of pleasure, joy, and activity, but the night birds only become blinded by it. The warmth of the sun makes the wax soft, but the clay hard as stone. So different are the effects of the Word of God. Take, for example, the Jews! They were blinded and hard even before Christ came. But when He came, when the sun was at its meridian altitude, their blindness, hardness, and wickedness grew into something dreadful. And Judas, the betrayer! The one who rightly considers his state must be frightened. He was one of the twelve. He had heard, seen, and experienced much, but he had used it badly. He had not heard the word of Christ rightly. It is the same way even today. We see how some people know almost all the Bible by heart due to daily reading, but are asleep in sin and at ease! Like Judas, others have kept company with Christ and His disciples, but have lost all the life of grace in their hearts, all power and demonstration in their living, though they continue to use the Word. But then these are not merely as dead as if they had not heard any Word of God. No, they are seven times worse, as the Scripture says. If the Word of God is not used rightly, there is no true fruit.

Maybe someone now asks what it means to use the Word of God rightly. To this we reply: It is only necessary that you receive it as the Word of God, with the fear, obedience, and faith that the words of the great God demand. Of course the Word of God should not only be heard and understood, but it should be obeyed, observed, and believed. Only do this, and you will not be put to shame. The first, most common, and most dangerous misuse is only to listen to the Word being preached, and to pick up the Word of God only for the intellect, but never to begin to do according to it. This was the way Judas Iscariot became hardened. Therefore, as soon as you see that you should do something, then immediately begin to do so; as soon as you see that you should have something that you have not got, immediately try to obtain it. As soon as you see that you should drop a sin, do so immediately. Because by only hearing without doing, you will harden your heart. And this doing must be at once. For what is the benefit of the Word of God, if it is not observed? Otherwise you can stop reading and hearing it and at once give yourself to the devil, if you do not want to carry out what the Word demands. And

no one can do that except yourself, if you want to go to heaven. It is the straight way to perdition when we let others take the Word to themselves, and let them obey it, but for ourselves, only gather it in our memory. But if you reply that you are not capable of doing the will of God, then we ask: Has God demanded too much? Are His commandments unreasonable? Is it not reasonable that you love Him above all? Or that you love your neighbor as yourself? He does not ask more from you. And have you so seriously strained your powers to do the will of God? Or maybe you have so far made rather little effort? Yes, maybe you have been at ease, hard, and indifferent, and gone out to sin with a light heart? Is it then not reasonable that you are condemned, as the law of God threatens? If you would but seriously think about this, and obey the Word of the Lord, you would soon begin to do according to it, or you would at least try to do so. And then the pride of impenitence would soon fall. You would be roused from the slumber of sin, and come to a wholesome feeling about sin, and sorrow after a godly manner. And that leads to repentance and eternal bliss. And when you strain by your own power fruitlessly in your distress and impotence, you should pray for the Spirit of the Lord. And thus partly by this Spirit, and partly by these inward experiences, you will get the true light upon the Word of God, the light from above. Without experience, extremely well-educated men and scribes are still as blind as stones in spiritual matters. And without the Spirit of God nobody can understand the Word of God. Luther says: "When God gave us His Word, He said: I shall let it be clearly and distinctly written and preached. But, nevertheless, I will always arrange it so that it will depend on My Spirit as to who will understand it." Therefore, we also see that those who think themselves capable of understanding the Word themselves, and who disdain to bow down to God, are also allowed to remain in darkness.

But now in the same way as when you came to spiritual awakening, namely, by only revering the Word as the Word of God, in the same way you will also come to the true faith. It happens so that you cannot help yourself in your distress over sin, and then when you hear the good tidings about the undeserved grace in Christ, you will revere it so much that those tidings will be more valid than all the objections and contradictions of your reason. And then throughout all your life, you will let the Word of God have dominion over your reason, your heart, and your life. Therefore pray seriously for the Spirit of God each time you go to hear and read the Word, and know, that then you will never use it in vain.

*He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit ... doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? – Gal. 3:5.*

**M**any speak and think and dream of sanctification and the Spirit, and they do not know what the works of the Spirit consist of. They are only a dream and a notion to them, but no real fact. But the Scripture says definitely what they consist of. Paul says: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness,” etc. (Gal. 5:22).

The first fruit of the Spirit is love. Love is also the only right source of all sanctification and all good deeds. Therefore we should now look into the matter to see how we can get love. Can we ever acquire love by resolution, seriousness, commandments, laws, fighting, and struggling? Is it not a common rule that nobody can command love? I love what I love, no matter whether God forbids it. How shall I then get love to God? Christ explains this in Luke 7. He says: “This love only arises because God forgives our sins, and we receive this mercy of God. To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much. To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell Me therefore, which of them will love him most?”

When the Pharisee Simon himself had admitted that the one to whom most was forgiven would love most, Christ applies it to him: “You, Simon, have so much piety that you do not scoff at Me like the other Pharisees, but you even invite Me to your table. But this woman, the woman with her great sins, she washes My feet with tears of love, and wipes them with the hairs of her head. She cannot cease to kiss My feet. On the contrary, you have not even kissed My mouth. You have not even given Me any water for the washing of My feet. Although she is a woman with great sins, and you are a great saint, she, nevertheless, has the Spirit, and you have not. She has the fruits of the Spirit, and you have the works of the law. She is a true saint, and you a false one. In brief, to whom more is forgiven the same loves more. The only way of kindling love in the hearts of the children of Adam is that I forgive them all they have done. Then they will love Me.” This was the spirit in the speech Jesus delivered on the source of love.

It is the same way with the other fruits of the Spirit. The apostle furthermore mentioned joy and peace. Can laws, commandments, and compulsions induce us to rejoice, and make us happy, really happy? No, no man can force himself to have joy in God, or delight in the Savior. No man can induce in himself a real peace in God, an inward meekness of the heart, and other fruits of the Spirit. Nothing of all that is really the work of the Spirit can ever be obtained in any other way than the following: As a sinner, while I have not yet become holy, I get grace. And the

love of the Savior and His forgiveness melt me the way the sinful woman melted when she was warmed by it. Not until then do I get love and the other fruits of the Spirit.

There are many who think: “Of course I believe in Christ. Who would not believe in Christ? Of course one believes.” Soon there are shortcomings in the lives of such. Their speech only proves that they do not know what faith in Christ is. They mean that they believe in Christ when they think everything is true that is written about Christ. Yes, they mean that they believe in Him when they believe that everything Christ has done for us has been done well, and that there is no more need to think of it. On the contrary, all their attention is turned on themselves. And thus they have consolation when everything goes well and beautifully with their life. But when they have fallen into a somewhat grave sin they flee to their remorse, prayer, and improvement in order to get grace and peace with God thereby. Why, this obviously is to believe in oneself in the heart, no matter whether the intellect and confession are according to the Word.

The one who really believes in Christ has all his attention turned on Him and all his joy attached to Him. He looks at Him and has all his consolation in Him. Because a true Christian is ashamed of himself and his own work, therefore he has learned to consider his own works wretchedness and impurity. Now he has his all in Christ, really his all, both his righteousness and his sanctification. A true Christian then confesses: To be sure, also, I think that I should work more and not believe so much. Yes, I sometimes fear that I believe too much, and that I should again come under the law in order to become more serious and thereby more pious. But when I again remember my experience, then it testifies the same thing as the Scripture says: because as long as I went about with the works of the law, the depth of my heart was cold to God. I had no inward delight in and love to Him and His ways. In addition, I always remained in bondage under certain sins. And inwardly I was gnawed by a fretting uneasiness. When I, on the contrary, learned to know the Savior, and could believe in His grace and assurance of the forgiveness of sins, I immediately received a strange inclination and power to good. I received a warm spirit, a love and delight that made everything easy, so that what had been difficult for me before, now went as if by itself. And all this still happens. When I am caught in the mind of bondage I become cold and weak. But when I have peace in Christ I have a new inclination and power to good. The experience of a Christian is like that. And this experience agrees with the Scripture. The piety and spirit that do not have their source in the way the Scripture teaches are not true.

*What must I do to be saved? – Acts 16:30.*

**Y**ou ask: How shall I come into possession of the grace that has been given to us in Christ? It has been brought to my knowledge that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to be our second Adam, to stand before God in our stead, the for the unjust” (1 Pet. 3:18), to do in our stead what we should have done and suffer what we should have suffered. I realize that this is the deep, unchangeable foundation for the eternal bliss of all the children of Adam. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). Thus great treasures have been earned, and given to me. I have assurance of them in the eternal testament. But now the question is: What shall I then do in order to come into possession of these treasures of grace? What is the right way to receive them? Because everybody can readily understand that all men do not become saved. All do not come into possession of the great inheritance, but only those seeking and receiving it in a certain, prescribed way. Everybody can readily realize that the one who either does not at all seek this treasure, or seeks it in the wrong way, has no more benefit from it than if it had never been earned for us. How shall I with wisdom know the only right way to come into possession of merits of Christ?

Reply: It would never have been possible to be sure about that in this present time if God had not, in His eternal counsel in heaven, taken and established a certain decision as to this matter, and then revealed it to us in His Word. But praise the name of the Lord! He *has* established a certain and definite way whereby we should come into possession of the grace earned for us. And He has even revealed this established way in words so explicit that He said: “Now they have no cloke for their sin” (John 15:22).

The one who only wants to pay heed to the counsel of God as to our salvation such as has been revealed in the Word, can become as certain about the way to salvation and eternal bliss as he is about his own existence. The one not certain about the way to salvation, certainly has not paid attention to the eternal decision of God revealed in the Word as to this matter. But instead, he has tried to make his own way to salvation by his own thinking, by consulting his own blind reason. When such a man then reads the few, simple words that express all the secret of how to receive the kingdom of God, he is astonished that the Word says so. Yes, he stumbles at it rather than receives it humbly and obediently. In that way he must become more and more confused and blinded, and must remain in an eternal uncertainty. Have not thousands perhaps wondered why the small and simple word “faith” should occur so frequently in the Scripture and why all salvation should be tied up so obviously to faith? Thousands have stumbled at that. But, what does it



matter? It still stands there, this rock of offense. It stands unshakably firm, founded on God's eternal counsel of peace.

In His eternal counsel, God has decided, and in His Word He has revealed that, as the only begotten Son, our Mediator would earn all the treasure of salvation of sheer grace in His own Person and give it to us as a free gift, so we should not need to do the least little bit to earn it or become worthy of it; but would only receive it as a free gift. As this gift is distributed by words and promises, it could not be received by anything else than faith. Here it should be well noted that saving faith is really nothing other than faith. It is nothing other than to receive the gift in such a way as corresponds to the way in which it is given. It is given as a free gift. It should be received as a free gift. It is given by words, should be received by faith. Thus the only thing we have to do is to receive it.

"Therefore," the apostle says, "it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed" (Rom. 4:16). Because the fundamental law was: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). Note: it is the gift of God! This is the reason why at the same time as Christ announced the Father's eternal counsel of atonement: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son," He immediately added the established ways and means whereby we would come into possession of the gift. He said: "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." At the same time as He gave His disciples the great mission of the apostles: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), He immediately explained who would be partakers of it: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Yes, this was the reason why Christ Himself so perpetually had the word faith on His tongue. He said: "Thy faith hath saved thee" (Luke 7:50). "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee" (Matt. 8:13). "If thou wouldest believe" (John 11:40).

So by faith also all the fathers in the Old Testament have become justified and "had this testimony, that they pleased God" (Heb. 11:5). Already the second son of Adam and Eve, Abel, was righteous by faith. And therefore his offering pleased God, "by which he obtained witness that he was righteous" (Heb. 11:4). "By faith Noah ... moved with fear, prepared an ark ... and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb. 11:7). "Abraham believed God [as regards the promise of the blessed seed Christ], and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3). And the pious Tobias said: "We wait for the life that God will give to those who remain in faith strong and steadfast before Him" (Apocrypha).

## June 27

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*Set your affection on the things above, not on the things on earth* – Col. 3:2.

**I**t is as if the apostle wanted to say: You are not at home, but pilgrims and travelers in a foreign country, yes, in an enemy country, where neither your Lord nor your other spiritual relatives have ever had their peace or possessions, but which all of them have only passed through as fleeing refugees. Therefore, you must consider all good that is being given to you here on earth only as a pleasant night-refuge for the pilgrim, where he, however, will not stay forever and settle down. He should have another destination for his journey than the night-refuge.

Everyone who knows that he is a wretched sinner, tired out, despairing, yes, killed by the law, but who has his consolation, his righteousness, and his life in Christ, now lives in such a faith and such a life, that he cannot get peace in the world and sin. You that know this as regards yourself, this sweet admonition is for you: Seek what is up there, where Christ is. Nevermore let yourself be deceived into trying to make a paradise for yourself on earth! It is only a delusion of the imagination, when a Christian hopes to find any great joy in something earthly here on earth, after he has found his delight in God. No, if something else becomes a greater desire and delight, then at once his spiritual life suffers. Therefore, if you want to lead a peaceful and blissful life on earth, and still keep the love of the Father, only try to get a more and more heavenly mind. Try continually to forget all other gain, and desire and seek only what is up there where Christ is, so that nothing earthly may captivate your heart. Because as long as the seed of God remains in you, and you lead the true life in God, all earthly happiness and delight bring you both into fear and in danger. Into fear, if the life of the Spirit remains in you, because then you will never get peace so long as you have more delight and comfort in something other than God. If you can think something earthly is more delightful, more precious, and more pleasant than God and His friendship, and still be peaceful and happy, then there is something not at all right with your life in Christ. You must work and walk down here, you must have and use earthly things, but only with your body. Your heart should be in heaven, where Christ is. The zeal of your soul's Bridegroom for your love demands it. When God gives you something sweet, take it with gratitude, but also with fear, so that your heart will not be captivated by it. Nothing that is not God Himself and His grace may be treasure and consolation of your heart. A good bodily livelihood, wealth, comfort, reputation, and glory, or spiritual gifts, intelligence, experience, a respectable life, the confidence of the brethren — all those are precious gifts of God for which you may thank Him, but with fear, that no such gift will become the chief delight and dwelling of your heart.

After all, a Christian must have his greatest delight and comfort in God, so it is not of very much value to seek any earthly happiness and comfort, because if I

find it, it will be my danger. If I do not find it, it is my worry. If something earthly becomes a greater happiness and delight to my heart than the happiness I have in God, why, then it is an eternal unhappiness. If on the other hand it does not become a greater delight and comfort than the delight I already have in God, then it is not worthwhile seeking it, because I already have a greater delight from above. When it is added that the heart of man naturally very much thirsts only to get some other treasure and delight than that found in God, then we must count Praetorius right when he says: “The greatest happiness of the Christians is not to have any earthly happiness.” And so those who really want to go to heaven must soon come to the point where they love poverty more than wealth, contempt more than glory, suffering more than enjoyment, yes, death more than life.

This means: You are dead — and crucified with Christ! Oh, what a bitter state for the flesh! Here everyone should note how important it is for those who are to follow such laws, to remember that they have another life than only that of nature, that they have been born of God and are happy in God, yes, and have heaven in their hearts, so that Christ is their Life, their Treasure, and their Delight. Because otherwise it grows too unbearable, yes, impossible for us always and in truth to seek what is above and not what is on earth. Even if we say it with our mouth, we lie in our soul; the heart always seeks what is on earth, its own glory, pleasure, and wealth, as long as it does not have delight in the Lord, or life and pleasure in God. It is true also that good Christians have an earthly, depraved flesh full of lusts and desires. But they are crucified with Christ. Asaph confesses that his heart was grieved, and he was pricked in his reins when he saw the prosperity of the wicked, whereas the righteous had to suffer so much. But he adds: “Nevertheless I am continually with Thee... Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever” (Ps. 73:23, 25–26).

## June 28

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*For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee – Isa. 54:10.*

☾☾ Whom should I believe about God more than God Himself?” Ambrose said. It is an unhappy thing that all men, even also the awakened and the faithful, have an infinite inclination to judge salvation according to an inner feeling of their own opinion or reason. We have an inclination to judge the relation of God to us according to something we perceive or experience ourselves. We have an inclination not to want to look up to God to see how He has revealed His will and His counsel regarding our salvation. We are inclined not to want to think over what God has decided, and how it is written in the documents of His counsel. But instead we are inclined to sit down with ourselves, worry, think, sigh, and ask as of the winds: Oh, if I could know how the matter of my soul is before God? How can I come to any assurance in this way? What assurance can I get from my own thoughts, feelings, and opinions? What do they matter in this great question, more than hay and straw to the winds? One moment I think that God is sheer grace and love. Another that He is a severe Judge going about with law and justice. One moment I see God in all that surrounds me. Another I think that there is no God. One moment I consider myself rather a good Christian. Another, a quite hopeless sinner. In that way my thinking and feeling falter, and turn themselves here and there. And what I think at one moment can be as false as what I think the other moment.

The same inclination, namely to judge according to one's own thinking, has caused so innumerable many to altogether lose the way to salvation. Everyone has his own thinking and does not believe in anything other than that. One thinks that one certain thing pleases God. Another that something else pleases Him. Thus everyone choose his own way, and maybe feels something sweet in his heart thereby. And then he immediately judges that it is a good way and follows it. Thus, for instance, one wants to please and win God by an external work of the law, such as charity work, attendance at church, etc. Another wants to please and win Him by some inward works such as by humbleness, love, etc. A third by self-denial, prayer, and solitariness. A fourth by a religious activity for his fellow men. A fifth by all of this together. By such things a man tries to become pardoned and well-pleasing to God.

And what is the reason for all these false ways they choose for themselves as it pleases them? Verily, nothing else than that they do not know or reflect upon what God already has decided from eternity, in His heavenly counsel, as regards the salvation of fallen man. They do not know what a covenant God has made with

His Son, and what a testament He has made for men. We do not speak now about those who, with a sleeping and hypocritical mind, neglect to seek their salvation. Nor about those who, with an imagined faith, “turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude 4). But we speak about those who really seek salvation, but only seek it in the wrong way.

You do so also when you actually seek salvation rightly by faith alone, but seek the faith within yourself. You make up your mind and take pains to believe. You bother your heart and work on it to make it believe. But you have your eye turned only inwards on yourself, or on what you yourself experience and perceive, in order to note whether there is any faith yet or not. But you do not get any assurance. You falter here and there. And what is the reason? Certainly nothing else than that you seek at the wrong place. You seek in the winds; namely, you seek in yourself what there never was, but what should be sought in the counsel in heaven. It should be sought in the Word of God — the Word revealed to us. Note: faith is not kindled because we try and take pains to believe. But it is kindled in that we turn our eyes away from ourselves, away from what we have, perceive, and are, and turn them to what God has decided and revealed about our salvation. You have taken pains to believe, and you have invoked God for grace to do so. But so far you still have no faith, nor peace. And now you wonder what the reason can be. Do not wonder. Maybe you still have never known, cared about, or reflected upon what was decided before the foundation of the world in the great counsel that God held in heaven about the matter of men. Maybe you have never known or reflected upon what a covenant God made then with His Son, and what a testament He made for men!

How necessary it is to learn really to know this, and then to conform to it, and to build thereon only! Then I stand on a firm foundation, a foundation that will endure in life and death, because it is an eternal foundation. It was laid more deeply and earlier than the foundations of the earth. “As He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). And it will also endure longer than the foundation of the earth. “For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”

## June 29

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*Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry – Col. 3:5.*

**I**n reality there are only two kinds of sin mentioned here — that of fornication and that of covetousness. Two dreadful abysses into which many faithful souls, who were on their way to heaven, and who had rightly “escaped the pollutions of the world” (2 Pet. 2:20), have sunk down again to their loss. These two ways of sin are, however, different in the sense that the former is heinous and abominable, and usually troubles and worries souls, while on the other hand almost no man wants to admit that the latter is what it is. People can complain bitterly of, and worry about, the former, but one seldom hears anyone bewailing and worrying about the latter. Usually it gets a better name and is excused, for instance, like this: “Why, I must earn a living for me and my family. It is not covetousness, but a necessary household care.” Nevertheless the old captivator can distort a person’s vision so dreadfully, that even the sin of fornication, in itself so heinous and abominable, can seem quite undangerous and rather innocent at the moment of temptation. Yet for a Christian this is the plainest sign of the presence of the devil and the moment of danger. Verily, when the same sin, so dreadful to you at sound and sober times that you tremble at the mere thought of it, now seems quite unimportant, quite trifling and excusable to you, then you know that the moment of temptation is there, and that it is the spirit of the old captivator and the power of darkness that distort your vision that much. Then watch yourself! Watch yourself! You must either take to your heels in a hurry or fall! Mark it: flee speedily, or fall in the hands of the enemy! If you only start to deliberate, then you have been caught. Eve only let herself be engaged in a discussion with the serpent, and looked at the forbidden fruit, and that was the way to the Fall. In this fight one wins more by flight than fight. Then you should also know that it is the shift of the devil, and the deceit of the already corrupt mind, that you do not want to fall in sin, but only want to try to see how near the edge you can go without falling into the abyss. When the mind is sound and watching you would rather try to get as far as possible away from the edge. The general rule is, that the one who wants to escape sin, should start by fleeing from temptation, from the cause and occasion, at the first thought, and to the extent possible from places and objects involving temptation. Here the words of Christ apply: “And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Matt. 5:29). Also a thing in itself innocent, like the eye, must be got rid of, when, because of the intervention of sin, it brings temptation to you. And even if it is as dear to you as your eye, and even if it is as

bitter for you to lose as the plucking out of an eye, flee it, anyway! Flee with your soul as a prey! It is better for you now to suffer most bitterly, and save your peace of conscience in time, and your soul for eternity, than to have delight in sin here for a short time, and pangs of conscience and the flames of hell in eternity!

But to awaken Christians to watchfulness and horror at this sin in all its degrees, from mere thoughts and desires to heinous practice, nothing more powerful can be quoted than the text in 1 Cor. 6. Oh, a chapter worth thinking over! So the apostle says: "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Take note of such things. You are bought with a price, with the precious blood of Christ. You are not your own, so that you cannot do what you want with your body and your spirit, your heart and your thoughts. Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a harlot!

The other abyss is covetousness. This swallows up souls so much the easier as it does not seem so dreadful a sin, but has a beautiful appearance, and so many excuses. Who wants to confess to covetousness? No, a Christian beginning to become captivated by this desire, knows very little about it. But no matter if he looks at the desire itself, or at the objects of it, he only sees innocent things. He finds it permissible, yes, a duty to earn the living of himself and his family. Moreover, he looks at the objects of his desire, and also these are innocent. They are the gifts of God Himself, and for them one should thank God. Money, a farm, oxen, a house, food, and clothes — all of them are innocent things. Who can then punish him for hankering for them? It is only the degree of that hankering that shows the danger, and there are so many degrees. Who can determine what is covetousness? Oh, if the Christian is not to be ensnared here, and become a Demas, he should not joke and play the saint, but should have his attention sharply fixed on the weal or woe of his soul, as well as on the Word of the Lord telling us what an honest being in Jesus is like, and what, on the contrary, covetousness is and does.

## June 30

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*Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? — Matt. 6:26.*

**F**or unexperienced bon vivants not knowing any distress, and for warmly believing Christians to whom the Word is all, this discourse is not necessary. But when a Christian comes so deeply into darkness and tribulation, that he doubts all the Word of God, then the Lord refers him to the works of creation where he needs not believe, but can see with his eyes. For instance, with reference to bodily worries the Lord says: “Behold the fowls of the air: your heavenly Father feeds them. Are ye not much better than they?” Would God take care of the small unimportant fowls, but forget the human being, His most precious and glorious creation, the image of God, His child and heir, the lord of the fowls and the animals? Would God forget the human being? Behold the lilies of the field! Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you? O ye of little faith, you that are of “His offspring” (Acts 17:28). O ye of little faith! With reference to the fear of wicked people the Lord says: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. The very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore” (Matt. 10:29–31).

You feel forsaken by God. As regards a certain thing you feel quite helpless, you cannot possibly put it right yourself. In all the world there is nobody capable of putting it right, and you have invoked God so that you have become hoarse and tired and everything seems to be equally in vain. God “behaves like a hero in despair and like a giant not capable of helping.” Is it possible that it really is the way it seems to you? Do you not understand that it is some deep concealment on the part of the strange, but still faithful God? Provided that you do not fight against the Lord and His order; for instance, that you do not ask for power for sanctification before you have become a believer and happy in undeserved grace; or for *bodily help without wanting to work*, etc.; provided then that you seek for help in the right way, it is quite impossible that God will not give you all that is best and most useful for you. Or is now the Lord’s hand shortened, that it cannot help anymore? (Isa. 59:1). And would the Maker of the eye not see your distress? And would the Maker of the ear not hear? He who takes care of the birds, would He not take care of you? Think thoroughly of the question posed by Christ: “Are ye not much better than they?” The Savior declares: “Ye are of more value than many sparrows!” Think, the Lord Himself says so. Yes, so Christ must have considered it, He that so precious



redeemed us: “Ye are of more value than many sparrows.” And now, He that takes care of the sparrows, would He then forget you? You say: “I have sinned. I suffer what I have well deserved. I have been rightly forsaken.” O man, has God then dealt with us after our sins? (Ps. 103:10). He that has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), He who hath reconciled the world to Himself by Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:18), when we still were enemies (Rom. 5:10), when we had no reconciliation when nobody invoked Him, would He now deal with us after our sins? Should we now stand before God in our own righteousness? Then no flesh would be saved. Neither would we get a drop of water. Now, on the contrary, we are surrounded by innumerable blessings of God all the time. So from what we see we should learn to believe also in what we do not see.

In the same way, with our eyes on the great things of creation, we should break the temerity of our reason that wants to reply against God, judge His words and deeds, and doubt what it does not understand. When once in bygone days an otherwise pious man, so pious that there was none like him in the earth, fell into this temptation, the Lord answered him: “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? ... Where wast thou when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? ... Have the gates of death been opened unto thee, or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death? ... Where is the way where light dwelleth, and, as for darkness, where is the place thereof? Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? ... Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? Canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth?” (Job 38:4–5, 7–8, 17, 19, 31, 33). A man should try to answer such questions when he wants to judge the Word of God, and when there is something he does not understand. Then he will soon be happy to be allowed to leave that attitude and say: “Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth” (1 Sam. 3:9). Such a one has then surely benefited from considering the wonders of creation.

# July 1

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*We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement* – Rom. 5:11.

**H**ere the apostle Paul sums up the bliss that can be experienced in the eternal Source and Origin of all, namely God Himself. God Himself is our Friend and Father. And with that, all security and eternal bliss must follow. First, God is much more than all His gifts. Friendship with Him is more than the eternal bliss of heaven. In fact, God Himself is the sun and eternal bliss in heaven. So friendship with Him is the real source of joy for the faithful. Secondly, all the gifts are also included in Him. In Him is our righteousness and strength. In Him are our peace and comfort. God is our Father, and all the wealth and security of the children are in the Father Himself. “And if children, then heirs” (Rom. 8:17). “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things” (v. 32). So, when you have the friendship of the great, almighty God Himself, then surely you must be happy all the time. Even if otherwise you were the poorest, you would then be the richest. Even if you were the humblest and most despised, you would then be the most exalted. If you were the loneliest and most forlorn, you then would always be in the most glorious company. Thus we see that David and other holy men rejoiced in God Himself as their real comfort and glory. “My soul shall make her boast in the Lord” (Ps. 34:2). We should glory in God each day — for He is all that we need. So that echoes in our hearts: “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my rock; in Him will I trust: He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge” (2 Sam. 22:2, 3). In this way all justified souls should know their God and glory in Him. As the prophet says: “In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory” (Isa. 45:25).

“Through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement” (Rom. 5:11). The apostle perpetually repeats that we have all grace, security, and glory only by our Lord Jesus Christ and His atonement. It is also most necessary to bear this in mind all the time. All our consolation and boasting of God, of His friendship, and of eternal bliss will immediately vanish when we turn our eyes from this, the only valid ground and cause, and begin to look at ourselves. Then our sin and manifold unworthiness soon appear, and we are at once faint-hearted. The joy and glorying in God come to an end. Therefore always bear in mind that all this grace, whereby we glory in God that He is ours with all He is and has, is founded only on the atonement by Christ. It is not based on any goodness and worthiness of our own. No, it is based only on the eternal love whereby God gave us His Son, when we were still “sinners,” “ungodly,” and “enemies” (Rom. 5). Reflect upon what it means that God first created us to be His children and heirs, and then also gave

His Son to be our Savior when we were ungodly and enemies, and that “we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Rom. 5:10). This is an eternal ground of consolation for poor sinners. It does not waver and fall with our faltering and falling, but it always remains firm and permanent. God has done much. He has transformed us, His enemies, into His friends. Now, consider whether He could do any less and still deal with us as His friends? Now that we have been so preciousely atoned for, would He not deal with us as atoned for? In other words, He would not look at our sins and judge us according to the law, but would always be benignant and gracious towards us, and lead us up to eternal bliss. For that He originally created us, and to that end He then redeemed us so dearly.

It is necessary always to glory in God, i.e., always to keep a real, happy, and heartfelt confidence of faith in Him. On Him depends the spiritual life of a Christian. It is always necessary to stick to the meaning of this: “Through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” It is especially necessary when, as it sometimes happens, our heart is ice cold towards God, so that we become diverted and unfamiliar to Him. But there is distress, so that there is a need for us to pray. Then we think that God is also quite ice cold towards us. We think that He does not care about us, does not see us, or hear our prayer. Then it is necessary to remember that this picture of God is quite false. It is a most dreadful distortion. And it arises only because of our cold and unbelieving heart and the inspiration of the devil. Because the Lord God Himself has given quite another picture of Himself, as an eternal and immeasurable love that has given His own beloved Son for us, and that at all moments sincerely loves those who believe in Him. He has given us a picture of Himself as a gracious Father who is near us at all moments, sees our needs and worries. And even if He hides himself, and help tarries, He still always delights in doing good to us. God can never be cold and indifferent to those who have been so dearly atoned for by His beloved Son and made righteous in Him.

## July 2

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*They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy:  
there is none that doeth good, no, not one – Ps. 14:3.*

**H**ere we have an extremely important lesson concerning sin. Here the Lord helps us to understand that all of us are equally condemned sinners. In that sense, we are all alike. We all need to consider this thoroughly. It is the nature of all of us, to think ourselves better than others, when we see the whole world sunk in sin. First of all, the sleeping children of this world can never believe that before God they are as great sinners as thieves and murderers, publicans and harlots. And on this fancy they base their safety. It is a presumption by means of which they resist all the counsel of God for their salvation, and all the admonition of God to repentance and conversion.

But the awakened and believing also have their share of the same imagination. When we are frightened at the sight of our sinfulness and have sought and found salvation in Christ, it still happens that we often forget, that we still carry the same depraved nature of Adam. It seems to us as if we are of a better race than heinous sinners, publicans, and harlots. This is seen from our surprise when we find some bad sins in ourselves. When the dark depths of the decay of our heart reveal some rather terrible things such as, “evil thoughts, adultery, manslaughter, theft, greed, treachery, cunning, fornication, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride,” all sins that Christ says come from the human heart, then we are astonished and frightened and are ready to despair. Just think, there are times when we may feel even “blasphemous” against God, sometimes even in prayer, as some Christians experience in times of trouble; or we may feel a dreadful coldness towards God and have too strong a love for visible things, and a mighty inclination to sin, etc. Also we may find that we are not at all times contrite enough, but are still hard and lighthearted; or when we ought to love our neighbor as ourselves, we even feel envy or anger and hatred at a reprimand. This is not to speak of the most terrible sin, that we do not hold the sufferings of Christ in the right respect, but can hear that He was scourged, wore a crown of thorns, and hung on the cross for our salvation and eternal happiness, and still love Him so little, that small, useless things matter more to us than His death. Oh, when we feel such things, then we are afraid and astonished. What is the reason for such astonishment? Only that we had not thought that we were so depraved. We have seen other children of Adam quite sunk in all sorts of vices, still defending themselves with pride, arguing away the Word of God, and scoffing at Christ. At that we have not been so much astonished. But at ourselves we have looked as if we belonged to another race. Now, it is true that being born of God, we have a new nature by the Holy Spirit. But the part of us which is born of the flesh is still flesh, and this is always poisoned and evil.

Here the Lord — like all the Scriptures — teaches us that sin is in the nature of us all, the inheritance we all have in common from Adam, whether we want it or not. “There is no difference: for all have sinned” (Rom. 3:22–23). “The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Ps. 14:2–3). God early complained “that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Man is like this by nature, i.e., by what is inherited from Adam. If we were to believe and consider this correctly, we would not become so much astonished and fall into despair, when we find it within ourselves. But, praise the merciful God, only because of our lost state, He gave us His Son to be our Savior. To remain in the confidence of faith, it is very important that we deeply impress upon ourselves, and quite decide in our own minds, that through Adam we are all depraved and lost creatures. In our nature there is nothing but sin, wickedness, and powerlessness, and our Lord God had never thought anything else about us. Because of this then, in our most humiliating experience of sin, we should hurry to the throne of grace and say: “It is all lost with me, but God! do not look at me, look at Thy Son!” And always bear in mind that God has all His satisfaction only in His Son, and that all our righteousness is only in Him. Therefore God’s friendship can never be altered by the depravity within us, as long as we remain in His beloved Son, in whom we have much more righteousness, and are much more well-pleasing to God, than Adam before the Fall.

## July 3

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*Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works – Rom. 4:6.*

**T**his text tells us in clear and distinct words, that a man can be righteous before God, even if he is still harassed by sins. Here it is plainly said, that when God justifies a man, it does not happen in such a way that He obliterates sin from his being and makes him free from sin in himself, but that it happens by imputing. This text says, that we are justified because God credits us with a righteousness that we do not have in ourselves, and also “forgives” and “covers” the sins we have. To some people the word justify may appear ambiguous. The apostle here uses the words: “imputeth righteousness” instead. And then he explains the same work with the words of David, that only that man is saved, “whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered”; that only that man is saved “unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity” (Ps. 32:1–2). Now think, when the human being is saved to whom God “imputeth righteousness without works” and to whom the Lord “imputeth not iniquity,” then it means that righteousness is not in the saved man himself, because then it would not have been necessary to “impute” righteousness to him. On the other hand, it also means that the saved man has sins, as it says that they are “not imputed” to him, but are “covered.” This is the main teaching of all the Scriptures, about the mediatorial office of Christ, and the imputing of His righteousness. But here we have it in short and distinct words, which altogether destroys the false idea, by means of which the enemy of our souls has misled people, the false idea that we can be justified and made free from sins in ourselves. No, the apostle here says plainly, that God justifies us, by imputing righteousness to us, without our being or becoming righteous or free from sins in ourselves here on earth. Therefore the sins must be “forgiven”; “covered.”

So, if we have understood that we are not righteous in the sense that sin has been obliterated from our being, and that we in ourselves keep the law completely, but that it has happened by “imputing,” then we should also not make an equally great and opposite error, namely, to think that God counts us righteous, even if in fact we are not so. No, praised be the name of Christ, our Lord! We really are justified through Him. When one has awakened to see the perfection of the Being of God, one dreams of such a justification by means of which God — through a commuting of His holy words and judgments — would let us be considered righteous, without our in any way possessing what righteousness means, even a whole fulfillment and unimpeachability before the law. This is to think rather sneeringly of God, as if He would be merciful at the expense of justice. The apostle teaches otherwise. God has set forth His Son to be a mercy seat through faith in His blood, to show His justice and, that He justifies the one who believes in Jesus. As the words read in Rom.

3:26: “To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” And in Rom. 5 he plainly says, that it is by the obedience and righteousness of one, that we shall be made righteous. It is not made by the concession of any jot or tittle of the law, but by a whole and strict fulfillment of all the commandments and judgments of the law, which the mediator did as fully for us in our place as if we ourselves had done and suffered all, according to the law. A man can fulfill the obligation of another — e.g., pay his brother’s debts — so that the one in debt becomes really free from the debt and inviolable. He is not only considered so, but he really is free from the debt because the kind brother has paid his debts completely. How much more the fulfillment and payment made for us by Christ, our Lord, must make us really righteous, and free from debt although we cannot ourselves fulfill the law. Therefore we must not understand the words “imputeth righteousness” as if God would count us righteous even if we are not. The meaning is only, that we have received, and been credited with the righteousness of another, but in such a true and perfect way that we really are righteous. The majestic right of the holy law has not at all suffered. Its requirements have been fulfilled in all its entirety. Its judgments and punishments have been undergone in all their dreadfulness. In short: God is just, when He justifies those who believe, because it is a real righteousness He credits us with. And in the last day, in the presence of the whole world, He will call His believers righteous, and in accordance with perfect justice give them the “crown of righteousness.”

## July 4

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*And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? – Matt. 22:12.*

**I**n Matt. 22, Christ says that “the kingdom of heaven,” i.e., His kingdom of grace on earth, is “like unto a certain king, who made a marriage for his son.” He bade many to come, but most of them despised the invitation and presented an excuse for not coming. One was prevented by his merchandise, another by his farm, a third by his wife. Nevertheless, all did not despise the calling. No, many received it. The wedding was filled with guests.

But now, Christ says plainly that among those who had received the calling, who had come to the wedding and were sitting at the table, there was also a man who had not put on a wedding garment. He was sitting there in his own clothes. And only because of that he was bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness. What is this? What does the Lord mean? Why, the man had come to the wedding! He did not belong to the despisers who stayed away, but he was sitting at the wedding table among the other happy guests. Yes, what else is this than that there are men who have not only experienced the call of the Spirit in their hearts, but have also obeyed it, so that they have begun to seek the means of eternal bliss. They have abandoned their former “ways,” their former life and company, and joined the faithful as regards company, customs, and observances. They read, hear, and sing the Word of God. They have joined the faithful in prayer, devotion, and in Christian activity. In brief, they have joined the faithful in everything that one thinks belongs to a more serious godliness than that of the crowd. Because of this the man cannot possibly represent the great crowd at ease among us. Where would we then have those who hear the call but do not come? The heathens who do not have the Word have not received the call! Thus we find that this man is religious. He represents a religious people within the church of faithful Christians because he was at the wedding and had not despised the call. And still these people lack something so essential that they are cast into outer darkness.

Also, the five virgins who came to the wedding without oil in their vessels, in Matt. 25, symbolize exactly the same thing as this man. There Christ says that the kingdom of heaven is likened “unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom,” etc. During all their waiting one could not see any difference between the wise and the foolish. No, all of them were virgins. All of them had their lamps. All of them had gone out to meet the bridegroom. All of them waited for the happy entrance with Him into the wedding hall, into the glory. But at midnight there was a cry, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh.” And not until then did it become clear that half of them lacked oil and that their lamps did not burn. And they became eternally shut out from the wedding joy.



But this is expressed still more dreadfully in John 15. There Christ says: “The branches in Me that bear no fruit.” May everyone think over what that word can mean! And in Matt. 7 the Lord says in plain language how much one can do in His name without being honest. One can prophesy in His name. One can show signs and wonders in His name such as cast out devils and raise the dead. In brief, one can do many powerful works. And both the doctrine and life of the bishop in Sardis were such that he was, in general, considered a living soul, but he was not. “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”

Who would not fear for himself when Christ speaks such words! At such words very honest Christians, rich in the Spirit, have often had great fear of possibly being deceived. And with power and eagerness they have cried: “Search me, O God, ... and see if there be any wicked way in me” (Ps. 139:23–24). Would you be the only one who has no need for fear? Would there be no need for you to pay attention to the words of Christ on this matter? But we are now going to see what it was that was missing in the religious people who had such a dreadful end.

A wedding garment? “How camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” What can this mean? In Rev. 19 it says that the marriage of the Lamb was come, and it was decreed that the bride of the Lamb should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white. And then it is added: “for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” What this righteousness of the saints is, can be seen in the seventh chapter. Concerning the blessed multitude clothed with white robes it is declared there: “These are they which have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God.” And to the lukewarm teacher in Laodicea, Christ says: “I counsel thee to buy of Me white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.” Thus, the ones present at the wedding, but who sit there in their own garments, and are not wearing the wedding garment of the King, are that kind of religious people who with more or less seriousness, zeal, and godliness, still only continue in their own righteousness. They have not yet rightly known their sin. They have not yet taken off their own piety. They have not yet put on that of another, namely the righteousness of Christ. They have not yet been able to confess from their heart — with a holy shame: “In the death and blood of the Lamb alone I am saved, holy, clean, and righteous.”

## July 5

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*If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved – Rom. 10:9.*

**H**ere it is said plainly that you become saved only if you believe in your heart, and confess Jesus with your mouth, that He is the Lord and has been raised from the dead. So near and so certain is eternal bliss in “the word of faith.” If you only hold this in your heart so that you believe in Jesus and confess Him in a living way, both as “the Lord” that is come from heaven, and also as your perfect Savior “raised from the dead,” then you shall be saved.

But let us consider this well. When the apostle wants to pronounce the great declaration “thou shalt be saved,” he first states a characteristic feature of true faith, and also, in certain respects necessary, the practice of this faith. And the sign of saving faith is that, by this, you become a friend of Jesus. And out of the abundance of your heart you confess Him and try to promote His kingdom. But the confession also becomes a necessary practicing of faith, as truly as the living faith always bears in the heart, partly an inner desire and prompting to speak about Jesus, who has now become its Treasure, and partly the zeal of love for His glory and the salvation of souls. And we understand immediately that the word confession here means this free, living expression of the heart’s faith. Here no such confession is meant that is only of the mouth, or what is learned from our childhood. Nor is it the confession that we repeat after the clergyman in church. That confession can also be made by all unbelievers. We know, first of all, that the Scripture always speaks in earnest. And when it speaks about a saving faith or confession it always means the living faith and the true confession when “the mouth speaketh out of the abundance of the heart.” Furthermore, the apostle has plainly added the words: “and shalt believe in thine heart.” Here the apostle speaks about a confession where you “believe in thine heart” and therefore speak. As even David says: “I believed, therefore have I spoken” (Ps. 116:10).

And what then does the believing soul confess about Jesus? That He is the Lord, says the apostle. This is the first thing we must believe and confess. Namely, that the deeply despised, tortured, and killed Jesus is the “Lord of heaven,” and that “it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead” (Acts 10:42). Yes, in the confession that Jesus is the Lord is everything that we believe and confess about His Person and Being. We cannot believe and confess this rightly without the Spirit. About this the apostle says: “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor. 12:3). The apostle here speaks about such a confession as a work of the Spirit in the soul. Because by the enlightenment of the Spirit we

can already believe in our heart what all tongues will one day confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

But the believing soul confesses still one more important thing about Him. And what is that? “That God hath raised Him from the dead.” In this short confession of the resurrection of Christ, all is included that the believing soul needs for its full security and eternal bliss. What the apostle here says is that a saved soul believes and confesses that Jesus is the “Lord,” and that “God hath raised Him from the dead,” and this comprises all that saving faith embraces. Thus it is the same thing as is said briefly: “Believe on ... Jesus” (Acts 16:31), “hath the Son” (1 John 5:12), “eateth His flesh, and drinketh His blood” (John 6:54). All the Scripture witnesses about such a faith in Christ, that “whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16)!

“Thou shalt be saved.” Still think of what that word means: *saved!* “Thou shalt be saved.” Can I be saved, eternally saved and blessed in the heaven of God? Do I know something certain about this matter? These matters should make our text important beyond measure to us. Here the apostle speaks as if it is quite certain and decided who will be saved, and it is so. The apostle says definitely: If you are such a confessor as becomes enlightened only by his heart’s faith to confess his Savior (when you always also have several signs of the same living faith), then it is decided that “thou shalt be saved.” Now, it is only a few years or days in the vale of tears, and then you will be in the eternal bliss of God! This is by far too wonderful. Yet it should be said: In all the Word of God it is quite decided that as truly as you live in this faith in Jesus to the end, so that you are enlightened only by faith to confess Him, then you are also one of those who will one day stand on His right hand and be invited to inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. Note the emphasis with which the apostle uses the word “thou,” “thy mouth,” “thine heart” in this verse. Thereby he gives every reader cause to ask himself: Am I such a believer? Is the confession he speaks about here in my mouth? Am I in the habit of speaking about Christ and that only because of the faith of my heart? We have exactly as great an assurance of salvation as our belief in Jesus in our heart, and our confession of Him with our mouth.

## July 6

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*Distributing to the necessity of saints – Rom. 12:13.*

**T**his admonition means that Christians should consider as their own, the wants and needs of their poorer brethren in faith. They should be as eager to help the brethren as to help themselves. We should have so true and heartfelt a love that we act according to the Word: “Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). Yes, according to the great commandment of love: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” And when the apostle especially mentions the saints, we also (as in Gal. 6:10) learn that, though we should “do good unto all men,” according to the general law of love, we should still do so, “especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” This text about the “necessity of saints” shows us that the sharing of goods originally introduced in the first church had already terminated. And the reason, no doubt, was that lazy persons had misused it, and such persons joined the church early. And we learn here that we should give with discernment, not to support laziness and vices, but only for “necessity” or a real need. But this we should do even more willingly. We should “distribute to the necessity of saints.” And it means that with a gracious, brotherly love we should support those who are in real need. And we must not allow it to be misused to encourage laziness and superfluity.

But who are the “saints” now, these “poor saints” as the apostle calls them in Rom. 15:26? Oh, that we would once for all learn to understand the word “saint” aright. Everywhere in the epistles of the apostles we find that the title “saint” is used for all believing Christians. There are no especially prominent Christians, such as the apostles or prophets, that are called “saints”! But all those are saints who have been taken out from the world by the new birth of the Spirit, and have been separated for God. This is the first sense of the word. And these born again souls are holy to God in two respects. First, the perfect holiness of Christ has been imputed to them, and secondly, the sanctification of the Spirit has begun in them. The apostle states these two facts that they “are sanctified ... in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). We are then the saints of God, though we are not free from sin in ourselves. We see this when David first speaks about his difficult distress in sins and then adds: “For this shall every one that is godly pray unto Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found” (Ps. 32:6). Thus we are truly holy only in Christ. Luther speaks about this in strong words worth thinking about: “Paul here speaks about the holy on earth, i.e., the Christians, and calls them saints to the glory of the grace of God, because of which they are holy in faith without works. It would be to scoff greatly at God if a Christian were to deny that he is holy. Thereby he would infer also that the blood of Christ, the

Word of God, the Spirit and grace of God, yes, God Himself are not holy. God has called him holy.”

These are now the saints, and to their necessity we should distribute in such a heartfelt way, as if the necessity were our own. And thus we should try to relieve or alleviate their distress. If we do not do so, but keep all that we own only for ourselves, then we certainly cannot live in the love of God. It is quite another thing if we forget out of weakness, or otherwise be or do what we do not want. But not to have or show any love, witnesses to something still more serious, namely that we do not have the love of God. As John says plainly: “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17).

“Given to hospitality.” This admonition appears frequently (cf. Heb. 13; 1 Pet. 4). And the reason is that, during the persecution, the first Christians were often driven from their homes to foreign places. Moreover, there were few public inns for travelers at that time. The brethren of faith should lodge such displaced Christians with happy and willing love. Yes, they should seek for an opportunity to do so. Today, even if conditions have changed, the great law of love is still valid. We should serve our neighbor in all possible ways. And our love should not only be proved by beautiful words, but in work and deed, even if it involves some pains and sacrifices. Even now we may often be called to provide hospitality. Even if this sometimes involves trouble, it is not impossible for us. We should always serve the brother in need, and that with a happy heart and face. Peter also remarks that it should be done “without grudging.” That is the way we would want to have ourselves when we need the service of our neighbor. And the main commandment concerning our neighbor is this: “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke 6:31).

## July 7

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*I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin – Ps. 32:5.*

**I**s this not a short summary of the doctrine in the Scripture about the pardoning of a poor sinner? But with explicit words, and with innumerable examples God has declared, since the beginning of the world, that in this way the children of Adam will become partakers of His grace. Therefore, let us pay careful attention to the words. David says: “I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” It is easy to understand that this is not a matter of only an outward or occasional confession of sin. No, it is the matter of a poor, worried sinner. However, we should also make a distinction between worry and worry. Many confess the sin with a certain worry, a certain regret and still walk in darkness, as we see from King Saul when he confessed: “I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words” (1 Sam. 15:24). But he never sought a wholehearted reconciliation and union with God. Further when King Pharaoh said: “I have sinned this time” (Exod. 9:27), his confession was only a result of the eight plagues that racked and frightened him. It was not the result of any inclination to come to a total reconciliation with the God of Israel. Yes, Cain also confessed: “My punishment is greater than I can bear” (Gen. 4:13). But at the same moment he went away from the face of the Lord and did not seek His grace. So it was with Judas, too. With bitter grief he exclaimed: “I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood” (Matt. 27:4). From all these examples we see that a right confession of sin requires repentance and a total conversion. Sin will be seen as a transgression against God, and repented of only by the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul. And therefore there is a need for pouring out our heart before the Lord, confessing our sin and asking for forgiveness.

As we have now seen, many an impenitent person bound by vices can confess his sin with bitter grief at certain moments, but only because of the sad consequences. He is not grieved by the sin itself as a transgression against God. Neither is he at all anxious to come to a total union with God. But it is only an occasional pang because of the consequences of the sin. Therefore in the future also he remains in bondage under sin. Thus the true confession of sin requires that the voice of God has awakened the conscience and brought the soul under His righteous judgment. Also it is required that because of the gracious calling of God to reconciliation, because of the gospel of grace, the soul hopes for mercy and therefore goes to the mercy seat and seeks mercy. One who does not know anything about grace, but only knows about sin and judgment does not go to God. Thus a spark of faith is needed for the confession of sin. As long as Adam and Eve felt only the sin and judgment, they fled away from the face of God. That was the way also with David,

when for some time, he kept at a distance from God and did not want to confess his sin. But he “waxed old” and “his moisture was turned into drought” through his roaring all the day long. But he says: “I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”

If you want to see what true knowledge and confession of sin is, then look at David in Ps. 51. We want to point out two things in the prayer of his heart. Though he had caused much offense to people by the obvious sin mentioned there and a dreadful evil deed especially against Uriah, it seems as if God and the offense against Him were so clear to his heart, that he seems to forget all his crime before men. He says to the Lord: “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight.” Here is the picture of a truly God-fearing heart!

Secondly, it is not only the heinous outburst of sin that grieves him. But he also looks with grief at the very wickedness of his nature. He goes to the source and says: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” To know the wickedness of nature itself, to know the complete depravity of one’s being is by far the most important thing. As long as one only looks at some occasional sin, but does not know the sinfulness of the very heart, the very being, one can still always quiet oneself with a false comfort. One never becomes quite lost in oneself, and therefore one does not become quite free and saved in Christ either. Therefore the most important thing in the true confession of sins is that one knows the depravity of the heart itself, namely, the dreadful contempt for God, the ease, unbelief, hardness, hypocrisy, and all the malicious cunning, so that our knowledge agrees with God’s own description of our heart as “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9).

## July 8

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*For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth* – Heb. 12:6.

**T**he Lord Christ said: “Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2). From this I see that the very souls approved of God and called good, fruit-bearing branches are still not quite clean in themselves. Many Christians mix this up to mean that the bearing of fruit means purity from all evil. But these are two different things. A good and precious branch, bearing plenty of rich fruit, may nevertheless at the same time have some dry branches or shoots which should be taken away. Similarly a Christian can be alive and faithful, rich in love and all the fruits of the Spirit, and still have not only his share of general sinful depravity, but may also be afflicted with some annoying fault, a bad habit, which must be crucified and mortified continually, but which nevertheless continuously besets him to some degree. However, he is quite different from the false branches which carry no fruit. Many a natural man can have less faults, i.e., have better behavior by nature, but still at the same time be altogether dead and barren. Note here: that you are not completely pure, but must daily suffer from sins and bad habits. This will not condemn you so long as you are still in union with your Savior. Note also that because of this union you can have the characteristic fruits of the Spirit in spite of all your infirmities. Although you can never become satisfied with “your fruits,” you are, nevertheless, a “new creature” if you are united with Christ.

But now — what does the heavenly Husbandman do with the fruit-bearing branches? The Lord says: “Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” Note: “He purgeth it.” It is a rather short word, but in experience it is very long and painful. He purgeth the good branch. The branch not bearing fruit is not being purged. It may grow free and as it desires, because it will only be burned. But the one bearing fruit will have to be nursed, and so He purges it. Now how does that happen? The picture of Christ is full of instruction (John 15). He speaks of the purging by a gardener. This is not done by means of water, but by means of a knife or a scraper, by means of which dry sticks, moss, superfluous branches, and leaves hindering the fruitfulness of the good branches, are purged away. This indicates rather well, what the faithful ones experience. Do we not often feel the knife of this gardener? When we listen to the Word, do we not feel how this two-edged sword cuts us inwardly, and how it particularly attacks the infirmities and bad habits with which we are afflicted. Furthermore, when we have been negligent in the work of the Lord, cold and disobedient towards the Lord, are we not being scraped inwardly by the punishments of the Spirit! It is the gracious Husbandman who walks in His garden, and makes sure that we are not satisfied with ourselves, but are being continuously purged inwardly. “Chastise



me, also my reins in the night,” says David. Where the Holy Spirit lives it cannot be otherwise. Why, it is impossible that He would not find impurity in us; and it is equally impossible that He would not attack and punish it, even wherever He dwells and works. But what cannot be accomplished by means of these inward chastisements through the Word, the faithful Lord accomplishes through outward suffering, sorrows, and adversities. As Peter says: “If need be . . . through manifold temptations” (1 Pet. 1:6). In short, a child of heaven has to be purged. The apostle says: “Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth . . . But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons . . . Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:6, 8, 11). Note the purpose. He “doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men” (Lam. 3:33), but only “if need be”; as Christ says: “He purgeth the good branch that it may bring forth more fruit.” This is the good purpose. He wants a worthy and precious branch, bearing good fruit, to become even more fruit-bearing and magnificent. Praise the Lord! We see that this is also accomplished by chastisement! Do we not see here and there a Christian, on the whole enlightened and honest, but yet, to our regret, we find in him a certain easy-love and spiritual infertility. Quite unexpectedly we see him struck by a deep sorrow or accident, or a difficult inward tribulation, so that we are alarmed at it. But when he has come out of the furnace of affliction he is changed altogether; he has become a more serious and a more fruit-bearing Christian. As soon as some sensuousness, vanity, self-conceit, etc., begin to captivate us — do we, and all Christians under the guidance of the Lord, not feel that we will soon have a new sorrow which will bring us back to reason? And when the Lord has again solaced our heart, we feel like the aftermath of a refreshing bath, and start to walk in the way of His commandments with new diligence. The Lord has a holy zeal for the souls He prepares for heaven. He wants them to be cleaner and cleaner and more and more fruit-bearing, whereas, on the contrary, others may grow up quite freely and according to the pleasures of the flesh.

## July 9

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*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me* – Matt. 25:40.

☪ I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me... Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me” (Matt. 25:35–36, 40). From the deeds listed here by Christ we can learn something about the field and extent of Christian charity. We notice here that Christ supports an activity turned outwards. He not only speaks about the good things everybody can do inside His house, but He also says: “I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me.”

It is strange that there can be different opinions among Christians as to whether we should seek the distressed or only wait for them to turn up at our door. One complains that he is tied to a household vocation, and so he is deprived of opportunities to do good deeds. He does not see that it is exactly at home among those nearest to us that we should do most of our good deeds. At the same time there are others also who want to be Christians, but who reject downright all extensive activities and want to limit their charity to the ones nearest to them. But where one does not seek a secret defense for one’s own laziness, but really wants to see the truth, the words of Christ: “I was sick, and in prison, and ye came unto Me” and the general commandment of love: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” will no doubt convince you that every Christian should serve all men according to opportunity and capability. We should not only serve those belonging to our household and our friends, for “do not even the publicans the same?” (Matt. 5:46). No, we should also serve those outside. At the time of Christ there was a man who was trying to escape the commandment of love for one’s neighbor, and who replied, “And who is my neighbor?” But in the parable about the good Samaritan, Christ showed that even where there is such a distance in all respects, as between Jews and Samaritans, we should still serve all human beings.

Therefore, you should do good deeds, well-pleasing to God, when you first make friendship with your Savior by faith and attend to your vocation at home with patience and faithfulness, whether as father, housewife, or as a child or servant. In all cases we have many good deeds to do, and they often demand much patience and mortification of the flesh. If you remain faithful in them, all of them will please God, because He Himself has commanded and ordained them. If in addition you can serve those outside the home in spiritual or bodily needs, the sick, the poor, the ignorant, then one day Christ will praise these deeds. He will say, “I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me.”

In brief, “the deeds of a Christian have no name,” says Luther. That is, a Christian does not do any special deeds like the hypocrites who choose a certain deed, and except for this one deed, one does not get any other good from them. But a Christian has love and therefore does all sorts of good deeds, according to the words of Christ: “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matt. 7:12). He has great grace in that he lives in friendship with God and under an eternal and perpetual forgiveness, even as long as God approves of the Surety, the beloved Son. In addition, Christ looks at our small deeds with such a pleasure that He wants to say: “Ye have done it unto Me.” How sweet it is then, to look at Him in great and small and say to oneself: “For the sake of the Savior I now want to give this poor man an article of clothing. For the sake of the Savior I want to say a wholesome word to this ignorant man. For the sake of the Savior I want to have patience with this trying fellow, and show him a happy face and give him a good word. For the sake of the Savior I want to trouble myself with visiting this and that wretched person, and so on.”

When I have the consolation and love of faith in my heart then all this is a pleasure. Nevertheless, when the Lord lists what we have done to Him, we shall think that we have not done anything and reply: “When were we fortunate enough to be allowed to serve Thee?” But then He will protest and declare: “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.”

## July 10

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*Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight – Rom. 3:20.*

☪ No flesh,” says the apostle — “by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified.” Here he uses the word “flesh” in order to remind us of the natural birth from which all flesh derives its nature. Christ says: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6). But now “all flesh,” all human nature is like what it became in the Fall of man, always filled with the old serpent’s seed, and dead with regard to the life which is of God. Because all of nature is commanded by the Creator that all should propagate according to their kind, grass, herbs, and trees “everything after its kind,” fish, fowl, and all sorts of animals, and in its propagation each of them should keep to its kind, as we have seen. As a serpent only bears serpents and the young of a panther also become panthers, so the children of all human beings also are born with the same nature as was the child of the first, fallen human beings: i.e., filled with the serpent’s seed, enmity towards God, contempt for His Being and will, and with an inclination to all evil. God already describes man in the sixth chapter of the Bible as follows: “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). And by nature “all human beings or flesh” is like this.

When we consider this we can understand why the apostle can declare so definitely, that “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified.” The inborn nature is so full of sin, and God puts up the mirror of His holy law against it, a mirror that cannot tolerate even the least little bit of a sinful thought, the least little bit of coldness towards God or our neighbors, but demands that we should love God with all our heart, yes, with all the power of the soul. Further, God’s law demands that we should love every fellow man and woman, not some certain ones, but all who can be called our neighbors, as ourselves, and this not only at one or another moment, but at all moments of our lives. Then how can anybody in his own person please God?

Finally, we should here mention one more fact explaining why no flesh will be justified by the deeds of the law, a fact that few men reflect upon, namely that the mere existence of the law of God and our need for it is sufficient to condemn us in the judgment of God. First of all, because God has given us such a law, with its threats and promises, we can realize that we are not good, seeing we needed such commandments and promises. And secondly, to only do good and flee evil simply for the sake of the law, and its threats and promises, is a black stain on all our piety, because we should do all good only because of the inward good in our hearts. Otherwise we are hypocrites only being kept, by an outward power, from the exercise of evil, which we still have in our heart. For instance, it is like

somebody giving you his child and saying: "I am sorry, but I must ask you to watch over my child for a week so that he does not steal anything." If you watch over him carefully and he does not succeed in stealing anything, and you return the child and say: "He has not stolen anything," is it a good witness concerning that child? "O poor child!" you say. Why? He has not stolen anything. No, but the fact that he had to be watched over is a deplorable thing concerning that child. It is just like that with us!

Is the law not such a watcher looking after us everywhere and saying: "Thou shalt not steal! Thou shalt have no other gods before Me! Thou shalt not steal! Thou shalt not commit adultery! Thou shalt not bear false witness" (Exod. 20)? What do such commandments and reminders bear witness of, if not that we are thieves, adulterers, murderers, liars? Because the commandment "Thou shalt not steal," whispers into our ears: "You are such a man who must be watched, but you must not steal." The commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery," says: "You have an evil desire, but you must not follow it." The commandment "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me," means: "You do not love Me; I must command you to do it." Thus there is an accusation in every commandment, and the Lord our God not only forbids the act of sin, but also every evil inclination, thought, and desire. He does not only want evil to be restrained and, so to say, shut up in the heart, but He wants it not to exist there at all. He wants you yourself to love good so that because of your own good inclination you do all that is good. Thus the mere existence of the law with its threats and promises is proof enough that we cannot be righteous before Him. And that we do good and flee evil because of the law, is enough to prove that we do not keep the law, which, first of all, demands a good and holy heart. Because of this we can even more clearly understand the words: "By the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified."

## July 11

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*(I have made thee a father of many nations), before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were – Rom. 4:17.*

**A**braham believed in an almighty God. And the one believing in a God capable of raising the dead, can then also easily believe that God can do everything He promises. If God raises the dead, why should He then not be able to make old Abraham and barren Sarah parents of a numerous seed? How could Abraham then doubt that God would be able to perform His promise about a numerous seed through Isaac, even if he now offers him and burns him to ashes? God would surely be able to raise him! Abraham had such a faith. But further: “God quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.” That is, God speaks about the things not yet existing as if they already existed, as soon as He has decided to do something. In this way He speaks to Abraham about what did not yet exist, and He gives him the name Abraham (father of a multitude). Because He says: “I have made thee a father of many nations” God quickeneth the dead, and to Him, Abraham already was what the promise said that he would be.

This is an excellent text, full of instruction and strength for our weak faith. In this way we must all learn to believe and think as regards God. Then we become true Abrahamites. God created heaven and earth by His Word and “commanded the light to shine out of darkness” (2 Cor. 4:6). He is mighty enough to make all out of nothing. He is mighty to make life out of death, righteousness of sin. Out of bondage under the devil He can bring forth the glorious freedom of the children of God. The prophet says: “Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one faileth” (Isa. 40:26). The way God calls the stars of heaven by name, He also called all the children of Abraham, each of them by its name, before even one of them had yet been born. And they were to be many. Because to God there is neither a past nor a future. But everything is present to Him — everything that will ever befall us.

Because of the omnipotence and Word of God Abraham believed things he did not presently see. Yes, he believed in a thing most contrary to everything he saw or felt within himself. In that way also, every Christian must on the basis of the promise of God, believe quite contrary to what he sees and feels within himself. This is what really is called “faith,” “faith in God,” “faith in the omnipotence and faithfulness of God,” that He will turn everything into the contrary of what is seen or felt now. So, for the consolation of the poor Christians, Luther has pointed out the faith of Abraham and the God of Abraham — the God “who calleth those things which be not, as though they were.” Luther says: “When Christians are trodden

under foot or their heads are cut off, it certainly does not look like glory, rejoicing, and eternal bliss, but utterly contradictory. But God says: 'I can make what is not as if it were. I can make nonexistent things to be existent.' Sheer joy is made out of all sorrow, and all deep grief. I can say: 'You death and the grave, be you life! You hell, be heaven and eternal bliss! You poison, be a precious medicine! You devil and the world, be more useful to My Christians than the dear angels and the pious saints! Because I can, and want to, build and attend to My vineyard, so that it will only become better by all sorts of calamity and suffering.'"

When an obsessed Christian does not feel anything else but that he has been fully handed over to the devil, and that he fills up his heart, thoughts, and his whole life with sheer sin, sorrow, and misery, then God can say: "You are holy, you are 'clean every whit' (John 13:10), you are My temple." When, due to much sin, I feel quite abominable to God, He says: "You are well-pleasing, lovable, and dear to My eyes." When I see only death and corruption before me, God says: "I see you saved and glorious among My angels in heaven." God quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. And He will do all this to the faithful in this present time, as certainly as He has fulfilled His strange promise to Abraham so that his seed has spread out all over the earth. May God only give us more of Abraham's faith! But you must seek the precious gift with more seriousness than is usually done. Those who, out of their hearts, ask for that gift, often and seriously, and pray to God for it, and diligently consider the Word and deeds of God, they also grow in faith and become strong and fervent in spirit. The ones who are again content with their small measure and who despise the most precious gifts of God, their faith decreases and can even cease completely and depart.

Now, away with all that alarms me and all that weighs me down.

## July 12

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*We ... rejoice in hope of the glory of God – Rom. 5:2.*

**T**he expression can as well mean the glory of God Himself, as the glory He will give His faithful. But it is also one and the same glory in kind and being. God will really give us of His own glory. As Christ said: “And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:22–23). “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me” (v. 24). What human thought can understand all that such words promise us?

And here we should not overlook, but pay careful attention to the following thing. The apostle had not yet spoken even one word in his letter about the sanctification of believers and good deeds. But he already says before, that they rejoice in hope of the glory of God. He shows that they do not base this hope of theirs on sanctification resulting from faith. But he says, that when we have been “justified by faith,” immediately we have both peace with God and hope of the glory of God. The newborn children of grace immediately have their inheritance in heaven. When the people heard Peter preach the day after Pentecost, we also see, that all those who believed could immediately eat their bread with one another with gladness, and that they praised God in singleness of heart. We also read about the Ethiopian eunuch and the keeper of the prison in Philippi that they could rejoice immediately when they had come to the faith. It was not necessary for them to see themselves ripened in grace, or see the fruits resulting from faith. No, only because of the grace that had been announced to them, in Christ, they already had a joyous and blessed heart. And nobody can have such a blessed heart in God without believing both in present grace and coming glory. Because if we do not believe in the latter, for what would the former then serve us? It is true that the fruits of the Spirit can give us a greater assurance of the genuineness of our faith. But faith itself and hope must already first embrace exactly what God has promised, namely not only forgiveness of sins, but also eternal life.

May then everybody be on his guard against the dangerous delusion that a believing child of God will not at once be ready to enter into heaven, but that some ripening in grace and some fruits of the Spirit will be needed first. A false and dangerous opinion! It is true that such a ripening may bring along a greater measure of glory, as the Scripture shows in some places. But we immediately have the very kingdom, adoption, and inheritance by faith alone. And even if we were to live for a hundred years under the upbringing and growth of grace we would not have any more reason for hoping for eternal glory. At the very moment a sinner comes to faith and grace, he is clothed in the wedding garment and can enter into glory.



The thief on the cross and John, worn out with work for Christ, both of them got the gift of eternal life by the same grace. Although Paul still thought the Colossians needed such admonitions as we read in the third chapter of his epistle to them, he nevertheless exhorts them to give thanks unto the Father, which had made them meet to be “partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12).

Thus the hope of salvation and eternal bliss already follow with faith and grace in the same way that the earthly right to inherit property depends only on birth. May we not only own, but also rejoice in this hope. Thereby we give the glory to God. And thereby all our spiritual powers are strengthened in the fight. “The helmet of salvation” (Eph. 6:17) is an important weapon. If we really are in the fight for the crown, then we will not only become tired by the tribulation of these days, but we will also get many wounds, many glowing darts. And then it is necessary indeed that we refresh and strengthen our spirits with the hope of salvation and eternal bliss. If the blessed home and the glorious crown become dim to your eyes, then immediately hasten to the great eternal foundations for the blessed hope. If God is faithful and almighty, then our hope will not be confounded. Only let your faith be increased, and you are at once rich and blessed beyond measure. Look at everything God has made since the beginning of the world, and ask yourself whether it is possible that God has created man for no higher purpose than that he should come to nought after having suffered on earth for a time! The faculties of the human soul already bear witness that there is some higher purpose. And then, would God have given His Son to a bloody death of martyrdom only for our temporal good? Has God instituted the Sabbath and given us the Word and the sacraments only for our temporal good? God has sent His Spirit into our hearts to make us contrite, to solace, and to sanctify us. He has given us the cross and all the chastisement that we suffer daily. And can you still be uncertain about what all this foretells? Finally: Has God given us all the promises of an eternal life in order at last to deceive us? “Lord, increase our faith.” That is the prayer we need here in order to “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Heb. 3:6).

## July 13

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*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me – Ps. 66:18.*

**M**aybe it is difficult for you to believe your adoption with God. Yes, maybe it is quite impossible because of this or that. Then pay attention to the following distinction. Maybe the ground for your despair is that you know that you live in an intentional practice of sin, which you do not want to abandon. For instance, you cherish an irreconcilable hatred towards a fellowman. Or you have made a pact with a fleshly lust. Or you practice dishonesty in business or work. In brief, you obviously live in the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19) and intend to go on like that. Then do not try to drown and stifle such contradictions by means of the gospel. Do not try to reason yourself into believing that you, nevertheless, are within the kingdom of grace, because all the Word of God is quite clearly contrary to that. And the Spirit of the Lord, that should give you the assurance of faith and bear witness that you are a child of God, is “the Spirit of truth,” a clean and holy Spirit.

He cannot give you a witness contrary to the truth. And you will always knock into the words of the apostle to the sorcerer: “Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God” (Acts 8:21). He does not say: “Your sins are too many and grave.” No, he says: “thy heart is not right in the sight of God.” But be glad that he does not say either: “Therefore you must be lost forever.” But he furthermore adds: “Repent therefore of thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.” The sorcerer was leavened throughout with hypocrisy, “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” And think, not even he is condemned, but also he is allowed to come to God and pray for forgiveness! But furthermore, notice that the apostle did not only say to him: “Believe on the Lord Jesus,” but “repent of this thy wickedness.”

So also Christ says: “if thine eye offend thee [if it is to destruction, a hindrance to your life in grace], pluck it out, and cast it from thee” (Matt. 18:9). He does not say: “So believe on Me, and there will not be any need for you to pluck out your eye.” No, faith and a good conscience can never stand together with sins we have tendered allegiance to. They will always drive us away from the mercy seat. Luther remarks that many keep away from the Lord’s Supper and from prayer, because they lie fettered in ruling sins such as irreconcilable hatred, etc., and they do not want to give them up. “To such people,” he says, “the best advice would no doubt be to let the sin go and then come to God in sacrament and prayer. To be sure, this would be better for them than to continue in sin and give body and soul to the devil.” Oh, yes, it is much better for you, says also Christ, to suffer the plucking out of one eye and “enter into life, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.” Oh, be wise! Flee sin! The crown of glory is a good reward for all you have suffered

when crucifying your flesh. If you remain in sin, you prevent your prayer and lose the blessed peace of God in this present time and heavenly joy in eternity.

But note that this concerns the sins you tender allegiance to. It does not concern the ones you only love. As the old love to sin is always left with the flesh, even also with the holy. No, we spoke about sins you tender allegiance to. That is when you again make a pact with sin, excuse it, and intend to keep it. And that in spite of the fact that it is not ambiguous to you, but an obvious sin. To approve of such a sin in the way mentioned is always quite contrary to faith and grace. It is quite another thing when a Christian says: "I love you, sin, terribly, but I hate and curse my love for you," and seeks the help of the almighty God against this very love for sin. Look, if your situation is like this, i.e., if you look that way at your love for the sin and seek redemption — then you should not for a moment flee from your benignant, reconciled Father. No, then you should immediately run into His arms and believe His grace with full assurance.

And then note! Be on your guard so that you do not undertake first to wait for deliverance from sin before you believe in grace. Just because that time of waiting would be a most mighty snare whereby the devil would be able to catch you. It is only by faith that you can expect any redemption. And your flesh loves sin. Yes, some inborn, bad habits follow and plague us as long as we are on earth; at that fact all the holy are compelled to wail. "But such sins," says Luther, "which we thus punish ourselves, are naked and bare sins. And they always have the sacrifice of Christ between themselves and God." Therefore, they will never condemn us as long as we remain in Christ, and sin, therefore, also is crucified.

Now, against such sins and all daily shortcomings you must only, deeply and perpetually, claim the great, eternal grounds for pardoning on your heart. You must fight, as for life and eternal bliss, to keep your confidence of a child. Because you should know that it is by far the highest aim of the devil to snatch this out of your heart and hurl you into despair and the mind of bondage. Therefore, take all the gospel of God to your help. Take the sacrament, and prayer, the advice and intercession of the brethren to your help. So that your conscience will not be drawn down into bondage, but will win victory over the contradictions by faith.

## July 14

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*Hallowed be thy name* – Luke 11:2.

**T**his petition, no doubt, must have a deeper meaning and a greater importance than we see at first sight, as Christ has given it the first place. In addition, this petition obviously means the same thing as the second commandment of the law of God: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain” (Exod. 20:7); and to that commandment the dreadful threat has been attached: “for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.” When now such a distinguishing importance is attached to this commandment and this petition, everyone should begin to suspect that a great secret must be hidden here; as the same commandment and petition seem to be the least important to all ordinary thoughts of man.

Now what can then the Lord Christ mean with the petition: “Hallowed be Thy name”? In order to clarify this we must think of what the name of God means. What is the name of God? Reply: The name of God is everything that tells us what God is, with all His divine qualities and perfections. But all the revelation of God on earth is needed to tell us what God is; and still we can only understand Him in a most incomplete way. Now God has first revealed Himself in His created works. But from that revelation we, so to say, behold only His outer Being. The thoughts of His heart, His divine righteousness and mercy, His will and counsel as regards us human beings, would still remain eternally hidden secrets to us, if He had not also revealed Himself in the Word, first the written one and later in the personal Word that was made flesh, and dwelt among us as the glory of the Lord and the perfect image of His Being. Therefore, all the Word of God is needed in order that we shall learn to know Him.

In brief, the name of God is not hastily pronounced, as the Angel of the covenant Himself suggested when Manoah asked Him for His name. He replied: “Why askest thou thus after My name, seeing it is secret?” — or maybe more correctly: “it is Strange” (Judg. 13:18). So also Moses asked the Lord for His name, and the reply he got was: “I am that I am” (Exod. 3:14). This is the meaning of the name of Jehovah. This is the name of His majestic Being. And, furthermore, to it He has attached many additions which are both dreadful and sweet descriptions of His qualities. Thus it is, for instance, a name that can pierce our very marrow when He says: “For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God” (Exod. 20:5). Yes, He is called a “devouring fire” (Exod. 24:17) — a dreadful God to all the ungodly — He who is the almighty, righteous, holy, and great One. But the Word of God also abounds in sweet and blissful names of our God. He calls Himself full of compassion, gracious, longsuffering, righteous, plenteous in mercy and truth. Most especially, God revealed in the flesh to our salvation is called Immanuel, i.e., God with us,

and Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). He also calls Himself our Consoler, Friend, Shepherd, Bridegroom, Brother, Father. But who can list all the names of the Most High! As a sweet balsam they have been poured out over all the Word of God! As Solomon says: “Thy name is as ointment poured forth.”

In brief, all the Word of God is or expresses the name of God. How could we ever neglect to remember the name which is above every name! To sinners that name is sweeter than all names that can even be mentioned in heaven and on earth. “There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). That name gives rest to all that labor and are heavy laden. It consoles the sad, heals the wounded, gives liberty to the captives, makes the poor rich, blots out sins, justifies and saves human beings! It is the precious name by which God has called Himself in His Son. It is the name of the Savior, the name of Jesus, so rich in consolation. In that name God has put down the whole of His heart towards sinners, His eternal counsel of salvation, His eternal love, His mercy, His longsuffering, His faithfulness. All, all that can make a sinner saved and blessed, God has put into the name of Jesus. That short name is an entire gospel. It means the salvation of sinners.

But while we consider these significant names of God as well as all the other holy words of God, we notice that God Himself begins to appear to our souls glorified, great, glorious, holy, gracious, always according to the names and descriptions of Him that we are considering. From this it seems that it is not only a Hebrew way of speaking for one to say the name of God when one means God Himself. We also use that way of speaking. When somebody speaks badly about his neighbor’s person, his words and deeds, we say: He “disparages his name.” Considering all this, we notice that the hallowing of the name of God includes everything that causes God to be glorified to souls, and rightly known, honored, and loved by them. On the contrary, all that contributes to distort the notion of God, or lessen the reverence for Him and His Word, His work, and His cause on earth — that is not to hallow His name.

*Thy will be done* – Luke 11:2.

**T**his petition altogether demands a heart that loves God, a heart really looking only for the pleasure of God. It demands the heart of a good child who does not have any will of his own, but wants only what his father wants. It demands the heart of a child who does not demand any more reason why so and so should happen, than that it is the pleasure of the Father. Thousands can love something good, noble, useful, or necessary. But that is not the same as to love the will of God, because it is not enough that we love the same things as God. No, we should love the very pleasure of God without regard to the thing He wants. Thus we should love God — and because of His pleasure, love anything He wants, even if a thing seems so wrong or difficult as when Abraham was commanded to offer his Isaac, “the son of the promise.” Then he could not possibly see any reason for it, but only because of the will of God he had to do so. And now the third petition demands us not only to endure such a will of God, but also to so love it, that we pray for it. You see, we should never forget that prayer must be a matter of the heart. It should not be the work of the intellect, or the result of a commandment, but it should be the heart’s own desire.

But when the will of God is the mortifying and crucifying of our old Adam, all human nature wants to be free and loves its own will. Then one may well ask: How can any man get such a heart as loves the will of God so that he really prays for that? Even if we could torment ourselves to death, we would never get such a heart in any other way than by a new birth of God. But when a soul has become well harrowed by its own wickedness and the holy demands of the law, and at long last, as quite unworthy, is so overcome by great and undeserved grace that he says, “O Jesus, it is too much” — and he receives all cleansing in His blood, and all his happiness in His love, when the love of God has been poured out in his heart, then also the pleasure of God becomes more precious to him than anything that can be thought or mentioned. Then the first question of the heart will be: “Thou, my matchless Savior, what may I do to please Thee? Oh, that I might do only the will of God!” And then that soul does not know anything else so good and right as the will of his heavenly Father. And then he does not know anything so wicked as his own heart. And in full earnest he says: “O God, mortify Thou my will. I cannot mortify it myself as I should, but Thou must do it!” And when he thus prays against himself, then he prays for the will of God.

Thus when I have first become exhausted by the wickedness of my own will, and then been seized by the grandeur of God that His will is more to me than all of my eternal bliss, and when His love and sweetness have vanquished me so that

everything is well if only His will is done, then I have a heart really loving the will of God.

Everyone should now pay attention to his own situation. Here again we have a text revealing the innermost depths of our hearts. We again remember that the prayer must be the expression of man's own care, desire, and anxiety. Not everybody will be able to say this petition. Dear reader, please stop for a while as before the face of God, before the eyes seeing the thoughts and intents of the heart. What is your situation in this position? You know well within yourself whether you are in the habit of going about with such anxieties, sighs, and prayers: "God, show me Thy will! Help me to do Thy will!" Why, it is impossible that the Holy Spirit can dwell in a heart without prompting such an anxiety! It is true that a Christian may often be absentminded, and go over the petition: "Thy will be done," while he is not even following it in his thoughts. But listen to the first and last prayer of his heart, and see if it is not just this: "God, my Father, my Savior, help me, help me so that I may do Thy will! Help me against my dreadful sloth! Give me desire and the power of Thy Holy Spirit to do Thy will! And show me Thy way so that I may walk in Thy truth!"

Yes, this is something quite characteristic of a heart where the Holy Spirit dwells. This is exactly one of the great halves of what was to distinguish the children of the new covenant. About this the Lord says: "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33). Why, the law of God, is the will of God! That the law of God has now been written in our inward parts and hearts is only noticed by the fact that the heart loves the will of God and that I have a mind sincerely sighing: "Oh, that I may be able to keep Thy law with all my heart! Oh, that I may be able to do the will of God!" We do not say that a Christian is perfect. Oh, no, there are plenty of infirmities in his inward life and outward living. Neither can he watch, pray, and fight against his bad habits as he should, and desires to. There are no people feeling so many shortcomings as keenly as the faithful. But still note: If he understands that something is the will of God, then this immediately is a law for his life. He also wants to fulfill it. And if his flesh wars against the Spirit then prayer arises. See here how this very petition arises in the heart. It is just the very fight of the flesh against the Spirit that leads to fight and prayer for the will of God to be done. We insist that it is necessary for a Christian to have such a heart and mind.

## July 16

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*Give us this day our daily bread* – Matt. 6:11.

**T**he word in the original text here translated by “daily” has been an ambiguous and dark word, but all interpretations, however, agree that the word stands for something necessary for our being. It does not mean everything the heart desires, but something necessary. It really means, “what belongs to the maintenance of our being.” Now we ask him who wants to “reply against God”: Have you not up to now got what has been needed for the maintenance of your being? Maybe you have not got all according to the picture you have made for yourself of your earthly lifestyle. Nevertheless, you have got all that He has promised, and He knows best what is most useful for you. Do you know how much chastisement of poverty and troubles you need for the eternal good of your soul?

Here we will probably get the following reply from a Christian that is not only poor, but also tied up by debts: “My case is different. Poverty is nothing in comparison with it. You see, I owe people money, and maybe I will not be able to do right to every man. Maybe I will become the talk of the gossipers, and thus a shame for the gospel.” Reply: “Provided that you have no especial inclination for pride which needs very deep humiliation, and provided that you do not ‘tempt God’ by negligence and laziness, or vanity and wasting of His gifts, but you are orderly, humble, diligent, and faithful in your vocation and pray this prayer in simple faith, you have all the promises of the Lord that He will give you so much that you will not need to be put to shame as a defrauder, but will be able to do right to every man.” It is either the matter of the tempting of the Lord by laziness or extravagances, or a difficult pride which needs to be cast down. Only such things can bring over a Christian the bitter experience, so very much more difficult than all poverty, i.e., that he cannot do right to every man.

On the other hand, due to illness or other circumstances many a child of God cannot always support himself, but has to avail himself of the mercy of the brethren. Surely this also is humiliating for our proud nature. But it still belongs to the upbringing the Lord gives some of His children. Sometimes He deals with them in that way until they have become chastised enough to be able to bear some gifts of God. This should always be regarded with the fear of God and humble submission before Him. He alone is the wise and mighty Father, and His right hand is also capable of changing everything.

But the fourth petition also contains some instruction for the happy ones who do not know of these anxieties for their livelihood, and who do not seem to have any need to pray for their daily bread. There are two words in this prayer that they should reflect upon. They are “us” and “our.” If you have the mind of Christ, then you will also think of these words of Christ. He does not say: “Give me my daily



bread,” but “Give us ... our daily bread.” Do you mean that God has given you all those good things so abundantly, only in order that you should live on them yourself and use them as you please? Or should you only collect wealth for *your* children? What does the Lord say? “Give an account of thy *stewardship*; for thou mayest be no longer *steward*” (Luke 16:2). See here what God means when He gives some people so much of earthly goods. Did you ever think of why God distributes His gifts in such an unequal way here on earth? One is so rich that he has much more than he needs. The other is so poor that he has not even got what is necessary.

The secret of the strange and uneven distribution is nothing else than that we have different vocations. Those who have more than they need of the good gifts of the Lord, should be the “stewards” of the Lord. For Him they should administer His gifts. He wants to let a crowd of poor people gather around them to put them to the test to see daily whether they want to administer His gifts honestly, as stewards, and distribute them, or whether they want to lay them up in a napkin and make gods of them for themselves and their children. May we never forget the great, general rule: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48). Neither should we forget the royal commandment: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 19:19). Also do not forget that you are surrounded by so many poor, ill, weak, and infirm, and they all stretch out their hands for bread. Therefore, in this prayer you should pray for all human beings without thinking “me, my,” but “us, our.” Furthermore, do not pray like a rogue so that you say “our” in the petition, but deal with the good things you get as if they were only yours. No, you are only a steward. And stewards we should be with delight, for the sake of the love of Christ. So that He can say about all the good things we have done: “Ye have done it unto Me” (Matt. 25:40).

Furthermore, we know that the expression “daily bread” does not only stand for food and clothing. No, it also symbolizes everything belonging to the subsistence and necessities of this temporal life, such as house and home, goods and money, a pious wife, pious children, pious servants, good and faithful authorities, a good government, good and suitable weather, peace, health, honor and chastity, good friends, faithful neighbors, and so on. When we know this, then at least no Christian will be short of reasons for this prayer, if he does not live only unto himself, but also loves his neighbor. Moreover, the Lord can hastily take away all the good you have now. And therefore, there is always a reason for you to pray for His preserving grace or a daily giving, a “daily bread.” And it is rather wholesome for a Christian thus to feel his perpetual dependence upon the Lord.

## July 17

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*And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly* – 1 Cor. 15:49.

When we hear an announcement like this, we should pray God for grace to have faith and our eyes opened. Listen! “As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” Do you believe that? We bear the image of the earthy (the image of Adam), and that is felt in all our limbs and senses more than we want. But do you also believe as certainly that we will one day bear the image of the heavenly? — we that have been united with Him? Do you believe that Adam and Christ were, one as certainly as the other, ancestors and test-men according to whom we shall be fashioned? Do you believe that they are, so to say, two great models according to which our two different epochs will be formed: One epoch, namely that of the earthy life according to Adam, formed to the image of the earthy; the other epoch, namely that of eternity according to Christ, formed to the image of the heavenly? Do you believe that as certainly as we have borne the image of the earthy in this present time, with all the misery belonging thereto, we shall one day bear the image of Christ with all the glory belonging thereto? Do you believe that for all those who are in Christ this follows at the time set for it, and that as certainly as a definite order of nature, the way the day follows after the night, or the raw and chilly winter comes after the sweet summer? Oh, is this true? Yes, praised and glorified be the name of the Lord!

From all that we are we see what it means to bear the image of the earthy. “Adam ... begat a son in his own likeness, after his image” (Gen. 5:3). Here the apostle, however, really speaks about our bodies. As regards our body we bear the likeness of Adam in the qualities the apostle had listed in verses 42–45. It is in dishonor, infirm, corruptible — in brief, a natural body which must be maintained by means of earthy nourishment from the vegetable and the animal kingdom. And finally, it must itself become earth. But then a chain of all misery, sin and distress, sin and sorrow — all sorts of vexations — belong to the image of the earthy. All our being is, so to say, made up of sins, such as contempt for God, idolatry, ease, hardness, self-conceit, pride, hypocrisy, untruthfulness, wrath, hatred, envy, evil suspicions, unclean lusts, greed, selfishness, etc. As Jesus says: “Out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” (Mark 7:21–22). Look, this is the image of Adam as regards sin. But from this then all curse and misery on earth follow: an uneasy heart, a guilty conscience, sorrow, offense, worry, insecurity, fear, suspicions, ill-health, pains, poverty, the glowing shots of the devil, and finally death and corruption. No matter whether we want it or not,

we still must go about clothed in these remains of Adam. We must go, as it were, through a narrow forest of thorns where we become wounded and bleed all the time. Oh, child of God, do not become tired! Do not become impatient! It is only a difficult passage. Another time will come as truly as God has not created man only for suffering.

“As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” And “the image of the heavenly” is quite the opposite of the image of the earthy. To the likeness of Christ, first of all, “a spiritual body” belongs. It is like the glorified body of Christ. Instead of dishonor, an eternal and heavenly honor and glory. Instead of infirmity, weakness, and ill health: an eternal health, strength, and well being. Instead of sorrow, fear, agony, and insecurity: an eternal joy, bliss, and security, eternal rejoicing on the right hand of God — a never-ending chain of high heavenly delights. And above everything else, instead of our endless, painful sinfulness, an eternal, imperturbable holiness, love, and purity. There we will be able to love God so fully, perfectly, and ardently and with such a felicity as we can never understand in this present state of ours.

Yes, the one who has, even for a moment, e.g., during the first betrothal-time with his Savior, tasted something of the power of the world to come, tasted something of the exceeding grandeur of the sweetness of the Lord will probably agree that there would already have been heaven and eternal bliss if this experience had only become eternal. Look, in this perfect love to God which was the sum of the image of Christ, there is also a most high bliss. And fancy then: to be free from all evil in all respects. To feel quite holy and pure like an angel of God. Perfectly to be all that we wanted and hungered for here, but never achieved. And, never more to need to be afraid of anything evil or dangerous, but to have an eternal security and rest in the company of the glorified Savior. And always and forever to learn in the light to know the wonderful secrets of God. Oh, to such a destiny, the strange creature man has really been created. Yes, one could also expect that from God, when He created mankind in His own image. He is the God of all bliss. And equally easily He could create a never-ending bliss as He created the water-masses of the immeasurable sea.

## July 18

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*Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you — Rom. 2:23–24.*

**H**ere the apostle gathers together all he has said before in the chapter, and furthermore, all he could have said, into only one crushing, final remark: “Thou makest thy boast of the law, and dishonorest God through breaking the law.” That is, when you boast of the law at the same time as you lead a criminal life, you bring dishonor and blasphemy upon God and His Word. “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.” You live in such a way that when the Gentiles see your deeds, and hear that you boast of the knowledge and law of the true God, they must think that this God and this law cannot be good, because you that are His people do such evil deeds. As it is written — to your own prophets God Himself complains of this. He says: “And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned My holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord” (Ezek. 36:20). This is the chief point in the crushing denouncement the apostle gives the Jews here.

That the way we live should cause the dear name of God to be blasphemed, is something so terrible that it makes a pious heart almost die at the mere thought of the possibility of having done something like that. And here the apostle says that the Jews lived so that the very heathen, in their darkness, could dishonor and blaspheme the name of the Lord because of them. Let us remember how the Jew, though he was above the heathen because of the many and great superiorities he had in comparison with them, always looked down on them with pity and considered them “blind” and thought they were “in darkness.” When the apostle now throws over the Jew the accusation that the very heathen were learning to despise and blaspheme God because of his sins, then we must say: It was a terribly crushing combination. And the human heart must in consequence be broken to pieces and crushed if there is to be any new birth — any true receiving, any blessed life of the grace that the gospel announces. That was the purpose of the apostle’s crushing sermon. It was to “prepare the way of the Lord,” to “fill every valley,” and to “bring low every mountain and hill.” Thus he had to wound and grieve in order that his glorious gospel would then be allowed to heal and solace the better.

I am sorry to say that the apostle’s words about the Jews here, apply far too well to most of the nominal Christians, most especially the scribes among us, the teachers who do not teach themselves but live in impenitence. Oh, that everyone who reads these words of the apostle were able to take them to his heart, and look into them to see whether or not they apply to him. Through the holy baptism you have been taken up into the covenant of God. Maybe you also use the sacrament

of the body and blood of Christ. Maybe you have a good knowledge of Christianity so that you can speak the Word of God correctly to others. Maybe you also speak about the need for repentance, true faith, and a holy life. But how is it with your real being, your heart and life? This is a correct application of the text! Do you yourself live in repentance before God? “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). He knows it. Do you yourself live in a true union of faith with your Savior? Do you yourself live in daily sanctification in order to mortify your own flesh, its lusts and desires? Or maybe your Christianity only consists of knowing and speaking — so that you say: “One shall fear and love God above all,” while you live in the worshipping of your own small gods, without any fear or bewailing of it at the mercy seat. Maybe you interpret all the commandments of God to others, and impress them on them, but are a swearer yourself, or a Sabbath-breaker, or a drinker, or live in hatred towards a fellowman, or live in secret vice?

Oh, that would be a dreadful hypocrisy! But the Lord, the almighty and holy One sees it. He knows you. As truly as God does not lie, you hereby “treasure up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5). And in this way you give others reason to blaspheme, and show contempt for the holy doctrine you profess. Your household and your neighbors will take support from your ungodliness, and console themselves in their unconverted state. Thus you contribute to destroy and harden those for whom Christ has suffered death. Such things He will one day require from you. If only you did not confess the faith of Christ, then you would sin on your own account. But now you sin against the holy Name of the Lord, and the flock He has bought at such a high price. Because of this fact the Lord says: “What hast thou to do to declare My statutes, or that thou shouldest take My covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest My words behind thee” (Ps. 50:16–17).

*He [Abraham] staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God – Rom. 4:20.*

When Abraham did not mistrust the promise of God, but continued to believe and wait for its accomplishment, no matter how bad the situation seemed to human eyes, the apostle says that he thereby had “given glory to God.” This is a word worth thinking about. The one who, in difficult trials of faith, still continues to believe that God is truthful and keeps His promise, the one who still continues to hope where there is no hope, only because God has given the promise, he is the one who gives glory to God. That man acknowledges in earnest that God is almighty and truthful.

As Luther says, “To give God His rightful glory is nothing else than to consider Him a faithful and truthful, wise, merciful, and almighty God, and in short to recognize Him as the One who alone creates and gives all good things.” This is only done by faith. On the other hand, by unbelief we deprive God of His glory and make Him only a weak, powerless, or unfaithful being. As John says, “He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar” (1 John 5:10) — which of course is quite terrible. But unbelief is like that.

“Therefore,” Luther again says, “God our Lord does not demand anything higher of us, human beings, than that we give Him glory and hold Him to be our God, i.e., that we do not hold Him to be an imagined and empty God, but a right, truthful God, who Himself takes an interest in us, hears our prayers, has mercy upon us, and helps us in all distress. When He gets that from us, then He has His Deity whole and unviolated. Yes, then He has all that a faithful heart can possibly give Him. To give God such glory with all one’s heart, no doubt is wisdom over all wisdom, righteousness over all (human) righteousness, worship over all worship, sacrifice over all sacrifice.”

If we would bear this in mind correctly, we probably would, more than usually is the case, try to obtain the gift of faith, because after all, it would be a pleasure for us to be in a position to give God something really pleasing to Him. And this we do, only if we take Him at His words and promises and thereby give Him glory. How by faith Abraham gave glory to God, the apostle indicates furthermore by adding: “And being fully persuaded that, what God had promised, He was able also to perform.” He was fully persuaded and pervaded with the truth, that He who had given the promise also was mighty to fulfill it. By the question: “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14) the Lord had made Abraham think the matter over deeply. Whatsoever God promised He also could perform, because He was the Creator Himself, the Almighty. To Him nothing could be impossible, of course.

It was by the same remark that the Virgin Mary also was made to believe the strange annunciation that she who “knew not a man” (Luke 1:34) was to become the mother of the Son of God, when the angel reminded her: “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (v. 37).

Here we see that faith must be based on the omnipotence of God. Faith shall comprise things so high and absurd to all reason, that nothing less than the omnipotence of God will secure it. It certainly is not faith when one adjusts and interprets the word of promise so that we, poor, powerless, and blind beings as we are, should be able to understand in what way it will be performed. On the contrary, this is to measure the power and wisdom of God according to our own, and thus make God equal to us, fallen, helpless fools. This is downright blasphemy. No, when I have only the Word of God the Almighty, I should let it be enough for me. Then faith does not any more allow itself to be bent back by the question: “How is this possible?” but cuts off all such debates with the only counter-question: “Could anything be impossible to the Lord?”

It was exactly with these words and our text that Luther and his fellow combatants strengthened themselves in the fight for the right doctrine as regards the sacraments, against those who wanted them to consist only of what reason could explain. All the faithful should especially prepare for such trials, trial of faith in the grace that is present and felt in all sin, temptation, and tribulation, and trial of faith in God’s reply to their prayers, and help in all other distress during the way.

In such trials nothing else will be enough to uphold faith except the power of the strength of God Himself. The Lord our God will Himself see to it that we get such trials, because it is a matter of His glory and our perfection in grace. The more we are tried, so that we cry and scream with all inward and outward distress and still are saved by Him, the more His power and faithfulness are glorified.

As He Himself says: “I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron... That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me. I am the Lord and there is none else” (Isa. 45:2, 6).

## July 20

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*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:  
who forgiveth all thine iniquities – Ps. 103:2–3.*

**Y**ou may say: “I too would believe in the forgiveness of my sins, if it were not for a certain sin. That sin is by far too grave and wrong to be forgiven!” There is a secret weight on your heart. It is true that this is difficult, but note how the words read: “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities.” It is true that there is a sin unto death — a sin that can never be forgiven, and that is “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 12:31). But those who are guilty of it are never in the habit of seeking forgiveness. Now Christ also says plainly that this sin is the only sin that will never be forgiven. As regards the rest He says: “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men,” even such grave sins as blasphemy against God, yes, even the most dreadful sins. Remember the Lord Himself declares solemnly: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18). Stop here! At such a great declaration on the part of the merciful God, would you not comply with His will and take Him at His words even if you do not feel anything in your heart? Or perhaps you still want to fight against God, and refuse God, and refuse to believe Him, though He has given a word so great and rich in comfort. Thereby you make yourself guilty of the dreadful sin of making God a liar! After that, do you still even for a moment want to turn away from your God in unbelief, cold and stiff and in a wrong attitude?

But you say: I also once received and believed in forgiveness, but have sinned again. God cannot forgive perpetually, can He? Reply: It certainly is a most grave sin when you sin again after receiving grace and enlightenment. But, nevertheless, pay attention to the words. The word does not say “has forgiven” as if it has happened only once. No, it says “forgiveth,” perpetually and incessantly. If God does not forgive perpetually, then His forgiveness is of no use, for then no soul would be saved. Everything would be lost immediately, as there are perpetual sins in our flesh, and they also appear all the time. Here the precious words of Luther apply: “As there is an eternal sin adhering to our flesh as long as we live here on earth, and as there is no end of faults and offenses, it certainly is necessary that we have an eternal and firm forgiveness. This is so that we shall not again come under the wrath of God because of our sins, but that we shall, nevertheless, always remain under grace for the sake of forgiveness.” This is the eternal covenant of the Lord, and it is a fact that sin cannot condemn us!

Take David himself here as a proof for you. For a long time he too had been under the grace of God, and had enjoyed quite an extraordinarily great grace. In his early youth he was endowed with the Word of God and the enlightenment of



the Spirit. He was a shepherd chosen and anointed to be the king of the people of God. Then he had been blessed with great victories and much glory. Yes, he also was a great prophet of the Lord. And look! He falls into two of the greatest sins — adultery and murder — at the same time! There were now “sins as scarlet.” And mark it, they had been done by a most enlightened and pardoned man. And nevertheless — nevertheless he received forgiveness! He received a glorious promise and forgiveness. And that immediately he had confessed his sin unto the Lord. And what had he done in order to reconcile himself to God and get forgiveness? Nothing at all. Not even the least little bit. Only after much resistance had he finally been driven by distress, so that in the midst of his shame he came before God to confess the sin. And then he immediately received forgiveness. He says himself: “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me... I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Ps. 32:3–5).

I now see what the eternal covenant of God is. It means that no sin can condemn us. Here I see that though the sins be as scarlet they shall, nevertheless, be as white as snow when they have been washed away in the blood of the Lamb. Here I see that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Here I see that even if we have had grace and enlightenment before, the sin, nevertheless, will be forgiven immediately. Here I draw the sound, simple conclusion: David had so much light and such great grace, and yet he sinned so heinously. If God forgave *him*, then I dare not despair even for a moment and go far from my God. Then I can, I ought to, and I may be assured that He will forgive me as well, provided I do not increase all my other sins by the blasphemy against God that would say, quite contrary to His Word, He has respect of persons (Rom. 2:11) and does not keep His Word! May God preserve me from such unbelief! After all I also am a human being, I, as well as David. Surely I also have been atoned for by the precious blood of Christ, I as well as David. And David was just as heinous a sinner as I. When, nevertheless, he received grace over such grave sins, then I dare not despair. Most especially as the great, merciful God Himself says: “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ezek. 33:11). “Only acknowledge thine iniquity” (Jer. 3:13) — and “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”

## July 21

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*Who healeth all thy diseases [shortcomings, Swedish] – Ps. 103:3.*

**N**ote this also. It is a tremendous comfort, and the second great help we need against sin. When we have received the forgiveness of our sins, we also need grace to keep away from those sins, and the Lord also wants to give us that grace. He healeth all thy diseases, which is as true as that God has forgiven you all your sins, and as true as that you have really received this forgiveness, and are a child of God, and have been united with your Savior and thus have the Holy Spirit, and as equally true that you have such a mind that your highest anxiety and desire are to get rid of the shortcomings adhering to you. There is no more difficult torment for you than your own weaknesses and sins. Note this: you have such a mind that these, your shortcomings, are your most difficult pain! If this mind does not accompany your faith, then you do not yet know what true faith is. Even if you have experienced much, and understand all the articles in the order of faith and now believe that you have faith, your faith, nevertheless, is still only a self-made faith of the imagination, if you are not troubled more by your own shortcomings than by any other evil thing on earth. The Scripture says expressly: “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5). And “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (v. 9). But it is impossible for those who have the Spirit of Christ not to think of how to be holy and like unto Christ. This must be their deepest concern and they must suffer from their shortcomings to the same degree, because the Spirit of Christ cannot possibly live in peace and concord with the flesh. And it is equally impossible that the flesh, the very sinful nature in us, can be at one with the Spirit. Therefore, also Paul confesses as regards himself: “I delight in the law of God after the inward man [the new creation within us, which creation is born of God]: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin” (Rom. 7:22–23).

But secondly, it is also required that we understand correctly what it means that the Lord heals our diseases. Many say that it means that we shall be fully delivered from them, and thereby would soon be quite clean, the way Christ was, and the way we shall be in heaven. But it is not so! This is a delusion. It is true that God will heal our shortcomings and spiritual diseases each time, but they can always come back. May nobody be at ease! We have seen that Paul always had to feel a law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and sometimes *bringing him into captivity*. No, it acts in the same way as with bodily healing. In bodily healing a human being can always stumble again, fall, injure himself, or otherwise fall ill. And God has never given us any security against such accidents. Instead He has filled up the earth with medicines and given us doctors to heal all sorts of

illnesses. That is the way it is in this matter also. God never makes us free from our shortcomings here on earth, but He Himself wants all the time to be our Doctor. As He says: "I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exod. 15:26). The church of Christ on earth is only one huge hospital where everybody has his infirmities. You will not find even one holy, or not harassed by any shortcoming. And in addition, we are by far too impotent to make ourselves free from it. Because if we did indeed have power to do so, every Christian would certainly do so immediately.

It is our only consolation that the Lord Himself wants to be our Doctor and all the time to heal all our diseases. Notice that it does not say here "hath healed" as if it had once been made so that it would never more be needed. No, it says "healeth" here. It happens and should happen perpetually. And He does this so that He first punishes, grieves, smites, and kills our old man. And then when we cry for grace, He again consoles, solaces, and restores us. He then gives us a new intention to walk more carefully. It is so consoling to hear Him say Himself: "See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal" (Deut. 32:39). Take David himself as an example of this. In addition to the minor, everyday shortcomings, David sometimes fell into grave, spiritual illnesses. One time into an unclean lust which was so mighty that he took his neighbor's wife. And look, the Lord smote him, but also healed him. The other time he fell into pride so that because of it he counted his people. And behold, the Lord smote him, but healed him again. Then he sang this Psalm: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases."

## July 22

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*And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing* – 1 Cor. 13:2.

**I**t is a distressing fact that, while a finer form of self-righteousness seeks to make a way to eternal bliss out of our love and its evidences, on the other hand, we also see the opposite. Christians who have learned the great principal truth that we are justified entirely without merit, only by faith in Christ, and who, by means of this faith have received the new heavenly love, after some time, partly become so cold, dead, and negligent as regards love and its manifestation, that they seem to “live only to themselves”; and partly also, they are easily able to console themselves for this lack and say that after all we are saved only by grace through faith — as if we could be saved by a faith without love.

It is most especially against this regrettable deceit that we should — often and seriously — think of what the Word of the Lord teaches us in this matter. It is true that we become righteous only by the grace of God, by faith in the love by means of which God loved us in Christ, and not by any love of ours. It is not true that we become righteous by means of a faith without love. No, the apostle says: “Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, yet have not charity, I am nothing.” “It is as impossible that there can be living faith without love, as that there can be fire without heat” (Luther).

When the Scriptures teach that we become righteous only by faith, it only means that faith makes the heart alive and warms it with love. Christ our Lord said: “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). And in his first epistle John many times repeats, that just because of love we should “know that we are of the truth” (1 John 3:19), should “know that we are of God” (1 John 5:19), and “born of God” (1 John 4:7). If we once have faith, we also know, how we have a new, burning love in our hearts, not only towards the gracious God who forgives us all our sins, but also towards our neighbors.

On one hand we have the “brotherly kindness” towards all those who in our opinion believe in and love Jesus Christ, and on the other hand we also have “charity,” so that with heartfelt care we think of the salvation and eternal bliss of all human beings. If now this holy love has ceased, how is it then with our faith? No matter how serene and strong our confidence is, and how great our spiritual light is, our faith, however, must now be nothing else than a dead image of what it was before, as it does not produce any love. Note also, what great and praiseworthy deeds Christ our Lord found in the angel of the church in Ephesus, even after he had left his first love, which Christ declared was such a serious sign, yes, such a “fall” that if there were not repentance, the candlestick would be removed out of its place.

“I know thy works,” the Lord said: “and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name’s sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent” (Rev. 2:2–5).

Here we find that love still is a special thing in the heart, and can be lost, in spite of such praiseworthy activity, and such powerful Christian deeds as the ones Christ lists here, when you are no longer lying at the feet of Christ, but are good in yourself, and therefore can no longer be smitten with love towards the brethren. That this love can be missing in spite of most magnificent deeds is also shown by the apostle when he says: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, ... and though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned [like the martyrs at the stake], and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Cor. 13:1–3).

Indeed this should awaken us to think it over, in the presence of our Lord, how we can have true love. Both from the words of Christ and from the words of the apostle, we see that no matter what we are, believe, or do without having this real love in our hearts — which love is born in our hearts by faith and grace — everything is false and words a deceit no matter how Christian and beautiful they seem. Let us remember and think of this throughout our lifetime!

## July 23

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*Whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's* – Rom. 14:8.

**T**his is both the secret and the greatness of the life of the faithful on earth. Their whole life, their existence, and also their death, belong to the Lord. They are not their own. They belong to the One who has created, redeemed, and sanctified them. They are His — not only according to the covenant with Him, but also according to their spirit and the complete direction of their life.

“For none of us liveth to himself.” The spiritually dead cannot but “live to themselves,” live for their own account and according to their lusts, “free from righteousness” (Rom. 6:20). The reason why, on the other hand, the faithful really live unto the Lord in their spirit and the whole direction of their life, is that the new birth and the spiritual life are not only a thought and imagination. No, they are a great reality providing themselves in powers and qualities which never exist in nature. Among these powers and qualities the characteristic is that we no longer live unto ourselves. Now we have the highest and dearest goal of our life as the Lord — His sake, His glory, His pleasure — no matter how well or poorly we may succeed in realizing in work and deed what we most sincerely love and strive after. As we said, already we live to the Lord, not only according to our covenant with Him, but also according to our spirit, our most innermost inclination and striving. If we do not live up to this, but begin to live to ourselves in some respect, then this is a deviation from our innermost will, and we ourselves must punish that deviation.

“And no man dieth to himself.” With regard to his death also a Christian is no longer his own. No, he is the Lord's and submissive to Him. A Christian has neither right nor will to throw away his life as he likes, e.g., for his own glory. If he must risk or sacrifice his life, then it must happen according to the commandment and order of God. “Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price,” says the apostle in 1 Cor. 6:19–20. Only if the glory and pleasure of God, or His commandments and order, require it, should we be willing to sacrifice our life. And then in the way and at the time when it pleases God. A faithful man should neither desire to live nor to die, as regards himself. He should always say: If God wants me to stay on earth longer, then I too want to do so. Again, if God wants to take me home, then I do not want to be on earth. At one time we err by desiring a longer life; at another, by selfishly wishing to die. All that we are and have — including our life — belongs to the Lord and should be submitted to Him.

“Whether we live, we live unto the Lord.” That we live “unto the Lord” means that we consider our life, our entire existence, as the Lord's property and therefore always act as His servants. It means that we look at His will in everything, as the only rule for everything we do or undertake. It means that our only goal is His glory

and His pleasure. It also means that in everything we experience here in this life we resign ourselves into the hands of God — in weal and woe, whether He gives or takes, and we want to sacrifice all our gifts and powers to Him.

“Whether we die, we die unto the Lord.” As all our life is the Lord’s, and has been consecrated to Him, so also is our death. If we die a natural death, it then happens in the consciousness of the fact that we are the Lord’s. We want to be content no matter at what moment and in what way it pleases Him to call us. But in certain cases our death also depends on our own choice. During a bloody persecution the martyr can escape death if he denies the gospel; or a missionary may avoid a certain enterprise for the salvation of souls which involves a certain risk of death; or the soldier who should risk his life according to the command of God, may be able to save it by fleeing. In all such cases a Christian is both obliged, and according to the Spirit, willing sooner to give up his life than to forsake his loyalty to the Lord, or cease to live only for His command. And when he thus sacrifices his life for the sake of the Lord, it is also obvious that he “dieth unto the Lord.”

“Whether we live, or die, we are the Lord’s.” Both in life and in death we are His property and His servants. Only the faithful have got the consolation and advantage that no matter where they are — in life, in death, or after death — they “are the Lord’s.” They are His property and the object of all His love and faithful care. They are always in the hands of the One who said, “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). If we live here in a foreign country, we are nevertheless His children and servants. We are in His invisible company. And if we are called to depart this life, then we are “present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8) to see Him forever as He is. Here in this present time we belong to the Lord first according to faith and conscience and then according to love and service. And when we die, we are also the property of the Lord. And we are in His care — both as regards our body and our soul. Our body is in His mysterious, but safe keeping, hidden until the day of resurrection. Then it will be restored, incorruptible, to eternal life. And our soul is in the paradise of God, in conversation with Christ and His saints until the great day when it shall again be clothed with the “spiritual body” which is like unto the glorified body of Christ. Be certain that the one belonging to the Lord in this present time also belongs to Him in death and eternity. Thus it is a condition blissful above all our thoughts that “whether we live, or die, we are the Lord’s.”

## July 24

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*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved* – Mark 16:16.

If we want to have a Bible word comprising all the glorious gifts of baptism in short, strong, and explanatory terms, we have one in Gal. 3:27: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” God, help us so that we will immediately notice this fact! “You have put on Christ.” Look, here is the entire secret of the inconceivable purity and well-pleasingness before God we receive as a gift in baptism into Christ. We have put on Christ. We no longer stand before God in our own persons, but in the Person of His Son Christ, even as Christ stood before His Father on the day of atonement not in His own Person with His own appearance, but in our persons as the only sinner for all sinners, bearing the sins of all the world on Himself. Then He represented the world. Now we put on Christ by baptism into Christ. And before God we are not considered according to what we are in ourselves, but according to what Christ is. We stand before God in the garment of Christ, in the Person of Christ, in the righteousness and reputation of Christ. This is what it means to “have put on Christ.”

All that Christ was for us and did and had, has been transferred to us and given to us in our baptism into Christ. Because, according to *His* gracious pleasure by His words about baptism, Christ included the whole of salvation and eternal bliss in that baptism and attached to it all that He had merited for us. Therefore, as many as are baptized into Christ at once put on all that belongs to salvation and eternal bliss, i.e., the whole of Christ and all His merits. So that what Christ was and is to us is so fully ours as if part of our persons. And what Christ has done in our stead is so fully ours as if we had done it ourselves, simply because we have put on Christ. Now what is Christ? First of all, Christ is sheer purity and righteousness. Therefore also we are sheer purity and righteousness. In ourselves? No! Only in Him. “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Furthermore, Christ is well-pleasing and beautiful, so that the Father has all His pleasure in Him. Christ is the Son of God and the Heir of the kingdom. Therefore, we are the children of God, heirs and joint-heirs with Christ.

Now we understand how the infirm disciples were clean every whit. Now we understand the meaning of the text: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). That is, though they are still in their flesh, and much impurity and infirmity adhere to their feet during the daily walk, nothing of all this can in any way be imputed to them to condemn them. Simply because they have put on Christ, that they should no longer be looked at and judged according to what they are in themselves, but according to what Christ is. Now we



understand why the prophet foretold: “And this is His name whereby He shall be called, The Lord our righteousness” (Jer. 23:6).

The one who correctly and fully understands this secret can truly be said to know something. He has come completely out of the hands of the devil and has laid an unwavering foundation for a true, divine peace in his heart. But the one who does not understand or want to understand this secret has no right insight in the gospel and can neither advise himself nor others. Neither can he ever during all his lifetime come to peace nor to true sanctification without this secret. Even less can he help others to peace and sanctification. Therefore, this knowledge of salvation is so necessary to a Christian. Then he can at long last get a warm Christian mind both towards his God and his fellow men, and a well-founded and wholesome peace in his heart. Because, when this truth enters the heart of a man, and he no longer stands before God in his own, unclean garment, but has put on Christ and is clean, beautiful, and well-pleasing to God in Him; and knows that his sins, which are such a wretched pain to him, will never be imputed to him, oh, then he becomes a new creature. Then he is disgusted by all his own efforts — both his piety and non-piety. Then Christ, Christ, only Christ becomes his All, and in all, both his Righteousness and his Sanctification: yes, the focus of his life and thoughts. Then he loves Him and His holy ways. Then he is pleased to take leave of his previous world, his previous living in sin and vanity. Then he gladly wants to follow his Lord and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and bliss. For that matter he has his hope only in Him. He prays in confidence: “My dear Jesus, take all my heart. Cleanse me now. Mortify my flesh.” This is what is both worked in us and typified by baptism. Therefore the apostle calls it “the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5).

## July 25

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*Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve – Luke 22:3.*

What we most especially should learn from this dreadful event is that nobody should be at ease and think: “The hypocrites are hypocrites. An honest Christian has not got anything to fear.” No, the example of Judas teaches us otherwise. In fact, when the Savior chose Judas to be an apostle, he was not what he later became. And how many there are who have begun in the Spirit and have ended in the flesh? From the example of Judas and all other instances of falling into sin, we see how soon it can happen that even one outwardly a Christian is lost. When the truly evil moment comes, the devil attacks you with cunning and power and kindles the desire of your flesh, and blinds your intellect so that most dreadful sins do not seem the least little bit dangerous to you, but, they seem infinitely dear, yes even necessary — then it is easy to fall. At such a moment of temptation three things are evident: First, The sin becomes very dear and pleasant to you. Secondly, You cannot find it dangerous, no matter how much you look at it, but it seems trifling and unimportant. Thirdly, You begin to sin with regard to small things and think: “so little does not matter.”

In that way the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety. He said: “You shall not die. Why, it is only the matter of taking an apple! And an apple is only an apple! But on the contrary you will win much. First you will enjoy the sweet fruit, and then you will get a better intellect.” It was the same when he seduced Judas. It began only with some pilfering. And then he would think: “I take so little — and only this time! (though it happened every time). And surely it is not wrong that I have something for my pains.”

Furthermore, when the devil inspired his heart to betray Jesus, then it was so natural to think: “Thirty pieces of silver is not to be despised, and there is no danger. First of all, Jesus is innocent, and then He is almighty. His life would not be in danger. But I get a good profit.” Judas no doubt thought like that. Who could have told him that the day after the deed was done he would be so desperate that he would go away and hang himself? No, he did not think so. He only thought of how he would enjoy his money that day. On Thursday Christ had warned him, and if he then had believed what he experienced the next day, he would surely have feared that transaction as much as hell itself. But he did not yet see it for himself, and the devil filled him with other thoughts.

May everybody think of this in time and learn to understand the true face of sin and the devil. If you approve of sin and hypocrisy in only one case, and on one occasion, then you will soon become so blunt, duped, and blind that you can no longer see that there is any danger at all. And then you will — step by step — go

to your uttermost perdition. It is so strange that at the evil, satanic moment of captivation, even if you want to consider and look most profoundly into the sin to which you are tempted, you will possibly not be able to see anything else than that it is not at all dangerous, but trifling and feathery. On the contrary, it will at the same time also seem dear and sweet to you. These are the right colors of the face of sin at the moment of temptation, and true signs that you are in temptation at that time, or going through a test when the weal or woe of your immortal soul will probably be decided. Because if you now begin to play the saint, and tender allegiance to sin and hide it, then you will be done for.

Hypocrisy is the golden overcoat of sin and the devil, and without it the devil cannot achieve anything. Remove hypocrisy and you will never be able to remain in any sin or continue in it. But you will always get up from it and be saved. If Judas had only confessed what the devil had inspired him to do even if it had been only to one of the disciples — then the devil would at once have been disarmed. And then Judas would not have continued in sin any longer. This is a means seriously tempted Christians at all times have used against the devil, and always with great blessing. Therefore, the admonition of the apostle applies in exactly this way: “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed” (James 5:16).

But all this is something a man seldom believes and reflects upon rightly, before he has learned it from his own bitter experience, and then it is often too late. What is it that he does not believe or reflect upon? Even that a man is blinded at the moment of temptation, and so becomes confident and daring, and thinks that there is no danger at all. Yet after all one’s very life and soul are at stake. And even if someone believes this, it often happens that sin does not seem dangerous to him, at the time he himself falls into temptation to sin.

Here we should then fear continually and ask with the disciples: “Who then can be saved?” And Jesus replied: “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:25–26). So long as we remain in this fear and this consolation we can never perish, but we will always be in the hand of God. He is a faithful Helper and Shepherd. And He says Himself: “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand” (John 10:28).

## July 26

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*Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath* – Rom. 12:19.

**H**ere the apostle sets the just wrath and revenge of God against our ungodly self-revenge. Thereby he suggests that God will take care of us in everything, avenge all wrong inflicted on us, and arrange for right to be done to us, if we let God protect us. If we avenge ourselves then we have gone in advance of God, and taken away the case from Him. In that case we have to help ourselves. Such things are suggested when the apostle sets the revenge of God against our revenge, and says: “Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath.” The apostle does not say that the injustice we have suffered will not be avenged. No, he only wants God to be allowed to keep His majestic right, and to be the Judge of all men, so that we do not infringe on His office by any self-revenge. The Lord alone wants to be King and Judge over His creatures.

“For it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” These words of the Lord should forever put an end to all our desire for vengeance. Because, when the great God wants to be our Avenger, then we should be so afraid of His wrath, that our anger would be turned into sincere mercy and intercession. We see how very much God loves His children and friends when He says: “for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye” (Zech. 2:8). We see with what an ardent zeal He watches over His own when Christ declares: “the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matt. 10:30). This also means that God will pay attention to the most hidden wickedness and cruelty that anybody can inflict upon us. And furthermore, we know how dreadful it is when the Lord God Himself is angry and punishes a man. Then surely we should be quiet and only pray: “God, have mercy upon us all. Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Because when the Lord punishes the ones who do something wrong and evil to you, then He will do it in a somewhat more dreadful way than you yourself might have wanted to do. Let us never forget that the one inflicting undeserved suffering upon us has not done so only to us, but in an even higher degree, to the Lord God. He takes much more heartfelt care of us than we do ourselves, and then your oppressor is immediately subject to the wrath of God. And he will not be able to escape Him, as no man has so far escaped the Lord God!

The truth is that sin will not come to nought. The high perfection of God will see to that. Sin will always hit the sinner in some way, either in this present time or in eternity. And here in this present time either in the sorrow of repentance and a partaking in the suffering of Christ, or in eternity in the suffering of punishment and revenge. If in this present time the sinner comes to repentance and a partaking in the suffering of Christ for sin, then he will not bear the punishment for the sin, because Christ has undergone that. But he will, nevertheless, have the suffering of

remorse and chastisement. If on the contrary, this does not happen, then the wrath of God will always befall him. This often happens in such a way in this present time that we do not see it as a punishment for sin. It may happen by ordinary accidents, illness, famine, fire, water, war, etc. But sometimes it also happens in such a way that we human beings can clearly see the just revenge of God therein; for instance, where a man has oppressed the weak, the widows, and fatherless children, and has wrongfully usurped the possessions of others, and then is punished by strange accidents and ends up in uttermost poverty and misery; or when somebody has reviled, betrayed, and belied people, and has deprived them of their good name and reputation, and he himself falls into obvious shame and dishonor; or when somebody has inflicted serious, poignant griefs upon the hearts of human beings, yes, sorrows for all their lifetime, and human justice has not been able to reach him, but finally he ends in an unbearable mute melancholy, insanity, or suicide; and so on. But if God does not avenge the evil deed here in this present time, then His just revenge waits for the dreadful eternity, the coming wrath. How then could you want to be angry with your enemy? How could you want to avenge yourself further or entertain any evil thoughts and wishes against him, when you know that such a grave wrath of God already lies upon him? Should you not then rather be filled with a heartfelt pity, and pray for him that he might come to repentance? We should bear such things in mind, when the great and dreadful Lord says: "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay."

The apostle now speaks these words to us in order to refute and choke off our strong disposition for wickedness and self-revenge. And in fact for all those who want to be Christians, and themselves live of sheer mercy, and need the patience of God at all moments, this should be enough to persuade them not to take the least revenge upon a sinning fellow-servant or have disaffection towards him.

## July 27

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*The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ – 1 Cor. 10:16.*

In these words the apostle tells us what the Lord Christ intends and brings about when He administers His body and blood as meat for us. You see, this is the intimate union between Him and His faithful ones. Of this He Himself says expressly: “He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him” (John 6:56). And immediately after the institution of the Holy Communion He said: “Ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you” (John 14:20). “I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit” (John 15:5). And again at the same moment He says to His Father: “And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:22–23). Think what such words of Christ mean! What a wonder of divine love! “He that eateth My flesh, dwelleth in Me, and I in him.” Remember that these words have been said by Christ Himself! They startle us. We cannot contain such great glory. But what can we do? They are the words of Christ Himself. They are no dream or myth. Christ cannot lie! And moreover, what is the limit for the glorious counsel and works of so great and strange a God?

He has first reconciled us by His blood, made us clean, righteous, and well pleasing to God. Then it pleased Him also to make us glorious and to unite and amalgamate Himself so intimately with us, as we notice here, in giving us His holy body for food and His blood for drink. Because what we eat and drink becomes our own in a way that nothing else can become our own. For instance, the gold and silver I own, do not become part of me; neither do they have such an influence on me as the bread and wine I enjoy. Our Lord Christ desired to ordain His holy body as meat for us and His blood as drink for us in order to be incorporated with us in the closest way. He desired to make an indissoluble union between our spirit and His Spirit, our body and His body, our blood and His blood. He desired that His love, His purity, His worthiness should be our own — eternally our own. The pious Tauler has the following noteworthy words about this: “Nothing is closer to the Son of God than the human nature He took on. By personal union He has attached it to Himself. But nothing is closer to us than what we eat and drink as it is transformed into our flesh and blood. As now Christ desired to unite Himself with us in the closest way, He instituted this holy sacrament whereby we eat His body with the blessed bread, and drink His blood with the blessed wine.”

Should this not be the height of the glory of this very precious sacrament! Should this union not be the greatest glory to us on earth! Yes, when a soul first receives

against all his sins the great consolation that this sacrament wants to give, then he often becomes so burning with love to his Lord and Savior that he would surely desire to be able to press Him into his heart. So that he would not consider anything a greater bliss than to be able to be united with Him in a most intimate way. And behold, then the gracious Lord comes and finds a way to satisfy that desire also.

But if we want to think of the real basis for this, we must remember that it was exactly the reunion of man with his Origin, with God, that was the aim of the entire counsel of the atonement. Man had been created for an intimate union with God. Therefore also he had been made in His image. This was lost in the Fall. When the uniting tie was torn off, man separated himself from his Creator. And this was the death of which the Lord had said: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

The first step towards the reunion between God and man was taken in the birth of the Son of God. Then the Son of God became a man. He became like unto one of us. He put on our flesh and our nature, and became our Kinsman. A remarkable union took place between God and us. Because we were now united in a blood relationship, therefore, the prophet had also said in advance: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). It is not only God among us, but God in us, God in our flesh, God our Kinsman. About this the apostle also says: "For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:11). This union began with the birth of Jesus, but He seems to want to perfect the union in this wonderful sacrament. There He allows us to unite with ours the human body He had taken on. This is surely something the angels desire with deep desire to look into! What a sanctuary the man carries in himself who has been made a partaker in the holy body of Christ! He is one body and one soul with Him! What glory and bliss!

## July 28

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*As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him – Col. 2:6.*

**N**otice here the small word “so” — “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him.” As it happened at the receiving, at the beginning, at the origin of life, so it shall also happen during the walking, in the continuation, in the growth of that life. The same thing as became the death of the old man, and the origin of the new one at the first, the same thing shall henceforth become the death of the old man, and the growth of the new one.

The whole chapter where we find these words, is to the effect that the faithful, having once received Jesus Christ, should never let themselves be led astray to think that something special should be undertaken in order that they might become holy. No, they should know that the same Christ and the same faith whereby they have been justified and pardoned, has also worked and continues to work sanctification. They should only simply remain and grow in the faith by which they first received Him, and “hold the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col. 2:19). The sum of this is: Everything depends on whether we remain in Christ, who of God is made unto us both righteousness and sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). So also Christ said: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me” (John 15:4). By the abiding in Him, we have first, all life, all desire, and all power; and secondly, all the necessary care, supervision, and correction. As He says: “Every branch that beareth fruit [that truly is in Me, living and fruit-bearing], the husbandman purgeth it [because, nevertheless, this good branch is not quite clean], that it may bring forth more fruit.”

When the very foundation and the inward life have first been made right, the second step is, that the flesh should be mortified, and the Spirit should rule in all conditions. In baptism the old man has been sentenced to death. We have been baptized into Christ’s death. When a man becomes a Christian, he must at once begin to take leave of his previous being and living. “Christ died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15). When we have received grace and peace with God, we also get a heartfelt desire to be allowed to live unto Christ, and to die to ourselves. Maybe somebody confesses the faith, but does not have a spirit willing to die. He does not want to be crucified with Christ, but wants to have both his faith, and freedom to live as he likes. He does not want to obey any admonition of the Word, but wants to be unpunished and licentious in his natural being. Such a person deceives himself with a false and imagined faith, for “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal. 5:24).



We here want to give to those young in the faith and grace some simple examples of how and when the flesh should be mortified. You wake up in the morning. What is more reasonable than that you begin to thank and worship the God of your life, your heavenly Father, with a heartfelt delight for all He has given you both for your body and soul? Most especially you should thank Him that He has given you His Son, and the Word, and the sacraments; that you are a child of God, that you have put on Christ, and that you are clean and well-pleasing to the eyes of God. Then thank and pray! Do you feel slothfulness when you come to pray? That is the flesh. The flesh should not rule, but must be mortified. This is the exercise of the new life in you! You should be warm towards your God throughout the day. You should be afraid of doing anything against Him. You should dread sin more than death. Are you cold and at ease? That again is the flesh. Do you have an earthly vocation? You should attend to it with diligence and care. Are you dull and slothful towards it? That is the flesh. It must be mortified. Are you a master or mistress in the house? Then you should manage your house with care and zeal, also with mildness and meekness. Are you negligent and careless, or impatient and angry? That is the flesh. It must be mortified. Are you a child or a servant? Then you should do what you have been commanded to do, and that with love, respect, mildness, diligence, and loyalty. Do impatience and displeasure rise up? That is the flesh. It should be mortified. Maybe somebody insults you and makes you a liar, and you want to be angry and hate him? That is the flesh. Maybe unclean lusts, or envy, or pride, or self-satisfaction rise up. They are all of the flesh. They must not rule, but should be mortified. In this lies the exercise of faith.

In this way you know from the commandments of God Himself what true holiness is. There is no need for you to look at uncertain deeds and your own imaginations for a holiness of the reality of which you are not sure. In this you will also get so much to do, that you will not be very content with yourself. That is, if you rightly and seriously look at the holy will of God, and look at your own inward man in the light of the spiritual requirements of the law of God. If you do this you will remain all your life in a constant state of dependence on the faithfulness and help of your God. And behold! This is exactly the way the flesh is mortified. It is the art of sanctification that we depend on God like a child, every day, and keep close to Him every day, by His Son. We should keep on maintaining the faith, the confidence of a child, joy and inclination and power by the Word about Christ. And then, with this willing spirit, we should pay attention to the holy will of God and the beautiful example of Christ. This probably will not go as smoothly and beautifully as when we say it, but it goes as the Lord gives it, when He deals to every man the measure of faith (Rom. 12:3).

## July 29

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*And he [the serpent] said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said? – Gen. 3:1.*

O h, that for the eternal well-being of his own soul every man would, once for all, learn the real point in all the efforts of the devil with regard to us, and the real point on which it depends whether we shall be saved, or caught by this enemy. It is the point Satan attacked first of all, the matter of the Word of God, whether a man should definitely believe what God had said, or whether, by careful thinking, a man could find some reason for believing something else. The result of the fight will surely depend on this point.

When for many decades an old Christian had fought against Satan, and at last sought to express briefly what had been the main thing on which always depended his standing or falling, he had to say: "It depended on whether I was able to stick to the Word of God, or whether, on the contrary, I let it go, and merely began to think my own thoughts, to think freely according to my own opinions outside the Word. I would think and float at one time, in one direction, and at another time in another, according to the opinions of myself and of other men." Yes, in all temptations, whether on the right hand or on the left, the victory or otherwise depends on that point.

How does it happen that a Christian, who was once frightened at the faintest thought of a certain sin when it was still far from him, can at another time make a downright pact with the same sin, and in a casual and careless mood can begin to both freely indulge in sin, and even to defend it? Only by turning his eye away from the commandment of God against the same sin when tempted, and by beginning to think his own thoughts, to think freely regarding the matter, without looking at the Word.

How does it happen when in the name of religion and conscience, for the sake of the Lord, people undertake some very great foolishnesses, and make a good and holy deed out of things God has never demanded of us, yes, even out of things He has forbidden; and on the contrary, make sin of things God has never forbidden in His Word? There are so many examples of this in the Jewish and papist churches, but it also often happens amongst ourselves. The reason is only that man does not attempt to find how God has spoken, but thinks he knows because he has a feeling, or an inner voice saying this and that. Or perhaps other people think and say so. He does not see what God says.

Now does it happen when because of his sins and shortcomings a fighting Christian loses confidence in the grace and friendship of God, and becomes unfamiliar and shy with the Savior, and gets tied up by the spirit of bondage, in spite of all that the gospel tells us about Christ and the eternal grace and freedom from the law that He has earned for us? Only because he turns his eyes away from

the Word God has spoken to him, and begins to think his own thoughts, till he feels it is quite impossible that he can be a child and friend of God, while he is feeling this way. Oh, that we could shout the truth into the ears and hearts of all the children of God so that the mountains would tremble: Listen! All the power of Satan over you depends on whether he can turn your eyes away from the Word of God. All your victory will depend on whether you can stick to the Word of God. The Word of God! The Word of God! What does it say? Look into the Word to see how God has spoken. Everything will depend on it. Everything you may want to be considered spiritual, but which is not founded on the Word of God, is foolishness and false. Only the things commanded by God are good and holy. Only the things forbidden by God are sin. What God calls sin and forbids, that is sin and dangerous, no matter whether your heart refuses a thousand times to consider it sin, and the whole world with all holy and learned persons consider it innocent. What God calls good and holy is good and holy, even if you and the whole world think it unholy. And as to the things not especially mentioned by God, they should always be judged, used, or forsaken, according to the law of love, as to whether on that occasion it will do yourself or your neighbors good or evil.

So the basic rule stands firm that what God has not commanded in distinct words, or in the general law of love, is no good deed, even if in the eyes of yourself or others it appears most glorious. What God has not forbidden in distinct words or in the general law of love, is no sin, even if you and the whole world think it to be so. Everything depends on the Word of God. If you do not stick to it, you will always be a reed shaken with the wind, and then the devil can bring you wherever he wants to.

This was very strongly preached to us in the remarkable conflict between Satan and Christ, where He, who of Himself could have spoken the holiest and purest words of God, still does not answer Satan by one single word of his own, but only by the words of the Scripture: "It is written! It is written!" Only reflect upon and remember for all your lifetime that the Lord Christ Himself did not say anything else to Satan than only: "It is written!" Is this not a strong burst of thunder against all our own thoughts and opinions, and an eternal testimony to the fact, that all the devil aims at with his temptations is to take us away from the Word, and that to overcome him we must stick to the Word of God alone?

## July 30

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*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you* – John 6:53.

**A**s barbaric and indigestible as it is to many when Christ speaks about the eating of His flesh, so clear, precious, and enlivening it is to those who live in daily exercise and enjoyment of same thing. When the faithful want to describe their real heart-life, they can never express themselves better than by saying that Christ is their meat. The words of reconciliation are their deepest, most vital need and their vital nourishment. Look at the true children of grace. I can never recognize them so well by anything else than by this quality, that the consolation of the blood of Christ is their vital need. They are not always what they should be, and what one would wish them to be. They have to fight against their manifold infirmities, but they have one distinguishing feature, and that is that Christ is their vital need. Year after year they continue with one and the same main theme for their discourses. First and last they read, hear, sing, write, and speak about their Savior, about Christ and His grace, about the flesh of Christ given for us; and then about sin always adhering to them, and making them inert and unworthy, and how they plan to overcome sin, and so on; but then again they return to the subject of their Savior, and His grace and power.

When they have been without the dear Word of grace for some time — whether they have been prevented by earthly cares or by sloth and negligence — all their inner man is as weak and faint as the body of a hungry man without nourishment. They are powerless and uncomfortable in their lives. Their faces are gloomy. Their profession has become silent. Their walk is unsteady and faltering. But if they now come to the Word they are like a physically hungry person coming to a good table. When they have sat for a while under an evangelical sermon about Christ and the grace of His atonement, then we see their eyes brighten up. Their heart becomes cheered up. Their confidence and intentions of improvement are renewed. And when they go out from that place they often can hardly be silent about it. It has gone with them according to the proverb: “There is a happy head on a full stomach.” We do not say that they are always fitted for eating like that, for becoming refreshed like that by the words of the gospel, or even always for hungering that way. No, sometimes they are spiritually ill and indisposed. But we do say that, if their inner man is ever to be rightly enlivened and strengthened, then it must happen by the Word about Christ given out for us. The Word about Christ is their perpetual, vital need, the real food for their soul. And Christ here declares that this quality is absolutely necessary when He says: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.”

A heart not able to live without the word of reconciliation is a most sure witness to a spiritual life and a continuous repentance. Because the living knowledge of sin works this perpetual need for grace and the Word of grace. Yes, is it not a remarkable sign that even though a man may not study, read, hear, and consider anything else as much as this Word of grace about Christ, yet he can never become fully taught therein? He can never remember and keep it. I can remember and keep other things I have learned thirty, forty years ago, but not this thing that is dearest to me and that I study daily. Does it not witness that my faith has become something other than knowledge, when its nourishment is consumed and vanishes like the food I eat?

On the contrary, there are other spiritual men who need nothing so little as this Word of reconciliation. It is something they have learned once and now know. And therefore they now want to hear something else. These cannot wonder enough at the weak and strange souls, who never get enough of the Word of grace. And they, therefore, conclude that those others are an infirm people not making any progress, but stopping at the first thing, despising the law, the admonitions and sanctification, etc. Oh, if they would realize what this intellect of theirs reveals about them! If they themselves would live under the chastisement of the Spirit in the true exercise of repentance and faith, then surely they would know that it is simply because the Spirit daily drives and chastises the heart because of all the sin still dwelling there, and because the law goes so deeply against inward depravity that man can never get rest and consolation in his piety — it is because of these reasons that the soul perpetually needs again and again the Word about grace and the atonement of Christ.

Yes, I do not quite understand it. But there is something strange with the souls that can never become fully taught in the subject they study most. But it is sure that the Word of Christ comes true to such souls that His flesh is their meat — and they have His certain declaration that they also will “live by Him.” And if somebody worries you because of the fact that His flesh and His atonement are the perpetual meat of your soul, then you should console yourself by remembering the words of your Lord: “For My flesh is meat indeed.” But on the other hand, those who do not have such a heart, but who have been fully taught in this vital subject, and yet are now becoming equally enlivened by subjects that cannot possibly be the “bread of life” — those of whom Prätorius says: “they are equally enlivened by Sirach as by Paul” — those souls no doubt have a suspicious sign that they do not have their vital need and their nourishment in the atonement of Christ. The one who does want intentionally to shun the light, should stop at this noteworthy sign. The Lord Christ Himself has said this.

## July 31

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*But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons – Heb. 12:8.*

God is a gracious Being immeasurably rich in love. This is the most certain thing on earth. Does this verse then mean that all the children of God on earth shall suffer? Yes, here is wisdom, the revelation of the secret thoughts of God. If our eyes would only be opened to see what the suffering of the children of God represents, then we would love and rejoice at all our suffering as sincerely as at sweet messages from our Father in heaven. By these He tells us so lovingly: “Be of good cheer! You will come to heaven. Do you not feel that I have already begun to prepare you for it? I have begun to mortify your flesh; cleanse, try, polish, and sanctify your spirit, soul, and body! Be confident, that I do not prepare you in this way without having a reason for it! Be assured, that I will really take you to heaven, if I prepare you for it here in this present time.”

This sign speaks so clearly, that even the blind have hereby caught sight of the great truth that God gives His children eternal life in heaven. Only because of this phenomenon many thinkers have come to assurance, by sheer reason, that there is an eternal life after this life. They have studied the phenomenon that in this present time “there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked” (Eccl. 8:14). On the contrary, it always goes well for the unrighteous. From all that these thinkers see about God in creation, they have, nevertheless, understood that God must be quite a perfect Being, perfect in justice and infinite in goodness, love, and tenderness towards man. Then some of them have come to understand there must be another time coming when the uneven will become even. Then Lazarus will get his good, and the rich man the evil he deserved. And others have understood that all the suffering of the children of God is nothing other than the work of the Holy One in order to mortify sin in us and to complete our sanctification. They have seen with their own eyes what the apostle says: “for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin” (1 Pet. 4:1), and realize that the “old man” becomes weaker, and his lusts and desires become fainter, by sufferings and afflictions.

Thus we understand the meaning of God in our sufferings; He prepares us for heaven; He mortifies our sinful flesh and completes our sanctification. What would happen to all our Christianity, to all the work of the Spirit in the soul, if God all the time did not chastise and salt us with sufferings? Do we not feel daily how we immediately begin to become sleepy, fleshly, and worldly, when everything has gone well for us for a short time, and all has been quiet and happy? And how would faith be exercised and maintained, if we did not have trials? To faith, it is a natural exercise, when we are brought into a position where we do not see anything, and

do not possess any help and power, but must depend only on the almighty and truthful God! What would happen with our prayer life, if we always had all we need, or were able to help ourselves? How would it be with our fear of God, if He did not show Himself angry now and then? How would we appreciate grace in the long run, if of ourselves, we were able to get rid of our sins in the flesh, or were able to make ourselves free from them whenever we wanted? How would it be with our love and humility, if we never had any humiliations? It is regrettable that, in spite of chastisements, we sadly make slow and weak progress with regard to the growth of all these good things. But how would it be if we had no chastisement? From this we see how necessary it is for our growth for the better, for our sanctification and our preservation from spiritual death and the dominance of sin, that God all the time follows us with His awakening and correcting chastisement.

This is the main reason, why all the holy formerly, and all the true children of God still today, must have something bitter, some suffering, some chastisement. And this is so definite an order of God that the apostle says: "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." This is a plain statement. It says plainly that you shall have chastisement, if you are a child of God. If you are without chastisement, and may live freely as you please, then it is a decisive sign that you are a bastard and not a son in the house. We understand well that small infants do not yet need chastisement. They are still led well by only the Spirit and the Word. But when they have partly grown so that they can stand harder trials, and have partly become sleepy and careless during the passage of time, then they shall have chastisement. Because it is unknown in the Scripture that a child of God can be so clean and good that there is no more any need for him to grow, or to be purged, or tried. It is a rule without exception that all those who are being prepared for heaven should endure chastisement, trials, and the rod.

## August 1

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*Ye that fear the Lord, wait for His mercy; and go not aside, lest ye fall – Ecclesiasticus 2:7 (Apocrypha).*

**H**ere someone may ask: How should we fear God and put our trust in Him? Reply: Only in as far as it corresponds to what God really is. We must know Him rightly. Then we immediately have both the fear of God and faith. When we are lighthearted and at ease, the reason is that we do not know, believe, or keep in mind who God is. If we rightly believe how great and mighty God is, and what a holy zeal He has against all sin, and how truthful He is in His threats, how close He is to us, and how He sees everything, and how gracious and faithful He is, and so on, then we certainly would both fear Him and put our trust in Him. And when we consider all these qualities of God, which we should see with our eyes in all His judgments, which we know from the Word and experience; and when we add to these qualities the fact that He often commands us in His Word to fear Him and put our trust in Him, then we shall reply: we should fear God and put our trust in Him so that we do not fear anything else, no matter how dreadful it may be in itself. We should fear absolutely nothing other than God. And we should not put our trust in anything nor anyone else, no matter how strong, excellent, and reliable it or he may seem. We should not put our trust in anything other than God, and then the Lord will be our only God. Then He alone will be the object of our heart's fear, confidence, and worship.

But how shall I understand that I should not fear anything except God? There are many dreadful things on earth! One must shudder at the mere thought of them. Just think of how much evil, bitter and mighty enemies can do to us. Or think what it would be like to die at the hands of a murderer. Or to lose our sight. Or our reason for our entire lifetime. Or to be seized with a dreadful and incurable disease. Or to be smashed by a thunderbolt. And the list of dreadful things can be made longer. Should we not fear such things? Reply: Yes, everyone who does not have as his only God, the almighty Lord, no doubt must fear.

Do you on the other hand really believe and keep in mind that there is a living, thinking, watching, and almighty God present everywhere? Are your spiritual senses open so that you see and believe that? Then you must realize that none of all these dreadful things can touch even a hair on your head unless the faithful and almighty Father has decided so. If it is His will, then the lightning, the disease, the accident, or the sudden death will come upon you. If He has decided otherwise, then none of these can touch you. If He sees that it is necessary or profitable for you that your heart is again made contrite, and again suffers and bleeds, then He will send you a sorrow, a loss, or a wicked man that injures, belies, and reviles you. If He wants to give you peace, nothing like that can happen to you.



Look how Christ answered Pilate: “Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:11). Look how David speaks about the wicked man Shimei: “So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David” (2 Sam. 16:10). And when Jeremiah speaks about manifold afflictions in such words as, that one is “crushed under the feet,” and that “the right of a man is turned aside,” etc., he says: “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?” (Lam. 3:37–38). When Satan gets permission to plague Job, the Lord God prescribes to him exactly the measure and the degree. The prophet Amos says: “Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?” (Amos 3:6). And the Lord Himself explains the reason: “That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me. I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things” (Isa. 45:6–7).

The one who does not believe in this only God has thousands of things to fear on all sides. Such a man looks here and there and has a perpetual unrest. Today he fears illness, tomorrow poverty or losses. Today he fears that a wicked man will do damage to him, tomorrow that a friend will desert him. If there is worrying news, then he does not know any helper, if he himself, or other people, cannot help him. That is the just punishment for those who do not allow the almighty Lord alone to be their God. On the contrary, what a blessed security and peace he has that believes only in one mighty God, and believes also that He is a faithful Father.

## August 2

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*I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images – Isa. 42:8.*

**F**rom the Scripture the Jews knew that God had promised to send a great and good Shepherd for mankind. The promises of this read thus: “And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even My servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd” (Ezek. 34:23). Now the Lord says in John 10: “I am this promised Shepherd. All those who have come before Me and claimed to be considered as the coming shepherd, are thieves and robbers. I am the good Shepherd promised to you.” By this, the Lord wanted to teach us that He is the only good Shepherd of His kind. He is the good Shepherd in such a sense, that nobody else than He can make such a claim. This is an important truth bringing both warning and consolation!

You see, Christians should be on their guard against an idolatrous clinging to an under-shepherd. First, it is an idolatrous and injurious clinging when you become so dependent on a human being that: (1) all your consolation and guidance would be lost if that person should die or be removed, and (2) you also would deviate from the truth if your teacher should go astray from the way of truth. Just think, what a danger! A Christian must have his center and his heart’s real support in the Lord alone. So that, if he should come to a most desolate place, where there is no gracious voice of a shepherd from any human lips, he would still be able to support his soul with only the Savior and His Word, and exclaim out of his heart with David: “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want” (Ps. 23:1).

Secondly, if an otherwise most excellent teacher preaches another gospel than Christ and His apostles have preached, then you must let it go, and stick only to the Word of the Lord. You should say: “I know how Christ taught and dealt with sinners. I stick to that. He is the good Shepherd. I stick to Him.” Among the other plagues pressing on the faithful undershepherds, it is not the least when they experience that the poor sheep they have wanted only to draw to “the great Shepherd of the sheep” (Heb. 13:20), that has bought them with His blood, now begin to become so dependent on the servant that, without him, they are unhappy, or without all consolation and guidance in the truth. Because the sheep cling to him, many a faithful servant must be taken away or be put to shame by a stain, so that people learn not to make a man into God. So says the Lord: “My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside Me there is no Savior” (Isa. 48:11; 42:8; 43:11). “I am the good Shepherd.”

By this we certainly do not want to praise the cold spirit of carnal wisdom who despises all the vessels the Lord has given to His church out of great mercy, and despises the light in the Word God has given to the world through these vessels. The

carnally-wise only believe their own spirit, and say that only they can interpret the Word in the Spirit of God. In their own mind they can even despise such glorious vessels as God has used for the recreation of His church, although these vessels have received the seal of God Himself and His confirmation of their sending, in the form of extremely rich fruits. We certainly do not want to praise this carnally-wise spirit. Neither do we want to contradict Paul when he praises the state of the Galatians as extremely “blessed” at the time when they received him as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus Himself, and would have been willing to pluck out their own eyes for him. So burning a love can be only a most beautiful sign of a true and blessed state.

We only want to warn against the idolatrous and slavish clinging described above — a clinging so injurious both to the sheep and the under-shepherds. We want to say the same thing as John the Baptist said: “Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not Christ, but that I am sent before Him. I am only the voice of one crying in the wilderness. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom. He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:28–30). The apostle Paul said the same thing: “Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor. 1:13). From these places we see how even these holy men were subject to the plague of the disciples who wanted to cling to the servant. Therefore, we should not wonder if it happens today also. But we should be on our guard against it as against something injurious to souls bought at such a high price. And many beautiful examples show that at that time when a Christian was deprived of a good shepherd — not that he despised him, but that he was deprived of his service, and was compelled to stick closely to the Lord Himself and to His Word — even at that time his spiritual zeal increased. And not only that, but his heart also was filled with a much higher and more abiding joy in the closer acquaintance with the Savior Himself, who now sought and attended to the lonely sheep. And by such an experience we learn to understand and know what the Lord says: “I am the Lord: that is My name: My glory will I not give to another.”

## August 3

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*For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things – 1 John 3:20.*

Look carefully at the word: God knoweth all things; therefore He will pronounce another judgment than does our heart. What does this mean? Let us look at it carefully. Christ says that His body was broken and His blood shed for us. If you could rightly believe and keep in mind what it means that the Son of God has given His body and blood for us, would you not begin to cry with sheer joy? Would you not say: “Against that, all sins are like nothing. They are hardly like a spark against the great sea”? But it is always that very way to the eyes of the Lord. In heaven the blood of Christ is always highly exalted and honored. There it has more value than all the world. You and I have such miserable hearts that they can never even for a moment hold and carry in our thoughts this that is greater than all the world. To our dark and infirm hearts the value of the blood of Christ is rather trifling. But to God it always has an immeasurable and inexpressible value. Christ knows this. Therefore He could say: “He that is washed ... is clean every whit: and ye are clean” (John 13:10). You and I cannot quite believe this, but Christ believes utterly that His blood is valid. Therefore He can judge the way we have seen above. Ponder this deeply! Then in your worst distress over your sins you will be able to say to God: “Holy Father! If Thou now wantest to reject me, then Thou must first reject Thy beloved Son, His body and blood, which Thou hast received as a ransom for me. Thou canst not reject me as long as Thou approvest of the ransom.”

This is the real reason why grace is unchangeable. But John says: “God knoweth all things.” There are still more facts which God knows and because of which grace is imperturbable. In Luke 22 it says that Christ knew in advance that Peter would fall and deny Him. That makes me think that, had this infirmity of Peter been a reason for Christ to reject him, He would have done so earlier, and He would never have been gracious to him for even a minute. Because He knew all the infirmities of Peter from the beginning, He did not, even for a minute, think anything better of Peter. Our thoughts go wrong if we think that God sees our sins only now and then, when He has seen them all from the beginning. In the twinkling of an eye He sees everything dwelling in us, every evil thing that will break out in the course of our life. If He would ever reject us or become tired of us because of such things, then He would never have begun with us. He would never have begun to save us, or to draw us to Himself, or to pardon us. He knows that we, in fact, are always the same, both for better and worse. A Christian has two natures, the flesh and the Spirit, and they are at constant war against one another. One moment the Spirit comes into sight so gloriously that one hardly notices anything of the flesh, but

only life, peace, love, and godliness. The next moment the flesh and the devil come into sight so dreadfully that one hardly sees anything of the Spirit. Who could see anything of the Spirit in Peter at the moment of sifting? But the next moment the Spirit again appeared, and he “went out, and wept bitterly” (Matt. 26:75). Now Christ always knows that we are really the same in all these changes. He does not let Himself be deceived. At the moment when Peter shows himself so strong and faithful in the garden, Christ nevertheless knows how he will fall in the evening of that very day. And at the moment he falls, Christ nevertheless knows how Peter is still the same faithful friend at heart and in spirit. At which moment should He then reject him? To keep this in mind belongs to the “wisdom of God in a mystery” (1 Cor. 2:7).

Once more: “God knoweth all things”! Christ says that the very same, infirm disciples who forsook Him at the moment of sifting, would one day be in heaven with Him, and would sit upon their thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Then no sin and infirmity would adhere to them. Christ knows how one day, throughout all the never-ending eternity we will be clean, glorious, and beautiful, full of love and holiness, to His never-ending praise. Now I think — and so also an old teacher writes — that we can say to Him with all consolation: “Oh, my dear God! I pray Thee to consider me, at the moment I fall, in the state I will one day be in heaven. There I will not sin against Thee in any way. No, there I will love and praise Thee infinitely. If on the contrary Thou dost want to look at me the way I am on earth, then Thou wilt find a sinner offending Thee with some sin each day and moment. But if Thou lookest at me in paradise, then Thou wilt see a saint who will never, for all the never-ending eternity, offend Thee even once, but all the time will be perfectly loving and praising Thee. Look at me in that state, and be not wroth, though for thirty, forty, or fifty years Thou must see me subject to weakness and infirmity.”

Oh, might this inexpressible grace captivate, strengthen, and delight all faithful hearts, so that they will not love anything or anyone more than this dear, gracious Savior. Then that love will be the source and power of true sanctification, because love makes everything easy. And “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10). May God increase our faith and love — for the sake of His love!

## August 4

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*For I through the law am dead to the law – Gal. 2:19.*

**T**hese words contain the secret of our freedom from the law. We also read in Rom. 7:4, 6: “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law.” And again: “but now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held.” Note the word “dead.” In the same chapter the apostle shows how it happens, and what it means to become dead to the law through the law. He says: “I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died... For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me” (vv. 9, 11). What do such words mean: “I became dead through the law? Sin killed me thereby?” If you go to the bottom of that question you will find a precious light. What death does the apostle mean here when he says: “and I died” — “dead through the law”? The catechism speaks about a threefold death: bodily, spiritual, and eternal. But here a fourth death is mentioned. The apostle was already spiritually dead before the commandment came! What does he then mean here by the word “dead”? Those who have had the experience know, and the others do not believe it.

Yes, it so happens that if the law hits a man all is well, if the holy eyes of God begin to pursue his thoughts and his heart’s intents, then he dies. And the more seriously he is attacked, the sooner he dies. The old Pharisee Saul was killed before there could be a Paul. The sinew upon the hollow of Jacob’s thigh had to go out of joint when he wrestled with the unknown man in the night, before Jacob could say: “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved” (Gen. 32:30). And then he received a new name. After that he always halted upon his thigh. In brief: Take the apostle’s words as they read. Then you will see who it was who died. He says: “I died.” It was his ego, his self-active, self-righteous, self-holy ego that was killed in the fight against sin under the law. The law egged on the fight by a perpetual pressing, with requirements and comments. And the deep imagination about our own power, which is the soul in the old man, kept up a tenacious hope of success in the fight. But it all the more contributed to exhaust and kill him. He expresses all this as follows: “Sin deceived me and slew me by the commandment.” Now it is broken — the old imagination about one’s own power, and the capability of the law to make a man pious and holy. And then the man lies there, lost, helpless, powerless, yes, “dead.”

But when the exhausted soul despairs of all his own work, both of his will and capability, his prayer, remorse, and of everything within himself, and when God’s eternal counsel of reconciliation, Christ with His doing and suffering merit, becomes plain to him, “then he is drawn to Him, such as he is, so paralyzed and lame, and so unworthy of all the grace of God that he wants to sink down with

shame.” Thus the bride sinks into the arms of the bridegroom, the other man. “That she should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead” (Rom. 7:4). And look, at once he receives the fulfilling of all the law in Him who “is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 10:4). And now the bride only lives on the righteousness and care of the bridegroom in everything. She says: “I sat down under his shadow with great delight... And his banner over me was love” (Song of Sol. 2:3–4). Look: such a soul has now been made free from the law. As the apostle declares in explicit words: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal. 3:24–25). In fact, the old imagination about my own power still rises up thousands of times, usually in the finer form that I can, and should be and do, so much more by prayer and the power of God. It is revealed as an Adamitic imagination thereby that I, I, I — not Christ — become the focus of all my thoughts. But then I again become exhausted and killed, until I must again sink down at the feet of my Savior and let Him become my All. And as long as I am continually brought back again to Christ I am not under the law, but under grace.

From this you can also understand who are not under grace, but under the law, namely those who have not been killed by the law the way we have seen now. They have still got their hope and confidence in the law, in their work, their prayer. And they have not become so lost, nor have despaired so of their work that they have been compelled to surrender, surrender as lost only except for grace. No, they still intend and mean to strive *after* victory by their own works. If hereby they are more downhearted at themselves, they are “not far from the kingdom of God.” It is only necessary that they despair of their attempts, and then in the twinkling of an eye get to see Jesus clearly. In other words that, at a blessed moment, He becomes plain to them. But if this work is still accompanied by much consolation and self-satisfaction, and their faith and confession as regards Christ are only part of their own righteousness, then they are further from true grace. Then faith is not a distressed and lost sinner’s real refuge in Jesus, but a new and more beautiful piece of cloth on the old garment.

## August 5

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... *That we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope* – Rom. 15:4.

**T**his is the purpose of God for the Word of the Scripture, namely that we should not only derive knowledge from it for our minds, but chiefly the necessary benefit and power in our life, “that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” “Through patience and comfort of the Scriptures” means through the patience and comfort which the Scripture gives — which the Scripture shows us both by words and examples, and also by works in us when we study it in the right way. And that we “might have hope” thereby — how should we understand those words? First of all, we should understand that “hope” means the hope the faithful have of salvation and eternal bliss. But having this hope through patience and comfort of the Scriptures follows chiefly when we are in affliction and distress, and read the gracious promises of Scripture, or look at the beautiful examples of men who have had long and very bitter sufferings, and have endured with patience, have waited for the Lord, and have at long last been crowned with a glorious end, then this gives us comfort, the “comfort of the Scriptures.” Then also we are roused to patience, tenacity, waiting for the Lord, and for the hope that we also will get a blessed end after all the suffering. We are roused to believe that the Lord will still be the same, faithful God as formerly, and that He will show us also the same grace as our fathers. We are roused to believe that we will not be put to shame with our waiting. The words “patience” and “comfort” tell us that we will have sufferings and afflictions, because otherwise no patience or comfort would be needed. But patience can only be trained by sufferings and afflictions, and only then can the true comfort of the Scripture be rightly known and appreciated. Without sufferings and worries all the texts of comfort in the Scripture are quite powerless and useless. It is in affliction that the comfort of the Scripture becomes powerful, and gives us patience and hope. But this also happens only by the comfort of the Scripture. Because if we leave the Word out of sight, this light will not shine in affliction. It is only through the patience and comfort given by the Scripture that hope becomes strengthened during suffering. Let us illustrate this by some examples. Then we will see at once something of the comfort that the Scripture gives.

“Ye have heard of the patience of Job,” says James. Now we see in the history of Job how dreadfully this friend of God was plagued. First, he was deprived of everything dear to him on earth. Then, he was smitten “with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.” And thereafter his wife and his neighbors scoffed and mocked him. When we now see how during all this the Lord still was his gracious Friend, and later on gave him more than double goods in this present time, and the gracious witness that he was righteous, etc., then we gain instruction and comfort



from it. We see that we also can have a close friendship with God during all our suffering. We see that we also can receive relief and comfort when it pleases God. And after this life also, we can get a blessed end.

Look at the long trial of Abraham and how at last he received such a rich blessing. God had given him the promise that he would become the ancestor of a very great nation. And then He let him go without children up to his hundredth year. And when finally the “son of promise” had been given, the Lord commanded him to be offered for a burnt offering. What trials! Yet we see here how gloriously God fulfilled His promise! See what a great and wonderful seed Abraham received. Even the Son of God was to belong to it according to the flesh!

Yet another example: David was “a man after Mine [God’s] own heart” (Acts 13:22). And still, what inexpressibly bitter experiences he had to go through! For instance, when he — a holy prophet — made such great and dreadful falls that he became an obvious offense, and gave reason for scoffing in Israel, and was the talk in the mouth of all the unfaithful. Then his own son stirred up rebellion and drove him away from his throne. Then again pride made him count the people, and he was dreadfully punished for it. The Lord visited the sinful people with a pestilence taking away seventy thousand men, and David had to consider himself to be the reason for the death of all these (1 Chron. 21). Who would have wished more sincerely than David to be only the greatest blessing to that people! Oh, how dreadfully bitterly God can plague His dearest friends! Now David could see himself only as an affliction for the people; one time because of his grave fall, and another because of the proud deed above mentioned. And still the same David had not been cast away. No, he was in such good grace that the Son of God on earth could use the words of David to express His deepest feelings, yes, even in His bitter suffering on the cross. Such is the comfort of the Scripture.

Surely such examples will strengthen our hope. They will strengthen our hope so that in our most bitter experiences we still keep our confidence in the strange, but faithful God. The New Testament refers us continually to the suffering of Christ, to see how He became plagued and entered into His glory after all His pain. “That we might run with patience the race that is set before us,” the apostle says: let us look “unto Jesus ... who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross ... and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him, ... lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Heb. 12:2–3). Such is the comfort of the Scripture, through which comfort we should learn patience and have hope unwavering to the end.

## August 6

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*Strive to enter in at the strait gate* – Luke 13:24.

What is the uttermost purpose of all our spiritual striving, our searching and reading, if not that we shall be saved, that we shall be on a good footing with God here in this present time, and go home to Him at our death, and be in the presence of the Lord forever? Should we then not stop to think and see whether our spiritual striving is such that it really leads to this blessed home, that we “so run, not as uncertainly; so fight we; not as one that beateth the air” (1 Cor. 9:26)? For many it will be necessary first to look into the matter to see whether *all* spiritual striving leads to the mark. It will be necessary to see whether everyone in some way seeking the kingdom of God, will really enter into it, or if, on the contrary, there is only one way to life. And then it will be necessary for us to see whether we are on this one and only blessed way, so that we can rejoice and see the years rush on to the end; or whether we must still change to another manner of life before we can die saved. What an unhappy and dreadful thing it would be if we do not get grace to reflect upon this! What an unhappy and dreadful thing if we could immediately decide the matter for ourselves in the lightheartedness of fleshly ease, without examining ourselves before the Lord! But the one who receives grace for reflection, and wants to be honest to his soul, should be well on his guard so that he does not seek the reply to his questions in his own head. He should not sit down and think and think, or wait for an immediate reply in his heart. Neither should he be satisfied with the opinion of any human being in so important a matter. No, here we should consult only the words of the Lord Himself, for they will judge in the last day. For such purposes we will quote some words worth thinking over from the mouth of Christ Himself. May God give us grace to notice what He says.

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” Now the most important question is: What does this mean? How does it happen that people seeking to enter in at the strait gate, will not be able to do so? Fortunately, the Lord has also explained this, and the Scripture has two explanations of this. The first is: Many seek the kingdom of God, but not seriously enough to be able to go through the strait gate. They have been awakened to some extent, but not altogether. They want to have God and His grace, but also the world and its friendship. They want to serve two masters. They want to abandon certain sins, but accept others, and do not want to consider them sins, but rather defend them. Christ said: “If a man cometh to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple... Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple... He is like unto a man who began to build a tower, and

was not able to finish it” (Luke 14:26, 28, 33). It is true that he has taken pains and invested money in it, but he does not get anything from it. There was a rich young man who gladly wanted to follow Jesus, but he could not do so and still keep his riches. And when he heard that he would have to leave them, then he went away sorrowful! That is what happens to many. Oh, how sad it is that they go away sorrowful! They were so near the gate of heaven! They saw the Lord and loved Him in a certain way. But they had to go away from Him because they could not leave everything for His sake. Thus these sought to enter in, but were not able.

Others go away from the Lord with a false consolation, without knowing it. They mean to show that they are His, though they lack all the distinctive features of the new birth and the new creation. Furthermore, there are others who, for all the world, do not want to give up seeking. Neither do they mean that everything already is well with them. But they always tarry at the very entering in at the gate. They think of repentance and faith, but they never undertake the same in practice. They never undertake the repentance they think of. Nor do they ever here and now seek grace and reconciliation to God, the gift of faith, the life and peace of faith. No, that does not happen. They tarry and wait until it is too late. They tarry year after year and think that the Lord will always be waiting for them. They think that He will not be able to shut the door before they have entered in. And thus they become so deceived that at last they cannot enter in.

It is much more difficult to understand the second reason. It is the very “stone of stumbling and rock of offense.” This can be expressed like this: many will seek so seriously to enter in at the strait gate that therefore they can forsake father, mother, brethren, yes, their life. And nevertheless they will not be able to only because they do not want to forsake something they stick to even more than their life. That is, their own opinion, and the value of their own repentance and forsaking. In other words: They seek to enter in at the strait gate, but do not want to be told where the strait gate is. They go ahead and bang their head into the wall where there is no gate. These are the people Christ really refers to and describes by the man at the wedding without a wedding garment, and the virgins at the wedding, who have lamps and go out to meet the bridegroom, but who do not have oil in their vessels. It is true that they have Christ and faith in the doctrine, in their intellect, and in their mouths. But in their hearts they have something else. Something else which is more important to them, namely, what they themselves should be and do by the help of God.

## August 7

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*And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity – Isa. 33:24.*

**H**ere we now see that the forgiveness of sins procured for us in the death of Christ, and received by us through faith, will be our eternal possession. It will be a daily and eternal grace. And it will not be revoked or taken away from us because of the sins adhering to us, troubling us, and — I am sorry to say — also breaking forth now and again. No, as long as we remain in Christ by faith we will have one and the same grace with God all the time, as grace is not of works. As in ourselves we are equally worthy of condemnation all the time, but in Christ equally righteous at every moment. When the Lord speaks about the kingdom of grace in the Old Testament, the kingdom of grace to be instituted on earth by Christ, He calls it in Isa. 33:20 “the city of our solemnities” and “Jerusalem.” And finally He says about the city: “And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.” In Ps. 89 God speaks about His covenant with His Son, the covenant about eternal grace over those whom the Son obtained and defended by His atonement, who believed in Him, and who here are called “His [the Son’s] children.” Thereby He says: “If His children forsake My law, and walk not in My judgments; if they break My statutes, and keep not My commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from Him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips” (Ps. 89:30–34). And in the New Testament John says: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1–2).

We shall not list more of the innumerable and very consoling words about this in the Scripture, but we shall consider only one of them. In the first one, the Lord says that there will not be any need for the inhabitants in the city, the kingdom of grace, to complain and say with worry that they are weak, because they already have forgiveness for their sins. It seems that the Lord wants to say: Why, the forgiveness of sins already presupposes in advance that there are sins and weaknesses! Because otherwise it would not be called forgiveness of sins. But at the same time it presupposes that the sins will not be imputed, thought of, and punished, because it is called forgiveness. There is no need to speak about or think of a forgiven thing with alarm anymore, because forgiven is forgiven! “And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.”

This text also reminds us of a special fact regarding the honest babes of grace. It is true that they believe in the forgiveness of their sins. But at the same time they have something else (so they think) racking and worrying them. It is a thing they do not remember to call sin. It is a weakness, a shortcoming in their Christianity, a fault, or whatever it may be called. They say: "I surely believe that God forgives me all my sins. But I am so weak. I have such and such weaknesses," and so on. Now the Lord says here that it all belongs under one title: sins. "And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." And this forgiveness takes away or covers all weakness. Tell me a weakness that is not a sin! Why, the law demands the whole man, his heart, thoughts, and feelings! Therefore it also accuses everything such a man does when it is contrary to the Word. In quite the same way: Are not the shortcomings in your Christianity sins? Is it no sin to be cold, slow to the Word and prayer, cowardly in profession, etc.? But everything that is sin belongs under the forgiveness of sins. It does not say that Christ atoned for the sins of the hand or the tongue, but all the sins of the whole human being. Therefore, as long as you remain in Christ by faith, and though you also then always suffer from sin, yet watch, pray, and fight against it, "there is no condemnation" to you, but forgiveness stretches over everything you are and have.

About this subject our dear Luther says: "We should understand this doctrine so that we know that all our piety before God is because we enjoy forgiveness for our sins. When a human being wants to deal with God, he should know that neither his sin nor his piety matters a thing." When I say that I should do something, think, speak, and live as before God or men, then I want to be pious, be on my guard against sin, and do many good deeds. But as soon as it is a matter of how I stand before God, if I have His grace, or how I should get it, then I do not need to be anything else than a sinner. So that this article about the forgiveness of sins will be applicable to me. Yes, then I need to say boldly in faith: If I have sins, Christ has righteousness. His piety is my piety. I am now at a place where the sins cannot reach me.

Such is the gracious kingdom, the happy city, of which the Lord Himself said, "And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity."

## August 8

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*As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me – John 15:4.*

**Y**ou complain: “I am so cold, so powerless in the fight against temptations. I see the danger and exert all my strength. I read the words of admonition, but all in vain. I am as cold as I am weak. What is the matter with me?” Exactly the same thing as when at your first repentance you were in the same distress. It is unbelief, the cold, killing mist of unbelief, that surrounds your soul. You do not know your Savior in the right way. You do not taste the warmth of Jesus’ breast, where you used to get life and warmth. Thus here again the remedy is that such as you are, you must only fling yourself into the arms of forgiveness and lie there so long that you become warm and strong again. That is, you should turn your eyes away from yourself, your wretchedness, and your sins, and look only at the heart of God and the atoning blood of Christ, and His intercession for you so long, that you get back the joy and peace that formerly gave you love and power to sanctification. Oh, that it would be possible to write it with golden letters into the hearts of all the faithful, that finally all salvation and eternal bliss are only based on one point, i.e., the abiding in Him that has loved us. Then a remedy will surely be found against sin.

Here let us draw instruction from the unhappy experiences of an apostate woman. First, she fell into sin out of carelessness. Maybe it was rather trifling, if any sin can be called so. Still it cast down her faith and peace. She tried to restore them and the shaken, good relation between herself and the Savior by repentance. In her opinion, the first thing was to feel sorry for some time, and then try to improve and then finally to seek grace and forgiveness. But what happens? The temptation to the same sin becomes stronger and stronger, and so does unbelief to the same degree. And the powerlessness resulting from it becomes greater, so that she falls again. From this she gets doubled reasons for despair, and a courteous departure from the pure, holy God. So that wretched woman by unbelief then goes step by step from the only Savior, until finally she thinks everything is lost. And now in order to quiet her uneasy, crying conscience, she begins to seek some false comfort, an excuse for the sin overcoming her. Or she tries in the general unbelief and frenzy of the world to dissolve away the last thoughts of what she has had and has lost. And then it comes to an end. She dies. What then is the decisive cause of her death? She did not seek the grace of reconciliation, the purifying washing in the blood of the Lamb immediately after sinning, but went away to remedy her injury herself. It is true that it was a bad thing that she fell into sin. It had been better if she had watched and fought unto blood against evil. But it would have been possible to remedy this fall by grace, if she had at once taken refuge therein, because “Christ hath received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also” (Ps. 68:18).

But the fatal thing was that, at that point, she let her reason and the devil deceive her, and went astray from the way to restoration.

Here we again have the narrow way before our eyes. Before the sin — that is, at the moment of temptation or even earlier — we should fear and dread, should “walk in fear.” But after the sin — that is, if we have happened to fall — we should boldly go up to the mercy seat. We should close our eyes to our reason and feeling, and only plunge into the river of grace and wash away our impurity there. The dangers are that we are too sure and bold before sinning, and too timid and cautious after sinning.

It belongs to your *watchfulness* that at the first conceited imagination of your strength you are afraid of a fall, At the first sign of the presence of a temptation you should dread, and immediately shout for help. Wherever your vocation allows, you should flee all occasions, rooms, persons, and conditions you know will involve you in temptation. Because if we pray, “lead us not into temptation” and then fling ourselves self-willingly into her arms, then we mock the Lord and deceive ourselves intentionally. But it belongs to your *faith* that as soon as you have fallen, you will not try to help yourself, but that you will seek grace in exactly the same way as you did the first time. You should go immediately to the purifying blood of the atonement with your stains and wash your garment there. This exercise will break your reason, make contrite and melt your heart, and compel you to resort daily to the Word and prayer.

What cannot be accomplished by these means, that are provided by the faithful and strange One by means of the cross, if only you ask Him for it? An honest soul often sighs: “I do not care how much I suffer, if only the work of God would increase in me. Oh, that God Himself would mortify my flesh, because I myself am too weak for that!” The faithful God very readily hears such sighs. Therefore, if you are, for instance, tempted to idolatry, and begin to cling to something earthy, He takes it from you in such a painful way that you may weep and lament thereby. Or maybe He will give you what you ask for, but will allow it to become a very great sorrow to you. If you cannot be kept humble, but you begin to have high thoughts about yourself, then He allows the devil to attack you. He allows you to come into difficult temptations, yes, to fall in sin and be ashamed. Thereby, you have lost less than if you were to remain lying in pride, because then all would be lost. Therefore the rule is: as much humility as a man wins, so much holiness and gifts of grace he also receives. If you begin to consider the Word trifling and become disobedient to it, then God lets you fall into that hellfire, where you begin to doubt the divine origin of the Word. If you only are honest with regard to your will to become sanctified, then your God will certainly sanctify you, though maybe in another way than you hoped for.

## August 9

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*Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; . . . that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things* – Tit. 2:9–10.

**M**ake a note of the reason the apostle gives here for his admonition to servants: “that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.” And again: “to please them well in all things.” The servants should seek the pleasure of their master and mistress and not their own opinions and habits. They should try to please their master and mistress in everything. That was the way it was in the old more pious age among the faithful in Israel. Then David could use this service relationship to illustrate the life of the holy before God. He also shows thereby how faithful servants should behave. In Ps. 123:2 he says so beautifully: “As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord.” The eyes of the servants look unto the hand of their masters, that is, they pay attention only to their master to see how he wants to have things. And likewise also the maids try to please their mistress only.

But in Col. 3:22 the apostle says that no matter whether their master and mistress see it or not, this attitude should exist for the sake of the Lord, and for their own satisfaction with sincerity, he says: “not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God.” If the servant works hard and is faithful and careful when his master sees it, but is negligent, unfaithful, and careless in his absence, it is eyeservice. That is such a hypocrisy and a contempt for the presence of God, that the Lord Himself must punish such things. Therefore, says the apostle, serve in singleness of heart, i.e., with sincerity, and fearing God, i.e., for the sake of the Lord, as before the face of the Lord. He sees your deeds everywhere; He hears your speech and will repay everything. Therefore the apostle again says: “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (v. 23). But he immediately shows that he does not mean that we should serve only as if we were serving the Lord. No, the servants should bear in mind that they really are serving the Lord Himself, when they are serving their master and mistress at the Lord’s command. The apostle says: “Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ” (v. 24).

Here we have the great foundation for both the duties and the encouragements of servants: ye serve the Lord. Oh, if we could only once realize this! There is a hard and thick film over our eyes as soon as it is the matter of seeing the words and ways of the Lord. It is the devil’s power over our senses that does not allow us to see these glorious things. Here the apostle says, that servants and maids serve the Lord Christ Himself when at the Lord’s command they serve their master and mistress.



The apostle says that they serve the Lord with their most simple household work! But who can see that? Is it not foolishness to our reason what the apostle says here? “Serve the Lord?” you say. No, a simple peasant, a poor crofter, a wicked mistress, yes, cows, sheep, and horses — that is what I serve. Not the Lord! Not even an angel! That I were allowed to serve an angel would be something too great. I would not dare to ask so much as to be allowed to serve the Lord Christ Himself! And so on. But wait a moment, my dear, modest servant! You say that you serve cows, sheep, and horses. That is true, and who has commanded you to that? Is it not your master and mistress? Certainly. But do you not then serve the ones who have commanded you so to do, simply by serving with the cattle? Why, a man serves the one whose command he fulfills! But then we ask again: Who has commanded you to serve and obey your master and mistress? To be sure the Lord in heaven. Do you not serve Him then, as He has commanded you to it? Do you not serve the Lord simply by serving His creatures, namely your master and mistress? These are as certainly the creatures of God as the domestic animals mentioned above are the master’s cattle. God has created your master. Will He not be as zealous that he should be served, as the master is himself for his cows and sheep? If your eyes were rightly opened and you should get grace only to look at the words and order of God, then you would see that you have not only got the great honor of serving angels, but that you really serve God Himself by your smallest household tasks. Because God has commanded you to serve and obey your master and mistress.

Thus there are precious instructions for servants. The first instruction is this: God has commanded you to serve and obey your master and mistress, and therefore you must not ask what sort they are, or whether they also fulfill their duty. Your duty will remain the same, anyway, because you serve the Lord. Secondly, maybe you are a Christian wanting to do some good deeds. But you think you have been deprived of all opportunities to do so because of the diligent service, whereby your life passes in such a futile way. Then you should bear in mind that in your service itself you do the best deeds, when for the sake of the Lord you subject yourself to all the inconvenience of service, and are patient, obedient, humble, and faithful to your master and mistress, “for ye serve the Lord Christ.”

## August 10

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*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly – Col. 3:16.*

**T**hat is how it is where the life in Christ is sound and warm. And, surely it should always be like that! At such a time this admonition is not so very necessary, but there will be other times. “While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept” (Matt. 25:5). Then time becomes long and tedious, and Christian life becomes an old and everyday matter. Then there will be slowness, coldness, and negligence with regards to both one’s own soul and those of the brethren. It is especially then that this admonition is needed. As long as there is still some oil in the lamp, the faithful also love this admonition. And thereby they are distinguished from those who are fleshly minded, and who downright fight against this doctrine of the apostle. The faithful have a willing spirit, but nevertheless their flesh is so weak and slow that they “cannot do the things that they would” even after this admonition. It is not observed though it is loved and recognized. On the one hand, we see how the Word of Christ which should dwell richly in the hearts and houses of all Christians, on the contrary, dwells there rather scantily. We see how mutual teaching and admonishing have almost ceased with many. We see the psalms and hymns and the spiritual songs have become silent there. Or in fact they are being sung, but now not to the Lord and in the heart, but only to men and with the mouth. On the other hand, we see the immeasurable importance of the matter. We reflect especially upon the fact that the rich dwelling of the Word of Christ in us is the true universal remedy against all spiritual evil, both for individual Christians and for the congregations formed by them; yes, for all the church of Christ here on earth. When we reflect upon what a great blessing it would be, both for individual Christians, and for all those surrounding them, if the Word of Christ were to dwell in them richly, and what great damage and loss it is when this does not happen, then we are seized with a certain alarm and gloom. When one considers this admonition, one feels that no words speak strongly enough about this, and that no hearts are open enough for a matter of such importance. But what should a man do? He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

We now want to see what the apostle means by his admonition. The apostle here admonishes us clearly about the thing we, praise the Lord, may see at times and places where an awakening of the Spirit and an evangelical life of faith are flaming up. We see it where a plantation of God blossoms. That is, we see how the Word of Christ then dwells richly in souls. We see how the Christians begin to read, speak, and sing. They begin to teach and admonish one another. We see that this happens in a happy and trusting way, with a heartfelt rejoicing and willingness. In this way it happens at all times and in all places, so that still today the world stands as amazed and embittered, and as full of reviling as the Jews on

the great day of Pentecost. Then the apostles began to speak about the splendid works of God with other tongues, and the world said: "These men are full of new wine." We can now see what the apostle means when he says: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." If we could always remain so fervent in the Spirit, if the first love never became cold, then this would be exactly what the apostle intends by this admonition.

Our spiritual and eternal welfare demands of us, all the time to continue and grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. We should never become neglectful and allow the Word to be put aside. No, we should always maintain and propagate the holy fire by reading, speaking, singing, and mutual teaching and admonishing. Because otherwise things will go the way concerning which Christ admonished the angel of the church of Ephesus. If he would not return to the first love, the Lord would remove his candlestick out of its place. This is not a free thing we can do or leave undone according to our own pleasure, and still preserve our life. No, if we do not want to end in the flesh and in eternal death, we must all the time maintain the spiritual life by going about with the Word of God every day. A child is nurtured with milk. In the same way also the new man must have his milk, and this is the "Word of Christ." Thus a Christian must all the time be in diligent communion with the Bible, and feed his soul there. The apostle says: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly"! It should not only dwell in you as a guest getting a night's lodging with you; no, it should dwell in you forever, he says. The Word of Christ should be completely united with our inner man, and always dwell and rule there. He also says: richly; not only for certain short periods, but all the time, everywhere and in many ways. If you do not have an opportunity to hear or read it so often, you can still think of it, speak, or sing a Word of God. As the Lord bids us to inculcate the Word in our children everywhere with such diligence, He says: "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:7). In the same way also, we should always train ourselves in the Word of Christ everywhere, even when our physical work does not allow us to devote ourselves to it in a special way.

## August 11

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*And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father,  
Jesus Christ the righteous* – 1 John 2:1.

**H**ere the apostle speaks to the faithful, and calls them “my little children.” He admonishes them that they should not sin. But at the same time he considers it possible that they may still sin, “if any man sin.” What does he say about such a man? What should such a man think and do? The apostle says that the man has an Advocate with the Father and that he should remember it at such a time. “And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” The spirit of the words of the apostle seems to be: My children, I write these things to you in order that you should not sin or be careless, now that you have been cleansed in the blood of Jesus Christ, and have received forgiveness for your sins (because he had said the same a moment before). No, you should now watch, pray, and fight against all sin even the more. But if things should go so badly that you sin, out of fleshly weakness, the seduction of the world, and the cunning of the devil — and indeed, it happens easily, because you can never watch so faithfully that these enemies will not now and then overthrow you — then this is in fact something deplorable, and it would have been better if you had never sinned that way. You would indeed really deserve the disgrace and rejection of God. However, this will not happen. God will not be ungracious to you, because you have an Advocate with the Father. And that Advocate serves you only when you have sinned — never otherwise. Because the one who has not sinned does not need a mediator, atoner, and advocate. God certainly does not want you to sin, but still less does He want you to despair and perish. Therefore, He Himself has given you an Advocate.

But John furthermore uses the word about Christ: “the Righteous.” What should I think of that? In this way: If I am sinful, Christ is righteous and holy, and that is sufficient. His righteousness is my righteousness. And furthermore: “He is the propitiation for our sins.” For which sins? Surely for all. Otherwise He would be of no use to us, He would be dead in vain. But with His blood, Christ has certainly not only atoned for some sins, but for all sins; and not only for imagined and fancied sins, but for real sins; not only the small ones, but also the great ones. He has not only atoned for the sins of the hand or the tongue, but also for the ones of the heart and the thoughts. He has not only atoned for the former sins, but also for the present ones. Or as Luther says: “Not only the ones that have been overcome and put away, but also the still strong and mighty sins.”

Maybe you say here: “Yes, Christ is the Propitiation for the sins of the holy, such as John, Peter, Paul, and others of that kind. But who knows whether He is also for mine?” Then John says here: “and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the

whole world.” Now “the whole world” does not only mean John, Peter, Paul, and other holy men, but everything called a human being belongs to the world. Only look into the matter to see whether you are a human being, and then you will know that your sins also have been atoned for and blotted out in the death of Christ.

But you probably say: I nevertheless must not console myself with this except when I have been pious and done what the Word of God requires, and when I have not sinned! The apostle says on the contrary: “And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father.” Pay careful attention to the small word “then” — “if any man sin, *then* we have an advocate with the Father”! Thereupon all the importance and value of the text lie. We gladly want to believe and appreciate the grace of reconciliation, but only when we ourselves have been better and more devout, when we have prayed, read, done something good, etc. But as soon as we have happened to fall and sin, or have neglected the prayer and been cold — all of which are grave sins — then Christ and His atonement are not allowed as of any account. Then we are as if we do not have any Savior and Advocate, or as if He has come only for the righteous, and will only serve us when we ourselves are the way we should be. But the apostle here says the opposite: It is exactly when we have sinned that the Advocate serves us. The consequence of this is that those who believe in Christ are in a perpetual grace. And that does not falter and change the way their own piety changes.

This is now the doctrine of daily and eternal forgiveness for sins. The doctrine has been revealed throughout the Word of God. It is such a sweet doctrine, and so full of consolation, that no hypocrite or false Christian should be allowed to hear it. This usually happens to their perdition, because they then turn “the grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude 4). Yet we have not got permission to be silent about it. No, for the comfort and salvation of wretched, despairing, and poor hearts it must be proclaimed. From abounding grace such hearts only obtain a renewed inclination and power to sanctification. On the other hand, those who use it as a reason for ease and remaining in sin, i.e., who do not try to overcome and throw off the sin, but preferably excuse and defend it — such turn “the grace of our God into lasciviousness” and commit sin. With regard to them the same sweet John announces in the same epistle: “He that commiteth sin is of the devil.” “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; and he cannot sin [continue to commit sin], because he is born of God.” “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8–9).

## August 12

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*For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ – 2 Cor. 1:5.*

**I**n order not to be “swallowed up with overmuch sorrow” (2 Cor. 2:7) in this wicked, miserable world, and thus lose our very important peace, how necessary it is for a Christian to have his heart’s stronghold, treasure, and joy in the Lord only, and always to support and strengthen his heart by means of his heavenly cause for rejoicing, his great happiness, his glory and riches in the Lord. It must not be denied that unspeakably bitter experiences can befall the heart of a Christian in this wicked world, which is rightly called a vale of tears. How much suffering and sorrow the Fall of man has spread over the earth: most heart-rending losses and sorrows, most pressing distress and pain! And to a soul who lives under the chastisement of the Spirit, how much sorrow the inherent sin, the anxious conscience, and all the fiery shots of Satan bring about in the frightened and faint heart. Moreover, we are surrounded by the whole mass of evil souls in union with the enemy, and what a manifold annoyance and heart torment that crowd can inflict on a miserable refugee who has dared to go out from Babel and witness of its depravity. Here surely are sorrows and tribulations enough! Here surely a more than human and more than earthly comfort is required, if in all this we shall continue to be solaced, and not succumb on the way. And still Paul says, that not only did he have consolation, but he was also “exceeding joyful in all his tribulation” (2 Cor. 7:4).

Now, how does this happen? How does one come to such a strange mind, that one can have joy in sorrow, yes, an exceeding joy? We have seen innumerable examples of this, examples of weak, fragile Christians having been able to lose everything, even their lives, and that with a smiling, happy face and a rejoicing heart. What is the secret and the art of getting a mind so much above all earthly things, of coming into a position of such independence, that the wickedness of all the world and of all the powers of hell, cannot deprive us of our peace and joy? Listen and make note! It only happens by owning and keeping a great happiness alive in our heart, a happiness weighing more than all the bitter things that can meet us. Here is the secret: to have sufficient happiness outweighing everything else, not only by the cold knowledge of one’s intellect, but also with the living faith of the heart, and in full certainty. Thus in addition to great happiness, the grace of the Holy Spirit is required in the heart. Therefore the apostle declares quite briefly, that joy and peace are the fruits of the Spirit. But the ground and way with regard to the winning of this, is that the heart is filled with great happiness.

Only pay attention to the following picture: There is a happy bride who has been picked up from the greatest poverty and humble surroundings, and become

the object of the love of a rich, noble, and in all respects lovable gentleman, whom she loves more than her own life. She is now on her way to his palace to marry him and receive all the riches, happiness, and joy waiting for her. How easily does she not put up with all the troubles of the journey! With what a light heart does she not smile at any small loss! If a wild man at the side of the road casts an evil eye at her and shouts an insulting word after her, it will not cause her any long sorrow. The love of her husband towards her, and his smile, are enough for her, and her heart is completely filled by her great happiness. Similarly, it is only required that the heart is filled by a great happiness outweighing everything else, the happiness of being in union and friendship with the Almighty, the happiness of knowing that one has been elected to eternal life, of being a child and heir in heaven, of being the bride of the Lord of glory. To be in a position to lean one's head to the breast of the Savior with heartfelt confidence and to say with the full assurance of faith: "My Friend is mine, and I am His!" — that is something that can make our joy "full," i.e., not such as the heavenly joy will be, but as much as it can be here in the kingdom of faith, where we still are on our way to the palace of our Lord. While in this temporal house we can still only see and feel what is before our eyes, within us and around us. Nevertheless we have already won, and can rejoice at the thing our heart mainly desires and seeks, so that we sing: "This is my highest happiness, I have all I desire, because the entire Person of my Savior is mine by faith." Then it is called a "full joy."

## August 13

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*I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead* – Rev. 3:1.

**T**his is a dreadful condition. The Lord here speaks about the finer and more hidden type of hypocrisy, whereby a man can be blameless with regard to all the proofs of Christianity. He may be a first-rate Christian among the brethren. He may know how to speak about both repentance and faith, about grace and sanctification. And, moreover, he may live in accordance with his confession and Christian practices, so that with reason he is considered honest by people who see only what is before their eyes. But, in spite of all this, there may be an important lack in his hidden, silent, inner man. That is, the lack of the experience of spiritual life, so that he, for one instance, does not recognize the Spirit of the fear of the Lord so characteristic of living Christians, which Spirit manifests itself in suspicions as to oneself, fear of deceiving oneself, dissatisfaction with, and sorrow at one's inward evil. All this is the work of the law in every true Christian. The consequence of his lack is that he does not either experience the refreshment and rest Christ gives to all that labor and are heavy laden, nor does he ever taste the double solace a child feels when he is sorry for a mistake made and receives forgiveness. Never does he have that childlike joy at the gospel, which, to his astonishment, shines forth from the eyes of the truly believing babes, and is characteristic of their life. He reads about all these signs of life, these fruits of the Spirit in the Holy Writ as being characteristic of the true life. However, though he himself lacks them, he continues to believe the best about himself. He does not allow the signs stated in Scripture itself to warn him. No, he believes in himself more than in them and remains immovable. Surely all this must be called turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.

Not to recognize in one's own experience the descriptions of a true life in grace given by the Spirit of God in the Scripture, and, nevertheless, to continue to remain calm, and imagine that so great and rich a grace will cover that shortcoming also — that is to turn grace into lasciviousness in a finer and more hidden, but as evil a way as if one were to go through life in heinous deeds of the flesh under the cloak of grace. We do not say that grace would not be great enough for everything to be forgiven. But the fact is: the heart is not right in the sight of God. Such a man lives in a hidden, spiritual death. It is of this finer kind of turning grace into lasciviousness that Jesus accuses the angel of the church in Sardis in such an astonishing way: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." Mark this: "thou hast a name that thou livest." Your confession and life are such that you are regarded and received as one of the living Christians. You are not of the world. It has not got a name that it lives. No, you belong to the flock of living Christians.



But you are dead. Jesus speaks about the same, hidden death in Matt. 25. There He speaks about ten virgins — five of them wise and five foolish. These ten virgins were quite alike in everything that is visible. All of them were virgins, i.e., separate from the world and from its pollution of vices. All of them had their lamps. All of them went out to meet the bridegroom. And nobody suspected that there would be any important lacks. In that way Christ here describes the state of a soul! But in the lamp, there was the lack. And it was such an important lack that they were shut out forever from the wedding. They had no oil. The lamp did not light up. It did not burn. It was dead. If the unhappy virgins had suspected anything like that, they would surely have tested their lamps before.

Even an honest Christian is in danger of turning grace into lasciviousness if he loses “the Spirit of the fear of the Lord,” so that he no longer examines his inner life and the power of his faith, but is enchanted and contented by knowledge and form, content with the fact that there is access to grace in the heart of God, and indifferent about whether he has the life of grace in his own heart. Actually, he is in danger if he begins to become satisfied with himself, loses the feeling of sin and the inward struggle, and it becomes easy for him to believe. He can easily come to that point when he becomes aware of the opposite danger. We mean the danger of making a foundation for faith and consolation out of this inner life, this grace in his own heart, the refined delusion of self-righteousness, whereby that one is not allowed to claim the merits of Christ before he has the work and life of grace in his heart. When he has learned to accept this delusion, then he can easily go over to the opposite one by which in fleshly ease he despises the apostle’s admonition: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:5). But this secret death and coldness bringing eternal death, is such that you do not feel your coldness and ungodliness so intensely that it drives you really to flee to Christ, but you only approach Him with your mouth and honor Him with a strong, dead faith. You honor Him with a strong, dead faith without any heartfelt hunger and thirst after Him, without any rejoicing in Him. From all this we can see that the way is narrow and the mystery of godliness is great.

## August 14

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*The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin* – 1 John 1:7.

**Y**ou who are really a grave sinner, just ask yourself what you weigh against this verse? Mark how the apostle speaks here! In order that you may realize to some extent what this great means of reconciliation is worth, we want to look at every word in this beloved text. First, see who is the Person mentioned here: the blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Jesus Christ — the woman’s Seed promised for so long a time, “the Lord’s Anointed” (Christ). “Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2), but born at last in Bethlehem. Then the angels sang in the sky: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). And again: “And thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

The blood of this Lord Jesus Christ — what is it worth! What a power this text would have, even if it said that only! But it says something far more glorious. The apostle purposely wants to stress the value and importance of the Person. Therefore he has put in two important words — “His Son,” the Son of God, “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son.” Follow the hint of the apostle and look at the words: “of the Son of God!” Oh, is it possible! Is it true! The Son of God! And the Son of God shed His blood for us! Is it true? Yes, if this is not true, then nothing is true in the Word of God, then we might as well let everything go.

You feel that it is true? Oh, then think what is it worth! The great, almighty Lord God created all the world and mankind at the beginning of time. He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, His own Being, and lets Him put on our flesh, and become our Brother and Mediator. Think what a Person He is! God did not give us an angel or a saint. Nothing like that was enough. But God gave us His only begotten Son, true God of God, equal to the Father in divine power and glory. Such a Person is given for the salvation of fallen children. And it is worth noticing that the manly form the Son took on is united with the Deity in such a way that His blood is also called the *blood of God* in the Scripture. Paul says: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). Just think, how costly was that ransom! The heavens are the works of His hands. He has made the earth with everything upon it. So that against Him “the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance” (Isa. 40:15). And such a Person gives Himself, His life and blood for the salvation of human beings.

About this blood the apostle now says that it “cleanseth us from all sin.” What is meant by this “cleansing”? “Does it help us to become clean?” No, He says it actually cleanseth us. “Does it cleanse us from the desire to sin?” Not so, it cleanseth

us from sin. “Yes, from the sin of spiritual slumber and slowness?” No, only use your eyes. He says: “From all sin.” “And the ‘blood’ does that?” Yes, the blood! “But does not John himself teach us that the Spirit cleanses us?” Yes, but not in the same sense as the blood of the Son of God does.

It is absolutely necessary that you first understand and believe what this blood does, before you can get any cleansing of the Spirit. If it had been the matter of the Spirit here, then the cleansing would have meant sanctification. But here it is the matter of the blood, which is the means of atonement. The apostle here speaks about the cleansing of the atonement, the blotting out of guilt. This is what Christ Himself said about His blood: “which is shed ... for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28). It would give your heart life and spirit, if you could get sufficient grace to see how the blood of the Son of God alone cleanses us before God from all sins, so that God Himself says: “Ye are clean.”

First, all the sins of the world were blotted out in the death of Christ. As the apostle clearly says; Christ “made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; ... whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col. 1:20). Therefore, the satisfied God looks at all human beings as dearly atoned for. And now His ambassadors only pray: “Be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).

Secondly, the consequence of this is — and this is what our text really aims at — that whosoever sticks to Christ and lets himself be punished for sin, but still keeps close to the mercy seat, and thus “walks in the light,” is always clean from all his sins in the sight of God thanks to the same blood. So that the impurity and sin that still dwells in his flesh and, deplorable as it is, moves daily in his thoughts, words, and deeds, will never be imputed to him. No, in the sight of God he is clean every moment, only by the atonement power of this eternally valid blood. He is, so to say, under a constant rain of grace. It is decided with God that no sin will ever be imputed to him, because he keeps the atonement of the blood ever before him, and therefore he is clean.

Here we see that this blood is somewhat of greater value to the eyes of God than to ours. We see that as soon as somebody is in Christ, all is clean to God where we see sheer impurity. We see, that the blood is still valid to God, even when we do not see and believe very much in the atoning power of the blood.

## August 15

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*In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you – 1 Thess. 5:18.*

**C**an a human thought ever be enough? Can a tongue ever express all our reasons for gratitude, all our causes for praising and magnifying God? The whole earth is full of His glory. Everything that meets our eyes bears witness to the goodness and grandeur of God. It bears witness to His love for mankind, that everything on earth has been created for us. And we also believe and confess that He has given His only begotten Son for us all, in order that we might receive eternal life as a free gift, “the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). Should not our hearts be full of an eternal and incessant praise and thanks for all this? Certainly, all our life should not be anything else than praise and thanks. Everything in me, my soul and senses, my heart and thoughts, my words and deeds — everything should praise the Lord. Is this not reasonable? When this does not happen, but when, on the contrary, you go about cold and ungrateful, maybe dissatisfied and impatient at the very least inconvenience, do you not rightly deserve that God should immediately cast you into hell in eternal wrath? Yes, the faithful see and feel such things, so that they testify from their hearts, that, if only because of this very sin of ingratitude, they deserve hell every day.

Now those who are not only cold and negligent with regard to praising our God, but who are also downright dissatisfied and impatient with regard to the things He has given them, should take care lest the Lord really gives to them what they deserve when they are not content and satisfied with the things they receive. Ingratitude is such an abominable sin both before God and men, that an ungrateful man has been called the heaviest burden the earth carries. Ingratitude is the drying weather causing all the sources of the grace of God to run dry. The Lord God cannot repay ingratitude in a more just and suitable way than by taking from man the good things he cares so little about! Therefore, we should wake up in time to recognize this great sin, ask God for forgiveness, and the grace to repent. As we said before — the benefits of God towards us are really so many and great, that all our life should be an eternal and incessant thanking and praising.

Gratitude is your most holy duty towards God. It would also make you happier yourself. It would make your mind content, and your prayer warm and comforting. We want to speak about only the last mentioned thing. What is the reason why many an otherwise serious soul is so cold, dead, and downhearted in his prayer? Why does he have so little comfort and confidence in prayer at the moment of distress? The reason is no doubt that he begins to pray at once, without having first given thanks and praise. A man says: “When I read the serious remark of Luther with regard to the irrational order in which so many begin first to pray, instead

of first giving thanks and praise, I was astonished. But now I know by experience that it was an excellent remark.” Luther speaks about Ps. 18:3:\* “I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised” and says: “One cannot believe what a powerful thing it is to praise God in the face of approaching danger. As soon as you begin to praise God, evil immediately becomes mitigated, and your comfort and courage grow. And then you can call upon the Lord with confidence. Therefore, all true servants of God watch carefully that they do not begin in any other way. They see to it that they do not seek comfort and help against evil in any other order than *this verse teaches us*. We should not call upon the Lord first, but praise Him first. There are people who wail before the Lord without being heard. They cry, but there is no helper. They cry to the Lord, but He does not give them any reply. And why? Because they do not praise the Lord when they call upon Him, but are angry with Him. They do not think of the Lord, how sweet He is. No, they only think of their own bitter experience. But nobody gets rid of evil by looking at his misery, and being frightened thereby, but by coming to the Lord and looking at *His* goodness.”

However, it seems an advice difficult to follow, namely, that, at the moment of distress, one should begin by praising God. But this is something that should distinguish pure faith and the true bride. To her the Bridegroom is worth more than all His gifts. She reveres and praises the Lord Himself, not only when He does something that pleases her, but always for what He is in Himself. The harlot love can only thank for gifts, but it cannot praise the excellency of the Lord Himself. Also for the faithful it is difficult to rise to the eternal goodness and the faithfulness of God Himself in the midst of the darkness, make an effort at once, and begin to praise God. Meditate upon the qualities of God and the great proofs you and all the holy have seen of them. Then you will soon experience relief, and finally see the truth of the words of David: “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O most High” (Ps. 92:1).

## August 16

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*And to virtue knowledge* – 2 Pet. 1:5.

**I**n his second epistle the apostle Peter first admonishes the faithful: “Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue.” Then he adds: “And to virtue knowledge.” A word rich in wholesome instruction, and that also for very zealous Christians. The word really means knowledge, wisdom, understanding. The instruction here is that a true Christian should not only practice “virtue,” holy zeal and power, but he should also see to it that he practices it in the most sensible way, with wisdom and discernment. He must not act blindly. He should pray for the enlightenment of the Spirit of the Lord, and always ponder the matter carefully to find out what, on a certain occasion, is wisest and most expedient for promoting the glory of God, and the weal of human beings. Is this not also a most important admonition! Let us think of the manifold tricks Satan uses to deceive us and the great damage and offense brought about when a Christian has wrought “folly in Israel” out of a well-meant, but unwise zeal, and gives room for blame, and causes weak souls to take offense. Oh, then how important it should be for us — with fear for our own spirit — to pray all the time to God for His light. How important it is for us, to try all the time to obtain more and more knowledge of what the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God is.

But, oh, what an honest spirit and strict watching of the heart will be needed here, so that a rogue will not hide himself under pretension to this wisdom. Maybe you do not really seek the glory of God and the weal of souls, but only popularity among men and fleshly peace. Maybe your wisdom and cautiousness are in fact the attempts of nature to escape the cross, the hatred and persecution of men. Oh, how false the heart is! Oh, how narrow the way is! One man despises the doctrine of the Scripture about wisdom and humility, under a pretext of “honesty” and holy zeal. Another is a powerless salt having lost his savor, and therefore easily bends according to the taste of all, but calls his action wisdom and cautiousness. Oh, how necessary it is to pay careful attention to the heart and motives, to see if you are really seeking and promoting the glory of God and the weal of men, or are seeking only popularity and fleshly peace.

We now want to illustrate the meaning of the words “to virtue, knowledge” by some examples taken from present conditions. It is virtue, it is a holy zeal and power, if you are zealous for the glory of God and the growth of His kingdom, and try to wake up the sleeping, and admonish the immoral. But it is knowledge and discernment if you also pay attention to the right way and the right moment. The right “time” is usually the first moment, or a desire to immediately punish the sin you see. But wisdom often demands that you should not do so. For instance, when your neighbor is in a vexed state, or when he has just offended you, your

admonition will always be taken as the expression of your own resentment. On the contrary, you should choose another occasion when there are good relations between you and him, so that he can realize that you are driven by love. The right “way” is usually to adjust the punishment to the fault, and punish a grave fault more, and a smaller one less. But wisdom often teaches us that we must not do so, but should adjust the punishment to the state of the person. Thus in the case of a strong and self-satisfied person you may have to punish the least fault. If it is the matter of a weak, sensitive disciple you may, on the contrary, find it best either to be silent altogether, or to use very gentle words. You can let him understand that you know the power of the tempter yourself. You know your own weakness, and you acknowledge the good points of your brother. So you can console him in his sorrow at his sin, but warn him only against the sin itself.

Still one more example: it is a virtue, it is a holy zeal and power if you detest all vanity and lack of thrift, such as vanity and extravagance in food, clothes, and household utensils; lightheartedness and thoughtlessness when you go about with people, and so on. It is virtue, a holy zeal and power if you labor seriously to mortify your old man, and are zealous for that self-mortification among your fellow Christians also. But here it also says: “to virtue, knowledge.” In this respect you should use sense and discernment, so that you look at the *use* and *purpose* of self-mortification, namely the glory of God and the benefit of yourself and of other human beings. According to that you should adjust the measure and degree of both in each individual case, so that you will not get into a blind formalism such as is the spirituality of the Pharisees, monks, and other such saints. If I look at the purpose of, for instance, fasting and moderation as regards food, clothes, sleep, household utensils, etc., then I must sometimes be more strict, sometimes less strict, according to the requirements of the circumstances. That is, I must live more severely when it is necessary, for instance, for the mortifying of my own flesh, or because of the customs of the pious at that place, or because of my temporary means, etc. On the other hand I must live less severely when the circumstances *require* that change. That is, when such a change helps to promote the glory of the Lord and the weal of myself or of my fellowmen. The apostle admonishes: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17). It is adding “to virtue, knowledge” when we pay attention in that way to the circumstances, the purpose, and the directions of love and wisdom in each individual case. Thus God wants us to do that which is good and useful when it concerns our own life.

## August 17

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*And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ – 1 John 1:3.*

**T**his is a great, hidden secret. It is often called the “mysterious union.” Nevertheless it is an equally great truth. It is already founded in the eternal counsels of God with regard to man and the creation of man. The apostle says: “We are the offspring of God” (Acts 17:28). This is the first foundation. This first union with God which was dissolved by the Fall of man, got a new, even more glorious foundation when Christ took on the form of man. In Him God and man became united in one Person. He shall be called Immanuel, God with us, God in our flesh. Thereby, the human being has been elevated to the glory and dignity of becoming the mansion and companion of God, one body and one Spirit with the Lord. This union begins when a contrite spirit hungers and thirsts for the Lord and His righteousness. Then the door of the heart is open, and “then,” the Lord says, “I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20). The Bridegroom seeks the bride, and the bride seeks Him. Who can then prevent the union? And Christ says that He will “make His *abode* with” such a soul. Oh, who can believe such glory? It is by far too great, and our hearts by far too small and narrow. The reason cries: No, no, impossible. But what helps is the assurance that it is the strange counsel of God Himself, and He Himself has said it. He says: “If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). If you cannot understand how it is possible, only think who the Lord is who says so: “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37). What is easier than for the Almighty to do what He wants! Now it is the counsel of His own will and His free pleasure to reunite with the human being, dwell and live in His children on earth. In John 17 when speaking with His Father, Jesus says: “I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one” (v. 23). It clearly says so. Can anything be more explicit? And Paul says: “Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them” (2 Cor. 6:16). It is because of this intimate union that we, according to the words of Peter, will become participants of the nature of God.

This now is the first thing belonging to our companionship with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ! Secondly, with this union also the participation in the good of Christ, His kingdom, and His treasures follows. From all the gospel of God we know “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). Verily, He did not come for His own sake and take the form of a man. It all happened for us, for our benefit. As the Scriptures so implicitly testify and say: “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness



of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). What a precious exchange! He takes our sins and gives us His righteousness. The bride was poor and loaded with debts, but the Bridegroom takes her debts and gives her His riches. This is the main content of the whole gospel! Secondly, it includes that everybody who now believes in Christ and becomes united with Him, at the same moment is participant in all that Christ has won for us: His obedience, His holiness and righteousness, His suffering and the merits of His death. Everything becomes as entirely our own as if we ourselves had done and been and suffered what He did and suffered. When a poor sinner begins to hunger and thirst for this grace and embraces it with the faith of his heart, then all the merits of Christ will be given to him, and accounted to him, as his own merits and righteousness. For all the days of his life this is his consolation and glory against his daily sins and shortcomings. Please remember, it is not at all enough that you know this, and have often heard it, but it must be meditated over, considered, and thought of so long, that your heart gets consolation from it and can say in earnest: “It is mine!” Not until then does it give life, and not until then does a blessed communion start, between the bride and the Bridegroom. Oh, what a strange and great comfort to be able to say with heartfelt faith: “All mine is His, and His is mine. He has taken my sin; my distress became His distress, but His righteousness is my righteousness. His obedience is my obedience. His blood is my purity. His death is my life! Praised be His name: Against my sin I put His righteousness. Against my coldness His love. Against my weakness His strength. If I am sinful, Christ is righteous; if I am cold, Christ is warm; if I am timid and shy, Christ certainly is not timid nor shy. He knows a remedy. In short, all His is mine and mine is His. He Himself wants us to believe this.

## August 18

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*And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness – Col. 3:14.*

**T**he sum of all the apostle's admonitions in this chapter (ch. 3) is love. In order to avoid a further list of isolated virtues he says: Put on charity (or love), this is the bond of perfectness. This comprises all the other fruits of the Spirit, and all the other Christian virtues, as he says in Rom. 13:8, 10: "He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law... Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Therefore, he also calls it here the bond of perfectness, the "bundle of perfectness," the summing up of all perfectness. Love works all good and nothing evil. In 1 Cor. 13 the same apostle again says: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, thinketh no evil; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (vv. 4–7). In brief: The last touch to the precious garment the apostle has spread before us here is love. Love is the brilliant string of pearls finally beautifying the robe, or the golden belt enclosing and keeping together all the other adornments of a Christian. It is the bond of perfectness.

What a beautiful garment this is, in which the children of God should walk! And yet this is not their "goodly raiment" (wedding garment) in which they shall stand before the King. For that a much more perfect robe is needed, even the white linen washed in the blood of the Lamb. This other is only the everyday dress in which we should walk and work before men. Not even the highest holiness of the saints is worth anything to God. Not even the heavens are clean in His sight. "Behold, He put no trust in His servants; and His angels He charged with folly" (Job 4:18). The only thing of worth to Him is the garment of the righteousness of Christ. He Himself must at last pull it over our best and most well-intentioned life and say: That may be good before men, but not before God. But "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake" (Isa. 43:25). "I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with a change of raiment" (Zech. 3:4).

Perhaps someone says: "Yes, that is what I believe. Our life cannot stand before God. Therefore, it is not worth making so much ado about it." And then he gives his nature full freedom. He speaks about faith and grace, but gives freedom to his flesh, as after all we cannot be anything else than criminal! If a man acts that way, it is not a good sign in that man that the Spirit of God is dwelling in his heart. Where the Spirit of God with grace and peace has His place in the heart, there also must be a new condition. The Holy Spirit cannot possibly be inactive. At least He reveals Himself herein. Even if the weakness of his nature surprises a child of grace, he will, nevertheless, have a spirit contrite over his failures. He will avow his weaknesses, punish himself, and ask both God and men for patience and help.

Where the Spirit of God dwells, a man must, at least, strive after good; even if heavy pains and much struggle and weakness are involved, he cannot leave the matter. In brief: every branch that bears fruit, is pruned. The one that does not bear fruit is not pruned, but is free to grow as it pleases, because it will be burned. May God help everybody to be honest!

Perhaps another says: "This is exactly as I thought. Therefore it is true, that neither before God, nor before men am I what the apostle says here. It is clearly my condemnation that in this case I cannot be what I should be. Therefore I am not one of God's elect." If we should say: "You must live the way the apostle admonishes here. You must not live according to your own nature. You must repent. You must live according to the Word." Then the soul replies: "This is exactly what I believe. But the more I pray to God for grace to be otherwise, the worse I become. So that at last I am not even as serious as I should be. I do not even fight, repent, and pray in the right way." Then, my friend, you do not *believe*: you have not got peace with God and salvation in the Lord. You are lying in bondage under the law! You have not become dead to the law. You have not risen in the righteousness of Christ. You are not free and saved by faith. And how then can it be possible for you to have the fruits of faith? The gospel does not joke when it speaks. It is not there only to be sweet and to please us. No, it is our greatest necessity and requirement to be obedient both to the gospel and to the law, if your soul is to be saved. And it bids: Rest from your labor! Otherwise you will become eternally unhappy. Rest and let yourself be convinced that you are a totally lost sinner, and that you must now be taken up from your sinful blood just as you are. When you have become saved and holy by sheer grace, and have received a joyous and free heart, then, and not until then, can you expect any power, or any fruit of faith.

## August 19

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*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world,  
and men loved darkness rather than light – John 3:19.*

When the Lord comes up to Jerusalem for the last time, He beholds the city and weeps over it. Once more He pronounces the irrevocable judgment over it. Then He expresses the reason for it by these words: “because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation” (Luke 19:44). The husbandmen had first maltreated the householder’s servants in manifold ways, and when finally he sent his son they said: “This is the heir; come, let us kill him” (Matt. 21:38). They who were bidden to the wedding did not only neglect it, but they also took his servants and slew them. “When the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city” (Matt. 22:7). As long as the Jews allowed the prophets to punish them, and revered the Word though they still sinned against it — as long as they did that, the Lord corrected and brought them up the way a father does with his children. But when they no longer wanted to listen to His voice, but threw His words away from them, and finally committed an outrage on His lovable Son, and rejected the only sacrifice atonement, there remained for them “no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:26–27).

And then the Lord again says: “And this is the condemnation [or the way to, and reason for condemnation], that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.” This is the condemning unbelief, namely, that because of the light, man has no excuse. He does not want to stop at its admonition, but resists and vexes the Holy Spirit of God. As we read in Isa. 63:10: “But they rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them.”

“For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged,” says the apostle in 1 Cor. 11:31. If a man stops at the voice of the Lord, feels and avows his sin, and would be glad to get rid of it, but knows that he is tied up and powerless under it, yes, powerless and lost, and therefore seeks mercy and salvation only in Christ, then God has a perpetual patience with that man. Yes, “like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him” (Ps. 103:13). The Lord does not impute any sin to that man to condemn him. No, He only looks at him in His lovable Son, as His well-pleasing and beloved child. So says the Lord, and thereby He swears by His eternal Being, because He can swear by no greater: “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezek. 33:11). And again: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely”

(Rev. 21:6). Listen! Freely! No matter who you are that read these majestic words, if you have realized that there is a living, present, holy, and zealous God speaking in these words, then hurry to bow to Him! Know the time of your visitation! Maybe something is not all right with your soul. Maybe you are bound under sin, and unfamiliar with your God. Then hurry to Him; to Him who only cries: “Come, I want to forgive you everything! ‘Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God’” (Jer. 3:13). “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isa. 1:18). “Thou hast not called upon Me ... but thou hast been weary of Me... Neither hast thou honored Me with thy sacrifices... But thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied Me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins” (Isa. 43:22–25). Oh, what words full of grace! May God give us the grace of His Spirit to believe and save our souls!

And you that are in the covenant of God rejoice that you have “a kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb. 12:28). We live at a time of a curious unrest and uncertainty. Almost all the world begins to notice how deceitful and risky its kingdom is. And as regards spiritual matters the manifold changes of doctrine put every soul to the test to see whether he wants to forsake the “old Word.” What a grace it is to be allowed then to lean one’s weary head on His breast who is called “the ancient of days” (Dan. 7:22) and “the everlasting Father.” He is, and He was, and He will remain. What a grace that His own Word is so explicit with regards to how we can be saved. Praise God eternally that there is no need for us to be uncertain about that matter! Then do not let anything in this world worry you! Everything is risky, everything is vain, except for one thing, and that is to have the friendship of God and the assurance of eternal life. “The time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; ... for the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Cor. 7:29–31). Soon we will all be equal. Blessed are all those that trust in Him! And is it not already a heavenly consolation in all the vexations in this present time, that not even the least thing will happen to me without my Father. There shall not a hair of my head perish! The least thing delighting my heart has been sent by my Father. The least thing worrying and grieving me has also been sent by my Father. This is the only foundation for a peaceful heart in this world of unrest. Therefore, still once more: “Rejoice and be glad, all you that wait for the Lord! He will be, and is with us always, even unto the end of the world.”

## August 20

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*But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law – Gal. 4:4.*

**H**ere is the great eternal ground for our freedom from the law! God sent His Son under the law, and that to redeem them that were under the law. Observe, that it says as follows: “To redeem them that were under the law.” You, poor souls, praise and exalt Him eternally! The main content of this text, so full of consolation, is so obvious that everybody must see it.

The holy apostle has written his words with much consideration and deep spirit. Thus they require careful thinking over. He says first: “When the fullness of the time was come,” namely “the time appointed of the Father,” when the tutelage government of the Old Testament was to come to an end and all the promises and symbols of prophecy were to be fulfilled. Thus these words “when the fullness of the time was come” lead our eyes to the long, golden chain of divine promises, examples, and pictures of the whole of the Old Testament ever since the first promise given on the day of the Fall, the promise of the woman’s Seed which was to bruise the serpent’s head. They lead our eyes to all those divine prophecies and symbols in the extensive Levitical divine service where so many thousands of sacrificial animals with the sacrificial priests all typified the Great High Priest and the great atonement offering. Indeed, an infinitely strong, thousandfold witness of God. Against that, all our thoughts, opinions, feelings, and contradictions fade and come to nought. What are we against the thousandfold examples and promises given by God Himself throughout the whole of a long age?

And now what do all these promises, and all these bloody sacrificial animals in the prefigurative divine service say? In Heb. 10 we read: “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect... For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when He [Christ] cometh into the world, He saith [to the Father], Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me... Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), to do Thy will, O God” (vv. 1, 4–5, 7).

In that way the Son of God speaks when He enters into the world. “In the book it is written about Me. The entire holy book of the Old Testament deals with Me. It says that I will do Thy will, O God. Thou dost not want to have the sacrificial animals themselves, O Father. No, but Thou hast prepared a body for Me. It was My body that they all foreshadowed. My body will be the offering Thou hast wanted to have, O God.” May God open our senses to understand such an inexpressibly glorious text! Here we see the ground for our freedom from the law. Here we see

the explanation of the words: Christ is the end of the law, and the Lamb of God. May God open our senses and hearts!

“God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” Ever since the eighth day, when He was circumcised according to the law, all His life was only a fulfilling of the law for us. The law demands quite reasonably and constantly that we should love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength and all our mind, and our neighbor as ourselves. But none of us fulfills this. Then Christ came and did so for us. He loved God with all His heart and with all His soul. It was His meat to do the will of the Father. He loved His neighbor as Himself. He laid down his life for the brethren, yes, even for His enemies, and the apostle says clearly that all this happened for us. It happened “to redeem them that were under the law.” Think thoroughly of all this. Then to your great and blessed wonderment you will find, that we do not need to keep the law in order to have God’s grace and salvation thereby. No, the great mercy of God has laid that matter on another Person — our Mediator and Fulfiller of the law. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.”

The Fall destroyed all our powers so fundamentally that there was not the least little bit in us which had not been poisoned and filled with sin and wickedness. No creature in all of mankind could fulfill the law of the Lord, but everything within us fights against all its commandments. This is also deeply and bitterly felt by those who have been touched by the holiness of God so that they fight and work to fulfill the law. For the sake of His eternal truth and righteousness, God could not remit even one jot or tittle of the law, and therefore all flesh was under an eternal curse, of which we are conscious daily.

Then God was moved by His unchangeable mercy and love to the man, and made the gracious decision to send His own Son to fulfill the law for us. Such things are contained in the precious text: “when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” And this is the ground why God does not look at us and judge us according to the law. And therefore there is “now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). No, they are as well pleasing to God in Him, as if they had never sinned even once.

## August 21

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*Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee* – John 21:17.

**M**ay we all be honest to our own souls, and examine ourselves before the face of Jesus as to whether we can participate in this confession of Peter. You that read this, the Lord asks you: “Lovest thou Me?” Answer before Him only as you really feel. Do not try to make your heart love Jesus, because this love cannot be forced. It can only be born into you. Here the question is: Have you gone through such experiences that Christ Himself, or what He is in His own Person, has become the highest delight, consolation, and treasure to your heart, so that you cannot exist without loving Him, and hungering and thirsting for Him?

The replies to this question will differ very much. We do not want to speak about the duped, self-contented saints who are never capable of fear with regard to themselves, and who therefore do not take the question to themselves, but only think of others. Rather, we want to speak about the different replies of faithful, serious souls to this question. Many faithful children of grace can at once reply with Peter with deep feeling: “Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee.” Others again become quite frightened at this question posed by Jesus, and want only to reply like this: “Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee. But Thou knowest my dreadful coldness, hardness, and indifference. Oh, it is terrible.” There are many faithful Christians who will want to reply that way.

Let us speak for a while with the latter. What should a Christian do when he does not feel anything except his great coldness? And suppose that somebody has not really loved Christ, but has been lukewarm, or quite cold to the Savior, because of all his work under the law. And suppose he awakes to see this condition. What should such a man do? Praise the Eternal Grace! He has Himself replied to this question. Otherwise I would never have become quite certain in my own mind. On two separate occasions the Lord Christ has spoken clearly to those so concerned. About one of them He says that he had “left his first love.” To the other He said: “Thou art neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm.” May God be praised eternally that He lets us see what He says to such people! Whom should we believe if not God Himself! Now, what does He say? His own words are before the eyes of all, in Rev. 2:1–5 and 3:14–22. However, the first thing we must say here is that He is really speaking to people who themselves did not worry about themselves. On the contrary, they said: “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” Therefore He speaks to them with serious threats such as, that He would “remove the candlestick” in Ephesus, and that He would spew the lukewarm man in Laodicea out of His mouth. On the other hand, we never find even one example in the whole Bible where He would have spoken with threats and severity to a person who condemns and punishes himself, and is ready to despair. But now note the



glorious thing that can make us shout for joy, or weep for sweetness, if we get the grace to reflect upon it! Yes, in the midst of the dreadful speech to the lukewarm man in Laodicea where He threatens to spew him out of his mouth — in the midst of that severe speech the Lord adds the inconceivably sweet words: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” Oh, my Lord and my God! Was that Thy intention with the dreadful speech? Was the reason for it that Ye loved him, a “lukewarm,” unworthy disciple? Oh, then one can really begin to love Thee, when Thou hast such a heart, such an intention when making a most dreadful speech. Then I know what it means when even today Ye frighten our hearts. Ye love us! “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” Ye want us only to be saved, not to die. Ye do not want us to despair and flee away from Thee.

Therefore, if I want to love the Lord Jesus, I must learn to know Him in some way. I must be captivated by Him. We know that our heart is such that it is often as difficult to get rid of a love one disapproves of, as it is to get the love one desires. Now you can never disapprove of your love to Jesus. It is only sad that it is always too small. But we take this up so that you will reflect upon what happens that love awakens love in the heart. It only happens if something captivates my heart. You will never get love to Jesus by working on your own heart, but only by experiencing His love so much that you become captivated by Him. “To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much.” There was an old teacher who understood this. A man almost despairing with grief at not loving Jesus, paid him a visit and said that he could not reply anything else to Christ’s question, “Lovest thou Me” than: “Thou knowest that I do not love Thee.” The old shepherd of the soul replied: “Then I do not know any better advice than that you immediately turn the question back to the Savior. Ask Him: ‘Lovest Thou me?’ Because here your love to Him cannot help, but only His love to you. As John said: ‘Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.’” And when the teacher had spoken in this tone for some time the downhearted man burst into tears of joy and said: “Now also I can say: ‘Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee.’”

## August 22

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*I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel ... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts* – Jer. 31:31, 33.

It should attract the attention of every reader, that the Lord God is saying here, “I will make a *new* covenant.” And He says clearly: “Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt and came with them to the Mount Sinai.” Please notice that the Lord says that He wanted to make a covenant which would not be like the covenant of the law — not according to that covenant. He says, “Not according to that covenant.” How strange, that nevertheless no human being believes it. How strange, that almost no human being knows in a living way about anything other than the covenant of the law.

But the Lord also says plainly what the difference between the two covenants would be, giving three special points. The first difference is that the law was written on stone in the first covenant, and that human hearts were unwilling, so that the Lord “must compel them.” Now however, the law would be written in the very heart and mind itself. That is: He will give us the heartfelt delight of the Holy Spirit and the love for good, which will become an inner, living law in us. Secondly, the laws of the first covenant could be passed from one man to another. Because the moral law is in man’s very nature, even in the heathen also, though obscured in them. But the new covenant was to be such that nobody would be able to enter into it by all the teaching one brother can give to another. No, as Jesus explains, “they shall be all taught *of God*.” This is what Jesus often said: “No man can come to Me, except the Father ... draw him” (John 6:44). “Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him” (Matt. 11:27). The third difference is as follows: According to the first covenant, sins had always to be required of the sinner. He had always to be punished for them. Now, on the contrary, they would be forgiven and forgotten in the new covenant. They would not be imputed. And this point begins with an important “for” — “for I will forgive their iniquity” (Jer. 31:34). This shows that this forgiveness is the ground and reason for the two previous points. Yes, it is even so. All the Scripture and all experience teach us that not until then does the human being learn to know God, and not until then does the law become written in his heart by a deep delight in the way of the commandment of the Lord, when He forgives him all his sins and comforts his heart.

This is what the apostle testifies so strongly against those who at his time also, meant that the “preaching of faith,” so full of consolation, would make the law come to nought, and that, on the contrary, the law would work sanctification. He says to them: “O foolish Galatians... This only would I learn of you, Received ye

the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Gal. 3:1–2). And so he also says to the Romans: “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Rom. 3:31).

The Lord God is saying the same thing here: The law shall be written in their hearts and minds: “for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” The event in Acts 10 says the same thing. At the very moment Peter uttered the word: “To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins,” then exactly, “while Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.” We should therefore learn fundamentally, to reject the opinion that in addition to the preaching of faith, there is still another preaching, that gives the Holy Spirit and sanctification. No, it is plainly this preaching of faith alone that gives the Holy Spirit. No human being believes in Christ, and is justified in Him, without the Holy Spirit, and where the Holy Spirit dwells He works sanctification. All piety that is not born of grace and faith are only the “dead works” (Heb. 6:1) of nature or forced “deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:20), and all those are under the curse.

Therefore the apostle says clearly: “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God” (Gal. 2:19). And again: “But now we are delivered from the law; ... that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom. 7:6). Such things are meant by the Lord God when He says: “I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” And this sanctification doctrine of God never excludes the use of benign and serious admonition, or the faithful husbandman’s purging of the branches. It only reveals how vain it is to purge the dead branches, which after all will only be burned, no matter how well purged they are. But this inward life, this love to and delight in good, only arise because of grace abounding outpoured on an exhausted sinner, a grace that melts the heart and gives the Holy Spirit. Thus we understand the words of the Lord God: “I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts. For — for — I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

## August 23

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*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, ... nor anything that is thy neighbor's – Exod. 20:17.*

**H**ere Divine Majesty has finally expressed what He really wants and means in all His commandments, namely that we should be quite pure and holy as He is holy. Here Divine Majesty has forbidden the first movements, yes, even the mere existence, of a sinful desire in our heart. However, notice that it is a “sinful” desire. We cannot deny that there are also innocent desires: namely first, the purely *natural* ones, such as desire for food, drink, sleep, etc., when these are kept within reasonable limits. Secondly, the *spiritual* desires such as the longing and desire for God and all good. David often speaks about this: “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord” (Ps. 84:2). “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God” (Ps. 42:1–2). But all desires in any way contrary to the commandments and ordinances of God are sinful. Sinful desires are, for instance, the ones mentioned by the Lord here: lust for a neighbor’s wife (or the lust for unclean pleasure), desire for his neighbor’s servant (which can be the desire of selfishness), desire for his ox or his ass (the desire of greed), and desire for anything that is your neighbor’s, which are all the things God has not given to you but to your neighbor, no matter whether they are earthly possessions, or glory, or distinction, or any other superiority. Even if only out of reverence for the pleasure of God, you shall not covet such things. In brief: the desire is sinful as soon as you are not subject to God and His pleasure. Then the desire is sinful, even if its object is innocent. In the wilderness the children of Israel coveted what was evil. And we see that the object itself was quite innocent: meat, fish, and spices. But they did not bow to the will of God and His ordinance regarding their life in the wilderness. They wanted to have the same things as they had in Egypt, and did not want to hear the will of God. Therein was the evil thing, and therefore, the wrath of God befell them, so that the place is still today called Kibroth-hattaavah, the graves of lust, because there they buried the people that lusted.

From this we see that the sum and secret of this commandment is as follows: As good children we should not desire more than God and His pleasure. If God wants to give us food, drink, clothes, friends, glory, and esteem, then we may enjoy them for our benefit, and thank the Lord as long as He gives them. But if it pleases God to take these things from us, then we should be as contented as when He gave them to us, for we still have Him and His pleasure which should be the only necessary thing for us.

Thus we now see that the last commandment meets the first one to form a circle, so that it really only demands that the Lord God is allowed to be the only

God of our heart, the only Object of our desire, our love, our thirst and panting. This was the intention of Divine Majesty, when He created man in His own image! The meaning was that man would only look at Him in everything, live in Him and of Him, as his origin and element. To the image of God and the true life, belonged chiefly that man had a heart where God dwelled, a heart not capable of living without Him, a heart thirsting for and getting its nourishment from Him the way a child takes nourishment from his mother's milk. Yes, He planted this thirst after God so deeply in man when He created him that our heart would be without calm, rest, and peace as long as it did not embrace Him, the living God, and have its delight and full contentment in Him alone.

No earthly delight or joy, no silver or gold, no art or science, no glory, no dominance, no world, and no heaven with all its armies, would satisfy the innermost desire or longing of the human heart. In the midst of possessing all these things, the human heart would be poor and miserable without Him, the living God, the highest good thing. Man should consider everything else unworthy of his desire, no matter what it might be called. All the world with everything it is and has, would not give our thirsting heart even a drop of satisfaction. We should thirst after the greatest and highest thing, the infinite and eternal thing — Him alone, our Lord and God. He alone wanted to be our Refreshment, our Rest and Fullness. This was the will of God when He created man in His own image. Therefore, He formed our heart so that it is full of an infinite longing and desire. But His meaning was that He Himself would be the Object thereof. Now we ask: Are the will and meaning of the great God not the same still today? Yes, certainly. His first and last commandment are the same still today: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mark 12:30).

## August 24

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*Through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins – Acts 10:43.*

What should I believe and know about this forgiveness? I would say that on the basis of the eternal words of God Himself, you should know and believe that no matter how grave your sins are, even if they are “as scarlet,” the forgiveness of them by Christ is still quite a matter on its own. Not a hairbreadth of it will be reduced, disturbed, or revoked by any sin. Sin is not strong enough to overcome the righteousness and defense of the great Almighty Savior for us. Sin may cause lack of uniformity here on earth, that is, in our earthly righteousness, but sin cannot reach and disturb heaven. You see, David says: “For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him” (Ps. 103:11). And there it will be the matter of which is mightier, our sin or the righteousness of Christ. But Paul says: “That as sin hath reigned unto death [in Adam], even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” “For if by one man’s offense death reigned by one [Adam]; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:21, 17). Grace is still mightier than sin. Measured against the great Lord Christ, we are creatures by confession so small and weak. Our work, sin, cannot overcome His work, grace, and forgiveness. If I that believe in Christ can have grace when I am pious, and lose grace when I sin and forget myself, then the kingdom of Christ would be a kingdom of works reigning over grace! — and no longer a kingdom of grace reigning over works. For what use would Christ be to us then? If I can have grace at the moment I am pious, but no longer, then, indeed, righteousness would be of works! And Christ would be dead in vain! Christ did not take flesh and offer His blood to show such an unsteady grace. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

Therefore we should realize that the reason why God speaks about our sins and duties in a punishing and threatening way in His Word, is only because He wants to awaken and frighten those lighthearted souls who are at ease, and who do not want to repent. By this means He wants to drive them to Christ. And He also wants to keep the faithful awake and in exercise. But He does not want to revoke grace itself, because then the law would be contrary to the promise of God! God forbid! No, everyone who believes in Christ is forever free from all the curse of the law, and now lives in the city of refuge. He is at a place where no sin can reach him or be imputed to him. As it is written: “Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord

imputeth not iniquity” (Ps. 32:2). Make a note of this: imputeth not iniquity! This is the kingdom of Christ — the kingdom of an eternal, constant, and unceasing forgiveness. About it the Lord declares solemnly: “the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity” (Isa. 33:24). Thus no matter what I feel or see within me — evil, coldness, and slowness, or cowardice and fear of men, or impatience and wrath, or unclean lusts or whatsoever it is — it consists of sins that well deserve to be punished, repented of, and prayed against. But not a hairbreadth of grace, or forgiveness, will be revoked. No, I will have that quite undiminished in Christ as long as I stick to Him by faith. Then by the same faith I always also have the mind with which I punish myself, suffer from evil, and agree with the Spirit. Thus I should avow and punish sin within me in earnest. I should improve my life in earnest. But as regards my conscience — my relation to God — I should live in such a freedom as if nothing is sin, as if there is not any law, neither one nor ten commandments, but as if I were already in heaven. Because that is the way my condition is before God. Because where God speaks about the forgiveness of sins, the non-imputing of sin, etc., there it is no play upon words. No, it is said in all seriousness, divine earnestness, and truth. This is the freedom to which Christ has redeemed us. This should not be understood as that there is no sin in a Christian, or that nothing that he does is sin. But as it has already been said: he is now in a kingdom where no sin is imputed to him for the sake of Christ. He believes in Christ who has taken all sin upon Himself. He is now in the kingdom where the law has no condemning power. It is true that it may worry and trouble us, but cannot condemn us. Praised be the mercy of God.

About this Luther has said these excellent words: “As long as we live here on earth there is a perpetual sin adhering to our flesh, and there is no end and cessation of faults and offenses. Then it is necessary indeed that we have an eternal forgiveness set against them, so that we will not come under the wrath of God because of sin, but that we will live under grace for the sake of forgiveness. Behold, this is His eternal covenant. And it stands firm and does not waver. So our hearts can be assured that sin cannot condemn us.”

## August 25

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*He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death – Ps. 68:20.*

God's children, who often rejoice in the hope of the blessed hour when they shall leave wretchedness and enter into glory, still sometimes fear and dread death. This is only a natural consequence of the fact that they are not yet spirit only, but also flesh. And as Luther says: the "stupid flesh" does not know better. If you are unfamiliar with God, if your conscience pricks you, and you do not know for certain that you are God's friend, then it is no wonder that you shudder at the sight of death. And there is then so much more reason for you to seek this certainty as soon as possible. But when those who are otherwise on good terms with God are also sometimes caught by a strange fear of death, they should realize that this is only due to the glowing darts of Satan, who as long as he can do so, tries to harrow the faint hearts of the faithful. At such a time the only remedy is to invoke Him who was mighty to cast out evil spirits.

By the way, at times of fear of death there are two things we should bear especially well in mind. The first is that nothing can happen to us unless it has been sent by our faithful Father, not even a hair falling off our head. How very much less then the greater thing of being moved from time to eternity. We should not completely forget that our true and faithful Savior has said: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:29–31). Yes, Lord, Thou certainly thinkest us somewhat more worth than a sparrow! Praise the Lord! Then nothing will happen to us without Thy command. Krummacher says: "No one dies by chance, but we die exactly at the moment we should die, neither before nor later." David says: "In Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Ps. 139:16). And Job: "Seeing his days are determined ... thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass" (14:5). Death is not the work of illness or sword, but the work of God. Is it not, then, very wrong, when Christians have too great a fear of death! No accident, no human hand, no pestilence can do them any harm before the very hour that has been entered beside their name in the great book in heaven.

The second thing is: Even if our flesh makes objections, it is still good, when the hour of God comes, that He should call us. Even if a mother must often compel a child to sleep, and press on its small arms until it has cried itself to sleep, it is good for the child, that it gets some sleep. Also for a Christian it does him infinite good, when he goes to sleep in faith out of a world full of wretchedness, danger, sins, and sorrow, even if his flesh does not like that sleep. We should also thank God,



that this unwillingness towards death does not condemn us, as after all we have to base our life on forgiveness! No, our pardon is based on something much more steady than anything that can be upset by any sort of weakness or sin, as long as we have all our hope under the wings of Christ. And now, what happens when the Lord calls us? Oh, then the fantastic thing happens, the thing we have thought of so long, the solemn entrance into the Lord's rest, into a world, the glory of which no eye has seen before, and no ear has heard about. Consider that we shall be delivered from all evil in this bad world of sin and sorrow, and shall receive all the good gifts that God Almighty can give His friends in His kingdom of happiness when He begins to do them good!

Thus we find that even if nature does not love death, but wriggles and shrinks from it, it still is something very good, and brings us only endless good, when at last we sleep away under the wings of Christ. Therefore Christians should quiet their hearts before God and try to get a peaceful and reconciled attitude towards death, so that they will not fall into the devil's snare, and begin to shrink obstinately from their gracious Father's wise and good will with them. However it is quite correct, that a Christian should get into a somewhat curious mood, when the last guest greets him. To go from one world to another, is a tremendous step! To go from one's bedroom to stand before the face of the Most High, encircled by the holy angels, just think what a change! With what strange feelings the heart must beat at such a moment! But what is wrong for a pardoned child of God is the self-willed disgust and dread due to unbelief, making us consider the arrival of death a hostile attack, when after all it comes only to deliver us completely from all evil and give us a good rest. Would anyone really consider it an enemy attack, when a mother lays her baby in his cradle? Or if I were shut up in a tower by my enemies, and my king should come with his soldiers to let me out, there would no doubt be fighting and noise, but would I be afraid in the same way as in the case of an enemy attack? Would I not think that it would be for my own benefit? Should I then feel afraid when a solemn procession of angels approaches to snatch me away from my enemies, and place the crown of life on my head? Verily, this happens at the death of every child of God. We know that is absolutely true because of our Savior's words when He said farewell: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3).

## August 26

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*But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved* – Matt. 24:13.

**T**he Scriptures give us to understand that there will still be much external persecution; that in the last days our enemy, the devil, will have great wrath, knowing that he has not much time left. But we need not speak of coming days; now also persecution frightens, chases, and bends many a soul away from the footsteps of Christ.

There are many ways and degrees of persecution. Since, during the first period of the church, the serpent's hatred of the woman's Seed tried its power in vain by means of bloody persecution, he now usually proceeds in a finer and more careful way, but still can torment and frighten our poor flesh inexpressibly. How bitterly faithful children and servants often have to suffer in their homes for the name of Christ, even if only by bitter words and glances! A Christian workman or shopkeeper with a wife and children to keep, often becomes frightened and worried in his heart only because he sees how old customers are leaving him because of his Christian zeal and confession. How bitterly a faithful teacher learns both from his superiors and his audience that he disturbs the old peace, and does not leave in peace their safety in sin, disbelief, and ungodliness. At such times, the poor flesh dreads the suffering. Then there is the danger that he will turn away and make himself a more conveniently pious way of his own in order to enjoy peace and follow the sensible counselors who say: "Spare yourself, this shall not happen to you."

This temptation becomes specially powerful when a man has first been persecuted in a more painful way, and is tired out by the persecution. Then there follows a serene quiet when the world shows a mild face. To the tired mind this is such a mighty enchantment that it is a miracle if such a one is not overcome at that time. But that somebody has been subdued does not necessarily have to manifest itself in an entire and open return to the world, but only in these new principles of adjustment and judiciousness, by means of which he now will be able to be the friend both of God and of the world at the same time. Then he will not do the things that the world disapproves of, and he will not ask what Christ wants and what is necessary for the good of souls. On the contrary, he can now participate in the things that the world loves, and will not care about the Word, and the example of Christ, and the offense this will be to simple souls. It looks like this when the inner power has been weakened, and, when he begins to follow the winds. But what do the Scriptures say? The apostle says: "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Pet. 4:15–16).

“If any man suffer as a Christian,” that is, when he suffers only for the sake of Christ, for faith, confession, and for following Christ, and the demands of the clear, plain words of God. If, on the contrary, he does something evil or wrong, or is a busybody in other men’s matters, then he does not suffer for the sake of Christ. But those who suffer for the sake of Christ are highly encouraged and consoled in the Scriptures. How sweet and strengthening it is when Christ says: “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil things against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad” (Matt. 5:11–12). “Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven” (10:32–33). And “if the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:18–19).

These are the gracious and sweet words of the Savior. They will also be sufficient to console and strengthen us, if we only believe in them, and live in a real friendship with the faithful Lord. And now here is the integral main point, i.e., what is really needed for all upcoming conflicts and dangers. We often get uneasy and ask: “Where will I get strength for it all? I see what I should do, but the whole trouble is that I have no power to do it.” Oh, that, once and for all, we would learn and believe what is so often repeated in the Word of God, that all strength depends on intimate union and acquaintanceship with our Savior. Never think of the victory in the hour of temptation. It is never worth fighting, for such will only result in powerlessness, distress, and death as long as you are not in close union with your Savior, but your conscience still pricks you, and you are bound by the law and unfamiliar with God. Therefore nothing is so necessary as to obtain the full assurance of faith. As is so plainly proclaimed by the Scriptures in the frequently repeated words: “The victory that overcometh the world: our faith. The joy of the Lord is your strength. Through faith the elders were made strong out of weakness, waxed valiant in fight,” etc.

Only a full assurance of faith and union with Christ, by means of which we can be filled with the Holy Spirit, give us the right desire and power to fight and overcome all that can meet us.

## August 27

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*I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee – Isa. 44:22.*

**Y**ou miserable souls that never find your attempts at improvement to work out the way you intend; nor your contrition, repentance, prayer, and holiness to be the way they should be, and therefore all the time you remain far away from full consolation in Christ. Listen to what the Savior says to you: “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return to Me; for I have redeemed thee.” It is certainly true what the Word of God says of the necessity for improvement, repentance, and prayer, etc., but this one wants to make a new expiation out of improvement, repentance, and prayer; that one dares not believe in free grace in Christ, because of the great lack in real repentance, improvement, and prayer. “That is a fault in his attitude by not esteeming Christ’s blood.” There is enough of improvement, repentance, and contrition when a man cannot anymore get peace in the world or by his own piety. There is enough of contrition when, because of his unworthiness, a man dare not assimilate the great undeserved grace of God, no matter if it were only his lack of contrition, his hardness and carelessness that makes him contrite. It is often that very lack of repentance, improvement, and prayer that makes us contrite and strips us bare. If a man, unfit and unworthy as he is, does not want to flee to Christ and embrace His merits, that is indeed “a fault in his attitude by not esteeming Christ’s blood.” It is to make himself too important! You are not worth so much, neither with your sins nor with your repentance: you are included in the great purchase, only if you now decide to receive and believe the great grace of God.

Oh, that we would understand God’s gift! That we would understand what the words mean: “I have blotted out thy transgressions.” First, here I see again what from the beginning of the world the whole gospel of God has announced, that it was God’s great counsel of eternity that all the sin of the world was to be laid upon One, and be atoned for, and taken away “by the obedience of one” (Rom. 5:19) by His suffering and death. “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). That is the secret, even that the condemnatory power of all sin has already been taken away through the death of Christ, and has been completely “cast ... into the depths of the sea” (Mic. 7:19), so that it is nevermore an obstacle to grace; so that nobody will ever be condemned because of sin, but only because he remains away from the kingdom of grace. Oh, that people would know that their sins have already been taken away! Oh, that they would know that ever since the death of Christ, they have had the forgiveness for their sins ready for them! That is the first thing. Secondly, I see here Christ’s burning heart of love. I see that the beloved Bearer of sins is not displeased at having had to labor with our sins.

He has done it out of an overflowing love. Let us not so completely forget the love of Christ our Lord! “Continue ye in My love” (John 15:9), He says: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (v. 13). But Paul declares that He has given His life for His enemies. From this draw a sound conclusion and realize that if it is so indeed, that His love then must be quite free and independent of us and our state.

In brief, when you again are filled with these thoughts: “If only I were so and so. I am not what I should be, not so contrite and serious. I am so hard, cold, careless, hypocritical, sinful. And how can I then believe that I have God’s grace?” Please notice for once, what is the central point in all this speaking of yours — the central point around which all your thoughts turn and upon which your faith depends is the little word *I*: “if I were,” “if I were able to,” you say. It is your ego that is so important. You want to be righteous yourself and thus become your own savior. Be on your guard against that fault! Paul was so afraid of the very least mixing in of any consolation of his own, that he considered his highest righteousness both impure and harmful. He says, in order that I may “be found in Christ, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ” (Phil. 3:9). Notice here that when we keep saying: “I, I,” the Lord also repeats His “I” and says: “It is true, you are not what you should be, you are altogether criminal and unworthy, but I, ‘I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions.’” Praise His name. Therefore, when you say: “I do not repent of my sins as I should!” He says: “No, you have not repented of them as you should, but I have repented of them for you (in the garden). I, I have blotted them out.” You say: “I do not pray as I should.” He says: “No, you have not prayed as you should! I, I have ‘offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears’ (Heb. 5:7). I have blotted out your failures.” You say: “I am not as anxious as I should be!” He says: “No, you have not called Me, but I have been anxious for you. I have worked. I, ‘I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins.’”

Oh, should we not respect His gracious statements, humbly fall down before Him, and thank Him and confess: “Our Lord, do not give the glory to us, but to Thy name! Thou, only Thou, art righteous and justify those who believe in Thee. Lord, increase our faith!”

## August 28

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*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands,  
as it is fit in the Lord – Col. 3:18.*

**T**he basis for all the duties the wife bears towards her husband is obedience. The apostle could have mentioned more duties such as kindness, faithfulness, domesticity, but he only mentions one special duty for the wife: “Submit yourselves.” This was also the only commandment God gave the woman in the beginning. He said: “and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Gen. 3:16). Then the husband can always remind her of what he desires more. Therefore, the apostle could express the duties of the wife so briefly. But here we at once hear many a wife ask: May the husband then rule as he pleases? The reply is: No, it is not that way. He too gets his rules to conform to. But if he does not conform to them, then note the addition the apostle makes immediately. He says: “as it is fit in the Lord.” It is not for the sake of the husband or his perfection that the wife should submit herself, but “as it is fit in the Lord.” Thus she should submit herself for the sake of the Lord no matter whether her husband fulfills his obligations or not. About a mere human ordinance the apostle Peter already says that we should submit ourselves for the Lord’s sake. How much more should we not then submit ourselves to a purely divine ordinance as this one.

The words: “as it is fit in the Lord” comprise two things: First, the wife should submit herself to her husband for the Lord’s sake for Christian reasons, as said above. Secondly, this should happen in a Christian way, in a way agreeing with the Word of the Lord. She should be as obedient as the Lord has commanded her to be. Thus she should let her husband be her master. Not only should her words and deeds be submitted to him, but also her will. “And thy desire shall be to thy husband.” Out of a heartfelt desire, “for the Lord’s sake,” she should make her husband’s will her own. But on the other hand, it is also a fact that when you do all for the Lord’s sake, you never let yourself be induced to be so obedient to your husband that you would be disobedient to God. No, if your husband demands something contrary to the commandments of God, then the universal rule applies: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). About this the old teacher of the church, Gregory, says: “The wife shall please her husband so that she does not become displeasing to her Creator.” But as regards everything else the Scripture teaches plainly that the wife, should submit herself to her husband *in all things*. Thus the words of the apostle read: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church... Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (Eph. 5:22–24). Why, these are great and glorious motives! As Christ is the Head of the church, and the church,

His bride, “the Lamb’s wife” (Rev. 21:9), is subject unto Him, so the husband is the head of the wife. God has ordained him to be so. And thus the wife should be subject unto her husband.

Also Peter says so: “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear” (1 Pet. 3:1–2). Here the apostle speaks about wives whose men were downright heathen. At the time of the apostle this was often the case when the gospel was preached for the first time and either the husband or his wife was converted. Though the Christian and enlightened wife had a heathen husband, the apostle still bids her to be subject unto him. Oh, that every Christian wife would note this! If you have been converted and your husband has not, even if you are more intelligent and skillful than your husband, it is still your duty to be subject to him, so long as he does not demand a downright sin from you. However heinous and ungodly a heathen may be, still the apostle bids a Christian wife to be subject to him. And if she is not allowed to preach to him by words, the apostle wants her to do so by her Christian submission, mildness, kindness, faithfulness. In this way the husband may possibly be softened by the melting power of humility and love and also stop to consider the Word of God; so that he changes his mind and says: “From my wife I see that the Christians are a good people. God help me also to become a Christian!”

May God grant every Christian wife to think of this, and everything we have seen with regard to her duties! It is true that it is painful to the flesh and blood. They want to rise up against the ordinance of God and say: “Should I always submit myself?” Where the Spirit of Christ dwells, there the flesh must be crucified. And there it should be sweet beyond measure for the spirit to know what deeds God desires of us. It is sweet beyond measure to the spirit to be allowed to do deeds that certainly please God. As Luther says about this: “It is a great and veritable treasure for a wife, obedient to her husband, to be certain that her deeds please God. Can she experience a greater happiness? Therefore, if you want to be a Christian wife then think like this: I do not want to look at the qualities of my husband, whether he is good or wicked. No, I want to look at the fact that God has placed me in the married state. And therefore I want to be subject to my husband and obey him.”

## August 29

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*Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them* – Col. 3:19.

**T**he basis of the duties of the wife is obedience. So the basis of the duties of the husband is love. “Husbands, love your wives.” Where there is only love everything else follows automatically. As the apostle says: “Charity suffereth long, and is kind... Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things” (1 Cor. 13:4, 7). But let us look at the love of the husband to his wife. And let us especially focus our attention on the solemn description of it in Eph. 5. The apostle says: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it... So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church” (vv. 25, 28–29). Look what a glorious picture! What a high honor for matrimonial love, which is illustrated by the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge (Eph. 3:19).

Let us now look at the instructions drawn from this. The most characteristic feature in the love of Christ to the church is: First of all, He loves undeservedly, without our deserving or worthiness, only because of the Father’s eternal election. About this He says Himself: “Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me... Those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition” (John 17:6, 12). “Neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all” (10:28–29). So also the husband should love his wife for the sake of the Father’s will, no matter whether she is more or less perfect. He should love her only because the Father has given her to him, only because she is his wife. A love depending on qualities, or better and less good occasions, is a flighty, inconstant, and superficial love. If Christ had loved us that way, then He would not have given Himself for us. God has given you this wife. He has brought her into your arms and said: “This will be yours. Love her. Stick to her.” That is a thousand times more valuable than all the beautiful qualities in a woman.

Secondly, the love of Christ made Him one with the church. As the apostle says right here: “we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (Eph. 5:30). So, the apostle adds, a husband and his wife have also become one. They two become one flesh. However, this does not only happen by love, but it is really based on what God thought when He created the woman. Only think of the wonderful description of that in Gen. 2. First it says that God created the woman of a rib taken from the man. And when the man saw the woman his first exclamation was: “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh”! Immediately thereupon we have the first words of God as regards the matrimonial union. They read: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” This way the Lord Christ Himself explained the matter



when He reminded the Pharisees of this institution of God and the indissoluble union between a husband and his wife: “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh” (Matt. 19:6) This is now the basis for the apostle when he says that the husbands should love their wives as their own bodies, that is, as really being their own bodies. Because the verse goes on: “He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh.” Should this fact not wake up many a man to reflection and more love to his wife?

Thirdly, the love of Christ was a self-sacrificing love. “Christ has loved the church and given Himself for her.” Moreover, He feeds and nourishes her; and not only that, He also gives her happier moments, her rejoicing and refreshment. So should also the husband do everything, not only to support his wife, but also to give her happiness and refreshment. And why? Love does this automatically! In brief, all the duties of the husband are comprised in love. “Husbands, love your wives.”

But the apostle adds furthermore: “and be not bitter against them.” It is true that God has given you the dominion. The wives are obliged to submit themselves. But do not think therefore that you may follow an angry mind as you please. Do not think that you may meet your wives with sullen and hard words and treatment. No, watch over yourselves! The apostle Peter says: “Ye husbands, dwell with them [your wives] according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7). We are, all of us, weak vessels, but woman is still the weaker one. How then can the husband expect such perfection from her, that he will not put up with any fault? He should use his power “according to knowledge.” And he should never forget that God cares about the woman equally, because she is also an heir together with him of the grace of life. Once more: she is obliged to submit herself. That is true, and you have power to command. But use your authority so that you do not cause damage to the weak vessel or tool, so that her mind does not become altogether downhearted and apathetic towards you.

## August 30

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*Be sober, be vigilant* – 1 Pet. 5:8.

A path on which many saved children of God lose their life is spiritual sloth, the laying aside of spiritual weapons, the negligence of the use of the means of grace, and of the exercising of faith and good deeds. At the beginning of the path of grace it was so precious to be able to be conversant with the Word, to read, hear, speak, and write about Christ, about faith, grace, love, and good deeds, to speak with a personal God in prayer, and be a communicant at His table. Then also all these things were alive and precious to the heart, and the whole being was Christian. But after a year or so, all that became less important. Then maybe new occupations and hindrances came. The devil made these very important and, moreover, told the soul, that he already knew all he needed to know, and could live on the memory for some time, and hope that God would maintain his spiritual life. Can he only get the soul away from the Word, then the devil can bring him where he wants him, and inspire him to anything. This is a path to all sorts of wrong roads, morbidities, and falls. Soon the soul does not see any more sins in himself than those punished by reason. Soon he does not believe any more in faith, than he thinks himself worthy of being allowed to believe. With a dying sense of sin he has enough comforting support, and soon he is right back in a natural state.

The negligence of the observance of the Word and the lack of care about the voice of the Spirit also belong to spiritual laziness. At the beginning the soul wanted to do all the Lord has commanded us to do. He was attentive to all Christian duties. It is true that he could not fulfill them all, but it was his intention, and he strove to do so, and considered every lack therein a sin, which he complained of before God, and for which he asked for forgiveness and for grace and strength for improvement. Now, on the contrary, he begins to set up a certain measurement for himself, how much he can and will do; and all the rest he leaves completely. He does not strive to achieve it and does not think of it. And when he thus does not try to do more than he is already doing, the natural consequence is that he will soon not have any shortcomings to repent of, and that he will be only as good as he wants to be. It is a fact that all self-satisfaction only comes from laziness and negligence of the holiness of God, and the spiritual requirements of the commandments of God. And when man is now satisfied with himself and no longer feels his guilt and shortcomings, then what is faith and the complete spiritual life? What then is Christ to him? A dream-picture or maybe a Sanctifier, but not a Defender before the Father; a King he should acknowledge, pay homage and honor to, but one who is in fact not so important, beloved, and indispensable to the depths of his heart as a Defender standing before God, and always our only Righteousness. In short, the Saviour, the Reconciler, has lost His true and real office and value, and is in fact, no longer

the life and consolation of his heart, but only is so in his imagination and mouth. When the first part, repentance, and the consciousness of sin, has been lost, both the second and the third are false. In this way a Christian becomes a Pharisee.

Also another unhappy consequence results from this laziness, and that is the emptiness in the soul, the [unholy] liberty, boredom, lukewarmness, and confidence which open all doors to the devil and his band. As there is no longer any fight and delight in victory; nor any sin, or distress; any prayer, or any joy in grace, in short, because there is no exercise, Christianity is soon fully learned and no longer contains anything special, but only tedium and heaviness. This is the state Christ describes when He says that the house is swept and garnished (Luke 11:25). There the devil goes and gives the soul a hobby to relieve the boredom, something with which to fill the vacuum, some good or some sinful lust which he presents in a very pleasant and sweet form, seemingly free from danger. After the fasting this tastes abnormally good, because there was before a vacuum so empty, so free. There was no exercise, no treasure, no precious company for the heart. And the human heart is such that it always wants to be filled with something, have some treasure, some company. When the treasure is missing, the delight of grace, communion with God, and the right to cry: Abba! has ceased, then the new things are welcome and attractive. Then the heart drinks in what the devil offers the way an empty fungus drinks in water. And with this lust or idolatry, e.g., friendship with this world or worldly glory and distinction, or earthly gain or voluptuousness, or some other god, with this the old "strong spirit" with its seven more wicked spirits, go in and dwell there (Luke 11:26).

It is true that every Christian can blame himself for much spiritual laziness and negligence, but hereby a difference should be noticed. On one hand, the inertness they complain of often is only a lack of liveliness of feeling, whereas they are in daily exercise, use the means of grace, and strive both to believe and to love. On the other hand if, in the case of real laziness, they let the Spirit of the Lord punish and awaken them, so that they fear, begin to take to the Word and to seek the grace of improvement with God, the result will not be spiritual death. If, however, it happens that one accepts no punishment for his laziness nor gives any time to listen to the awakening Spirit, but lets things go on unchecked, however bad they may be, then the result is a fall and spiritual death.

## August 31

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*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts* – Col. 3:15.

**T**he chief purpose of the atonement of Christ was that we would get peace with God. “The chastisement of our peace was upon Him” (Isa. 53:5). “And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. And My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places” (Isa. 32:17–18). And Paul explains it thus: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). That is the way the Scripture speaks. Then would not the peace of God rule in every believing heart? Or is it possibly not true what the Scripture says, that being justified by faith, we have peace with God? The Scripture cannot lie. What is the reason, then, and what does it mean that, in spite of all, this real peace with God is such a rare guest among us?

We are not speaking about those who do not even know what true peace with God is. These have so much peace of another kind that they never will be able to get the peace of God. They live in the peace of ease, a peace coming from healthy clean blood, or a good earthly position or something like that. Or they may be awakened, chased, and tormented under the bondage of unbelief and works of the law with a painful unrest, fear, and pangs of conscience gnawing inwardly. Such people should notice only that they lack something important, because, the Scripture says plainly that being justified by faith, we have peace with God! Can the Scripture lie? Do you not understand that you lack true faith?

But we want to speak about those who have come to faith and peace, but have again sunk down the more in lack of peace, in fear, darkness, and a mind of bondage and sighing: “I am chastened every morning. If I wake up, I am afraid. If I go to sleep, I am uneasy. My life is sighing.” Now we ask: What is the reason why believing souls also often go about without peace and in agony? The reply is that a Christian only lacks the peace of *feeling* if his eyes are still on Christ and the gospel; but he cannot get it into his heart so that it gives life and peace. That is more painful than dangerous. If he still can say: “Nevertheless I am continually with Thee... My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever” (Ps. 73:23, 26). “Though Thou lettest me walk in a dark valley, Thou art still faithful, and it will go according to Thy Word.” If I can still speak that way with my God, then it is not dangerous; then the lack of peace is not unto death, but to the glory of God. It is perhaps due only to the concealment of God, a necessary chastisement, or a natural infirmity which does not at all concern the soul.

But if you lack all foundation in the Word, if you think now one way, now another, then look at your sins and duties and try to help yourself; but, if it is all bondage and fear, then there is danger; there is unbelief and the mind of bondage

which can be unto death, if help and comfort are not soon forthcoming. Then what can such souls do? First of all, they should cease from all their own doings. They should allow themselves to be punished for their unbelief and self-righteousness, and reflect how by these things they are, in fact, scoffing at the dear Savior, and everything He has done and suffered so abundantly for us, and has given and promised us in the Word and the sacraments. They should wake up to see that they only go about looking at *themselves*, *their* sins and *their* feelings, as if their sins were mightier than all the merits of Christ, and their thoughts, feelings, and opinions were worth more than all the witness of God, both of the Spirit, the water, and the blood! They should reflect upon this, that they go and think, guess, and reason, now one way, and now another, and wait for the replies to their heart's questions to come to their own minds. The Lord has given the reply in His Word and sacraments.

Therefore, when you lack peace with God, when your heart is dark and uneasy, do not sit down and think only, now one way, now another, how it may be with your soul and the grace of God towards you. Neither undertake only to work on your heart to make it think well of God. No; hear, read, and consider the Word of the gospel; and thereby sigh to God for opened senses, for the gift of faith. If you only get your eyes opened so that you see the glory of God in His gospel, then you will get a great and inexpressible peace. The worst disturber of the peace, and the worst tribulation are our sins, and the doubts as to our conversion and honesty. But now the apostle says: "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. 5:10). If I am harassed and sorrowful because I fear that I have not been rightly converted, and therefore do not believe, the apostle says, that we were reconciled to God at the moment when we were still enemies, not at the moment when we were converted and became the friends of God. And the apostle says that it happened by the death of His Son, not by our repentance, remorse, and faith. If I were only able to believe this, that all the world was reconciled to God by the death of Christ, and that I am at once righteous and blessed when this grace becomes the object of my heart, its consolation, or at least its longing! If I would only understand that I should thus believe in a grace existing before I believe, and existing for all the world, why then I shall get a great, high, and blessed peace from that tribulation! And when a soul is worried at his sin and repentance, and gets this consolation, then there is both conversion, repentance, and faith of the true and right kind.

# September 1

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*God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us – Rom. 5:8.*

**T**he apostle says that God proves His love, and expresses His love. That is, God declares it to all the world. He “makes it so great, so certain and evident, that it is not possible that a man can consider this proof of love rightly and yet doubt it” (Luther). Even if you would otherwise be full of doubts as to the love of God, and full of uneasiness of conscience and fear of the wrath of God over sin, this proof should give you a notion of the heart of God. At this proof you should begin to realize and understand that in spite of all His holy zeal against sin, God must nevertheless have in His heart an infinite love and mercy towards sinners. We would never have been capable of thinking such things if God Himself had not revealed it by this great proof. Thereby God shows His love to us.

When wanting to explain the love of His Father to us, Christ only states this proof: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). So also John says that this is the real proof: “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us” (1 John 3:16). And again: “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him” (1 John 4:9). Otherwise we would never have been able to think anything like that about the heart of God. Therefore it is also rightly said that God has expressed, “commanded,” His own love thus. It is only God’s own matchless love that has proved itself this way. When we love somebody, it must be a friend or at least a good, lovable person. If, on the contrary, we see something detestable in a human being, or he is our enemy and a backbiter, then we are not in the habit of loving him, but of hating him. It is like that with our love according to nature. God has a most intense hatred towards sin. And furthermore He sees us, all of us, full of sin. And still He has such a love for the sinner that He gave His beloved Son to death, rather than see the death of the sinner.

And when we consider rightly what the apostle has repeated so frequently, namely, that God did so much for the ungodly, for sinners, for enemies, then surely we must ask with great wonder: “Oh, gracious God, from where hast Thou such love? Is it true, that Thou lovest so? And what has moved Thee to such a love?”

An old servant of God had learned much about the kingdom of heaven. He confesses that for a long time he had pondered over the matter of what could be the real, tender reason and ground for God’s love towards sinners. And then he admits that he had come to this final conclusion in the matter: “God loved, therefore He loved.” The reason was expressly in God’s own love. He had such a heart that loved, therefore He loved. God has Himself explained His love by the picture of a mother’s love.

You see a mother day after day carrying and nursing her sick child with an indefatigable love. In the nighttime, when other people sleep, you see her watch equally tirelessly at its bedside, or you see her carry it in her arms. And it is a child who has not yet done anything else than exhaust its mother by all its need for help, care, and nursing. But if you ask her why she still loves it that way, she will not be able to give any other reason for it than that she feels love in her heart. She will be astonished at your question and say: "Why, it is my child!" That she loves her child thus is a law of nature to the mother's heart. There is no need for her to oblige herself to it. And this does not even illustrate a pious mother, but only a mother.

And this nature of the mother's heart is so mighty that even if the child becomes a child of sorrow, commits crimes, falls into the hands of the justice of society and must be punished, a natural mother cannot think of it with indifference. No, she will suffer most bitterly for it. Such is the nature of a mother's heart. Remember it is also that way with God's heart! Remember, God has an equally deep love for us as a mother for her child! The Lord God Himself says that He has an even deeper love. The Lord says: "Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" (Isa. 49:15). And "hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us."

But hereby also we have touched one more thing that can explain the love of God for the human being. It is the love to the child. The Lord suggests this when He speaks about Himself and asks: "Can a woman forget her sucking child?" No matter how deep we have fallen, and what distorted children we are, no matter how far we have gone astray in sin and ungodliness, God still cannot forget that the human being is His child. He says that He has a mother's love for us. After all, the Lord God has created us to be His children and heirs. And when the devil seduced us, God still did not want to let him keep the prey. No, He still wanted to do something to save the child. To some extent this can explain the otherwise inconceivable love of God, that Christ died for us, while we were yet sinners.

## September 2

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... *Who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen* – Rom. 9:5.

**A**s this is said about Christ, Himself, namely that He is “God over all, blessed from eternity to eternity,” we have here one of the more noteworthy texts about the eternal deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle had first spoken about the human parentage of Christ. And then it was appropriate also to remind people plainly of His divine nature. And here He does so in such clear and unmistakable words that this text has always caused much worry to those of the enemies of our Lord, and those who deny His deity, who, in their foolishness, have not been able to throw away all the Scripture.

But this text is the most precious to all believers, and especially to those who have been well-bombarded with the glowing darts of doubt. Even if you have never doubted as to the deity of Christ, reflect upon the grandeur and value of the faith you confess! Do you really believe that the eternal God has become a man like unto ourselves, except for sin? Reflect upon what that means and conveys, and think, what if we do not have enough witness regarding this truth? Praise God, the witnesses of the Scripture are utterly sufficient and unmistakable in this matter so vital to us. Let us recall some of them. Among the multitude of these witnesses we will only list such as tell us what Christ has been and done before He became a man.

Such witnesses are the following: He says to His Father: “In burnt offerings, and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me), to do Thy will, O God” (Heb. 10:6–7). And again: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same” (2:14). These texts express that He existed before He took human form. So also the noteworthy text in John 1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth” (vv. 1, 3, 14). Here it says plainly that the One who created everything in the beginning was made flesh and dwelt among us. So also in Phil. 2 where it says about Christ: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man ...” (vv. 6–8). Here it also says that Christ Himself took upon Himself the form of a servant and became like a man, consequently, that He existed before He took this step. He also Himself says that He was in heaven before He came to the earth. “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13). And in verse 31 the Baptist says the same thing about



Him: "He that cometh from above is above all." And Christ says again: "For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6:38). And again: "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before?" (v. 62). And again: "And now, O Father, glorify thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5). Oh, listen to such words! He was with the Father before this world existed. It is also said in many places that everything has been created by the Son. Besides the things quoted above from John 1, the Word also says in Col. 1 about the "dear Son" of God: "by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him" (vv. 13, 16). And in Heb. 1:2: "By whom also He made the worlds." In such places it says in explicit words that Christ Jesus, who walked here on earth, has created everything and that such things happened before He became man. Such a Person must be the eternal God Himself. So it is also said in Mic. 5:2, that the One to be born in Bethlehem had His existence from eternity: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." So also the Lord Jesus said to the Jews with a majestic calm: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). But how can we list all of such witnesses? Let us only pray and worship!

And the apostle now puts Amen! to this declaration that Christ was God, blessed forever. Amen! was a word of confirmation which showed that the thing said was an important and imperturbable truth. The truth that Jesus Christ was the eternal God was also rightly confirmed by Amen! We have seen that from the Bible texts quoted. Christ is God over everything, blessed forever. Amen!

## September 3

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*Rejoicing in hope* – Rom. 12:12.

**B**y hope the apostle means the expectancy by the faithful, of the glory to come. Faith embraces the present grace of God, but hope looks up to the “glory that God will give.” Now the apostle says that we should rejoice in this hope. The apostle does not bid us to rejoice at nothing. Neither does he bid us to rejoice at something small and corruptible. No, he presents the hope of all the eternal bliss to us, as a cause for rejoicing. If we were to bear this rightly in mind, namely, the hope to which we have been called, and then were to believe in a truly living way what God has promised, we would certainly be full of rejoicing. And that not only in the days when everything goes well for us, but also in our most deplorable experiences on earth. And this joy, the rejoicing in the hope, is much more important and blessed than we are accustomed to think. It brings quite a new power into all our Christianity. Let us therefore look into the matter.

As now regards the objects of the hope, or the glorious things we await from God, we shall probably never be able to understand them rightly in this present time, because “it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, ... the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9). But what we see and surmise in the promises of God, is already so great and glorious that no man can express it. Who can tell how much it means that we shall be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ? And who will become so glorious and blessed? Exactly all those who are the children of God in this present time. Because the Word reads like this: “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). Thus it means everybody who has been taken out from the world, everybody who has been awakened from the sleep in sin by the Word and Spirit of God, and has found His salvation only in Christ; and has still all the time, with all his infirmities, continued to cling to Him and cannot do without His grace and friendship, yes, His flesh and blood, i.e., His atonement, but has his meat, the vital need of his soul, therein. The Lord Christ says so: “Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54). Think, what the Lord Christ Himself says about all such poor souls as have their consolation only in His atonement, even that they will have the bliss of eternal life. And He says it quite definitely and repeats it many times. Who can then express how happy such a human being is? Who can express how much the words of Christ Himself contain: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43). Who can express how much these words of John contain: “We shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). And David already had this hope when he said: “I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness”

(Ps. 17:15). The Lord Christ has also plainly declared: “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me” (John 17:24). What can be more certain than a thing the Lord Christ Himself says? Thus our hope of salvation has a foundation that definitely cannot fail. Therefore it is also called “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast” (Heb. 6:19).

If we now have such a glorious and firmly founded hope of eternal joy — we should surely take leave of all earthly sorrows and say: Away with all sorrow, away with all uneasiness and restlessness! I have an eternal happiness. I go towards an eternal joy, as truly as our hope of salvation has not been based on our own worthiness, or our own thoughts, but on God’s own work and eternal counsel. It is both unworthy of a confessor of Christ and also a great injury to our Christianity, that we forget our hope of salvation and do not rejoice in it, but go towards the joy of heaven with heavy steps and sighs. If we were to stick with more earnestness and diligence to our hope of salvation, then it would, as said above, give strength to all our Christian life. It would make us more anxious for the right way of life, and more indifferent about earthly things. It would enliven us to more patience and tenacity in the fight for the crown. Therefore the hope of salvation is also called a helmet. The helmet is an important part of the armor. It makes us dash forward more courageously in the fight.

And when the apostle calls the hope “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast” he has thereby expressed that in all the storms of temptation the hope of salvation will keep us with the Lord, so that we will not be carried away altogether on the wide sea of the world. At the time of suffering and distress, a living and firm hope will take us into the eternal solaces of heaven. And in the day of earthly happiness and joy it will keep us sober and wise. So that we still say with the apostle: “I ... have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phil. 1:23). Oh, may the Lord forgive our unbelief, that we rejoice so little in hope! And may He help us also to improvement in this matter.

## September 4

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*For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God... Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God – Rom. 8:19, 21.*

In a high and magnificent way the apostle presents the sighing of creation for redemption, and thereby wants to give the children of God still more ground for the certainty and grandeur of their glory to come, the glory of which he had spoken before. In the beginning God created everything on earth to serve and delight His children, for the praise and glory of His holy name. But at our Fall this creation got its share of the curse, so that it does not now fulfill this, its original destiny. It no longer serves the children of God the way it would have done, if sin had not come. It mainly serves the enemies and blasphemers of the Creator. Yes, it serves sin because most people misuse it for sinful purposes. This is, however, an oppression, a bondage that the creation suffers under, without its will and without its guilt. It suffers this for the sake of Him who has subjected it to such a bondage.

This anomalous state of things will, however, not last forever. Creation has been subjected to the bondage of corruption “in hope” that one day it will be delivered from it into the glorious liberty of the children of God. This is the matter really presented here. The prophets often speak about the reasonless creation as if about reasonable creatures. For instance, they say that the mountains and the hills shall rejoice and the trees shall clap their hands, and that the sun and the moon, beasts and fishes praise the Lord. In that way the spiritual eye of the apostle sees the whole of creation in a suffering, restless longing towards the reaching of its destination. He hears creation sigh and tremble while it waits for the redemption of both the children of God, and itself from the present bondage.

And the apostle presents this in order to strengthen and encourage all Christians. First of all, he makes reference to the certainty, the security for the manifestation of our glory therein, that not until the realization of the glorious liberty of the children of God will all creation come to its destiny. Because they must then surely have another and better life to look forward to as the present order of things cannot be the right one or the one God planned in the beginning. No, according to His promise we are told to wait for new heavens and a new earth. And secondly, the children of God should reflect upon the *grandeur* of the glory to be manifested when all of creation shall be renewed and glorified to the manifestation of their glory. All the created works of God, which will belong to the new heaven and the new earth, shall be cleansed, renewed, and embellished only in order that the glory of the children of God shall stand out even the more.

The apostle wants to say: Because of sin creation was made subject to corruption by the judgment of God. But it will be restored from its present degradation under which it sighs. And according to the promises of God regarding renewal, it waits together with the children of God for participation in the deliverance from corruptibility and depravity. Together with the children of God, creation waits to be clothed with the glory and beauty in which it once entered out of the hand of the Creator.

When a daughter in a rich house is to be married, all the house will be cleaned, adorned, and decorated for the ceremony. All the guests, yes, also the servants, will then put on their best attire. Creation is the rich house where God put man as a child and heir. When the bride of Christ will enter into the glory of her Bridegroom; when the children of God will put away the humiliation and contempt under which they have been hidden in this present time and shall be manifested in their true greatness and glory, then also everything that belonged to their abode will be renewed, cleansed, and decorated. About this, Peter says that the elements shall melt with heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. But we look for new heavens and a new earth according to His promise, and there righteousness will dwell. The things that shall belong to the new heaven and the new earth, will have been prepared for the children of God, and will have been delivered from the curse and restored to the state of perfection wherein they were, when in the beginning God looked at all He had made and said that “it was very good.”

The word of the original text for “earnest expectation” really means a waiting where one lifts up his head and looks for the one waited for. Thus Lütkehan here sees the picture of a crowd of men sincerely longing to be allowed to see their beloved king as he comes, so that they stretch their necks and rise up on their toes to be able to see over the heads of the others and to know whether he is already approaching. In that way, also, all creation waits with earnest expectation for something. What then does it wait for so fervently? The apostle says: the manifestation of the sons of God. It waits for the children of God to be revealed. Here the children of God are so hidden, partly under their own infirmity, partly also under the tribulation, cross, and suffering of this present time, so that they do not even themselves know who they are. Much less can the world recognize them. But one day their hidden glory will shine forth, and for that all creation waits with earnest expectation.

## September 5

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*Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God – Rom. 6:13.*

**H**ere the apostle admonishes us that, even if we cannot escape the inward movement of sin in evil thoughts and lusts, we should not carry out evil with the members of our body. No, contrary to the inward wickedness, we should speak and live according to the Word of God. Therefore, he really means our mortal body and its members here; eyes, ears, tongue, hand, foot, etc. For instance, your eye feels tempted either by the corruptible treasures of the earth, or by the seducing beauty of a body, or by the vanity and clamor of the world. These visible objects thus want to draw you to sin. Then you should flee the rising lust. You should not even let your eye occupy itself with the enticing objects. If you do so, you will yield it to sin as an instrument of unrighteousness. By your ear you receive the temptations of a sinful and beguiling speech. If, nevertheless, you stop to listen, you give your ear to sin as an instrument of unrighteousness. Wrath tempts you to hurt, sting, or tear your neighbor by means of your tongue. A secret grudge or envy tempts you to slander or defame your absent neighbor and to interpret his words and deeds in the worst manner. If, in such temptations, you give your tongue freedom, then you give it to sin as an instrument of unrighteousness.

But yield yourselves, that is, soul and body with all inward and outward powers, unto God. First, the heart's fear, confidence, and love; and then, all obedience and service with doing and suffering. That is what we should give to God. Unto Him we should yield ourselves with everything within ourselves. To Him we should devote all our life with all our powers. We should not shirk any work He wants to have from us, nor any suffering and cross He lays upon us. For His sake we must not consider our life dear. Oh, what a grace to be allowed to give oneself to God that way. He wants to have us as His own so fully. He wants to say to a poor sinner: "My child, give Me your heart!"

And when we thus have given ourselves to God with everything within us, we must also devote the service of our limbs to Him to be instruments of righteousness. Here we find that it is not true piety when one wants to give God only the heart's inward worship and keep the limbs from sin, but also wants to remain inactive and without doing anything for the service of the Lord. The apostle says that we should also serve Him with our outer man. He says that we should "yield our members as instruments of righteousness unto God." We should not only be pious and abstain from evil, but we should also be active and use our members for the service of the Lord, as instruments (weapons, as in Swedish), says the apostle. This suggests that also our King wages a war on earth and that our limbs should serve as weapons there. And he says: as instruments of righteousness. Our King shall

“execute judgment and righteousness in the land” (Jer. 33:15), that is, everything that is true, good, and holy; and to that we shall be allowed to contribute.

We can do this in a number of ways, everyone according to the gift he has received (1 Pet. 4:10). We should use our limbs, eyes, ears, hands, tongues not only for what one usually calls divine service, listening to and considering His words, worshipping and confessing Him, but also for everything love demands in our everyday life, in the home and in our earthly tasks. Constrained by the love of Christ, we should gladly serve our neighbors. When, for the sake of the Lord, you work patiently and honestly, or generously distribute of your earthly goods, then you yield your hands to God as instruments of righteousness. When, for the sake of the great grace of the Lord, you gladly go on errands of love, then you yield your feet unto Him. When, out of love, you speak what is good and useful, whether you admonish, console, and teach men in general, or you take care of children, or the sick and distressed, then you consecrate your tongue unto God to be an instrument of righteousness. Yes, when, enlivened by grace, a worker on the field or in the workshop, and a poor servant or handmaid, do their duties with faithfulness, and endure their difficulties with patience, they should have the encouragement that they have not only served human beings, but God Himself. Because concerning all those who have served their neighbor in faith and love for the sake of Christ, in the way they have been able to, the great, faithful Lord will one day declare solemnly: “Ye have done it unto Me” (Matt. 25:40).

What a mighty consolation and encouragement if we would always bear this in mind! All the world serves sin. What a blessed calling it is that we are allowed to devote our life with all our powers and gifts to the service of the great Lord, and participate in His holy war on earth! Thus this is an invitation sweet beyond measure to the spirit: “Yield yourselves unto God, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.” Blessed are those who truly live in faith that both their spirit and their life reply: Yes! and Amen! to this!

## September 6

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*Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born* – John 18:37.

**T**he Lord here confesses to Pilate: “I am a King.” Indeed, at the last, Christ, unknown to all the world and despised by it, will be found to be a great and mighty King. He has a very great kingdom on earth, and all peoples and countries are under His scepter. Blind unbelievers hear and sing about it, but they do not see anything. They do not perceive anything of it. To them the kingdom of Christ is like a dream-picture, nothing, only the imagination of some misled people. But look what an extraordinary power that kingdom exercises in the world. Look how all peoples and countries became completely recreated as soon as the gospel of Christ started to rule among them. Look how, without any swords, it wins victories in the midst of its most hostile enemies, and then, how no human power can fight against it. When this King had only commanded His poor witnesses: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), they went. They did not ask for the permission of any emperor. No, they defied the most strict prohibitions and the most violent resistance of all emperors. Against the kingdom of Christ the emperors had no power in spite of all their armories and instruments of torture. All stakes and axes and swords proved powerless there. The kingdom of Christ is no dream-picture, as the world calls it, for the number of real martyrs is so great that it amounts to several million. Among these we do not count those who have only been recreated spiritually, but those who have dared to undergo the most cruel torture for the sake of Christ. The kingdom of Christ is no dream-picture, as all the Bible has been translated into more than five hundred languages, and so on!

The kingdom of our Lord Christ is no dream-picture. Maybe you have seen with your own eyes people whose fleshly and ungodly heart and mind could not be changed by any human power or art. Only by the gospel of Christ did they change altogether. Maybe you have seen a man who before lived in sheer vanity, engrossed only in earthly thoughts and occupations all the day long, and day after day. But now he has a spiritual mind, heart, and understanding, so that he thinks and speaks of Christ and the things related to Him with heartfelt joy and love. Now he wants to serve Him both with words and deeds. And this not because of any compulsion, but because of the innermost delight and inclination of his own heart. Maybe you have seen a man who was before always at ease and satisfied with himself; but now he is all the time dissatisfied with himself, and in the fear of his heart has all his consolation only in Christ. Maybe you see a man who before was always unhappy and dissatisfied both with God and with men, but now his heart has a deep peace and joy in his Savior. Or you have seen a man who never before cared about the eternal weal or woe of his neighbors, but who now has such a



love that all the time he thinks of how this and that soul shall be saved, and so on. Are not all those things proofs of a great, wonderful power capable of recreating the innermost being of men, and are not such things evidence to our eyes? Then see what the kingdom of Christ is, and that He really is a King. He is a great and mighty King whose cause advances in spite of the resistance of all kings, and who works things no human power and wisdom can do.

All this that we see in part with our eyes is exactly what we can expect from the Person and Being of this King! When we think of who this King really is, and that He has long ago revealed that He would do such a work on earth, then it cannot be otherwise! “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world,” He says. Who is He? The words “came into the world” must be taken in the sense which they really have in His utterances, and which we see elsewhere in His speech, for instance, when He said: “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father” (John 16:28). In Bethlehem He was to be born “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2). He is a King who was with the Father before the world was created.

Think now, would this King not rule and have a great and mighty kingdom! Such things were also prophesied all through the Old Testament. The Father says to the Son: “Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession” (Ps. 2:8). And again: “It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isa. 49:6). “Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end” (9:7). In the same way He is also shown in the vision of Daniel, namely, first coming with the clouds as the Son of man, and then it is said: “And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:14). Therefore He is also presented in the Revelation as a king having many crowns on his head. “And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16).

## September 7

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... *If the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through* — Luke 12:39.

**W**ith this parable about the thief the Lord Christ is seeking to point out the danger of not being ready for His arrival. And He wants to remind us that we have reason to be ready at every moment, as no doubt we would watch, if we knew the hour of His arrival. From the application by the Lord Himself we see that this is the aim of the parable: “Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.”

First, we see how these words of Christ completely cast down the dream that a new, more glorious *time of grace* will start on earth with His visible coming, and not the judgment. Such a coming of Christ would not be so dangerous as that of a thief. The Lord Himself says that, when He comes in His majesty, then He will judge all people. He says that He will judge so that the righteous will be invited to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. And the others will be commanded to depart from Him into everlasting fire. The apostolic faith has been on these lines from the beginning: “Ascended to heaven — shall return from there to judge the living and the dead.” No matter how learned, pious, or well-meaning the interpreters may be, who contradict the many and explicit declarations of Christ Himself, that tell us that He comes to the last judgment when He comes in the clouds; we should reject and turn away from their interpretation, even as we do from every other contradiction against the explicit words of Christ.

Our text also casts down the other dream consoling vain souls — namely that one will be able to obtain a good relation to God after death, if one has not done so here in this present time. It casts down the dream that there will be also a time of grace in the world of spirits. If it were so then Christ would not be so anxious about our being ready, when He comes. In fact, it would be merely empty words when the Scripture says: “Today — today — if ye will hear His voice” (Heb. 3:7). “Now is the accepted time; ... now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

The Lord Christ teaches us, that the time of grace comes to an end when He comes, either with death or by His own visible revelation. Then only the decisive judgment and eternity remain. “Be ye therefore ready when the Son of man cometh,” He says, ready to enter into the wedding with Him. Those not ready then, those who do not have oil for their lamps, but want to buy it at such a time, will be shut out forever. This is taught by the Lord Himself in Matt. 25:1–12. Those virgins cried and prayed: “Lord, open to us.” But no, no grace was given. The time of grace had come to an end. The Lord Himself teaches us these things. He also adds thereto:

“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”

Oh, is it true what the Lord has announced here? Is it true that all grace has come to an end, and eternal bliss has been utterly lost if a man is not ready when Christ comes, or when He calls his soul away by death? No matter what our blind reason may think of it, the fact remains that He has said so, and He is the eternal Judge. Whom shall I believe if not Him? But, how terrible it is if, even for a moment, we are not ready! How terrible it is to go to sleep even for one night without having assurance of friendship with God. What if death surprises you? It often comes like a thief in the night! And then you will not wake up in this present time anymore, but you will have entered into eternity unsaved! There are no words strong enough to express the dreadfulfulness of such a thing. We are either saved forever, or lost forever! It is for that reason that the Lord Christ warns us in this verse.

And what advice does He give in order that we shall escape that dreadful thing? He says: “*Be ready, watch!*” But what does it mean to be ready? Surely it must mean that we do as regards God and our soul, as the Word of God itself teaches us is absolutely necessary for salvation. This means that we are “clothed, not naked” (2 Cor. 5:3). We should be clothed in the “wedding garment.” Surely it is a word inexpressibly valuable and worth thinking of, when the Lord Christ says that even among those who have realized the hindrances of their merchandise and farm, there are people who will at last be cast into outer darkness! And that only because they have not had the experience, the kind of repentance, whereby one becomes so unclothed and deprived of all hope and comfort in one’s own piety, that one cannot do without the righteousness of Christ and the words of the gospel about Him. If you have not “made a covenant with death” (Isa. 28:15), then you must surely take such words of the Lord Himself to your heart, and ask yourself before Him: Is Christ my vital need? Are His atonement and righteousness my vital need? so that I do not only understand and know that it should be so, but really live therein. Am I really compelled by my distress over sin to “wash my robe in the blood of the Lamb”? (Rev. 7:14). Look, dear soul, if you feel like that, then bow down to God and worship! Because you are now certainly clothed in “the wedding garment.”

## September 8

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*And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die – Gen. 3:4.*

**N**otice how the devil here begins his attacks. He begins by gently loosening the tie that holds up the human being — namely, his faith in the Word of God. He says first: “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” He speaks cautiously. He does not immediately say anything definite. He subjects it to Eve’s own consideration. He wants her to use her reason and think over whether such a commandment of God could be reasonable, or whether they might have misunderstood it. As soon as Eve let herself be engaged in a discussion, his audacity immediately grew, so that he then says definitely: “Ye shall not surely die.”

The devil is in the habit of doing like this. He begins by upsetting the faith, confusing the intellect as regards the Word of God, and making man uncertain about God’s meaning. If he wins therein, then he wins all. If, on the contrary, man remains steadfast in a living faith in the Word, then no desire is so mighty, no fall so deep, that everything cannot still be helped. The devil knows this. “Therefore,” as Luther says, “he tried, by his speech, to bring Eve away from what God had said. And when he had cleared away the Word, he destroyed the good will the human being had before, so that she rose up against God. He also distorted and destroyed her intellect so that it doubted the will of God. This results in a disobedient hand, insubordinate to God, and stretching out to pick the apple, contrary to the commandment of God. Thereafter the consequence is a disobedient mouth and obstinate teeth. In brief, all evil follows after unbelief or doubt as to God and His Word. What can be more evil than to become disobedient to God, and obedient to the devil?”

The devil aimed at such things with his first impudent and captious question: “Yea, hath God said?” as much as by these words: “Ye shall not surely die.” It is as if he wanted to say: “You are good fools indeed, if you believe that God has said that. Because God certainly does not attach much value to whether you eat or not. And, moreover, you have been put to be rulers over all the earth. Would you be subject to such a bond? Would you not have desired freedom to eat of every tree of the garden? Would this prohibition not be contrary to God’s words to you: ‘Look, I have given you all sorts of fruitful trees for food?’” In this way the old serpent worked to confuse the woman and to bring her into uncertainty and unbelief as to the Word of God.

He uses the same way today. Is it not strange, that one often still hears exactly the same words from many a cunning serpent by which the devil tries to pluck away faith from simple souls! “Yea, hath God said?” For instance, would God have said that the one who does not keep all the law will be condemned? Or would God

have put the human being on earth, when He saw that he would fall, and that he would condemn him at last? Or would God let an innocent person suffer for the guilty? Or would God have said that He will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain? God is love. Would He be so particular? etc. In this way the devil strengthens the ungodly in their certainty. He helps them to an imperturbable faith in the goodness of God. He helps them to believe that nothing evil will befall them. He says: "Ye shall not surely die." On the contrary, he harasses the confidence of the faithful all the time. Then he again says: "Yea, hath God said?"

For instance, would God have said that He does not impute sin to me? I mean the sin I really have and feel with me. Would God have said that on the contrary, He imputes righteousness to me — a righteousness I do not possess and feel in myself? It is sad, but I sin every day. Would God have said that nevertheless I shall be His dear child quite as if I had never sinned? And all that only because of His own Son who gave Himself for our sins? Or would God have said that He will be with us every day, even in my tiny room, and hear everything I pray or sigh? etc. In that way the old serpent harasses our faith in the Word of God in every way. The serpent wants to make us uncertain and drifting in our thoughts. Thereby he can then bring us where he wants us. We should always be prepared for that and be on our guard against it.

## September 9

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*Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound* – Rom. 5:20.

**N**othing else helps! Man can never be made to pay the right homage to the Remover of his sins if he is not driven and compelled by the sin and the law. God is reconciled. He says: “I ... will not remember thy sins” (Isa. 43:25). His merciful heart burns with love towards all those He has bought so precious. But they cannot be saved, they cannot be made to flee to the cities of refuge, unless they are chased by the avenger of blood. Therefore He must always plague, frighten, and exhaust us with the commandments and judgments of the law. As Joseph burned with love when his brothers came to Egypt, and immediately decided to do good to them, though, via his interpreter he still “spake roughly” (Gen. 42:7) to them, and let his men bind and imprison, frighten, and grieve them in order to make their hard hearts soft, so also the Lord must frighten, imprison, compel, and grieve us through His servant and interpreter, Moses. But “he does not ... grieve willingly the children of men” (Lam. 3:33). “What things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19) — in order that sin may abound.

In Rom. 7 the apostle shows how the abundance of sin is brought about by the law. That is, the law does not only show us the sin as in a mirror, but also — by the prohibition — rouses the slumbering sin to action and fight, in order that it shall not lie hidden, and the sinner think himself free from sin. “For I was alive without the law once, and then sin was dead: but when the commandment came, sin revived and wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.” And immediately the sinner is miserable and wretched, the sinner who before was so self-satisfied, safe, proud, and rich in virtues, is now miserable and wretched, powerless and perplexed, so that the whole world becomes too narrow for him. Now the life in sin, so dear before, becomes bitter, the foreign country howling, the Father’s house sweet, yes, even a place as a servant there! Oh, what a lot of good comes out of this miserable abundance of sin! And this was not brought about by lawlessness, but by the law. For this purpose the law is good and not something to make the human being pious. Once and for all please notice and remember that the Scriptures say: “Moreover the law entered, that sin might abound.” Notice it does not say “be overcome,” but “abound”! So that at the very moment you want to become better, you become worse. When you want to behave well and be holy, then you are anything but good; sin abounds. You want to love God, then you feel only hatred, at least an insufferable coldness in your heart. You want to be mild and meek, then you boil with bitterness. You want to be clean in thoughts and heart, then all manner of concupiscence is wrought in you (Rom. 7:8).

You want to be contrite and humble, then you are hard as stone, stiff-necked, and full of pride. Paul says that “the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death” (v. 10); that “sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.” Such are the right effects of the law, when it hits the heart.

But now it becomes all too absurd and breakneck to receive grace in the middle of such a misery of sin. Therefore, the soul turns to all sides and seeks other ways out. If the law has not hit the sinner deeply enough, he can find relief and consolation in his own deeds, his repentance, his prayers, his improvement, his victory over certain sins, his new religious life.

In that way a Pharisee is molded. One takes to outer deeds, charity work, religious activities. Another seeks his salvation in penances, tears, prayers, self-denial, humbleness, dying to this world. A third can subdue the trouble aroused by occupying his head with spiritual studies, collecting knowledge, clear and beautiful knowledge, without himself really owning and exercising what the knowledge contains, etc.

Now is the time for the punishing office of the Spirit. The Spirit will punish all these saints. What for? “For sin, because they believe not on Me” (John 16:9). The Spirit will reveal that when at last they have done all that any mortal has done; when they have repented of their sins so much that they could have cried blood; when they have been down on their knees in prayer day and night; when they have mortified their flesh in the most severe way, and have resisted unto blood, striving against sin (Heb. 12:4); when they have forbidden their eyes to see and their ears to hear and their tongue to speak anything vain; when they have forbidden their mouths to taste and the whole of their being to enjoy any superfluous luxuries; when they have given all their possessions to the poor, and have used all the moments of their lives for the welfare of their neighbors, when they have prophesied in the name of Jesus and done many wonderful works in His name, then the Lord with the wounds in His hands and His side will condemn them and say: “Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity, for sin, because ye did not believe on Me.” The Spirit will reveal that with all this holiness of theirs they will be thrown into the utmost darkness, because they are not clothed in the wedding garment consisting of the righteousness of Christ. They have not had their only consolation in the blood of the Savior on Golgotha. They have not exchanged with Him, i.e., they have not accepted His righteousness in the way He has taken their sins on Him. Oh, for once mark it, dear soul, that if His merits are not yours, if His righteousness, His prayers, His sufferings and death are not yours, then you are eternally lost.

## September 10

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*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world* – John 1:29.

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ, and had been sent by the Father to manifest the Son, and announce His work to the world. When he saw Christ coming he exclaimed these words: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” This is the great central word about the real work of Christ on earth. And at the proclamation of this word it would be well worth while ringing all the bells! In all our churches this central word is sung over our heads when we kneel at the altar to receive Jesus’ body and blood. Then it is repeated three times: “O the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Let us then look carefully at this meaningful text!

The Lamb is really called the God-Lamb in the original text. And when John speaks about the Lamb in this definite form he certainly reminds us of all the lambs which had been offered as patterns in the services instituted by God in Israel. The strangest among them were the passovers, an innumerable number of examples, as a lamb was offered in every house throughout the country every year. But John does not say only “the Lamb” here, but: “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Thus it seems that he referred especially to Isa. 53 where we find both the matter and the word of this text. There it does not say only that Christ would be “as a lamb which is brought to the slaughter, and as a sheep which is dumb before her shearers, and does not open her mouth.” It also says that He would bear the iniquities of all the world. There we have the precious words: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” And again: “He shall bear their iniquities.” “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.” All such things John now expresses here by this short, rich word when he points to Jesus and exclaims: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

Maybe somebody wonders what has really happened, when it is continually obvious that sin is still left in all parts of the world, and we feel it still dwells in ourselves. Then let us reflect that John here speaks about a “taking away” which is made by means of a sacrifice. But the representing sacrifices only symbolized the “taking away” or transfer of the guilt and punishment from the guilty man to the sacrificial animal brought there. And therefore this was also slaughtered. Such things are also said by Isaiah in the words: “the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” And again: “He was wounded for our transgressions: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.” Neither these words nor the prefiguring act of the sacrifices suggest anything of a taking away of the taint of



sin from the sinful man. No, it only says that the chastisement and punishment were laid upon Him.

But Isaiah says “of our peace.” Also the epistle to the Hebrews says that we should not bear the sins on our conscience, if the sacrifice really takes them away. Because there it says that it was a proof of the incapability of the Levitical sacrifices to take away sin, when those who offered them still carried their sins on their conscience. To have our conscience free from sins it is now only necessary that we really believe and accept what the sacrifice of the Lamb has accomplished. Here it will be a matter of our faith. Here it only depends on whether we believe. There are no shortcomings in the work of Christ. There is nothing imperfect with that. By His sacrifice the Lamb of God has really taken away the sin of the world. If we still bear our sins ourselves, and lack the peace of God and freedom of conscience, then the whole fault is that we do not believe the witness of God as regards His Son. God says that He laid on Him the iniquity of us all. And here we shall see what faith is, and also what a condemning sin unbelief is. With this text before our eyes, faith is such a simple thing as only to considering the word to be true — the word that the Lamb of God bears away the sin of the whole world. Or as the words of Isaiah read: “the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Our full freedom from the guilt and judgment of sin before God and our conscience, depends on this simple truth: if a thing is taken from its place and is put elsewhere, then it is no more left where it was before. If your sins have been laid on the Lamb of God, then they are no more lying on you. If the Lord God has laid your sins on the Lamb of God, imputed them to Him, and punished Him for them, then they are no more left on your account. It is true that you have committed them and offended against the law of God. But out of great mercy the Lord God has taken them from you and laid them on His Lamb. Therefore He certainly will not impute the same sins to you.

About this Luther has spoken the following words, rich in consolation: “The Lord God said: I know that it is too difficult for you to bear your sins. Look, therefore I want to lay them on My Lamb and take them away. Believe in this, because when you do so, you are free from the sins. There are only two places where the sins can be. Either they are with you and lie fastened to you, or they lie on Christ, the Lamb of God. If they are on your shoulders, then you are lost. But if they are on Christ, then you are free and are saved. Now choose the alternative you want. It would be law and justice that the sins should remain on you, but out of grace they have been laid on Christ, the Lamb. Otherwise, and if, God desires to enter into judgment with us, we shall be lost.”

## September 11

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*It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel* – Gen. 3:15.

**T**hese words contain the first seed, not only of the consolation and salvation of the first human beings, but also of all the gospel of God, and of all the kingdom of grace God has established on earth. The first thing we should consider here is this: as the Lord begins His speech of punishment to Satan by the words: “Because thou hast done this” (that is, because thou hast beguiled the woman and brought her into sin and under the curse), He finishes the speech by the words: “It shall bruise thy head.”

Here I see that it is because of our fall that the Lord burns with zealous anger. The fall had to be avenged, and that so powerfully that He says to the seducer: “Your head will be crushed, and bruised, because you have done this.” Here I see that the Lord Himself has taken up our cause. He sides with us against Satan, to take vengeance upon him and save us. And that with such a burning heart that He uses the strongest words of threatening that we can think of. What could be considered more dreadful and killing for the serpent than that his head would be bruised and crushed. Surely this was a dreadful word to the cunning Satan. In this we see again that God burns with zeal for His lost son, man. We also see how excited Christ was when He spoke about those who offend (that is, seduce, destroy) the little ones who believe in Him. We have never heard such hard words from the mouth of the mild Savior as when He says that a millstone should be hanged about the neck of such seducers, and that they should be drowned in the depths of the sea. From such words we should realize how God’s heart burns for souls. At least we should realize that God is not so indifferent about us as our wicked, unbelieving heart paints Him to be. In fact we have His definite assurances of this zeal of love on His part. We have still more proof of it in work and deed, in everything He has done for our salvation. But our hearts are such that we often do not believe or think of these great proofs. It is often easier for us to believe what we ourselves discover when the Lord does not speak to us. We may, so to say, listen carefully to the Lord’s speech to the serpent, and ourselves discover His innermost thoughts about us from what we hear. “Because you did this, be cursed among everything that has life! And the woman’s Seed shall bruise your head!”

The second thing I notice here is that the Lord makes our case a matter between Christ and the devil. He says that the woman’s Seed shall bruise the serpent’s head, and the serpent shall bruise the heel of the woman’s Seed. The Hebrew word for “bruise” really means all kinds of evil that can be inflicted hostilely. A closer meaning depends partly on the one inflicting the evil thing, and partly on the limb on which it is inflicted. In the Swedish Bible it has been translated by “crush,” by “treading” in the former case, and by “stinging” in the latter case. Here we have a

remarkable suggestion of how Christ also was to be bruised in this fight, how the serpent also would use all violence against Christ and bruise Him, even if only His heel, His lower part, His manly shape, which was also bruised in His death. On the other hand, Christ, as regards His higher part, maintained victory and life. The whole expresses the fact that there would be a hard fight, a life-and-death struggle between the woman's Seed and the serpent.

That is the way the Lord speaks. On the other hand, He does not say even one word about us, about our doing anything in this great matter of our salvation from sin, death, and the devil; so fully has the Lord taken this matter from us, and so fully has it been put under the authority of Christ Himself. Otherwise we would be eternally lost. Because to remedy the Fall, and deliver us from sin, the devil, and death, is a work by far exceeding all our powers. "We are far too weak in the cuirass." Therefore the gracious Lord has made it His own case. Praise His name! "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). Thus the Lord says: "Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money" (Isa. 52:3). "For he hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). And what is the result for us? That we need not do anything at all to blot out our sins, but that we get everything completely as a gift through the free, undeserved grace of God, if only we want to receive it, if only we want to come to His gracious wedding when He calls us, and allow Him to do good to us. Then we shall be nothing less than the very righteousness of God in Him. O God, increase our faith! Here the words of Moses come true: "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace ..." (Exod. 14:14). "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will shew to you today" (v. 13). Lord, increase our faith!

## September 12

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*Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart – Jer. 15:16.*

**H**ere the prophet shows us the benefit and necessity of the use of the Word of God. But at the thought of the impossibility of speaking of this matter as one should, at the thought of the importance of the subject, and the mighty enemies surrounding us here, i.e., the slothful flesh, the captivating world, and the wicked Satan, the hand wants to sink down because of lack of power. The words should be written with fire into the heart of every man, and yet no words would be strong enough. We need to reflect on the fact that the real reason for all spiritual misery in the world, all weakness within the church and within each individual member is to be found in the negligence of the Word of God, and that the frequent and right use of the Word of God is the reason for all spiritual good in the world! It is true that man has fallen and the consequences of this Fall are deplorable: unbelief, sin, darkness, love of ease, hardness, etc. But it is possible to remedy all this. The mercy and righteousness of God could not leave man in that state without any means of reparation. Therefore, He gave us a remedy from heaven, a holy Seed which, implanted in the human heart, was to restore the lost image of God, the light in the intellect, and the holiness in the will, and was to give new spiritual powers. You are blind, you are hard, unfaithful, unspiritual, unsaved, and bound in sin, but all this can be cured by means of the remedy God has given us from heaven. By means of this remedy you can receive your sight, become contrite, and faithful, and be saved and free in Christ. But without using this remedy it is impossible for you to overcome your evil and become restored, even if you pray to God with all your heart for grace to do this, even if you watch and fight to death against evil. It is all in vain; the deluge breaks through with overwhelming power.

All this is also confirmed by experience. There are towns and congregations with faithful teachers always preaching, plowing, sowing, and watering the seed sown with intercessions and tears, and still the people are altogether miserable. They cannot see any lasting Christian power and its demonstration. There is no exercise of faith and piety, but only some loose display of the intellect and feeling. What is the reason? Look into the matter, and you will find that the people have not yet begun to use the Word of God. And until then, all the good things they hear from the pulpit fly away and do not bear any fruit. There are places and times where there are mighty awakenings. Many people are responding, and the spiritual landscape starts to become green. There is blossoming everywhere, and the heart rejoices in the hope of rich fruits from this beautiful plantation of God.

But some years elapse, and you pay a visit to this field, and do not recognize it. You look with sorrow at the devastated land, and see only thistles and thorns, increased

impudence and godlessness. And what do you think the reason is? Yes, a powerful worker was taken away, and there was nobody taking care of the people, and they themselves had not studied the Word, nor had started using it of themselves. In another place you may see where maybe there has not been any excellent personality leading the work of God, but where the people themselves have started to edify themselves with the Word of God. And you rejoice and are filled with wonderment at seeing that not only has the work of God been preserved, but it has been increased, has expanded and ripened visibly. These things are quite usual, and anybody with some insight in the state of the Kingdom of God sees them. And how can they be explained?

Think of your own experience, if you are a Christian who has been in the school of the Spirit for some time. What have you got to glory in with regard to the means of the maintenance and growth of your spiritual life? Have you been so strong, so faithful, so watching, so enlightened that you have been steadfast against all temptations because of it? No, you must not praise anything else than the faithfulness of God. But now God is equally faithful to all. There has been no lacking of faithfulness on the part of God where Christianity has died out.

The difference has been that the means of grace have been neglected there, but you have used it. In spite of your sloth and forgetfulness, you have all the time used the Word, gladly read and heard it, in spite of the fact that you also have much negligence in this respect to reproach yourself with. You have also experienced different effects of different conditions in this respect. Have you not often experienced how sometimes after a long lack or negligence of the Word, you have become cold, dead, uncomfortable inwardly, weak towards temptation, worldly and fleshly?

On the other hand, when you have used the Word more diligently, your inner man has also got on better. And furthermore, were you not many a time near a fall in self-confidence and into sin, but a Bible text, a sermon, in short, a Word of God awakened you from slumber and saved you? Were you not many a time cold and dead, and the whole world was dark and gloomy to you, but you happened to read a verse, a chapter of the Bible, or a paragraph of a good book, or you met a friend having the Word of God in his mouth, and you got new life, new warmth, and you brightened?

Have you not then the experience and confession of David: "O Lord, unless Thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction" (Ps. 119:92). There you see how the Word was the means by which God has maintained your life of grace. It is the same with all other Christians. The Word of God is not called a means of grace in vain, and without the Word of God it is impossible to maintain the life of grace.

## September 13

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*By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God – Eph. 2:8.*

**G**race is an important keyword in the teaching of salvation, and therefore we should consider it thoroughly. It seems to be very easy to understand, so long as it is only a matter of thinking and speaking of it, but as soon as one comes to the application, when our eternal bliss or condemnation depends on it, then there is no word more difficult to understand rightly and believe than this short word “grace.” The doctrine about grace is an important part of the doctrine about God. But to know God rightly in His grace, that is eternal life.

First of all, the whole world is in a thick darkness with regard to the grace of God, when it thinks that grace could mean that God will not be so particular with man as he is weak and cannot be perfect. Someone will say: “But God is gracious. He does not count our faults so precisely.” This is the sermon of grace by means of which the old serpent lulls the whole world to sleep and deceives it. In this way the grace of God is some sort of weakness which brings His righteousness and the truth in His judgments to nought. But Scripture teaches something else about the grace of God; something else which you will learn from Christ’s sweat of blood, the scourging He bore, and His loud cries on the cross.

Then also we learn from the fall of Jerusalem and all the dreadful things which thereby befall the peculiar people of God, when, even no sparrow shall fall on the ground without our Father (Matt. 10:29). The grace of God is not concession or weakness. It is true that in His heart God has what is to us an incomprehensively great love and mercy, but this cannot be exercised contrary to His equally great and absolute righteousness. “Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before Thy face” (Ps. 89:14). Nobody can get the grace of God except in the most absolute accordance with His righteousness. Christ can weep over Jerusalem, but He cannot save it, because it does not want to listen to His voice.

When we speak of the forgiving grace of God, by means of which grace man is received in His union and friendship, we should always know that this grace is never given outside Christ. But if he is in Christ and owns all that He has done for us, and all that He is to us, then there also is an absolute grace and the highest friendship and love. Because, as no grace is given outside Christ, but only according to His merit, on the contrary, no deed, no sin, no unworthiness will be counted to those who are in Christ Jesus. Such things are the meaning of grace. Grace is the contrast to all emphasis on work and merit. This is a very important remark, if we want to understand what grace is. The apostle says: “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then

is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:6). And again he says: “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt” (4:4). There grace and debt are put against one another, as contrasts. And again: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8–9). From all such texts we see that grace and works, grace and merit are quite contrary to one another, so that it is necessary that one excludes the other. When it is taught in the Scriptures, that man becomes righteous and saved only by grace, those enjoying this grace are considered, not only as those having no right to this gift, but on the contrary, as those who have earned only the punishment and wrath of God, and who, as long as they live on earth, will not even earn anything else, if God deals with them according to their merits. Complete righteousness demands complete holiness, and instead of that, there is only continuous sin.

So long as it is only a matter of doctrine, it is rather easy to understand all this. But when God has sought a man and awakened him from his sleep, he now sees and feels the deep, enormous depravity of sin in his innermost being, in thoughts, desires, and emotions. He knows that the old heart always wants to go the wrong way, and the flesh is full of sinful inclinations, all of which become more and more clear and painful because of the work of the Spirit in him. Then it becomes a difficult art to understand that grace is such, that it is not at all hindered nor upset by all this depravity. Because when the law is written in the being of a man, and the great grace of God makes all its requirements so much more fair and important for the soul, the inward accusation of sin becomes more and more painful.

In the same degree as God is gracious, all sin becomes the more unworthy and insulting. And when now the enemy no longer can keep the man asleep and at ease, it is his continuous effort to try to bring him to despair and uneasiness, and for this he now uses all means. First he tries continuously to rouse the remaining sin in him, and then by means of all the threatening words of God to frighten and torment the soul, cloud the intellect with regard to the grace of God, and perpetually point out the holiness of God and His wrath at sin.

Now to keep the word “grace” in its true and full sense needs a wisdom exceeding all human intellect. May God save every Christian from the stupefaction that concludes that he has learned everything regarding this subject; whereas all true saints have always remained small school children in this respect, which can be seen readily from all the bewailing, fright, agony, and distress we read about in the Psalms of David and the history of all the saints.

## September 14

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*Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened – Rom. 1:21.*

**H**ere we learn how seriously God demands man to praise Him to the degree he knows Him. Even if we only know Him as a wise and almighty Creator, He still wants us to worship Him as such a Creator. We already owe Him the love, reverence, and obedience of all our heart. “Neither were they thankful,” the apostle adds. We should all the time remember that God is the Source of everything we are and have. “For in Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Therefore, it is a main part of our divine service that we continually thank Him, acknowledge our dependence upon Him, and in everything give Him the glory. And remember, when the heathen who are without the light of the gospel are still without excuse, when they do not glorify and thank God, how will it then go with us? To us He has spoken first through His prophets and then through His own Son. How will it go with us if we do not glorify and thank our God?

But it is still worth looking into more thoroughly as to what it means to glorify Him as God. It is not done only with words, gestures, and beautiful deeds. No: those who understand that God is a Spirit should also worship Him in spirit and in truth. As we have already said, God wants us to worship Him to the same extent as He has revealed Himself to us. We should love Him to the extent we understand that He is lovable. We should fear Him to the extent we understand that He is worthy of fear. We should believe in Him to the extent we understand that He is faithful and truthful. We should obey Him in everything to the extent we understand that He has power over us in everything and the right to command. This is what it means to praise Him as God. If we want to praise Him that way in earnest, then we must be crushed before Him because of all the shortcomings and sins we find in ourselves. We must admit that His judgment is quite right if He decides to cast us into hell. Then we praise Him as God. Then God receives back the glory that He was deprived of at the Fall, when the serpent inspired the woman: “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden. Ye shall not surely die.” When we judge ourselves guilty even to the deserving of death, then we praise Him as God. But He has also revealed to us His counsel concerning our salvation. He has also revealed His Son to us and His earnest will to save all those who kiss the Son. Therefore it is demanded of us that we acknowledge the truth of His Word, so that we do not throw away the grace of God, but bow to His Word and believe in His mercy. Such things mean praising Him as God. If we sinners understand that it is His earnest will that they who now live through the death of His Son “should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose



again” (2 Cor. 5:15) and that they should take leave of everything displeasing to God and do what pleases Him — then it is also demanded that we do so with happy, grateful, and willing hearts. And for all shortcomings we should always believe in the eternal forgiveness that He has earned for us at such a great price, and has promised us so very much in earnest. All this belongs to the praising of Him as God. If this does not take place, but we “become vain in our imaginations” and begin freely to live contrary to our understanding about God, then the consequence is as a just punishment, that God takes His light from us, and lets our foolish hearts become darkened, and fall into all sorts of foolishnesses as the apostle here says about the heathen.

This is the serious teaching of this text, and it should really take hold of us because God has given His gospel to us. God has favored us so highly that He has not only put all creation before our eyes, full of witnesses to His eternal power and deity. But He has also given us His Son from heaven who has become our Brother and faithful Mediator. And by fulfilling the law and shedding His blood He has redeemed us from the sin and curse of the law. Furthermore, He has given us His Word about all this, and still sends us daily the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit Himself works in us everything that is necessary for life and godliness. He calls, awakens, enlightens, chastises, and solaces us according to our need. Think, God has given and gives us all this, but, nevertheless, the world goes its way, at ease and ungodly. It does not fear God, nor, does it praise and thank Him for all His grace. No, it lives freely in its sins, its vanity and idol worship. Who can wonder then that our God lets the world go, yes, allows her to be blinded and hardened so that hardly for a minute does she fear hell? But much more, if we who have been pardoned with the life and light of the Spirit, have tasted the goodness of God, and have begun to walk in the Spirit, should again fall away, become vain in our imagination, and again live at ease, and in intentional sin, how dreadful will be the judgment of God! No matter how weak and sinful we are, if we would only give the glory to God, confess our sin before Him, judge ourselves, and seek His grace, then everything would be remedied! But when we despise Him, misuse and defy the light He has given us, and begin to keep back the truth in unrighteousness, who can then wonder, we say it again, that in His majestic righteousness God should then deal with us the way this text teaches us!

## September 15

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*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities* – Rom. 8:26.

**T**his is the deep source of the unutterable signs of all the children of God — our infirmities. This is something we recognize, a word right from our hearts: “our infirmities.” And here the apostle himself says it: “our infirmities,” and thus includes himself among those having infirmities. Yes, the longer we live under the chastisement of the Spirit, the more we feel our infirmities, so that at last we say: Everything within us is only infirmity.

What God is and does is something quite different. But in ourselves are nothing but infirmities, and this we feel most keenly in all the things dearest and most important to us, such as our spiritual understanding, our faith, our hope, our love, our Christian gravity, our watching, our prayer. In all such things we feel our iniquities most keenly.

Although God has given us a new spiritual intelligence, there still are times when we are just as though we were blind. We cannot see the clearest thing in the Word. There are very strong grounds for consolation right in front of our eyes — and just right for sinners at their wit’s end. And even so it is still as though we did not see them. We are like a man standing before a wall without seeing it.

Not only do we believe that God is present everywhere, but we also feel it in our consciences, we feel that He sees even our most secret thoughts. And still we go through hours and days as if God did not exist. Neither do we fear Him at the moment of temptation; nor are we consoled by His presence at the moment of distress or prayer. How does this square up? Such things must surely be regarded as our “infirmities.”

Although God has declared His Son to us, so that there is nothing so great and precious to us as Christ, there still are times when we are as if there were no Christ, but we would still have to stand before God in our righteousness. Although God has given us very solid grounds for our hope of salvation, our hope and our waiting often are so weak, that we go through long periods without thinking at all that we are moving towards an eternal glory. No, to us that hope sometimes seems only a dream, and in our heart and our feelings it is as though we will be done for when this life comes to an end.

Although God has worked a new love in our hearts, we often notice that first and last we think only of our own benefit. Although it is true that with the adoption a spirit of prayer was born into our hearts, and although prayer should be — as it is sometimes — the dearest thing for the children of God, at other times we feel downright fed up with praying, and in the middle of our prayer we can be occupied with vain thoughts. All such things are no doubt great infirmities.

When we not only realize and acknowledge, but really experience, that our weakness is so great, we are inclined to despair altogether. But then the apostle says: Do not despair, we have got a Comforter: “the Spirit helpeth our infirmities” (Rom. 8:26). “The Spirit itself,” says the apostle. This Spirit is the great Comforter, Leader, Solacer, and Advocate whom our heavenly Father — because of the merits and intercession of the Son — has charged with the task of following and attending the children during their pilgrimage upon the earth.

With all God has given us in Christ, and with all the means of grace and all the work of the Spirit in our hearts, we still could not successfully come through all the dangers and difficulties ahead of us, if the Spirit Itself did not attend us, lead us, warn us, and console us. Such things Christ also suggested to His disciples when He prepared them for His departure from them, and just at that time so often repeated the promise regarding another Comforter.

Besides this He had given them most glorious promises. He had assured them that though He now left them, He would not leave them comfortless. They would surely see Him again and get a joy that no man could take from them. He had told them, that there were many mansions in His Father’s house, and that now He was going to prepare a place for them, and that they knew the way, even that He himself was the Way, and that He would come again and receive them unto Himself.

By all this He explained that they were not yet quite safe from all dangers. He still gave them a promise, which He often repeated, that He would send them another Comforter, the Spirit of truth, and that the Spirit would dwell with them forever, lead them in all truth, and remind them of all He had told them.

We should, all of us, impress this thought deeply in our hearts, that we have not been left to ourselves, to our own care; and that our victory in the fight will not depend on our own strength. No, in that case we would, all of us, be completely lost. The Spirit itself helpeth our infirmities. The word “helpeth” is a very important one in the original text. It really means “to put in a hand to help,” or “to lend a hand to somebody as one wants to help with the work.” Thus the Spirit itself seizes upon our infirmities, not yet to take them away fully, but to lead them, so that His power will appear in our weakness, and that at last we will only admire and praise Him, His wisdom, faithfulness, and power.

## September 16

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*Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning* – Luke 12:35.

**T**hese words say in pictures exactly the same thing as the Lord adds immediately afterwards: “Be ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.” And as regards the matter itself or the spiritual meaning of it the Lord wants to say: “Be every moment prepared for My arrival. Let Me and My service be your constant aim. Be on your guard so that your hearts do not sink down into anything else, and grow blunt, become controlled by the world or the flesh, and thus become unfit to serve Me in the right way, and to receive Me with rejoicing. As regards My visible presence I am away from you until I have gained My bride (i.e., the whole church or the entire number of mankind that has to be gained), but then I will come back in great glory to judge the living and the dead. Therefore see that you watch, that you may be ready for that day at any moment.”

But in order to be ready for that day two things are specially required. The first is, that we should constantly be dressed in wedding garments, i.e., we should live in the faith, by a daily putting on of the righteousness of Christ, that we may not fall asleep regarding the knowledge of sin, which knowledge is what really drives us to Christ, but that our sins may always trouble us so much that we cannot live without Christ and His Word. This is the main thing we need in order to be able to meet the Judge with rejoicing, because “he that hath the Son hath life” (1 John 5:12). The one who lives by Christ’s flesh and blood, i.e., by His atonement, has quite definite assurance with regard to eternal life. This is the first condition required that we may die saved and stand before the judgment seat of Christ. But then so that we may have an abundant, free, and peaceful entrance “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11), and not only enter “so as by fire” (1 Cor. 3:15), it is also necessary for us to see that we live in a healthy spirit of love, that we serve Him with delight and joy, and seek what is above, that our hearts may not be laden with the things of this life, with greed and other dominating\* sins, or with hatred and lack of reconciliation with a fellowman, so that we are unable to come to God with confidence, indicates that all such obstacles have been put aside and that the service of love is being practiced. Having the “loins girded” and the “lights burning.”

By these words the Lord Christ wants to admonish us not to allow the fleshly, self-confident, and vain life to gain predominance. This we see still more distinctly by His addition in Matt. 24:48–50 where He says: “But ... if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come

in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of.” This servant certainly does not only symbolize a careless Christian, but a fully apostate one. This we see from the judgment of eternal wrath befalling him. The Lord says here: He “shall cut him asunder and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites” (v. 51). We should never forget that spiritual ease may lead directly to this dreadful result, when a Christian begins to become so careless and self-confident, that he does not fear the dangers and does not allow himself to be warned. It is just such carelessness that leads to a complete apostasy, to spiritual death and eternal condemnation. Therefore it is quite definite that if we are to be saved, we must take the warning of Christ to our hearts absolutely. If we have begun to become worldly, vain, and at ease, we must leave this condition of ease and seek all the mercy and grace of God to revert to the first, God-fearing and watchful spirit in which we lived at the beginning when God had first called us.

Throughout all the Scripture — from the first page to the last — we will not find even one place giving hope to a man at ease, promising that it will go well with him. There is not even one word saying: “God is so gracious and faithful, that even if you do not fear sin and the devil, even if you are thoughtless, the Lord will still help you because of His grace.” No! Believe that there is no promise to that effect in the Scriptures. There are wonderfully gracious promises for sinners, yes, even during the most difficult temptations, falls, and sins, but note this, only for the event in which the sinner allows himself to be corrected, comes to repentance, fears, fights, and prays. Then in everything he will find help. Otherwise he will not. The armies of the enemy of the soul no doubt will destroy the ones who are at ease. In this enemy country a man should either be fighting and fearing and then be saved by the strength of God only. Or he may be at ease, and unworried, and perish at last. It is always that way in a real war. It is also like that with a man striving up a rapid river. In order not to be taken down the steep waterfall he has to strive all the time. If he lies down to sleep in the boat, he will immediately start to drift with the current and soon perish in the depths. And after all, in our whole nature we have a taint that all the time draws us away from the way of salvation. And on top of that, there is the indefatigable work of the world and the devil for the same purpose. All this can explain why it is necessary for us to observe this admonition of the Lord: “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning.”

## September 17

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*And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son – John 14:13.*

**H**ere we notice what it means to pray in the name of Jesus. To pray in the name of Jesus really means to pray on the basis of the merits of Christ as a Mediator. It means to invoke the Mediator in prayer. This is what the very expression, to ask in the name of another, still always means. And this is well known to us because it occurs daily in human life, when a rich and trusted man gives a poor and needy one only his name and recommendation to somebody possessing the means the poor man needs. With such a name and recommendation from a rich and respected person the poor man always goes with great confidence to the one who should give the necessary help. And this helper is hereby so confident and ready to give this help that he does not even ask the poor man for any assurance regarding the punctual refunding. No, the helper replies: "I do not need anything more than this name." Thus it happens when one is allowed to come in another's name. From this we may to some extent understand what it means in general to pray in the name of Jesus. In our church prayers this is usually expressed by the words: "Through Thy Son Jesus Christ, our Lord." But if we look at the context of the words in John 14, it probably also gives some ground for the opinion of those who say that the praying in the name of Jesus also means that one prays according to the mind of Jesus.

But in order to be able to pray rightly by the merits of Jesus and pray in the mind of Jesus, the work of the Spirit in the soul is necessary. The work of the Spirit makes us true disciples of Jesus and children of God. The taint is so deeply rooted in all human nature that God will look at us and our worthiness and be gracious to us when we have been rightly repentant and obedient. On the contrary, we think that we cannot expect Him to be gracious to us and hear our prayers when our conscience pricks us for sin and unworthiness. The taint of self-righteousness is so deeply rooted in the nature of us all. There are true children of God, who, in the first great change of their mind, have been so crushed and made contrite by the law that only with great difficulty they have come through the strait gate by faith in sheer grace and the merits of Christ alone. By this faith they have become saved in Christ. But thousands of times, yes, as long as they live on earth, they again fall into the same delusion that God will be gracious to them and hear their prayer only to the extent they have been obedient and repentant. On the other hand, they think He must be wroth and reluctant to hear them when they have been surprised by sin and feel great unworthiness. But when we come forth in prayer with the thought that God will hear us to the extent we ourselves are worthy, it is quite the opposite of praying in the name of Jesus and consoling ourselves with His, the Mediator's merits alone. Oh, how much distress and what humiliating

experiences are required before, at long last, we will say and mean truly and purely: “Only on the worthiness of Jesus, only in the name of Jesus, only for the sake of Jesus, be gracious to me, and give me what is good, though I have only deserved what is evil.” If this is a most difficult art even to the born again children of God, how impossible it is to the unconverted to be able rightly to say even one prayer on the basis of the merits of Jesus alone!

It is equally impossible to pray in the mind of Jesus while in the unconverted state, i.e., that out of the heart one could be exercised and pray for the same things as the Lord Christ Himself would ask. And this is the second thing belonging to the act of praying in the name of Jesus; because the desire and anxiety of the heart belong to prayer. But think what a wonder of grace I realize when I discover that by faith I have received such a heart, that I have the same anxiety, the same care, desires, and sighs in my heart as I find in the Lord’s Prayer and other expressions of the mind of Jesus. And that also when I do not think of the instructions or examples Jesus has given us regarding prayer, but I go to my everyday work, I still go and think and think and sigh that God may give me His grace to an increase of His kingdom in my own heart and that of others. I have such a mind that I have no greater joy than when I notice the work of God in the soul of some person, when I notice that the kingdom of God grows somewhere, and that the name of God becomes known and honored.

In this I have the same thing as in the first two petitions in the Lord’s Prayer: “Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come.” This was also the sum of everything Christ sought here, for which He tasted death and used all His powers to save souls, and spread the kingdom of salvation on earth. Maybe you go about with anxiety and sighing and think of the same thing. You think of the salvation and eternal bliss of souls. Then rejoice and be amazed at the grace that has fallen to your lot, that you have the same mind as Jesus. All the world may otherwise be dark and narrow to you, but a wonder of grace has been worked in your soul, and it weighs a thousand times more than everything else we can think on earth. Without thinking at all of the commands of Jesus, or the things in the Lord’s Prayer, you perhaps go about with this sighing day and night: “Oh, that God would force His will through me! Even if His will would prevent and mortify my self-will, may only His will be done! Oh, that I might be able to do the will of God!” Now your heart has the same mind as the third petition: “Thy will be done.” Wake up with rejoicing and amazement at the wonder in your heart, that you have the same mind as Jesus. What grace, what glory, that the same Spirit dwells in us as in Him! Is this not proof enough that we are “partakers of the divine nature”?

## September 18

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*To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken  
than the fat of rams – 1 Sam. 15:22.*

**H**ere we are told that to God it is only a matter of obedience. From this we learn that one deed is equally great to Him as another. We learn that the value of a deed only depends on the commandment of God. If God has commanded a thing, then it is a great and important deed, no matter whether it be only the taking up of a straw. If God has not commanded it, then it is less than nothing, no matter whether it be as great as the raising of the dead, or the converting of all the world. Thus only the revealed Word and commandment of God will become the lamp unto our feet and the rule for our walk.

May everyone then look carefully into this to see what God has commanded us to do. Every Christian always has two kinds of duties which God has enjoined upon him. First, some individual duties or some duties related to his vocation. Secondly, the general ones or the occasional service of charity towards his neighbors. About the first mentioned the Scripture says: “I ... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Eph. 4:1). “All members have not the same office” (Rom. 12:4). “As the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk... Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called” (1 Cor. 7:17, 19–20), and so on. About the common duties it says: “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke 6:31). “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:39). “Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10). Still we should notice that it is right in the work of our vocation that usually most of the services of charity are being done to our neighbors.

As regards the vocation there are few who really think of how God has put down right there His first and chief requirement concerning us. Therefore we should open our eyes and see how the order and institution of God rule in everything from the throne of God in heaven down to the lowest place on earth. God is “the God of order,” and He has ordained one to be sovereign and the other subject, one to be master and the other servant, one to be father or mother and the other to be a child, one to be rich and the other to be poor, one to be married and the other unmarried; as in the body one member is the eye, another the ear, a third the hand, a fourth the foot. Now it is the first will and requirement of God that everyone should do his duty. The sovereign should rule well. The subordinate should obey faithfully. The eye should see and leave it to the ear to hear. The foot should walk and leave it to the hand to work. Oh, what a blessed life there would be on earth, if everyone would bear in mind that it is the first will and requirement of God with regard to our life that everyone does the work of his own vocation. That is a true



and holy and divine service well pleasing to the Lord. In the midst of the household work and in very simple deeds one stands as in a holy temple, and performs a most well pleasing divine service.

But, oh, for this a spiritual eye is needed — an eye not only seeing what is before the eyes, but seeing the order and commandment of God. If with our bodily eyes we could see God before us and hear Him ask us for a service, even if it were extremely small, it would no longer be small to us. No, it would immediately get a higher value, and we would do it with great delight, only because we are allowed to serve God thereby. As Luther says: “If God and His angels were to pay you a visit one day and command you to sweep the floor, you would probably become so happy that you would not know what to think. And this certainly would not be because of the deed, which is small in itself, but for the sake of Him that has commanded it.”

Now God has really given you such commandments, when He has, for instance, allowed you to become a maid or a child in a house. Because to them He has said: “Be obedient to them that are your masters... With good will doing service” (Eph. 6:5, 7) and “Honor thy father and thy mother” (Exod. 20:12). Do then what they ask you to do! This is the commandment of God. Thus you then see that when your father, mother, master, or mistress bids you to do something, then God stands there by his or her side with His fourth commandment and says: “Yes, go and do so!” Therefore the apostle says: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (1 Pet. 2:13). Notice: for the Lord’s sake — for the Lord’s sake! What does this word mean if not simply that fundamentally this human command is an ordinance of God, a commandment of God — that is, as long as it is an orderly ordinance of man and not a devilish rebellion against a commandment of God. It is an ordinance of God as God has instituted it. It is important and necessary for the Christians to pay careful attention to such texts in the Scripture, and often to think of this subject. Because how hard Satan attacks us in this respect. In one person he works slowness and negligence. In another he works most dreadful tribulations, dissatisfaction, and temptations. And another he will strongly desire to lure away from his vocation, make him envious and unsteady, so that he is not happy with anything, but is thrown here and there. May we then bear these words of the Lord well in mind under every condition: “To obey is better than sacrifice.”

## September 19

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*Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands – Isa. 49:16.*

**T**he Lord says: “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands.” Thereby He wants to convince the sorrowful Zion, His poor children on earth, of the fact that He cannot forget them, even if He would want to, which He, however, denies completely, because, He says, “I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands. Where would I then put My hands, if I were to forget you, when you have been graven thereupon? Thus you are always as an adage before My eyes.”

But the Lord does not mean this to be a picture only. There is something deeper. The Lord has not only graven us upon His hands, the way one can bear the name of a man on a ring on a finger. No, the word in the original text means the palm. Also in the Old Testament, long before these words were spoken, the Spirit of the Lord had announced that the hands and feet of Christ would be pierced. Such a reference is in Psalm 22 of David, where Messiah laments: “They pierced my hands and my feet.” Thus it is on good grounds that Bishop Hersleb explains that the words “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands” refer to the engraving the Lord Christ got from the nails in His hands. These He often showed to His disciples with special emphasis after His resurrection. Hersleb adds: “The holes left by the nails in the hands of Christ remind Him permanently of those for whom He allowed Himself to be pierced in that way. There He has not graven us with ink, but with His own blood. He has not graven the writing so that it can be removed, but right through His palms. He has not made the writing by pencil or slate-pencil, but by means of an iron stylus, by iron nails.” And this He did in order never to be able to forget us. And moreover He never wants to forget us. The matter is as David says: “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning” (Ps. 137:5). So also the Lord wants to say in this verse: “There is no need for you to fear, you sighing soul, that I shall forget you, as long as I do not forget My right hand, both of My hands, upon which you have been graven. I must first forget My own hands, if I want to forget you.” The Lord surely means something great by His words: “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands.” And it also was something great that Christ ascended from earth to heaven with pierced hands.

But the thing most understandable, sure, and useful for us, is that all of us have been graven forever in those wounds as partakers of the atonement which has taken place in Christ Jesus. We are all partakers thereof. That is what the Scripture has revealed most clearly. And we can never be separated from that partaking, no matter how desperately bad it may seem to us. Yes, even if we are apostate and away from the Lord, and therefore our names are not found in the book of the living, we are

nevertheless still graven in the atonement sign of Christ. That is, that atonement has nevertheless happened for us, and can never be brought to nought. It is eternally valid and will always bring salvation and eternal bliss as soon as we again receive it. This was understood by the evangelical singer who wrote: “Praise the Lord, I have been allowed to get rid of my unrest, since I have seen myself graven in Thy wounds. Sooner Thou wilt deny Thyself and Thy Father than that I will ever be deleted.” How can it be so? What if I fall away? Reply: It is true that I may now be missing from the book of the living. But I will always remain graven in the wounds of Christ, as partaker of the eternally valid atonement. This is the firm ground why everything can be remedied and I can never be forgotten by God. We should stick to this when everything seems desperately bad. By this means we can press into the kingdom of God — by not seeing, yet believing.

## September 20

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*And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus – Phil. 4:7.*

**T**he one who, in all the various experiences of the Christian life, wants to remain a Christian and keep and strengthen the peace in his heart must, first of all, diligently and simply be in touch with the gospel of peace. This is the right source of the peace of God. The gospel must continuously hold us up during the tribulations, pangs, and sorrows into which our reason, feelings, conscience, and Satan want all the time to drag us down. Against all those disturbers of our peace we have only the Word and the sacrament as defense and walls. There the Comforter dwells and speaks with us, consoles us, and says: “Do not fear. Be of good comfort! If you are sinful, Jesus is righteous. You are now in the kingdom where sin never is imputed to you. You are now not in a kingdom of works which overcomes grace, but in a kingdom of grace which overcomes works. You are reconciled to God forever, and He has sworn that He will never be angry with you.” This is the trumpet of the peace of the kingdom of God, and it must always sound in our ears and hearts if we are to have any peace here. But in addition to the Word we also need the Lord Himself, i.e., we should diligently pray for the power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. As Prätorius says: “Each morning when a Christian wakes up and often during the day he should sigh: May the peace of God which passeth all understanding, keep my poor heart in Thee, against all lack of peace that, because of the tyranny of the devil, the wickedness of the world, and other adversities, may engulf me.”

And now would it not be more desirable, that the peace of God should rule more in the hearts and minds of all Christians! First, it is the will of the heart of the gracious God with regards to us, that we should not waste our days in darkness and pain, when after all, we have been bought at so dear a price, and are so precious in His sight, so gloriously dressed, so very rich and happy in Christ. Rather, because of these things, we should have great peace in Him. The apostle plainly says: “Rejoice evermore... For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:16, 18). And Christ Himself says: “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Notice this peace was a principal purpose of the whole atonement of Christ, as it is plainly said: “the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5). And again: “The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever” (32:17). Therefore the more rejoicing and peaceful someone is in Christ, the dearer he is to God, and the more Christ is glorified and lifted up thereby, Christ, who is the ground for this peace and rejoicing. Apart from Him, a Christian does not have much joy on earth. In this wicked world, where

there is nothing but conflicts and tribulation because of the wickedness of the flesh, the devil, and the world, it is necessary that a Christian is well equipped with a high, imperturbable peace of God in his heart. As Jesus says when He concludes His parting speech to the disciples the night before His death: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Thus it was seriously the will of the Savior that we should have peace in Him, although nobody but He knows better how sinful and unworthy we are! When He wishes us to have peace and even suffers and dies for us so that we should get it, when He solaces us and speaks in a friendly way to us, in order that we may have peace in Him, then it would only be reasonable if we also would rest well contented on His promise, like little children on the bosom of their mother. Finally, it is just this peace that above anything else strengthens and keeps our hearts in Christ, gives us life, desire, and power to do all good things. Remember it is said: “The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7), and again, “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). When by faith I have peace with God, then I can do and suffer anything. Anybody wanting to do so, may be unfriendly towards me, when I am assured of friendship with God. I can suffer an earthly loss, when I am happy about the heavenly treasure. On the contrary, when my heart is empty of the peace of God, I am weak in everything, and open to any temptation. Therefore it is a truth that every Christian should bear well in mind, that the peace of God keeps the heart, and that the joy of the Lord is our strength.

## September 21

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*Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save;  
neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear* — Isa. 59:1.

**T**here are many people who while otherwise proving that they are true Christians, go about, sunk so deep in a certain sorrow, distress, or embarrassment that it appears as if there were no possibility to have it put right, as if there were a distress where God cannot help, as if God were dead, or had become impotent, and that thus there is a need for the children of the Most High to be unhappy over something. Otherwise these people seem to have faith and intellect enough, but in a certain distress or difficulty they feel fear, sigh, and mourn in such a way as if they had no God and Savior. If they are reminded that they should have confidence in God, they reply: "To be sure I know that God is mighty and faithful, etc., but this thing is such that it cannot be helped."

Yes, at certain times this spirit of sadness can attack any Christian. But it is only darkness, disbelief, and delusion that a Christian should feel unhappy and think something cannot be helped. The Lord always replies: "Is My hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?" (Isa. 50:2). Or have I no longer any heart for you? "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? Or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you?" (v. 1). Thus it is sheer darkness and error to think that there is any need for any Christian to be unhappy for any reason at all.

A child of God should never be unhappy, should never be really unhappy, because, first of all, to be a child of God in itself is such a benefit or happiness, that against it any adversity in life, even if that adversity could not be remedied, is only as a small grain of sand against the whole earth, only as the loss of a penny against the gain of a million pounds. And secondly, our God can remedy anything. "The right hand of the Lord can change everything." And what the Lord does not want to, or does not think best to, help or change, should never make the children of God unhappy, because then it is certainly for their greatest happiness that it may go on — to use the words of the apostle: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28). That is the great advantage the children of God have over other people, that anything happening to them must be for good to them.

The world may have more of gold and silver, more of houses and farms, more of food and clothes, more of jokes and merriment, but they can never achieve the happy condition that everything will work for good to them. On the contrary, they use everything for evil to themselves. And when they have it at the best and are on the top, then they are no more than servants of the devil and joint-heirs of eternal fire. On the contrary, when it is at its worst for the children of God, and when they

are at the deepest depths of the vale of tears, suffering, and trials — when Job sits in sackcloth and ashes and wails as he scrapes his sores, when Jeremiah lies in the manure pit, Daniel is in the den with the lions, and poor Lazarus lies with sores clad in rags at the door of the rich man — when it is so bad with Christians, it is no worse than the fact that in the midst of it all, they are the apple of the Lord's eye, the delight of His heart, the children of righteousness, the holy people, and the peculiar people, finally to be carried by angels into Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22).

Surely the children of God can never be unhappy, for even adversity must serve them for good, and moreover even sin which is the greatest evil shall not condemn them, the devil shall not overcome them, death shall not hurt them. On the contrary, at the slightest hint of the Lord all these dreadful enemies must serve them in some way.

From this we see then, that there is no distress where our God cannot help. There is no power that can “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39). There is no enemy capable of plucking the sheep of Christ out of His hand. In order that these can ever be lost, they, as well as our first parents, must “willfully” (Heb. 10:26) go away from Christ, “willfully” become disobedient to His voice, become charmed by the voice of the serpent and the deceit of sin. Here is the ground for the important truth, that no Christian will be lost as long as he fears God, reveres the Word of God and listens to it, and allows himself to be warned. So long no power will be able to separate him from the love of Christ, no matter how weak he is, no matter how bad the trouble looks, no matter how deep he lies in misery. Everything can be helped as long as he seeks help with the Lord, and according to the way the Lord has promised to help. Because it is impossible that anyone who trusts in the Lord, and who invokes Him in faith, will be confounded at last. Look into the Scriptures from the very beginning and see whether anyone who has trusted in the Lord and who has invoked Him, has ever become confounded. No, it is only wretched disbelief when in any matter a Christian mourns as if he had no hope; because our God can help in everything. In everything He is a Father, an almighty and faithful Father, in everything taking care of His children, sharing in everything that happens to them, helping, protecting, and nursing them. It is said: “For thus saith the Lord of hosts; ... he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye” (Zech. 2:8).

## September 22

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*For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully* – 1 Pet. 2:19.

**I**n a sermon on the fifteenth Sunday after Trinity Sunday, Luther says: “It is in general called serving God, when one does what God has commanded and abstains from the things God has forbidden. In that way all the world could be full of divine service, not only in church, but also in the house, in the kitchen, in the cellar, in the workshop, in the field, in the houses of townsfolk and peasantry, if we would only behave correctly herein. Because it is certain that God has not only ordained and wants to maintain the church and the worldly government, but also the household. Thus everyone working there — first the father and mother, then the children and finally the servants and maids and neighbors — all of them together serve God, because it is His will and commandment. Thus in all his pains and toiling each man would be able to be happy and of good cheer. And nothing would be troublesome to him, if he acted that way in his office and vocation. But the devil fights with hands and feet against that. He does not want us to achieve this joy. No, he wants everybody to be reluctant to do what he should do and has been commanded to do. So that men would not love to serve God, and God would not get any service from men.”

It is only necessary that each one of us should have a willing heart and spiritual eyes, faith and love and delight in the law of God. It is necessary that everyone — in his status and vocation — should have spiritual eyes to see God, see God before himself, look at the commandments and will of God and not at the value of the deed itself. Secondly, also an indefatigable patience is often needed, as the devil makes our status and our circumstances quite bitter and repulsive to us. Oh, what grace then to have the love towards God whereby our displeasure can be drowned in His pleasure, so that we now suffer and persist with patience only for the sake of His will! The apostle Peter says: “Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully... If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example” (1 Pet. 2:18–21). You that are servants and children, notice the words: “Not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.” Notice the words: “for conscience toward God ... endure grief, suffering wrongfully ... for this is acceptable with God ... hereunto were ye called ... because Christ suffered for us.”

Yes, it is thankworthy when a child believes in Christ and suffers wrongfully because of ungodly parents and sisters and brothers, but suffers humbly, patiently, and enduringly, “for conscience.” It is thankworthy when he neither rises up to



reply unduly, nor succumbs with grief and sadness, nor returns to the world. It is thankworthy when he suffers and has patience, biding for the Lord and having his Consolation, Friend, and Refuge only in the Savior. This is acceptable with God.

It is thankworthy when a true Christian having an ungodly and difficult husband endures her grief with patience “for conscience,” suffers wrongfully and proves love, and serves her husband with a perpetual forgiving.

It is thankworthy when a pious father or mother with ungodly and depraved children, works on their upbringing with indefatigable firmness, patience, and love. It is thankworthy when he or she admonishes, punishes, forgives, reminds, and first as last commends them to God in prayer.

It is thankworthy when in spite of barren soil, a faithful teacher works with love and has patience and does not faint. It is thankworthy when he goes on with zeal and love, in public and privately, in season and out of season, punishes, urges, admonishes with all meekness and wisdom. It is thankworthy when for all this he readily suffers the enmity of all the world, his colleagues, and all wicked spirits. It is thankworthy when thereby first as last he trains himself in godliness and maintains his own life of grace.

It is thankworthy when a pious student suffers the scorn of his ungodly fellows with patience. It is thankworthy when he keeps himself untainted by the world and gladly accepts being considered as a fool for the sake of Christ. It is thankworthy when he gladly sacrifices his powers to Him and studies his heathen authors, history, and other sciences only because of his vocation and duty, but has his favorite subject in the heavenly matters.

It is thankworthy when a pious craftsman is honest and faithful in his profession “for conscience toward God,” and would sooner suffer poverty and want than avail himself of the tricks and deceits whereby his brothers profit in the profession, and so on.

In this way everyone, in his status, has got his tests and difficulties. Patience and spiritual eyes and hearts are needed both to see and to love the pleasure of God, remain firm, faithful, and diligent in one’s vocation, serving one’s neighbor in that way, and thereby doing the will of God. This is acceptable with God, and the right way for our life.

## September 23

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*I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire,  
that thou mayest be rich – Rev. 3:18.*

**N**otice what the Lord says here: “Buy of Me!” Think for a while of what it means when in this burning spirit, in a high, majestic, seriously admonishing tone the Lord says: “I counsel thee to buy of Me! of Me!” That is a powerful rejection of all our own works! It is a powerful confirmation of the fact that nothing is valid for God, except what is of the Son. But “buy”? What does that mean? Thus says the Lord: “Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1). And again: “And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). Notice: “freely!” About such buying He says here: “I counsel thee to buy of Me gold,” that is, “I counsel you that you give up your own works and only believe, only receive from Me.” It is true that He speaks half in a tone of punishment, in a seriously admonishing spirit. But it is therefore the more sweet. It is as if He would say: “I command you not to do the least little bit yourself to make Me gracious or yourself warm. I command you to give up all your self-activity and only to receive. I command you to believe that what I have done for you is enough!”

If you get grace to reflect upon this and to consider these majestic words of the Lord with faith and understanding: “I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich,” then you will realize that they are really able to cause a lukewarm soul to burn. They can make a cold and dead soul living and warm, because here everything is great and glorious. First, a moment earlier, the Lord gave a very strong description of the misery and unworthiness of the person to whom all this is offered, so that not even one soul would be able to draw away, remain portionless, or feel too unworthy. Secondly, this is a very earnest counsel and wonderful word of the great Lord Himself to an unworthy sinner. Against these counsels and words all our thoughts, opinions, and feelings are only as flying straw and grains of sand against a great, high mountain.

But what did Christ mean by this “gold” He offers? Some have thought that it may be faith, but that is wrong. It does not fit in at all here. Faith is symbolized by the buying itself, and that comprises both asking and believing. But the gold that is to be bought, and which is to represent the very riches offered, symbolizes the thing embraced by faith, namely the precious blood of Christ or all of His merits which have been tried and tested in the fire of His suffering. About this Peter says: “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18–19). The apostle wants to say: “Silver and gold are

needed for the redeeming of a person. But the gold whereby we were redeemed is not corruptible gold, but incorruptible. It is the precious blood of Christ. This blood, or the merits of Christ, are the only thing that can make a poor sinner rich." Faith itself is not the riches valid before God. If a man wants to stand before God it is not enough that he presents his own faith or his repentance, his prayer, his love, his humility. Because even these things cannot, worked by the Holy Spirit in us, defend us or stand the fire of judgment. These things are still always imperfect because of the infirmity of the vessel. No, if a man wants to stand before the judgment of God and be called "rich" before God, then he must have something still higher and more excellent, namely the gold tried and tested in the judgment of God. This is only the righteousness of Christ Himself.

And reflect in earnest what a value this gold has — the gold Christ offers here, namely His precious blood. You are very sinful and poor. You owe ten thousand talents. You have sinned so often, so heinously and so wrongly. But put all this misery in one scale of the balance and the blood shed by the Son of God in the other, and tell which weighs most. To be sure our sins are great and heavy, but when I have heard from His own mouth: "This is My blood ... which is shed ... for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28) and from His apostle: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7), then my poor, sinful, sorrowful soul is full of consolation and boldness. Then I again begin to revive, and to become fervent in my spirit, because what can be a more sufficient atonement than the blood of Christ? What sin of a finite being can be worth more than the value of the blood of the infinite One? And Christ says here to a most unworthy man who had sunk deeply from grace: "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold, that thou mayest be rich." Thus He declares that the man would become rich, not only guiltless, but also rich, only by this gold!

## September 24

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*Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light* – Rom. 13:12.

**F**rom the following verse we see what the apostle means by “the works of darkness.” There he lists some of them such as gluttony, drunkenness, chambering, strife, and so on. And that he calls such sins “the works of darkness” does not only mean that a man shuns the natural light when he commits them. No, he does not speak about the natural light or darkness here. He says that these works really belong to spiritual darkness, the darkness of fleshly ease and ungodliness, where one lives freely in all sins and vices.

But what we should notice specially is that the apostle says: “Let us cast off,” or put away, these works of darkness. And he says such things to believers. From this we learn, first of all, that the faithful are not quite free from every degree or kind of such sins. Even if we cannot live in them the way the world does — which sins willfully without repentance for the sin — we can nevertheless be tainted. And at times of slumber or difficult temptation, we can be more or less captivated by lust. This is shown by the history of many of the holy. From this we learn first that we should not despair immediately, and condemn ourselves or other Christians when something like that has happened. No, if the soul still sticks to its Savior in repentance and faith, and seeks His grace both for forgiveness and redemption, then grace is still great towards him. For that we should thank the Lord Christ who has earned for us perfect grace over against real sins.

And the second thing we should notice here is the real admonition of the apostle that we should cast off these works of darkness. Because of all this grace we should strive to cast them off. The apostle does not say: let us only acknowledge and confess them. No, he says: let us cast them off. Here is the right test distinguishing a true and a false Christian. The first mentioned is frightened at his sin, and seeks all the grace of God and all the means of grace to get rid of his sin. The last mentioned makes a secret compact with the sin, and intends to keep it. He excuses it to himself, even if he sometimes confesses it with his mouth. It is true that the faithful also may forget God, and act as if he were completely abandoned by the Spirit at the moment of sifting. We see that with Peter when he denied his Lord three times. But as Peter immediately thereafter went out and wept bitterly, so also every true Christian is deeply hostile in his spirit to his own sin.

But how does he really go about casting it off? It happens in different ways. We can cast off some sins immediately; and then we should rejoice, and not speak about weakness. Rather, we should praise the grace of God. On the other hand, other sins become a rod of chastisement to us for a long time, maybe for all our lives. Otherwise we would become really free from sin. That we fight against the

sins adhering to us, so that they do not get dominion over us as with the world, does not happen by our own power, but only by fleeing to “the power of God’s might” (Eph. 6:10).

“And put on the armor of light.” The “armor of light” is the opposite of “the works of darkness.” As these consisted of sins and vices, the armor of light consists of purity of mind and life, sobriety, watchfulness, and above all faith, love, and hope whereby we fight against the temptations of the flesh, and against the seduction of the world and the devil. The apostle had just before spoken about the works of darkness. And now as their contrast he uses the words “the armor of light.” He does not say: “the works of light.” Thereby he gives us to understand that here will be strife and fight. He gives us to understand that weapons will be necessary here if we are to be able always to remain in faith and godliness.

The Christian life will not be an easy and calm life such as the life of those that “sleep in the night” (1 Thess. 5:7). No, the Christian life will often be a hard, long, and risky conflict where we must fight for our very lives, or die and lose everything. It is a life of war. In a war there is no peace and security, but a perpetual unrest, danger to life, and fear. There we must always watch and be armed for new struggles. At one time faith and conscience are attacked, so that we are in danger of getting “entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1). At another time the outer life is attacked when the devil wants to throw us into sin and shame. At a third time love is attacked, when we are near to remaining in hatred and enmity, and so on. Against all such attacks we must now be armed and have put on the armor of light. And here the fight may often become so hard and risky that we are near despair, and that we are saved only by the “great wonders” worked by the almighty and faithful Lord. Therefore Peter also says that the righteous shall “scarcely be saved” (1 Pet. 4:18).

How will it then go with those who want to be Christians and who nevertheless live still in peace as if they were in a very safe home, as if they had no longer any spiritual enemies, as if the devil no longer held anything evil against them, as if the flesh and the world were no longer dangerous enemies? Both the Word and experience bear witness that no Christian has managed to cross this enemy country successfully without fear and fight. If I do not fear, then I am in danger. To consider myself in no danger among perpetually intrusive enemies, that is only self-deception. Either I fear and fight, and am then saved by the power of God; or I am at ease and do not care, and so am lost. Therefore, the Lord Christ has admonished us so faithfully: “Watch and pray” (Matt. 26:41). “And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (Mark 13:37).

## September 25

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*Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good – Rom. 12:21.*

When these words are read in connection with the previous verse, the meaning seems to be: Let not the wickedness of your enemy overcome you, so that you also become wicked, but overcome his wickedness by your constant love, so that you change him into your friend. But this requires that we overcome our own heart's wickedness, so that it does not overcome the forgiving love. The one who remains in hatred and revengefulness, has been overcome by evil, namely by a twofold evil. Evil in his enemy, and evil in his own heart have joined to tempt him to hatred and revengefulness, and have then won the victory over him, when he accepts his own wickedness and does not want to forgive, love, and do good towards his neighbor.

And when you so have been overcome by evil, then you are also unhappy in a double sense. It is not enough that you lie in hatred and enmity towards your neighbor, which in itself already is an unhappy state without peace, but by the same hatred and inability to be reconciled you are shut out from the grace and friendship of God, as truly as the Lord Christ has declared: "If ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother his trespasses," "neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 18:35; 6:15). Thus it is rather an important thing that we do not let ourselves be overcome by this evil and remain in hatred and lack of reconciliation. This is quite necessary for our eternal bliss.

There is something quite special about this evil, namely the hatred, as it bears witness of the relation between your soul and God, and the relation of your soul to sin and grace. Because if only you say that you cannot forgive a certain human being, you thereby declare that you can do without the grace of God and forgiveness for your sins, yes, you can even do without the eternal bliss of your soul. If only your own sin becomes really painful to you, and the grace of God really necessary, then you can forgive the most insulting wrong. If you cannot do this, then pray God that He may have mercy upon you and awaken you both with regard to your own sins and also to the precious grace of God. Then you will be able to forgive anybody and will not let yourself be overcome by this deadly evil, the irreconcilable hatred.

"But overcome evil with good." First of all this means: overcome the wickedness of your enemy with your continuous love and good deeds towards him. In reply to a "grievous" word, give a "soft answer" that "turneth away wrath" (Prov. 15:1). In return for an unfriendly look, give a gracious and friendly one. When you hear that your neighbor has spoken bad about you, then say something good you know about him. Then he also can hear it after you and become inclined to friendship. When he has refused to do you a service, then look for an opportunity to do him a service that he may need. In this way evil is overcome with good. The wickedness

of your enemy is like an emulative struggle against your patience, your love and charity. Then see to it, that this good within you will not be overcome, but on the contrary overcomes your enemy's wickedness. And if only good within you cannot be overcome, but you still always continue with love and charity, in most cases the enemy's wickedness certainly will be overcome by them.

But even if this does not happen, you have still overcome the most dangerous evil thing, if you have only overcome your own heart and can remain in love. But this evil moving in your own heart will also be overcome only by the goodness of another, by the grace in the heart of God. If you only fight against the wickedness of your heart with your own strength, you will soon be overcome. But if the great love of God, always forgiving you all your sins, becomes visible to your heart and always rules there, then you will also always be sincerely inclined to merciful love towards your neighbor. Then in the highest sense — you have overcome evil with good.

Such are the fights and victories of the Christians. The world calls it victory, when a man has been able to take his revenge on his enemy. In the kingdom of Christ it is called a victory, when a man does not revenge himself, when he overcomes his desire for revenge. The Christians, first of all, fight against their own wickedness, and when this can be overcome, it is their most precious victory. But when they also fight against the wickedness of others, they use love and good deeds to overcome it. May God with His great, eternal love more and more rouse our minds to such a fight and struggle — to “overcome evil with good.”

## September 26

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*Your life is hid with Christ in God* – Col. 3:3.

**O**ur life in God is hidden! — and hidden with Christ! Christ is our Life, but Christ is hidden. Therefore, our life is hidden. So speaks the apostle here: This is also confirmed by the experience of all the holy. But we do not want to allow that fact to be true and correct, so we say: If it were a real life with Christ in God, then it would not be hidden, but would shine forth, be noticed, seen, and felt somewhat more. Now, let us see how it stands. It is true that “he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself” (1 John 5:10), and that “the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:16).

It is true what John so often repeats, that we know definitely that we are of God, we know that we are the children of God, we know that God dwells in us. It is true that a man who has not experienced any conversion, any awakening from the sleep in sin, any working under the law, any redemption in Christ, any new life with Christ, and any new walk after Him, but is still one with the world, even though maybe not in her rougher existence, it is true that such a man deceives himself if he means that in spite of all, he can live the hidden life with Christ in God, if he wants to understand this text as meaning that the life in Christ does not have any definite signs, any certain power and demonstration. It is true what the Scriptures teach regarding the fruits of the Spirit, by which fruits, the good tree shall be known.

That at the same time the spiritual life is so hid is due to the following circumstances: First, that our fallen, blind reason never fully understands the work and fruits of the Spirit, never fully esteems them, but in some way wants to take hold on life itself with its own hands, and see and examine it. Sometimes we are not satisfied with the fruits of the Spirit listed by the Scriptures, but ourselves want to determine how the spiritual life should appear. So that when, for instance, the Scriptures mention love, joy, peace, etc., as the chief fruits of the Spirit, many say: “Yes, what is that? To be sure there came a new love into my heart, when I got forgiveness for all my sins. To be sure I got a joy and peace with God I had never had before. But what is this? Those are such weak and inconstant things in me. I should have a much greater love, joy, peace, and meekness, and so on.

Then we pine for some inner sensations and feelings of life itself within us. And when such a feeling is missing, we immediately are in doubt with regard to life. Secondly, our life in God is most of all hidden when God not only draws away from us all feeling and power of faith, but also allows much sin and infirmity to come over us, allows Satan to sift us most painfully, tempt and torment us with sinful thoughts, lusts, and desires, so much so that we forget ourselves, so that



Peter denies his Lord with lies and curses, so that Paul and Barnabas quarrel. When something like that happens to us, where is our life with Christ in God? We feel that to believe that the Spirit of God could dwell in us is simply foolishness! Surely it is not the Spirit of God, but the spirit of the devil. Now our life with Christ is deeply hid indeed.

Finally, in addition God lets all sorts of nasty experiences, accidents, and sufferings meet us; yes, wash over us as a torrent. So that against a pious Job, at the same time all powers, nature, men, and spirits join, when the robbers, the wind, and the thunder deprive him of all he has, even of his children. The devil claws his body, his wife scoffs at his faith, his wretched comforters put new stones on his burden, and his own heart rages with questions against God, so that he curses his birthday. Where is now the man so highly endowed with grace, the equal of whom was not to be found in the country? Where is now the friendship with God he should have enjoyed? This certainly can be called the hiding of our glory deeply, or what?

Of all this evil that covers and conceals our life with Christ, there still is nothing to be compared to sin. In comparison outer sufferings are golden. One can soon enough learn that they are a fatherly rod, “for whom the Lord loveth He correcteth” (Prov. 3:12). But sin, the fury of the devil in the flesh, persistent lusts to sin, the following dead feeling thereupon, and the imagination that we are justly forsaken by God, and abandoned by the Spirit, etc. These are the right deathblows to pierce our very marrow and fully cloud our life of grace. At such a time usually nothing else helps, except to abandon all thoughts of one’s own life of grace and look only to the eternal unchangeable God Himself, to see if He cannot save and help. But when the spiritual atmosphere again clears up, we may see, that in the midst of the black darkness not only an unchanged father-heart in God, and an undiminished righteousness in Christ were concealed, but also a true, living, fighting life of grace in our heart. We will learn how God leads His holy ones in strange ways, and in this way conceals life under death, righteousness under sin, grace under wrath, yes, heaven under hell. That is the high wisdom of God, and that, above all, is necessary for us, if we are to hold out with the Lord.

## September 27

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*Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth* – Eph. 6:14.

**T**his expression has been borrowed from the way the soldiers fought at the time of the apostle. The soldier would gird his loins with a girdle or belt. This was not only for the fastening up of the long clothes worn at that time, and which otherwise were fluttering around and preventing him from running; it was also to give the body a certain firmness and carriage. But what is the girdle with which we should gird ourselves about? The apostle says: “with truth.” Oh, what divine wisdom! Here the Spirit of the Lord speaks. We should gird the loins of our minds about with truth. As the real being and power of our enemy is in lies — falseness, lies, and dissimulation — so our first weapon against him shall be truth. But the word “truth” has a double meaning in the Scripture. Namely, first the truth of the doctrine or the Word of God. Then it would indicate that we should arm ourselves with a clear and certain knowledge of the Word of God so that we do not let ourselves be led astray by divers and strange doctrines. But secondly, the word also stands for truth in our being. That is honesty, earnest, real intention, so that in everything we want only to know what God wants, in order to do according to it. And we should no doubt gird ourselves about with truth in both of the senses.

Against all the seductions of the devil there is no more powerful a weapon than to stick firmly to the things God has spoken in His Word. As the soldier’s clothes otherwise fluttering around, were tied up by the combat girdle, so our thoughts drifting about should be fastened tightly with the truth. So that we always say: “God has said this and that. Heaven and earth shall perish, but never a word of His mouth. What God Himself has spoken is certain and firm. To that I will stick!” Oh, what a blessed security to be allowed to gird oneself about with the truth of God Himself! And this is the first and most necessary thing if we wish to stand firm in the evil day of seduction.

And what is all firmness in doctrine, if we do not have an earnest of it worked in our mind by the Spirit of God, so that in everything we want only to know the will of God, in order to do accordingly? What do the soldier’s weapons help if his limbs do not have any life and strength? Then the sword falls out of his hand of itself. So we also drop the truth of the Word, ourselves, if the truth worked by the Spirit of God in our heart, the honesty in our mind does not remain. By nature the heart of each human being is full of hypocrisy and falseness. All men are liars (Ps. 116:11). It is only after the new birth that the Spirit of the Lord creates this holy zeal in our minds, so that we say: “Cost what it will, even if I die for it, I only want to know what God means, how He wants to have things done. His will shall be my rule.” I want to study carefully all the Word of God. I do not want to choose some

certain works and observances. No, I want to pay careful attention to the innermost being, the heart, thoughts, desires, and secret inclinations which no man sees. It is true that thereby I may be punished and become downhearted in all things. But when Christ has been glorified to my soul and I have forgiveness for everything so that I rejoice at His perpetual grace, I also have a heartfelt love to all that God wants. There is truth in my godliness, when I do good with heartfelt delight and not under compulsion. I now walk before the Lord God both with regard to my inner and my outer man. And thereby I become more and more purged, honest and true in thoughts, words, and all my being. This is altogether a work of the Spirit of the Lord. Because He works truth in our being, He is also called the Spirit of truth. And therefore all the work of the new birth in us is called to *be of the truth* and to *walk in truth* (1 John 3:19, 3 John 4).

But the devil wants to destroy all that God has worked. Therefore he always works to make the soul false and lax again, so that it will not pay such careful attention to the meaning and will of God. It is required that, by the grace received, we fear this deceit of the devil in earnest. It is required that we are most scrupulous so that we do not give room for any falseness in our mind. No, at the very first perception of it we should immediately call on God: "Rather let any other evil thing befall me, than that I should become false before Thee! Rather use most bitter means, O God, if only Thou makest me rightly honest before Thee." This also is to gird about the loins of the mind with truth. And if this is not done, then everything is lost.

That a Christian still feels the serpent's seed creep in his nature in all evil inclinations, including that of falseness, is not unto death, so long as an honest spirit fights against it, curses this brood of the serpent, and calls upon God. Yes, the one who does not feel any falseness in himself, but thinks himself quite clean from that, has already been lulled to sleep by its spirit. But falseness becomes unto death when a man begins to tender allegiance to it, makes a secret compact with it, and intends to follow it. Then the very spirit and being are false. Such a Christian cannot wage the war of the Spirit. No, even if in only one thing he knows in himself that he tenders allegiance to falseness, he is immediately powerless, shy before God, cowardly in the fight, and unsteady in all his life. On the other hand, where honesty dwells, the devil cannot accomplish anything, because there all temptations to sin only lead to increased prayer and fear of God.

## September 28

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*Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him – Heb. 12:5.*

**Y**ou have grace to believe the forgiveness of your sins and consider yourself a child of God. But still you are ready to become impatient and displeased with the household of your heavenly Father just because things have not gone according to your heart's desire, plan, and calculation. Maybe there was something you desired very much, but you did not get it. On the contrary, what you have feared most has happened to you. We wish to speak some words with you.

Many short trials and afflictions can also do evil to your heart. One is persecuted by men for a time. Another falls ill, but gets well again. A third has lost something, but it did not concern his future, and so on. All those are small exercises for a child. One is easily comforted for them. The really deep sufferings are those which seem to concern all your life and your future. You see your life's dearest wishes and hopes come to nought. You sought to become happy, but seem to have only become unhappy. You are afflicted with something from which you cannot hope for deliverance here in this present life, for instance an incurable disease. Or you are afflicted with a person to whom you are bound for all your life, and who is a cross to you. Or you had attached the whole of your heart's happiness to a person, and this person has now been taken from you, and so on.

You now feel sad in silence and think yourself unhappy. But lift up your eyes and look straight forward at the infinite eternity! Are you quite certain that you do not need the strange and hard ways of God in order to reach your home safely? Have you forgotten so completely what a great and stupendous fight is the matter of this life? It is a matter of whether you will become saved and come to heaven. And that at the very time when the whole world lies in wickedness, and you believe that few they be that are saved, yes, that "the righteous scarcely be saved" (1 Pet. 4:18).

You believe and perhaps experience that all your being has been saturated with the poison of the old serpent. It is that way with every human being. Your heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). It always has an inclination to the wrong way. Your flesh is full of lusts and desires.

You believe and see that all the world around you is full of seductions. You believe and see that the power and cunning of the devil are so great and manifold that many great saints have been seduced, secretly deceived, and captivated, so that they have got lost forever. Why, those are dreadful things! And still you can think that only you will be exempted from all danger! You mean that *you* can never be deceived by your false heart and the old serpent. Are you confident that no doubt everything will go well for you? Are you sure that you will get through all the dangers of this world? "Oh," you say, "how is all this connected? I think

myself unhappy. Why, that cannot be the same as that I am at ease and think myself exempted from eternal danger!” Reply: There is a deeper connection than you think. Be sure that God “doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men” (Lam. 3:33), but only when need be. Be certain that, were the suffering not needed for your eternal weal, the infinite love in God’s heart would sooner have given you a paradise on earth.

And even if it were not always a matter of the escaping of eternal death itself, it should be enough for you that the Lord wants to sanctify you still more. He wants to mortify your old man and make you richer in spiritual power, life and spirit, faith, prayer, love, watchfulness, and humility. Do you think such things are of no value? Do you think so indifferently of your sin and your fleshliness that you do not want God to mortify them? Do you not attach much value to God and His pleasure? Should you be against it, if God wants to gain more glory through you? Do you care more for your earthly happiness than the glory of God? O man, think of who has created you for this world. He has not only given you an immortal soul. He has also given His own beloved Son to die a bloody death in order to save you! Has He not got the right to make you a “vessel unto honor”? (Rom. 9:21). Has He not got the right to arrange for you to promote His glory? And are you so much opposed to that, that you get angry because of it? “Oh, no,” you say, “I do not get angry with that. On the contrary, it is my sincere prayer that God would make me rightly serious and holy to the glory of His name. How often have I not prayed that He would mortify my flesh, when I have felt my own great negligence and powerlessness in that respect. I am not displeased that He mortifies my flesh. No, I speak about my bitter experiences. They make me unhappy.” Reply: Then you want to be crucified and mortified, but without suffering. You want to suffer the death of the cross with a smiling face. You want to have nails through your hands and feet, but without pain. Oh, how foolish our thoughts are. Therefore, now reflect that your old man cannot be mortified without suffering. You have prayed for God to mortify your flesh. Then do not wonder why many bitter things befall you. By such a prayer you have yourself drawn them upon you. God is very ready to hear a prayer for the mortifying of your flesh, and an increase of grace. But He does not know any better method than suffering, contrarinesses, temptations, the cross, and afflictions.

## September 29

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*He saved us, by the washing of regeneration – Tit. 3:5.*

**I**n these words we see what treasures of grace the Lord has attached to baptism. We see that, and how much we receive from it. It says no less than: “He saved us.” And to be saved means to be delivered from all our sins, from the power of death and the devil, and on the contrary, to be put into the infinite inheritance and favors of eternal life. It means at once to get back all the grace, the adoption with God, the glory and splendor for which we were intended in creation. By sin we had fallen from them, but by all His doing and suffering, yes, by His death and resurrection Christ gained back our title to them. Oh, what a matchless counsel of love!

And all this Christ wanted to connect with, and, so to say, include in, the water of baptism, and He wanted to be able to distinguish the individual possessor of all this grace by means of a visible sign in His church. He wanted to make us at least embrace His great, but spiritual and invisible gift and draw comfort from it.

To the outward eyes the water of baptism, the outward seems very trifling, but it is, nevertheless, a water rich and precious beyond measure. It is as if the owner of a great estate would say about a small ring of gold: “Whosoever will get and receive this ring will own myself and all my possessions.” Even if that ring has only a small value in money, it would now be wonderfully precious, because it would not only represent its money value. Now the entire person who has given the promise and also all his great possessions would be included in the value of the ring, only because of the word of promise attached to the ring, namely, that the one getting and receiving it would own all this. It is that way also with baptism: without the Word of God it is also only water of no value. But by the word of promise Christ attached to this water, it is a sacrament wherein all grace and eternal bliss have been included.

It is full of instruction to see how often God has used this method of attaching invisible and heavenly gifts of grace to earthly and visible things and signs. The weak, sensual, skeptical human heart has always needed such things. We have many examples of this in the Old Testament, examples plainly symbolizing our salvation by Christ. When the children of Israel were to be saved from the sword of the angel of death, it happened by the visible sign that the two side posts and the lintel were marked with the blood of the passover. And when they had been bitten by the fiery serpents in the wilderness, they would be saved from death if they looked upon the fiery serpent of brass on the pole. About this sign of salvation it says expressly: “For he that turned himself toward it was not saved by the thing that he saw, but by Thee, that art the Savior of all... For it was neither herb, nor

mollifying plaister, that restored them to health: but Thy word, O Lord, which healeth all things” (Wisdom of Sol. 16:7, 12, Apocrypha).

In 2 Kings 5 we also have a pertinent symbol of the washing of faith and the attitude of our reason thereto. When Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, came to the prophet Elisha to seek cleansing and remedy for his leprosy, Elisha only sent him the following promise through a servant: “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thou shalt be clean.” Then Naaman was wroth and wanted to go away because the prophet did not come personally to perform some solemn ceremonies, but only sent a simple message with a servant. But when finally Naaman let himself be persuaded to obey the word of the prophet and go out into Jordan, he immediately became quite healthy and clean as promised. And why did he become so? Certainly not because of any quality of the Jordan water. No, only because of the word of promise attached to it: “Wash, and thou shalt be clean!”

This is a picture of baptism — and of us. At first we see only an insignificant servant of the Word who officiates at the baptism — and that with such simple and plain gestures. If we could see God Himself baptize with such heavenly solemnity, and hear Him promise us salvation, then we could believe that it is so important and precious. But now it is such an old and remote promise. Now we do not see anything before our eyes. Secondly, we stare at the water itself, and think: Is for instance the water of my tears of repentance not better for the washing away of my sin, than the water only taken from the well and poured on the body? But if we go on only staring at the water and forget the word of promise, then we become lighthearted despisers of the Word and remain in our leprosy of sin.

## September 30

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*He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities* – Ps. 103:10.

**T**he words are so full of grace and comfort and so clear, that we can never rejoice enough at them, never praise and thank enough for them, never take them deeply enough to the heart! First, they are the entire contents of the gospel, that God does not deal with us after our sins, but after the merits of His Son. The Lord has once dealt with one Person “after our sins” and rewarded Him “according to our iniquities.” “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). He “Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses” (Matt. 8:17). “The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities” (v. 5). “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor. 5:19).

Here is the reason why He does not deal with us after our sins, why very great sinners have received grace, and those who expend much self-effort in saintliness have been condemned. But it is true that the Lord wants to deal with certain people after their sins. It is said in Rom. 4:4: “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt,” i.e., they will strive after merit, because they want to have it so, and thus have not truly kissed the Son. “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (v. 5).

In short: That God does not deal with us after our sins is the sum of the contents of the gospel. And nevertheless, the tainted thought dwells indelibly in all men, even in the faithful, that God will still be more gracious to us when we are more pious, and less gracious when we have sinned. But if it were so, then verily righteousness would be of works, and then Christ would have died in vain. “And if it is by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:6).

But furthermore see how high this reckoned righteousness is. Oh, the wonderful words now following in our psalm: “For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him” (Ps. 103:11). May every Christian impress these glorious words deeply on his heart — this great picture that the Spirit of the Lord Himself has used, and they will make a heavenly paradise in his heart.

Think “as heaven is high above the earth” — no human eye can measure that; and still here it says, as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards us. Now the heaven is so high above the earth, that all the inequalities here on the earth do not cause the least little disproportion in the heaven. To be sure to us down here, it is a great distance between the bottom of the valley and the highest



tops of the mountains. Thus to us down here, there are great irregularities on earth. But no mountaintop reaches up to the heaven to make an unevenness there.

So it also is with sin and grace. To us our sins often are like high mountains. But the grace of God is as high above them all as the heaven is high above the earth, so that all our sins will not cause even the least disparity in grace. And think: if sin could cause unevenness in grace, so that we would have grace from God, when we have done some better works, and would not have the same grace, when some shortcomings appear, then verily righteousness would be of works. Then everything would be false that the gospel teaches about reconciliation and grace.

Notice here how our reason and feeling get dizzy at this thought! And when Christ says of the weak disciples: “Now ye are clean, and clean every whit,” and when Paul says: “If it is by grace, then is it no more of works,” and when David says in this verse that grace is as high above us, as the heaven is high above the earth — they all seem to be fools and liars! So deeply the taint dwells in us, the taint that grace must depend on works. But the one that will be able to stand steadfast in such a fight of faith, must impress the words of the Holy Spirit deeply on his heart, and in earnest pray to God for that faith.

# October 1

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*And forgive us our debts* – Matt. 6:12.

**T**his prayer, “forgive us our debts,” is the heart-work of the new creature by means of which all other powers in him are set into operation. When the heart in the body stops and no longer pumps the blood through the arteries, life is gone, and the soul leaves the body. So it is when this prayer ceases, and one no longer sighs for forgiveness, no longer needs to come to the mercy seat. Then it is all up with the life of grace. Then the Spirit of God flees. We know that the spiritual life depends on two principal works of grace which in brief are called repentance and faith, or on one hand the living knowledge of sin, which knowledge drives man to ask both for forgiveness for, and help against the sin, and on the other hand the knowledge of grace, because of which knowledge the human being comes to the mercy seat and asks for and receives this forgiveness. It is because of this most important point in our spiritual life that the Lord taught us this prayer. We know that if there is everything which serves to life and piety in a man, but this conversation at the mercy seat is missing, then everything is false and dead. The Lord Christ announces this when He says to the angel of the church in Ephesus: “I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love” (Rev. 2:4). “The first love” is the love of the betrothal, the love of the one who is just pardoned, because of the forgiveness received, whereof the Lord said: “to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much.”

This is the first thing this prayer wants to teach us. Because when the Lord taught His children to say in this daily prayer: “Forgive us our debts,” I first of all learn from it, that His children should be such that ever after they should feel a need for forgiveness because of the worrying presence of sins. Because He cannot have intended His prayer as an empty expression of something one no longer is worried about, i.e., as hypocrisy, but truly as an expression of a real concern. May God make us afraid of such a hypocrisy where we would continue to say this prayer when we do not know of any worrying sins in ourselves! Thus we find that this prayer shows that true Christians should have a continuous feeling of sin and a continuous need for assurance of forgiveness of sins. This is the first thing we should learn and reflect seriously upon.

The second thing we find here is that it will not be any proof against our Christianity that we are aware of sins worrying us. There are some Christians, who, with all their light with regard to the gospel and their diligent use of it, seldom are quite free in their spirits, only because they do not have the power and the liberation from their sins which they think should accompany the right faith. They well know because they see it throughout the Scriptures, that the faithful also have sins, that the flesh fights against the spirit, etc., but nevertheless, as soon as some real sins

appear in themselves, they get perplexed and lose their boldness because of the thought that such sins would not be found in them if they were true Christians. Thereby they also betray that inside them, there is still a hidden imagination, that true Christians will be free from real sins. Each time such men say this prayer they should be awakened to see their error and reflect that there still must be real sins in true Christians, because there is really no need for us to ask for forgiveness for sins that do not really exist in us. No, when the Lord here teaches His closest disciples a prayer they and all true Christians should pray daily, and in that prayer teaches them to say: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," I notice that His true children are still afflicted with real sins. I notice that He had not taken it for granted that His children would be free from sins, but on the contrary, that they would still always be worried by sin.

The third thing I notice, because the Lord taught us to say this prayer, is that He really intended and wanted to forgive us our sins, that He prepared for a perpetual forgiving with regard to His children. Just think how the faithful Savior Himself said: "Therefore pray ye, Our Father, forgive us our debts," proving that He truly wanted to forgive them. Here we again have the mighty consolation to be found in the fact that the Lord has taught us to ask for something definite. Thus we know, that He must want to give us at least the thing He Himself has taught us to ask for. Or can we imagine that the faithful Lord and Savior, who gave His blood for the remission of sins, and who had taught us how we should ask for this forgiveness, would not give it, when we come and do exactly what He Himself has taught us, and ask for it? In this most serious matter with regard to our souls, would He mock us that way? He who has come because of great love and has given the blood for us? Who is it then that makes this matter so uncertain to us, who plagues our hearts with a dimness and uncertainty with regard to the grace of God so that almost never are we rightly content and certain of it? Should we not realize that it is the Enemy of our souls, and therefore begin to have confidence in the faithfulness of Christ, and be quite certain about this forgiveness!

## October 2

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*As we forgive our debtors* – Matt. 6:12.

**M**any pious souls consider this addition to the fifth prayer as something so terrible, that it often causes them to become downhearted. This is due to a misunderstanding. On the contrary, this addition should contribute to assurance in faith, if we understand it the right way. To some false Christians who can live without reconciliation and in hatred it is rightly dreadful, and for them it is the key by which they are, in fact, locked in eternal condemnation.

Let us then look at this addition: “as we forgive our debtors.” Many have wondered whether really the Lord Christ wanted to infer, that only to the extent we forgive our neighbors, He will forgive us. And they have thought: “Why, He is God and not man, and does not judge according to what the eyes see. How could we then even be really certain of forgiveness, if God does not forgive more than we forgive?” But there is no need for us to be uncertain of the meaning of the addition, when we see how the Lord Himself explained it as soon as He had dictated the Lord’s prayer.

The first thing He said was just to explain this paragraph. He said: “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” And in Matt. 18 the Lord tells a particular parable in order to inculcate this fact, namely the one about the servant owing ten thousand talents who had everything forgiven, but who then claimed all that his fellow-servant owed to him, one hundred pence, and because of his lack of mercy again came under his own great debt, which now had to be paid completely. Then the Lord declares: “So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” From this we see the Lord’s real meaning with regard to this addition.

From this parable we also see that it does not at all concern the world. It seems to say: It concerns a good man who has not rendered account on his own behalf to the king, i.e., who has not become united with God by repentance and faith, but still lives in the natural state. No matter how blissful he feels because he has no enemy on earth but always readily forgives all wicked people their trespasses against him, none of that counts. He will still be cast into the uttermost darkness of the pit, simply because he had not sorted out his own account with the King. This is the first thing we should reflect upon here.

But on the other hand, by the great grace of God and the drawing of the Father, a man may really come to repentance and reconciliation with God. But he then comes out into the world and is brought into such circumstances that the only thing that was the pivot at the moment of his conversion, namely the grace of God and friendship with Him, gets pushed to one side, so that, because of very great

wickedness and unrighteousness on the part of his neighbors for instance, he can continue in hatred towards them, and cannot in his heart forgive them. In such a case that soul has rebuffed the pardon he had already received from God, and has suffered a very great loss due to the wickedness of the neighbors or, rather, due to the apostasy of his own spirit.

But you say: “Is it possible that God judges a weak man like that because he cannot forgive such wicked men?” Yes, not only is it possible, but it is exactly what Christ has told us in explicit words in the parable above. Therefore, He has put these words in our daily prayer in order to remind us of this important fact. The matter is like this: it is true that the unrighteous also who have vexed you to hatred will be punished. And it is true that the blood of Christ has blotted out sins as great as your hatred. But that you can remain in hatred shows that you are fallen, that you are no longer in the grace of the new birth. “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world” (1 John 5:4) — also overcomes the greatest wickedness of the world as we can see from the holy martyrs who let themselves be burned with a joyous and quiet heart. “And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

The thing is that the right appreciation of the grace of God, whereby your own sins once were such a great evil to you, that in comparison with that, the wickedness of all other people became so small to you, and the friendship with God was such a great and good thing to you that for this good thing you let everything else go — the thing is that this mind has now been lost if you can be overcome of evil in such a way that you can remain in hatred.

This is always a matter of how great a man thinks his own sin is, and the grace of God. If your own sin becomes great enough to you, then the wickedness of other people becomes small. If the grace of God becomes precious enough for you, then you will easily let everything else go. This is why the weakest, most wretched Christians depressed under their own sins and wretchedness can very easily stand the test of forgiving others. Yes, the weaker and more wretched they are in their own eyes, the easier it is for them to forgive others. This is the secret of this addition. Oh, it is so fine, so beautiful, that it surely reveals its Master!

## October 3

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*He [Christ] rose again the third day according to the scriptures – 1 Cor. 15:4.*

**B**y this remark about Christ in 1 Cor. 15, the apostle has quite unostentatiously laid the firmest ground for all his proof of the doctrine about the resurrection of the dead, before he had yet told the Corinthians what he intended to prove. First of all, he had thereby taken them from the unsteady drift-sand of their own thoughts and opinions to the firm foundation of all true faith. Namely that God has spoken. God has spoken on earth, and what God has said must be valid forever, no matter what objections our poor heads and hearts make. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but no jot or tittle of the Word of God.

It is important to notice this here, because as regards this, and every article of faith, the whole of the ground for all our doubts is only that we do not understand how it is possible. Our small heads rise up against the great God, and want, as Luther says, “to seize Him by the collar and ask how He can say so.” And in our blindness we do not reflect upon the fact that we do not even understand our own body and soul which are so close to us. We cannot understand our own faculties such as our memory, our thought, our sight, our faculty of speech.

If we only think thoroughly of these faculties, we must confess that they are wonderful creations of God, which we do not understand. And still we want to understand the very Creator, or find fault with Him and make Him a liar as soon as He says something to us that we do not understand. Who of us was His counselor when He created the first human head on earth? God, be gracious towards us! Do not let us become fools!

Look, when the apostle now began by reminding the Corinthians of what had been announced to them according to the Scriptures, he at once wanted to take the whole of the matter away from the jurisdiction of their reason and bring them directly to the Word. Faith should not see anything else than the Word and should not let reason judge the holy articles of faith. Because otherwise we will soon lose all true light, and finally we will not believe anything else than what we see with our eyes and feel with our hands.

Reason certainly cannot understand, for instance, the article which declares that I should believe in the resurrection of the dead. Reason cannot understand that all men will become alive again one day and that our body and soul will come together again the way they are now, because our reason only looks at the things before our eyes. It only sees that the world has lasted for so long and that men die one after the other. It only sees that everything becomes dead, molds away, and becomes dust and ashes in the grave, and that so far not even one has returned. Moreover, it sees that some bodies have been burned to ashes and the ashes scattered, and others have fallen into the sea, and have been eaten up by the fishes. When our reason

now wants to find out how our Lord God will keep count of all these and make new bodies of them one day, then all this article of faith certainly seems done for.

And it always happens that way when our reason judges a pure article of faith, and man does not stick only to the Word. When, for instance, I am worried because of my sins, and the judgments of the law and my conscience, I certainly must lose all confidence in the grace and pleasure of God, if I do not keep my eye strictly fixed on God's covenant of grace in Christ and His declarations about that. If I let this promise go and come only into my own thoughts and feelings, then my faith will soon be done for. It has also often gone that way with the very doctrine about Christ, when someone has wanted to understand how God could ordain His Son to be our propitiation. Or how the Son of God could become a man, weep, pray, suffer, and die. Or how God has been able to leave a great part of the world in ignorance about this, and how He has not spread His gospel by means of angels for instance, etc. Then that man has stumbled on all sorts of strange and foolish thoughts, and the outcome has been that he has not believed in anything at all.

Today also it is happening the same way with many, with regard to other statements in God's Word. And when they forget that God is almighty; or confess it by their mouth, but think in their hearts that He cannot do this and that, then they soon lose very glorious truths of faith, only because they mix with them their blind and presumptuous reason. God has spoken; that should then be sufficient. A divine and heavenly declaration and assurance are needed in order that I shall remain firm in the faith that though I am lying in the ground, moldering away and becoming ashes, I shall one day enter eternal life with a beautiful and glorious body. And they should not be guided by any feeling and seeing. No, they should look above all such things up to Him who has spoken so. He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). It did not seem likely that Christ would rise when He had been killed so horribly and was lying in the grave under the sealed stone. Then indeed it was by far too difficult to believe that He was now Lord over death and the grave. But "Earth's mass is poised on three of His fingers" (Isa. 40:12, Knox), and as He has said, so it must also happen in that way. No matter how absurd, yes, impossible it seems to all reason, our resurrection also must one day be a reality, as truly as God Himself has said so, and cannot lie. How important it was that the apostle brought the Corinthians to the foundation of the divine Word.

## October 4

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*For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die* – Rom. 8:13.

**H**ere the apostle quite simply and plainly pronounces judgment over all those living after the flesh. Hereby he especially wants to awaken those to reflection who under the pretext of the freedom of the gospel, want to follow the lusts of the flesh. The apostle here speaks to a group of Christians, and he wants, if possible, to awaken them from such wrong imaginings, so that they may not end in eternal death, instead of the life and grace they glory in. It will not do at all, he endeavors to say, that you who have been saved from sin and death, and are partakers of the grace of Christ, should go on with your previous, fleshly life. If you do so, you should not think that you will in any case be able both to continue that life and also go to heaven. No, for you must surely end in eternal death. The merits of Christ will certainly not serve for those who want to remain in their sins. The death of Christ has been given to serve only those who desire with joy to become free from their sins, but are not capable of themselves to deliver themselves from them.

It is necessary to understand somewhat more clearly what it means to “live after the flesh.” The natural heart usually wants to interpret that matter according to its condition so that hypocritical souls want that phrase to stand only for a heinous life of manifest vices. On the other hand, serious and fearing souls dread the possibility that every weakness or sin indicates this life “after the flesh.” Apart from that, some have often been too vague and careless when they have explained these words. That is especially dangerous, when it is a matter of life and death, as in this case.

What does it then mean to “live after the flesh”? First we should note that “the flesh” does not mean any special sin or lust, but the whole of our depraved nature, the way it has been since our birth from our father and mother. As Christ says: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6). Hearing this some people might say: To live after the flesh is to give the flesh freedom to do what it wants. This is so vaguely expressed that it can easily be misunderstood. There is hardly anybody that is so ungodly, that he does not fight against his flesh in some form or other. Then that person would be able to think: I do not give my flesh *all* freedom, and therefore I know that I am not living according to the flesh. On the other hand, there is no believing Christian who is not compelled to confess with repentance, that he sins in word and deed. Such things always presuppose that the flesh has *some* freedom!

Therefore, a more distinct conception of the matter is needed. Those who have interpreted this text with Christian understanding and in more detail have often said: The apostle seeks to say that if the Christians become careless and give way to the flesh, they can die spiritually thereby, as sin works either sleep and hardening, or



unbelief and despair. It is true that this is a Christian interpretation. But nevertheless still another interpretation is no doubt more correct. The words of the apostle are much more definite than the interpretation mentioned above.

It is true that it is dreadfully dangerous to be careless and give way to the flesh, but it is not the same thing as to live after the flesh. According to the apostle's way of speaking, the words "ye shall die" mean something more than that you shall die spiritually. From other places where the apostle uses such threatening language to the Christians, we find that he pronounces a real death-sentence, and speaks about eternal death as the wages of sin. The very way of speaking used by the apostle is the most important ground of explanation. As the word "live" shows, to "live after the flesh" does not only mean to forget oneself occasionally, but to lead a life that is according to the flesh or the fallen nature.

Thus to live after the flesh must mean the same thing as to "walk after the flesh" (Rom. 8:4), to follow the fallen nature with both the mind and the life. Now we know that a fall is sometimes to the right-hand side, that is, to self-righteousness, the works of the law. Such as the fall of the Galatians of which the apostle says: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace" (5:4). And about this very fall he says "having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:3).

Sometimes a fall is to the left-hand side, into the impurity of sin. About this Peter says that those who have once "escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of ... Christ" and have again been "entangled therein, and overcome" (2 Pet. 2:20), have sought a false comfort for the sin and have begun to live in it "willfully," the way Judas did. In that case they always have the same sign as he, that they no longer confess their sin to the Lord and seek redemption, but tender allegiance to and defend it. Either this, or they live under a hidden despair, when they have put away their good conscience and have made shipwreck in their faith (1 Tim. 1:19), so that they no longer live at the mercy seat. All such things are called "living after the flesh" and are something quite different from being brought into captivity by the law of sin which is in our members (Rom. 7:23), in which the Spirit fights against sin, and enables us to "thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:25).

## October 5

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*If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live – Rom. 8:13.*

**T**he apostle shows us here the right power to obtain victory over the flesh. This is for consolation and guidance for those who know their own weakness and powerlessness in the fight. Something other than only human strength is needed in order to overcome and mortify the mighty lusts of the flesh. As also Luther when he speaks about the mortifying of the flesh through the Spirit, tells us that, at the moment of temptation we should “remember the Word of God and strengthen ourselves against the temptation by faith in the forgiveness for sins.”

Oh, that we would all be able to remember this, when things go really bad with us! When we lack all power in the fight, and only feel the mightiness of the flesh, so that we often fall and forget ourselves, and it seems to us as if God were dead and had vanished from the world. If only we would remember this! If only we would remember that then is the time to drop our own fight and turn only to what God says about the great grace of God in Christ! If only we would remember to turn to the gospel at such a time and all the means of grace in order to restore the broken peace of our faith! If only we would leave all thoughts of our own power or weakness, and pose only one question: “God, do I get Thy grace? Do I get Thy forgiveness for all my sins?” To this question we must have a definite reply before we can get any power.

However, we should not seek the reply in our feelings, but only in God’s own Word. If you have the consolation that God is your Friend and Father, then leave it to Him to take care also of overcoming your temptations. This is the secret of the power to victory. As long as you think yourself capable of doing something, you will always be allowed to fall, because the zeal of the Lord to glorify His grace is so great, that He would rather allow our most beautiful life to be ruined than give His glory to the creature.

The final instruction for all our fights for the mortifying of our flesh is that it is only the Lord that has the power to do it; it is the Lord that performs it, though in such a way, that He rouses anxiety in us about it, and works in us a poor spirit and faith, willingness, and prayer. Therefore He exhorts us to seek it all with Him. And when the point has been reached where we in faith sincerely desire all grace and power from Him, then He always performs His work to mortify our flesh, no matter how He leads us. If He hears our prayer and gives us grace and power to give up all ungodliness and worldly lust, then our flesh becomes mortified. But if He withdraws His power from us and leaves us to be sifted by Satan, then also our flesh becomes mortified — even the innermost flesh of the old man, the deep imagination about our own power.

The deeds of the body to be mortified are the manifestations of all sorts of inherent depravity, which get mixed into our thoughts, emotions, words, and deeds.

So there will never be any lack of occasion to mortify the flesh. In Gal. 5 a great number of works of the flesh are listed. But even if you are not tempted to heinous sins, you still have a deep and infinite self-will, an opinion of your own, a will of your own, and a glory of your own to be perpetually on your guard against.

It is easier to forget this finer, inward depravity than the outer and more heinous one, but still it is the very source of all evil. Therefore it requires special, serious attention. For this reason reflect often that what you yourself think and want is the first thing you should suspect, prove by the Word of God, and mortify by the power of the Spirit.

When you are, for instance, tempted to wrath and impatience towards men, you should remember how much God has forgiven you, and how you therefore should forgive your neighbor. Maybe you are tempted to pride of intellect, learning, art, skill. Then remember that "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). Maybe you are tempted by sensual pleasure and unclean lusts. Then you should remember that you are the holy temple of God which should not be defiled. First and last you are in the eternal grace and company of God, and therefore should walk worthily of Him. Maybe you are tempted to greed and self-interest in commerce and work. Then remember that you are an heir of heaven, and that you should seek those things which are above.

In this way there will certainly be a perpetual need for mortifying our flesh, and this mortifying will often become a bitter suffering to us, and will therefore demand infinite patience. But blessed are those who are steadfast to the end in this respect! They are children of God and heirs of heaven. It will often be bitter, but to God, the angels, and saints, it is a sweet sight when, for instance, a young person, who earlier loved the world and its pleasures very much, now gives it all up for the Lord's sake. Or when a child, who was very self-willed by nature, now fights against itself, and subdues its own will under the will of God and its parents. When a person, who was much inclined to pride and vanity, has now become modest and simple by the chastisement of the Spirit. Yes, what a beautiful sight when a haughty and wicked person begins to chastise himself or herself, and be mild, humble and meek, etc. When, for the sake of grace, a human being thus begins to go straight against his nature, and fights against himself, that is certainly called mortifying the deeds of the body through the Spirit. The apostle says that such people shall live, and go to heaven. After a short time of mortifying of their flesh they shall have eternal life with God, His angels, and saints, in infinite bliss.

## October 6

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*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?*

*It is God that justifieth* – Rom. 8:33.

**B**riefly and word for word: “Who wants to persecute God’s elect?” “God’s elect” are those who “are in Christ Jesus.” God has all His pleasure in Him, and He “hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). These are the ones He has also taken out from the world in this present time, or separated to be His children and heirs.

About this the Lord said: “I have chosen you out of the world” (John 15:19). This is the only true and wholesome use of the word “elect.” This application stands together with all the Word of God and gives both consolation and fear of God. If, on the other hand, I were to turn my thoughts on to God’s providence — which is a secret to us — and remember that He has seen that I will either remain in faith to the end or that I will not do so, then this would show a light-heartedness not worthy of a Christian in holy and serious matters. Yes, it would mean founding my consolation or alarm on loose thoughts and imaginations.

The only sure thing is that nothing will be able to separate us from Christ’s love, so long as we do not “sin willfully” (Heb. 10:26) or fall away, but fear to lose Him. We are unchangeably and always God’s elect. As Peter says: “Ye are a chosen generation” (1 Pet. 2:9), so our apostle here calls the faithful, “God’s elect.” Still he gives another and special ground for the consolation that no accusation will befall them, namely this: It is God that justifieth.

From this we notice that, in this matter he does not base our consolation on the providence of God, which always is hidden from us. But against: “lay anything to the charge” (“accuse” in Swedish), he puts “justifieth” as a completely opposite act. When God justifies, no accusation will be worth anything. Such is the consolation of the apostle in this text.

It is God that justifieth. God is the only Judge. God is the One we have offended by our sins. As David says: “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned” (Ps. 51:4). When God justifies, who wants to accuse? What do the accusations of our heart and conscience matter then? There is an especially mighty consolation in the fact, which many overlook, that while God is the only One we should fear, it is God Himself that justifies. It is God Himself that defends us. It is God Himself that has taken our cause to His heart. It is God Himself that uses so many words to convince us of the firmness of His grace.

Remember that ever since eternity the Lord God has had this intention, and ever since the beginning of the world He has announced that He Himself has wanted to deliver us from our sins. And when the fullness of time was come, He gave His own Son to fulfill all that the law could not do. Therefore He also justifies all

those who believe in Him. Think, how can sins then matter anything before God to condemn us? If so, God Himself would have disapproved of His eternal counsel and His own most precious deed.

We should never forget that our justification is God's own free deed. As the apostle says: He has "predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:5). The Lord God Himself also says: "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake" (Isa. 43:25). There is also nobody that can justify or redeem a sinner from his sin and declare him righteous, except God alone. It is God alone that justifies. How can any accusation then be valid against a human being whom God justifies?

The apostle here speaks in the same, consoling, defiant tone as does Christ in the parable of the workers in the vineyard, where the householder says: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? If I want to give this man an undeserved gift, what is that to thee?" So the apostle also seeks to say here: God is free to justify whom He wants. Now He wants to justify all those who kiss the Son. He puts on them a divine righteousness and judges that no sins shall be imputed to them to condemn them. He announces that all the sins still troubling them will always be forgiven to them.

Has He not got the right to do what He wants with His own? Why, He alone is the Lord and Judge of mankind. And if we do not rightly understand and appreciate the merits of the Son of God, or the justifying grace of God, it will still be appreciated by God Himself. He Himself still considers His own work great and precious.

If now my heart and conscience do not understand and esteem what God has done for us in His Son, but only feel and rate my sins, this is something not valid before God. And when it is not valid before God, but only in my feeling, my unbelieving heart and opinion, then all such accusations do not accomplish anything. They can only worry me for a while, but they cannot condemn me.

Such things are meant by the apostle when he says: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." As God thus Himself must consider this our justification to be perfect, we should certainly praise this His great work of grace, in blessed comfort and security, and say: Everything is well! Everything has been made perfect! Even if my sins were a thousand times more numerous and more difficult, they would still not weigh anything against the justification given to me by the great God. Praise His name!

## October 7

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*Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked – Eph. 6:16.*

In antiquity the soldiers were armed with a shield carried by their left hand and arm, and intended for the protection of the whole of their body against darts and javelins, because the soldier could take such a position behind his shield. Such is also the shield of faith, the faith holding up only Christ and His word, yes, faith holding up the very Son of God before itself and taking cover behind Him, when nothing else helps. This faith is also such a shield as protects our entire being, no matter how many and grave our faults and sins may be.

No matter who you are that read this, if you want to be a Christian, impress this instruction well on your heart. We are convinced that, no matter how true the work of God may be within us, and no matter how seriously we put on all the cuirass of God and watch and pray, we will still always feel and see much more sin and unbelief in ourselves than piety and righteousness, provided that we are quite asleep.

All that is left in us from Adam becomes an inexhaustible depravity, so that finally we, after all, must be saved as equally undeservedly as a thief, or a brigand coming to Jesus directly from the forest where the robbers dwell. We work, we preach, admonish, punish, warn, pray, encourage to the end that the Christians might be holy in all their being.

There is nothing that causes all honest souls to cast themselves so utterly at the mercy seat as the desire to get rid of their evil. But it will never be otherwise here on earth than that the flesh will be always full of wickedness and sins. And it is sad, but these often break out in deed. And all the works of the Spirit, faith, love, and prayer are always infected and mixed with the impurity of the vessel. Therefore at long last we must only ask for undeserved grace like other great sinners. We must pray Christ to cover, hide, and defend us with His merits against all the tribulations of Satan. Otherwise we will be lost, and this even when our life is at its best.

Thus we must always hold this fact high, great, and inviolate above all others, that we are saved only because of Christ. We must always hold the righteousness of Christ Himself in front of us when we stand before God. Because not even can faith in itself, as a virtue in us, protect us against this wrath. No, it is really only the object of faith, *Christ*, with His obedience and bloody death for us, that is the shield against which all the glowing darts of Satan shall stop and be quenched.

May every Christian then, above everything else that can be thought and mentioned, get well accustomed to using this shield of faith in all possible events. That is, as soon as God warns, bids, or forbids something, you should revere all this with a great fear of God, and invoke Him for grace to be able to act accordingly.

But as soon as you again see your great shortcoming and wretchedness, that you have not fulfilled or cannot fulfill what God has commanded, you should at once let it be a distinct conclusion that, nevertheless, you are protected from wrath by the flesh of Christ alone.

The covenant of grace in Christ is a separate matter. It will stand forever, no matter whether it goes better or worse with our obedience and piety, as long as we still remain at the mercy seat. There are infinitely different degrees of piety and living as far as Christians are concerned, but salvation and eternal bliss lie in one thing only, that we are in Christ by faith. As John says: "He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:12). Therefore no matter what is lacking in you, say immediately: "May God forgive and help me, a poor sinner!"

It is deplorable, it is dreadful, that I am still so wretched. But infinite thanks and praise to God, the eternal King! There is another who is my righteousness before Him! You, wicked Satan! you have filled up all my being with a lot of evil. Thereby you now want to frighten me to death and condemn me altogether. But another Man will forbid it. His name is Jesus Christ. He is my eternal and faithful Savior. He is my full and sufficient righteousness. If He is not so, then I and every Christian are eternally lost.

You are right in this matter, that I am not so well girt about with truth as I should be. It is regrettable, but there is still much falseness in my heart. But I know a Man whose side was pierced with a spear. Only in that side there is a heart that is perfectly filled with truth. That side is my shield against your glowing darts. It is true and it is deplorable that my deeds and my life are still so infirm and unsteady. But I have seen a Man with pierced hands and feet. In those hands are my good works and in those feet my good life. If the works of Christ are not mine, then I am eternally lost.

It is true and it is my daily torment, that I still have so many evil thoughts. But I have seen a holy head with a crown of thorns. In that head are my good thoughts. I would so gladly see that my own Christianity were perfect. I have not prayed for anything else so much as I have prayed for that. But if it is a matter of my salvation and eternal bliss, then I must say this: I do not want to have any other righteousness but that of my Lord Christ. If my Christianity does not stand the test, that of my Lord Christ certainly does so. Therefore, He is dear, precious, and indispensable to me. In that way we can meet and quench "all the fiery darts of the wicked" only by this shield.

## October 8

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*And take the helmet of salvation – Eph. 6:17.*

**F**rom the parallel passage in 1 Thess. 5:8 we see what the helmet of salvation is. There it says: “Let us ... be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.” Thus it is the hope of salvation, i.e., a firm and living hope of the eternal bliss in heaven. That is our helmet. The helmet, or hat of warfare, was a metal cover on the head of the ancient warriors. It protected a very important part, because only one blow with a sword on the head could lead to immediate death, or make the warrior unfit for further fighting.

Our spiritual helmet is as important. Only take away the hope of salvation, and all spiritual power will go immediately, and all the Word of God will be without importance. The human being now only sees “the things which are seen” (2 Cor. 4:18). And then he will be fit for neither work nor for suffering. But as the metal cover on the warrior’s head caused him to dash forward in the battle with doubled boldness, and not to be afraid of the sword-blows, so also a firm and living hope of salvation causes us not to mind so much about what can meet us here in this present time. Instead the hope makes us only simply look at the pleasure of God. Because we know that there are such glorious things waiting for us after the fight, that all sufferings are not worthy to be compared with them.

But in order that the hope of salvation will really become such a helmet and power for us in the fight, something other than a number of words and beautiful thoughts are needed here. A profound pondering and a real faith are required here. When the sun is still shining and everything goes well and beautifully on our pathway, one can easily speak and sing about the eternal bliss of heaven, but at the same time may need that comfort the least.

But be prepared for it, for there will be other times coming, namely the evil, dark days, when all the world will become too narrow to you, when your heart will be fit to break with an indescribable anguish, so that you will want to “dig up death from hidden rooms,” when all the happiness of your life has been lost and you do not long for anything other than that your existence might come to an end altogether.

Therefore prepare yourself carefully for that. Look into it most seriously to see if we have got any real and sure foundation for our hope. And pray God for His Holy Spirit in order to get it deeply impressed on your innermost heart, so that it becomes your leading, principal thought throughout all your life. A certain and firm hope of salvation should lay a foundation in your soul for the right wisdom of life in the ups and downs of your life, a deep and imperturbable consolation in all afflictions, a divine peace and power in all fights and trials.

But this is not a subject for just anybody. First of all, it certainly cannot taste like anything else than lukewarm water in the mouth of those who want to have their good here, and to be the children of this world. “Heaven! — What? — Heaven? No,



tell us something about health and joy here.” In that way it echoes in their hearts. “Tell us something about food, clothes, glory, amusements. But Heaven! — well, heaven will probably come in its own time. We do not need it now.”

But also among those who have begun to seek things which are above and are in the covenant of God, many are quite unfit to know the value and power of the hope of salvation. Namely those who have not yet been greatly mortified, disappointed by their life on earth, wounded, downcast, and exhausted, but still have all sorts of beautiful plans and expectations regarding this life.

Be prepared however, that, provided you are prepared for heaven, there will be other times, when throughout all the Holy Writ you will not find any words sweeter than those about a blessed departure. As truly as you belong to Christ, your old man shall be crucified together with its lusts and desires. And a crucified life is an uneasy, hanging life, a perpetual dying.

What joy can one give to a man hanging on the cross? It is true that by the grace of God he may be given a momentary relief and rest, as an angel was sent to Gethsemane to strengthen Jesus. But this relief will soon be interrupted by a new blow, pain and bitterness, tears and crying. The longer we live as Christians, the more true will we find the words of the apostle: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor. 15:19).

The longer we live, the more certain we find the words of the old Scripture regarding the whole of this life: “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow” (Ps. 90:10). And again: “Great travail is created for every man, and an heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam, from the day that they go out of their mother’s womb, till the day that they return to the mother of all things. Their imagination of things to come, and the day of death, their thoughts and fear of heart; from him that sitteth on a throne of glory, unto him that is humbled in earth and ashes, ... wrath and envy, trouble, unquietness, and fear of death” (Ecclesiasticus 40:1–3, 5, Apocrypha).

It will strengthen your hope of salvation in a mighty way, if you bear well in mind that the deep, infinite desire of man for eternal bliss can never be satisfied on this earth, and that the whole of this life is only a great deceit. During a long and glorious life, the richest and happiest king of Israel had all the time looked for felicity in everything that can be given on earth. And finally he stopped in the depressing experience that everything was deceit, everything was vanity. Earth has not got the thing capable of making the immortal soul happy. The one who gets most happiness and joy, always also gets a heart not capable of enjoying it. And finally there will always be the sad thought that there will soon be an end to it all.

## October 9

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*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended* – Phil. 3:13.

We can see here what it means to have a healthy and sound inner man! Listen to what the great apostle Paul says. He says that he himself has not yet won it. What does the apostle mean? Had he not yet come to faith, evangelical freedom, life, and bliss (salvation) in Christ? Yet we know that he wrote his epistle when he had already filled all the country with his doctrine.

When we bear this in mind, and nevertheless hear him say as follows: “Not as though I had already attained,” then we become still more astonished and ask: What was the state of the inner man of the apostle? Or maybe he speaks in the name of others? Maybe he expresses how it is with a novice in Christianity? Or a man not yet certain about whether he has grace or not? Or a man who has not yet come through the strait gate?

But no! In verses 1–14 of this chapter he has plainly told us his own spiritual history. He has only spoken about himself. And now he says here plainly: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended.” These words are spoken by a man who is no novice in Christianity. No, on the contrary, he is obviously standing on such a height of the evangelical life of faith as certainly none of us have attained. Such words are spoken by the same apostle who could say: “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2:20). The same champion of faith who was capable of exclaiming with a triumphant voice: “Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?”; the same saint in whom Christ had been formed as in nobody else after him; the saint who could exclaim with truth: “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample” (Phil. 3:17). That man here confesses freely and openly that even he had not fully attained, nor was perfect.

At this point many an evangelical Christian among us will probably start and be astonished. And you have reason also for doing so. But at the same time see to it that you understand the matter correctly. When Paul here speaks about imperfection, he does not speak about what he is in Christ *before* God. When speaking about that, he uses another expression. He says: “Who shall lay anything to the charge?” (“Who wants to accuse?” Swedish translation). “Who is he that condemneth?” (Rom. 8:34). “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Rom. 5:1). “For by one offering He hath perfected” us “forever” (Heb. 10:14). Here Paul was perfected. But when he speaks about imperfection, then he speaks about the state of his heart, about his inner relation to the Lord, about his life in faith. And only with his eyes on that does he admit that he had not yet attained perfection and had not yet achieved the mark towards which he is striving. He had not yet received the light he desired on the secret of the atonement of Christ. He had not yet got what he sought of the firmness in faith and the comfort it brings in his heart. “Oh, well,”

you say, “what is there that is so strange in this humble confession? Because who would consider himself to be perfect, and that he has already achieved the mark, as regards his own life in faith!”

Do not say that! Surely one must think that he is perfect, and has attained the mark towards which he is striving, when he does not seek anything more, when he is satisfied with the point he has achieved in spiritual matters. Do not be offended, but take this matter in self-examination before God! We have, all of us, a deceitful and desperately wicked heart (Jer. 17:9). We have, all of us, an enemy that has sworn to kill us and intends to do so. When he cannot any longer keep us in obvious sin and unbelief, then he turns to another angle and seeks to pour into our false heart a comfort and rest that will as surely lead to his goal. This is the consolation: You are now an enlightened and evangelical Christian. You do not need anything more. All is well now. And even if he does not tell us so in so many words, he still blows his somniferous breath on the soul’s eye and reduces him to slumber and indifference. The consequence will be the same, namely that the soul is satisfied and content with its state, and does not worry about renewal and growth in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord Christ.

But the one who really uses the instruction of the gospel, and does not have it only in his intellect and mouth, but desires to have its power in faith, peace, joy, love, and godliness, he will never feel he knows everything. No, he will only feel more and more how much he is lacking. And here is exactly the reason why we make such a fuss about the state of being spiritually satisfied. Alas, it witnesses to something, to a stagnancy, a dying away of the very life of grace. Maybe you lead a so-called Christian life. You keep your daily divine service with certain devotions and good deeds. You can also confess with truth: My sins have been forgiven me. At such and such a time I received assurance of it. And then are you content? Everything is all right? You are at the goal? “Yes,” you say, “have we not then really reached the mark? Is not everything then well with us?” Yes, if you also now stand in faith and live in Christ, then it is certainly all right with your righteousness before God! Mark it, dear soul, before God, in Christ, you are so perfected, that you can never believe it enough! May God give you grace always to be able to keep that point clear. But also at the same time, and exactly when it is all right with your life in grace, and perfect before God, you must yourself feel that something is still lacking in you. You must have the mind of Paul saying: “Not as though I had already attained, I press toward the mark.” You must then feel the many shortcomings in your life in grace, in your faith, your joy in the Lord, your love and godliness. You must then have a daily hunger and thirst after righteousness, the way you see it here with Paul.

## October 10

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*For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself* – 1 Cor. 11:29.

**A**s regards Holy Communion it is one of the most dreadful delusions to think that, by so-called “Christian preparation,” anyone who so wishes will be able to become a worthy guest at the Lord’s Supper, no matter whether he is a true friend and disciple of Jesus or not. It is a dreadful delusion also to think that those who throughout all their life, both before and after communion, belong to the ordinary, unconverted crowd, will be able to go worthily to the Lord’s Supper after a preparation for the occasion. Oh, what a dreadful delusion! It should cause the hair of every enlightened Christian to stand on end.

Where is there even one word throughout all the Scripture suggesting anything like that? Where is there even one word saying that those who have not been converted to the Lord, who are not friends and disciples of Christ, and who are not living of Christ and in Christ every day throughout their life — where is there even one word saying that they should prepare themselves for the Lord’s Supper and become worthy thereby?

Oh, that all that have ears might hear, and that all that have a voice might cry out at this delusion! Can Christ allow Himself to be deceived by an occasional preparation, a piety adopted for the occasion, and consequently regard you as His friend? Can the Holy One allow Himself to be deceived in that way by a forced and self-induced piety, remorse, confession of sins, and prayer, immediately after which you go back to the same vain life as before, when your annual communion is over? May God have mercy! And may God awaken all teachers from their slumber, if they do not say this honestly to their people!

Should they not express the truth with short, explicit, and honest words, that only one thing is necessary in order to be a worthy communicant? It is only the fact of whether you are the friend and disciple of Jesus, or at least are anxious and seeking to become so, for the whole of your life. Nobody will become a worthy communicant by an occasional preparation, but only by a complete conversion. Thereby one will become a friend and disciple of Christ for the whole of one’s life.

If you are that, then you are a worthy communicant. If you are not, then you are unworthy. Nobody should bother himself with an occasional preparation, but should know that by so doing he will “eat and drink damnation to himself.” And that is indeed the case, even if a man works on his preparation for the communion so zealously that he stands on his knees not only for one day, but for a week, or even a month, and bathes himself with tears during that time. He will still be an unworthy communicant. He will eat and drink damnation to himself, as long as he wants

only to prepare himself for communion, but does not want to become the Lord's own for the whole of his life, and remain and live under Him in His kingdom.

Here are the facts! Christ instituted this great supper for His friends. The sincere union which takes place between Christ and His faithful in the Holy Communion is the same thing as indicated in His prayer on the same evening as He instituted the Holy Communion: "I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee" (John 17:23, 21). And in that prayer He added "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me" (v. 9). How would it be possible for Him to pray like that for the world? How would it be possible for Him to invite the world to celebrate the remembrance of His death, and invite His despisers to eat His flesh and drink His blood?

Oh, it is dreadful, when one realizes what it means for a human being to live "without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12) for all his days — yes, and get on well without Him, yet he comes before God once a year, in this holy supper of love that His friends celebrate, and thereby wants to suggest a most sincere friendship with Him, in order immediately thereafter to return to the same vain existence and ungodly life as before! Is this not the same as when Judas came up to Jesus in the garden and saluted Him: "Master," and kissed Him? Will the Lord not also say to such communicants: "Friend, wherefore art thou come? Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?"

Should you not tremble in all your soul and body, and dread to come before God with such a mind! Do you not understand, that the great holy Lord will then say to you: "You hypocrite, I know your works! You are not My friend, but the friend of the world. Why do you come here where My friends celebrate the remembrance of My death? I know that tomorrow you will go back to the service of the world and sin. Go away, you hypocrite!" Would you not expect such a reply from the Holy One, whose eyes are as flames of fire, when you make only a preparation for the Holy Communion, but otherwise for all the days of your life do not care to belong to God or follow Him?

# October 11

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*Rejoice evermore* – 1 Thess. 5:16.

**D**oes somebody say: “Rejoicing in the Lord is a fruit of faith and the Spirit. One cannot take it before it is given. It cannot be produced by admonition”? That is true. But as love, humility, and meekness are also the fruits of the Spirit, and the apostles admonish us to exercise them, so they have also admonished us to exercise this fruit of the Spirit, the rejoicing in the Lord, and have said, “Rejoice evermore... For this is the will of God ... concerning you... Rejoice in the Lord always” (1 Thess 5:16, 18; Phil. 4:4). And thus we should always strive after that grace and use all means to promote that rejoicing. If we lose the rejoicing of faith, then we also lose all the other gifts and powers.

But another says: “Joy depends on circumstances. When I have reason for joy, then I am glad. But how can I rejoice, when distress and affliction come?” These are right expressions only for human and fleshly joy. But the apostle says: “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:10). He says: “I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation” (2 Cor. 7:4). He says: “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice” (Phil. 4:4). If you are still an unbeliever, then you certainly cannot rejoice in the Lord. Then your joy depends on temporary circumstances. But a faithful man has such a strong and strange peace that he can also rejoice in tribulation!

Nevertheless, is it possible that outer circumstances do not have an influence on the hearts of the faithful? Surely as long as they dwell in this body, they feel well how it smarts. Asaph confesses about himself: “Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant I was as a beast before Thee” (Ps. 73:21–22). But listen! what a deep source of joy he still had! He adds: “Nevertheless I am continually with Thee... Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever” (vv. 23, 25–26).

This is spoken about a believing heart. An unbelieving soul is quite unfit for rejoicing in the Lord. Either he is full of gods, quite light-hearted and earthly; or he is pressed by the law, in bondage and afraid of God. And to encourage such a soul to rejoice in the Lord, would be like trying to make water burn. There is no reason for an unbeliever to rejoice. It is a piteous foolishness for a child of this world to smile about anything, because he lives under the wrath of the Almighty and goes toward eternal death. No apostle can admonish such unhappy souls to rejoice. No, to them it is said: “Weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you” (James 5:1).

Here the apostle speaks to the children of grace who have been born again and have friendship with the Almighty. And these have reason indeed, yes, very great reason to be glad and rejoice all the time, even if grave earthly accidents and

sorrows have befallen them. They are still always fortunate. Yes, even if they are not always glad, they are still fortunate. They should surely always rejoice for that reason. No Christian yet knows the art of always rejoicing. The feeling vanishes and changes like the sky. But he has reason to rejoice all the time. Because he is fortunate. “Behold, we count them happy which endure” (James 5:11).

And secondly, there is a deeper joy than that of feeling. There is a joy of knowledge, a joy of faith, and it says: Nevertheless, I am glad! Even if I do not now feel any special joy, I am still glad that I have a Lord, a friend, a treasure weighing far more than everything else. Christians should have such a joy. The apostle admonishes them about this when he says: “Rejoice always”! But he also states the ground for it, when he says: “in the Lord.” Notice “in the Lord.” Not in silver and gold, not in luxury and song, not in health and strength, not in art and wisdom, not in might and glory, not in friendship and favor, yes, nor in good deeds and holiness. Because such things give only a deceitful and false rejoicing.

If you are true children of God under the chastisement of His Holy Spirit, you will not be allowed to rejoice long in such things. Partly this is a dangerous joy drawing your heart away from the Lord. And He alone wants to be the joy, treasure, and contentment of His children. Partly also all such things give a short and doubtful joy which will soon come to an end. Therefore, if you want to rejoice “always,” your joy should be “in the Lord.” All other rejoicing, including that of the gifts of the Spirit, such as one’s own sanctification, power, and good deeds, is a dangerous rejoicing. In this matter we have a lesson worth thinking over in the rapid warning the gracious, watchful Lord gave to His disciples when they were delighted to tell how they had cast out devils in the name of Jesus. He said: “Rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

So also the Spirit of the Lord warns us through the prophet: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me” (Jer. 9:23–24). The Lord is greatly zealous. He does not tolerate that His bride has real joy and heart treasure in anything other than in Himself.

## October 12

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*For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace – Rom. 6:14.*

**T**he apostle says that sin shall not have dominion over those who live under grace and not under the law. This is a strange declaration! But what is the reason why sin shall not have dominion over us because we are not under the law, but under grace? It is based on two facts. The first lies in the quality of the heart born again of grace. The second in the heart and government of God.

When a soul “through the law is dead to the law” (Gal. 2:19) and now lives of sheer grace, then he has thereby received a new heart. His heart now sincerely loves God and His will. His heart sincerely hates sin. Before he was under the law’s yoke of bondage, and did not believe this forgiveness, but saw God threatening and wroth because of his sins. Then his heart could not love Him and hate sin. It is true that the threats of God could make him worry about sin, and suffer because of it. But he could not really hate and curse his sin. No, his relation to the sin was that of a lover driven away, and tearing himself away from the beloved object, only because of the father’s severity. As God was in his eyes only as threatening and wroth, he could not love, delight and rejoice in Him. And therefore his love was attached to the sin He condemned.

A man of the Spirit said rightly: “An unforgiven sin is loved. Only a forgiven sin is hated.” But, love is the mightiest power in man. The object of my love rules over me. Love and rejoicing in the Lord, and hatred towards sin, arise in a soul that is removed from the yoke of bondage to the kingdom of grace. These are, however, not only a natural love in return; there are really “God’s seed” (1 Pet. 1:23) in the one born again, the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in the heart of the believer.

It is only this seed of God that overcomes, rules, and kills sin. Yes, it is only this seed that even brings about that we “cannot sin,” as John says; that we cannot be happy with sin and therefore cannot “yield ourselves servants” of sin. And as long as this is the case, sin does not have dominion. This is the first thing we should notice in order to understand our text.

Moreover, there is still another secret. The apostle says that “sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” This declaration is based on something more than our new, holy mind. It is based on God Himself. The secret is: when a man “through the law is dead to the law” and has all his consolation only in God and His grace, he is in the weak and dependent state of a child, for which God Himself has undertaken to be responsible.

In 2 Cor. 12:10 the apostle says: “When I am weak, then am I strong,” thereby he expresses the secret. “When I am weak, then am I strong.” This is based on the fact the Lord had expressed in the words: “My strength is made perfect in weakness.”



The power of God is only proven by the weak. God does not give His power to the strong, to the ones who still think that they have some power of their own. No, He only gives His power to those who have been ashamed and who have come to nought with all their own works and therefore now only live by grace.

But those who are still under the law, who have not yet been exhausted and crushed, but still think themselves to be capable of doing something to get dominion over their sin, such still work with their own power. Even if they pray to God for His power, it is contrary to His wisdom and His laws and grace to give them this power at a time when in their innermost being they still trust in their own power, have not become dead to the law, and do not live only by grace. If you look more superficially at the piety of a self-sufficient man, it may seem to you that he has the power of God against sin. But the Lord says that it is only an outward purity, like that of a whited sepulcher. The very inward power of sin has not yet been revealed to him, as he can still hope for something good to come from his own powers and observances. Therefore the power of his inward depravity is still unbroken.

It is quite different with those who have despaired of themselves and who have all their righteousness and strength only in Christ. And the Lord Himself now assumes responsibility for such crushed souls, those weak and dependent children. He consoles them and says: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." This is the second reason why the apostle can declare that sin shall not have dominion over those who are not under the law, but under grace.

But this is a secret to our reason. Therefore we need to pay special attention to the instruction the apostle gives us here: sin can only be controlled when we are not under the law, but under grace.

## October 13

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*Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt* – Rom. 4:4.

**T**he Greek text actually reads, “He who works,” who labors, or, as Luther so aptly rendered it, “he who is associated with deeds” (or works). The meaning is certainly that which is expressed by our Bible translation: “to him that worketh.” That the word “work” in our text signifies the heart’s reliance on work can be seen by what the apostle expresses as its opposite (or antithesis), when he says: “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly.” There we see that the word “work” means that the heart has its hope in works. Moreover, we understand that works would not be any obstacle to righteousness before God, if the heart is free, dead to the law, and believing in Christ. No, on the contrary, the works would be a fruit and proof of this righteousness.

It is like this: No matter what your understanding and confession are, your heart still cannot but have its hope in one of these two things. Either it has its hope in your own works, being, doing; or in Him that justifies the ungodly. The merit of our own works, and the grace of God in Christ are quite opposite to each other. If I now have my hope in my own works, then I cannot possibly have it in Christ. And then my works are always the chief thing to my heart, and in my thoughts, no matter what my intellect and mouth say. Then I am called a worker here, and before God will get only according to my merit only what belongs to me.

To him is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. Notice: he that worketh gets a “reward” — not of grace, but of “reward.” If he has fulfilled the master’s requirements completely, then he gets the wages agreed upon. And there is no need for the worker to thank him for it, as for a gift of grace. No, it is now his own merit. If on the other hand there are shortcomings in his fulfillment of his obligation, then he is punished. He does not get anything of grace.

The law is like that. The one who holds to the stipulations of the law will also be judged by them.

We have already seen the Lord Christ explain this matter regarding the laborers in the vineyard. And there is an inexorable definiteness in this government of God. There is no indulgence or leniency. The one who holds to works will be rewarded only according to his own merit and will not get anything of grace.

Nevertheless such a person may have done many more good deeds than a person who seeks and gets grace. This seems very hard. But nothing helps. There is a severe and inexorable tone in the words about this in the Scripture. When one of the laborers murmured, there was no compliancy on the part of the goodman of the house. He did not yield to his murmuring even for a minute, but replied:

“Didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way” (Matt. 20:13–14).

The same crushing language is used by the apostle in Rom. 9. He is worried at the insistent self-righteousness of the Jews, and the inseparable condemnation that comes with it. There he speaks in this tone: It does not help how you work and run to become righteous. You have the election of God against you. God has chosen those who believe, and has rejected those who go about with works.

And it is God’s own choice as to who shall be saved. “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Rom. 9:16). “They which followed after the law of righteousness, have not attained to the law of righteousness. They which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness” (vv. 30–31). And wherefore? Because the former sought righteousness by works, they did not get it. The others again received it by faith and got it.

He speaks in the same way in Gal. 4. There he distinguishes between two types of people seeking salvation. They are symbolized by the two sons of Abraham: one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. Thus the apostle distinguishes between bondservants and children. He also calls the latter the “children of promise.” And then he announces that without leniency, it will be with the former according to the words: “Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” Does not this seem hard? When they have worked and been bondservants for a long time, they are finally driven out!

Human beings who have participated in the wedding of the kingdom of heaven on earth, and strive after works and walk, symbolized by hand and foot, but finally do not have a “wedding garment,” will be cast into “outer darkness.” So great is the zeal of the Lord for the righteousness of His law, and the glory of His Son! Oh, that everyone who wants to be or to become a Christian would bear this well in mind!

In this matter it will not do to let your thoughts float at random. It does not do to make a way of your own to salvation according to your own opinion. No, here is an inexorable judgment. It has not been made by any human being. Nor can it be changed by any human being. It is the counsel and decision established by the Almighty God Himself that the one who wants to be saved must be a poor, lost sinner, despairing of all his own righteousness and capability, and seeking his salvation only in the righteousness of Christ.

## October 14

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*And being not weak in faith* (Swedish: "And he [Abraham] did not become weaker in his faith") – Rom. 4:19.

**N**ot weak in faith. This is a usual way of expressing the contrary fact, and thus means that he had a very strong faith. However, this should not be understood to say that Abraham never had to fight unbelief, or that he did not feel sometimes that weakness in faith, from which other saints have usually suffered.

The apostle was well aware of the history that, at the renewal of the promise in Gen. 17, Abraham could not avoid thinking of his and Sarah's old age. We notice this when Abraham laughed and said in his heart: "Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old?" And at the same moment he began to speak in favor of Ishmael the way he had earlier wanted to suggest that the son of Eliezer would be allowed to become his heir. But when nevertheless, the apostle says: "And being not weak in faith," he thereby gives us rather a useful lesson on the nature of faith, its strength and weakness.

We usually mean that the strength of faith should prove itself in a perpetually glad and bold spirit, and that, on the contrary, the feeling of weakness, faintheartedness, and worry would indicate a weak faith. We can now learn something else. Abraham had a strong faith, and still it was possible to put him in fear and dread.

The truth is that the strength of faith really proves itself in darkness and tribulation, not in happiness and light. A glad and bold mind may often only indicate that one overlooks holy duties and threatening dangers in a light mood; or is favored with sweet feelings of grace. But to be able to cling to the promises of the Lord, and to be bold and happy because of them, even while paying alert attention to worrying conditions, and lacking all feelings of grace, that is no doubt a certain sign of strong faith. But even if a man cannot be glad and bold in the darkness and fight, if he can still cling to the power and faithfulness of God, this is surely a sign of strong faith.

When it says that Abraham did not become weaker in faith, it means that, in the fight against his reason which wanted to deprive him of hope, he still maintained victory through the power of God. He still endured in this fight. He did not allow the promise of God and hope to vanish from his heart. No, he still waited for its fulfillment, no matter how absurd it seemed. And finally the laughter of his reason was turned into a blessed smile of sight, when Sarah's child was lying there before his eyes and the happy mother exclaimed: "God has made me to laugh."

But the apostle explains furthermore wherein the strength of Abraham's faith proved itself, when he says: "He considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb." He no

doubt felt the weight of his half-dead body and his hundred years. The enemy and reason no doubt reminded him of the barrenness of Sarah. But the strength of his faith was such that he did not pay heed to it. He did not allow his eyes to stop at these depressing facts. He did not allow them to captivate himself, even if he had to fight against his thoughts. He always put the omnipotence and truthfulness of God against the objections of his reason.

His strength was this: *God has said so*; “even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17). *God has said so*. He has created the worlds out of nothing. And He cannot lie. This fact meant more than the “dead” bodies of himself and Sarah. It was not in the power of these half-dead bodies, but in the omnipotence and truthfulness of God that he believed.

Oh, what an excellent example of faith! May we also learn to have faith like that! If you want to be a Christian and hold out in faith during all the strange ways of God, then you will certainly need to train yourself herein; so that you do not pay heed to your half-dead Christianity, your half-dead faith, love, prayer, but all the time keep your eyes fixed on something outside ourselves — on God, His attributes and promises.

It is necessary that you do not look at your half-dead faith, but at the faithfulness of God. You should not look at your half-dead love, but at the love of Christ. You should not look at your cold and infirm prayer, but at the firm promise of God. You should not look at your powerless fight in temptation, but at “the power of God’s might” (Eph. 6:10); at the faithfulness of God, “who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able” (1 Cor. 10:13).

But be certain that life will not be easy. No, a hard fight of faith will be required for such a mortifying of reason, always pointing out to us what we are of ourselves. Faith and reason no doubt fought violently about this matter in the heart of Abraham. Still faith finally won and held the field. Faith overcame and destroyed his reason, the most dreadful and injurious enemy of God. That must also be the case with all other faithful men who with Abraham enter into the shadow and hidden darkness of faith. And thereby they give our Lord God the most well pleasing sacrifice and divine service He can ever get.

## October 15

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*For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous – Rom. 5:19.*

All the children of Adam were judged to be sinners because of the disobedience of Adam. So also all the seed of Christ is judged to be righteous by the obedience of Christ. “By the obedience of one.” Here the apostle states plainly what the righteousness of Christ consists of. He says: it was His obedience, His own personal fulfillment of all the will of the Father.

The Fall consisted of “one man's disobedience.” So it should be remedied by “the obedience of one.” The entire life of Christ on earth, from the manger to the cross, was sheer obedience. “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10), says the apostle. Christ had a perfect love both towards His Father, and towards us human beings. Out of love to us and obedience to His Father He came to the earth and became our brother. In the same love and obedience He walked this earth, did good deeds and helped all. Out of love to us and obedience to His Father He also wanted to “taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). He was “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8).

And nothing less than such a high and perfect obedience could save mankind from the condemnation that had come upon us by one man's disobedience. But in this perfect obedience of Christ we can see what now covers the perpetual disobedience of us all. All the spiritual distress and lamentation of the holy is simply that they cannot rightly obey God, but always offend against Him. Where the spirit is willing and holy, there the inborn depravity is only the more painful and pressing, and always as *disobedience*. All sin in the heart or life, in the thoughts, desires, words, and deeds is always disobedience to God. In His holy law He forbids all this evil. Then the faithful are alarmed, wail, and get frightened, when they realize their disobedience to their God.

Against all this disobedience of ours God put the obedience of His Son. His obedience shall be our obedience. This text reads like this: “by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” God expressly sent His Son under the law to redeem them that were under the law. From eternity God saw all human beings fallen under sin and judgment, and filled with such depravity that no one could perfectly obey or fulfill the law.

Then He decided in His eternal mercy to remedy all this Himself. His Son would become a true man, but with a perfect obedience. And as a father He would fulfill the law and undergo its curse in our stead. In order that, as by the disobedience of the first ancestor we had become sinners, so we should become righteous only by the obedience of the second.

It is exactly this perfect obedience of Christ that is the very righteousness wherein we stand before God. The Formula of Concord says: “Therefore faith looks at the person of Christ as having been made under the law for us, having borne our sin and having, by His going to the Father for us poor sinners, shown His heavenly Father perfect obedience and having thereby covered the disobedience of us all, which dwells in our nature and stands out in our thoughts, words, and deeds, so that this disobedience of ours is not counted to us to condemnation, but is forgiven us by sheer grace only for the sake of Christ.”

Do you want to be a Christian and believe in the grace of God? Are you prevented and pressed by your own manifold disobedience? Then in earnest embrace this consolation and say: The obedience of Christ is my obedience. My own obedience and righteousness are absolutely nonexistent. If I will be judged according to the law, then I must despair altogether and nevermore think of salvation and eternal bliss. But Christ has been under the law and has shown a perfect obedience in order thereby to “redeem us that were under the law” (Gal. 4:5).

There certainly was no need for Him to be under the law for His own sake! No, He did it all for us, in our stead and for our benefit. This is then my only righteousness; namely not *my* obedience but *His* obedience. When my new man wants to be obedient, my old nature is still full of disobedience. Therefore, it is now my only consolation that Christ was obedient in my stead. This is the way we should make use of this text so full of consolation.

Maybe somebody says: What does it help me that Christ was obedient, when I cannot be so myself? Then the reply is: if the obedience of Christ is not your obedience, you are eternally lost. Here the apostle of the Lord tells us that we will be made righteous only “by the obedience of one.” We should then impress these precious words on our hearts with much zeal and in earnest: “by the obedience of one.” Otherwise our feelings, conscience, and the inspirations of unbelief will always carry us around like chips on the wild sea. On the other hand, what a blessed consolation and security it is for a poor, exhausted sinner to be allowed to rest on this firm rock: the eternal counsel of God! As by one man’s disobedience we all became sinners, so only by the obedience of one shall we be made righteous.

## October 16

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*God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness – 1 Thess. 4:7.*

**N**ext to the statement of the atonement of Christ, and the receiving of it by faith, this great statement about sanctification is the most important one for the maintenance of spiritual life. Or more correctly, the spiritual, yes, eternal life, is in these two statements, the righteousness of Christ for us, and the sanctification of the Spirit in us. Their relation to one another in the kingdom of grace is like that of creation and maintenance in the kingdom of nature. Thousands of souls that have begun in the Spirit, have ended in the flesh, only because they did not early enough and seriously enough take this statement to their hearts. They did not pay enough heed to the Word and Spirit of the Lord, when He wanted to work sanctification in them.

Look at this case. A man is awakened and begins to worry and seek salvation. Usually he first comes under the bondage of the law, and an unhappy attempt to establish his own righteousness. He tries to improve, to leave off sins, watch, pray, and fight against them, in order, when he has once succeeded therein, to accept grace and consolation in Christ. But it becomes a constant fiasco. Sin overcomes him. He falls, gets up again, but again there is another fall. He does things he formerly eschewed. He becomes so sure, hard, and light-hearted that he is frightened and despairs. In brief: “sin abounds” (Rom. 5:20). In this unhappy state he hears the gospel. He hears how Christ has come to save sinners, and to justify the ungodly. He hears that we become righteous freely, without works, without the help of the law, but by grace and faith alone. At this point he gets life, and is saved. In this word of grace he finds redemption, consolation, and the kingdom of heaven on earth. And now he begins to really live in the glorious freedom of the children of God. “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). Now this life of faith is immediately accompanied by a new, holy mind, willing and ready to all good deeds. He has now a new power of ease to walk in the imitation of Christ. And thus true sanctification really begins. He has now been planted in the right place as a palm tree by the rivers of water. He has been grafted into Christ, and lives in His atonement.

Who would believe that, exactly here in the midst of this sweet spring blossoming, in the midst of the growth-giving rain and sunshine of the evangelical word, the worm or rot could be generated that soon will be able to make all the beautiful planting come to naught? Still this does happen deplorably often. And how does it happen? First and foremost, the old serpent appears early, the old serpent that beguiled Eve through its subtlety, the artful Satan. As he could not deceive the human being by the law and hold him fast, he now seeks to tempt him to the opposite direction. He now fills him with consolation that the Word has never



given. Namely, that as he has now become free from all the guilt and judgment of sin, from the curse of the law, from the power of death and the devil, he has also escaped all danger, so that he has nothing to fear, but should have sheer joy. Now this is as equally injurious as false inspiration; because the justified soul has not escaped all danger, and the danger is double as great and twice as near, when one does not fear it. It is true that the justified man is free from the guilt and judgment and curse of sin, but he has another enemy left that can soon destroy all the treasure he has won. That is the wicked flesh, the depravity that dwells in him, and all the time desires to have a compact with the devil and the world. Although this inherent sin now is not imputed to you, and although it does not condemn you, as long as you remain in Christ, it can still do another evil thing, if it is not attacked in time, and if it is not crucified and mortified in a daily repentance. Yes, this sin can do a dreadfully evil thing. It can choke and kill your spiritual life the way Jesus plainly declared the thorns did when they sprang up along with the good seed and choked it. Then all the treasure is as lost as if you had never attained it.

But in addition to the delusion by Satan there are also some contributing factors on the part of the man. In the Word of God he reads serious warnings not to let himself be caught by the yoke of bondage again, but to stand firm in the freedom with which Christ has delivered us. From this he, along with the good instruction, also adopts the false opinion, that he should not mind so much about the Word demanding something of us, but that he should exclusively stick to the sweet gospel. Thus (as regards the freedom from the law) he mixes up conscience with the flesh, righteousness before God with life on earth, and includes freedom in both of these quite separate matters. Yes, it is regrettable, but he gives much more freedom to his flesh and life than to his conscience! Because in our nature there is a taint and bad habit whereby we want to be legal and bond-minded in our conscience, but free and lawless in our flesh and life. When the Word speaks about freedom from the law, and he does not make a sharp distinction between what should be free and what should be bound, and when there are in addition special temptations to sin, then it is easy to “use liberty for an occasion to the flesh” (Gal. 5:13) and “turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude 4).

## October 17

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*That ye put off . . . the old man . . . and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created* – Eph. 4:22, 24.

**I**t does not seem to be so easy to say what the new man who is created after God, or in the image of God, really consists of. But praise God! He has given us a man who was the perfect image of God, in order that we should look at Him and follow after Him, the “man, Jesus Christ” who was “the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person” (Heb. 1:3).

If we want to see the image of God, to see how we should be and become, then we need only to look at Jesus, not such as He was as the Son of God, or the Lamb of God, our Atonement, but such as He was as a man. In Him, God has not only given us the most perfect and beautiful example to behold and imitate, but also one very dear to us. Because at the same time He is our hope of salvation, our Savior and Defender with the Father.

On the other hand, the old man that should be put off, crucified, and mortified, consists of all the depravity that the fall of Adam brought along. First, the carnal mind which is enmity against God, our deep self-conceit, the willfulness and egoism whereby a man seeks himself in everything and is even jealous of himself, the infinite pride that wants to be something, vanity that wants to be seen and heard, deep unbelief with all its saplings: contempt for the Word of God, complacency in prosperity, despair in adversity, earthly sorrow, hardness and coldness towards God and one’s neighbor, disinclination for the Word and prayer, evil thoughts, unclean lusts and desires. Then all sorts of sins which break out by provocation: vain speech, careless living, hypocrisy, lying, dishonesty in commerce and work, voluptuousness, lasciviousness, fornication, greed, mercilessness, wrath, hatred, and other sins and vices which can hardly be listed. Such things are the wicked image that shall be put off, crucified, and mortified. We certainly would not be so much at ease, so free, impudent, and self-satisfied, if we would rightly occupy ourselves with this matter.

We have here the matter before our eyes. Now it only remains to have it in exercise. The contents of the will and counsel of God, yes, the gracious voice of the Word and Spirit to the faithful about this are: As you have become free from your sins, so that you need not think of that very difficult worry, namely, how to make yourself free from your sins — then be happy and grateful and take this easier care to your heart, namely, only to follow in the footprints of Jesus, to be renewed to the likeness of the image of Him that has loved, bought, and delivered you, to become like unto Him, and for all your life to hate what He hates and love what He loves. You are free from your sins, and you need not worry about them. You are a child of God and a brother of Christ. Then be as He was and walk as He walked.

For instance, He was intimately united with His Father. He was full of love to God and men. It was His life and meat to do the will of the Father, and so on. Are you also intimately united with your Father? Be in a diligent and close conversation with Him. Let it be your meat and your life to be allowed to do His will, to serve your neighbor, to mortify your flesh. As you are “the temple of the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor. 6:19) so that the same Spirit dwells in you as in your Savior, do not drive this dove away, do not grieve the Spirit of God by disobedience to His admonitions, by vain words or other sins.

Do not destroy or defile the temple of God with the lusts of the flesh or the deeds of the flesh. No, sooner suffer anything than do anything against your God. Christ confessed the truth even when it cost Him His life. Confess Christ even if it costs you the esteem of men, your name and reputation, yes, and even your life and property. No matter in what situation He was, Christ was content for the sake of the Father’s pleasure. Be you also content in the position you are in, and let your annoyances be lost in the pleasure of God. Christ was never seen joking in a light mood, but He was glad and feared God. You that are a child of God and a brother of Christ, must know that for you also this is the most becoming way.

You may say, But who is able for this? Oh, if I could only be capable of living thus! It was never intended that you should do this in your own power or that you should become perfect immediately. No, the intention was that you should begin to strive after perfection, and thereby learn thoroughly that you cannot attain it of yourself. Therefore you must sigh to the Lord and invoke His name, who Himself, and in this way, performs the work of sanctification. This is not the work of man but of the Lord. And this work is performed by the power of the urging and warning and consoling Word. “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves” (2 Cor. 3:5). “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do (note this) of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).

What cannot be accomplished by the Word and inward admonitions and inducements, that will be done by the Lord with the rod and in the furnace of affliction, “where need be” (free transl.). Because “the rod of correction teaches us to pay heed to the Word.” And the faithful say out of their heart: “God, use any means Thou find, only win my heart.” Only one thing is needful. And without sanctification nobody will be allowed to see the Lord. But still, first as last, keep this point clear: “By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14).

## October 18

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*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow – Isa. 1:18.*

**A**s soon as the sinner has been destitute and stripped of all his own glory, God does not want anything more. He now only wants to forgive and console him in every way. It is clearly revealed by all the Word of God, that sin has been blotted out! It says clearly that God is gracious and burns with the zeal of an infinite love to be allowed to forgive and console the sinner. But man does not want to have any grace. No, in his adamically strong mind, he intends himself to stand before the Lord. This attitude is the only dam against the grace of God. If this dam is removed, then the grace of God has free course And then everything will be all right.

If the child of Adam can only be humbled so that he desires grace, and does not desire only to return and become reconciled to God, but wants also to abandon all his own doing and accept grace as grace, then he immediately gets forgiveness and more forgiveness. Then the sinner meets together with the mercy of the great and forgiving God, and there is no limit or end to His mercy.

There are sins on your conscience. You go there burdened and condemned. And you cannot do the least to put the matter right. But listen! You do not need to. You do not need to do the least thing about it. And you do not need to despair and perish either. Praise the Lord, O soul, He “forgiveth all thine iniquities” (Ps. 103:3). You deserve never to be consoled, but always and forever to be sorrowful and condemned. But you do not need to be sad. You may be glad. You may throw your burden away, and be as free and happy as if you had never sinned. Praise the Lord, my soul, who forgiveth all thine iniquities! God forgives sins. He forgives all sins, and in all circumstances and at all times. And He forgives quite undeservedly and thoroughly. Only learn to know the divine forgiveness, or pray to God for faith. And everything shall be all right!

Many think they understand the forgiving of God quite well. But still they do not understand anything of it. First, it should be noticed, that forgiveness or grace is the opposite of all merit. And Paul says: “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:6). Forgiveness is also something quite different from an excuse. God does not excuse the sin, but He forgives it. Therefore also things that are impossible to excuse, can still be forgiven. Because forgiveness means sheer grace.

Grace means that a man who according to all justice should not be spared, but should be judged and punished, nevertheless, is now pardoned and free from all judgment, only because of sheer mercy. Forgiveness means that God

does not “deal with us after our sins nor rewards us according to our iniquities” (Ps. 103:10). God is like that! He does not at all deal with us after our sins. If even for a moment God dealt with us after our sins, then no flesh would be saved! But all the kingdom of Christ on earth is sheer forgiveness for all those who in faith stick to Christ — yes, a perpetual forgiveness, a quite undeserved forgiveness, and a complete forgiveness.

Is it not sure enough and has it not been confirmed enough that God forgives you all your sins? Have not heaven, earth, and hell, yes, men and spirits also come to know the fact well and emphatically, that God forgives all sins, and that nobody will be condemned because of the size of the sin, but only because of contempt for grace? With thousands of firm assurances God has testified, in His own person, by prophets and angels, yes, by the only begotten Son and His apostles, and by a great crowd of evangelists, that He wants to forgive sins. All the gates of hell would not be able to overthrow the witness of this brilliant army, or deprive us of our assurance of the forgiveness of sins.

All the Bible, from its beginning to its end, really does not contain anything else than the great arrangements of God for the forgiveness of sins. The very law was given chiefly to teach us to appreciate and receive forgiveness. And everything the Son of God did on earth was for the forgiveness of our sins. He became a human child, our brother and mediator, as the angels said, only to save His people from their sins, He shed His holy blood in order to atone for the sins of the world, as He Himself said: “My blood ... is shed ... for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28). He instituted baptism where He takes us up in an eternal covenant of grace. He instituted the Holy Communion in order there to be able often to give us a new assurance of the forgiveness of our sins during our daily walk. In the Lord’s prayer He taught us to pray daily and definitely: “And forgive us our debts.”

Why would He do all this, if it had not been His serious intention and will to forgive sins? God certainly has not given us His Son from heaven to condemn the world! Neither has He done so for a short temporal benefit! Everything God has done assures us that He has a real and serious will to forgive us our sins, take us back as His children and dearest friends, as He has also created us for that and out of sheer grace has given us eternal life.

## October 19

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*Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies – Ps. 103:4.*

When God forgives a man all his sins, and heals all his shortcomings, then he has been not only preserved from wrath and condemnation, but also, is immediately the object of a most inconceivable love on the part of God, the great, divine love which passeth knowledge. He embraces him with a heartfelt love such as that of a tender mother to her baby, or that of a loving bridegroom to his bride. This is the most wonderful and glorious thing God has revealed in the Holy Writ. It contains many wonderful words about this. As Christ Himself says plainly that “joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,” the way it was with the father of the prodigal son, when he was allowed to see him again. And in Isa. 62:5 it says: “As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.” And again: “Thou shalt be called Hephzibah: for the Lord delighteth in thee!” And the Lord Himself says about His faithful: “Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good.” Or first: “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good” (Jer. 32:40–41). And the Lord says again: “O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice” (Hos. 6:4).

And in Matt. 9, Christ showed clearly that the heart of God with such love embraces all that come to the Lord, even though extremely unworthy sinners. Because when the Pharisees murmured against His great kindness to publicans and sinners, He replied: ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.” The one who believes on Him, even if he is a most unclean publican and sinner, will immediately be most sincerely loved. And that man will henceforth for all his life be carried most graciously in the bosom of the mercy of God, and be preserved from all evil. His soul is forever free from eternal depravity. It has been redeemed by a kinsman. And his temporal life will enjoy an especially gracious care by the same kinsman, “Joel,” our Savior. Yes, on all sides he will be surrounded by the benefactions and mercy of God, the way a golden crown surrounds, covers, and adorns the head. This is the meaning of the words: “Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.” Because the Hebrew word for “redeemeth” means that a kinsman cares so much for his relatives that if necessary he redeems them.

What follows next in our psalm also belongs to the same gracious care on the part of God. “Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” As the eagle is renewed when its old feathers fall away, and he gets

new ones again, so also we are renewed when the Lord refreshes our soul with comfort. And if the Lord does not give the gift of faith, we cannot possibly have real comfort and peace. He is the Author and Finisher of our faith. Furthermore, if somebody oppresses or judges us in an unjust way, the Lord judges rightly, protects and helps us in our cause. As it says here: “The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.” For instance: Our most respected enemies revile us most bitterly. They distort our words and boldly call us heterodox and false Christians. And we keep silent though we would often be able to rebut their reviling in clear words. We keep silent and behave “as a deaf man that heareth not, as a dumb man in whose mouth are no reproofs” (Ps. 38:13–14). Still God executes our cause so gloriously that it grows more and more; and our adversaries become more and more commonly known for what they are. All this is only the result of the Lord’s faithfulness, if we can only believe and rest and wait upon Him. “The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.” How graciously and faithfully and kindly did not the Lord behave towards Moses and the children of Israel? “He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel” (Ps. 103:7). Thus we now have the great advantage that we need not be uncertain about the will and intention of God. Let us reflect upon the fact that God Himself has revealed Himself on earth. He Himself has spoken and said what His will and counsel are, as regards our salvation. Moreover, He has shown by glorious deeds who He was. He has proved to be the Almighty Himself, the Creator Himself. If only we reflect upon this, then we will not go about and guess and think at random as to the will and intention of God with us. No, we should only look into the Word of God. There we shall see His ways and His heart. And there we shall become as certain about what God thinks of us, as if the judgment had already been declared. Oh, what great grace!

## October 20

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*We were dead in sins* – Eph. 2:5.

**N**otice the word the apostle uses for the natural state — the short, but very expressive word: dead — “dead in sins.” It is a deep, calamitous word describing all the consequence of the Fall: “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” The life from God is gone. Man is a spiritual corpse. The Lord Christ Himself has said: “Let the dead bury their dead” (Matt. 8:22). Many say that this is a hard speech, and that it does not have as full a meaning as the word “dead” usually has. Nobody should suspect that the Lord Christ has used an exaggerated expression. We see that in the word used here He classed the bodily and the spiritually dead together, as two kinds of corpses. Let us look at the matter closely and we will be astonished to notice what a meaning there is in the word: “dead.”

A bodily dead person is recognized in that he does not perceive anything. He does not see, hear, feel anything. Moreover, he has not even the feeblest breath. All this in spite of the fact that he has the same organs — eyes, ears, mouth, and lungs as the living. Is it not quite like that with a spiritually dead person. He may have all his other senses healthy and alive. He can have a clear intellect, a sensitive heart, much knowledge, noble principles, beautiful words and deeds. But the life in Christ — it is only this that is lacking in him, only the union with God, the sense for God, for His will, His word, His grace. He sees, hears, thinks, and feels most vividly everything that is earthly and pertains to the senses. But he does not perceive anything that belongs to the Spirit of God.

Let us look at some examples of this. He reads, understands, and believes in a certain sense, the Word of God. But he can also read and hear God’s definite judgments on himself, and still remains quite calm. He reads and hears about the kingdom of God, about the grace and friendship of God, about blessed union with God, but that does not arouse within him the least little bit of longing for it, as there is no breath in a corpse. His heart is filled only with idols, with earthly and vain things. It is filled with questions: What shall we eat and drink, and wherewith shall we be clothed? What shall we be allowed to see, hear, and enjoy? But God — God! — What? What does God want? He does not care about that at all. True, he has a certain faith in the truth of the Word of God. Maybe he has never doubted it. He has a certain inner witness as to that. And then, in the same Word of God, he sees and hears a most definite judgment of condemnation on everyone who has not been born of God — born again. And yet he does not know of any new birth in himself. But he is not the least little bit afraid! He still considers this the Word of God! In this Word of God he sees, reads and hears about two ways: first, the broad way which leads to condemnation and where “many” walk; and second, the



narrow way which leads to life, and where only “few” walk. But never even for a day does he worry about which of the ways he himself is walking on. And still he thinks the Bible is the Word of God! But why then does he not fear? This is called being “dead.” Here we see what the word means: dead! — dead in transgressions and sins.

But when the human being is spiritually dead, what is it that leads him through life? In verse 2 the apostle says: “the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” First: “the course of this world.” He goes with the stream, does as others do, watches at the world and the prevailing customs. If they are rude, he also becomes rude. If the customs are refined, then he also leads a more beautiful life. Thus he can appear in different shapes. In all those shapes he still belongs to the world, to the many going on the broad way.

But is the world then its own ruler? Is it the one really ruling? No, the apostle says. The course of the world is determined by the prince of the power of the air. Christ also calls him the prince of this world. And the Lord certainly will not be a liar with regard to this word either. We should never forget that there are two spiritual kingdoms and two princes fighting for the souls of the human race: Christ and Belial, Michael and the dragon, the serpent and the woman’s seed, the strong one and the stronger one. “Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels” (Rev. 12:7). This fight will go on as long as the world stands. The constitution in the kingdom of darkness is one of lies and murder, deceit, sin and death. As Christ says the prince of this world is the father of the lie, and a murderer from the beginning. And the subjects in that kingdom are together with the fallen angels — all the unfaithful human beings on earth and in hell. The constitution of the kingdom of Christ is truth and grace, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

As the Scripture says: “Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before Thy face” (Ps. 89:14). And the subjects in that Kingdom are, together with the good angels, all the faithful people on earth and in heaven.

## October 21

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*The son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman* – Gal. 4:30.

**T**housands of otherwise rather enlightened human beings do not know that there are two different spiritual kingdoms in Christendom. First, there is the kingdom of law where a man has everything according to his own merits, according to the words of the apostle: “to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt” (Rom. 4:4). Christ wanted to show us this when He said that those who had worked all the day, and borne the burden and heat of the day in the vineyard, did not get any grace, but only according to merit, only the penny a day agreed upon, as they “worked” (Swedish: held to the deeds). The Scripture calls such people servants, bondservants, the sons of the bondwoman, who only get what they deserve.

Secondly, there is the kingdom of grace, where nothing goes according to our merit. No, those belonging to it have a perpetual grace — at moments better or worse the same state of grace because they have a Surety. He has secured for them that they are not judged according to the law, and that no sins are imputed to them. As it says in Rom. 4:5: “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” As also David says: “Blessed is the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works” and “to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” These are in the Scripture called children, sons and the sons of the freewoman, who will “abide in the house” (John 8:35) and have the inheritance.

By these words about servants and children in the house, most especially in the important and symbolical house of Abraham, Paul has pointed out a thing full of instruction. Still many have not reflected upon it. God has put a striking picture of His institutions of grace in the midst of our families. Is it not true, that the dear children in the house live under such an order of grace in the fact that they never become indebted, no matter how much they use every day and how little they work? They have all they need freely and at no cost. They get their food and drink, their clothes, their care, their bed, their training. And still, though they maybe do not earn anything at all, but only consume, they never become indebted. No, at long last, when for many years they have enjoyed all this good, they shall also have the inheritance. And the servants in the house work hard and faithfully, and maybe produce all that the house lives on. But with them an account is kept. If during the year they have taken out more than their wages agreed upon, then they are finally in debt. And it is quite out of the question that they would inherit the house. Once more let it be said, the children never become indebted for all they use without earning anything. Is not this something strange?

And what is the reason why the children are never indebted? The reason is only that one never keeps any account with them. “Why, they are the children,” you say. “Who would keep an account with the children as long as they live on their father’s bread, or on the footing of a child?”

That is the secret of the kingdom of God! No account is ever kept with the children! Our debt or freedom from debt only depends on whether we are servants or children, “the sons of the bondwoman,” or of the “freewoman.” In your own family circle is the true picture of the kingdom of grace, the picture the Scripture so often uses. As it is with your children, so it also is with those who are in Christ and live as the children of God. No account is kept with them. They are the people to whom God does not impute any sin. They live of grace because of the merit of their firstborn Brother. Therefore they are in a perpetual grace of adoption.

Oh, is it true, is it possible that there is such a kingdom of grace on earth? Yes, it is true! The Scripture cannot fail, even if our unsteady hearts, soaked with legalism, cannot accept this blessed comforting thought. But as truly as the Scripture does not lie, this is the case with all the faithful: God does not impute any sin to them to condemnation. They are the lovable children of God. They enjoy the same grace with God at their worse moments as at their better moments; both when they rejoice at the power they have to do something good, and when they are alarmed at their sins and foolishness, so that they “roar by reason of the disquietness of their heart” (Ps. 38:8). They enjoy the same grace when they see and taste how sweet the Lord is, and also when they are fed with wormwood and gall during a long draught. If it were not so, but we were more well-pleasing to God only at the moments we receive grace to be more pious and holy — why, then righteousness would be of our works, and Christ would be dead in vain! Then we would be in a kingdom of works having overcome the grace, and not in a kingdom of grace having overcome the works. I do not deny that this seems a great foolishness to our reason. Everything within us — our feeling, reason, conscience — is so filled up with legalism that we are all the time drawn down into our imaginations. But should we in earnest believe what we feel according to our nature and how things seem to us? Why, that would be to depart from faith! No, the kingdom of grace where no sin is imputed, is the sum of all the merits of Christ and of all the witness of the Scripture to them. Eternal thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift! (2 Cor. 9:15).

## October 22

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*Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die ...  
but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him – 1 Cor. 15:36, 38.*

**I**t is as if the apostle seeks to say here: You fool! Can you for a moment consider resurrection absurd and impossible when you see it happening daily before your eyes in a much less important way? You see how God makes the dead, dry grains to bear fruit even when they are moldering away in the earth, so that they rise in new, living, and more beautiful bodies. You cannot understand that God can give our buried and moldered bodies a resurrection, even though you see the insignificant grains of wheat, or suchlike, worthy of a resurrection

Every spring you see resurrection before your eyes. In the autumn the seed was put down in the earth quite dry. There it lay as if thrown away, and there it moldered away. In the winter it was frozen under a great, thick winding sheet of snow and ice. And cold winter storms went over the wide grave. During the long winter months and dark nights it was to you as if that seed was utterly lost. But what happened? At long last the greatly desired spring comes. The sun shines again with all the splendor of its beams. And by their warmth the Creator dissolved the winding sheet, and then bids the dead to rise. Thousands of new, living, healthy, green straws rise up from the earth. And these will give back the thrown-out seed to the farmer many times over.

God has put such things right before the eyes of us all. And no one is astonished any longer, because we see it happening every year. Verily, if we were not accustomed ever since our birth to seeing this dead, dry, thrown away seed rise again in the summer, we would certainly find this fact, something most strange and incredible. However, on the contrary, the seasonal course of nature almost prevents us from bearing in mind that it is nevertheless a wonder. We only say: "It grows," and do not reflect upon the fact that this growing really is the work of the Creator, and that all the world with all its science cannot make even one blade of grass. The coming up of the new crops from the earth is a creation that has its beginnings in the very grain that moldered away in the earth. Thus it is a case of resurrection of the dead. All the world cannot do anything like that. It is the work of the Almighty Creator Himself.

But if now this same God reveals to us that He wants to do the same with our bodies, i.e., wants to let them also be buried in the earth and molder away, surely to rise again one day when the summer of the great eternity draws near and "the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings" (Mal. 4:2) shall come back to us, yes, if the Almighty God tells us that He wants to bid our dead bodies to rise, how often we find it absurd and impossible. Do we not then deserve to be called "Thou fool"? Think once more: We can see that the inconsequential grains of rye,

wheat, etc., rise. And still we want to think that the great, precious, so wonderfully created and so very costly grains, our bodies, which have been so highly honored that the very Son of God took on a human body — we think that they would not have the same honor of resurrection as wheat and rye! And why do we think so? Only because our poor reason does not understand how it can be possible that the Almighty can do what He has said. Do we not then deserve to be called fools?

But herein is the real and great foolishness, that we do not stop and reflect upon the fact that the case here is of a new, great creation work of the Almighty God. As the apostle remarks: “God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him” — God, not you, O man, not the grain itself, but God, the Creator, who once created all the earth and all the planets out of nothing. Thou fool! It is about Him that this is spoken here: “God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.” It only depends on His free pleasure. What is easier to the Almighty Creator than to do what He wants? But see how we become fools without realizing it when we despise God, His power, and His Word! We have no time to realize it before we have become so blind in spiritual matters that the first ideas about God — the ideas the very heathen have only by looking at creation — have been taken away from us. So that we wonder whether this or that is possible while we still speak about the Almighty God. We should take care so that the punishment of blinding will not befall us. God is great and holy. The one who does not want to humble Himself under His truth and might, will be blinded by Him. “God turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish” (Isa. 44:25). “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:22), real fools capable of denying what they can see with their eyes, namely that God can easily do what He wants.

## October 23

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*Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings – 1 Pet. 2:1.*

**I**t certainly is a dreadful sign of our deep depravity, that we, often without knowing any real reason, would rather hear and speak evil about our neighbor than talk about his laudable qualities. We are so particular about our own name, that we cannot easily bear it if somebody says the least little evil thing about us. No, all of us want all the world to say everything good about us. And still we cannot bear to listen if somebody speaks good about others. From the old serpent's seed in the human being such sinful attitudes have resulted and become common, that hardly two or three persons can come together without somebody being subjected to a loveless and tactless discussion. Yes, are there not so-called friends and acquaintances, yes, even relatives, who pay visits to one another only to get stuff for evil thoughts and tales about each other? If they find something really evil to say, then this will be scrutinized, pondered, expounded, and painted in a very exhaustive and circumstantial way. This is called betraying and slandering one's neighbor. It is already an obvious sin against the holy law of love: "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (Luke 6:31).

But usually it is not enough that someone relates, expounds, and spreads about the actual evil report. The person usually also makes his small additions and further calculations with regard to inner motives and intentions, which make the evil still worse. Every time the story is related anew, because everybody has the wicked inclination to add and exaggerate his neighbor's faults, the result is that those faults grow bigger and develop while the tale is being told. At last one can hardly recognize the small core of truth representing the origin of the tale that now has become beyond recognition. Such things we experience almost daily! May everyone who still has some fear of God and sin, be well on his guard against participating in such creations. Otherwise he can easily happen to repeat something that originally was nothing less than a lie fabricated by revenge and antipathy. Do you think God will put up with your sin, when, whether of a good-natured thoughtlessness, or of secret ill will you immediately believe and repeat all that people say? In this way many a person becomes an abominable backbiter without having really had any such intentions.

What rules the world and the hypocrites becomes a temptation to the children of God. This is also the case with this inclination to think and speak bad about certain persons. Because even where a good, willing spirit and love dwell, one still has depraved flesh left, the wickedness of the old heart. The consequence of this is — what the God-fearing often feel and admit with grief, but what the unwatchful overlook — that their opinion, judgment, or even look at a person often only depend

on their relation to themselves. If a person is kindly disposed towards *me*, thinks and speaks well about me, then I can so easily interpret everything in that person to his credit even if he is not a good person. On the contrary, if an otherwise much more perfect person has happened to affront me — for instance, has made a nasty remark about me, or shown me disrespect, or has overshadowed my glory by his superiority, etc. — then my wicked heart has immediately a certain, secret inclination to seek faults in him, and if possible to exaggerate and spread them about.

What an abominable beast is the fallen human heart! Only because your pride has been wounded by a remark, you try to invent and say all sorts of evil about your neighbor! Can he not be an honest and respectable person though he has corrected you? Or if it has pleased God to bless him with a certain gift or distinction above you, can he not anyway be a respectable person? Why do you try to pick a quarrel with your neighbor simply because his field or commerce seems to have been more blessed than yours?

Has not many a man for such a private and secret reason within his wicked heart — begun to think and speak evil about a person whom he before had loved for years, and in whom at that time he saw all good? A Christian should be on his guard in time against this falseness and subtlety of the wicked heart. We do have constant examples showing that wicked or good opinions depend on one's will and interpretation. To a malevolent person a thing may be quite black. To somebody else with a good will to the person concerned the same thing may be a triviality, or maybe something quite innocent, yes, even laudable. In that way one's opinion may depend on the interpretation. Let us bear this well in mind, and be on our guard against our heart. Let us be on our guard against following the thoughts and feelings that we get towards those who have in some way affronted us. Yes, verily! If envy and hatred against your neighbor move in your soul, if you feel a desire in your heart to attack him, and if this and that story about him burns in your soul — oh, be on your guard then! Then the power of darkness is present.

## October 24

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*This do in remembrance of me* – Luke 22:19.

Someone may ask: What does the dear Lord mean by the Holy Communion, this strange and high institution? What was the real purpose thereof? Many Christians never get any correct understanding of the Holy Communion or of the worthy enjoyment of it. They do not get the consolation, joy, and rejoicing that the Holy Communion otherwise gives. And this only because they do not know or bear in mind what the meaning and purpose of Christ was, in this institution. Not until everything is explained in eternity will it be possible to say all that the Lord means by it. But still we can understand something of it. At this time we shall see only the quality of the Holy Communion as being a remembrance of the expiatory death of Christ.

The Lord said: “This do in remembrance of Me.” First of all — we must understand that He did not institute this remembrance for His own benefit, but for ours. Because everything Christ did on earth happened for our sakes. As He Himself says: “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). What a gracious meaning we already discover in that He instituted a remembrance of Himself. Christ knew the weaknesses of His children and the toilsome way they had to walk through the wilderness and vale of tears of this life. He knew how often they would nearly succumb by the way. He knew how, with their weak, faint, and fearing hearts, and during a daily and incessant fight against their flesh, the world and the cunning and darts of Satan, they would become tired, sick, wounded, faint, and despairing. Moreover, He knew that they would have all their consolation, power, and refreshment only in Him. He knew that if they would only constantly think of Him, they would again get new life, courage, strength, and cheer to go on walking. Furthermore, He knew that what would quench their courage most, and make them timid and worried, would be their own *sins*, faults, and infirmities. But He also knew that against all the sins their only consolation would be in His suffering and death, His offered body, and blood which was shed for the remission of sins. Then He instituted this remembrance of His expiatory death and said: Children, come often together here. When it begins to become dark before your eyes and you begin to succumb, then come together to enjoy My body and blood and think of Me. In brief, He wanted to put huts of rest along our way. There the tired pilgrims would be able to go in and strengthen and refresh themselves by this heavenly bread, His body and blood, and by the remembrance of Him.

This remembrance of the wonder of atonement is certainly useful for everything for the inner man. It awakens us from our forgetfulness and inclination to slumber. It cleans our eyes from the dust obscuring them while walking. It paints sin and



grace with their right colors. It comforts, consoles, strengthens, and restores the peace and rejoicing of adoption in our depressed hearts. It lifts up our souls from earth and directs them towards heaven.

But from the fact that in His Holy Communion Christ did not only institute a feast of remembrance, but also gives us His body and blood to eat and drink, and from the words He spoke at the moment He held out the cup of blessing, we notice that it was especially one benefaction He mainly intended. His words were: "For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28). From these words we notice what was the main thing, namely, to console us against our sins and to satisfy our heavily laden consciences. Because the only thing He said about His blood was that it was the blood of the New Testament, and that it was shed for the remission of sins.

Then notice the Lord's meaning and heart! It was not enough for Him only to shed His blood for the remission of sins. He also wanted to assure us most powerfully and deeply of participation in this atonement. He wanted to have us really consoled and happy because of it. And He is so anxious for this, that He puts this very blood of His in our mouth and says: "Take. Drink ye all of it. Here drink a most powerful counter-element against your sins, against their condemnatory power. Here take yourself the ransom, so that you know that you, yes, even you are partaker of it. This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for the remission of sins. In this blood a New Testament is made, a new covenant between God and you, not like the old one. The old one demanded and condemned. The new one gives and atones. The old one said: Do! Give! The new one says: Believe! Receive! And the blood of the old covenant was that of bulls and goats. The blood of the new covenant is the blood of the Son of God. And this blood of Mine is shed for the remission of sins." Look, the Lord wants to say such things. Here we now have an inexhaustible source of comfort for all souls tormented by sins and pangs of conscience. Oh, if they only could stop, calm down, and think quietly and thoroughly over what the Lord does and says here!

## October 25

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*And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh  
with the affections and lusts – Gal. 5:24.*

**T**his is an alarming, yes, dreadful chapter to the one who has not, even to some extent, died away from his old ego and who has not wrapped himself altogether up in Christ, but still thinks that we should do this ourselves. Not to speak about those who do not have any firstfruits of the Spirit, but have a carnal mind which is at enmity with God and His law. Therefore we should never forget that the foundation and beginning of the mortifying of the old man and the birth of the new man is that we must become dead to the law in our conscience and become free, happy, and saved in Christ. In Him we must have both our righteousness and our sanctification. This is the beginning.

When a man has in fact been awakened, but does not believe, and has not been made free, then everything seems vain, alarming, heavy, slow, difficult, and impossible. He is a worried bondsman. Paul shows that we cannot bring forth fruit unto God, we cannot walk in newness of life according to the Spirit, until we have first become dead to the law, and have been made free from him that held us captive. Can I say in faith with Paul: "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God" (Gal. 2:19)? I have tried to fulfill the law in order to become righteous, but have been confounded. I became more and more condemned, perplexed, powerless, helpless, embarrassed. "I died." But all that I sought I found in another, in Christ. In Him I am righteous, pure, saved. He is my *righteousness*.

And further, then I thought that it would be my task to sanctify myself, and I tried to do much to that end. I would pray. I would fight. And I made all this a care of my own. It became my own work. But also this proved a failure. I was not capable of anything. I could not believe and pray. Yes, I was not even "sufficient of myself to think anything" (2 Cor. 3:5) more than my Lord worked in me each moment. Then I noticed that also my sanctification was the Lord's free grace and gift. And I came to nought. "I died." But "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

When in this way Christ has become both my righteousness and my sanctification and I depend on Him in everything and at each moment — then, not until then, will there be truth in my sanctification and the mortifying of my old man. Then will not only his outbursts be checked, but then also the inner man will become mortified, the very heart and life in the old man, the deep, endless selfishness, the self-glorifying, the self-conceit.

The old man means all the evil that is born in us by nature as an inheritance from Adam. The first and most essential thing belonging there is the above-mentioned

selfishness, self-conceit, and high thoughts about oneself. Because the serpent put special deeds into them, when he said to our first parents: “Ye shall be as gods,” from this source there springs a dreadful crop of sins in all the powers of nature. And these then show themselves in turns of mind, desires, thoughts, words, and deeds, such as pride, forgetfulness of God, ease, unbelief, coldness, disobedience, self-will, laziness, voluptuousness, uncleanness, vanity, wrath, impatience, wickedness, hatred, envy, greed, falseness, lying, slander, and other sins and vices. That is the picture of the old man.

The new man again who shall arise and increase within us is the new being, born through faith by the Holy Spirit in the heart. It is really a partaking of the life and nature of God. And it manifests itself in us in a new relationship of adoption to God, the confidence of a child, love, mildness, humbleness, fear of God and fear of sin, love of the law of God, of holiness and righteousness, of self-denial, of a pure life, of meekness, patience, honesty, etc. This we can see most especially in all its perfection in Christ. He was “the express image of His person” (i.e., the person of God) (Heb. 1:3).

As now regards this new man in us, the child is small as it has only just been born. But still it is holy, and well-pleasing to God. When Christ was lying in the manger, He, too, was small and lowly. But still He was the Son of God, conceived of the Holy Ghost, dear and lovable to God, angels and men. And, in the midst of sinful Nazareth, this holy Child was brought up and increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. Yes, later on, during many fights, suffering and trials He proceeded to the goal of His life. That way, in the midst of the old Adam remnants, the temptations of the world and wicked spirits, the new man in us, Christ in us, should be brought up and should increase in grace, until Christ becomes more and more alone working and ruling in us, yes, becomes more and more our all in all; whereas the old man is nailed to the cross and suffers more and more day by day and becomes exhausted, choked, and mortified.

## October 26

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*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God* – Rom. 8:14.

**T**his is the great, decisive, distinctive mark of all human beings on earth. Only those are the children of God who are driven, ruled, and led through this present time by the Spirit of God. The children of the Spirit of God are the children of God. All those who are the children of God, they are led by the Spirit of God. Those who are not led by the Spirit of God, they are not the children of God. Thus this text tells us the great, common, distinctive mark distinguishing the children of God from all other human beings. In all the world we see this great difference. The great crowd of men only live after the flesh, either in a free and coarse way, according to their own lusts or after this world, or in a finer way, by establishing some righteousness of their own, but without being ruled by the Word and the Spirit. But in addition there is also, where they have the gospel of Christ, another people, a people perpetually going about with the emphasis on how one should rightly believe and walk after Christ. With all the infirmities and lamentations, this people still chiefly strive after believing and living for Christ. They strive to mortify the flesh and confess their Lord both with words and deeds. Thus all their life goes in a direction quite opposite to that of the rest of the world. Such things are never worked by flesh and blood. No, they are only worked by the Spirit of God. And “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

The “sons of God”! Who can believe or bear in mind something so great? Those who can easily believe this, certainly do not think of what the words contain. Those who can bear in mind what the words contain, can never on earth believe it fully. It is by far too great. It does not get room in our narrow hearts. If we remember that these are the children, sons and daughters, not servants and maids, of the great, Almighty Creator! We can to some extent realize how great this is, when we look at the words the apostle uses here. He says that if we are children, then we are also joint-heirs with the only begotten Son, “joint-heirs with Christ.” And then he says that Christ shall be “the firstborn among many brethren.” But how should we then understand this? To be somebody’s child in the true sense usually means that one is born of him. Can we possibly be the children of God in this sense? In a certain sense the “only begotten” of the Father is alone the Son of God, as born of the Father in eternity and being of divine nature. But in another sense all the children of God on earth have also been born of God, when by the Spirit they have become “new creatures.” It is usually in two ways that we become somebody’s sons: The first way is by birth, the second is by adoption. It has pleased the great God that we should be His children in both of these ways. The apostle speaks about the latter in Eph. 1:5: “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by

Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” John often speaks about the former way. He says for instance: “the sons of God ... which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12–13). And again: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9). What wonders of heaven are on our sinful earth! It still carries living children of God, children born of God. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

That we are the children of God is the sum of everything the triune God has done for the human being — as Creator, Atoner, and Sanctifier. Is it far too much for you to realize that you are a child of God? Then remember that God created man for this in the beginning, when He created him in His image and to be heir of everything He had made, yes, even prepared the mansions of heaven for him. But, you say, Why, we are fallen! We are full of sin! Then remember that God therefore gave His only begotten Son to become a man like unto us and earn back our lost right to be His children by His obedience unto death. Does it seem impossible that you can be a child of God when you feel so much sin? Then think of all Christ did simply for that reason.

Ye say again: All men are not the children of God in the right sense because of that. Then the reply is: Therefore we also become born of God, born of the Spirit. In spite of all the wickedness and fight of your flesh, you can never be free to sin, cannot habitually “commit” sin, for the “seed” of God remains in you, and the Spirit of God fights against sin, punishes, solaces, and leads you. Think of the words in our text: “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” If we look at the foundation for our adoption, namely the work of the triune God Himself, we will still, with all our infirmities and all the contradictions of our heart, confess that as truly as God is greater than our heart, we are, in truth the children of God, as many as are led by the Spirit of God.

## October 27

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*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ – Rom. 1:16.*

One could ask why the apostle makes this remark, as the gospel is nothing to be ashamed of, and has been given by God from heaven, and thus is the most glorious thing on earth. Why does the apostle then say that he is not ashamed of it? No doubt because people are nevertheless in the habit of being ashamed of it. Hereby many will certainly affirm that it could only be the case at the time of the apostle, when unfaithful Jews and heathen did not know the glory of the gospel and despised it in their false wisdom.

It is certainly true that at the time of the apostle the gospel of God was a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks. “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:23). But it is also the same today. The gospel of Christ is a stumbling block and foolishness to most of those baptized in His name. At all times and in all places human nature is the same, no matter what the outward changes. Therefore the Word of God also is applicable at all times and to all nations, no matter whether they are Jews or heathen, Mohammedan or nominal Christians. Everywhere it comes true as the apostle says: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them” (1 Cor. 2:14).

And not only that, but in all respects the gospel of Christ is (battling hard) against all the things lying deepest in our nature. The gospel attacks what the human being loves most — his independence. It requires unconditional submission of both his intellect and his will to the Word of Christ. In the gospel all proud fancies and self-confidence are thoroughly cut down till only God remains great and the human being is merely a poor beggar. Such things can never please human nature. No, to it they cause only pain and death.

Here is the ground, why the Word of Christ and the true witnesses of Christ always must be hated by everything not born of God. Therefore, the Lord also said so often to His disciples, that they should be prepared to be hated by all men for His name’s sake. And He explained that it was not all right with them and that they were not His true disciples, if they did not get that sign of His, if it did not happen with them as with their Master. It is not the gospel of Christ in truth and purity if the world can love it, if it does not become scoffed at and attacked.

No enemy of the gospel wants it to appear that he hates the good and right things. The enemy always has to put on the form of a “zeal for the truth” and thereby scoffs at the gospel of Christ as foolishness or as something false and evil, deserving to be blamed and detested.

The disciples and friends of Christ are always in the minority, just a few, despised souls, while all the world that scoffs at them consists of the great leaders,

and respected crowd. Thus one can easily understand that it will always be a difficult temptation to be ashamed of Him and His words. To many a Christian it becomes an unspeakably hard fight for the sake of Christ, to give up the esteem of the world, to become a fool, see oneself despised and depicted as a terrible man by one's family, friends, and the whole of society, when formerly we had nothing so precious on earth as people's esteem, friendship, and confidence. Now we have to give up all that. A divine work in the soul is needed in order that for us to be able always to abide by this in the future. We are not speaking of the godliness the world can approve of and respect, but of the true, genuine following after Christ, which following necessarily must be a stumbling block and foolishness to all the world as truly as Christ has said: servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). As if He wishes to say: If they pretend that they hate you because of some fault, e.g., lack of humility, mildness, etc., know that I was "meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29), and still they hated Me.

## October 28

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*By Jesus Christ also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand – Rom. 5:2.*

**T**he word access, access into grace, is a word full of heavenly consolation for poor sinners. The Scripture teaches us that we have a perpetual access to this grace. The apostle says elsewhere: “access unto God” (free transl.) or “access unto the Father through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 2:18). And in Hebrews 10 he calls it “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh.” What an eternal consolation is this access, this freedom to approach unto the throne of grace. This new and living way, through the veil, stands open for us all the time! It is this that helps in all situations, no matter what I can discover about my state, even if I find that up to now I have not believed, but have been false and deceived, like Judas or the sorcerer. The sorcerer was “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:23), but still he had access to grace, as the apostle said: “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray to God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.” The lukewarm man was addressed with the hard words: “I will spue thee out of My mouth,” but still he had access to grace as the Lord added: “I counsel thee to buy of Me gold” (Rev. 3:18).

Therefore, as long as it is still called today, everything can be helped, as we always have access to grace. We can today begin to flee to this grace, as the apostle admonishes us on the basis of this access: “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Everything is based upon the fact that we have this access only “by Jesus Christ,” that we have a high priest, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. We have “an high priest forever” (Heb. 6:20), who “hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:24–25). That by faith we can constantly remain in grace is partly due to the perpetual access to grace, and partly due to the fact that we have grace only “through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The great, consoling truth is thus certain and confirmed by the Scripture, that no shortcomings and infirmities, no changes from better to worse moments will revoke or upset our state of grace, as long as we remain in faith in Christ and do not depart from Him fully. Any sin we can ever do during our walk can definitely be remedied and counterbalanced by the divine institution of grace, the covenant of grace founded in Christ. Everything shall be remedied by the eternal High Priest. To this reason therefore, He has entered into heaven with His own blood, that He may be our Defender with the Father. As John says: “My little children, these things



write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). This Defender and this covenant of grace are mightier than anything that can possibly happen in all our life. As the light of the Spirit reveals and punishes all that is sinful in the faithful, many and difficult trials will arise for them as regards this faith.

Maybe someone has been overthrown by difficult temptations and now feels dreadful threats in his conscience. He laments: “I have made a clear fall. I have been separated from grace.” Another laments under persistent temptations: “My heart is false. It loves sin. It is unsteady and wicked. I do not watch as I should,” etc. A third goes about in a lingering drought, inwardly dead and destitute of feeling, like one asleep. He laments and does not know what to do in order to become rightly awake and God-fearing. All the depravity we have inherited from Adam can be felt in many ways, when the Spirit throws light upon and punishes it. Is it possible that all this wretchedness can be covered by grace?

Well, if grace did even for the least little part, depend on us, then grace would be impossible. In this we see whether you really believe the words that we are in grace only “through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Do you doubt whether all this wretchedness in which you are lying at the throne of grace, can be covered by grace? If so, you must either partly base your faith on something good in yourself, or you must say that the Son of God is no perfect Savior and Advocate with the Father. This point is important beyond measure, i.e., to stick closely to the words: “by Jesus Christ” and let the truth be deeply impressed on our heart that our righteousness and peace with God are *only* in Him who has appeared in the presence of God for us. Otherwise everything is lost and everything is false that the Scripture witnesses with regard to this. If righteousness even partly comes by the law, “then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2:21). “For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect” (Rom. 4:14). Verily we have an eternal grace with God, but only as it happens “through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

## October 29

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*And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness* – Rom. 8:10.

**H**ere you can ask: Why should the faithful die, when God has forgiven them their sins, and death is a punishment for sin? Reply: Do not think that the death of the faithful lessens even the least little bit the absolute fulfillment of Christ, and our full freedom from the curse of the law. Their death is not a punishment according to avenging justice. To those in Christ Jesus, death and all sufferings are only a wholesome means of purification in their Father's hand. They are only trials to their faith and spirit, to destroy their enemies and fetters. Everything will work together for good to them. "Life, or death; all are theirs" (1 Cor. 3:22). Such things have been accomplished by the death of Christ. In that death all the law of God has its full right, and there also a new covenant has been established, according to which all those in Christ are free from the wages of sin — death — and from all the curse of the law. To them "death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). Their death-day has been changed from a punishment for sin into a day of redemption from death and all misery. To them the grave is a hidden passage to the paradise of God. The burial of their bodies is a seed for the second life. The autumn seed that is put in the earth shall come up another summer in a new, young, and beautiful shape. Thus it is not lost in the earth. The bodies of the faithful have not been destroyed by death. They have only been put down in order that they shall rise in new, more beautiful shapes. "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:42–44). Can a death possibly be called the punishment of sin, or the curse of the law? Why, on the contrary, it is by far too great a grace and blessing. Its purpose and use for the bodies of those born again are to uproot and destroy sin which dwells in them. They must die in order to become quite purified. The poison of sin has soaked and destroyed their bodies so that they, like the leprous houses in Israel, must be pulled down and renewed in order to become clean. A corn of wheat does not become living, except it fall into the ground and die. So also our bodies should die and molder away in the dust in order to become rightly holy.

One could well remark: Those who live when Christ comes, will never die. No, in the twinkling of an eye, they will be changed. Why could the Lord not do so with all His people? Why could He not merely change them in the twinkling of an eye so that there would not be any need for them to die? To this we can only reply: God is wiser than man. How many deep, wholesome lessons and impressions would we not be deprived of, if death were to stand no longer before our eyes? Why, the

faithful need all possible help against sin. The certainty of death often checks the fleshly and worldly mind. Thereby we are shown both the goodness and severity of God. We see the severity of God and His hatred towards sin, when He, the God of life and eternal bliss, allowed death to come into the world because of sin. And we see His goodness, His heartfelt mercy, when He gave His Son to die our death in order to break its sting and change it into a good sleep. As long as there is sin in the world, death is a blessing for the faithful. They still need to pray: “Lord, make us to know our end, ... that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Ps. 39:4; 90:12).

Finally, the faithful shall die also because they must follow after their Head in everything. He died. Should we, His members, be exempted from this order? He has gone this way to glory. Should His members then go there another way? It is a great consolation that, when we die, we follow our Lord and Savior, who has gone that way before us. Nature still always has a tendency to shudder at death. This has also been the experience of many of the holy. It is very necessary and useful for faithful souls to bear this well in mind, and first as well as last to remember that they are in the hand of God, in the arms of the faithful Father and Savior. There shall not a hair on their head fall without their Father’s permission. Though death has a frightening shape, it is still their gracious and well-known Savior that comes to them in death. In death it happens with us the way it happened with the disciples when they were in the boat, and Jesus came to them on the water. They became frightened and said: “It is a Spirit.” But He said: “It is I; be not afraid” (Matt. 14:26–27). Up to this very moment He has attended to us with such great graciousness. He will not leave His dear ones in their death. Nor will He let anything happen to us that His love has not prescribed. By death He will only give us what we have sighed for so long, namely, redemption from all evil. He will give us perfect holiness and security. We shall nevermore sin against Him. We shall never more be troubled by any lack of clarity in faith. We shall never more be harassed by the devil. We shall never more miss our Savior, but see Him, as He is, in the paradise of God. On earth we have always been strangers. We have been poor, frightened and insecure. Then we shall be taken into a heavenly kingdom and inheritance, the eternal bliss.

## October 30

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*Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom – Luke 12:32.*

What a mighty consolation and security to those who are seeking the kingdom of God, but who feel much dread, weakness, and fear that they will not be able to reach that kingdom! What a great comfort it would be if they were only able to wake up and see the importance of such a word of comfort from this Lord! Because the words “Fear not” from Him that has all power, must necessarily mean a promise that He will help us to reach the kingdom of God no matter how bad it may look for us.

But here it should be well considered that He does not speak so to all human beings without distinction. He does not say that no human being should fear. No, He says plainly who should have that consolation. He says: “little flock.” Surely the Lord in Himself is gracious towards all human beings. We cannot deny that. But still many are in such a state that they really have reason for fear. They have reason for fearing the most dreadful thing that can be thought. Namely, that they will be outright condemned and will never be allowed to see the kingdom of God. To such people the Lord does not say: “Fear not.” It is necessary to distinguish between different states of different souls, as it is called today. Everything can still be helped if we desire to hear the voice of the Lord. The Lord says this word of consolation, “Fear not,” only to His little flock, only to the souls He calls His sheep. And from John 10 we see how He speaks especially about the sheep and says: “I know My sheep, and am known of Mine.” “My sheep hear My voice, and they follow Me,” and “Neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.” And in the text about the last day He says that He will then separate all human beings one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

The point of it all is that in His judgments the Lord distinguishes between different souls. He speaks sweet and consoling words to those He calls His sheep. On the contrary, He utters most dreadful words to the ones on His left hand: “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). Therefore, no matter how consoling and sweet these words are, we must, in order not to become deceived or to deceive anybody, remember that this consolation only applies to those whom Christ knows as His sheep and characterizes by the words “they hear My voice,” “they follow Me”! He does not say that they are as good, as faithful, and as strong as they should be, and least of all, that they are saints free from sin. No, they are certainly sinners. Yes, this they lament bitterly themselves. But on the following point they are separate from other people: all the world lives freely according to its own heart's lusts and thoughts.

But the sheep of Christ are such souls as, in spite of all their infirmities, are still ruled by His voice. They always pay heed to His words and pleasure. They cling to Him. They become punished and chastised by His words, but also comforted and led through all their life by the same words.

Maybe you may heartily desire to be a true Christian. You cannot do without your Savior and His gospel. But you suffer from so much unfitting sin, that you fear that you will never be allowed to see the kingdom of God. You are often ready to despair altogether and leave it all. But by a curious grace of God you still cling all the time to your Savior and cannot forsake Him and eternal life altogether. Then listen to what the Lord Himself says in our text, the Lord that finally will judge all in the last day, the only One we have to pay heed to. Because whom should I believe if not Himself? And now He says here: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." What a mighty ground for our consolation: your Father's good will or pleasure! Here our comfort and our hope are again being built only on the divine majesty's own good will and free giving. Firmly believe that this also is the only right ground. Therefore, as soon as you are only one of the sheep in His little flock, then He gives you the kingdom. This was the Father's free pleasure and good will. Because He has "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:5). And what is now the eternal Father's will and pleasure? So says the Lord: "to give you the kingdom." To whom does He want to give the kingdom? To you that are a little flock, full of shortcomings in faith and obedience, in courage and understanding. Therefore He wants to give you the kingdom as a free gift. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). It is a gift. "Not of works, lest any man should boast." Obviously, therefore, He gives it to the ones who are a feeble little flock, not to the strong and courageous, even if these latter have less to repent and weep over as regards their deeds. "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace." All of us are in reality sinners. Now it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom to those who know their sins and only seek grace to live by faith.

## October 31

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*I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin – Rom. 7:23.*

**I**t is regrettable, but we have by far too many examples of this in our infirm life, both with regard to faith and walk. Also in my mind there is the law that I want to believe all that my almighty Lord has said, no matter how absurd it seems to my blind reason. But what happens? In my blind and proud reason there is another law bringing me into captivity and saying: “That and that is absurd, yes, impossible.” And when I do not *see* the possibility of a matter, then I doubt the Word of God and “make Him a liar.” This is a dreadful sin! I would never want to commit it. That I, nevertheless, do commit it, no doubt shows that I have been “brought into captivity to the law of sin.”

Or what happens when you, for instance, believe the article of the resurrection of our bodies? Your mind thinks the Lord’s words about this to be holy and truthful. And you think God mighty to be able to do all He wants and has promised. But there comes a moment when you fix your eyes on some moldered bones and think: Shall also our bodies rise? No, it is absurd. Then the law in your members, eyes and reason, has brought you into captivity.

The same thing happens all the time to the great, main article about the forgiveness of our sins! You have all your salvation in faith in the blood of Jesus, that it cleanses us from *all* our sins. But before you have time to think of it, you have begun to look at a certain sin, a sin you are suffering from most. You look at the fact that the sin is so wrong and incessant. And you think: “That sin should at once come to an end! And yet I still sin! How can I then believe the grace of God?” Thus you are soon caught by the law of unbelief and reason. In the same way, when another distress, want, and other worries arise, then the law in your mind says: “Let me hope in God! He is an almighty and faithful Father. Be not afraid, only believe.” But then you immediately hear another law from your unbelieving heart. It says: “Why, this cannot be helped! It is impossible! It is all up with me,” etc. In this way we all the time experience in our weak faith, how the law in our members brings us into captivity.

And this does not only happen with our faith and hope, but also with our life. According to the law in my mind I consider the commandments of God not only holy and true, but also very dear to my heart. But in the twinkling of an eye they become nothing to me. I cannot bear in mind and revere the presence of God. It is to me as if God did not exist. It happens as the apostle says: “That which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I” (Rom. 7:15). I should like to be imperturbably meek and mild, but in the twinkling of an eye I am seized with wrath and impatience. I should like all the time to be clean and free

from all sinful desires. But I am caught by the law of sin, so that I do what I hate. I should like to be meek towards all human beings, patient in affliction, altruistic, and heavenly minded. But in the twinkling of an eye I have been brought from my right mind to a state that is a riddle, and brings consternation and fright to me. What is now all such, if not exactly what the apostle says here: I have been brought into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. And who can say how badly things may go then?

That the Spirit, nevertheless, wins the victory is due to the fact that in the midst of all this the soul remains in the holy mind that still rises up against the flesh, fights against the flesh and is restored by repentance and faith at the mercy seat, again gets renewed consolation, mind, and power to proceed with the walking after the Spirit. It is due to the fact that, by all the humiliating experiences, the soul only becomes more God-fearing and learns to know its weakness, and dreadful power of sin more and more, and is more and more driven to prayer and the Word to seek help there. What happens? That is a very important thing we should pay attention to. Because, if on the contrary it happens that the soul begins more and more to remain away from the mercy seat, to feel at home in sin and excuse it, then this is a witness to a retrograde step. Yes, it bears witness to sleep and death. But if, on the contrary, sin becomes more and more dreadful to the spirit, and exactly the sin my flesh loves most, so that finally I think all other sins small in comparison to this, think myself a most dreadful sinner, but consider the grace and Christ more and more indispensable, then this bears witness that, in the midst of all fights, the spirit becomes more and more God-fearing and sanctified. If it again would happen so that all fight would come to an end, that the soul would find itself as good and pious as he wants to be, then this is a certain sign that he has gone to sleep and quietly surrendered to the enemy. When everything happens well in this life, then it also happens that sin is not dead and vain, but troublesome and pressing. Because I do not yield myself to sin's will, but watch, pray, and fight against it. Then the fight often becomes hard and the distress great. This is what the enchanted and sleeping souls do not know. This is the fight fought by those who fight for a crown, and in whom the law continually works all manner of concupiscence.

# November 1

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*Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done* – Luke 22:42.

Oh, when once my eyes are opened so that I may see the great main concern of God, the most tender thing in His heart, even His anxiety for the salvation of souls, so that for it He becomes man, for it He becomes a sacrificial lamb, sweats blood, lets Himself be scourged, crucified and killed, what an inexpressible, mighty consolation it will be to pray then: “Not My will, but Thine, be done.” Above all it is necessary for us to know and really believe, yes, be assured in our very hearts that God wants to save us and give us eternal bliss, and that He will never want anything else forever — today and tomorrow and every day.

For the sake of this, the most earnest will of His heart, even the salvation of your soul, He may let many bitter sufferings befall you. Only for the sake of the eternal welfare of your soul does He let your outer man perish and much temporal distress befall you, yes, sometimes most bitter experiences. He may let you lose the things most dear to you on earth, things united with your heart, things dearer to you than your life. Death may snatch away a dear bosom friend, maybe your dear husband or your dearest child. Another may lose all his possessions within a short time. Wicked men may deprive you of something still more precious, your good name. Another may get an incurable disease, etc.

What infinitely bitter experience the vale of tears has for the pilgrims passing through it! A heart can quite succumb if it only looks at the things before its eyes. But if with Asaph you can go “into the sanctuary of God” (Ps. 73:17), and get to see the true meaning of this life, the earnest of eternity, and the gracious meaning of the faithful God, when He has sent this trial to you, namely that He is thinking of your soul, then you will “quiet your heart before God” in worship and consider your most bitter experience a very great grace. Do you know how much suffering is needed for the salvation of your soul? We ask again: Do you know how much suffering is needed for the salvation of your soul? Stop here and think! If your faithful God has such a benignant thought with regard to you that He intends to make you eternally blessed in heaven, would you be dissatisfied because He uses so bitter a means to prepare you? And when you have felt your miserable sloth and weakness in the sanctification and mortifying of your flesh, you have perhaps yourself often cried out of the depths: “God, I cannot watch and fight and mortify my flesh the way I should. Please do what Thou wish. O Lord, mortify my flesh Thyself. Thou promote my sanctification!” Now the Lord has provided you the grace, and heard your prayer. Now He has begun to mortify your flesh and has not found any better means for doing that than this very suffering. Then you want to be displeased? Oh, no! Pray God for a submissive and quiet spirit, so that, in the



hardest death-struggle of your old man, you can pray: "Father, not as I will, but as Thou wilt!" It depends only on this: that one can surrender to death, take leave of this life, of all thought of earthy felicity and turn one's soul towards eternity. This prayer is learned in Gethsemane. The horrors of torture and death extort from the holy heart of Jesus the prayer: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." But He adds: "Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). This was the victory. Then He said with a submissive spirit: "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). When one has surrendered to death, the suffering is mitigated.

"But," you say, "if only it had been my Father who had sent me my suffering! But I see this and that evil man as the reason for it." Reply: "You get this thought because you do not believe in only one God. This is the heathen in your heart that has several gods: first the Creator, then the devil, and then a wicked man, etc. If, instead, you would believe that the Scripture teaches that there is only one God who rules over all other powers in heaven, on earth and in hell, that the devil cannot touch Job without getting permission to do so, and that the world cannot touch "an hair on our head without our Father," then you would also see that the kind and degree of evil things wicked people inflict on you have been determined by the wise Father. You would not look at flesh, but only see God in everything. The Scripture teaches that it is the Lord that sends suffering, even when it is inflicted on us by wicked people. David saw this when the wicked Shimei cursed him. David said: "Let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?" (2 Sam. 16:10). It was also wicked men that tortured Christ. And still He called it "the cup which My Father hath given Me" (John 18:11). And think when the Lord Christ says: "But there shall not an hair of your head fall on the ground without your Father." What can then happen to us without the will of God? What can be less important than a hair? Oh, what dreadful unbelief when we do not reflect upon such words coming from Christ Himself! Hereby He has expressed that our heavenly Father cares for our least anxieties, and that not even the least thing can happen to us without Him! Should we not then commend everything to God with happy submission and only say: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

## November 2

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*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation* – James 1:12.

**I**t is important to notice this. Let us therefore look a bit more thoroughly at this matter. Many pious children of grace are accustomed to being discouraged altogether, only because of the fact of temptation. And that especially because of the following thought. They say: “Even if I had fallen into sin I would not despair of grace. But I feel something still worse about myself. You see, I feel *love for sin*. And that is quite dreadful! “The reply is: Do you love this ‘love for sin’ and are you satisfied with it?” “Satisfied with it! How can I be that? On the contrary, it is the most detestable thing I know about myself.” Now this *I*, that detests and hates this “love for sin” is your true I. It is the new man. The Scripture does not call it: love for sin. No, what you call: love for sin, the Scripture calls “the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal. 5:24). Thus what you feel is the love of the flesh for sin. And how would it be possible for us to perceive a temptation, if we did not feel the affections and lusts of the flesh? Thus what you feel is a temptation.

Then only see that you do not assent to your temptation so that you begin to approve of, tender allegiance to, and follow it. No, resist the flesh and the devil with prayer in faith. And no matter how it goes for you, remain at the mercy seat, and cling to the unmerited grace in Christ. You always have eternal life in Him, no matter how bad and strange it may seem otherwise. Yes, even if at times you see yourself quite overcome by evil, so that, as Luther says, “the devil runs over you with his feet and treads on your throat,” i.e., seems to rule quite freely over you; and it seems that all power, and all the grace of the Holy Spirit, have vanished completely.

To become quiet and wait for the Lord in the midst of utter darkness, that is “the wisdom of them that are perfect.” That is a great wisdom, a wonderful grace. Because what the Lord does with His child at such dark times of sifting, is by far too great a secret. Then the one who wants to follow feeling and appearance must despair. It is exactly one of the purposes of these deep-going and ruining temptations, that we should lose all the accessory consolation of piety and strength on our own part. Therefore it must go to an extreme, and become coal-black to the soul, that he cannot see or perceive any consolation in himself, but only in the divine Being of God. His own divine faithfulness and power shall be all the hope remaining for him.

Also to such temptations the words of James are applicable: “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience,” and again: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life,” etc. That the apostle here speaks about temptations to sin can be seen clearly from what he adds immediately: “Let

no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” But notice the words: “endureth temptation,” i.e., not to grow tired and surrend and follow the temptation, neither to despair and abandon the mercy seat, but always continue to pray with strong faith and suffering: “Lead us not into temptation.”

So also Peter teaches us to do when we are tempted by the devil: “Whom resist stedfast in the faith” (1 Pet. 5:9). Notice: “stedfast in the faith”! When a man no longer believes the grace of God and His will and power to help, then he ceases to pray and wait for the Lord. He surrenders to the enemy. But if, on the other hand, I want to wait for the Lord, then I must prepare for a long and patient wait. However, at least to us, waiting often seems quite endless and in vain, so that we are ready to say: “I am done for. It is no longer worth waiting for any help. Why, I feel and see definitely that I have been left to Satan!” And if one stops at this, then prayer ceases, as we said above. Also our natural sloth contributes to make us tired of praying when we are not heard immediately, or, to be offended because of Christ (Matt. 26:33) when He does not lead us the way we had thought.

God Himself would become a liar if He allowed us to be confounded when we base our faith and prayer on His promises! In His Word God has told us: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me” (Ps. 50:15). His glory and truth would have to become nought, if He did not do according to these His words. Therefore wake up and impress it deeply on your heart: it is quite impossible that a soul who has tried his own powers so that he has learned to despair of them and to invoke only the Lord — it is quite impossible that such a soul be confounded, no matter how desperately it may look. Because here all the divine Being of the Lord Himself, all His divine faithfulness, truth, and power, are the security for my salvation.

## November 3

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*Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord* – 1 Cor. 15:58.

Maybe you that read this are among those fortunate to have been “chosen out of the world” (John 15:19) to be a follower of Christ. Maybe you are fortunate now to stand in an intimate union with your Savior. Oh, then hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown! The devil has sworn us to death. And he walks about sometimes as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and sometimes as an angel of light. Many that have “begun in the Spirit,” seek to be “made perfect by the flesh.” Sometimes because the world and the lusts recapture them, they get tired of the fight, and the mortifying of the flesh, and again yield themselves servants of sin. Sometimes because they get drowned in despair because of a strong and persistent temptation. Sometimes because of the fascinating power of new doctrines whereby they are carried away from the simplicity in Christ, and the very life is dried up. Sometimes because of imaginations of pride, which imaginations are the death of all grace in us. Some apostates are easily recognized because they return completely to the world and sin, and no longer continue with the Word of God. Others again keep a form of godliness, but have no Spirit, no life, no need for grace and the gospel. They have only “the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law” (Rom. 2:20). “For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness . . . and the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (2 Pet. 2:20–21).

Oh, pray that God will be gracious and preserve you from such an unhappy end! And notice the importance of the apostle’s admonition: *Be ye steadfast, unmovable. Be steadfast in faith.* Keep daily friendship with your Savior. Do not let anything be as important to you as being daily assured of the friendship of your God, and always being found in Christ. Be steadfast in love and the exercise of godliness, so that you do not allow yourself to be tired by the wickedness and ingratitude of men, or by your own wickedness; so that you become lax and indulgent when the fight becomes very hard and long. Hold out and mortify your flesh for a short time still. Now it really comes to the point! You are in the midst of the fight for the crown. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10), says the Lord. Be steadfast in hope and patience under a bitter cross and suffering. Hold out! Now it really comes to the point! Only a short, evil while is left. One can easily fall away. But to endure and storm the castle of heaven, that demands fight.

Stedfast, unmovable, says the apostle. Be “unmovable” from the established Word! Do not let yourself be carried about by the multifarious weathers of doctrine, like a weak reed shaken with the wind. We live at a time when all possible, spiritual novelties are offered. One offers one thing, another something else. And human

nature is such, that old things soon lose their taste and value. And new things cheer us up. Be on your guard not to follow this kind of nature. And do not be conceited enough to think that nobody can deceive you. Do not think that you will yourself always discern what is right and what is wrong. Neither be so ungrateful to the divine Spirit and truth by which you have been born again, that you consider some other doctrine to be better. Nor think that something new is needed for those already “in Christ.” The apostle says: In Him you are perfect. And now you want to perfect the state of grace by some new deed of your own! What do you want to reply to your Savior when He asks you: Were you not already saved in Me? We should not be children, and let ourselves be moved and overthrown by all sorts of weathers of doctrine. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Col. 2:6–7).

“Always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Be more and more diligent in the service of the Lord during the short time left for you in the flesh. Do not live in spiritual sloth. Do not “live unto yourself, but unto Him which died for us, and rose again”(2 Cor. 5:15). In everything whereby you can promote the glory of the Lord or the welfare of those He has bought at such a high price, you should prove your service diligently and fully. You should not become tired nor decrease in good, but on the contrary should become more and more diligent therein. Some people begin to serve God and the brethren in a living way, with a happy and willing mind. But after some years they are lax and cold-minded. There is no prompting mind and no power any longer. This is the deplorable end of such a beautiful beginning. Let us watch! Let us be well on our guard so that nature will not deceive us! “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:8). Your work in the Lord is not in vain. Wake up! Think! All that shall come will still come. We have not followed after any wise fables. It will still come. Namely, “to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life” (Rom. 2:7).

## November 4

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*He that committeth sin is of the devil* – 1 John 3:8.

**N**otice here the difference between “having” sin, and “committing” sin. In 1 John 1:8 it says: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.” And in the same epistle: “He that committeth sin is of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.” But to have sin means that sin is and moves in the flesh of a Christian, that in the fight he may be taken by it by surprise and fall, but with pain, with fighting. He has sin as a suffering, yes, a most difficult suffering, of which he would like to be rid. On the other hand to “commit sin” means to have it as an occupation, as a habit, not intending to leave it, but preferably to defend and swear allegiance to it. Though the hypocrite may disapprove of it in words, he still continues to approve of it in deeds. Many people are masters in complaining of and speaking against sin, but never undertake really to leave it, but have a secret lust to be able to keep it. Or they decide to leave it, but not yet. Or they leave many sins in order to be able to keep only a certain one or another, the dearest sin, which they often try to defend or conceal by means of good explanation. The honest soul seeks in the Word for advice and help to get rid of the sin; the other seeks in the Word for something that will excuse his sin. That is the difference between “having sin” and “committing sin”; between an honest and a false spirit.

To this also belongs the discerning of a difference in the sins themselves. There are two types of sins; one type consists of sins that can be driven out or left completely, such as swearing; taking God’s name in vain; profaning the sabbath, drinking, worldly pleasures and sinful pleasures unworthy for a Christian, otherwise-dominating outbursts of sin, in general, such as fornication, theft, lying, inability to be reconcile, etc., which never can stand together with true faith and a good conscience. If a Christian *falls* into such a sin — as the examples of the saints well show that it is possible to fall — his faith and peace also fall immediately, and are only restored by repentance and forgiveness of the sins. As regards these sins, on the other hand, the hypocrite can continue in one or other of them, conceal or excuse it, and let it become a habit. This is to “commit sin.” And he that committeth sin so is of the devil. This is to live “after the flesh.” But “if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die” (Rom. 8:12–13). It is of such sins that the apostle says: “They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21).

The other type of sins are the ones which lie in the flesh as seeds and roots of all evil things, and which cannot ever be completely rooted out during our time of testing. Because when these have been fully done away with then there is no need for us to watch and fight anymore. This will not be until we are in the grave. Sins of this type are for instance: lack of love to God, cowardliness in profession, sloth with regard to prayer and the Word, dissatisfaction and disinclination with regard

to vocation, impatience, wrath, impure thoughts and lusts, greed, unbelief, sorrow, etc. As regards these, the difference between “having sin” and “committing sin,” the difference between an honest soul and a hypocrite is herein, that the latter has learned that nobody is pure, that all of us are weak and sinful, and is satisfied with it, and does not want to try to be on guard and fight against these sins, which he will never get rid of anyway, and therefore he gives free course to the sins. It may happen that he does not even want to call them sins, but that he overlooks them completely as if they were not anything, as if for instance, coldness towards God, disinclination towards the Word and prayer, were not bad sins! On the other hand, the honest soul suffers from these sins and all the time fights against them. He sighs and is dissatisfied with himself, prays and is on his guard against evil. “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal. 5:24). It is true that the ” flesh can still be alive and wriggle on the cross in discontent and fury in order to come loose, but it stays there and does not get its desired freedom. Those again, who do not crucify their flesh are, according to this text, the ones who do not belong to Christ.

But as the spirit is willing and honest with regard to the fleeing of evil, so it also is with regard to the striving for good, and that again differs from the false spirit. There is a kind of pious people having, so to say, a measure for their godliness, prayer, faith, love, and good deeds. When they fulfill that, they do not strive any further and do not worry about any growth in grace, but think everything sufficient, if only they can maintain themselves on the point achieved. This is an inwardly dead and unrepentant spirit. The honest spirit again always strives to grow better, e.g., in more humility, more faith and love, more inclination and more power to walk in a way well-pleasing to God. There are some good deeds and fruits of faith too difficult for a false Christian to achieve. Then the falseness of his spirit is revealed by the fact that he may sometimes approve of them, praise them and speak well to them, but he never becomes ready to practice them himself.

## November 5

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*If his children forsake My law . . . then will I visit their transgression with the rod. . . Nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him — Ps. 89:31, 33–34.*

What does this mean? Here is something odd! Here it says that the children sin and are therefore visited with the rod and stripes. And, then it says that nevertheless, lovingkindness will not be taken from *Him!* Which “Him”? We see that from the context. The words immediately before these are: “My mercy will I keep for him (“My firstborn”) forevermore, and My covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven.” Then there follows: “If his children forsake My law.”

But can the grace promised to the Son be questioned when His children sinned? Yes, because it was grace to cover the children. But it had been forced upon them by the Son! It was grace to cover the children. But the covenant or contract regarding that grace had been made with the Son, the “Firstborn.” He is our Lord and surety. He is our Mediator and Defender with the Father. He has interceded for us. He has paid the debts, and satisfied the demands of righteousness. Therefore, for His sake, grace will be irrevocable, even when the children sin.

But notice: it says “His children.” That is, the ones belonging to Him, believing in Him and by faith being around Him, by faith clinging to Him the way a child clings to its mother, in order to have protection, consolation and righteousness in His righteousness. They also have a child’s heart towards Him. They do not want to go away from Him. They repent of their sins before Him, and sincerely wish they had never been committed. These are *His children*.

But in this present time they can fall and sin so dreadfully, as is indicated here that they forsake His law (temporarily), and “keep not His commandments.” What does He do then? He says, then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. But He will not take away His grace from them. Because that would also turn His grace away from Him that has bought and earned it. As Luther says: “When God seems wrath with me as if He wants to reject me, then I need to reply: Holy Father. Before Thou canst reject me, Thou must first reject Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Because He is my surety, yes, my Ransom. If Thou approvest of Him, then I must also be free and safe.”

Maybe you have come to Jesus. You have begun to believe in Him. You would gladly be His honest child. But now in this present time you are so sinful, or fall and forget yourself so gravely, that you think that God simply must leave you with your wrong attitude. Then remember that what He really wants to do to you for your sins is to visit them with a rod and stripes — first inwardly in your conscience



as long as that is enough for your chastisement, and then even outwardly with heaviness through manifold temptations, if need be.

He wants to visit your sins with rod and stripes, but He does not want to revoke His grace. Because as regards grace He has got to deal with the Son. He does not speak with *you* about grace. No, about that He speaks with Him who has earned it and is your Mediator, Defender, and Surety. Grace stands on another foundation than your piety and therefore cannot be revoked by your sins. In that case it would not be grace.

And even when you experience the truth of His threat, even the rod and stripes, fear and agony, then you should as firmly as ever believe in the truth of His promise, namely eternal grace. When you have sinned and He thereafter visits you with rod and stripes, you should not misunderstand Him and think that He is angry with you! Why, He has told you beforehand that He would visit your transgression with the rod and your iniquity with stripes, without being angry with you! You should then know this as a prearranged thing between Him and you, namely: there will be both sins and stripes, but in the midst of this all, grace will remain firm forever.

Therefore, when you are sinful and tormented, penetrate the black cloud and still say with confidence: "Holy God, be still more angry, chastise me with the rod still more and longer. I will never misunderstand Thee. Thou hast said this in advance. Thou hast said in advance that Ye would visit sin with the rod and stripes. But do not revoke Thy grace. Then I will be glad to suffer." This would be a beautiful experience of Christian faith.

If, on the contrary, you do not experience this fatherly chastisement for sin, these inward rod and stripes, fear and dread, but instead live for days and weeks without worrying about some sin, and suffering because of it, or if you are capable of living at ease and free in some fleshliness you are conscious of, then you are no doubt a bastard, not a son. Then you are a dead hypocrite, a foolish virgin, with a dry and empty lamp. When the Word speaks thus about the children, the sons often find it difficult to believe. They have weak, infirm, fearing hearts, but they seek their refuge in Christ. They seek their righteousness in Him. This verse speaks about them so that they may know that, in the midst of all their infirmities, they have grace as long as their Mediator has grace. As long as their ransom meets with approval, they have a perpetual, an eternal grace.

## November 6

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*What is man, that he should be clean? And he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? – Job 15:14.*

**T**he knowledge of sin depends on how much God means to a man. If he has a real, truthful, and holy God quite close to him, then he can be consumed. This is shown by the example of all the saints. Is there even one holy and serious Christian fulfilling, even for only one hour, what the first and great commandment demands? We ask those who are the most serious, and who have most of the Spirit and power of God: “What is the value of piety, if you do not keep the first and great commandment? That commandment requires you to ‘love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength’” (Mark 12:30). It also requires you to trust in Him alone as fully, and fear Him alone as fully, as His divine faithfulness and power deserve.

Is it not true that if you love God with all your heart and trust in Him alone, so that God alone is the only object of your love, your confidence and fear, that your soul will enjoy eternal serenity, and the imperturbable enjoyment of the only good you can ask for, even the uncorruptible God? Then you must believe that there shall not an hair fall from your head without your Father. You must also believe that not even the least thing can happen to you without your Father, that not even a word or glance can wound you without His permission. When you do not love anything else than God and His pleasure, the consequence must be that you are calm and happy at all moments! You must be so, no matter what may befall you, only because you know that everything comes from your God and you do not love anything else than His pleasure. Where then is the saint that keeps this commandment?

We want to speak to such a person. Are you calm and happy if somebody deprives you of the thing dearest to you on earth? Are you calm and happy if somebody takes all your possessions away from you, and you are brought to poverty and want? Are you calm and happy if somebody deprives you of your good name and reputation, if you become infamous, despised, and detested by all men, for all the rest of your life? Are you calm and happy if a difficult disease, or a murderer, shortens your life? If it is true that you love God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all the strength in you, and moreover believe in Him alone, so that nothing happens to you apart from His will, then you must necessarily be calm and happy in all these incidents.

Perhaps, on the contrary, you become worried at a rather trifling loss? Maybe it disturbs your calm for hours or days if you get to know how people have spoken badly about you, or have revealed a weakness of yours? Yes, maybe a mere glance of contempt worries you? How do you then love God and His pleasure alone? Do you feel that you love your God really warmly so that your thoughts are with Him

all the time? Maybe, on the contrary, you love and think of a human being in a much more lively way?

Furthermore, is it not true that we who have been redeemed by the blood of the Son of God from all our sins, from death and the hands of the devil, should have no higher mark for our life than to glorify Him who died for us and rose again? Is this what you really strive for at each moment? If you love God with all your heart, is it true that you should never be as happy with anything as with your God, in prayers and intimate conversations? Is it really so with you that all the time you want to go about with Him in prayer? Perhaps on the other hand, you would rather do a lot of household work than go about with God in prayer? What is then your relation to the first and great commandment?

You should also love your neighbor as yourself. Always think seriously of the greatest commandments of your Lord God. What is all piety if we do not first keep the most important commandments? Is it really true that you are as anxious for the weal of your neighbor as for your own good? Please bear in mind that your *neighbor* does not only stand for a *friend* or two. No, the word stands for all human beings, friends and enemies. Are you as particular about the benefit of each human being as you are for your own good? Are you as sensitive to disparaging words about your neighbor, as to those about yourself?

Furthermore, you believe that everybody who dies unconverted will be condemned eternally. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you must be zealous for the conversion of each human being with the same diligence and eagerness as if it were the matter of your own eternal bliss or condemnation. You take pains for a few, but maybe you see many unconverted each day, and you do not move a finger to awaken them? How is it then regarding your love to your neighbors?

And what about the observance of all the other commandments? Is it not true that rather trifling reasons cause many unholy things to move in your heart. Things that God hates and condemns: whether wrath, envy, hatred, pride, and self-conceit, or unclean lusts, or lust for the possessions of others, etc. We speak here about faithful Christians awake and aware of their sin. There are no people who lament so much about sin as the saints. Have the saints not had to pray: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Ps. 143:2). Thus the Scripture witnesses: "Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints." "What is man, that he should be clean? And he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? ... Even the heavens are not clean in His sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?" (Job 15:14-16).

## November 7

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*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth* – Rom. 10:4.

**D**o not these words contain inexpressible comfort for poor sinners? You want to be converted to the Lord and improve your heart and your life, in order to become righteous according to the law, and thus gain the grace of God. This is a delusion. On one hand, you will never become righteous in yourself according to the law, in this present time. On the other hand, it was exactly “what the law could not do” (Rom. 8:3) that Christ fulfilled for us. You do not know that the way of the law to salvation has now come to an end. Listen and ponder: “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.” Christ, the eternal Son of God, our Savior, has been under the law for us. He has fulfilled all its commandments for us. He loved God above everything, and His neighbor as Himself. And finally He suffered the curse of the law for us. All this He certainly did not do for Himself, because He did not need it! No, He did it for us — “for righteousness to everyone that believeth.” We should never forget this!

Yes, maybe you once began to believe in Him, but again found yourself so condemned and judged by the law that you despaired, as the law is also the Word of God, and demands much that you cannot fulfill. You should, for instance, at least love God with all your heart. You should be rightly God-fearing and have God before your eyes all the time. You should be warm and persistent in prayer. You should be truly grateful for all the grace of God. You should be quite serious with regard to the mortifying of the flesh. But you still find much to the opposite within yourself, coldness, godlessness, levity. And then you cannot believe that God will be gracious to you and look at you with pleasure.

This attitude is to seek your own righteousness, seeking to be able to stand before the law in your own person. This is a delusion. In this present time you will never be able to become righteous in yourself according to the law. But Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth. In Him you now have the same righteousness, and the same pleasure before God as though you yourself were quite perfect according to the law. Bear in mind and never forget that Christ is the righteousness of those who believe, and that there is no longer any way through the law to salvation and eternal bliss. It is only as an important rule of conduct for their life and a necessary chastisement for their flesh, that the law still exists for those who believe. But as regards the matter of salvation and eternal bliss, or as regards our righteousness, our well-pleasing before God, there is absolutely no law anymore. Because it is already clear that in ourselves we are always condemned before the law and have our perfect righteousness in Christ.

If this is true, then we should wake up and see it! We should rejoice greatly and lift up our heads and praise eternally such a grace and freedom. Yes, it certainly is not enough only to understand this. We must also always train ourselves to apply it to our conscience. Luther writes about this: “By means of these words a man should be able to defend himself and resist the devil’s inspiration and tribulation, no matter whether they are caused by earlier or present sins. He would be able to resist them by making a sharp distinction between these two things: conscience and outward life, faith and works. Thus if the law wants to force itself upon me and frighten my heart, then it is high time for me to give the dear law a writing of divorce. And if it does not want to accept this, then I must boldly turn its threats off from me and say: I gladly want to do and promote good deeds where I can when we move among human beings. But here where my conscience shall stand before God I do not want to know anything of works. Let me be in peace here and do not tell me anything about my doings and dealings. Here I listen neither to Moses nor to the Pharisees. Here Christ shall rule alone and be my all. But if I still always have sin in me, then it cannot be right? This is true, because I am a sinner and do wrong! But I should not despair because of this, or go down to hell or flee from the law. I have still one right and one deed above Moses, whereby I grasp Him who has grasped me, and stick to Him who has received me, and put me in His bosom. By the gospel He has made me partaker of all His possessions, and He bids me to believe in Himself. This is the art and learning of the Christians only, and belongs only where Christ alone should rule and conscience has got to deal with God. It is not preached to coarse, impudent, and loose human beings.”

Notice finally that it says here again: “everyone that believ eth.” Christ is for righteousness only to the one that believes. You think that this is consoling beyond measure. But how shall I know that this belongs to me? Simply because it says plainly: everyone that believeth? Do you live either in happy-go-lucky vanity, or in legal bondage? Can you still manage without Christ? Then this grace certainly does not belong to you. Have you come to the point where you can no longer find peace in what you do? But with all your great wretchedness you cling to Christ? Do you hunger and thirst after Christ? Is your only consolation in Christ, and the Word concerning Him? Then you certainly are a believer. And then all this also concerns you. Namely, the jurisdiction of the law over you has come to an end. God will nevermore judge you according to the law, as truly as Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth. Praise His name eternally!

## November 8

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*Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed* – Rom. 10:11.

**L**isten! You will not be deceived with regard to your hope of salvation, if you have sought it in Christ. No matter how dark and doubtful it may seem in the cause of our daily walk, the end will always crown your hope, when you have lived only by faith in Him. It is easy to understand this by human reason, but may God awaken us to keep thinking it! The attitude of “not being ashamed” is a fact of eternal importance. It should serve to awaken some and greatly comfort others. The hope of final eternal bliss can be either true or false. We should bear in mind, that almost all people have some sort of a hope with regard to eternity. The foundations for a man’s last hope are many. In addition to the general foundation, namely, a mixture of the mercy of God and a man’s own merit, usually every unfaithful person has something special he hopes will reduce his guilt, or even count as merit. But if this is anything that can be named or thought, in the last day their hope will always be ashamed. Only those “believing in the Son,” in the sense of the Bible, will be crowned with eternal bliss when He comes.

But now it is these very people that so often are harassed by this fear during their time of trial: “Just think, what if after I have believed in the Lord Jesus, I should be ashamed.” So many and so difficult are the trials of the faithful, so strong is their inherent depravity, so troubling their shortcomings and weaknesses, so strange and hidden the grace of their Lord, so different and confusing His reign, and finally so cruel the flaming darts of the devil, that many a faithful soul has thought with alarm: “Who knows whether I believe, or believe only until I end in condemnation.”

One man has his worst source of tribulation in some very persistent temptation from which, even with all prayer and other means of grace, he is never completely free, but from which he still always has to suffer. Another sees his whole life so full of sin, negligence, and unfaithfulness, that he cannot think it possible, for the Spirit of God to dwell in him. A third suffers from such a worrying dryness and coldness, such a great lack of earnestness, of anxiety, of sorrow, because of his sins, of prayer, etc., that he fears that he is a hypocrite, asleep, and spiritually dead.

Then the question is: May this one and only thing — that I still believe in Christ, keep close to Him and cannot do without Him — may this protect me against all danger? Surely when by faith you have become a new man always keeping close to Christ, there may be much left in you to be punished, complained of, and repented of, but with the fact that you live by faith in Christ, you are still a child of grace, and will go to heaven. Even if you still always feel a mighty fight between the flesh and the Spirit as the one the apostle speaks of in Rom. 7:15–25 and if you still cry with him: “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” — even then all this misery cannot prove that your faith is false.

Neither can it bring to nought the eternal covenant of grace, in which you stand only by faith in Christ, by which all misery will be under forgiveness. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). The only demand: “He that hath the Son hath life” (1 John 5:12). Yes, the apostle says, when someone builds on the ground, Christ, with heart-faith, even if he builds so badly, that his work will be burned, and he “suffers loss,” and he loses the reward for his building, “he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Cor. 3:15). Mark it, only because of the fact, that, with heart-faith he built on the right foundation, he must still be saved, even though he had built so badly, yes, even though he had built badly with regard to doctrine also.

Much more all the shortcomings we ourselves (not only because of true doctrine, but also according to a holy mind) disapprove of, condemn, weep over, punish in ourselves, all these shortcomings will be under a continuous forgiveness because of the merit and defense of the Lord Christ in whom we believe. This is testified everywhere in the Scriptures.

The text tells us: “Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.” Only by Him do we have an eternal grace, yes, a kingdom of grace which will be mightier than all the shortcomings still adhering to and worrying us. Christ has been given in order that He shall be a real Savior and Defender, and not only with regard to some thought or imagined sins, but real sins. Praise the name of the Lord! “Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.”

## November 9

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*Behold, I make all things new* – Rev. 21:5.

**A**s all the new things the Lord creates within us, by the gospel, are the evident proof of a real experience of the birth of the Spirit, of a new “creature,” it is rather important to consider it deeply. Therefore, let us look at these new things which appear in every new man a little more closely. They do not only consist of new spiritual sight and hearing, but also of a new heart, new thoughts and speech, a new life and a new relation to all the world. Before we saw and heard the judgments and promises of God it was as if we had not seen or heard these things at all.

Also when we considered the Word, the Word of God Himself, with our eyes we saw what the Word said to us; with our ears we heard, but we could not apprehend. We could see and hear what meant judgment and eternal death, and still we could immediately forget, and could eat and drink and sleep afterwards. And still we considered it the Word of God! Now, on the contrary, we see and hear so that it has an effect upon us, so that we become both frightened and solaced, both grieved and happy; yes, so that it gives direction to all our life. Formerly we could think freely and according to our own liking with regard to spiritual matters. Now we always have a decisive rule for our opinions in this respect from the Word of God. Formerly we could think rather well about ourselves and had consolation and courage even without nourishing ourselves with the Word of the gospel. Now we always become depressed, when we think of ourselves and have consolation only by the gospel.

But not only our eyes, ears, and thoughts have been changed, but also the heart itself, so that now our greatest desire and delight is in things we thought disagreeable and repulsive before, whereas, on the contrary, we now suffer and are troubled by things which had been our greatest delight and dearest pastime before. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). Formerly we could speak millions of words about quite vain things, and that with all delight and ease, but for years we were not able to speak even half an hour about the Savior and His heavenly good. We were spiritually deaf and dumb. Now, on the contrary, there is no subject we want to speak about more than God, His Word, and His grace.

Also our life has changed. Formerly we lived freely according to our own liking and desires, as far as our own advantage and glory allowed. Now we have got both a holy inclination and a holy chastisement governing our life. In brief we are in a new world, with new sorrows and joys, with new aspirations and new fears. We have come into a new relation to God, to ourselves, and to all human beings. To *God*, because in the past He was an unknown God or a dreaded judge, now He is our dear Father. To *ourselves*, because in the past we agreed with our own fleshly



heart; now we are in a perpetual fight against it. To the *world*, because in the past we were intimate with her, now we dread her as an enemy.

Also the Word teaches us that she is one of the three principal enemies: “the devil, the world, and our flesh.” “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Surely this is worth thinking about, and full of consolation beyond measure. Think when our eyes can see such new creatures, yes, the new creation of the heart itself, which no human power in the world could do!

Should we not then wake up and praise the gracious God who does such wonders among us? And you who have not yet experienced this new spiritual creation, but who see it in others, should you not begin to suspect that such a spiritual new creation must be necessary for the salvation of every human being?

And all this that is new was born within us only by grace, by the promise of the gospel. The law could not do it, as the apostle says: “He ... that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Gal. 3:5). No, only by the promise was this new thing born in us, and that at the very moment when we despaired of ourselves and all our own works. Therefore we are rightly called “the children of promise” (Gal. 4:28). And only these are the children of God, so the apostle says. This is what he impresses upon us everywhere as a proof, that God is faithful in His words, though the unfaithful reject them. Because the promises of God concerns only true Israelites, and not the ones who are “the seed of Abraham after the flesh.” “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17). So also John says in the first chapter of his gospel with regard to the children of God. “Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (v. 13).

## November 10

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*And the man [Adam] said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat – Gen. 3:12.*

**H**ere the depravity and wickedness of Adam come to light and rightly so. He has a definite question as to whether he has sinned or not, so he cannot help speaking about the matter. But what is he saying? He has not even one word of true confession of sin. No, he only tries to excuse himself: “The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me was the reason why I ate.” This is the first thing that characterizes fallen human beings: they do not want to confess their sin, but, want to make themselves appear innocent. The Lord immediately turned to the woman and asked: “What is it that thou has done?” But she was of the same kind as Adam. She uses the same speech. That is, she says that she had been beguiled by another. She said: “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.” This is such a distinguishing feature of human nature that we find it even in small children as soon as they begin to speak. If a small fault has been committed they immediately try to put the blame on someone else. They have this naughty streak in them before they ever learn it from outside. It is inborn in them. This nature of ours reveals itself perpetually in great and small things: First, before men. Nobody wants to assume the guilt. Nobody wants to confess his bad habit. No, everybody wants to cover or defend it. And that even if he feels guilty inwardly. Second, before God. No one ever wants to stop at God’s judgments and confess them as right. Man always tries to exculpate and excuse himself. This is the basis for all laxity, impenitence, and lack of blessing.

If the human being becomes attacked and pressed harder by the law of God, then his wickedness increases. Then he becomes bitter towards God Himself, who has created us, and has given us His law. This is the second thing we find in Adam’s reply. He does not only excuse himself. He even wants to lay the blame on the Lord God Himself. Adam says: “The woman whom *Thou* gavest to be with me,” etc. Here it is clearly seen that thereby he wants to blame God for having given him the woman. Otherwise he could have said only: the woman or my wife especially since there was then no other woman. But he adds on purpose: “whom Thou gavest to be with me.” “Therefore,” as Luther says, “these words are full of animosity and wrath towards God. It is as if he was trying to say: “Ye Thyself hast thrown this dirt on me. Had Ye not given me the woman, but given her a garden of her own, and had she not dwelt with me, then I probably would have remained without sin. But the fact that I now have sinned is Thine own fault. Because Thou gavest me the woman.”

See now what a dreadful wickedness seized upon the human being who had been so clean and good a short time before. Adam should have run to meet the

merciful Father, thrown himself down at His feet, confessed his dreadful sin with bitter tears, and prayed for forgiveness. But instead he first begins with false and evasive replies. He begins to accuse the voice of God, and his naked body created by God, as the reason for his fleeing. When the Lord then asks him in plain words whether he had not sinned, he begins to exculpate himself in most definite words. Yes, he even begins to blame God and say that He would be responsible for his fall because He had given him the woman. He should have said: I have sinned. But he says instead: You, God, have sinned; because you gave me the woman.

From Adam we see how all human beings are, and what they do when they have sinned, and perceive the voice of the law in their conscience; when no gospel and no faith have yet seized and changed their hearts. Suppose God had immediately shouted: “Adam, you have forgiveness. I know how you have sinned. But I have forgiven it.” Then Adam’s heart would have been sincerely humiliated. He would have repented and confessed and cursed his sin most highly, and have said: “I have sinned! I have sinned! Merciful Father, forgive me!” But he did not yet have the hope of forgiveness. No, he saw only the judgment of God, and was filled with fear and dread. And therefore his heart was closed, and was hard and bitter towards God.

But it does not help if a man sees that all this is bad. He cannot do anything else so long as the grace or forgiveness of God had not warmed up and humiliated his heart. Eve no doubt saw how poorly Adam succeeded in exculpating himself and should have drawn a moral from it. Then she would have given glory to God, confessed her sin, and prayed humbly for grace and forgiveness. But, no! A minute later she acts the same way as Adam. She is no better. He had laid the blame on the woman. She lays the blame on the serpent, which had also been created by God. As if she wanted to say: Thou, God, created the serpent, and let it wander around in paradise, and it beguiled me.

In that way they both accuse the Creator and exculpate themselves, and that is the way it still happens! After unbelief there always follows disobedience by all our powers and limbs. And disobedience is followed by exculpation. Sin does not want to be sin or be punished as sin. No, it wants to be called innocence. And when it is not allowed to be so called, then it blames God for a lie. Thus it passes over from being a *human* sin to being an altogether *devilish* one. Unbelief becomes blasphemy against God and disobedience becomes an accusation against the Creator. This then is the last degree of sin: namely, to blaspheme God, and impute sin to Him as if sin had come from Him. Such are the things we find with Adam and Eve.

## November 11

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*We, having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak – 2 Cor. 4:13.*

Maybe somebody is saying: “There are so many pious Christians who never speak about what they believe, but who prove their faith by their deeds!” To this I can only reply: “Where is that written? Where does it say in the Word of God that such are Christians, who do not want to speak about Christ? — “Indeed! But they are so pious!” Maybe but yet: Where is it written that such are Christians? Piousness, a quiet, righteous, and humane life can spring from many sources without being the fruit of faith. Where is it written that those who have such a great treasure as Christ in their heart can be silent about Him? With the words and examples of the Scripture before my eyes I can only admit that some tender children, otherwise weak in grace, may be spiritually dumb for some time or times. But God never intended that they would remain so forever. For some time Joseph of Arimathea could be a disciple of Jesus, “secretly for fear of the Jews” (John 19:38). There was also a time when Nicodemus went to Jesus only under the veil of night. But at another time both of them appeared with an open confession. It is something quite different if for weakness, fear of man, or the inertia of the flesh, we sometimes are silent about the Lord. Such things can still always happen to the faithful, and also always stand under forgiveness, if they seek both forgiveness and new power at the mercy seat for all sin and shortcomings. But it is something quite different if our faith and spirituality are of such a sort that they have never been accompanied by an inward inclination and prompting to confess Jesus. Here the Word of God must be more valid than the thoughts and opinions of all men. And now, as we have already seen, the Word of God teaches us plainly: First, that it lies in our very nature that we like to speak about the things our hearts are full of. Second, that true faith fills the heart with great, heavenly treasures and a zeal for the glory of the Lord and the weal of souls, and that all such things must then appear in our speech. Furthermore, the Word of God teaches us that at all times the faithful have confessed Jesus, not only by deeds, but also with their mouth. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,” so says the Lord in Matt. 12:34. And the Scripture teaches us that they have not only spoken on request, but also out of the abundance of the heart.

From all this, three important lessons can be drawn. The first lesson: Have you never yet possessed such a mind that it is your delight to speak about spiritual matters? Do you not have the zeal of love for the glory of the Lord and the salvation of others either, so that you wish you could say something that would serve these important purposes? Then be sure that you have not yet experienced what living faith is. No, even if all consider you a Christian, you are in a false, self-made piety.

Do you then want to put the matter right by taking pains to speak about Jesus in order to obtain the sign of living faith? Then that is only doing something to deceive yourself. The Scripture speaks about a confession that is the result of the inward mind and prompting and worked by faith itself. It does not speak about a confession resulting from an enforced painstaking. No, let yourself be convinced that you lack the very source of confession even a living faith. Then bewail this fact before the Lord in soul-distress, and do not rest content until you have such a faith as will itself produce the effects you see throughout all the Scripture, as having always accompanied true faith.

The second lesson is this: Have you, by the great grace of God, come to such a faith in Jesus that it has become your delight to speak about Him with your friends, and to be able to witness about Him for the weal of others and for His glory? Even if you are daily humiliated by a great weakness and negligence in this matter, if it nevertheless is your delight, and if your delight and power to confess Christ also increase when your faith is enlivened, then know, that, in spite of all your shortcomings, this witnesses that the Lord has given you His grace and has worked in you the faith that our text and all the Scriptures speak of. Flesh and blood never have this delight to speak about Jesus. They never have this zeal of love for the salvation of souls and the glory of the Lord. The work of God shall be known by its fruits, also by “the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name” (Heb. 13:15).

The third lesson is: Maybe you have experienced all this. And after the Spirit you still want to witness for the Lord. But the slowness of the flesh, the enmity or friendship of the world, etc., prevent you. Then watch and pray that you do not follow after the flesh in any way and become disobedient to the Spirit. Because then the work of God in you can thus again be choked.

## November 12

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*My kingdom is not of this world* – John 18:36.

A kingdom of this world, we can see with our eyes. It comes with outward features, with outward splendor and prestige, power, armies, weapons, titles — and all sorts of arrangements for this outer, bodily life. On the other hand, the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual and invisible kingdom, contemptible and wretched to the human eye. It does not serve for this life, but for our eternal good and for another age. From our greatest evil — a spiritual and eternal evil — all the kingdoms of the world have no escape. Sin bows the mightiest kings under her power, the devil, “the prince of this world,” compels all kings and sovereigns to serve him, if they have not fled to Christ and become redeemed by Him. Every king has to lay down his scepter and allow himself to be carried away by death. Yes, eternal condemnation befalls an unrepentant king as certainly as it does anybody else.

Against this eternal evil the kingdoms of the world have no help. But on our part the kingdom of Christ will serve us. In the world the kingdom of Christ certainly has no esteem. To the eyes of people it is as wretched and miserable as its King was, when He stood before Pontius Pilate with His cheeks boxed, spat upon, and Himself scoffed at. Thus His kingdom seems most wretched. It does not protect its subjects against the contempt of the world, nor against the tyranny of people, nor against the cross and sufferings, nor even against temptations and tribulations by sin and Satan.

No, sooner or later all such things overtake us. But from the wrath of God and eternal death God’s kingdom protects us. From sin, both its punishment and its control, it delivers us. From all the reign and superior power of the devil it saves us. Against hell and eternal fire it preserves us. The ones who believe in Christ and who are in His kingdom will not die eternally. No, not until bodily death ends their wretched life upon the earth, shall they begin really to live; like Christ going straight into His glory, when He was killed. The kingdom of Christ is like that, and that is what He means by the words: “My kingdom is not of this world.”

But we should seek to impress this upon our hearts by means of the picture of the King Himself. Because the deep degradation and suffering of Christ should be so painted before our eyes, and in such moving details that at all times the faithful will see in Him a model for their own path through suffering to glory. And so depressing and strange this way — the kingdom of Christ upon earth — often seems to us, that even its most enlightened members are always puzzled over it. Therefore you must — profoundly and diligently — behold the King as an example of the kind and nature of the kingdom. Train yourself especially in keeping the great contrasts in Christ well together — the contrasts between the fact and the appearance.

Behold what a great and glorious Person He is! And how deep His degradation, how pitiable His appearance! In His person and in reality He is the great “King of Glory,” the only begotten Son of the Father; the Son unto whom — even as a human being — the Father had given all power in heaven and in earth (Matt. 28:18) and “a Name which is above every name: that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9–11). Such is the King in reality.

But how much of that greatness can be seen in Him? He was born in a manger, in a stable. Throughout all His life He is the most “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). So poor that “the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests; but the Son of man had nowhere to lay His head” (Matt. 8:20). When He makes His important entry into Jerusalem, the entry foretold by the prophets, then He rides on a borrowed ass, and a colt the foal of an ass, with the clothes of His poor disciples as a saddle. Is that the great Lord of glory, of whom the prophets have sung since the beginning of the world? Yes, He is the very “King of glory; the Lord mighty in battle” (Ps. 24:8). But no one can see anything of it now, so that we cannot wonder if all men were tempted to smile scornfully at His name of “king” and say: Then He must be a beggar king.

Now add the intended teaching that as the King is, so is His kingdom — a kingdom of extremely striking contrasts, a great glory and majesty before God, but veiled by great wretchedness before ourselves and all people. His kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness and peace, and at the same time there is perpetual sin and fighting and harrassment. His faithful have a great grace and glory before God, they are nothing less than the children of God, “sons and daughters, says the Almighty Lord.”

Yes, we are brethren of Christ and joint-heirs with Christ — His brethren and joint-heirs, who will “shine like the sun in our Father’s kingdom.” Yet we often go about down here on earth as if we were under His wrath because of our sins. At such times we should remember the form of our King and that it is really part of His kingdom, that in this present time, great grace and glory should be hidden under all wailing and wretchedness, so that faith will be exercised all the time.

## November 13

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*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path – Ps. 119:105.*

**T**hink how cruelly those treat their own souls who deny them this divine light, the Word of God. God has been gracious and has given us a visible communication from heaven. In that communication He Himself dwells and works. And all eternal bliss rests on its right and diligent use. Yet we see the blind, coarse world only despises and treads on these pearls. We also see what is still more dreadful. We see those who have once been enlightened and have tasted the good Word of God often allow the world and the flesh to keep them from the Word. And thus the whole day may elapse without their using even one moment for the nourishing of their soul. Not to say all the week. Or maybe they hastily sit down at the Word for a while. But their thoughts and hearts are quite full of worldly things. A stormy and surging sea cannot possibly become warmed up by the beams of the sun. In the same way all the fruit of going about with the Word only results in an increased boredom with it.

The Word of God must be received with a quiet, considering spirit in order to warm up the heart. But the obstacle is: the many earthly things, or what Jesus meant by “the thorns that sprang up and choked the good seed,” namely “cares and pleasures of this life” (Luke 8:14), fleshliness, slowness, and the many worries and duties. To the eye of the charmed soul all this is more important than heavenly things. Such will say: “I have no time to use the Word so diligently. Because this and that must be done.” And the thing that must be done is always something earthly, and what can be neglected is a heavenly thing that now matters less! So much the soul has been charmed and blinded!

You say: “The duty of vocation is holy. It must not be neglected. And if any provide not for his own house, he is worse than an infidel” (1 Tim. 5:8). But Jesus says: “These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Matt. 23:23). If you have attended to your office and your house in a most perfect way, but have allowed the life of grace to die away, the office attended to so faithfully cannot save you in death and judgment. And if somebody alleges that your house or your office will suffer by the moments you have devoted to the Word of God and prayer, then it is only the charmer, the old serpent and the heathen in your breast, the unbelief of your heart which does not know the blessing of God, and does not care for heavenly things, but would rather play away and talk away for ten minutes than use one minute for the study of the Word of God. Oh, what a heathen contempt for God and your immortal soul! You have the opportunity for a blessed, high, and glorious conversation with the Lord of heaven and earth, your Savior and the One who makes you blessed. You have the opportunity to hear Him speak in the Word and to speak to Him in prayer. And you say you do not have time for it! But you



have time to hear and speak vain things with men! This no doubt must be called being charmed by the devil! For the sake of your work you do not have time to use one of the twenty-four hours of the day for the nourishing of your soul. But think! If God strikes you and lets you be ill for a year, you may be sure the world will continue to stand anyway! Also you will not have many thanks from the worldly work you have attended to so faithfully. It will not be able to help you then. Yet you have despised God and His work. You do not want to resort to that despised means for help do you?

When you neglect the Word of God and the consequence is that your inner man grows weaker day by day, your faith becomes dim, and your fear of God and all the powers of grace become weaker, then you will maybe lament over weakness and temptations you do not overcome. But how could you expect anything else? Neither God nor men expect you to overcome your evil without the means of grace. No, there are no such powers in man. And therefore God gave us the means from Heaven. If, on the contrary, you would use this means rightly, then nothing serving to life and godliness would be impossible.

Maybe you say you have tried to read the Word of God, but nevertheless you do not become better. Then the reason must be one of these two: First, either you do not understand what repentance is. You thought you would speedily reach a certain height of power, piety, and holiness. And you did not know that the way there went through the vale of debasement and poverty. You did not know that an integral part of it is that you shall not consider yourself better and better, but the reverse. Second, or maybe you are really still a bondsman of sin. You have not yet got new life, new inclination, new spiritual powers. In that case you certainly have not used the Word *correctly*. Maybe you have changed the order of God and tried first to overcome evil in yourself before you seek to profit by the merits of Christ. You have tried to bear fruit before you have become grafted into Christ.

Now begin to obey the Word that says: "Flee first to Jesus. Beg for grace. Then there will be a remedy against the power of sin." Let your deep self-righteousness go. And fling yourself, such as you are, with all your shortcomings and contradictions, into the arms of grace. And you will experience that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). Now this abounding grace will delight, melt, and change your poor heart so that it will lose its taste for the evil things that held you captive earlier. And the good things you were not capable of receiving will now become your delight. Thus the Word teaches. Use it with obedience. Then nothing is impossible that is necessary for salvation and eternal bliss.

## November 14

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*Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering* – Col. 3:12.

**H**ere we see what costly things should adorn God's elect, saints, and beloved ones! First the apostle reminds us of the high titles belonging to the faithful. He wants us to be clad conformably to our station, namely as befitting the elect of God, saints, and beloved ones. Such is also the same apostle's admonition in Eph. 4 when he says: "I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness, with longsuffering" (v. 1). Mark the words: "worthy of the vocation." What is worthy or suitable for the children of this world can be quite unworthy and unsuitable for a child of God. For instance, to keep his good for himself, or to be proud and vain, or to bring an adversary before the court, or to speak many vain words is customary with this world, and nobody wonders at it. But it would be unworthy for the children of light. They should go in a manner that is quite the opposite to that of the children of this world! It is not becoming for the king's children to go dressed like the children of the beggar. As you are now the elect of God, holy and beloved, says the apostle, put on therefore, what befits and adorns such people.

We now want to look at the garments themselves. First, a hearty mercifulness or a merciful heart is mentioned. This means a sincere and burning movement of mercy in the heart. The result of this is compassion, partly to forgive an offender, and partly to help a needy or distressed soul. It is thus the opposite of the cold, selfish mind which only looks at what it considers to be its right. In the hearts of the faithful this is really partaking of the nature of God and in particular of the very innermost and most characteristic feature of God. God Himself expresses this sincere mercifulness in many places. He says, for instance, in Jer. 31:20: "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." This is the sincere mercifulness of our God. And it should be reflected in all His children. As Christ says: "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:36). And again: "That ye may be the children (or image) of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45).

The second item of our garments is kindness, or goodness, or benevolence. This is an inclination to be of service and use to people. And it is such a beautiful adornment on the elect of God, that only because of this quality many have been drawn to God and His people. The children of God should be the kindest and most benevolent people on earth. What no sermon has been capable of, has often been accomplished by this quality. All the life of Christ on earth was sheer kindness and

charity. He went about doing good and helping all. The highest enlightenment, and most splendid words are of no use, and only arouse animosity when a cold, unfriendly being present them. Oh, how deplorable such things are! No, those having a very precious knowledge to pass on, should have it wrapped up in a sweet and kind being.

The third item, humbleness, is — as everybody can easily understand — closely connected herewith. A Christian is driven by the mercifulness of his heart, and must often say a warning word to awake his neighbor. This in itself must necessarily be interpreted as spiritual pride. Therefore the world's most frequent accusation against the faithful is that they are proud. Yet there are no people who know and bewail their own wretchedness as much as the Christians themselves. But we ought to speak the truth. And when the very contents of the confession of a faithful man are such that they seem like pride to the children of this world, then it is the more necessary for us to express and prove in every way possible that we are not driven to it by pride. It is necessary for us not only to possess humbleness in our heart but also to put it on.

If pride and self-satisfaction arise in our heart and if we tender allegiance to and keep such things there, then there is a great danger ahead. Then a deep fall or another foolishness will soon stand at the door. For God resisteth the proud (1 Pet. 5:5). Then no intelligence or watchfulness will help us to escape the pitfall that will be put in our way. Therefore the apostle says: "Stick closely to humbleness. It will nevertheless hardly be possible for you to remain therein. Do not have high thoughts about yourselves. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits" (free trans. Rom. 12:16).

The fourth item we should put on is meekness. That is, we should not let ourselves be provoked soon to anger. And the fifth item is longsuffering. That is, we should not let ourselves become weary of showing forgiving meekness, so that we cease altogether to think of friendship with a fellowman who tries our patience.

## November 15

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*Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching* – Luke 12:37.

**B**lessed are those servants, says the Lord. And what a high degree of blessedness He suggests by this extraordinary declaration: “Verily, I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.” How much this really means will only be explained to us by the eternal glory of heaven. But it certainly is something great beyond measure. And it is as true and real as our Lord says it is, and even confirms by the words: “Verily, I say unto you.” The bliss of heaven is described in a good many places in the Scripture by the picture of a supper or a meal at our Lord’s table. The Lord uses that picture here. It is sure that the very matter illustrated hereby is that, in the eternal glory, the Lord will fill all His faithful with an infinite bliss, with “the rich gifts of His house.” But we should no doubt also reflect upon the *expression our Lord uses* for the matter, as He thereby always gives us some deeper glimpses both into His heart, and into the matter He is seeking to illustrate by the picture.

Let us then first call to mind a remark made in this illustration. Christ says that the bridegroom will gird himself and serve at the table. He will let the servant sit down to meat and will come forth and serve him. To this someone has made the remark that the picture exceeds the reality in human life. On earth it is more likely to go the way Christ describes in Luke 17:7–9. It is more likely that the servant will work all the day in the field and then be finally made to serve at the table. It has seemed too strong a picture to say that the bridegroom will let his servants sit as lords at the table, especially when we realize that Christ means Himself by the bridegroom here. It has seemed too strong a picture to say that He will gird Himself and serve His servants. But a good and correct reply has also been given to this remark. And the reply is this: The reason why the picture and illustration here exceeds reality in human life is that Christ has painted the picture according to the very thing intended, the coming interdependence, the heavenly supper; and according to His heart, His eternal counsel, and how He will really honor and delight those who remain faithful to Him. His heart and high intentions regarding us by far exceed all we have ever seen on earth; this is a natural reason for the picture appearing exaggerated to our eyes. In the heavenly glory we should expect from Christ, not something we can understand or imagine, but something exceeding all human thought. Because “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9). In creation God has already made such extraordinarily great things that no human thought can follow Him therein. Likewise He will also prove Himself

as extraordinarily great in the grace and bliss He will give His friends, when He undertakes to really refresh and delight them after their toils and troubles.

Especially with regard to the promise that He will let His servants sit down to meat and gird Himself and serve them, the Lord has already given examples of this during His visible stay on earth. This happened especially on two occasions. The first occasion was when He gathered His disciples for the last time to eat the passover with them. And on that occasion He told them that another time He would again share the heavenly feast in His Father's kingdom with them. At the same time He also instituted the Holy Communion. Then it was He that served. He distributed both the bread and the wine to His disciples. And they received it from His hand. Then He also took a towel and girded Himself and went around with a bason and washed their feet. All this is also an outer symbol of what He will do one day with all His faithful at the eternal wedding.

The second occasion was the morning at the sea of Tiberias when the Lord had fried fish on the shore for His hungry disciples. Then also He went around and gave them both the fish and the bread. In this way He has sought already on earth to show how one day, when our time of debasement in this world has come to an end, He will perfectly satisfy, honor, and delight His friends in His kingdom of glory. When for a short time *they* have sought His glory on earth, *He* will give them an eternal glory in heaven. When for some years *they* have girded themselves here to serve Him, *He* will there gird Himself and serve them. When *they* have confessed Him before men, *He* will now confess them before His Father and His angels. Oh, what a wonderful barter! And who is the person that has told us this? Can we believe Him? Can also such glorious promises be true? He is called Faithful and True. And He Himself has said so! Praise His Name eternally!

# November 16

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*Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification* – Rom. 4:25.

Luther calls this text “a bundle where all the Christian faith has been collected.” Therefore he has put this text as the heading for the Schmalkalden articles as a foundation for “the first and foremost article from which no Christian can move or remit anything, even if heaven and earth and everything else should collapse.”

The apostle has written this text with deep thought. Therefore it also demands deep thought from us. As already mentioned it contains a short summary of the great articles of the atonement work of Christ and is especially worth thinking over because of the part of it that appears here. The apostle says that Christ was delivered for our offenses and raised for our justification. When we put delivered and raised against one another, we notice that the word “delivered” means: given up to death. We know that the Scripture everywhere presents the death of Christ as the foundation for our justification, and that His work of atonement was really finished thereby. Christ made us understand this when He exclaimed on the cross: “It is finished!” So it is very much worth while looking into the meaning of the apostle here when he says that Christ was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification.

The meaning is no doubt this: In His death Christ was a bearer of sins. He was loaded with the sins of all the world. And He paid for them with His life. In His resurrection He was justified as our Surety, and brought forth eternal righteousness, life, and an incorruptibility for the world. In His death He was “made to be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21) and thus He redeemed us from the guilt of sin and the curse of the law. Because He satisfied divine righteousness and underwent death that was the wages of sin. But His resurrection was the victory of righteousness and life over sin and death, that crowned and sealed His finished atonement work for all mankind. As our Mediator and Surety, the second Adam had undertaken to be responsible for all our sins, to undergo the punishment we had deserved, to fulfill what the divine, retributive righteousness of God demanded. He fulfilled all this when He gave Himself as a sacrifice and redeemed us by His blood.

By His resurrection He has not only given all men a proof that He suffered and died holy, and as the Son of God, for the sins of others, and not for any guilt on His own part, but He has also given us a proof that the Father had fully approved of and agreed to the compensation Jesus had undertaken to give for our sins. The Scripture says that He was “quicken by the Spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18) and thereby also was “justified in the Spirit.” That is, He has been acquitted of all the guilt, punishment, and judgment He had taken on Himself as the Surety of the human race. But our

Surety was so utterly in our stead in the judgment of God, as if all mankind had done and suffered what He did and suffered. “Because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Cor. 5:14). This also concerns His resurrection. We were all included in Him, in God’s eyes. So that He rose righteous for all, as if we all had risen righteous. Therefore He is also called: the Lord, our righteousness. Therefore the resurrection of Christ is the foundation for our justification in the most proper sense. The apostle no doubt wanted to say such things by the words: Christ “was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.”

By His resurrection Christ has also entered into the eternal priesthood whereby He is perpetually “in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:24). In our stead He is “just for the unjust” (1 Pet. 3:18). “We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle” (Heb. 8:1–2). For “Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:24). Notice: He will now be “in the presence of God for us.” This certainly is our perfect righteousness before God. But what do we read here? Is Christ in the presence of God for us? Is this true? Then we no doubt matter a bit more to God than we had thought. We are no doubt in a complete and perfect righteousness before His eyes. That Christ is perpetually before the Father in our stead and accomplishes the service of God for us as our High Priest — we say it again — that this fact is no doubt our perfect righteousness. Thus we see that our justification is, in all respects, based on the resurrection of Christ.

## November 17

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*But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held – Rom. 7:6*

**T**he apostle here presents the law as a prison wherein we are held captive. Its commandments and judgments are the iron gratings, doors, and locks that hold us in safe custody for death. First, it should be noticed that the law already sentences us to death for the sin inherent in our nature. Well, we have sin and death as a legacy from Adam. And the law says: “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10).

But secondly, when we do not believe this, namely, that we have already been condemned even if we should never more sin, but try instead to decrease our guilt by repentance, or improvement, in order to gain the grace of God, all our nature is so filled with wickedness and depravity that all the time we sin again and increase our debt. Therefore our conscience all the time knocks against and gets captivated by the judgments of the law as by iron gratings and locks. No matter where we turn, we will always be “held.” The law is such a prison. So the apostle also says in Gal. 3:23: “before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.” But this picture of the law as a prison has not only shown that we are death-prisoners under its judgments, but we are also reminded of the kind of piety the law works.

Luther speaks about this as follows: “The office of the law is to keep us as in a prison. This is a rather striking picture. It shows what the law accomplishes and how pious it makes a man. No thief, murderer, or robber that has been caught loves his bonds and the gloomy prison where he is kept bound. On the contrary, if possible, he would gladly pull down the prison with its irons, yes, and even burn it to ashes. It is true that he abstains from evil deeds in the prison. However, the reason is not his good will or love of righteousness. No, it is because the prison prevents him. And while he is shut up thus he does not yet detest and hate sin and his stealing. (On the contrary, he feels heartfelt sorrow because he is not free and permitted to steal.) But he hates the prison. And if he were allowed to go out, he would steal as before. The law confines people within certain pales both in social and spiritual respects. Such is the power of the law and the righteousness by the law that it compels us to an outward piety by threatening the transgressors with punishments and plagues. It is true that we obey the law out of fear of punishment, but unwillingly and with great displeasure. But what about such a piety when it leaves evil undone for fear of punishment? Therefore this righteousness of works is in fact nothing else than love of sin, hatred towards righteousness, loathing for God and His law and worship, and instead honor for a great wickedness. As heartily as



the thief loves the prison and hates theft, so heartily do we obey the law, do what it bids us, and leave undone what it forbids when we are captive under it.” Such is our piety under the law.

What a complete change the heart goes through when a soul has been plagued and exhausted, condemned and embarrassed in this prison of law, and suddenly gets everything as a gift! All he has, worked for and sought in himself under the law is given to him by another. And he now begins to see God in quite a new light. He sees Him as a gracious Father who is waiting only for an opportunity to do good to us, and who therefore has also exhausted us this way under the law.

All the requirements and judgments of the law mainly aim at exhausting us and casting us down so that we should abandon the fruitless striving after a standing before God in our own righteousness. He wants to give us everything as a free gift, both righteousness and sanctification. When an exhausted soul understands such things and now sees himself in the light of the Spirit, quite free from the law, and believes and sees the great love of God in Christ, then he gets a new heart towards God and the law. Then his hatred is transformed into love. Then he can serve God with a heartfelt inclination and delight. He will say out of his heart: “His commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22). Now the prison has been changed into a palace. Such things are brought about by freedom from the law. We now love the commandments and judgments of the Lord, so that it causes us pain each time we stumble. And it would grieve our heart if anybody would alter or interpret away the holy commandments. Such things are accomplished by the Spirit when the soul is made free from the threats and judgments of the law and is assured of eternal grace.

# November 18

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*If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together* – Rom. 8:17.

☪ If so be that we suffer with Him.” This is the running track to glory. It is true that we have the right of inheritance, simply because of the adoption. That right has been earned only by the suffering of Christ. But the arena to receive the inheritance is to suffer with Him. This is very important. It is a distinctive mark of the true heirs, the true children; partly to awaken and separate from the children of God those who falsely imagine that they are partakers of the inheritance, though they do not follow Christ, and partly to console those who suffer with Him, but suffer so that they are often ready to despair. Let us therefore look deeply into these words: “If so be that we suffer with Him.”

Here the apostle says that in the fact of suffering we shall have fellowship with Christ. Through suffering He went to glory. It is such a decided and definite ordinance of God that suffering should precede glory that even Christ, our Precursor and Example in everything, has gone this way and plainly declared that we should follow Him therein.

What Christ suffered on earth must be looked at in two different ways. First of all, He suffered as the Atoner for our sins. Secondly, the suffering was His way to glory. As regards the suffering for atonement He was quite alone. He trod the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with Him (Isa. 63:3). *He* alone satisfied the requirements of divine righteousness. *He* alone earned the wages of righteousness, the eternal inheritance for us. But in the second respect He was our Example and Guide. In that respect we must “follow His steps” (1 Pet. 2:21) and be like unto Him.

The Scripture also teaches us plainly about Him that He had to fight and win in order to become exalted, and that He shall be our Example and Model therein. He says Himself: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne” (Rev. 3:21). Thus suffering is the lot all the joint-heirs with Christ have in common with the “firstborn” here on earth. All the heirs must come to their inheritance through tribulation — some “through much tribulation” (Acts 14:22).

But here we should notice well that the apostle does not only say: “If we suffer,” but “if so be that we suffer with Him.” Because every suffering is not a sign that somebody is a joint-heir of Christ. “Many sorrows shall be to the wicked” (Ps. 32:10). And everything having life on earth suffers. No, here the suffering we bear is only what we have because we are united with Christ and follow Him. Not only the enmity and revilings of the world, but also all the tribulation from sin, the flesh, and Satan, which is plainly a consequence of our union with Christ. And finally,

the suffering that is the Father's correction, which is always a distinguishing mark of His true children. First, it is a decided thing in the Word that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). As Christ says plainly: "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20).

Maybe somebody wants to be a Christian. He rejoices in faith and the hope of eternal bliss. But his Christianity and godliness are of such a sort that he can be on a good footing with the world at the same time. He can be respected and loved by the great crowd. If it is like that, then it is only a dreadful and decisive sign of his kind of godliness. It is a sign that he is no true and faithful follower of Christ. The Lord has said so. Furthermore, all the suffering we have from sin and Satan because we have come into union with Christ also belongs to suffering with Christ.

Christ bare the sins of the world in agony and distress. He fought, prayed, and sweated in the garden. So also all that have the Spirit of Christ must feel agony, fight and pray against inherent sin. Christ was tempted and harassed by the devil. So also all the faithful here must be persecuted by the same enemy with painful temptations and glowing darts. Maybe somebody wants to be a Christian. But he has such a faith and godliness that sin does not plague him. The devil does not tempt and harass him. He is always strong, brave, and calm. If it is like this, then it is a precarious sign that his faith and godliness are false. This is confirmed by the history of all the holy.

However, we can never rightly recognize suffering *with Christ*, if we do not first ascertain that the person is a child of God. It must be a soul who does not live and walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit. It must be a soul led by the Spirit of God, and crying in that Spirit: "Abba, dear Father." Such a soul learns that he has quite a number of new sufferings from his own inherent wickedness, from the devil, and from the world, sufferings he never knew of before. All such sufferings he has only because Christ is in him. And then they certainly are sure signs of being a joint-heir of Christ — a joint-heir now being brought up for the inheritance he will receive.

## November 19

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*Let thy talk be with the wise, and all thy communication in the law of the Most High – Ecclesiasticus 9:15 (Apocrypha).*

**T**he purpose of everything God has announced to man in His Word is mainly to teach him two things: first, how he should obtain His grace, obtain forgiveness for his sins and become His child. Secondly, how he, as a child of God, should live here on earth to serve his heavenly Father and do His will. These are the things on which the kingdom of God among us stands or falls. Therefore, they are also always the points the devil attacks most, and wants most to deprive us of. It is also on these points that whole churches and also individual awakened souls have gone astray most frequently. When Christ appeared, it was on two main points that He punished His people and taught them the right way. First of all, He punished their false justification, and their self-righteousness; and secondly, their false divine service, and their self-chosen good deeds; e.g., He told them how they had paid “tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and had omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith” (Matt. 23:23).

When the reformation of the church was forced through by Luther, it mainly happened by the restoration and pointing out of two points of doctrine which Luther perpetually preached. Namely: first, the true righteousness valid before God, the righteousness of Christ, and the righteousness of faith; and secondly, what true good deeds, true divine service, and a holy life pleasing to God are, namely, only what God Himself has commanded us in His Word to do. Thereby Luther first attacked and punished the papist doctrine of justification. According to it the man becomes righteous to the degree he becomes holy. Secondly, he attacked the false idea about a holy life well-pleasing to God. It was, that one should go into a monastery, live a celibate life, fast, stay awake, plague one’s body, go on pilgrimage, etc. Therefore, it has been rightly said that it was two points of doctrine that brought about the reformation and also that we have the reformation to thank for the restoration of two main doctrines, as follows: the one of the true righteousness before God, and the one of true holiness of life.

As has already been said: These are also the points the devil has always attacked and distorted. And he has done it so finely, so little by little and gradually that people have not noticed it before they have already been led astray from the way. So also reason, feeling, and opinion are hostile to these two doctrines. Nothing is more contrary to my reason and opinion than that I should be righteous and well-pleasing to God, when I see and feel myself full of sin. Nothing is more contrary to my reason and opinion than that I should be righteous and well-pleasing only by a righteousness imputed to me. Neither can I possibly think that I do the works most well-pleasing to God, and that it is a true, holy, divine service when,

in the house and society, I do only such things as my bodily, domestic, and social vocation, or the distress of a poor, wretched man demand, the same deeds as in this respect, a pious heathen or a decent man or woman of this world would do. I cannot think either that there would be any pronounced danger in following the pious inspirations which seem to be the very voice of the Spirit of God in my heart, and which only prompt me to holier deeds. I cannot think that it can involve any great danger if I follow such inspirations immediately, or that it would be necessary to inquire first of the Word of God revealed in the Scripture. Reason and feeling cannot decide that.

But that both the devil and our reason want to use all their power to bring us away from the Word also with regard to life, is a thing we especially learn from experience. How many great follies and how much damage has not the devil caused in the church of Christ because he has drawn human beings away from the Word of God! The damage caused and still being caused daily by this is particularly of two kinds: first, some souls have a very serious godliness so that they do not spare any pains to serve the Lord. But they have been carried away to all sorts of undertakings of their own, to deeds and ways of life prompted partly by their reason and partly by a supposed voice of God in their heart, but neither ordained by the revealed Word of God, nor of use for their needy neighbors. Secondly, the second damage has been what we experience daily, all of us. Namely, if we actually do virtuous deeds, we do them with disinclination, slowness, and negligence as soon as we forget the Word, and forget also the deeds the Word demands of us. On the other hand, we would do them with the greatest pleasure and diligence, if we would look only often at the Word, if we would see only and bear in mind that we serve God Himself by these simple works of our vocation, standing before Him, and fulfilling His commandments.

## November 20

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*But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster – Gal. 3:25.*

Luther says: “A Christian is not a human being that has no sin, but one to whom no sin will be imputed.” A Christian has no special privilege to commit sin. No, but if it happens that he forgets himself, he will never be judged after the law. Because if we still have to answer before the law and be judged by it, then no flesh could become saved; and we had better immediately take leave of all thought of eternal bliss. But then all the gospel of God would be false. Then Christ would be dead in vain, and all the faithful would be lost in sins. But the Scripture says: “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3). The Scripture says: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). The Scripture says: “But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster;” the law. This is why no sin is imputed to the faithful. David and Paul testify plainly that blessed is the man unto whom God imputed not iniquity. Notice: they do not say: in whom there is no sin, but unto whom no sin will be imputed.

But it is not enough that we are free from the law, and that no sin is imputed to us. No, in addition a righteousness is imputed to us, a righteousness not found in us, a high, perfect, and eternal righteousness, namely the righteousness Christ earned for us. The Scripture again witnesses: “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 10:4). And again: “Blessed is the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.” The consequence is that, before the eyes of God, we are not only free from all sin, but also, we are, to the contrary, perfectly righteous. Yes, we are righteousness itself and well-pleasing every moment, in Him that is chosen. Thus there is now nothing to prevent God from loving us with all the love of His heart. All this is because we have put on Christ, with all He did for us. Thus God now only sees us in His beloved Son.

Look now, says Luther, “What boundless riches the Christian faith has, that all the works and sufferings of Christ are given as possessions to it, so that it can rely on them as fully as if man had himself done and gone through them. Because Christ has certainly not done them for Himself, but for us. He did not need anything of them. No, He has collected this treasure for us in order that we should believe and own Him.” And again: “As Christ is mine by faith and I am His, no law can accuse me any more than it can accuse Christ. And even if the law comes and attacks me, I throw this word against it and say: Why, I have done all and more than you even want to have (by my surety, Christ). And though there is still sin in my flesh, I nevertheless have my righteousness in Christ. He is mine and gives me all He has.

Thus also His purity is mine. Thus the law cannot do anything against me. But if I look at myself, I still find much impurity within me. There the law is quite right. The law says: You have sins (before God). If I reply: Yes, then I am lost. If I reply: No, I must have a strong foundation to stand on. From where will I then take this my 'No'? In my own breast I will certainly not find it, but in Christ. There I must fetch it and throw it before the law. He can say 'No' to the law. He has also ground for saying it. Because He is holy and without sin. And He gives me this 'No' of His. Because He gives me His righteousness."

Behold, such things are meant by the Scripture when it says: "Ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ" (Rom. 7:4), or "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 10:4), or "There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). It says that no sin is imputed to them. Oh, we should stop here and think — think of all our royal rights and privileges — think of whether this is true or not. Why, either all this must be true or then it is a lie! Is it true that there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus? Sin still dwells in them. Yes, it may surprise and overthrow them. Is it true that, nevertheless, it will never be imputed to them because they are not under the law, but under grace? Is it true that they will thus never be at the bar before the law as long as they stick to Christ in faith? If this is true, then it is a surprisingly glorious truth. Oh, a surprising truth!

And still it is true! As certain as the Word of God cannot lie. It is true in spite of all the devil, the work-saints, and our own reason may say about it. It is true even if I now have not got the feeblest feeling of it. Oh, here we want to stop. Here we want to delight and rejoice in the midst of the vale of tears. Because the Lord our Immanuel has established such a blessed kingdom on earth that sinners will not be sinners before God, but holy, well-pleasing, and lovable.

# November 21

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*As he is, so are we in this world* – 1 John 4:17.

Let us think of these words of John carefully. “As he [Christ] is, so are we in this world.” How hidden He was in this world? The only begotten Son of the Father, the brightness of the glory of God, and the express image of His person. God of God. How secretly He crept in under our form! How deeply hidden was His glory under “the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3)! It was true, surely faith should have enough ground for its security. Surely the angels sang in the sky on the morning He was born. Surely He did works nobody else than God could do. Surely He got glory and praise from God the Father through a voice coming to Him from the great glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17).

He surely had all the signs of the prophecies. He said: “For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind” (John 9:39). In order that the proud mind of unbelief that always wants to see signs would be punished by blindness, and that, according to the Father’s will, He would be like unto His brethren and bear their burdens, He was the most despised and rejected on earth, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief so that people hid their faces from Him. Think how hidden, how absurd this is to all reason: that the Son of God was born in a stable manger among the animals; and grew up in a town with such a reputation in the country that harmless Nathanael asks: “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). The Son of God on earth, poorer than the birds of the air, did not have where to lay His head. He was despised, spat upon, persecuted like the “hind that is early chased.” And finally He was tied with rope, scourged, wounded, spat upon in His face, and buffeted by mean soldiers. Then He was hanged on a tree outside the town. And the hangmen said with mocking scorn: “If Thou be the Son of God, save Thyself.” And finally He cried: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” He died and was buried. Where could people see in Him any divine majesty, any power and glory of the Creator? Can there be anything more absurd on all the earth than that this man was the Son of God?

But He also rose at the time He had foretold. He showed Himself for forty days, and to five hundred on one occasion. And He ascended to heaven before many onlookers. So a divine majesty was after all concealed under the weak, outer guise.

And now: “As He is, so are we in this world.” As the Head, so are also the members. As the bridegroom, so is also the bride. The bridegroom looked wretched and miserable. The bride looks wretched and miserable. But under her misery a divine glory is hidden, under her poverty heavenly riches, under her sin and infirmity



a great, eternal righteousness. Here it is only necessary not to allow oneself to be deceived by what is seen and felt. As impossible as it seemed that Christ was the Son of God, so impossible it seems to us that we can be the children of God, “the elect of God, holy and beloved” (Col. 3:12). Should we not content ourselves with being hidden with Him, our Head, in this present time? Should we not content ourselves with walking with Him in a state of debasement in the vale of tears? We now have the definite Word of God telling us that only by faith in Christ we are the children of God, righteous and well-pleasing to Him. Then we should believe this is so as certainly and firmly as if we were already in heaven. Yes, as certainly as God Himself cannot lie! It still is as certain as that — even if we do not yet feel the least little bit of assurance in our heart.

The main reason for all this that is hidden in our life, is that the kingdom of Christ shall be a kingdom of faith, a humiliating, strait, and low gate for the stiff children of Adam. Christ will always be for judgment in this world that they who want to see, may be made blind, and they who content themselves with not seeing, may see. And this in order that no other people shall come into this kingdom and be able to follow our Gideon than those who content themselves with anything it may please Him to arrange. The host of Gideon was not compiled by free choice, but by a humiliating test: “Everyone that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise everyone that boweth down upon his knees to drink... By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you ... and let all the other people go every man unto his place” (Judg. 7:5, 7). So also here: Only if you can be a dog, only if you can let anything you may experience, see, or perceive please you, can you follow Jesus. Maybe, on the contrary, you want to see, feel, and taste the sweetness of God. Maybe you want to have your life in God clear and obvious so that everything goes well and correctly. Maybe you want your own inner man always to be warm and godly: your own life always to be strong and holy, your happiness in the world always to be blessed. Maybe you want all Christians always to be quite clean and without defect. You demand that there must not be any infirmity, any discord, any fault in understanding or life in them before you consider them to be Christians. Look, if you want to have life in God that way and do not content yourself with it being hidden, yes, sometimes quite covered by sin and wretchedness then turn back any time from this host. You are not suitable for this campaign. The people of the crucified One must content themselves with walking in the thick, black mist of faith. They must often content themselves without seeing or feeling anything at all of the grace of God for long periods, quite as if they were altogether forsaken.

## November 22

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*So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth – Rev. 3:16.*

**T**his is a dreadful word from the mild Savior! May the Lord God help us all so that everyone will be honest with himself, so that he does not, without knowing it, stand in danger at such a judgment until indeed it actually befalls him! The main thing we should look at here, is the lukewarmness, or what Christ means thereby.

In this speech of the Lord about the lukewarm there is something that all see and understand, but also something that only a few notice. When the Lord says: “Thou art neither cold nor hot” everybody realizes that He means: You are not only an ordinary man of this world, quite indifferent to and unfamiliar with spiritual things. You are surely something other than the great crowd. You know My ways. You preach My Word and teach others. “I know thy works.” You have got works. But you are not hot either. Your heart is not right in the sight of God. You lack true love, life, and conversation with Me. You would rather speak *about* Me than *with* Me. You would rather concern yourself with the matters of the souls of others than with those of your own, etc. Such things are called being neither cold nor hot! Because we see the meaning of “cold” from the world in its quite earthly existence, quite indifferent to all spiritual matters. But what “hot” is can be seen from such faithful souls as always have the same object before them all their lives: the Savior and His grace. So that when they are at their happiest, it is because of their Savior and His friendship. When they are at their saddest, it is because of their sin and because they miss their Savior. When they speak, sing, or write about what pleases them most, it is about their Savior. This is clear, and can be understood by all.

But then in the application a dim and difficult question comes up: When the Lord hides Himself and the knowledge of wretchedness increases and sweet feelings are withdrawn, all Christians sigh and lament at their great coldness. They sigh and lament that they cannot love their Savior the way they would like to. They sigh and lament that they cannot pray so warmly as before, they are attacked by temptations, worried by strange, yes, sinful thoughts, their minds become abstracted, they become negligent and imperfect in love. When it is like that, what else can they think than that they feel strongly that they are themselves described here, when Christ speaks about the “lukewarm”? They know, they are not quite cold, but not quite hot either. What else then remains than that they are lukewarm? Well, what should we say to this? Does the Lord really speak here about such a state of a soul as these worried souls lament over?

Praise the Lord! He has Himself explained to us what is characteristic of the lukewarm. Otherwise we would all have had to despair before this text. Then

read the following verse. There the Lord explains what are the signs and proofs of lukewarmness. It reads like this: "Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Here we have the sign of the lukewarm; the Lord shall spue them out of His mouth! Why? The Lord says here in plain words by what we should know the lukewarm! "Thou art lukewarm. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods," etc. The word "because" is always used when a proof follows. The Lord thus wants to say that it reveals that you are lukewarm when you say: "I am rich," i.e., that you are completely satisfied with yourself. If you were hot, then you would not be able to be satisfied with yourself.

The word "thou sayest" should not be understood only about the speech of the mouth. In fact, many a lukewarm man is so fine and clever that he does not express it so coarsely before men. No, it should be understood that this is the saying of the heart or the inward opinion. The Scripture also uses the word: "Thou sayest in thine heart." It means to be satisfied with oneself silently and inwardly. It means not to feel wretched and miserable.

This is quite a noteworthy and precious sign as regards true repentance of the heart. It is a sign that goes much deeper and is much finer than all other signs, and it often reveals what cannot be brought to light in any other way. No matter how it is with everything else the following thing is still sure: If a Christian is satisfied with himself, and is not in the habit of worrying now and then, yes, of dreading and being alarmed regarding himself, but is always calm in that respect, then that soul is no doubt in the lukewarmness of the Laodicean teacher.

We do not speak about the fact that a Christian can be more satisfied with himself on certain occasions, either during much spiritual contentment or during an occasional slumber. He will soon become equally sad with regard to himself. And usually he is still dissatisfied with himself when he has the greatest consolation and rejoicing in Christ. Thus, dissatisfaction with oneself is the usual thing in the life of a Christian. So an occasional grave fault, particularly if it has been noticed by men, can also make the lukewarm occasionally dissatisfied either with himself or the deed. But in general he is still satisfied with himself, proud and unbroken. It is therefore necessary to pay attention to the human being's general or usual opinion regarding himself. This is the sign the Lord Christ describes here.

# November 23

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*For we are saved by hope* – Rom. 8:24

**W**e are saved, says the apostle here. It is both too comforting and too secret for us really to be able to believe it. This is something that only the words of the great God, yes, His oath and His Spirit can tell us. And still it does not really take possession of our hearts. Yet it is a divine truth the apostle tells us here, that we are already “saved” here and now — we that have the firstfruits of the Spirit. We *are* saved, though in such a way that it is not seen or felt in this present time. The word “saved” means that we have escaped condemnation, have been saved for heaven. This conception does not include any feeling on our part, nor any enjoyment of eternal bliss on our part. It is something we should only believe. Therefore the apostle says that we are “saved by hope.”

“Saved” is expressly the word from which the Savior Himself has His name. “Saved” comprises partaking in all the good things He has procured for us. Thus: we now have forgiveness for our sins, and an eternal friendship with God. We are children of God. We have been written into the Book of Life. We are known, loved, and waited for in heaven. We are in an intimate union with God. We have the Holy Spirit in our hearts. It enlightens, sanctifies, and leads us in all truth until the day we are called home. All this is certainly what it means to be saved and blessed!

And the apostle says we already are so. The word means that we shall become saved and blessed when we die. In another sense this is in fact true, namely, if we say that not until then will the faithful enjoy their eternal bliss. But in this text it says that they *are* already “saved” here. That is, to God they are already children, heirs, and right owners of the treasures of salvation. Abraham did not become the friend of God because he died. He was so before, when he lived in tabernacles on earth. But the same friendship of God he then enjoyed also followed him in death and eternity. Nobody becomes the friend of God the moment he dies, when the soul departs from the body. No, we must already be so here in order to be so in eternity.

He that has not already the Son here by faith “shall not see life” (John 3:36), as already said. But those who have the firstfruits of the Spirit here, will then get the fullness. Those who are united with Christ here will also be with Him in eternity. Therefore they are also already saved and blessed here. Or is it that a human being is not being blessed, who is the beloved child of God, and can speak with God as Father? Is not the human being blessed of whom Christ says the following words: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24)?

Are those not blessed of whom the apostle writes: “Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb. 12:22–24). Are they not blessed? And the ones to whom the apostle could write this were still about on the earth. They still bare this body of sin and death. They were still surrounded by all spiritual enemies. They still had to fight against their depravity, and to sigh for redemption. Yet, nevertheless, the apostle says that they were come “unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

The apostle sees here only one great and blessed church. Some of them had already come to heaven, “the spirits of just men made perfect.” And some were still on earth, still needed “the blood of sprinkling.” In that way it is really so with the faithful. As the children and friends of God they are only one church with the ones who have already come to heaven. It is like this: On the sabbath we see a great multitude go into a temple. Some have already entered and are inside. Some are at the doorstep. And others are still outside. Nevertheless, they are properly, all of them, only one great congregation. Similarly it is the same with the faithful. We still walk outside. But we belong to the church of the saved, and are blessed equally with those already in heaven though we have not yet gone in. Such things are also included in our text when it says that we are saved, however, by hope.

Oh, what a manifold blessing if we could have this truth deeply impressed on our hearts that we are already blessed here! We are already the children and heirs of God even here. We are only waiting for the blessed call home. This consolation of faith and hope is the real strength of all our Christianity.

## November 24

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*He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the Word: and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the Word, and he cometh unfruitful — Matt. 13:22.*

When Christ names what chokes the good seed of the Word in hearts where it has already sprouted, He only mentions the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of this life. He does not mention any heinous sins or crimes, any dishonesty, theft, or deception as the reason for the perdition of the soul. No, He says only that the work of the Word in the heart is choked. Here we learn the degree when an otherwise lawful care for earthly things does not only go over into greed, but also brings along death. This is a very noteworthy text.

An honest Christian feels with worry that he is not free from earthly cares. Then he asks: “Can I also still have life in God? Or is this earthly care something that brings death unto me?” Then notice the reply of Christ: When it chokes the good seed in your heart, then it is unto death. But how and when does this happen? As the good seed is the Word of God and this had begun to grow, then, first of all, think of what springs in the heart from the Word of God. As the Word is twofold — law and gospel — so also its work in the heart is twofold. Why, the work of the law is an awake and contrite heart! This heart knows sin, and knows it so that it makes all the world too narrow for us. It chases and drives us to seek salvation and peace in Christ. Also after faith is come, we are daily repentant that we cannot live like the world, happy and free in sin. We cannot live to the winds, but we are bridled, chastised, and crucified by the Spirit. Yes, we are still always conscious of our sin, so that it is most difficult for us to be able to believe. And Christ and the gospel always remain indispensable and sweet to us. This is the work of both the law and the gospel. The gospel’s own and special work is that the contrite soul gets peace in Christ, and gets life, consolation, and joy from the gospel. From it also it gets a new love that bursts out in a happy, simple confession and charity. In short: Repentance, faith, and sanctification are the work of the Word in the heart.

When this is now clear, it is easy to understand what is meant when the good seed is choked by the cares of this world, or by riches, or by pleasures of this life. This happens when you get much to think of — no matter whether anxieties in poverty, or joy and contentment in gain and wealth — you get so much to think of that your heart becomes so captivated, filled, and occupied with earthly things, that they push aside the care for the grace and friendship of God. And then the Word will soon have no effect on your heart. Soon sin will not have any power to worry and make you contrite. You will hardly notice it. It will be feathery to you, because you have got other anxieties, other sorrows or joys. You have not got time

to plunge deeper into any spiritual worry. You have got a deep foundation of earthly happiness. You have got a thick, soft, downy bed under your peace, namely your earthly happiness! Therefore, you are always strong and brave in your Christianity. Or at least you do not become broken down and wretched at your sin anymore. The same things as worried you before, and are real sins, can now come to pass freely. And you do not become downhearted over them. No, little by little you begin to excuse and defend them. Thus the work of the law has now been choked. Your heart and conscience have been lulled to sleep and become hardened.

But when the law has thus lost its power over you, when sin cannot make you contrite and worry you anymore — what is faith then? What are the gospel and Christ to you then? Nothing else than an old lesson in your head and mouth. It is true that you know it rather well, but it does not work anything in you. Because where the law does not bring about contrition and death, there the gospel cannot give any life and power. Therefore, you neither become rightly downhearted and unhappy at yourself, nor rightly happy and strong in the Lord.

And if, in addition, you do not want to admit this, but continue to glory in the gospel, then a frightful hypocrisy enters. It perfects the hardening and quenches the last spark of the work of grace. Such hearts are then like unto the slippery, smooth, and hard flintstones which have been ground at the shores by waves and sand. When the heart has been well shaved and ground by the turbulent cares of this world on one hand, and a hypocritical use of the Word on the other, it is finally so hard and slippery that nothing has any effect on it anymore. And still this was a heart that once was open to the Spirit of grace. It once felt sin bitterly, but grace in Christ still more abundantly. And now this heavenly seed has been choked by the thorns of the earth. How art thou fallen from heaven, son of the morning?

## November 25

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*It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is* — 1 John 3:2.

John says that by looking at God we shall become like Him. The apostle suggests that the blessed beholding of God shall have such an effect on us that we shall become like Him, so that the glory shining forth from Him will be reflected in our persons. The face of Moses could shine as the sun only because he stood before the face of God on Sinai. And only by beholding God in faith and the Spirit, we can already here be “changed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). To be sure, when we shall see Him face to face, His image will be impressed on us in quite another perfection than here. How we shall be made like Him, is a thing that we should leave to God. However, this much is certain, that He shall then perfectly restore the image of Himself, the image in which He created man in the beginning, and which was lost in the Fall. The Scripture says expressly: “As we have borne the image of the earthy [of Adam], we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor. 15:49).

Then our *heart* will not, as now, be an inexhaustible source of sins and anguish. No, the holiness and love of Christ will then dwell in us. Our *intellect* will then no longer be surrounded by the darkness of the fallen nature. No, it will be filled with the brightness of the light of God Himself. Then our *conscience* will no more have this uneasiness, accusation, and fear that torment us here. No, then it will be quite calm and peaceful in the love of God and in the feeling of the holiness dwelling in us then. Then we shall never more sin against our God and never more lament like this: “the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:19). No, then we shall be able to be perfectly good, pious, and holy — as we have desired here, and still much more than we are able to desire in this present time.

Our *body* will then no longer be afflicted with injurious desires, illness, and weakness. No, it will always be pure and beautiful, healthy, strong, and light. Because it will then be like the glorified body of Christ. The Lord says plainly: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43). We shall be like Him, when the perfections of God Himself are reflected in our souls and bodies, and have complete dominion over them. Then we shall again have the qualities that belonged to the image of God, and essentially belong to every good spirit, such as God Himself must have created us. And instead of the uneasiness, dissension, and pain brought along by unholy emotions and desires, our hearts will then be an inexhaustible source of holy, pure, and never disturbed refreshment. Such things and still much more, must belong to the fact that we shall be like the holy and blessed God.



But the Scripture tells us especially that we shall be like God in love. Love also is such a main quality of God that John says: “God is love” (1 John 4:16). If we now become like God in love, then a considerable part of our blessedness no doubt must consist of the satisfaction of true love, namely to see all the numberless multitude of saved souls enjoy the same glory, eternal bliss, and security as we. The faithful have some sort of an idea of this joy of love by seeing so many saved, from the first experience they have already received here, when they see the grace of God become mighty over souls. Then think, when, in the paradise of God, we shall look out over the numberless multitudes of human beings — all of them having fought against sin, dangers, and fear, but all of them standing saved and safe in the eternal bliss of God. And think, what it will be like when, because of love, this bliss is spread to all because of happy intercommunication and the influence of one soul on another. Well let us say it once more: Think what it will be, when all the children of God who have been scattered in all directions have gathered in the kingdom of their Father. All of them have essentially the same experiences — the many sins of their own and the great mercy, forbearance, and faithfulness of God. And think, when we shall have glorified and perfected faculties, and lively remembrances of all the proofs of the help and longsuffering of God which we experienced in time. Then we shall fully understand all the connection of all these experiences. Surely all this will fill our hearts with an inexpressible happiness.

The Scripture tells us that then we will not be able to praise the grace of God silently, but will cry with a loud voice: “Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!” (Rev. 7:10). Then, at the memory of the distance covered, and in the enjoyment of the eternal bliss of God, we shall exclaim: “Is this the inheritance that cost the blood of Jesus Christ! Oh, blessed ransom and blessed love! Is this the end of faith? Is this the glory the Scripture spoke of? Is this the end of my afflictions, my humiliations, my prayers, and my struggles? Why, then to be sure the sufferings were small against such a gain! “And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

## November 26

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*Christ is . . . entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us* — Heb. 9:24.

Christ was given and ordained by the Father to stand in our stead before the law as our *second Adam*. From the manger to His grave He was, and acted in, our stead. The Scripture teaches us this more strongly than anything else. “He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). He took over *our* obligations and debts — “made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law” (Gal. 4:4–5). What He did, we did. What He suffered, we suffered. “Because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Cor. 5:14).

When He had now fulfilled all righteousness for us, and we in Him had fulfilled it, He ascended again up to heaven from whence He had come. And all heaven shouted for joy. And what does He now do for us in heaven?

The apostle says: “now to be, show Himself, present Himself in the sight of God for us.” He presents Himself to the Father, not only with the glorified wounds, as signs of His infinite obedience, but in all the beautiful attire of the fulfillment of all the law for us. And as such He is all the pleasure, delight, and contentment of the Father. But maybe you say: “Why, He has been so from eternity! Or has He not? No, He is now not only as the eternal Word that in the beginning was with God, but He is all this as the Son of man, as the second Adam, as the Head and Surety of His human family.

He does not only present Himself to the Father, but in His person He presents or represents all His members before the Father. See how the apostle speaks: He is in the presence of God for us — for us — mark this, for *us!* Once the eternal Father saw all mankind in Adam. In the same way He now sees all the members of Christ in Christ alone. In the form of Christ He sees our form. In the purity, beauty, and well-pleasingness of Christ He sees ours.

As Christ Himself says plainly: “for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth” (John 17:19). And Paul: “He hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col. 1:13). But when the Father sees us in Christ, it also follows that He loves us in Christ with “the love wherewith He hath loved Him,” and which therefore is called His “love in Christ Jesus” in the Scripture.

Oh, this heavenly counsel! This glorious fact! It cannot be compared to any earthy picture! Let us, however, fancy this as a weak example: Joseph was all in all to Pharaoh, his right hand and the savior of the people. Let us fancy that Pharaoh had the same picture of all the other sons of Jacob — the same picture as he had of Joseph. Then he would have thought all of them as equally lovable as Joseph, and he would have loved them equally sincerely, and given all of them the same benefits, glory, and advantages as he had given to Joseph. He would have looked

at Reuben, Simeon, Benjamin, etc., in Joseph! In Joseph he would have loved and embraced them. And before the king, Joseph would have represented his brothers, and would have brought them before the king's eyes in his own person.

Now Christ represents us before the Father in such a way, though with this great difference, that the heavenly Father does not *imagine* that we are like Christ. No, we really have that likeness, namely, according to the great, divine law of imputing, and because Christ really represents us in our stead and has really fulfilled all righteousness for us. May no one think something so foolish that God does not know that we are impure sinners. He is well aware of that. That is why He brings us into all the fires of purification where we often think we will faint altogether. But He does not look at, and judge us anymore according to what we are ourselves, but according to what we are in His dear and beloved Son. Therefore, He also loves us above all our reason can understand. And that also in the midst of the manifold weaknesses and infirmities of sin that plague us. So while we go about sighing and thinking that we are most abominable to Him, He is delighted to let His eyes rest on us. And everything is because Christ is in the presence of God for us.

Now it only depends on whether we content ourselves with this, and do not want to be found in anything else than Christ. Do you want to let yourself be consoled before you are holy yourself? Then you want to be found in your own holiness. Do you want to doubt as to the friendship of God, because you do not find your faith such as it should be? Then you want to be found in your faith. Do you think that God cannot love you because your heart feels so dry and cold? Then you want to be found in your warm feelings. Do you mean that God would love you more, if this or that virtue could reach a more perfect beauty? Then you want to be found in your virtues. You want to be your own high priest yourself! You want to become saved in your own name! Be on your guard against the rebellion of unbelief against the Lord's Anointed, the Lord's Christ! "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," except the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

## November 27

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*Grace to you and peace from God our Father,  
and the Lord Jesus Christ – Rom. 1:7.*

**T**hese two short words — grace and peace — embrace all the Christian life. Grace contains the forgiveness of sins, and peace contains a happy and good conscience. But in a larger sense peace also comprises all the good and all the heart-depth security and happiness accompanying this good relation to God. The apostle declares that we do not glory only in the present grace wherein we stand, but also in hope of the glory God will give. And not only that, no, we glory in tribulations also, knowing that the very affliction must work all good to us. Yes, he says finally: “We also joy in God.” We glory in God Himself. He is our Father and so we must necessarily have all good. Because if God be for us, who can then be against us! Think, God “that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32). The word “peace” contains all that. And think again, when God has done the work of grace in a human being, He has opened his spiritual senses, so that he sees what it means that the Lord of heaven and earth is his friend! And that on such a foundation all the sin that still remains in him does not shake this fact, even the least little bit. Surely this must be an exalted and blessed peace! When, furthermore, I have caught sight of the truth that there shall not an hair of my head fall off without the permission of the gracious and mighty Father, and when I know that there is no evil thing He cannot remedy as soon as it pleases Him, and that He now cannot possibly let anything evil befall me, that is not necessary for me. Surely this brings an exalted and blessed peace.

But this peace is called: “peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ,” as the apostle says here, and that certainly with merit. We should understand that this peace is not only a gift that only God gives, but also that the peace must consist in God Himself, His friendship, and His power. Mark this well! He does not say: peace from the world. Because Christ says: “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33) and “the world hateth you” (John 15:19). He does not say: peace from the flesh. Because, He says, the flesh shall lust “against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other” (Gal. 5:17). He does not say: peace from the devil. Because John says: your enemy, “the devil hath great wrath.” Well, neither does He say: peace from good circumstances, peace from good friends, peace from a good reputation, from good health, etc. Because all this is an unsteady peace. No, He says: peace from our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, He wishes us a divine and heavenly peace. As also Christ says: “My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27).

The peace the world gives consists in this, that the outward evil alarming us is removed. Imagine, that the enemy stands outside a city. Then there is no peace, but there is peace again when the enemy has gone. There also is lack of peace when you are pressed by poverty or illness, but when this evil has gone you have peace again. Further, when wicked tongues attack you with lies and revilings, you have no peace. But when the reviling stops you have peace again. Such is the peace is the world.

But herein consists the peace of God: Although all this outward evil still goes on harassing you, you, nevertheless, have the peace of your heart only in the fact that God is your friend and that He is almighty. He hears your prayers, counts your tears, and can immediately, when He wants, rebuke the winds and give you rest again. Herein consists the peace of God: Also while your flesh is still full of sin, and the devil harasses you by temptations or accusations of conscience, you, nevertheless, know that Christ with His righteousness and grace is much greater than all this. He is your mighty defender with the Father. Herein consists the peace of God: Although all evil in the world can still torment you — illness, poverty, wicked tongues, etc. — you, nevertheless, know that God and His friendship are a thousandfold greater than all this. He will soon come and take you away from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven. There you will forever be free from all evil. There you will forever be secure and saved in eternal bliss, with God and His saints. This is the peace of God.

But this peace depends on the grace in our heart. And thus it can both be increased and decreased. And as all our Christianity depends on the grace and peace in our heart, how important are these objects, are they not? Both for desire and diligent care! But the means whereby the grace and peace are increased is only the one mentioned by Peter: the knowledge of God and our Lord Jesus Christ. The more we know God and our Lord Jesus Christ, the more of grace and peace reign in our heart. May therefore every Christian diligently maintain these precious treasures in his heart! Yes, may God Himself give us His grace to do this!

## November 28

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*For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death,  
we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection* – Rom. 6:5.

**M**ay everybody see in this what is the secret of true sanctification. The apostle does not say that we should only strive after the likeness of the death and resurrection of Christ, but he says that we have been “planted together with Christ in the likeness of His death and resurrection”! The word “planted together” or “grown into one” indicates a most intimate union with Christ. What can be a more intimate union than the one between a growing branch and its trunk? They are completely one body! The same life and sap as are in the trunk, are also in the branch. Their very being is one. What a wonder of the grace of God! The Lord Christ has thus Himself described the union between Himself and the faithful — namely, by the picture of the branches in the vine in John 15. There He speaks about this “growing together” with Him and says: “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him.” The same evening He also said to His heavenly Father plainly: “I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:23). This certainly is a wonder of grace exceeding all our thoughts.

And as the apostle here points out this intimate union with Christ, this “growing together” as the foundation for the sanctification, for the mortifying of the flesh and the walking in the new life, so also the Lord Christ says: “He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing... As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me” (John 15:5, 4). We should hear and believe the Lord Himself and His apostle!

There are many who do not speak about sanctification, and who have quite another doctrine with regard to it. They want to make people holy only by commandments, rules, and promptings, and do not pay attention to whether they have been united with Christ or not and whether they have become dead to the law and live in faith or not. May everybody be on his guard against this mighty delusion. It only creates “whited sepulchers,” hypocrites, and work-saints. Moreover this delusion is implanted in the nature of us all, when we are inclined to think that we ourselves have power to do the will of God if we only really make an effort.

Then for all the days of your life remember this: When the apostle wanted to announce the doctrine of sanctification, he did not begin by giving only commandments and rules. Neither did he begin by only punishing, admonishing, and urging. No, he first writes about the foundation and condition of all true sanctification — namely an intimate union with Christ. We have been “planted

together.” We are “dead with Christ” (Rom. 6:8). We are “buried” with Him and “risen” with Him (Col. 2:12). Such things must come first, he says. The apostle also begins the admonition part of the epistle to the Colossians with the words: “If ye then be risen with Christ,” “for ye are dead” (Col. 3:1, 3). And when the Lord Himself explains how we shall be able to bear fruit, He says: “If ye abide in Me... As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself” (John 15:7, 4).

Oh, when shall we become free from the unhappy foolishness whereby we expect fruit before the tree has even yet been planted? When shall we become free from the deep imagination that we ourselves have power to bear good fruit?

If you have not been planted together with Christ, then it is impossible for you to bear good fruit. On the other hand it is equally impossible for you to be without fruit, if you are in a real union with Christ. As He Himself says: “He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.” When He says: “A branch in Me that beareth not fruit,” He speaks about those who have “a name that they live, and are dead” (Rev. 3:1). But about everything that really lives in Him, He says that it bears fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. It is impossible that Christ and His Spirit could dwell in us without accomplishing anything.

Do you only live “to yourself” according to the way of this world? Do you do what your flesh and mind like? Are you unfamiliar with the mind that loves the law of God — the mind that attacks and curbs the old man? Then you can know that you do not live in union with Christ. And even though you have once been implanted in Him in baptism, or even though you now confess that you believe in and belong to Him, does not help you when you still live without being united with Christ. You have denied your covenant of baptism and are a branch broken off from Christ. And this way it becomes dryer and dryer. But God “quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17). He still always works great miracles. “Even when we were dead in sins, God hath quickened us together with Christ” (Eph. 2:5). He is “rich in mercy, for His great love” (Eph. 2:4). He still wants to work — even with you — the miracle of which Christ said: “the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” (John 5:25).

## November 29

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*Through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord – 2 Pet. 1:12.*

**Y**ou that are living Christians, be on your guard against falling asleep, getting blunt, coming to a standstill, spiritually dying away! Grow and always seek more, more of faith and more of the knowledge of Christ, more of love, more of the heavenly mind, more of humility and more of the fear of God! Imagine somebody saying: “I have enough faith, and enough love both to God and to human beings. I have enough peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. I have enough humility and fear of God, etc.” Then we would shudder at the state of his soul, at the power of darkness over his mind, at the ease and enchantment. But when a Christian does not speak like that with his mouth, but still does not seek any increase in these respects, then there is a risk that he is clearly saying the same things with all his soul: I have enough faith, love, fear of God! It certainly is not all right when a Christian does not care about this matter.

Therefore the matter of growth in grace is among the subjects that try and reveal our state before we even suspect it. Some feel a dart in their heart at this subject. They sigh: Oh, where is my growth in grace? On the contrary I go backwards. Some again read the Word about growth with a perfectly calm eye, only searching, studying. They leave it to others to take it to heart. And here the words of Luther come true: “Those who should fear as regards themselves do not fear. But those who should not fear, they fear.” There is an enchantment, a power of darkness, that makes the soul calm, strong, brave, resolute, hard, blinded, so that he does not perceive anything. He does not fear anything. He does not take anything to himself. No, he only thinks, understands, speaks.

You are a Christian, and you hear the Lord Christ Himself exclaim: “He that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still” (Rev. 22:11), and you do not get worried at it. Has that enchantment not even begun in you? You know with yourself that days elapse and you do not worry about any growth. You know that the serious admonitions of Christ Himself do not go to your heart. Would there not then be an enchantment in your heart? Why not? Why have you obviously been exempted from all enchantment by the spirit of darkness? Has the devil no longer any bad intentions with you? Has he now become good? Or is he dead? Think, Christ Himself speaks such serious words, and they no longer move you! To true Christians who have not gone to sleep altogether it usually is obviously a very great worry that they do not find any growth in themselves. Therefore they still have the Spirit of the fear of the Lord in their hearts and are under His rule, and this helps everything.



Luther says that faith in the heart is never still. Either it increases or decreases, and where nothing happens, there is no living faith. No, only a dead imagination about God in the heart. This is valid for all the life of grace in the heart, the faith, love, and fear of God, and is a true remark worth thinking over. It is a distinguishing mark of the plant the heavenly Father has planted that it is dependent upon spiritual care and nourishment and therefore is sometimes enlivened and grows, and sometimes again decreases. On the other hand, the faith that does not depend on nourishment, but always stands equally firm is only a self-made and dead faith. Here we should, however, notice the following distinction. The general, happy-go-lucky faith has the coarse sign, that it does not only live as well without all spiritual nourishment, but it is also at its strongest when no Word of God comes too close to it. It is plainly upset and destroyed by the Word of God.

But the finer work-saints resemble the Christians that their faith and peace are dependent and variable. But they depend on their religious observances. Thus if they have neglected their daily, special moment of reading, prayer, etc., or if otherwise some rift has appeared in their robe of piety, then their confidence has been upset. And peace is only restored by a renewed observance of the neglected devotion.

True faith, however, does not depend on the very observance of reading, prayer, etc. It depends on the contents of what is read, on the increase or decrease of the knowledge of Christ. Therefore, the apostle says that grace and peace are multiplied through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. And the consolation and strength that do not depend on the knowledge of Christ, but live of themselves, are not the right grace of God. They are a flower growing from the very heart, that has the quality that it faces when “the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it” (Isa. 40:7).

But, if the life of grace is always either increasing or decreasing, then it is dreadful not to pay attention to it! It is dreadful to go through it quite unworried about the growth. Because if it really decreases, it will also die if there is not a change soon. If it has been neglected for some time and has decreased, it must necessarily soon be awakened, enlivened, and strengthened again. Otherwise, it will lead to death itself.

## November 30

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*Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts – Rom. 1:24.*

**H**ere we see what God does with those who do not follow the light He has given them. He gives them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts. And immediately they are brought by these lusts of theirs into a depth of uncleanness, which now becomes their deserved wages. “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (James 1:13). But the power of wickedness is so great in the human being, that if God only leaves him, he immediately rushes into all sin and shame. By the Fall human nature was filled with the poison of the old serpent, sin and all wickedness. This poison all the time works and presses forth in the heart’s thoughts, lusts, and desires like a swelling flood or source. The Lord God complained early that “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” About this also the Lord Christ says: “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:19).

If God did not keep back this flood of sin by His omnipotence, and by a lot of natural hindrances, no society would be able to stand. All mankind would be ruined because of the intrusive wickedness whereby all human beings would soon destroy themselves and one another. Also where the powers of grace are not received and do not work, God has in His general fatherly care for mankind laid some natural obstacles to and restraints on the destroying wickedness. Such as: a natural prudence, fear of shame and damage, care for one’s own benefit, self-esteem, etc. Moreover, God always rules and keeps back the intruding wickedness.

But when He withdraws these hindrances for the outbreak of sin, as a just punishment for men’s contempt for and distortion of His counsel of love, and leaves the man to himself and the inspirations of the wicked enemy, then the power of wickedness exceeds all measures and limits. Then one may see these dreadful outbreaks — such as the apostle lists in Rom. 1 from the life of the heathen, but such as one also sees often enough within Christendom. Then one may see those terrifying examples when also people who have generally been thought wise and prudent are suddenly found sunk in a dreadful sin or foolishness. So that one is a thief or falsifier. Another a murderer. A third lies in abominable and destroying vices. A fourth commits suicide, etc.

So lately they were considered prudent and decent. And when they now end in this miserable way, the world stands and wonders and cannot understand how this has been possible. Surely never could that prudent and good man have wanted to do anything like that! And still he has done so. How has it come to pass? In no

other way than the apostle tells us in verse 21: “they knew God, but they glorified Him not as God.” They perceived the voice of God, but did not want to bow to it. They “held the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18); they “professed themselves to be wise” (Rom. 1:22) and did not want to believe what God told them. Because of all this God has now given them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts and thus they have become fools.

Oh, that every man still capable of reflecting at all, would think in time what the apostle of the Lord teaches us here! Many a young man or woman early hears the counsel of God both for our temporal and our eternal welfare from gracious and enlightened parents or teachers. They hear and understand that God is almighty and that it is not wise to defy this Lord. They hear and understand that it is the serious will and commandment of the almighty God that all human beings should be converted to Him, fear and love Him, believe, obey, and follow Him through life. But they do not want to obey this counsel of God. No, they still want to follow their own desires and the world, and intend that, nevertheless, they will always be on their guard so that they will not do so too coarsely. They will be on their guard so that they will not sink too deeply into the pools of sin. They intend that they will have power of themselves to observe a certain moderation. They do not want to be fully “the Lord’s own, become His and live under Him in His kingdom.” But still they intend to be on their guard so that they will not fall too deep. They will, however, not succeed therein.

It is such people the Lord is in the habit of giving up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, or dreadful unrighteousness, or other strange foolishnesses. “God is not mocked” (Gal. 6:7). If you do not want to hear His words and be fully converted, then no prudence or watchfulness will then be enough. You will sink into the depth sooner or later. In this present time or in eternity, you will experience bitterly that it was your most dreadful foolishness that you did not obey this Lord, but defied His will and counsel.

# December 1

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*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God – Rom. 13:1.*

Everyone who wants to respect the Word of God should know that it is his duty to show his authorities the qualities of humility, reverence, obedience, and faithfulness. The apostle Paul wrote this to the Christians in *Rome*, who were under heathen authorities. Had they not respected this apostolic instruction, but followed their own ideas, they would not have been able to think that, for the Lord's sake, they should even show respect and obedience of loyal subjects to the tyrant Nero. They would sooner have thought it more Christian to help to dethrone him when there was an opportunity to do so. We know that the Jews often rose in rebellion when they came under Roman authority. Therefore, the apostle thought it necessary to use so many plain words regarding this subject.

But if the Christians in Rome had to be subject to their heathen authorities, how sad it is for us as Christians to exert our constitutional freedom of expression in these last days, and within Christendom begin to lift up our impudent voices against the authorities and contrary to all humility. All Christians should think of this and not let themselves be led astray by the counsel of the ungodly. The apostles have also given admonitions to this effect, more than once. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man *for the Lord's sake*: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Pet. 2:13–15). "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates" (Tit. 3:1), etc. Thus our obligation towards the authorities has been definitely expressed in clear words. But the further addition the apostle makes seems strange to us:

"For there is no power but of God." This is the main reason why we should be subject to the authorities. But how can we understand that all authorities are of God? They are often evil and unchristian. If we say that God must suffer all that happens, we have not understood and interpreted it correctly. Even ungodly authorities may have their high place, if God allows it. What God suffers can never be said to be of God. Moreover, the apostle adds immediately "the powers that be are ordained of God."

Neither is it a correct explanation to say that the very office has been instituted by God, even if the persons holding the office are there contrary to the will of God. The apostle says plainly that "the powers that be are ordained of God." Thus he says that the rulers, not only the office itself, are of God. It is also a truth worth contemplating that the very office has been instituted by God. It was there in the patriarchy and in the fourth commandment of the law of God. It has also been

confirmed by the words of the Lord Jesus. Thus it is true that the very office is of God and is a precious gift. But here it still says something more, namely, that also “the powers that be are ordained of God.”

How can we understand this, when the authorities are often evil and ungodly, and when the Lord always hates evil? This must be understood in only the same way as the other judgments of God. We should understand that His ordinances are good, wise, and righteous, no matter whether He sends us something that is good or evil in itself. Here we must realize that there is only one Almighty God, the Ruler of the whole universe. The Lord Jesus Christ showed this fact to the representative of the Roman emperor when He said: “Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above” (John 19:11). And about the suffering imposed on Him by Pilate He said: “The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). It was “from above,” it was from the Father of Jesus Christ that Pilate received power to sentence the innocent Jesus to death.

If we have good Christian authorities over us, it is due to the grace of God. If we have evil and ungodly ones, they are a form of punishment and chastisement from the same holy God. In that ordinance we should only look at God and revere His judgments over us. And His punishments are as holy as His proofs of grace. Thus for His sake, we should also respect and obey the authorities He has ordained for us. At other times when we have good authorities, we should see God therein and be obedient to them for His sake.

No matter whether the persons in authority are good or evil, the apostle Paul still says three times in Rom. 13, that they are “the ministers of God.” Thus the worst authorities that a country can have are of God and have been sent to carry out His holy intentions. When God gives a people evil, ungodly tyrannous rulers or as Isaiah says in Isa. 3:4, “Children to be their princes, and babes” to “rule over them,” then this happens in order to punish and scourge the evil and stiff-necked people, and as a trial for the faithful.

Even if the ways or means by which the sovereign came to power were not right, he has nevertheless been able to get his present might only from God. And God will, as we said before, use him either for a punishment or a blessing to the people. Those who want first to scrutinize the qualities and measures of the authorities, before they recognize their duty of obedience, overthrow the foundation of the subject’s duty, namely, the ordinance of the almighty God.

## December 2

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*Deliver us from evil* – Luke 11:4.

A God-fearing soul may have learned to distrust his own deceitful heart and may have experienced the great cunning and charm of the enemy. However, he will still fear such evil as he does not yet see and feel clearly, the “wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11) and the manifold falseness of his heart. At such times he has the consoling resort of fleeing to the all-seeing and faithful God with the prayer that He might watch and divert all evil.

Such a prayer is conveniently expressed by us by the indefinite word “evil.” “Deliver us, Thou, faithful, mighty God from all evil, also evil that we do not understand. You see all the hidden nets and snares of the devil, the world and our own heart. And Thou hast commanded us to call upon Thee in all trouble. Save and deliver us.” Yes, it is one of the most common problems among the children of God. They say: “I do not want to be false or swear allegiance to anything evil. But I fear that my heart deceives me. I know with myself that I lack power. But I do not know where the fault is.” When we are in such uncertainty and fear of an unknown evil, what an inexpressible comfort it is to be allowed to throw all the worry on the faithful Lord. He Himself has taught us to pray: “Deliver us from evil.” What a comfort to be allowed to say to Him: “Deliver me from just the evil that Thou seest and know to be within me, but that is hidden from me! Remove, Thou, what displeases Thee, Thou, faithful, almighty God, and give me what I lack!”

Here it is necessary to think and meditate on the aspect, that God is the only One that can search and rightly know the hidden desire of the deceitful heart and the wickedness of Satan. God has never said that we shall be able to search our hearts. No, He has said quite the contrary. The Lord Himself said: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: *who can know it? I the Lord* search the heart. I try the reins” (Jer. 17:9–10). Here the Lord expressly denies that any man can know the heart, and says that He alone can do so. Even though David was allowed at his prophetic moments to see the future a thousand years ahead, he could not see into his own heart. In that matter he turned to God and prayed: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts” (Ps. 139:23).

Secondly, we should know and bear in mind, that the Lord God also is the only One who can remedy all that is not right in us. He has never said: You shall create new hearts in yourselves. On the contrary, He says: “I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26). David also turned to the Lord and prayed: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10).

Thus God Himself has said that it is not we, but He alone, who can both know our heart and remedy what is wrong there. And here He teaches us to pray to

Him for that. Therefore be sure to turn to Him for consolation whenever you are confronted with evil you do not know. And as truly as He is a faithful God, He will do what we have prayed. He will Himself assume all the care for our salvation and remedy all that is evil and dangerous, and what we ourselves do not understand. He Himself has taught us to pray: "Deliver us from evil." God does not want to disappoint a soul that fears and judges itself and wants to pay heed to *all* His Word, even the one who wants to put to death the old nature in us.

However, during the time of temptation we do in fact know what evil consists of, but we still cannot detach ourselves from it. I see that a certain action is sin. Yes, I see that it is the devil that works to bring me into it. And still I cannot free myself from it. It has brought me "into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:23). It holds me so that though I know it is sin, e.g., wrath, hatred, unclean lusts, desire for the neighbor's possessions, and I see the danger and feel sick at it, I still cannot stop going about with it in my heart and thoughts. Yes, finally it can so exhaust me by tormenting me that I am ready to despair. I feel quite lost, if God Himself does not have mercy upon me and save me. Here then I learn what it means to pray: "Deliver us from evil."

Oh, then immediately fall down and pray. Reflect upon the fact that at such moments we are under an enemy against whom there is no power in heaven or on earth except one, the only, almighty One. Therefore He has declared solemnly: "I, even I, am the Lord; and beside Me there is no Savior" (Isa. 43:11). Luther says: "Do not move in the intention to overcome sin yourself. Because then it will move against you so that you will be eternally lost." What is needed is that we flee in earnest only to the faithful, almighty Lord and pray: "Deliver us from evil!" And then we will be confronted if we are able to bear in mind that the Lord Himself has taught us to pray in that way to Him. After all the Lord did not want to fool around with His distressed children, when He taught them this prayer. But He really intends to deliver us and save us. He also says plainly: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me" (Ps. 50:15).

## December 3

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*There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another – 1 Cor. 15:40.*

**T**he apostle seems to say: Behold the infinite richness of variation in the creation of God! There is already a great difference between the terrestrial bodies. How very much greater must be the difference between the terrestrial and the celestial — between trees, stones, metals, etc., on earth, and the substances in the sun, moon, and stars. There is also a great difference between these celestial bodies. “There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory” (1 Cor. 15:41). Think then on the infinite variety there is in the creation of God!

Then do not be foolishly fearful, that our Lord God will be at a loss to find what sort of bodies to give us in the resurrection! No matter what other qualities our new bodies will have, they will no doubt be perfectly suitable for the new world where we will live; and for the faculties our soul will have there. You know our present bodies have been fashioned for the present faculties of our soul and for the world where we live now. And the bodies of all animals have been formed according to the instincts God has given them, and for the elements where they live, the fish in the water, the birds in the air, the animals on the earth, or the worms in the earth.

We also see the consequence of this before our eyes. When a living creature is moved to a new element in order, so to say, to start in a new world, it also receives a new body suitable for its new situation. For instance, when the silkworm no longer works in the mulberry tree, but is about to get the freedom and pleasure to fly about in the air, then it becomes equipped with a new body and wings suitable for its new destiny and element. Most of us probably know that all butterflies were worms at one time. They have crept and crawled in the dust, but now they fly about in the air. Why, these are a wonderful picture the Creator has given of the human being, the “worm” (Job 25:6), and her coming change. Let us have a better look at this picture.

The caterpillars are a very weak genus among the living creatures. Though the silkworm manufactures the beautiful and strong silk for man and seems a bit nobler than the cabbage-worm and the other caterpillars, they are still all miserable, creeping things on earth. But for these wretched, creeping things God has specially prepared a sweeter future, a wonderful change. When the work-time of the silkworm has been completed, and the cabbage-worm shall no more creep in the dust, then they are put into some sort of a coffin. A small, black shell is formed around them. And there they lie dormant for the winter. But in the spring of the new year, the sun begins to wake up the benumbed nature to life. Then the worm that had lain dormant comes out in a new shape in order to live in a new world. It will now no



longer creep in the dust or on the coarse cabbage-blade. No, now it shall amuse itself in the fine and open air and the bright sunshine. And for nourishment it shall only take the finest from the flowers. Therefore, it now has beautiful, light, golden wings by which it rises above the earth and floats about in the open air.

Who does not recognize here the voice of our Father? Who does not see, that here again He has given us a picture in order to show us our Father's thoughts and intentions with regard to ourselves. It is true that here on earth, we are miserable worms and creeping creatures. Nevertheless, we have been created for quite another life. We move towards a great change. When our time of trial is completed and we no longer crawl in the dust, then, as many of us are one spirit with Him that came from heaven, will also be moved by Him into a new world. There we will be glorious and saved. There we will enjoy ourselves in the eternal sunshine beholding His gracious face. And with new, glorified faculties we will get drunk with joy because of the wisdom, love, and grace He has now revealed.

And do you not think that this is one of the more important reasons why we shall receive new bodies and not remain bodiless spirits forever (the way we are during the intermediate state between our death and the last judgment). Namely, that we have been destined for transfer to a new world, much more perfect and glorious than this fallen, distorted world where we now dwell. We will move over to a world where "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: *for the former things are passed away*, ... but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face" (Rev. 21:4, 22:3-4).

God never goes downwards with regard to the quality of His works. He always brings them higher and higher towards perfection. In the new world He will certainly display His wisdom, goodness, and power in a much more glorious way than He has done in this present evil world. And therefore it is necessary for us to have bodies with senses suitable for that world. The senses will make it possible for us to be in connection with that world and to perceive, enjoy, and receive the more perfect knowledge of our glorious Creator that we will receive there. Because then "the invisible things of Him ... His eternal power and Godhead" will be rightly beheld "by the things that are made" (Rom. 1:20). There His works will be infinitely more perfect and greater than all those we have seen in this present world, the home of our childhood, a home that has been obscured and distorted by sin.

## December 4

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*But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people* – Rom. 10:21.

**D**o you desire to see clearly the mind of God and what He finally wants to do with us? Then look at the history of Israel. Look how He dealt both with miserable, penitent sinners, and with the unfaithful and gainsaying people. Observe what God will do with those who do not want to obey His call to repentance, but always choose to remain in sin and vanity. Observe, what He does also with those who are very zealous for God, are pious and prayerful, but also have their real consolation and righteousness in these things and thus “obey not the gospel” (2 Thess. 1:8).

What God did to the self-righteous, unfaithful, and impenitent Israel He will do also to unfaithful and impenitent Christians. The prophet says: “They rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them” (Isa. 63:10). The Lord then did what He had said before at another place: “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded... I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolalation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind... Then they shall call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me” (Prov. 1:24, 26–28).

The Lord did thus when punishing Israel, and especially at the destruction of Jerusalem. Then there was such a praying in the town that the stones could have moved. But heaven was like copper; it was shut up against all prayer. Now it was the *Lord's* time not to hear them, just as *they* had not wanted to hear *Him*. The Lord acts like that. At one time He stretches out His hands in grace and asks the sinner to come. At another time, when the day of grace has come to an end, there follows a judgment without mercy. Oh, that everyone would wake up to the fact that the Lord is still the same. His threats to unfaithful Christians are as true as His threats to unfaithful Israel!

But just as God is a dreadful Judge over His despisers, so He also is gracious beyond measure towards all those who hear His voice and come to His feet. See how He describes His persistent waiting for the “Disobedient and gainsaying people.” And again consider how God is the same at all times. He is today as He ever was, or described Himself. And what does He say about Himself? “All day long I have stretched forth My hands.” Thus He stands at this very moment with His hands stretched forth towards everyone who wishes to believe and come to Him. The Lord Jesus Christ says: “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). “And him that cometh to Me I will

in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). This is certainly the same thing as: I stand with My hands stretched forth.

But then you say: However, this grace can only belong to rightly penitent and obedient souls! I, on the contrary, am all the time disobedient. I do not even have a rightly earnest will, or a love to do good. Can I then have any comfort from this? Consider how the words read! He does not say: I stretch forth My hands unto an obedient and penitent people. No, on the contrary: “unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.” But how should this be understood? Have such a people been rejected? Yes, if you are always gainsaying, then it is true that on your part you are unhappy. But the Lord God Himself is still as He says. The question is whether God can be gracious, when you are so disobedient!

Do not forget that the grace in the heart of God is free and independent of your piety. Look, how He came to Adam with the first gospel message in the day of the Fall. Then Adam was so full of wickedness that he wanted with bitterness to lay the blame for the Fall on God Himself. And still God came with His gracious message. Look at the Father of the Prodigal Son! While the wretched son was still “a great way off,” he “ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). In that way Christ has Himself described the heart of God. If you remain forever away in the foreign country, then you will remain forever away from the grace and eternal bliss of God. Still the Father’s heart is unchanged. The Father’s arms are stretched forth towards you as long as your day of grace lasts, as long as you are being called of Him. All day long He stretches forth His hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.

But, maybe it has also gone so far, that you yourself seek to punish your wickedness and disobedience. You earnestly want to believe and obey, but each day you still feel the disobedience of nature, appearing in thoughts, words, and deeds. Even so you seek all grace at the feet of Christ against all these things, both forgiveness and help. Then surely you have been both sought and found by your heavenly Father. The disobedience against the gospel has been broken and you already are in the arms of the Father. May we never forget what this text says: God stands with His hands stretched forth unto a disobedient and gainsaying people. Then surely a person who punishes his own disobedience and sincerely desires to believe and obey Him, will be received with all His love and delight.

## December 5

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*They go about to establish their own righteousness – Rom. 10:3.*

This happens in many different ways according to the different degrees of enlightenment or darkness the person has. Then Jews thought themselves to be righteous only because of certain outer works according to the law, with their sacrifices, prayers, alms, and outward decency. They thought they were righteous if they were not obviously murderers, adulterers, or thieves. To the great majority among us this is also enough to make us think ourselves right eous or at least acceptable to God. Those again who have understood something of the holiness of God add something more to this. Such as — that one who loves God, reveres and considers His Word, should keep the Sabbath holy. Still others with more light demand that one shall be converted from likeness to this world, and become spiritual, repent, and put away all sins, watch, pray, and forsake the lusts of the flesh and believe in Jesus. This last thing is also regarded as a deed of the law. Some of these also participate in spiritual activities only to try to establish their own righteousness, as long as the soul has its way to salvation, its real hope therein: and has not become dead to the law.

Somebody may ask: Therefore do these deeds mean that one is trying to establish one's own righteousness? Not necessarily. These and many other deeds can also be done in true faith and fear of God. The deeds in themselves do not indicate self-righteousness. But what it does indicate is self-righteousness when such exercises or deeds are claimed to be the way to salvation, and the innermost consolation of the heart. Even if most heartily we confess our faith in Christ and His atonement. This deep hope in our own righteousness has not been put to death by the holy demands of God. Otherwise we would have learned to consider our most serious piety and best deeds as “loss” and “dung” (Phil. 3:8) when it comes to standing before God and being righteous, then we would have learned to seek grace and forgiveness also for our best deeds because we are contaminated with sin. When this deep hope of our own righteousness has not yet been put to death, but on the contrary, we flee to these pious exercises and deeds in order to find rest and consolation against sin, then all this piety indicates self-righteousness.

It is quite different when the person despairs of himself in everything, despairs of his own piety, his own power, and punishes himself, and regards himself as a criminal in everything, having his only consolation in the works and obedience of Christ, the suffering and prayers of Christ, and is encouraged only by the great, free grace to do good. Then the works are the fruits of the Spirit. And then they are well-pleasing to God.

By this we do not say that believers are now free from all self-righteousness. No, certainly not. But their self-righteousness is no longer their *way to salvation*,

but their *temptation* and *plague*. And they meet this temptation in the same way as they meet all other temptations and sin. Namely, they themselves punish and flee from it. But here it does not speak about such a tempting and tormenting self-righteousness. No, the apostle speaks about such men who intentionally, or with real intention to stand before God of themselves, go about to establish their own righteousness and are not submissive to the righteousness of God.

And the *ground* for such an intentional striving after establishing his own righteousness is that a man does not rightly know the depth of his depravity, nor the holy demands of God. One pretends not to notice that the Lord demands purity of heart. In personal piety a man looks only at outer deeds, and in that way can become good and pious in his own eyes. Do you want to know how to receive the consolation that you are pious and good? Then know that you only need to be so hypocritical that you do not regard the heart, whether it is all the time good, clean, humble, mild, and full of love. You only look at deeds. Then you can become as pious as you need in order to have consolation in yourself. And then with all your piety you have become a Pharisee.

But if the Lord God has been declared to your soul in such a way that you are anxious to be holy and righteous before Him in everything, even in your heart, and all the time, then you will never be satisfied with yourself on earth. No, then you will come to know your sin as so dreadful, mighty, manifold, and abominable, that you no longer know where to turn. Then you may many a time be about to despair altogether in spite of all the grace the gospel proclaims. Then you will no longer be able to see yourself as pious and righteous in yourself, but will realize yourself to be a miserable sinner always needing grace. You will always need your Savior, His atonement and defense. Such a person is a Christian.

## December 6

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*For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I* – Rom. 7:15.

**T**he most noxious evil thing the serpent implanted in our nature was the imagination that we ourselves should be our own saviors and helpers. The word “ye shall be as gods” (Gen. 3:5) went deep. It left deep traces in our nature, namely all sorts of pride. And most especially it led to the most noxious imagination that we ourselves have got power to resist evil and do good. In this sense “the free will” is a dream. From it springs both the ease and despair. If the awakened soul could only be convinced that he is not capable of anything, that the free will has been lost, that he has been sold under sin — then he would soon come to consolation in Christ. Then he would soon abandon his self-salvation-work and “throw himself like dead at the feet of Jesus” (free translation) on sheer grace.

But it sounds all the time: “You have not yet tried everything correctly. You have not yet exerted yourself properly. You have not yet watched, prayed, and fought acceptably. Tomorrow you shall do it better.” And thus day after day elapses equally unhappily. But it sounds again constantly: “You have not yet tried rightly. You have not been serious enough. You have not been sufficiently afraid of sin. Tomorrow you shall do it better.” The poor soul does not understand that it is not in his power, to be rightly serious, honest, afraid of sin, to watch, pray, fight, and even to rule his thoughts. He does not understand that “we are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves” (2 Cor. 3:5). We are quite lost sinners. Christ must do all. He must save what is lost. Paul says: “the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14). That is sold under sin like a slave sold to a master. And again he says: “the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:19). “For that which I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I” (v. 15). Where is the free will here?

Many have wondered why Luther fights so violently against the doctrine about the free will. But there are great reasons for it. If Christ dies a hundred times for us and has been most gloriously preached to us, it can all be made fruitless by the one false article that we ourselves have power to do whatever we desire is good. But the awakened soul does not believe so. When he has power to do what he should and does not do so — how will he yet take in grace? Therefore, we should impress this truth well on our heart: “What I would that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.” Also when by faith Christ has made us “free indeed” (John 8:36) — from the power of sin and the devil — we still have not got power to do all the good we want. Because Christ keeps this power with Himself. He does not leave it to us.

Therefore those that have been brought from the power of Satan to God, and are rightly free by the Son, lament and wail by far most over their miserable impotence,

when the Lord leaves them at the moment of temptation. They weep, fight, and invoke God for help. And everything seems to be in vain. They are very near despairing altogether. Where is now the free will? Why are they not pious, clean? If they themselves have power to it, why should they wail, lament, and pray? They should only dismiss evil, be strong, and be happy. If they can overcome everything by prayer, why should they then despair?

But the psalms of David and the lamenting of all the saints bear witness that man no longer has any free will or capability to do the good he wants. Peter had rather wanted always to be strong as he assured and proved himself for a moment in the garden. But soon he fell so dreadfully — at the question of a woman — once, twice, and thrice. Then he wept bitterly and learned that he had no power in his hands. Paul prayed three times for deliverance from “a thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7), but in vain. And then he learned the secret: “When I am weak, then am I strong.”

No, the free will is a dream from the days of Paradise. Man has never had the free will since Adam misused it. Since then the human being has been dependent on grace. He must beg God for each crumb of power. And when he must beg, he cannot take it before it is given. If the Lord lets us go, then we always rush for the abyss. Such is man after the fall of Adam.

## December 7

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*Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord – Lam. 3:40.*

In chapter 3 of Lamentations, Jeremiah speaks about affliction. He says, “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?” Then he adds: “Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.”

This admonition is vital if we want to be delivered from evil! The Lord is a great and faithful friend, a friend for eternity. He wants to save us from eternal damnation. And so even though the outer man is hard pressed on every side our inner man shall be kept alive and healthy! Therefore, do not have a carnal mind that only looks at the external situation *when evil befalls you*. Rather, believe that there is a living God who has counted all the hairs of our heads. And not even the least evil thing can happen to us without His will.

Be quiet and search yourself to see if there is something the Lord wants to point out by this painful evil. Unless we are blind, we will soon notice what the Lord is trying to teach us. And we will have to admit that some sin or unfaithfulness is the ground for the evil we suffer. We cannot excuse ourselves saying that the evil thing befalling us has no connection with our sins. And as long as you do not seek the primary cause, namely your sin or unfaithfulness and seek redemption from it, your soul will not get any rest.

David speaks about how he kept silent before the Lord, acknowledging his sins. And he says about it: “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me... I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgivest the iniquity of my sin. For this shall everyone that is godly pray unto Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him” (Ps. 32:4–6). See here the way to deliverance from evil.

If you again get peace in sin, if you get peace while you keep an unfaithfulness you are aware of or a sin you swear allegiance to — then the deliverance from the outer evil is your most great calamity. Then a new sorrow waits for you in eternity. Therefore, no matter what evil thing happens to us, no matter what distress has befallen us we cannot pray: “Deliver us from evil” without thinking of our sins.

This applies to true children of God who have the fear of God in their hearts. And notice that even if at first it is the external affliction that occupies our thoughts, it is not long before we turn to the inner man in reflection and discover what the Lord is pointing out. There will be no peace, no real confidence in the Lord unless you confess your sins to Him. You need to accuse and judge yourself, confessing your guilt, “I have deserved a thousand times more than this evil, in time and eternity,



because I have sinned. Save me. Deliver me from my sin.” And when we humble ourselves before the Lord, confessing our sins and accepting His judgments, then we will find comfort, solace, and a childlike confidence in His grace. Then we will have the assurance, “The Lord will hear my prayer. He will deliver me from all evil.”

Everything the Lord does is for the purpose of removing our greatest evil, sin, and making us spiritually whole and eternally saved. Therefore what do you think He does? He often acts contrary to our opinion and will. He does not take away the outward distress, and often not even the inner one. But He also allows spiritual evil to plague, tire, and exhaust our old man by perpetual humiliations. And all this when we ourselves would like to be strong and whole.

“The Lord leads His children strangely” (free transl.). And so He lets the evil thing distress you. Sometimes it becomes too hard for you to bear and you will be tempted to grumble against the Lord, unless you remember His faithful intention and purpose. His purpose is to purify and redeem you from your greatest evil, sin. He wants to sanctify your soul and body and make you ready for heaven. And when we become aware of this, then we cannot but “glory in tribulations” (Rom. 5:3). Then we can rejoice and thank God for our bitter experiences. And finally we can become those who prefer sorrow to joy, suffering to pleasure, poverty to superfluity, contempt to glory, death to life.

## December 8

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*And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace – Rom. 11:6.*

**H**ere is a Scripture portion especially intended to sort out the important matter of the meaning of grace. This is very necessary. Thousands of people profess and sing that it is only by grace that we are saved. Yet they depend on their own work to become worthy of the grace of God. If they then still are in the darkness where they find something good with themselves, they also hope for all good from God — and still say “by His grace.” Thus they mix up grace and merit. If they again are aware of their perpetual sin and wickedness they never have peace but always go about in agonizing darkness, half condemned and uncertain about the grace of God. They find themselves doing and being that which God doesn’t love. And still they profess that salvation is only by grace, not by deeds. Thus they confuse grace with desert, forgetting that these are quite contrary to one another. This confusion is detrimental for all spiritual power. When one is not at peace and is uncertain of the grace and friendship of God, then he cannot have the love, desire, and power to do good, which can only come out of a full consolation and peace with God. Therefore, we should consider this word thoroughly to obtain a proper understanding of grace.

Listen then to what the apostle says: “If it is by grace, then it is no more of works.” If it is by grace of Christ alone that we are made righteous and well-pleasing before God, then our own worthiness, piety, obedience, love, repentance, prayer, has no part in it. All your shortcomings do not diminish the love of God the least little bit, as long as it is true that it is by grace, by sheer grace. Because then it is not by our works — inner or outer — otherwise grace is no more grace, otherwise grace would not be what it is: a fully undeserved gift. No, then the whole conception of grace would become absurd. When the Word of God speaks about grace, it means a grace that excludes all our merit. If it was through works, or our own worthiness that we were justified, then it would not be grace. Then one should not say that God saves us by grace, otherwise work is no more work. Grace and merit are so contrary to each other that if it is by work or desert that we are received by God we also must recognize the value of the desert and not deny it by speaking about grace. Because it is no good a merit if grace is needed for the reward of it. So sharply the apostle has spoken here. He wants to say: Either it must be grace and then it is not desert, no absolutely, no desert; or then it is desert and then it is not grace, no, absolutely no grace. It is no grace that somebody is mild towards somebody deserving, worthy of love. It is no real grace if it is not quite undeserved. That is what the apostle wants to say.

No, the only remaining question here is, does God save a sinner by grace? What has the Lord God decided and revealed in His Word regarding this? On this question my peace and consolation at the moment of death depend. And in this important matter, I want to be absolutely sure of what the Lord God Himself says. Yes, what does the Lord God say about this in the revelation of His Son. Let us look at this. The strongest evidence that God wants to save us only by grace, and not by our own works is in the great deed, that He delivered up His only Son made under the law for us to become a sacrifice for our sins. This deed in itself and all that God has revealed about it lay the sure foundation for belief in a grace which is undeserved. From the beginning of the world God has announced His intention to deliver up His only Son to become our Savior. On the day of the Fall of man, He spoke of the woman's seed that was to bruise the serpent's head. Then by means of a long preparing age of innumerable symbolizing offerings and renewed promises He continuously supported His people's waiting for the Savior promised; and when at last this came announced by angels and certified by signs and wonders and the descent of the Holy Spirit — when “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), and we saw Him as an obedient servant, made “under the law, to redeem them, that were under the law” (Gal. 4:4-5), and we heard Him declare that He “came to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28) and we saw Him, holy and innocent in Himself, undergo torments and die for our sins; to be sure this tells us, that He wanted to save the human being by sheer grace. When the Lord God has given us His only begotten Son as a ransom — as a bloody offering for our sins — then everybody can reckon out whether He still wants to look according to some worthiness and desert on our part. “If righteousness come by the law (by some merit on our part), then Christ is dead in vain (Gal. 2:21), the apostle says.

## December 9

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*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love;  
in honor preferring one another — Rom. 12:10.*

**H**ere Scripture speaks especially about the love between brethren in Christ. And the apostle implies that many among us will be punished. The word in the original for “kindly affectioned” is the word used for the tender love of a father or mother to their children and for the love that natural brothers have for each other. Now the apostle says that there should be such a sincere love and heartfelt sympathy between all Christians who are brothers and sisters of one another according to the heavenly adoption.

Some Christians have a cold and distant attitude towards their brethren. They do not think and speak bad about them, but neither do they embrace them in sincere love. They are simply not bothered. Such a relationship is far from true brotherly love and will be punished.

If we really are brethren for eternity, then we should know and love one another. We should embrace one another with a sincere sympathy both in sorrow and joy, And this with the thoughtful care, forbearance, and mildness of a father or mother embracing their children. This is what the apostle means here. Luther remarks, “What now such a kind, brotherly love does, suffers and bears as regards its neighbor that can be learnt from the relation of a bodily mother to her child. So has also Christ done with us, and so He still does. He all the time puts up with us and takes great care of us — us that are so unclean, imperfect, weak, and sinful that it seems as if we would not be Christians. But His love makes us Christians without regard to our infirmities.”

This caring, brotherly love between Christians has also deep foundations, worth thinking about. Firstly, the Lord has commanded it in His Word. Secondly, Christ, in His love for us, has given us a great and encouraging example. But finally, the reason is that we are really and truly brethren. We have been born of the same Father, and we are destined for the same inheritance. Christ therefore has taught us to say: “Our Father which art in heaven.” So we have very good reasons for loving our brethren. They are children of our Father and our brethren. First we must love them for the sake of the Father. And then — as we love our natural brothers — how then can we not love them that are our brethren according to the high adoption with God! We call one another brethren, and rightly so. May your attention be drawn to the fact that we are to have a love and a sympathy for one another. “Above all things,” says Peter, “have fervent charity among yourselves” (1 Pet. 4:8).

In honor preferring one another. Here we learn that Christians should not only love in their hearts and serve one another in practical things, but they should also show one another respect and honor in their relationships. As the apostle says,

they should prefer one another in honor. That is, everyone should first give honor and attention to others. And this should not only happen by outward gestures, but also with the real respect of the heart. As the apostle admonishes us: “let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3). An outward politeness without the corresponding inward attitude is not befitting for the children of God. But if we have humility, love, and esteem in our heart, we should also — according to this text — prove it by our behavior. Christians should not be a rude and impolite people. No, as is taught here, they should be humble, polite, and be ready to help.

Remember, how the Lord Jesus Christ inculcated this in His disciples when He washed their feet. Namely, everyone should be the least and serve the other. He set Himself as an example. “The love and kindness of Christ towards us also bring along,” says Luther, “that we highly and greatly esteem one another for the sake of Christ. He is in us, and it does not do that I despise somebody for his weakness. No, I must think: My Lord dwells in this weak vessel and honors it by His presence. If Christ thinks my brother worthy and is so gracious and well-disposed to him that he may have an equally great part in all his good as I, then I must bow to him and honor him as the living temple and abode of my Lord. What is that to me, how humble the abode seems when the Lord still lives there? If it is not too lowly for Him to dwell in, why would I then not also honor him? After all I am a humble servant.” May God give us His grace to follow this instruction.

## December 10

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*If so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you* – Rom. 8:9.

**H**ere is a very important “if” or condition — “if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.” Here is a question that must awake us to reflection and self-examination. Also here is revealed an inexpressibly great grace. *The Spirit of God dwells in human beings that are still on earth.* Do you believe it? Which human being can understand or grasp this great truth. It implies being a partaker of the Spirit of God! If we would really believe this, then we would hardly be able to live for joy, amazement, and wonder. And it is indeed a divine truth concerning all those who become new men spiritually.

By the term “Spirit of God,” many now mean “a power” or “effect of God in the soul, or a mind in agreement with God, or the new man created in us by God.” This meaning is true of the term “spirit” in many places in the Scripture. But when the apostle here says: “If so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you,” he means that the true, living God Himself dwells and works in the faithful. By the term “Spirit of God” he here means the personal Spirit, the third person in the Divine Being, who is equal to the Father and Son in all the perfection. The apostle says immediately in verse ten: “if Christ be in you.” And in verse twenty-six he says that the Spirit is our advocate and helper. All this means that God Himself dwells in the faithful.

And “the Spirit of God” is not only a power or effect of God in man, but a person in the Triune Being of God. Let us remember the words of Christ Himself. He commanded that we should be baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). When Peter gives a short summary of the work of the triune God for our salvation he says: “the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit ... and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:2). And finally we have the words of Paul that can be called the prayer of blessing in the New Testament: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost” (2 Cor. 13:14).

And so the Scripture associates the Holy Ghost with the Father and the Son as one person in the Eternal Being of God. And how expressly Christ speaks about the Holy Spirit as a person and not only as a power when He says: “I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:16–17). “The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). “He shall testify of Me” (John 15:26). “He will guide you into all truth... He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you” (John 16:13–14).

From these words we also learn what the proper office of the Comforter is on earth. It is to put the work and words of Christ into practice within us. The office of the Comforter is to witness for Christ and build His kingdom. It is to enlighten, call, gather, lead, sanctify, and preserve those to belong to the kingdom of Christ. The Father has given them to the Son. The Son has redeemed them. The Holy Spirit will gather, sanctify, and lead them in all truth. All human beings are dead in transgressions and sins until the “Spirit of life” opens their hearts to embrace Jesus who has been given to us for eternal life. He unites them with Jesus and works in their inner man, recreating him.

The apostle says here that this Spirit dwells in the faithful. He also says elsewhere: “ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them” (2 Cor. 6:16). What great, inconceivable glory! One could ask: “How can the infinite One dwell in the hearts of His children?” Moreover, God is present everywhere! What do these words mean then that God will dwell and work in His faithful? These words mean an intimate union between God and the believing soul. They mean the perpetual indwelling of God in the human person. About this Christ also says: “I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20).

This secret is great. It exceeds all our understanding. Only the light of eternity will fully explain it. Still it is a high, glorious truth. The Spirit of God dwells, lives, and works in the hearts of the faithful. This is the secret of what we also experience. Though there are storms of temptations and good and bad situations cause such tension in our outward man, there still remains a holy mind. That mind feels sorrow at evil and sin, but rejoices at the good and holy. This mind is always the same as long as the soul has not altogether “fallen from grace” and lost Christ (Gal. 5:4). This mind is nothing else than the work of the Divine Guest dwelling in the soul. Because without the Spirit of God nothing truly holy can be in us.

# December 11

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*God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all – Rom. 8:32.*

**O**ur hearts would burn with joy and love, if we had spiritual understanding to know what it says here. Because here we have proof of the incomparable love and mercy of God. And this proof of love, says the apostle, is shown in that God for our sake has not spared His own Son, but has delivered Him up for us all. This is the great theme of the Scriptures. It is what we need most for life and godliness. But at the same time it is one thing we remember the least. It is obscured by our unbelief, reason, feeling, sin, and the devil. Therefore, let us look a bit more deeply into this text to see what it contains.

Firstly, the gift itself. The apostle says that God has given us His own Son. In using the words “His own,” the apostle expresses that Christ is the Son of God as regards His nature, to distinguish Him from those who are the sons of God by grace and adoption. And it is because God has given us His own Son in this sense of the word — that the gift can prove the immeasurable love of God. Had God given us an angel or a highly pardoned human being, it would not have proved that He also wants to give us “all things.” Here the gift is greater than everything else. So the apostle comes to the conclusion and assurance that he expresses by this question “how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

Praise the Lord! His Word is certain and clear, Christ is the true and eternal Son of God, promised from the beginning of time. But which human being is able to perfectly believe something so great? If we were able to really believe this — that God has really given His own, eternal Son for us — we would probably be overcome by wonder, joy, and love. Or can you believe this and still doubt God’s mercy, love, and care for us? Can you believe that God gave His only begotten Son to become our brother and our Savior, yes, our sacrificial lamb, and still at the same time doubt the sufficiency of His grace and love?

This proof of the love of God will become still greater to us, if we understand and reflect upon what the term “not spared,” but “delivered up” mean. These words will tell us something about the purpose of the delivering up of the Son. When the apostle says that God “spared not” His Son, he suggests first that it is a sacrifice. It was a painful thing for God to deliver up His own Son to suffer and die. It is as if the Father had outraged His own love for the only begotten Son. And in doing so He has given an unmistakable proof of His mercy upon man. So the Lord God said to Abraham when he was about to sacrifice his son: “Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me” (Gen. 22:12). That same God has not thought His own beloved Son too dear to be given out for us as a sacrifice. So, according to His confession to Abraham, this was the highest proof of love God was also to give. But it was



especially so because He gave up His Son to be a sacrifice, which involved bitter suffering and agonizing death.

So also all the prophets bear witness to Him. So He Himself said the night before He suffered: “this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28). So witnesses a great crowd of evangelists, “He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). “By the grace of God” He should “taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). So also the saved multitudes cry out with a loud voice before the throne of the Lamb: “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood” (Rev. 5:9). Oh, when such things become alive and true to our hearts, then we are blessed. And we have no words sufficient to praise God worthily for this love, that He for our sake did not spare “His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.”

For us all. This is now the third point in our text that should declare the love of God to us. He gave His Son for us all. This fact indicates two important things about the love of God. The first is that everyone — not even one excluded — has been atoned for in the death of Christ, has been redeemed by His blood from all his sins, from death and the hands of the devil. Everybody can, may, and should receive this grace and be saved. The second is this: Christ has come for all — including the chief of sinners. The implication is that the grace and love of God is quite independent of any worthiness on our part. It must therefore be an *unchangeable* love. Let us often and deeply consider such things.

## December 12

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*How shall he not with him also freely give us all things? – Rom. 8:32.*

**T**his is a logical conclusion from what has been said before. When God has given us the greatest gift, He does not want to deny us the smaller ones. His own Son is by far the greatest gift that could ever be given. Then, nothing that is good and useful will be withheld from those for whom God has given such a gift. He will give us all things *with Him*. The words *with Him* indicate that we get everything for the sake of Christ and because He is given to us. The way a bride becomes partaker of all that the bridegroom owns. With the Son the Father has already given us great gifts: an eternal grace and forgiveness for all sins, freedom from the covenant of the law and all curse, an eternal righteousness in God's sight, the Holy Ghost within, the service and protection of the holy angels, hearing of our prayers and help in all worries, finally victory over death and a portion of the inheritance of the heavenly glory. Was this too much to expect? On the contrary, the apostle says: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" The word *how* expresses that this conclusion is quite sure, in fact, necessary, that God wants to give us all things with Him.

This glorious and unshakeable ground of consolation should be borne in mind and used by us when we need the grace and help of God. For instance, you are burdened with sins. You often fall and forget yourself. And you think that God must be tired of you and would give up on you. But you still seek and pray at the mercy seat for forgiveness and help. How would He then not give it to you? He that spared not His own Son and that only to bring us an eternal grace, how would He then not also give you so constant a forgiveness, that He never imputes any sin to you? It is a decided thing that throughout all this present time He will bear you, as you are, in the arms of His eternal grace. How would He not give you such a grace, when He has not spared His own Son? And He delivered Him up for us at a time when we were quite immersed in our sins and were His enemies and despisers. How would He then now begin to look at your sins?

Or you become frightened and alarmed at your unbelief and your heart's hardness, that you cannot believe and rejoice at all this, at the love of God and the giving of the Son. And you sigh: Oh, if I would only have more faith and life in my soul! But how would God not also want to give it to you, when He has given you His Son? "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11:13).

Maybe you then complain that you cannot even pray so diligently and seriously as you should. You complain that you are cold and negligent in prayer. And you

wish that God would help you. How would He not also give you this grace? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for you.

If in addition you pray for an increased poverty in spirit, an increased feeling of your impotence and wretchedness — would He then give you a perceptible richness in spiritual gifts? No, then He also hears this last prayer and lets you more and more feel your poverty and great wretchedness. But He also gives you so much grace to faith and to prayer, and all that you need in order that you will not perish, but get eternal life.

Maybe you suspect your standing and fear that — after all you have experienced, heard and known in spiritual matters — you will at last be secretly deceived and end in the eternal perdition. Therefore you cry with David: “Search me, O God, and know my heart” (Ps. 139:23). How would He not hear such a prayer and see to it that you do not remain in a false state? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for you. And that at a time when you despised Him. How would He not hear your prayer for grace to become honest and faithful to Him?

Or when you are confronted with dreadful temptations. You do not see how you will get through them without falling. But you desire and pray that God will help. Or when you suffer from bodily worries, poverty, or illness, or from slander and suspicions from men. And you do not have any help on earth. And you turn to your Father in heaven. How would He then not hear you and give you all the grace and help you need? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.

In brief: When inner and external tribulations throw my mind in a whirlwind of uncertain thoughts and I do not know where I myself am or what God thinks about me; when my conscience condemns me for sin and unfaithfulness — what an inexpressible comfort and rest to look up to Him who for our sake spared not His own Son! From the beginning of the world, for His sake, He has heard and helped all who have invoked Him.

Finally, my hour is come and I shall die. Maybe the darkness of eternity surrounds me. Maybe my soul is full of fearful thoughts, thoughts of the past and thoughts of the future. What a comfort if somebody can then cry in my ear: He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how would He not help you now? How would He not be an equally faithful Friend and Helper in death as He was in life? When our time of trial comes to an end, shall He then not reveal all the richness of His grace and in the highest sense then give us all things with the Son?

## December 13

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*Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ – Phil. 1:27.*

**C**ount all the glorious things the gospel has given us. See how high and holy our calling is! We are children of God and heirs of eternal riches. We are brethren and joint-heirs of Christ (Rom. 8:17). We are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God (Eph. 2:19). We are a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9), living temples of the Holy Spirit, yes, saints on earth. This is what a person is who lives in union of faith with the Savior. And though this may seem absurd, it is nevertheless true because God Himself has said so. It stands on such firm foundations that all the storms of sin and tribulation cannot make it come to nought as long as we remain in Christ and under His wings by faith. Because the Lord Himself has said and done so.

We have seen our high calling in Christ. Then see what power there is in the apostle's admonition that our conversation should be as it becometh the gospel of Christ. If we reflect rightly upon these things, we may want to die of contrition, even if our life is far better than that of most people! It would not be becoming for princes to behave like the children of the gutter. Neither is it becoming for Christians to live like the children of the world. May God help us to think of and remember this a bit more!

Think! You have been fortunate to have been chosen out of the world to be a friend and follower of Jesus. And you see how all the world is overcome by the devil. It is spiritually dead and blinded under the spirit working in the children of unbelief. Among them, all of us walked before in the lusts of the flesh. But you have been chosen out of this power of darkness and been translated (put) into the kingdom of the dear Son of God, and now you are partaker of the inheritance of the saints in the house. You enjoy friendship and communion with God. You have constant grace, and eternal righteousness against all your shortcomings. You have the Holy Spirit in your heart and a firm assurance of the heavenly glory.

Should not your life then be consecrated to the Lord, so that you never more think of yourself as your own? You should always consider yourself called to live for your Lord and in a way that is different from that of other people. Yes, all life should be a perpetual walking in the Spirit so that it would adorn the doctrine of God and your Savior in all respects! The fall of Adam is a great power in our nature. It causes you much sorrow at your shortcomings and weaknesses. With Paul you will have to lament bitterly: "the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19). But, nevertheless, you must always be in this holy exercise. And you must perpetually pay attention to your calling, as a friend and follower of Christ, in order to be allowed to walk as it becometh the Gospel.

Luther writes: “Hereby the apostle wants to say: You have now got the word and grace of God. Thus you have become saved men. In Christ you have all you need. Remember this and remember that you have been called to something quite different and higher than other people. And also live so that people can see that you seek a higher good, indeed, have already received it. Seek that, so that your life may be to the glory and praise of the Lord who has given you such a treasure. And see to it that you do not give anybody cause for scoffing at this treasure and despising His Word. But much more attract and encourage each man by it so that your walking and good deeds may move them also to believe in Christ and praise Him.”

Moreover, notice here that every sin committed by Christians or the people of God is not only disobedience to God. But what makes sin much more grave is that it also causes the Word and name of God to be blasphemed and others to take offense. And so Paul says: “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you” (Rom. 2:24).

Therefore a Christian’s life should be such that the glorious name of God is not blasphemed. Christians should watch diligently so that they do not cause offense by their life. They should let the glory and name of God be dearer to them, then they would not want to bring blasphemy upon it. They would rather let their own glory, property, life, and living go.

May everybody search his life and think over carefully to try to obviate offense at the gospel. He should direct his deeds and life after the commandments of God, to the glory of His name. Yes, may everyone who reads this, stop and examine himself. Christians and clergymen should never forget that the eyes of all men watch over each move they make. What the children of this world do, does not matter much. It does not touch the glory of the Lord. Because they are not united with Him. No, they act for themselves. But what the Christians do is always associated with the gospel. May we then see to it that we walk as it becomes the high calling of a Christian.

## December 14

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*Hear, and your soul shall live* – Isa. 55:3.

See how the prophet confirms here the great doctrine of all the Scripture: we become righteous before God by faith. Paul says: “faith cometh by hearing” (Rom. 10:17). And Christ: “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3). You have not done more than listened to My speech and then faith has sprung up in your hearts. You are then clean. And this is said by Christ Himself — the One who will judge in the last day.

All Scripture binds salvation and eternal bliss to the short word *faith*. So we want to focus all our attention on how one comes to faith. And what is faith? Every person seeking salvation has to do with this. Eternal bliss depends on this matter.

Listen then what the Holy Spirit says about it: “Hear, and your soul shall live.” Only: hear! Faith comes by hearing. Faith does not come of itself. It is a delusion if we only think and think, and think over and over again, but do not hear what God says. Faith does not come this way. Neither does it come because we only desire and wait for the Holy Ghost. Neither does it come because we work in our hearts to make it believe. No, Christ says: “through the Word.”

Stop and listen to God speak. Take God at His words and rely on it that He does not lie. No matter what you deserve or your wretched repentance. No matter how small you may feel in your heart. If you can only take God at His words and embrace His witness for Christ with the heart’s faith — then you also will have the Savior and all that He has earned. Notice, how precious are the words, the apostle Paul spoke about this in Rom. 10:6–8: “the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above): or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.” Do not look here and there for Christ, the apostle wants to say. Do not look around in uncertain spaces, in a dim, infinite distance. What does the Scripture say! The word is nigh thee. Hear! You have the word — the word of faith!

Yes, but Christ? Do you not hear! *You have the word!* Take the word and you have Christ. You think that Christ is so far away. It is as if He would be in heaven or in the deep. You do not know *where* He is or how and when He shall become yours. You stretch for Him in an indefinite distance. You need not, says the apostle. The word is nigh thee, namely the word of faith. If you embrace that word, then you embrace Christ. Because at the very moment that word about Christ gets room in your heart, at that very moment you also have Christ with all His works, yes, all that the word contains.

This is the way faith saves. God gives you a word. You embrace it, and at that very moment you have what the word contains and promises. This was what Christ all the time wanted to teach us when He went around and helped people only by words. He said a word. They believed the word. And it happened immediately.

In John 4 we have an example for our instruction — the example of the nobleman. His son is at the point of death. Then he goes to Jesus and asks Him to come and heal his son. But Jesus began by punishing unbelief and says: “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.” Still the nobleman repeated his petition. But no, Christ did not go with him. What did He then do instead? He gave him a word and said: “Go thy way; thy son liveth.” “And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.” But he was so far away from his home that until the second day did he meet his servants who had been sent to tell him: “Thy son liveth.” And when he inquired the hour when he began to mend, he found that it was expressly at the same hour in which Jesus said: “Go thy way; thy son liveth.” Thus it was at the same hour when he embraced the word by faith.

But what is it to “walk by faith” (2 Cor. 5:7)? The man did not get anything visible. Nor did Christ go with him. Neither did he get any medicine to carry. No, he did not get anything at all that could be seen or felt. He only got a word. And with that word alone he went. And during the long night he had to content himself with only the word. Thereafter he got witness through his servants. So also, we should content ourselves with the word from our Lord. We should walk by faith and see absolutely nothing of its accomplishment.

It is important beyond measure to impress this deeply on one’s heart. Because it is quite incomprehensible what long, tormenting, and exhausting agonies it costs many a soul to come away from its feelings and understand this secret: we must begin by hearing and embracing the word of Christ and relying on it. All the time we want to feel something in our heart and get a sensational experience of the life of the Spirit before we will believe. But such things cannot happen to us before we have first embraced the word.

## December 15

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*Let us not therefore judge one another anymore: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way – Rom. 14:13.*

**T**he apostle speaks in gracious, persuasive tones including himself in the wish he expresses: “Let us not judge one another anymore.” Notice two things: first, our inclination for judging or despising the brethren is very strong and second, this sin is more important and destructive than we usually think.

We can soon find that our inclination for this is very great if we look at ourselves. How ready we are to judge our brethren for all possible reasons. This is true of all of us. But especially so in unbroken, conceited human beings who have not yet given in to the demands of God. Because they have neither been rightly chastised by their own wretchedness, nor pervaded by the grace of God. Still, is it not so that we all have this in ourselves?

If our brother does not have the same way of expressing as we do or have been used to, then we are immediately ready to suspect his life. Even if he has not spoken anything that proves guilt or falseness in the spirit. Perhaps he only has another opinion in the matter. Or maybe he has another way of being, dressing, eating, and drinking. Yes, immediately there is again a suspicion of his honesty and motive. And if we come across a real sin or weakness in him, then we think we have every reason to judge him without first having heard from him whether he deliberately committed sin or, on the contrary, is in remorse and fights against the sin.

Luther says: “We are such foolish saints. We have sin everyday and always need forgiveness for all our life. And still we want our brother to be absolutely without faults.” In addition, maybe he has offended us. Then we immediately have eyes like an eagle to see and seek all the faults in him. Such is the human heart. And here is the real source from where judging, despising, and all uncharity spring. It is the *heart*. It is our nature with its wickedness, selfishness, and self-conceit, by which also the faithful often become blinded. They do not know anything else than that they are only driven by holy zeal, when they judge or despise their brother. And they act quite contrary to this admonition, and to the great law of love. Because, with their judging they cannot do good to their neighbor! No, but always evil! This our great propensity for judging no doubt was one of the two reasons why the apostle has written so much about this.

The other reason is that judging is a much *greater evil* than we usually think. We may think it trifling, if not downright good and righteous to judge our brother. But on the contrary, it is an evil and destructive vice. The one who is a judge despises the majestic right of God over His servants and intrudes upon the exclusive domain of the Lord. He also inflicts much evil on his fellow men. Bitterness and



uncharitableness, evil suspicions, division, and parties have sprung up only because of the judging attitude of someone. A humble and confidential admonition will bring repentance. But all judgement over the inner attitude and secret intentions of the heart is likely to evoke bitterness and wickedness, separation from the brethren, parties and antagonism. In brief, judging is a detestable evil in all respects. And this probably was one reason why the apostle warns us so persistently and finally says: “Let us not therefore judge one another anymore.”

“But judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.” Here the apostle uses the word “judge” in a special sense. Before it was used for judging over the consciences, inner state, and other secret conditions of the brethren — a judgment that is always unlawful to man. Here it means that I pronounce a firm judgment over myself that I will never put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in a brother’s way. Emphasising the same word in different senses is used to suggest contrasts and distinguish one matter from the other. Here the apostle then wants to say: Instead of using your thoughts in uncharitable judging use them now for the purpose of love. Judge or make up your minds never to put a stumbling block or cause to fall in the way of the brethren. The words to “put a stumbling block” or “an occasion to fall” have the same meaning in the original text, namely to “give offense and cause to fall,” “worry the conscience,” bring the brother into perturbation and confusion. You see the strong may do such things by using their freedom at the wrong time. So those who are weak may become disturbed and confused about the right understanding of the gospel. Or then they might be allured to a way of living without yet having full assurance that it is innocent. Christians should not cause such things. They should make a firm decision never to give the brother any cause for confusion.

## December 16

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*In him was life* – John 1:4.

**A**s to the meaning of these words, it is certainly also true what perspicacious interpreters have remarked: “life” must here be taken in its widest sense. It must stand for all life that has gone out from the creating word. It does not say “the life,” but “life” in the original text. And we know that when God created all that is called life on earth by the word, it was from the word that this life went out.

But when we think of the spiritual aim of the evangelist in his writings and his way of speaking at other places, such as in 1 John 5:11–12: “life is in His Son [the Son of God]. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” — then He has, no doubt, the spiritual and eternal life of man in mind, the salvation of mankind. This was the main reason why the Son of God became man.

John is usually described as the sun-eagle. And it is characteristic for him that his eye is deep and sharp. In simple words he writes lofty and deep thoughts. In this text his eyes are directed to how all mankind had lost the life of God by the Fall — according to the first judgment of God in Gen. 2:17: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” The eyes of John are directed on the fact that this life is now only in the Son. According to His own words it has been given to Him alone to have life in Himself and to make those whom He wants alive.

John has here suggested all and anything that any man can effectively do for his salvation. It is as impossible as making a dead and stinking corpse come alive — even though he exerts himself to do the will of God and obtain life as the result of the struggle. Throughout creation there is not even a blade of grass or a worm which has not received life except by the creating Word. So also there is no one in mankind who has any capability by himself to live in God and earn eternal life. No, all that we do still always leaves us in death, until we despair of all our own doing and only hear the voice of the Son of God and get life from Him.

As the Lord Himself declares: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” (John 5:25). And we know that Christ has spoken so strongly about this spiritual death at another place, that He compares the spiritually dead men to corpses that should be buried. He did this, when He said to the man who wanted to bury his father: “let the dead bury their dead” (Matt. 8:22). Thereby the Lord has expressed strongly enough that life is only in the Son of God and that only he that has the Son has life.

But to have the Son is not only to pray to Him or to work to serve Him. No, it also presupposes that we have been born of God. It presupposes that we have

become new and living men who can confess with Paul: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

So Paul also says at another place: “if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law” (Gal. 3:21). But in his epistles he has strongly and extensively proved that no law has been given which can make man righteous and alive. It is an important instruction that all that we do according to the holy law of God and all the work of the law cannot give life to any man. Because the law can only demand what is in man. And that is not life.

Only He that created life at the beginning can give life, when He becomes the life and peace of the soul. This is the meaning of the text that only He is life. Luther has understood our text this way: “By this only text have now all human capability and all human works been cast down. How do you now want to raise up the free will and man’s own merit. Do all you can! Do the deeds of all saints and angels! And still it is all dead. Because here it says clearly and unmistakably: what is not in the word is sheer death.

All those who labor and are heavy laden need to reflect on and believe this — with all they can ever exert themselves to do for the conversion and sanctification of their soul — they will still always remain spiritually dead and lost as long as they do not despair of all their doing and come to the Son. He alone has life and gives life. And so all our labor is in vain. If we are to win any spiritual and eternal life it must only happen by the same almighty word of the Creator that in the beginning said: “Let there be” and there was life. No matter how perfectly human art can imitate the outer shape of a created thing, it still cannot create anything living. It cannot create life. All that is called life can only be made by God. So also every exertion to obtain spiritual life is in vain. Only in Him that is called the Word and that made all in the beginning — only in Him is spiritual and eternal life.

## December 17

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*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion* – Rom. 9:15.

**T**he apostle wants to say: God is great and sovereign. No man can claim anything from Him. No man can bring Him before the court or demand reasons for what He does. He gives His grace to whom He wants. In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, Christ speaks of the good man who spoke to the one who murmured because those who had come at the eleventh hour had received an equal amount as he. And he had worked all the day long and borne the burden and heat of the day. The good man says: “Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is . . . I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?” (Matt. 20:13–15). In the same way the Jews and all self-righteous people are told that God Himself says: “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

This is inexpressible and great consolation to all poor sinners! It is also very needful. All of us have a self-righteous nature. Even if we have experienced most deeply hundreds of times that we are not sufficient and that everything is perfected in Christ, we still begin each day to seek righteousness in ourselves. We think that if we become more pious, then God will be gracious to us. But if we have unhappiness and difficult experiences of our own depravity, then we think that God must be angry with us. Then we get discouraged and afraid of God. As if His grace would depend on our own righteousness. No enlightenment or experience helps against this foolishness of ours. It is an illness in our very nature. We cannot escape it.

But what should then keep us from following the inclination to unbelief, and to remain in faith? It is only through the Word. So we need to remember and reflect upon the Word we consider here. The Lord God declares so solemnly: “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” The Lord says to us here that all human worthiness is of no use. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious. It is only through My own free grace, that I have compassion on a sinner. There is no human being that is worthy of My grace. You are always lost, your worthiness makes no difference. Everything in you is sinful and cursed. What I do, I do for My own sake. So says the Lord God also in Isa. 43:22, 24–25: “But thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob; . . . but thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied Me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”

Let us then look at the conditions here for such a freedom of grace. The first is that all human beings are lost in sin. “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh

be justified in the sight of God” (Rom. 3:20). “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). “There is no difference: for all have sinned” (Rom. 3:22–23). The most pious Christian still carries great sins in his heart, namely the ones against the first and great commandment. He also has quite a lot of sinful thoughts, lusts, and desires against all the commandments of God. Therefore it was quite necessary that grace should be free and independent of us if any of us are to be saved! Because the Lord God did not find anyone to whom He could be gracious for His own sake. So it had to be as He declares here: “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

The second ground why the grace of God is so free is due to the redemption accomplished in Christ Jesus. Because of the great love of God to us He gave up His eternal Son to remedy the Fall. The Son would take upon Himself the sins of all human beings. And for them He would pay with His life. He would satisfy all the demands of the law by His obedience and earn a perfect righteousness for us. Therefore the grace of God is so free that God does not look at what we deserve. No, He is always perfectly satisfied with those who have put on the righteousness of the Son. Because it is only in the righteousness of Christ that we are righteous before God and free from the law. Then we are certainly righteous and free from all condemnation at all moments — as long as we are in Christ. If God would look according to our worthiness, then righteousness would not be only in Christ. The Lord God tells us these things in this solemn declaration of His: “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

## December 18

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*For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost – Rom. 14:17.*

If we want to know what makes us Christian, righteous before God, and members of His kingdom, then look at what the apostle says here. It is not meat and drink, or anything we can do. No, it is only by the great thing that God has done for us, only “the righteousness of God,” received by faith. “He that hath the Son hath life” (1 John 5:12). This is the righteousness of which the kingdom of God properly consists. Luther explains the text as follows: “In the kingdom of God, Christ rules over all that believe. As a faithful king He protects, punishes, leads, and rules over them and gives them wages. And in their turn they trust in Him and willingly receive His fatherly correction and punishment. They follow Him in obedience. This kingdom is not worldly or temporal, but *spiritual*. It does not consist in food and drink, nor in any outer thing. No, it only consists in *righteousness*, in consoling and satisfying of the hearts and consciences of the human beings. Therefore, it is nothing else than *forgiving and removal of the sin*. Sin stains, grieves, and defiles the conscience. A worldly kingdom consists therein that the people might be able to live in peace and support itself peacefully with one another. So the kingdom of God gives such things spiritually. It destroys the kingdom of sin and is nothing else than a *perpetual blotting out and forgiving of sins*. Therein does God show His gloriousness and grace in this life that He removes sins from human beings and forgives them. This is a *kingdom of grace* here on earth. But when sin with its court companions, the devil, death, and hell, can no longer harass the human beings, then this becomes a kingdom of gloriousness and perfect bliss.”

But when we have thus been delivered from sin and have put on the righteousness of Christ, then it results in what we call “the righteousness of life” (free transl.). It consists of new hearts received by faith and the Spirit. So that in love and willing obedience we now direct all our life after the Word of God, no matter how imperfectly we may be able to do so. But we begin and strive to love and serve our neighbor as Christ has loved and served us. Now we do not only want to do to our neighbor all that is right, but also all good to him. And thus we want to become servants of all human beings, the weak and unwise, in order to serve and be of use to all.

And when we are so ruled by *love* and only work for our neighbor’s benefit, then as Luther again says: “the deeds of a Christian have no name.” That is, he does not do good deeds in order that others may praise him. No, he does good because he is no longer bound by rules, except by the one to love and do what love bids in each case.

The second thing that the apostle mentions is *peace*. This peace consists of a good relationship with God. We are no longer under His wrath, but in His friendship

and grace. We are His children. By the same faith this reconciled state is also accompanied by a blessed consciousness of it. So that we also have a peace of heart and conscience. This is called the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry: “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15). The children lost by the Fall are again united to God. They can again speak intimately to Him like children with the father. This can indeed be called “the kingdom of God,” yes, “the kingdom of heaven on earth” (free transl.).

The third point is “joy in the Holy Ghost.” A Christian not only has peace, but also joy in the Holy Ghost. Yes, sometimes he is “exceeding joyful in all his tribulations” (2 Cor. 7:4). This “joy in the Holy Ghost” is a natural consequence of a living faith in the gospel. It “brings us good tidings of a great joy” (Luke 2:10), as the angel said at the birth of Jesus. But at the same time it is — like faith itself — a direct gift from God and a work of God which no one knows except the one who experiences it. Scripture contains many examples of this joy in the grace of the gospel. Such as the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, the Ethiopian eunuch, the keeper of the prison in Philippi, etc.

One who has been under wrath, has now been reconciled with God. And in the light of the Spirit he becomes aware of what a heavenly kingdom of grace he has then entered. Then surely he must be glad and rejoice! If he is in his right mind.

This joy often accompanies the first assurance of faith and in the sweet wedding days, when the Bridegroom is near or perceptible, when His concealment and other trials have not yet become too difficult. Joy is given differently, according to the Lord’s special bringing up with different souls. And usually those with less afflictions also have less of the supernatural joy. And after a greater affliction, we usually get a greater joy. The history of the saints teaches us so.

## December 19

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*He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you – Rom. 8:11.*

**H**e shall quicken your mortal body. These words tell us that our own earthly bodies shall be restored to life changed and glorified by the omnipotent God. These things had already been revealed to Job. He said: “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (19:26). And the prophet Isaiah says: “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead” (26:19).

On the last day every soul shall be joined again with its own body. With this body we have served God or the devil. At this present time the body is the tool of the soul. So it will also partake in the reward or punishment in the other world. This depends on whether the person has lived in the kingdom of darkness and served sin or whether he has lived in the kingdom of Christ and done good for His sake. The risen bodies will have been changed and made suitable for eternal life. This corruptible must put on incorruption. And those who have been united with Christ shall now be like the glorified body of Christ. In this present time they have borne the image of the first Adam, an image which was of the earth, earthy. So, in the resurrection, they shall bear the image of the second Adam, an image which is heavenly.

In Phil. 3:21 we read about Christ: “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.” When Christ was glorified on the mountain “His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light” (Matt. 17:2). So shall also “the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” according to the words of Christ Himself in Matt. 13:43.

May the Lord God increase our faith! The secret and the glory of resurrection are beyond human reason and understanding. If one depends on his intellect, he will remain in the dark night of unbelief and doubts. Here the necessary thing is to know in whom one believes. Here what is needed is to know that He is both almighty and truthful. Then one can be sure of the resurrection. But it is certainly necessary to pray to God for the gift of faith.

By His Spirit that dwelleth in you. For emphasis the apostle repeats the foundation for the assurance of a glorious resurrection. Namely, that the Spirit of God already dwells in them. He wants to say: Think! God has already given you His Spirit. Your bodies are the temple of God on earth. There He dwells and works. He has sanctified and purified your bodies. This bears witness that He intends to



make them glorious! It would be an outrage to the majesty and glory of the Holy Ghost if these temples of His — your bodies — would be destroyed.

It is good and well that you believe in the immortality of the soul at least. But it certainly is vital that you believe *all* the Word of God and not pick up and believe only what you think reasonable and doubt everything else. If you do that then you have already deviated from the way of faith. And it can be said that you no longer believe in the Word of God. No, you follow what your wretched reason and thoughts dictate.

To be sure it was not about the souls, but about the bodies that the Lord so often declared: “I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40). Perhaps you find it difficult to understand how it is possible to raise bodies that have decomposed or been burnt. Maybe you do not understand how it will be possible for the sea to give back its dead. Then consider how God once created all things out of nothing. Who has given Him material to make all things? Answer the question He posed to Job: “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (38:4). Bow to the High and Blessed. Confess that you do not understand anything. Confess that He is almighty and works miracles. Pray for understanding from Him. And then look at all He has done for us. He has sent us His Son, His Word, His sacraments, His Spirit. Does this not witness that He intends to glorify both our body and soul? And you will confess that He “that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb. 13:20), will also bring again the bodies of His people for the sake of His Spirit that dwells in them. Blessed be His glorious name forever.

## December 20

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*Without me ye can do nothing* – John 15:5.

It is worth noting that the original text has a double negation here. It means: “nothing at all.” I do not want to forget, that the Lord has said here: “Ye cannot do anything at all, anything at all.” Moreover He has given a picture that is a strong expression of this “absolutely nothing.” Namely, a branch broken away from the trunk. A branch that lies on the ground and becomes dry. It is impossible for such a branch to bear fruit.

Christ says: “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.” All prayer, all earnestness, all fight and struggle are fruitless, unless you are grafted into Me. Except you abide in Me, you cannot bear any fruit, so speaks Christ. And so says the apostle: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves” (2 Cor. 3:5). Think, when one cannot even control one’s thoughts, what can one do then?

The same apostle says that God must also give you the good, honest will. He says: “it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). And this He works in the surrendered souls who have learnt from their own fruitless efforts that they themselves are capable of nothing. When they hear His voice and obey Jesus, He makes them alive in Him. But if they want to fight and work themselves, then evil will continue to rule over them.

An old Christian had learnt these things. A young brother lamented at his miserable impotence in the fight. And got the strange reply from the old Christian: “Why, it certainly is not possible for you to win the victory while you are still fighting!” As this was considered too heretical the old man added: “I mean, as long as you fight. As long as your own ego has still got some power untried and intends to overcome by it.” No, you have to become nought. Then the Lord comes and asks you: Have you still got any capability to try? Can you still do something yourself? If you reply out of your heart, “No, I am lost. I am done for!,” then the Lord says: Well, then I can pull you out of the impurity and put your feet on a rock, so that you can go steadily.

So all life, all power to bear fruit depends on abiding in Christ. I have the blessed secret in my heart that I have friendship with God. God has forgiven me all my sins. And Christ is so inexpressibly precious and necessary to me. Namely, no sin is imputed to me. But I live in such a revelation of perpetual freedom from guilt as if I had not sinned, as if no law had ever been given. When I have this secret in my heart, the Lord becomes precious to me in reality. And then I am freed from the world. Then I want to live to my Lord. Then I confess Him with words and examples. And I now do with pleasure what was difficult before.

It is true that I have not become delivered from the unclean and depraved flesh. Still the proper, fruit-bearing power lies in this union of faith with the Savior.

Moreover, even up till now I could not rightly pray against all evil. Now I pray in faith and in the name of Jesus not with the self-righteous purpose that caused the Lord not to hear me. Now I have everything in the grace of the Lord and only seek His pleasure. And so the Lord says: “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).

And what you do not get by abiding in Him — commend it to His wisdom and pleasure. If He wants He is able to make you holy and clean like an angel. He knows best what is most useful for us. You may say, “But the Holy One certainly cannot want evil. To be sure the fault must be with me, when I do not get this and that power!” Verily, the fault no doubt is with you.

The problem is that we live in our own strength and not in His grace. Because of this He let Peter be sifted by Satan and Paul be buffeted by a messenger of Satan to teach him not to boast. And He said: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). That time it was more wholesome for Paul to learn to know weakness than strength.

Or do you want to live in vanity, in a light and worldly spirit, instead of sticking tight to your Savior? Do you still want to lead a careful and Christian life yourself? Then that is the fault. Then the fruits decrease immediately. And the Lord says: “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself,” etc. Likewise, if you live in unbelief and the mind of bondage, as shown already, then you cannot bear fruit.

The consequence is: Maybe it looks extremely absurd that you will continue to remain in Him. Your power seems so weak. Still there is no other way out. Where shall you flee? He is the only One who has all power in heaven and on earth. Only He can bruise the serpent’s head. He has come to destroy the seeds of the devil. Then only seek to become more closely united with Him and to come to a more implicit faith.

## December 21

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*For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins – Rom. 11:27.*

**T**he great Lord God says, “This is my covenant unto them,” or my covenant with them, “when I shall take away their sins.” This is the testament of God. A will is an irrevocable covenant, when it has been confirmed “by the death of the testator” (Heb. 9:16). It is his last will. One does not change anything in it. “No man disannulleth, or addeth thereto,” as the apostle remarks in Gal. 3:15. The Lord also says that He makes such an irrevocable covenant with apostate Israel. And what does this covenant consist of? The Lord Himself says: “I shall take away their sins.” He describes this covenant in Jer. 31: This new covenant would not be according to the previous one that He made with their fathers in the day that He took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt and they came to Sinai. No, this would be a new and different covenant. And this will be the difference, in the former covenant the law was written in tables of stone for unwilling hearts, so that He had to compel them. In the new covenant, however, the law would be written in their *hearts* and *minds* (Heb. 10:16). And in the first covenant sin would not be forgiven. No, it would be punished. In the new covenant the Lord would “forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34). Thus the characteristic features of the new covenant would be the forgiveness of sins and the change of heart. It would be a covenant of grace, a covenant of peace, and an eternal covenant, as the Lord so often declared.

The Lord wanted to make such a covenant with apostate Israel. Here is the immeasurable grandeur of the grace of God! Israel had sinned dreadfully, and He still makes such a covenant with them: He Himself takes away their sins. To be sure He first poured out His righteous wrath on them. He blinded their hearts. He afflicted them with plagues. Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were scattered. But after that He again wants to show them such grace as the new covenant promises. He wants to forgive them. He wants to take away their sins. And He never wants to cease from doing good to them. Such is the Lord God.

All this has been written as an instruction for us. When the Lord God pardons such a people and forgives such sins as those of Israel whom will He not then pardon? Which sins will He then not forgive? Among the most dreadful, most unworthy sins are no doubt those that we have done after we have received much grace. Nothing frightens us so as when we must say to ourselves: I knew the will of God, and I have received such a great grace. And still I have sinned. But that is the way it was with Israel. Moreover, their sins were so dreadfully great. And still the Lord God wants to forgive everything, if they only do not “abide ... in unbelief” (Rom. 11:23). He wants Himself to “take away their sins,” wash them in the blood

of reconciliation and do all good to them. Has it not been proved and confirmed here what He says in Isa. 1:18: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

And mark the words: “I shall take away their sins.” God has been insulted. And He still wants to take away the sins Himself. We usually think that we must first deliver ourselves from sins before God can be gracious to us. But here the Lord says — as everywhere in the Word — that He Himself wants to take away our sins.

And taking away of the sins is twofold: first He takes away the guilt of the sins, by reconciliation and forgiveness. Thus they will no longer condemn us. No, we will always be in a kingdom of grace. That is, all the sins that still are in our flesh and often break out, will never be imputed to us. No, to the eyes of God they will be as if they were no sins, but only illness and sufferings, for which He wants to comfort us. Yes, He is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15).

Then He will also take away the power of sins, so that they will no more rule over us. No, we will be able to go quite another way through life than all the world does. The Lord Himself will — by His Spirit and chastisement — kill sin in us and sanctify all our being. Think of it! The Lord will do this Himself. We usually think that even if God forgives us our sins for the sake of Christ, it shall still be up to us to weed out and put them to death. But the Lord says: “I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them” (Heb. 10:16). “I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me” (Jer. 32:40). “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God” (2 Cor. 3:5). Thus all punishment and admonitions should teach us to seek all with God. They should teach us to ask for and receive all grace from God and to praise God for everything.

## December 22

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*Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling stone and rock of offense: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed* – Rom. 9:33.

**H**ow does this happen? How can Christ become a means of perdition for us? We can see clearly how it happened for the Jews. First, they took offense at His humility and infamous death. Secondly, at His doctrine and judgment which were quite contrary to theirs. It is the same today. We know how the blind world takes offense at Christ and His gospel. They think it is “foolishness.” To think that the Son of God took on human nature and was debased so deeply is foolishness to the natural man. So are the doctrines about reconciliation by His death and the sacraments.

Let us look at the context. We find that the word “offense” refers to doctrine, that Christ pardons and saves unworthy sinners but He condemns self-righteous people. This is the “stumbling stone.” So people still say: “This man receiveth sinners” (Luke 15:2). “This man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him: for she is a sinner” (Luke 7:39), etc.

This “offense” exists in all places where the gospel is preached in Spirit and truth. And not only with happy-go-lucky people, but also with many that “have a zeal of God” (Rom. 10:2) and “follow after righteousness.” It also happens with many who are considered as enlightened and pious Christians. They now become quite confused and begin to revile the gospel that is the gracious word of Christ Himself. They call it a new doctrine dangerous to sanctification and so become its enemies. It is as the prophet says: “And many of them shall ... be snared, and be taken” (Isa. 8:15). Because if Christ would not have come to their town with His gospel, they would always have remained undisturbed in their self-righteousness. But now they become “snared” and revealed as enemies of the gospel, only because this came to them in a clearer light, in power, and demonstration.

And whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed. Praise the name of the Lord! Although many in Israel and many in Christendom stumble and fall on this stone, there are nevertheless others to whom He is “a precious cornerstone” (Isa. 28:16). He is a rock of salvation. On it they build all their consolation in life and death. And for those we have this assurance: “whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.” Not to be ashamed means not to be disappointed in one’s hope in Him. But we are warned that the faithful are also often harassed with fear and uncertainty: “Can I also really own and claim what the words contain and promise?” Such uncertainty has often troubled the saints. That can be seen everywhere in history. And we all feel it within ourselves. So is the hidden life in God. So many are our shortcomings and infirmities. So weak and dim is our faith that we often do not know whether we really are a saved people, though we believe

in Jesus. Then the eternal Father comes and assures us: “Build with all confidence on the stone that I have laid in Sion.” He will never fail. “Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.”

May we then pay special attention to the word “whosoever” and “keep it.” Here is no difference. Not one human being is excluded. Whosoever that believeth on Him — whosoever that is in distress because of his sins and flees to Him, whosoever that despairs of all his own righteousness and all his own attempts to save himself, but hears and embraces the gospel of Christ, that is drawn to Him and joins Him the way the sinners did who became His people and new men in the days of His flesh — whosoever believeth on Him that way shall not be ashamed. He cannot, must not be ashamed. No, he will have eternal life as truly as God is faithful and truthful and cannot deceive those who belong to Him.

## December 23

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*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,  
good will toward men* – Luke 2:14.

So the multitude of angels sang on the morning, the day Jesus was born, and the message is proclaimed: “unto you is born this day a Savior.” And immediately there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” How we should rejoice and sing this praise to the Lord — we that are of the so highly blessed mankind, we who are concerned by these good tidings of great joy!

Therefore, this theme is in itself great, glorious, and delightful beyond measure. If we were to comprehend this divine wonder of grace and love we would hardly be able to live for great joy. The eternal God became a human child. The Creator lies on hay and straw and gives Himself to us. If we really believe this, we would probably cry out with an unspeakable joy: “Glory to God in the highest!” Still the faithful have such a joy at this theme — as well as at everything Christ has done for our salvation — as nothing else in all the wide world can give. And they have such a joy as nobody else — nobody that has not got the true faith — has ever had.

Christian joy indicates the standard and quality of godliness. True joy of Christ and in Christ — is a characteristic of a true Christian. There is a great difference between joy and joy. It is true that we can be in gay spirits because of a good feeling at Christmas. But that is not rejoicing at the Savior Himself and His birth, a joy that inspires love, and praise for Him.

Many go still farther. They are very religious, devout, zealous, active for the kingdom of God. They can think and speak wisely in spiritual matters. They can pray, fight, and do many good works in order to become saved. But they find it impossible to really rejoice in the Savior. Not even for one hour can they delight to speak about Him, confess and praise His works.

What does this prove? This proves that Christ has not yet become the consolation and treasure of such people. They have not yet rightly believed on Him. They have not received the Spirit that gives life. They are those who have confidence in the flesh or in the outward religiosity, like the Pharisees. Christ has no value for such people. They remain in unbelief for secret sins or self-righteous work. The Scripture cannot come to nought. It says: “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace” (Gal. 5:22). “The kingdom of God ... is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17). Where there is no peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, there the life of the Spirit or the kingdom of God has not yet come.

The Scripture says: “I believed and therefore have I spoken” (2 Cor. 4:13). “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21). “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). Consequently people



do not want to speak about Christ because they do not delight in Him. Rather, they speak about other subjects, which in fact can be important. Then that person has a greater treasure, a greater joy and comfort in these subjects than in Christ. Then Christ is not the ground of the faith of his heart. Consequently, as long as you have not been consoled and happy in Christ, that you have begun to want to speak about Him, praise and confess Him, you have not yet believed rightly. Either you are in bondage of sin, at ease and asleep. Or you are in bondage of the law, and in self-righteous work.

The Israelites confessed when they had been delivered from Babylonian captivity: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” (Ps. 137:1–4). To want to help an un-spiritual person — still unfamiliar with God and in bondage — to rejoice spiritually, is fruitless. One can sing and speak. But it is the free heart that really rejoices. Nobody can compel himself to that. And to rejoice in the Savior and to simultaneously praise His deeds is a fruit of the Spirit. That is a free gift of God. On mount Sion a song is sung about the Lamb that was slain. “And no man could learn that song” but the sealed. And nobody can taste a true joy except the faithful. This is intended to help us in self-examination. It shows us the requirements necessary to know true joy. Namely to know what *sin* means and to find one’s *redemption* from it in Christ. In other words: repentance and faith are needed here.

## December 24

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*And the Word was made flesh* — John 1:14.

**T**he eternal Word was made flesh! The eternal Son of God becomes a true man. But not a sinful man. Born of a woman. The one born of a true, natural woman He is a true, real human being. The eternal Son of God partakes in humanity. So that His tribe and relatives are counted among the descendants of Adam, as the first page of the New Testament shows. The Son of God is our relative, our kinsman “like unto His brethren” (Heb. 2:17), except for sin. Inconceivable love of God! He decided on such a strange and gracious way for our salvation!

Reason fails to comprehend the mystery of the eternal Son of God becoming kinsman, our brother! Is it true? Is it possible? I cannot understand it. But I cannot get rid of it either. My thoughts are snared as if by a net of eternal incomprehensibility, but I also cannot escape witnesses. And the matter is so important that all Christianity stands or falls with it. And so does our salvation and eternal bliss. On one hand it is something far too great and glorious that we poor, fallen human children would be so highly esteemed and honored, that the eternal Son of God would be our brother and kinsman. So that I cannot believe it for its grandeur.

On the other hand this stumbling stone is too heavy for me to throw away. There stands an entire world of witnesses to Him. First the long age of prophecies. And thereafter an age of fulfillment at the right time of all that had been prophesied. Can I reject that person altogether — the person that is the object of all these prophecies and fulfillments? “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner” (Matt. 21:42). Shall I try to throw it away? Or can I reject what my own eyes see today of His kingdom on earth? Can I reject what I myself have experienced of this faithful Lord?

Oh, no! He is a living and present God. We know Him as revealed in the flesh. Because no man knows the Father except the Son (Matt. 11:27). But can I then believe that God has become revealed in the flesh? It is too great and glorious! But it is an eternal and divine truth — a truth that is certain, no matter what reason has to say. Yes, praise God, that we cannot understand it! That we do not have such a small God that our poor, blind reason can follow Him. May God preserve us from having a God that cannot exceed our intellect!

But the problem is that the poor, fallen, and narrow heart cannot keep this inexpressible treasure and joy. If I could keep this great truth living in my heart — that the eternal Son of God is our kinsman, our brother — then I would not want anything more. Then I would have enough. Yes, enough for this present time and enough for eternity. Not even one sad thought would be able to get room in my heart anymore. My heart would want to burst with great joy. Because if fallen mankind has been so honored, that the eternal Son of God has become one of us, become

our kinsman — oh, then I do not want to know more! Then mankind is honored and exalted above all angels and thrones! Then one may say that the damage, and debasement we have suffered through the Fall has been abundantly avenged. So now it is an honor to be a human being. Yes, and the blessed angels certainly have reason for desiring: “Oh, if I were a man!” It is true what Luther remarks: “since the Son of God became man, it should also have the fruit and effect on us that we would sincerely love and rejoice at everything that is called a human being. And we should never more be able to feel ill-affected towards any member of mankind.”

In order to get consolation and encouragement in the contradictions of life, Christians should dwell more deeply into this discourse. They should pray to God for understanding. So that they would be able to say with wonder and joy: Now I do not want anything more! The Son of God is a man. Then everything shall be well. If the Son of God has become our kinsman, then I sense a greater love for us human beings in the heart of God than we usually think. Then it cannot be as it often seems to us, that God is far and indifferent. No, then there must be some deep purpose when He takes such an attitude as if He does not care about us.

## December 25

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*I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people – Luke 2:10.*

What is the great, joyous message the angel announces here? It is nothing less than that God has become like one of us. God has become man. God has become our brother in the flesh. And what does Scripture say? “For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb. 2:11). Who is “He that sanctifieth”? God, the holy One. Who are “they who are sanctified”? The fallen and sinful human beings. And they are both of one nature, of mankind. Therefore “He is not ashamed to call them brethren,” as they really *are* brethren. After the flesh they are descended from the same ancestor.

So He also showed in reality that He was not ashamed to call them brethren before anybody — neither before His heavenly Father nor before human beings. Once He said to His Father: “I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee” (Heb. 2:12). Another time He said to a woman, Mary Magdalene: “go to My brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God” (John 20:17). The third time He says in front of all the world: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me” (Matt. 25:40).

Let us now bear in mind that this is a real and divine truth. The Son of God has become our brother. It is not only a kind and affectionate title, but is a true and great reality. It is based upon the fact that we are all of one. Then we must admit that we would probably be transported with joy and wonder, if we would be able to believe and bear this in mind rightly. The Fall of Adam has depraved our hearts so much so that we rejoice, love, and praise so little. We would long for the departure of this life and we would cry with anxiety: When will the thick, unbearable veil be taken away, the veil that conceals the gloriousness of God so much? “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24).

But further: Maybe somebody asks for the proper reason and purpose, why the Son of God should become man. Then the Scripture also speaks about this in an extremely consoling way: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14–15). And again: “Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17).

Please note here the reason why He should have flesh and blood like the lost children: Through His death He should destroy him that had the power of death,

the devil. Christ should deliver the bonds of death. He should atone for the sins of the people. He should be merciful, mild, full of compassion and sympathy.

Note: human debts should be paid with human blood, as was according to the law and justice. One man should pay for the offenses of the human being. Because He took blood of the woman's blood, whereby He put the matter that the "woman's seed shall bruise thy head" (Gen. 3:15). Therefore the Son of God should be born as a man and be under the law that had been given to the human beings, in order that He would redeem them that were under the law and thereby make us children of God.

The Spirit of God had already prophesied this redemption from the law by this child in an explicit and glorious way through the prophet Isaiah: "thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian... For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (9:4, 6). What is this "yoke of his burden" if not the sin and the law? They press us like a heavy burden. And in Gal. 5:1 they are called the "yoke of bondage." What is the "staff of his shoulder" and the "rod of his oppressor" if not the law? Like the scourge of a corrector or slave-driver it hits, drives, and plagues us in our conscience for our sins. It sentences us to death, leaves us to the devil and precipitates us into hell. Such a wrath of God, such a dreadful misery is the "staff of his shoulder" and the "rod of his oppressor." But our Gideon should break that staff and that rod, as in the day of Midian.

## December 26

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*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh — Rom. 8:3.*

**T**hese words open to us an entire world of extremely glorious themes for rejoicing. At once they put before a spiritual eye rich fulfillment of all the innumerable divine revelations, promises, and symbols regarding Christ. Of them, all the waiting during time of Old Testament was full. “The time appointed of the Father” (Gal. 4:2) had come when the Old Testament child-age and regency was to come to an end. Now all the prophetic words and symbols would come true. When the angel’s message sounded over the Bethlehem district: “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day ... a Savior” (Luke 2:10–11) — then the Word had been made flesh. God had sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.

Then one saw with one’s eyes the contents of all promises in the dear manger. Before the eyes one now had “the woman’s seed that should bruise the serpent’s head” (Gen. 3:15). Here one now had before one’s eyes Abraham’s seed wherein “all families of the earth” should “be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Here is now the hero of Judah — Shiloh — unto whom the gathering of the people should be (Gen. 49:10). Here is now the “Son of David” that at the same time was the “Lord of David.” Here is now the Zema, the branch of the old root of Jesse and the sign that a virgin bears a son called Emmanuel, God with us. Here is the child upon whose shoulder the government shall be and whose name is called, “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). Here is the Lord of Israel. He was to be born in Bethlehem, but His “goings forth have been of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2). Yes, here is the Lamb that was to be taken out of the flock and whose blood should be stricken on the side posts and the upper door post and was a protection against the destroyer (Exod. 12). The Old Testament time was full of such prophecies and pictures.

Oh, what does this mean? Throughout a long age of four thousand years there runs a chain of prophecies about a certain great man who was to come. He was to bruise the serpent’s head. He was to bear the sins of the world. And in Him all families of the earth should be blessed. Oh, here — against the innumerable witnesses of the milleniums — the doubts and contradictions of my dark heart become like dust flying for the wind and like straw against the firm old rock. Eternal praise and thanks to the Lord God for His unspeakable gift!

God sent His Son. Here is now the very heart-point of our text and in all our Christian faith. Here is also the point on which alone one should arrange prayers with much invoking that God would have mercy upon us and open our senses that

we might be able to see something of the immeasurable depths of God's wonder of grace, when He gave His eternal Son to our fallen mankind.

The Word of God reads: "Sending His Son." It does not say: Then the Son of God was born. It says like this: "God sent His Son." The child you behold in the manger in the spirit is not a child that has received such a great measure of the spirit and pleasure of God so that God would call it His Son. No, the Scripture speaks otherwise. It says, the child was the eternal Son of God and He was with the Father before this world had even been created. The Scripture says that He was to be born in Bethlehem "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Mic. 5:2). It says: "In the beginning was the Word, ... and the Word was God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 3, 14). Such things are contained by the word "sending" — God sent His Son — thus a Son that existed before, but only was sent to the earth when the fullness of the time was come.

So also Christ Himself says: "God so loved the world, that He sent His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). "O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5). "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (John 16:28).

The apostle John also says: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him... He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9–10). And again Paul says: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God" did, "sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh."

You will understand such things, when you sit in the spirit at the manger in Bethlehem and behold the wonderful Child whose birth is announced by all the heavenly host to the poor shepherds in the district and by the wonderful star to the wise men in the east. Thanks and blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto our God from eternity for His unspeakable gift! God sent His Son.

## December 27

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*The Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes* — Isa. 29:10.

What is worth thinking of here is that it is God Himself — the great God rich in love — that finally punishes His despisers so that He blinds them to their eternal calamity. And it is the same gracious God that burns with such love to the human beings that He has given His eternal Son for us and forgives very unworthy sinners, all their offenses against Him, as soon as they only kiss the Son and become His disciples. It is God that all the time forgives the poor children of all their sins and finally wants to give them eternal glory, though in themselves they have only deserved sheer wrath. This God, rich in love, pours out “the spirit of deep sleep” upon some other people, so that they become hopelessly blinded and hardened. And this He does to them that resist His gracious calling and play the saint before Him with only external works. And He lets this dreadful punishment go over the peculiar people, the children of His friend Abraham, when they began to play the saint that way before Him. Here we shall see the dreadful righteousness of God. Here we see that “God is not mocked” (Gal. 6:7).

And may nobody think that this dreadful ruling of God only belonged to the Old Testament time. No, in the midst of His loving zeal for the souls — also the mild Savior pronounces the same judgment over those hearing Him then without being obedient to His voice, and those not *wanting* to receive it to repentance and faith. What dreadful words of the gracious Savior! In Matt. 13:13, He says expressly that He spoke to them in parables “therefore” that some among the people would not understand it. He said: “to them it is not given.” “Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath” (vv. 11–12). And what such a person does not have, is the susceptibility to the voice of God when it speaks to him. And what then will be taken from him is the very light. So says the apostle in 2 Thess. 2:10–11: “Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.” Notice how far the righteous wrath of God extends in the judgment of blinding over His despisers!

This last place also explains the reason why souls with good intentions often worry. Namely, some times, even when the gospel has been preached with power and blessing in a country, there arises most dreadful delusions. They are spread both orally and in writing. Yes, obvious attacks are made against the faith in God and Christ. Then the children of God dread at the thought of the many that will be carried away from the very main truth and be turned into downright deniers. But then we should know that such things are the punishments of God over the



impenitent. With all the grace God offers them, they never let it be said to themselves. No, they always resist the Spirit of God.

And we must not blame the judgments of God. Not even when they show themselves in such a dreadful wrath that He sends a strong delusion to the ones not wanting to believe the truth. To be sure it is lamentable, yes, dreadful, to see how immortal souls will now become deceived and hardened so that they shall believe the lie and be damned. But we must also bear in mind that it is not a trifling thing they have done against the great Lord either. They have resisted and despised all His grace. Maybe they have not only heard His Word preached in a most strong way, but maybe also have seen the work of His Spirit in the country in the conversion of many people. Maybe they have also felt His gracious knocking on their hearts. Yet they have resisted the powerful awakening therein, and have despised all and gone away to the world and vanity.

Should such a dreadful contempt for God be followed by a dreadful judgment? God is greater than man. To be sure it is dreadful that human beings will go into perdition. But it is no less that the great God will be despised and mocked. Certainly it will be a dreadful sight in the last day, when the Judge tells the unblest to go away to the eternal pain. But then God will be so great and glorious to the righteous that they will not consider the wickedness of the impenitent less than their punishment. With an unspeakable wonder at the great grace and forbearance of God that has saved themselves from all their sin and unworthiness, they will, as regards the unblest, confess the righteousness of God and only say: "Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments" (Rev. 16:7).

## December 28

---

*For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance – Rom. 11:29.*

What a mighty consolation do these words contain! The main thought of the text is: God cannot repent or revoke a grace and election He has given before. Now we have a very early calling and election as the foundation for our hope of salvation. We have got some dear and most great promises. “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” “He hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). This counsel of salvation of God must be quite imperturbable. It must be quite independent of us. Because God made His decision so early, that no man could contribute to it. It happened “before the foundation of the world.”

No day had come yet. There was not yet any sun or moon. In the free counsel of His own eternal Being, the Lord God thought of creating the world and of creating mankind on earth in His own image to be children and heirs of all His gifts. A mankind that would be able to see and rejoice at all His works and perfection. And in order that we should learn to know also His divine righteousness and mercy, He also decided to put us to the test. He foresaw that we would be beguiled by the envy and cunning of the fallen angel and fall and become depraved. Then God decided on this counsel of salvation: He would give us His own eternal Son to be our Mediator. He would descend on earth, put on our flesh and assume our cause. He would undertake to fulfill the law and to undergo the punishment in our stead. Everyone that is in distress because of his sins and flees to Him and sticks to Him only in faith, will not perish, but will have eternal life.

This was God’s own, free counsel of salvation, God’s eternal election of grace. About it the apostle says: “He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.” He has “predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph. 1:5–6). He Himself announced this counsel already on the day of the Fall. And then He let so many witnesses and millions of symbolizing sacrifices perpetually repeat His promise until, when the fullness of the time was come, it was fulfilled by the birth, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

John the Baptist testified: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The Lord Himself testified: “My blood ... is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28). Then a great multitude of evangelists testified: In Him alone there is salvation. His blood cleanseth us from all sin. Thus this counsel of salvation was decided on very early and has been very amply announced. Would the Lord God now repent and retract this eternal calling and gift of His? Would He now begin to seek righteousness in us and deal with us after our sins? Is then the great Lord God not faithful and unchangeable in His eternal

counsel? Does He not stick to His many and precious promises? Would He ever alter what He Himself has decided and announced? Notice, “according to the good pleasure of His will.”

That we do not think about the great God, except when our sin frightens us. Then we think that God will deal with us after our sins. But may we then bear it well in mind that the Lord God gave us His Son to be our Savior mainly because of our sins. Would He then now be able to look at our sins and be ungracious to us for them? That is we, who — in all our wretchedness — still believe in the Son and seek our salvation only in Him. Would He get tired of us and reject us because of our sins? Why, then His own counsel of eternity would have come to nought! This can never happen. “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” Eternal praise and thanks to God who chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. He has decided to be gracious to us only in Him. He will never repent this eternal counsel of His. This is the first thing we should think of here.

Then He has also made an individual covenant with every one of us early. Namely, in baptism, “the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Pet. 3:21), adopted us to be His children and “put on us Christ” (Gal. 3:27), in order that in Him alone we should be “clean every whit” (John 13:10). Might the Lord God ever revoke this covenant and now begin to judge a believing person after what he is in himself? If he has fallen away in unbelief, then to be sure he, equally well, as an unfaithful Jew, is a “branch” broken off from the vine (John 15:6). In that state he cannot be a partaker of the sap but of the trunk. Then he cannot be partaker of the grace of Christ. But the Lord God “hath remembered his covenant forever” (Ps. 105:8). He wants to give him a special grace and bring him back. In brief, our unfaithfulness cannot make the faithfulness of God come to nought (Rom. 3:3). The Lord cannot possibly alter and revoke His covenant. “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.”

## December 29

---

*Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost – Rom. 15:13.*

Here the apostle does not wish us any small measure of hope and consolation. No, he wishes us a full assurance of faith, even up to “joy.” He says: “the God of hope *fill* you with all joy and peace in believing.” The expression “all joy and peace” reminds us of the causes for rejoicing we have got by our union with God. “Peace and joy in *believing*,” says the apostle. This again tells us that it is not the matter of joy that depends on good circumstances or on our seeing ourselves so pious and good that we would be able to rejoice at that. But it speaks about joy that only depends on *faith*. That joy only depends on our trusting in the words and promises of God, whereas in ourselves we see sheer causes for sorrow. To *believe* is to have consolation in something invisible only on the promises of God. And here the saving faith in Christ is meant, because it shall work with “joy and peace” and that “through the power of the Holy Ghost.” This faith is only a gift from God and for that gift we may well pray. This faith is a work God brings about only by the preaching of the gospel when it hits the destitute and the powerless sinners. But then we see and feel with ourselves only most depressing things. And so shall also faith during all possible worries be trusting in the mere Word of God, while we only see and feel what is threatening and deplorable. But how then can we have joy and peace? Yes, expressly then there will be a supernatural joy and peace, which will only be the work of God. And it is such a work of God that the apostle wishes us here. As he now adds furthermore:

“That ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.” This is now the last and sweetest fruit of all the good things God has done and does: we have a perfectly sure hope of the eternal bliss. Such a hope is a great power in all our Christianity. This hope gives us an inclination and power to run faithfully in the race that is set before us. It gives us courage and strength to do, suffer, and endure in everything that belongs to the fight. “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). And the hope of salvation is our helmet in the fight. All of life is so full of afflictions, trials, and misery, a perfect hope of the future glory is needed, which God will give us, if we will not become negligent and weary along the way. Patience and faithfulness are necessary to endure.

But now: We certainly have extremely strong foundations for the hope of salvation and eternal bliss, because we have been created for the eternal life. We have been redeemed at such a price for the eternal life. Christ has given Himself out for that life — not for this short life on earth — to be an expiatory sacrifice. God has given us the Sabbath, the Word, the sacraments, and the work of the Holy Spirit in our souls for the eternal life. If we are the children and friends of God, we

are then also sure to become His heirs. To be sure He will make His friends really happy and full of joy.

Although the grounds are so firm and unyielding, still our hearts — by the depravity of nature — are so full of doubt and so unsteady, that we cannot keep this blessed hope, if God Himself does not give us the precious gift. A hope depending on some efforts, thinking, and deciding on our own part is always weak and uncertain. But when God Himself gives us the assurance by the Holy Ghost and fills us with joy and peace in faith — then we get the perfect hope that the apostle speaks of here. Therefore he adds the words: “through the power of the Holy Ghost.”

Here the apostle now mentions the third person in the Deity and says He is active to give us full consolation. The eternal Father — called “the God of hope” — works a perfect hope in us by the Holy Ghost, when He fills us with joy and peace in faith.

And by this addition, “through the power of the Holy Ghost,” the apostle again wants to remind us that we cannot do or take anything ourselves, but it is given from above. Oh, how important it is to feel deeply, how all grace and power depends on the giving of God! All our peace and growth in good is all the time prevented by the imagination that we ourselves are capable of something. Even if we can use the outward means and — when we hear the admonition — eagerly desire what is good for ourselves, we will soon experience that we cannot take it ourselves.

And still the imagination of our own capability is so deeply rooted in our nature that it is the greatest obstacle to the work of God in us. On one hand, God then should perpetually cast down this imagination by leaving us in powerlessness. On the other hand, this imagination which is the source of unbelief works as an obstacle to the work of God in us. On the contrary, how warm and willing the person becomes when we feel and believe deeply that all good comes because God gives it!

About this we have such texts as these: “Without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves” (2 Cor. 3:5). “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). The apostle wants to remind us of such things by the words: “through the power of the Holy Ghost.”

## December 30

---

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? – Rom. 8:35.*

**H**ere the apostle meets the great main concern of the children of God — namely that of remaining in the love of Christ. Earlier in this chapter the apostle consoled us as regards our worry about the present grace against the accusations of our consciences and the fear of God’s wrath. Now he turns against the worry at the many dangers to the spiritual life. And he wants to assure us that nothing that can ever meet us during the walking will be mighty enough to separate us from the love of Christ. And as mentioned earlier, he also presents here his consolation in the triumphant tone of a question: He says:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” To be sure the very question expresses a strong faith and confidence of the apostle. But the mere fact that it is questioned whether we can be separated from the love of Christ and that an explicit reply is given to us here, shows that such a concern often worries the faithful and that they need this consolation. Provided that we should not think that the apostle wrote something only to announce his own confidence without any intention thereby to console some that needed such consolation. It is a downright common concern with all truly faithful, and a distinguishing mark of the true grace in their hearts, that they have an anxiety for abiding in the love of Christ. They do not content themselves with the fact that they have consolation and grace with God at present. They also think of the abiding therein until the end.

It is a good sign that you feel your weakness and unsteadiness so lively. It is a good sign that you know the power of the hindrances and enemies and that you fear losing your precious treasure, although it is a weakness in your faith that you do not have a corresponding consolation in the faithfulness and power of God. But the very fear is a good sign. Because it does not only show that you know your weakness and the power of the enemies, but also shows that the very gift has become precious and indispensable to you.

Because, it is so that the nature of the heart is always such: to the same degree we think something dear and too precious to lose, to the same degree we fear losing it. If I have got a very little treasure to keep, I do not fear thieves much. But fancy that the treasure is very great, let us say the sum of half a million. Then I think that all thieves will know of it. Then I do not find any place safe enough for it. The one never fearing to lose his treasure of salvation in this dangerous world, cannot yet think its value very great.

It is a better sign if you have a curious spirit of fear, an inclination almost always to fear some deceit and spiritual danger. As an old teacher writes: “when you think of the event that you would one day lose the fear of God and the faith from your heart, then it is as if you would be seized with fear of death.” Such things bear

witness to a work of the Spirit in your soul. It has made your state of grace rightly dear and too precious to lose.

But those worrying about the grace of God shall also be consoled by the grace of God. This is the main rule in all the Word of God. The apostle also acts according to that here. He wants to console expressly those who fear. Then he here assures that they have such a mighty and faithful Lord and protector, that nothing will be able to separate them from Him. It is true that many mighty enemies and hindrances may come on our way. But in Rom. 8:37 the apostle says: “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” Such is the consolation the apostle announces here.

The love of Christ. The grace from which nothing shall be able to separate me is here expressed by the few, but rich words: “the love of Christ.” Not *our* love to Christ, but the *love of Christ to us*, as all the context shows. Because in the preceding verse the apostle has only described what Christ has done for us. But then what does it mean to be separated from the love of Christ? No doubt, to be separated from the personal partaking of the love of Christ, that is, from the state of grace. In the state of grace the love of Christ is all our salvation. It is not enough that we have got all that belongs to life and salvation and eternal bliss, the eternal grace of the Father, freedom from all condemnation, the Holy Spirit in our hearts, the adoption and the inheritance — right in heaven by the love of Christ. No, it is also expressly the love of Christ that is already here the most precious treasure and felicity of the faithful. To the true bride the love of the bridegroom is more than all his gifts and possessions. A faithful soul says with Asaph: “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Ps. 73:25). It is also a distinguishing mark of a faithful soul: when he has forgotten himself, his worry mostly consists therein that he fears that he has provoked his Lord and forfeited His love. Therefore this expression — “the love of Christ” — has been altogether taken out of a pious heart.

And now the apostle says: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” As said before, the tone of the question already has an assurance full of consolation that nobody and nothing shall be able to separate us from that love.

And surely we must call it a great and divine comfort that we have such a faithful and mighty Lord as will be present in all our temptations and dangers and help us safely through, when we invoke Him, though we do not get the comfort our old heart would gladly want to have, namely that we are no longer in any such danger that we shall need to invoke the Lord and depend on Him each day. Praise the Lord! Nevertheless in His power and faithfulness we always have consolation at a time, when we feel a need for it. And only such is the consolation the Lord wants to give us.

## December 31

---

*Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name forever and ever* — Ps. 145:2.

**I**n order to be able to be aroused to praise and thank the Lord rightly it is necessary for us to bear well in mind the good things He has done to us. We have got all the fatherly love of God which creation bears witness to! We have got all the merit and defense of the Son so that no sin is imputed to us and no law or threat befalls us! We have got the Holy Spirit with all His grace, chastisement, and solace in our hearts! Or maybe is it a small thing to have only God? Only God — His friendship and His kingdom? May the Lord preserve us, if we think such things small, so that some dreadful evil will not befall us because of such an ingratitude! Therefore, do not stop praying to God before you have got a heart that has its highest happiness and peace only in Him and His friendship. Then you will have there a deep ground for an eternal peace, bliss, and gratitude.

Then your heart can also be roused to praise God by innumerable other proofs of grace. Just look back at the old year! How many great benefactions has the Lord not shown you — you and all the church of God! How many proofs of His presence and gracious caretaking have you not experienced! Maybe you know many a day or night with bitter worries on your heart. You did not see how this and that could be put right. But you invoked God in your distress. And He heard your prayer and helped you. And then how many sins has He not forgiven! And what a careful Shepherd has He not been for your soul! One time He sent you something bitter and worrying for awakening and chastisement when this was needed. Another time He sent you a consolation, solace, and joy, when such things were good for you. But His benefactions cannot be counted. And now for all this, God does not want to have anything more from you but only a grateful heart. And at the same time this is your own fidelity. Moreover, God always gladly pours out more grace on the grateful souls and does more and more good to them all the time.

If you now have gratitude in your heart, then you no doubt also ask how you will be allowed to show it to your God, who is so good. The first thing that pleases our God very well is expressly the thing you then already feel — a grateful and contented heart. He only wants you to remember His goodness and your great happiness in His friendship. So that you also can suffer some inconvenience therefore during your walking. So that you do not murmur and lament immediately like the children of Israel in the wilderness. Most especially as, because of all the love proved by His own heart, you should believe and bear in mind that nothing bitter befalls you, if it has not been sent by Him for your own benefit. This is the first thing that belongs to a grateful heart contented with all the ordinances of God.



Secondly, you should also often say in prayer a heartfelt thanks and praise to your good God for all His benefactions. Always begin your prayer by a heartfelt praise. Sometimes for His fatherly love that He gave us His Son. Sometimes for all the merits of the Son which brings about that no sin condemns you. Sometimes for the care, chastisement, and solace of the Holy Ghost. Speak like a child and say: "Holy, most beloved Father! Eternal praise and thanks to Thee. Because by Thy Son Thou hast taken me out from the kingdom of sin and eternal death and hast already given me the eternal life! Eternal praise and thanks to Thee! Because there is no need for me anymore to bear the heavy burden of my sins or taste the fire of hell, but I shall be eternally with Thee in the blessed Paradise." This is a very wholesome, sweet, and strengthening exercise for the inner man. The children of God should never neglect this exercise. And as said once before, all your prayers will become quite different if you begin by first thanking God for the benefactions, He has already shown you. Thereby your otherwise dry and lifeless prayer gets a new confidence, joy, and hope that He also now can do good to you.

Thirdly, the gratitude to God should also be proved by deeds. That is, only because of God's great grace towards you, you are willing gladly to serve your fellowmen, even if they do not deserve it! You do so for the sake of the good God. Only because of God's grace to you, you are willing to give bread to the hungry and clothes to the naked. Only for God's great grace to you, you are willing to contribute to the preaching and spreading of the Word of God. You are willing gladly to put up with and forgive evil, as God so perpetually puts up with you and forgives you. This is a true gratitude. And these are truly good deeds. They spring from the right source. And from this we shall find that gratitude to God is the precise life-sap and strength in all Christianity.

But if we now want, not only to understand this, but also really to exercise it — to be sure we will then find that the grace and help of the Spirit of God are needed for it. Oh, how wretched nature is! It wants to rejoice and thank only when something agreeable happens to us. To be able to praise God *always*, also when He chastises and tries us, that is only a wonder of God. For this wonder we only become prepared by much exercise, struggle, and prayer. Let us pray diligently that God will give us all this for the sake of His beloved Son! Amen.

# Index

---

## **Acts**

10:43 .....	478
10:44 .....	46
14:22 .....	316
16:30 .....	360

## **Col.**

2:6 .....	424
3:2 .....	362
3:3 .....	544
3:5 .....	366
3:11 .....	62
3:12 .....	642
3:14 .....	466
3:15 .....	492
3:16 .....	450
3:18 .....	486
3:19 .....	488
3:20 .....	116

## **Cor.**

1:5 .....	454
1:30 .....	134
2:2 .....	36
4:13 .....	636
4:20 .....	98
5:7 .....	100, 326
5:8 .....	348
5:15 .....	260
5:17 .....	150
5:21 .....	34
6:15, 17 .....	24
10:16 .....	422
11:24 .....	80
11:29 .....	572
13:2 .....	412
13:11 .....	160
15:4 .....	558
15:21–22 .....	192

15:36, 38 .....	596
15:40 .....	680
15:49 .....	402
15:58 .....	620

## **Ecclesiasticus**

2:7 .....	432
9:15 .....	652

## **Eph.**

1:4 .....	102
1:7 .....	186
1:9 .....	96
2:5 .....	592
2:8 .....	518
4:1–2 .....	290
4:22, 24 .....	586
4:30 .....	92
4:32 .....	58
6:2–3 .....	320
6:12 .....	278
6:14 .....	546
6:15 .....	280
6:16 .....	566
6:17 .....	568

## **Exod.**

12:11 .....	78
20:2–3 .....	170
20:3 .....	318
20:7 .....	50
20:8 .....	112
20:13 .....	122
20:14 .....	222
20:15 .....	224
20:16 .....	226
20:17 .....	476

## **Ezek.**

37:26 .....	198
-------------	-----

## **Gal.**

2:19 .....	438
2:20 .....	232
3:5 .....	358
3:13 .....	176
3:24 .....	264
3:25 .....	654
3:27 .....	212
4:4 .....	470
4:4–5 .....	20
4:30 .....	594
5:1 .....	236
5:24 .....	602

## **Gen.**

1:26 .....	118
2:3 .....	60
2:16–17 .....	350
3:1 .....	426
3:4 .....	508
3:4–5 .....	148
3:8 .....	314
3:9 .....	354
3:12 .....	634
3:15 .....	514
18:22–23 .....	298

## **Heb.**

2:3 .....	178
2:10 .....	168
4:1 .....	338
4:12 .....	356
9:24 .....	666
10:22 .....	18
10:37 .....	138
12:5 .....	548

12:6 .....	384
12:8 .....	430
13:8 .....	6
13:9 .....	174
13:22 .....	258

**Isa.**

1:18 .....	588
29:10 .....	728
30:15 .....	352
32:17 .....	248
33:24 .....	444
40:6 .....	332
40:11 .....	294
42:8 .....	434
43:24 .....	154
43:25 .....	152
44:22 .....	484
49:15 .....	346
49:16 .....	530
53:6 .....	144
54:10 .....	364
55:3 .....	702
59:1 .....	534

**James**

1:12 .....	618
------------	-----

**Jer.**

10:23 .....	322
15:16 .....	516
31:31, 33 .....	474

**Job**

15:14 .....	626
-------------	-----

**John**

1:1, 3 .....	302
1:3 .....	464
1:4 .....	706
1:6 .....	304

1:7 .....	458
1:9 .....	274
1:12-13 .....	12
1:14 .....	722
1:29 .....	512
2:1 .....	452
3:2 .....	664
3:8 .....	622
3:14 .....	74
3:16 .....	10
3:19 .....	228, 468
3:20 .....	436
3:36 .....	42
4:7 .....	310
4:14 .....	162
4:17 .....	656
5:4 .....	218
5:10 .....	340
5:14 .....	166
5:28-29 .....	194
6:11 .....	240
6:53 .....	428
6:57 .....	330
10:11 .....	136
10:14 .....	180
10:27 .....	308
13:10 .....	238
14:13 .....	526
15:2 .....	216
15:3 .....	262
15:4 .....	446
15:4, 9 .....	292
15:5 .....	714
16:8-9 .....	40
16:8, 10 .....	66
16:23 .....	266
18:36 .....	638
18:37 .....	504
20:17 .....	284
21:16 .....	26
21:17 .....	472

21:19 .....	146
21:22 .....	306

**Lam.**

3:40 .....	688
------------	-----

**Lev.**

19:2 .....	208
------------	-----

**Luke**

2:10 .....	724
2:14 .....	720
9:25 .....	48
10:27 .....	32
11:2 .....	396, 398
11:4 .....	678
12:32 .....	612
12:35 .....	524
12:37 .....	644
12:39 .....	506
13:3 .....	90
13:24 .....	442
22:3 .....	418
22:19 .....	600
22:24 .....	140
22:42 .....	616

**Mark**

11:24 .....	220
14:22 .....	230
16:16 .....	416

**Matt.**

5:13 .....	106
5:14 .....	296
5:16 .....	246
5:44 .....	324
6:9 .....	202
6:10 .....	204
6:11 .....	400
6:12 .....	554, 556

6:13 .....	242
6:26 .....	368
10:30 .....	172
11:28-29.....	200
13:22 .....	662
19:20 .....	268
22:12 .....	376
24:13 .....	482
25:5 .....	256
25:40 .....	386
26:28 .....	254

**Pet.**

1:4 .....	108
1:5 .....	44, 462
1:12 .....	672
1:22 .....	300
1:25 .....	142
2:1 .....	598
2:5 .....	158
2:19 .....	536
3:18 .....	344
5:8 .....	490

**Phil.**

1:27 .....	700
3:9 .....	334
3:12 .....	206
3:13 .....	570
3:20 .....	182
4:7 .....	532

**Prov.**

8:31 .....	312
16:2 .....	336

**Ps.**

14:3 .....	372
32:5 .....	382
34:1 .....	288
46:3, 5 .....	282

50:15 .....	244
66:18 .....	394
68:20 .....	480
81:11-12.....	342
89:31, 33-34 .....	624
103:2-3.....	408
103:3 .....	410
103:4 .....	590
103:8 .....	188
103:10.....	552
103:17-18.....	196
104:31.....	114
108:1 .....	190
119:105.....	640
130:6.....	156
145:2 .....	736

**Rev.**

2:4 .....	234
2:23 .....	130
3:1 .....	456
3:16 .....	658
3:18 .....	538
5:1 .....	8
21:4 .....	286
21:5 .....	632

**Rom.**

1:7 .....	668
1:16 .....	606
1:21 .....	520
1:24 .....	674
2:4 .....	126
2:23-24.....	404
3:20 .....	388
3:21 .....	210
3:22 .....	128
3:22-23 .....	22
3:25 .....	30
4:3 .....	88
4:4 .....	578

4:6 .....	374
4:8 .....	120
4:17 .....	390
4:19 .....	580
4:20 .....	406
4:25 .....	646
5:1 .....	52
5:2 .....	392, 608
5:3 .....	250
5:8 .....	494
5:9 .....	252
5:11 .....	370
5:19 .....	582
5:20 .....	510
6:2 .....	64
6:3 .....	38
6:5 .....	124, 670
6:12 .....	214
6:13 .....	502
6:14 .....	576
6:18 .....	54
7:4 .....	84, 86
7:6 .....	648
7:7 .....	164
7:13 .....	16
7:15 .....	686
7:23 .....	614
8:3 .....	726
8:9 .....	694
8:10 .....	610
8:11 .....	712
8:13 .....	560, 562
8:14 .....	604
8:16 .....	14
8:17 .....	650
8:19, 21 .....	500
8:24 .....	660
8:26 .....	522
8:32 .....	696, 698
8:33 .....	564
8:35 .....	734

9:5 .....	496
9:15 .....	708
9:31-32.....	76
9:33 .....	718
10:3 .....	684
10:4 .....	628
10:8 .....	276
10:9 .....	378
10:11.....	630
10:21.....	682
11:6 .....	690
11:27.....	716
11:29.....	730
12:1 .....	68
12:2 .....	270
12:3 .....	272
12:10.....	692
12:12.....	70, 498
12:13.....	380
12:18.....	94
12:19.....	420

12:21 .....	542
13:1 .....	676
13:12.....	540
14:8 .....	414
14:9 .....	28
14:13.....	704
14:17.....	710
14:23.....	104
15:2-3.....	56
15:4 .....	440
15:13.....	732

**Sam.**

15:22 .....	528
-------------	-----

**Thess**

4:7 .....	584
5:16 .....	574
5:18 .....	460

**Thess.**

2:13 .....	82
------------	----

**Tim.**

1:5 .....	110
1:9 .....	132

**Tit.**

2:9-10.....	448
2:11-13.....	328
3:5 .....	550

**Zech.**

9:11 .....	72
9:12 .....	184





