

Epistle and Gospel Sermons for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

Dr. Martin Luther, Augustinian

Contents

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday in Lent - Hebrews 9:11-15

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday in Lent - John 8:46-59

Fifth Sunday In Lent - Judica - Dr. Martin Luther

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday in Lent Hebrews 9:11-15

Dr. Martin Luther

From Luther's *Church Sermons*

Christ Our Great High Priest

Heb 9:11-15

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

1. An understanding of practically all of the Epistle to the Hebrews is necessary before we can hope to make this text clear to ourselves. Briefly, the epistle treats of a twofold priesthood. The former priesthood was a material one, with material adornment, tabernacle, sacrifices and with pardon couched in ritual; material were all its appointments. The new order is a spiritual priesthood, with spiritual adornments, spiritual tabernacle and sacrifices – spiritual in all that pertains to it. Christ, in the exercise of his priestly office, in the sacrifice on the cross, was not adorned with silk and gold and precious stones, but with divine love, wisdom, patience, obedience and all virtues. His adornment was apparent to none but God and possessors of the Spirit, for it was spiritual.

2. Christ sacrificed not goats nor calves nor birds; not bread; not blood nor flesh, as did Aaron and his posterity: he offered his own body and blood, and the manner of the sacrifice was spiritual; for it took place through the Holy Spirit, as here stated. Though the body and blood of Christ were visible the same as any other material object, the fact that he offered them as a sacrifice was not apparent. It was not a visible sacrifice, as in the case of offerings at the hands of Aaron. Then the goat or calf, the flesh and blood, were material sacrifices visibly offered, and recognized as sacrifices. But Christ offered himself in the heart before God. His sacrifice was perceptible to no mortal. Therefore, his bodily flesh and blood becomes a spiritual sacrifice. Similarly, we Christians, the posterity of Christ our Aaron, offer up our own bodies. Rom 12, 1. And our offering is likewise a spiritual sacrifice, or, as Paul has it, a "reasonable service"; for we make it in spirit, and it is beheld of God alone.

3. Again, in the new order, the tabernacle or house is spiritual; for it is heaven, or the presence of God. Christ hung upon a cross; he was not offered in a temple. He was offered before the eyes of God, and there he still abides. The cross is an altar in a spiritual sense. The material cross was indeed

visible, but none knew it as Christ's altar. Again, his prayer, his sprinkled blood, his burnt incense, were all spiritual, for it was all wrought through his spirit.

4. Accordingly, the fruit and blessing of his office and sacrifice, the forgiveness of our sins and our justification, are likewise spiritual. In the Old Covenant, the priest with his sacrifices and sprinklings of blood effected merely as it were an external absolution, or pardon, corresponding to the childhood stage of the people. The recipient was permitted to move publicly among the people; he was externally holy and as one restored from excommunication. He who failed to obtain absolution from the priest was unholy, being denied membership in the congregation and enjoyment of its privileges; in all respects he was separated like those in the ban today.

5. But such absolution rendered no one inwardly holy and just before God. Something beyond that was necessary to secure true forgiveness. It was the same principle which governs church discipline today. He who has received no more than the remission, or absolution, of the ecclesiastical judge will surely remain forever out of heaven. On the other hand, he who is in the ban of the Church is hellward bound only when the sentence is confirmed at a higher tribunal. I can make no better comparison than to say that it was the same in the old Jewish priesthood as now in the Papal priesthood, which, with its loosing and binding, can prohibit or permit only external communion among Christians. It is true, God required such measures in the time of the Jewish dispensation, that he might restrain by fear; just as now he sanctions church discipline when rightly employed, in order to punish and restrain the evildoer, though it has no power in itself to raise people to holiness or to push them into wickedness.

6. But with the priesthood of Christ is true spiritual remission, sanctification and absolution. These avail before God – God grant that it be true

of us – whether we be outwardly excommunicated, or holy, or not. Christ's blood has obtained for us pardon forever acceptable with God. God will forgive our sins for the sake of that blood so long as its power shall last and its

intercession for grace in our behalf, which is forever. Therefore, we are forever holy and blessed before God. This is the substance of the text. Now that we shall find it easy to understand, we will briefly consider it.

”But Christ having come a high priest of the good things to come.”

7. The adornment of Aaron and his descendants, the high priests, was of a material nature, and they obtained for the people a merely formal remission of sins, performing their office in a perishable temple, or tabernacle. It was evident to men that their absolution and sanctification before the congregation was a temporal blessing confined to the present. But when Christ came upon the cross no one beheld him as he went before God in the Holy Spirit, adorned with every grace and virtue, a true High Priest. The blessings wrought by him

are not temporal – a merely formal pardon – but the ”blessings to come”; namely, blessings which are spiritual and eternal. Paul speaks of them as blessings to come, not that we are to await the life to come before we can have forgiveness and all the blessings of divine grace, but because now we possess them only in faith. They are as yet hidden, to be revealed in the future life. Again, the blessings we have in Christ were, from the standpoint of the Old Testament priesthood, blessings to come.

”Through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation.”

8. The apostle does not name the tabernacle he mentions; nor can he, so strange its nature! It exists only in the sight of God, and is ours in faith, to be revealed hereafter. It is not made with hands, like the Jewish tabernacle; in other words, not of ”this building.” The old tabernacle, like all buildings of its nature, necessarily was made of wood and other temporal materials created by

God. God says in Isaiah 66, 1-2: ”What manner of house will ye build unto me? . . . For all these things hath my hand made, and so all these things came to be.” But that greater tabernacle has not yet form; it is not yet finished. God is building it and he shall reveal it. Christ's words are (Jn 14, 3), ”And if I go and prepare a place for you.”

”Nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption.”

9. According to Leviticus 16, the high priest must once a year enter into the holy place with the blood of rams and other offerings, and with these make formal reconciliation for the people. This ceremony typified that Christ, the true Priest, should once die for us, to obtain for us the true

atonement. But the former sacrifice, having to be repeated every year, was but a temporary and imperfect atonement; it did not eternally suffice, as does the atonement of Christ. For though we fall and sin repeatedly, we have confidence that the blood of Christ does not fall, or sin; it remains

steadfast before God, and the expiation is perpetual and eternal. Under its sway grace is perpetually renewed, without work or merit on

our part, provided we do not stand aloof in unbelief.

”For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes a heifer,” etc.

10. Concerning the water of separation and the ashes of the red heifer, read Numbers 19; and concerning the blood of bulls and goats, Leviticus 16, 14-15. According to Paul, these were formal and temporal purifications, as I stated above. But

Christ, in God's sight, purifies the conscience of dead works; that is, of sins meriting death, and of works performed in sin and therefore dead. Christ purifies from these, that we may serve the living God by living works.

”And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant [testament],” etc.

11. Under the old law, which provided only for formal, or ritualistic, pardon, and restored to human fellowship, and transgressions remained, burdening the conscience. It – the old law – did not benefit the soul at all, inasmuch as God did not institute it to purify and safeguard the conscience, nor to bestow the Spirit. It existed merely for the purpose of outward discipline, restraint and correction. So Paul teaches that under the Old Testament dispensation man's transgressions remained, but now Christ is our Mediator through his blood; by it our conscience is freed from sin the sight of God, inasmuch as God promises the Spirit through the blood of

Christ. All, however, do not receive him. Only those called to be heirs eternal, the elect, receive the Spirit.

12. We find, then, in this excellent lesson, the comforting doctrine taught that Christ is he whom we should know as the Priest and Bishop of our souls; that no sin is forgiven, nor the Holy Spirit given, by reason of works or merit on our part, but alone through the blood of Christ, and that to those for whom God has ordained it. This matter has been sufficiently set forth in the various postils.



Sermon for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

John 8:46-59

Dr. Martin Luther
From Luther's *Church Sermons*

Christ's Defense Against His Enemies

John 8:46-59

Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

1. This Gospel teaches how hardened persons become the more furious, the more one teaches them and lovingly stirs them to do their duty. For Christ asks them here in a very loving way for a reason why they still disbelieve, since they can find fault neither with his life nor with his teaching. His life is blameless; for he defies them and says: "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" His teaching also is blameless; for he adds: "If I say truth, why do ye not believe me?" Thus Christ lives, as he teaches.

2. And every preacher should prove that he possesses both: first, a blameless life, by which he can defy his enemies and no one may have occasion to slander his teachings; secondly, that he possesses the pure doctrine, so that he may not mislead those who follow him. And thus he will be right and firm on both sides: with his good life against his enemies, who look much more at his life than at his doctrine, and despise the doctrine for the sake of the life; with his doctrine among his friends, who have much more respect for his

doctrine than for the kind of life he leads, and will bear with his life for the sake of his teaching.

3. For it is indeed true that no one lives so perfect a life as to be without sin before God. Therefore it is sufficient that he be blameless in the eyes of the people. But his doctrine must be so good and pure as to stand not only before man but also before God. Therefore every pious pastor may well ask: Who among you can find fault with my life? Among you, I say, who are men; but before God I am a sinner. Thus Moses also boasts in Numbers 16, 15. that he took nothing from the people and he did them no injustice. Samuel did likewise in I Sam 12, 3, also Jeremiah and Hezekiah, who rightly boasted of their blameless life before the people, in order to stop the mouths of blasphemers. But Christ does not speak thus of his doctrine, he says not: "Who among you can find fault with my doctrine"; but "If I tell you the truth." For one must be assured that his doctrine is right before God and that it is the truth, and accordingly care not how it is judged by the people.

4. Hence the Jews have no ground for their unbelief than that they are not the children of God; therefore he passes judgment upon them and says: "He that is of God heareth the words of God; for this cause ye hear them not, because ye are not of God," that cannot mean anything else than that you are of the devil.

5. The Jews could not stand this, for they wished to be God's children and people; therefore they are now raging and slander both Christ's life and his doctrine; his doctrine, in that they say: "Thou hast a devil," that is, thou speakest moved by the devil and thy doctrine is his lie; and they slander his life, in that they say, "Thou art a Samaritan," which sounds among the Jews worse than any other crime. In this way Christ teaches us here the fate that awaits us Christians and his Word; both our life and our doctrine must be condemned and reviled, and that by the foremost, wisest and greatest of earth. Thus one knows the corrupt tree by its fruits, as they, under the pretense of being good, are so bitter, angry, impatient, cruel and

mad as to condemn and pass sentence, when one touches them at their tender spot and rejects their ideas and ways.

6. What does Christ do here? His life he abandons to shame and dishonor, is silent and suffers them to call him a Samaritan; while he takes pains to defend his doctrine. For the doctrine is not ours, but God's, and God dare not suffer in the least, here patience is at an end; but I should stake all that I have and suffer, all that they do, in order that the honor of God and of his Word may not be injured. For if I perish, no great harm is done; but if I let God's Word perish, and I remain silent, then I do harm to God and to the whole world. Although I can not now close their mouth nor prevent their wickedness, I shall nevertheless not keep silent, nor act as if they are right, as I do about my good life, so that they retain their right. Although they do me injustice at the time, yet it remains right before God. Further, Christ excuses himself, and says: "I have not a demon," that is, my doctrine is not of the devil's lies; "but I honor my father," that is, I preach in my doctrine the grace of God, through which he is to be praised, loved and honored by believers. For the evangelical office of the ministry is nothing but glorifying God, Ps 19, 2: "The heavens declare the glory of God" etc. "But you dishonor me," that is, you call me the devil's liar, who reviles and dishonors God.

7. Why does he not say: I honor my father, and ye dishonor him; but says: "Ye dishonor me?" Impliedly he proves by this, that the father's and his honor are alike and the same, as he and the Father are one God; yet along with this he also wishes to teach that if the office of the ministry, which God honors, is to be duly praised, then it must suffer disgrace. In like manner we will also do to our princes and priests; when they attack our manner of life, we should suffer it and show love for hatred, good for evil; but when they attack our doctrine, God's honor is attacked, then love and patience should cease and we should not keep silent, but also say: I honor my Father, and you dishonor me; yet I do not inquire whether you dishonor me, for I do not seek my own honor. But nevertheless, be on your guard, there is one who

seeks it and judges, that is, the Father will require it of you, and judge you and never let you go unpunished. He seeks not only his honor, but also mine, because I seek his honor, as he says in 1 Sam 2, 30: "Them that honor me I will honor." And it is our consolation that we are happy;

although the whole world reviles and dishonors us, we are assured that God will advance our honor, and therefore will punish, judge and revenge. If one could only believe it and persevere, he will surely come.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my word, he shall never see death."

8. By these words he spoils it entirely, in that he does not only defend his doctrine as right and good, which they attribute to the devil; but also ascribes such virtue to his teaching that it becomes a powerful emperor over Satan, death and sin, to give and sustain eternal life. Behold here, how divine wisdom and human reason conflict with one another. How can a human being grasp the thought, that a corporeal, an oral word should redeem forever from death? But let blindness run its course; we shall consider this beautiful saying. Christ is speaking here not of the word of the law, but of the Gospel, which is a discourse about Christ, who died for our sins etc. For God did not wish to impart Christ to the world in any other way; he had to embody him in the Word and thus distribute him, and present him to everybody; otherwise Christ would have existed for himself alone and remained unknown to us; he would have thus died for himself. But since the Word places before us Christ, it thus places us before him who has triumphed over death, sin and Satan. Therefore he who grasps and retains Christ, has thus also eternal deliverance from death. Consequently it is a Word of life, and it is true, that whoever keeps the Word shall never see death.

9. And from this we may well understand what Christ meant by the word "keep;" it does not refer to such keeping as one keeps the law by good works; for this word of Christ must be kept in the heart by faith and not with the fist or by good works, as the Jews in this case understand it; they fearfully rage against Christ, that Abraham and the prophets are dead; they know nothing of what

it is "to keep," "to die" or "to live." And it is not called "to keep" in vain; for there is a conflict and battle when sin bites, death presses and hell faces us; then we are to be in earnest in holding firmly to the Word and let nothing separate us from it. Thus see now how Christ answers the Jews and praises his own teachings. You say, my Word is of the devil and wish to sink it to the bottom of perdition; on the contrary I say to you that it has divine power in it, and I exalt it higher than the heaven of heavens, and above all creatures.

10. How does it then come to pass that man does not see nor taste death, and yet Abraham and all the prophets are dead, who notwithstanding had the Word of God as the Jews say? Here we must give attention to the words of Christ, who makes the distinction that death is a different thing than to see or taste death. We all must face death and die; but a Christian neither tastes nor sees it, that is, he does not feel it, he is not terrified before it, and he enters death calmly and quietly, as though falling asleep, and yet he does not die. But a godless person feels and experiences death, and is terrified before it forever. Thus to taste death may well be called the power and reign or the bitterness of death, yea, it is the eternal death and hell. The Word of God makes this difference. A Christian has that Word and clings firmly to it in death; therefore he does not see death, but his eyes are filled with the life and the Christ in that Word; therefore he never feels death. But the godless possess not that Word, therefore they see no life, but only death; and they must also feel death; that is then the bitter and eternal death.

11. Now Christ means here that whoever clings to his Word will in the midst of death neither feel nor see death, as he also says in Jn 11, 25: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me though he die, yet shall he live," that is, he will not experience real death. Here we see now what a glorious estate it is to be a Christian, who is already released from death forever and can never die. For his death or dying seems outwardly indeed like the dying of the godless, but inwardly there is a difference as great as between heaven and earth. For the Christian sleeps in death and in that way enters into life, but the godless departs from life and experiences death forever; thus we may see how some tremble, doubt and despair, and become senseless and raging in the midst of the perils of death. Hence death is also called in the Scriptures a sleep. For just as he who falls asleep does not know how it happens, and he greets the morning when he awakes; so shall we suddenly arise on the last day, and never know how we entered and passed through death.

12. Let us take another example. When Israel marched out of Egypt and came to the Red Sea, they were free and experienced no death, but only life. However when King Pharaoh arrived behind them with all his forces, then they stood in the midst of death, then no life was in sight. For before them was the sea, through which they could not pass, behind them King Pharaoh, and on both sides of them high mountains; on all sides they were seized and enclosed by death, so that they said to Moses: "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?" Ex 14, 11, so completely and wholly did they despair of life. Just then Moses came and brought them God's Word that comforted them in the midst of death and preserved them alive, when he said in verse 13: "Fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah, which he will work for you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever." They clung to this Word and held out until victory came; through it life appeared in the presence of death, because they believed the Word, that it would come to pass, and relying upon it they marched into the midst of the Red Sea, which stood on

both sides of them like two walls. Then it came to pass that nothing but life and safety were in the sea, where before there were only death and danger. For they would have never become so bold as to go into the sea, had it divided a hundred times, if God's Word had not been present, which comforted them and promised life. Thus man triumphs over death through the Word of Life, if he cleaves to it and believes, and marches into death with it.

13. Likewise Christ also says here in replying to the Jews, that Abraham and the prophets still live and they never died, but have life in the midst of death; they however only lie and sleep in death. For "Abraham," he says, "rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad." Thus, the prophets also saw it. Where and when did Abraham see it? Not with his bodily eyes, as the Jews interpret it, but with the sight of faith in the heart; that is, he recognized Christ when he was told in Gen 22,18: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Then he saw and understood that Christ, born of his seed through a pure virgin, so as not to be cursed with Adam's children but to remain blessed, should suffer for the whole world, cause this to be preached, and thus overwhelm the whole world with blessing etc. This is the day of Christ, the dispensation of the Gospel, that is the light of this day, which radiates from Christ as from the sun of righteousness, and shines and enlightens the whole world. This is a spiritual day, yet it arose at the time Christ was on the earth in the flesh, a day like Abraham saw. But the Jews understood nothing about such a day because of their carnal minds, and hence they reviled Christ as a liar.

14. Therefore Christ proceeds farther and gives the ground and reason why it is just his Word and not the word of anyone else, that giveth life, and says it is because he was before Abraham, or in other words, because he was the one true God. For if the person who offered himself as a sacrifice for us were not God, it would not help or avail anything, even if he were born of the Virgin Mary and suffered a thousand deaths. But the fact that the Seed of Abraham, who gave himself for us, is also true God, secures blessing and victory

for all sinners. Therefore Christ speaks not of his human nature that they saw and experienced; for they could easily see he was not yet fifty years of age, and did not live before Abraham. But with that nature by which he existed long before the time of Abraham, by which he existed also before all creatures and before the whole world. Just as he was man according to his spiritual nature before Abraham, that is, in his Word and in the knowledge of faith was he in the saints; for they all knew and believed that Christ, as God and man, should suffer for us, as is written in Heb 13, 8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever;" and in the Revelation of John, 13,8: "The Lamb of God that hath been slain from the foundation of the world." Yet now he is speaking here especially of his divine nature.

15. But here reason is terribly offended and becomes mad and furious because God should

become man; this reason cannot harmonize and understand. And this is the article of faith to which the Jews still in our day can not reconcile themselves, hence they cannot cease their throwing stones and their blasphemy. But Christ also continues on the other hand to hide himself from them and to go out of their temple, so that they cannot see nor find him in the Scriptures, in which they search daily. Again, this narrative is not a little terror to all who are so foolhardy about the Scriptures and never approach them with a humble spirit. For even in our day it happens that many read and study in the Scriptures and yet they cannot find Christ, he is hid and has gone out of the temple. And how many there are who say with their mouth that God is become man, and yet they are without the Spirit in their hearts; who whenever tested, prove that they were never in real earnest. This is sufficient on this subject.



Fifth Sunday In Lent
Judica
John 8:46-59
Dr. Martin Luther
From Luther's *House Sermons*

Martin Luther, "Judica," Matthias Loy, ed., *Dr. Martin Luther's House-Postil, or, Sermons on the Gospels for the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church Year*. Volume 1. Two Volumes. Second Edition. (Columbus, Ohio; J. A. Schulze, 1884), pp. 402-414. Translated by Rev. E. Schmid, A.M. Professor in Capital University.

John 8, 46-59. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. Then answered the Jews, and said unto Him, Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honor my Father, and ye do dishonor me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. Then said the Jews unto Him, Now we know that Thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and Thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste death. Art Thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest Thou Thyself? Jesus answered, If I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is my Father that honoreth me; of whom ye say, that He is your God: and ye have not known Him; but I know Him: and if I should say I know Him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know Him, and keep His saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto Him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at Him: but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

This is a precious and comprehensive Gospel, concerning which much might be said. It is however too full of import and truth to be wholly considered at one time; we shall therefore confine our attention to the most prominent declaration contained therein, which is that of Christ: "He that is of God heareth God's words, ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."

These are very plain words, so that no one, at first glance, would judge them to contain so deep a meaning. But when we look at these words closely, and carefully meditate upon them, when

we ask what it means to be or not to be of God, we will discover how important a subject is here mentioned by Christ. For we cannot pronounce a severer judgment upon any one, or reproach him more decisively, than by saying that he is not of God. To be called a knave or a villain, or to be murdered in cold blood, is nothing compared with the horrible misery which the Lord describes in few words, when he says to the Jews: "Ye are not of God." It is therefore the chief thing necessary gladly to hear and diligently to retain the Word of God.

In the narrative of our Gospel we can clearly see that all those who do not wish to hear the Word of God, but speak evil of it, follow the devil whithersoever he leads them, until they are finally wholly his own; they sink lower and lower in their degradation from day to day. The Jews at first, when Christ begins to preach, are angry; afterwards they rail upon Him, calling Him a Samaritan and one "who has a devil." Here we see how rapidly they fell, sinking ten fathoms deeper into hell than before. Soon after they become still more foolish and ask : "Whom makest Thou Thyself?" In short, they become worse and worse in their denunciations, until they come to an open assault, and like murderers pick up stones to throw at Christ for the purpose of killing Him. They committed this awful crime because they had despised the Word of God, and would not hear the preaching of Christ, but blasphemed Him. All this was an evident indication, according to the statement of the Lord, that the Jews were of the devil; for if they had been of God, they would have conducted themselves differently towards His Word, which Christ preached.

The reason why children in our day are so frequently disobedient and disrespectful towards their parents, will be found in their disregard of the Word of God. They are unwilling to hear it; or if they do hear it they neither learn nor retain it. If they have once begun, in opposition to the will of God, to despise their parents, they will not stop here in their career of sin, but will soon begin to curse their father and their mother, and though they do not strike or slay them with the hand, they still wish them dead; or they will lead such an abominable life of infamy and crime, that their parents will grieve themselves to death.

Thus it is everywhere. He who will not hear the Word of God, nor follow its precepts, becomes a liar, a slanderer and a persecutor.

Such conduct is the most criminal. If a man is given to other sins it is possible to convince him of his wrong, so that he desist from his wickedness. But it is utterly in vain to attempt to convince [our opponents], and also many among us, that they do a great wrong if they are unwilling to hear the Word of God, and even

despise and defame it. They are so corrupt as to imagine that they do this rightfully and meritoriously. The cause of this is that they deny this word to be God's Word ; they regard it as the devil's doctrine and sheer falsehood; and the preachers of it are in their eyes the most despicable heretics and seducers-from the truth. The Jews did the same when they called Christ a Samaritan. With this assertion they made manifest their thoughts, in regard to teaching, thus claiming for the most abominable sin an appearance of great sanctity.

The very devil himself is loose among the people, when they fall into the sin of disregarding the Word of God, so that they will neither hear nor heed it. The result is that they will openly persecute Christ, as did the Jews, who hurled stones at Him, and finally nailed Him to the cross, claiming impunity for such a horrible crime. Be careful then that you do not follow their example.

It is therefore a sharp and severe word which Christ says to the Jews: "Ye hear not the Word of God, because ye are not of God." For he who is not of God is of the devil, and has corruption and pestilence, and every other hellish plague upon his back; we could not invoke greater evils upon him. Alas, that this great and horrible sin is so prevalent among all classes of men! How many will you find, among rich and poor, who will lay it to heart as an awful announcement when you tell them: My friends, it is not well that you do not hear the preaching of God's Word, or if you hear it that you do not heed it; it must be that you are not of God! The greater part of these people would answer: What do I care for the Church; I know well enough what I have to do! And if you should still further tell them: Stop and consider; if you desire to be saved you must amend in this respect,—then will you discover that these people will only become more enraged by your admonition, turning you off with harsh and vulgar words, demanding of you to let them alone, or they will teach you your business with their fists.

Such stubbornness and wrath is terrible, so that a Christian heart trembles at the thought of it, especially when it is borne in mind what Christ says: "He that heareth not the words of God is not

of God, but is the devil's child." The most deplorable circumstance in this connection is the infatuation, in which these defamers of God's Word live, so that they do not perceive the error of their ways, but defend their conduct with bitter resolution. Thus did the Jews; they answered Christ: "Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? A self-righteous devil, who thinks that he is always right, is the worst of all devils; and such an one was prompting the Jews.

This is the first lesson taught in our Gospel, that they who will not hear the Word of God are not of Him, but of the devil. This, of course, does not mean that the devil created such persons with their body, mind and all they possess. No, God bestowed upon them these gifts, wherefore we must distinguish between the abilities of man and their use. The man who lies and cheats has a good tongue given to him by God, but the use which he makes of it is of the devil in whose service he abuses it against God. Thus also God may give to man beautiful and charming eyes, but their employment for lustfulness is of the devil. If the heart yearns after lewdness, falsehood and deceit, it is wicked and of the devil, in respect to its use, though it be good and of God as to its essence.

On the other hand, "to be of God" means to employ willingly and gladly the ears in hearing the Word of God, and to accept rebuke for that which is wrong. Thus we should also use the tongue to pray, to preach, to instruct and to give consolation. Ears and tongues thus engaged are of God and good; they accomplish the purpose for which they were given. The heart also, if it meditates upon that which is comely, upon what is beneficial for our fellow men, and does not give offense, is a creature of God as well as the ears and the tongue. It is "of God," because it strives to follow the precepts of God, and loves to hear His Word, and shuns everything opposed to it. It may happen, alas! that we are overtaken unaware by our weakness; that we curse where we ought to pray, and give way to anger where we ought to manifest kindness; but if we see our wrong and confess it, asking for mercy, we may then indeed have wavered, or even fallen, but we are not yet

of the devil. If a man repents of his sins, and turns to God with the firm resolution to avoid that which is wrong, he will obtain mercy, and the devil is not his master.

The children of the devil are they who are obstinate in their wickedness, who care naught for instruction and admonition, but steadily pursue their sinful course. Such persons are "of the devil," and will become worse and worse, since he continually urges them onward in their crime. At first they disregard the Word, then they blaspheme and scorn and curse it. Finally they are filled with murderous desires, as the Jews were when they took up stones. The devil can easily be detected by his promptings to disrespect the Word of God, to defame and curse it, to do evil unto others, and to seek the death of the preachers of the Gospel. Such manifestations point out the devil and his offspring beyond all doubt; he is a liar and a murderer, an enemy of God and His Word.

Let us therefore be vigilant, that we may avoid the sin of disregarding the Word of God, but let us hear it right gladly. If we thus hear and retain it, conforming our lives to its precepts, we can be assured that we are of God and are His children. The others can also know beforehand their doom; they are children of the devil. Since they reject the Word, they lose all hope of righteousness and life, but wallow, if I may be permitted the expression, in the filthy excrements of the devil. Nor does their wealth, or high position in the world, suffice to cover their sin. [There are some who deny the rule of the Word of God.] This is the devil's true calling.

To hear God's Word with a willing heart indicates, on the other hand, that such people are of God. God is no murderer, but a Creator of life; the devil however has never created nor infused life into any one. As God is the God of life, so shall they, who are of Him and hear His Word, also have life, according to the declaration of Christ: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death."

What is meant by "keeping the Word of God?" To believe what Christ in His Gospel tells us

concerning the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and firmly to retain such faith and hope. He who does this has eternal life, nor will sin, hell and judgment terrify him, since grace and mercy prevail. Death will indeed overcome him, but not with those terrible feelings, which they experience who die without faith and in the presence of the devil. These die unwillingly, with violent convulsions and with bellowings similar to those of cattle; they obstinately resist death, but still must die. If they could, they would put walls of adamant between themselves and death.

Christ declares that it shall not be thus with His disciples who hear and keep His Word. They will be exempt from such terror and suffering upon their death-bed. They trust in their God and are content, falling asleep in death, in the sure hope of a better life. Peaceably, and without trembling, they bid farewell to this world. For death, though he executes his power also upon the bodies of the believers, will for them lose his sting, so that they will meet him as a harbinger inviting to rest.

Thus it often occurs that the poor convicts, who are publicly put to death, die with resignation, and without such mad ravings as people indulge in who are without the consolation of the Word of God.

Consider therefore, my dear children, what great advantage you have, if you willingly hear and learn the Word of God. Learn, first of all, that you are of God, having conquered the devil and hell, so that neither sin nor the judgment of God can terrify. You will also be enabled to endure calmly other annoyances which, though they be ever so trifling, make the world impatient and hopeless.

It is true, the Christians must suffer much from the devil and the world, their bitter enemies. Their body and life, their possession and honor are often in great danger. How shall they endure all this with patience? In no other way than by clinging to the promises of God, so that they can exclaim: Let the world wag and do as it pleases, I am not of her, but of God, else would the world be my friend; but I prefer that she should hate and harass me on every side, to having her good will and then to be not of God. If the heart is thus

mindful, all tribulation and adversity will pass by as do the clouds in the sky or the birds in the air; we see them for a time and then no more.

Our only comfort in this life must be the possession of the Word and its power, especially when the last hour comes, when death approaches. If we believe the Word with a childlike faith, death will be as a sleep to us. Yea, it will be as when one who journeys along in a dense mist is attacked and slain before he is aware of the presence of the murderer. The devil is indeed a murderer, who has determined upon our death; we know that well. But this his threat and sure attack shall not alarm us. We have the Word, to it we cling; that causes resignation, joy and courage in the presence of dire visitations, even of death. The confidence that through Christ we have in heaven a Father, kind and merciful, will give us strength and patience to endure with true fortitude all the trials of life to the end. This consolation we find in the Word, and nowhere else.

Tell me then, should this not be the chief endeavor of man, to obtain amid the various trials and sorrows of life this consolation, thus to be happy and contented? Yet all these adverse experiences in our daily life are insignificant, compared with the last and greatest evil, death. No physician, skillful though he be, nor advice or assistance of any mortal being can aid and rescue us from the terror of this our foe; Christ alone, our Lord and Savior, must be our help. He gives us a remedy, so sure and so effective, that everything else which we possess is valueless compared with it.

How is this truth observed among us? When God offers this remedy, even at our own hearthstones, we reject it. Hence it happens that we are not of God and fall from one sin into the other, and become more wicked day after day, as has been shown above. If then the dying hour comes, we have no hope, nor consolation, so that we wind and twist ourselves in agony upon our bed, lamenting and crying, yea, even bellowing as an ox before the slaughter.

The chief lesson of our Gospel to-day is the exhortation to learn the Word of God with a ready heart, and to keep it in faith. If we do this, we shall be conquerors over sin, death and hell. Let death devour us as he may, we shall not feel the piercing of his fangs. The Word of Christ is our armor, through which we shall obtain a peaceable death and life eternal.

The wicked and the lawless, who despise the Word, have already the severest punishment possible; since they heed not the Word of God they are not of Him. What more terrific judgment could be pronounced upon a wicked child, which despises the command of God and disobeys its parents, than to call it the child of the devil? Truly, this is no light matter. I for my part would rather be in the hands of the executioner or the cannibals, than to be a victim of the devil, who is a liar and murderer, and thrusts into everlasting damnation.

Be careful to avoid such calamity. Learn, I beg you, learn with all diligence, to appreciate the treasure which is yours in the word of your Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that outside of the Word there are no means of escape from the devil, sin and eternal death; hence it must be accepted in confidence and firm faith.

When Christ says: "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death," He has no reference to the Law given by Moses to the Jews, which is indeed proper, good and holy, but cannot be fully observed by us, because we are sinners by nature and children of wrath. Hence the Law is a savor unto death; it points out our transgressions and their well-merited punishment. We need then another Word which takes away our sins and justifies us before God. Such a Word we have in the Gospel of Christ, where He gives us the comfortable assurance: "If a man believeth in me, he shall never see death."

This saying requires faith; we must not doubt in the least that what Christ here declares is true. If we would leave the Word out of view, and would judge according to our own knowledge and perception, we would see nothing but death. We must therefore in our great affliction of sin never

judge by what we see or feel, but by the Word, so that we can say: I perceive that I must die, but I also have the assurance of Christ and His Word that I shall live again through Him. He has paid my ransom from death, which was caused by my sins; God is merciful unto me and will give eternal life on account of His death and resurrection. He who has such faith keeps the Word; but it is not easily done, since flesh and blood are averse to faith and would always rather judge according to what they see and feel. We should never entertain such faithlessness, but pray to God for His Holy Spirit to strengthen our hearts in the Word, and to keep us in the true faith evermore.

The Lord tells us also, in conclusion, the reason why His Word is so effective and powerful; at which assertion the Jews became so enraged that they took up stones to kill Him. They could not understand the declaration of Christ that His Word would save from eternal death, since they knew that Moses, Abraham and other holy men of whom the Scriptures make mention, had died; men whom they regarded as superiors of Christ. Hence they concluded that it was a vain boast to speak of His Word as He did. But Christ answered: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad." That is, if Abraham had not believed in my Word he would have died an eternal death, for "I am before Abraham was." I am the eternal and omnipotent God, whoever wishes to escape death and live forever must be saved by me. This neither Moses nor any other prophet could say of themselves, for they were all human; Christ however is God and man, therefore He and none other is able to give life and salvation.

This declaration is very consoling, and a sure testimony of our faith that Christ is the Son of God, true man and true God from eternity. Similar proofs of this truth we find in other parts of the Gospel. We should therefore place our whole confidence in Him alone, and trust firmly in His Word, for it is the Word of God and cannot lie. Whatever He says is true, and must be true in all eternity. Through this Word God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. I repeat,

therefore, learn with diligence this important truth, and praise God for such instruction, and pray that He may, through His Holy Spirit, retain us in the Word and save us for evermore through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

