

Pentecost or festival of outpouring of the Holy Spirit. JOHN 14:23-31.

Contents:

A discourse of consolation, in which Christ gives his disciples a fivefold promise.

JOHN 14:23-31

Jesus answered and said unto him, 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. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But 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. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.

THE FIRST PROMISE CHRIST GIVES IN THIS SERMON OF COMFORT.

1. Since pastors are expected on this day to preach on the Holy Spirit, it would be well to begin the Gospel lesson with the verses preceding, which it has been customary to read Pentecost evening, where Christ says: "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments.

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth” etc. These verses are closely connected with today’s text, and they contain the first promise of the Holy Spirit. to the apostles. It is Christ’s intent in the promise richly to comfort the disciples in view of his bodily departure unto the Father, whither he was going, that he might there prepare a dwelling-place for them and receive them unto himself. He also assures them that while here upon earth they shall do much greater works than he has done, and that whatsoever they shall ask in his name, that he will do. Moreover, he promises them that the Holy Spirit shall not be with them for a time only, as he has been in his own short stay in his bodily presence, but that the Holy Spirit shall continue with them for ever; that they shall have in him a Comforter whose ministrations shall exceed the comfort which they have hitherto derived from his own bodily presence.

2. This is a beautiful, glorious promise which Christ makes to his Church, that is, to the little company who believe on him, to whom he before said, “He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also.” This is a glorious promise, that the Holy Spirit should certainly be with them and in them. It means that he shall be given them, not only in their office, but also that he shall be given into their hearts, to rule, teach and guide them, to give them strength and courage, and to protect and sustain them in every danger and need against the devil and his power. He says: *“I will not leave you orphans’! come unto you.”*

3. In the various instances where he describes the Holy Spirit, he does not designate him simply according to his nature, as he is and is called the Holy Spirit. The word would signify to them something not to be seen or felt; he would thus be incomprehensible to them. But, that he may be comprehensible and real in a bodily sense, Christ gives him a name signifying his office and work, which is the office of the Word. He thus conveys the idea of preacher, and he calls him the Comforter and the Spirit of truth, who is with them by means of the Word of preaching, and who allows himself to be heard and seen. The two offices, that of comforting and that of leading into the truth, cannot be exercised otherwise than through the Word, or through teaching. Thus, we know how and where the Holy Spirit is to be found, and we need not be in doubt nor waver, gazing here and there for special revelations or illuminations. Each one should hold to the Word, and should know that through it alone, and through no other means, does the Spirit enlighten hearts and is he ready to dwell in them and to give true knowledge and comfort through faith in Christ. Where this is accomplished, where the Word concerning Christ is accepted by faith and the heart finds comfort in it, there we may know that the Holy Spirit is assuredly present and is performing his work, as has often been stated.

4. Furthermore, the two names, “Comforter” and “Spirit of Truth,” are very affectionate and consoling names. The word “Comforter,” which is here used instead of the Greek word *paraclete* or the Latin word *advocate*, or *patron*, designates a person who acts as counsel for one who is accused or charged with some crime, and who in that capacity undertakes to defend him and win his case, to advise and aid him, and to admonish and encourage him as occasion may require. That, says Christ, shall be the office of the Holy Spirit when I have left you, and when ye shall find no comfort nor support in the world, when all the world shall be against you, and when the devil shall beset you and with his poisonous tongues of slander shall say the worst things about you, and shall pronounce you before all the world deceivers and rebels, and shall, furthermore, with the terror of God’s wrath, with melancholy and gloomy thoughts of your own infirmities, alarm your consciences and fill your hearts with fear, so that ye might well despair if ye were left in that state without comfort and strength. The devil appropriately bears the name *Diabolus*, that is *calumniator*, a false, wicked slanderer, who accuses Christians before God day and night, as we find indicated Revelation 12 10.

5. Now, says Christ, to protect you against this slanderer and accuser, I will send you, from my Father and in my stead, the Holy Spirit, who shall be your counselor and defender, and who shall intercede for you before God. He shall comfort and strengthen your hearts, so that you need not despair because of the abuse and slander and the accusations and terrors of the devil and the world, but, on the contrary, you may possess fearless hearts and courage, and may boldly speak in defense of your cause, the faith and confession of Christ. He says, in Luke 21:15, *“I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to gainsay.”*

6. This, we say, is portraying the Holy Spirit in the most friendly and comforting way. We are not to look upon him otherwise than as a kind and friendly comforter and helper, and we are to know that he was sent from God the Father and from Christ for that purpose; that he will certainly prove himself such through the Word, by showing us the pure grace, love and goodness of God. He shall assure our hearts that God, both the Father and the Son, is not angry with us nor does he condemn us, nor desire us to be filled with fear. The Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and Son to be a comforter, and has been commanded not to declare anything but what he has heard, as we have learned in the preceding Gospel.

7. Such comfort begets a fearless heart and courage against the ravings of the world and the devil, and enables a Christian, whatever his outward sufferings may be, to endure it all, even with joy, and to conquer in the end, as did the apostles and martyrs, and many weak women and young virgins. The Christians – and such were these mentioned . know

that the Holy Spirit is present in our faith and confession; that he will stand by them, and will direct and carry on the conflict against the devil and the world, so that the Christians shall not suffer defeat, but shall conquer, and, in spite of opposition, complete his work.

8. In the second place, Christ calls him "*the Spirit of Truth.*" This he does for the comfort of those who believe the Gospel. They may know, through the witness of the Spirit, that the consolation of the Word is true and real; that it does not deceive, and that the courage and joy which it induces are genuine and enduring, steadfast through storms and terrors, even to the gates of hell. For this comfort is not based upon uncertainties, as is the consolation of the world, but upon the Word of Christ and the everlasting truth of God.

9. Christ gives this name to the Holy Spirit in contradistinction to the devil, who is also a spirit, but not a comforter and helper of Christians; he is their adversary and murderer. Neither is he truthful; he is the spirit of lies, who, by means of false fear and false comfort having the appearance of truth, both deceives and destroys. He possesses the art of filling his own victims with sweet comfort; that is, he gives them unbelieving, arrogant, secure, impious hearts – as was said in the Gospel for the third day of the Easter festival. He can even make them joyful; furthermore, he renders them haughty and proud in their opinions, in their wisdom and self-made personal holiness; then no threat nor terror of God's wrath and of eternal damnation moves them, but their hearts grow harder than steel or adamant.

10. Again, with truly pious hearts, which in many respects are timid and tender, his practice is just the opposite. He tortures them with everything terrible that can be imagined, martyring and piercing them as with fiery darts, until they may find no good thing nor comfort before God. His object in both cases is to ruin souls by means of his lies and to lead them to eternal death. The first class, who, should they be terrified, might repent, he fills with false comfort and security, but in the end, when their last hour has come he abandons them to sudden terror and despair; the latter class he worries with unceasing torments and fear, and robs them of the comfort they should have in God, in order that they may despair of God's grace and help.

11. We should therefore rightly learn to understand the Holy Spirit, and should know that he is a comforter and does nothing else than to truly comfort, through the preaching of the Gospel in Christ, sad and timid hearts that know their sins and are being terrified and distressed by the devil beyond measure. He exhorts them to be comforted and to be joyful in God's promised grace in Christ Jesus. He keeps them therein, so that they continue in this truth and their hearts come to know that all other teaching and comfort, though purporting to be of God, are not genuine. The Holy Spirit cannot be present in false

teaching. All such is but the devil's work – lies and deception with which he seeks to effect his murderous designs. The Christian should allow no terror, threat or suffering possible on earth to force him from the real comfort of the Gospel.

12. Comfort and truth, when the product of the Holy Spirit, are concealed and deeply hidden in faith. Christians themselves do not at all times experience them, but in their weakness sometimes miss the presence of these. For the devil, through both the timidity within themselves and the wickedness of the world without, hinders and opposes believers to such an extent that it is often almost impossible for them to appropriate an atom of God's comfort; they find themselves in the same condition in which the great apostle Paul laments about himself (2 Corinthians 7:5), where without are rightings, within are fears. They cannot possess unalloyed comfort and joy, but the greater part of their experience proves to be sorrow and fear and deadly conflict. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:11: *"For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus sake."* Likewise in 1 Corinthians 15:31: *"I protest by that glorying in you, brethren, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily."* We also see many pious hearts that are always sad and downcast, tormenting and alarming themselves with their own thoughts, and being at the verge of despair because of the temptations of the devil. Where, say the world and our own flesh, do you find, under these circumstances, the Holy Spirit whom you Christians laud so much?

13. A Christian should be wise here, and should not judge and determine things according to his own thoughts and feelings, but, in spite of such temptation and weakness, he should keep to the Word and the comfort of the preaching which the Holy Spirit gives to all poor and distressed hearts and consciences. Christ says in Isaiah 61:1-2, concerning the office which he should exercise through the Holy Spirit: *"The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me; because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted; to comfort all that mourn."*

14. From this ye should learn – and you will find it everywhere in the Gospel – that God does not desire you to be sad or alarmed, but joyful, and comforted with the certain promise of his grace, which the Holy Spirit himself offers you. He declares that it is not the truth, but your false opinion and the devil's deception that lead you to feel and think in your heart of the wrath and punishment of God, as if he would condemn you to hell. Therefore, let God's Word be of more authority to you than your own feelings and the judgment of the whole world; do not give God the lie and rob yourself of the Spirit of truth.

II. THE SECOND PROMISE

15. Of this promise, this comfort, to allay our feelings and fears, Christ assures us in the words translated “desolate” he will not leave you desolate. The word translated “desolate” literally means “orphans.” By the use of this word Christ would intimate the condition of the Church. In the eyes of the world, and even in her own estimation, she has not the appearance of a prosperous and well ordered organization; rather she is a scattered group of poor, miserable orphans, without leader, protection or help upon earth. All the world laughs at her and ridicules her as a great fool in thinking that she is the Church and comprises the people of God. Furthermore, each individual is so burdened and oppressed in his need and suffering as to feel that no one else lies so low or is so far from help as he.

16. Such misery and fears grow upon one under the influence of the devil’s power, when he pierces the heart with his bitter, poisonous, murderous thrusts. Then the heart feels that it is not only forsaken by all men, but also by God himself. So it altogether loses Christ and sees no end to its misery. Of this we have heard before in the Gospel where Christ says (John 16:20): “Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; ye shall be sorrowful” etc. To be left thus, that is, to feel that all things have conspired to leave us comfortless and helpless, is to be left orphans indeed.

17. As Christ has thus told his Christians beforehand of such suffering, so also does he wish to give this comfort and consolation beforehand, and desires to teach us not to despair because of suffering, but only to hold to his Word, even if it does seem that help is being too long delayed. He desires to remind us of the promise that he will not leave us fast in misery, and that we should accord him the highest honor due to God, by holding him to be true and faithful. He says: It shall not continue forever, but only a little, a short time. And he says here: *“I come unto you.” Again: “A little while, and the world beholdeth me no more.” That hour will seem to you an hour of sadness indeed, yea, an unending hour of death. “But I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice.”*

18. This is a sufficient promise of friendship and comfort. But we need only to learn to believe it, and to experience the truth that in our greatest weakness he guides his Church by wonderful divine power and protects and upholds her, so that she shall endure in spite of all. Yea, it shall be that in the greatest sadness there shall be comfort; in the greatest misery and desolation, joy and help; in death, everlasting life; until these better things come to be our possession, and the heart, having overcome all evil and being filled with the unspeakable joy of salvation, hears the bold, joyful word of victory which Christ utters: *“Because! live, ye shall live also,”* and as we beautifully sing in Psalm 118:15-17: *“The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous. The right hand of*

Jehovah doeth valiantly. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of Jehovah.” This is what St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:10 concerning comfort and help for these poor orphans: *“We are always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body.”* And Christ says in Luke 12:32: *“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”*

19. Observe, this is the sublime wisdom and knowledge of Christians, which the Holy Spirit has revealed to them and of which the world knows nothing whatever. The world must confess that it knows nothing of this comfort, and that, further, it is impelled by the devil to despise and resist the Holy Spirit’s preaching concerning such comfort. Therefore, Christ passes judgment upon it for the comfort of Christians: *“Whom the world cannot receive; for it beholdeth him not, neither knoweth him.”* Oh, that is a fearful utterance, to be told that it cannot receive the Holy Spirit. It must follow from this that the world has no part in the kingdom of God; that it is forever separated from God and must remain in the power of the devil and in the bonds of hell. But it is also a just and well-deserved punishment upon the world, for the world will not have it otherwise, since it so shamefully despises, blasphemes and persecutes Christ, the Son of God, together with his Word and the Holy Spirit. So much, then, on the office of the Holy Spirit, concerning which the chapter just before the text teaches. Upon this follows now the Gospel:

III. THE THIRD PROMISE.

I. THE OCCASION OF THIS PROMISE.

“If a man love me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him.”

20. Just a moment before he began with almost the same words when he said: *“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him.”* Thereupon the pious apostle Judas asked: *“Lord, what is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world?”* For he, together with the other disciples, was still entangled in the Jewish notion that Christ would become a secular lord and king; they hoped that they, themselves, should become great and mighty lords over lands and people, and oft had they disputed and quarreled among themselves as to who among them should be the greatest. Therefore, Judas is astonished at this saying of Christ and cannot restrain himself. He must come out with it and ask Christ what he means by saying that he will not manifest himself to any except to them alone. His thoughts must

have been these: What kind of a king will he be if he will not show himself to anyone? If he who has hitherto gone about only as a servant though he has preached publicly and wrought wonders – if he now intends to begin his kingdom in such a private and secret manner and with such doubtful plans as not to allow himself to be seen or known by any but the few who love him, what kind of a king will he be? It seems to me, his thoughts were: You should now begin to manifest yourself fully, and let yourself be seen by all, even by your enemies, in order that all may be obliged to fall down at your feet. And what does it mean, that everything depends upon our keeping your Word? What shall we accomplish thereby if we do not add something else? And who are going to be your subjects if to know and love you is left simply to the choice of individuals?

21. But Christ answers in the same strain just for the purpose of rooting out their Jewish notions and of portraying his kingdom to them in the right light. No, my dear Judas, he would say, it will not be as you think. The world has honor and glory here on earth, and power and might. It is by means of these that the world rules in the kingdom of men; those things do not concern you and me. But it is essential that you love me and keep my Word. In such hearts I will rule, and to them alone can I manifest and show myself. For my government is not one of force and might, such as is necessary among the wicked men of the world, but I desire to rule men's hearts, and to have my subjects come to me cheerfully and of their own will. Those who do not believe on me, will not do this.

22. God had before, often and in various ways, tried governing the Jewish people simply by the Law and under punishment; the result was that almost the whole nation was exterminate in the wilderness, and afterward the people were smitten again and again, and carried away as captives, until finally they were completely annihilated. In no way could he bring them to obey him in sincerity and to keep his commandments. And what should they keep? In the beginning, when God spoke with them and gave them the ten commandments, they were not able to endure nor to hear him, but prayed that he might permit Moses to speak with them; him they were willing to hear. And then when Moses came and brought the ten commandments, they were not able even to look upon his face, but made a veil for him; which veil, St. Paul says, is upon their hearts to this day, so that they cannot understand, much less experience in their hearts, what God asks of them – that they should love him with all their hearts and be obedient unto him.

23. If, now, God, in the case of his own people, whom he had selected and honored above all others, was not able to bring them to himself through Moses and the prophets, how should he be able to accomplish more in another case by means of man's instruments – law and force? If he would have loyal subjects upon earth he must employ different means in his dominion. He would not accomplish his purpose if he were simply to

compel disobedient nature by means of terror and threats; although threatening may still serve a purpose in revealing the certain result of disobedience and sin, and teaching men to tremble at the wrath of God. But love and friendship must attract before love and longing toward God are begotten.

24. And only in this way can they be begotten: In place of the terror of God's wrath, which we have deserved by our disobedience, we must receive the Word of grace and the assurance that God is ready to withdraw his wrath and to pardon sin. Such assurances of friendship and grace Christ now gives in his Gospel. He begins his kingdom by leading hearts to learn of his love, and by teaching that he, through his suffering and death, has procured for us God's grace and mercy as a free gift, and in addition has given the Holy Spirit. He so rules us that we continue in this kingdom Of grace, the Holy Spirit working in us, so that we, on our part, begin to love God and to obey him willingly and cheerfully.

II. TO WHOM THIS PROMISE IS GIVEN.

25. Concerning obedience he now says: *"If a man love me, he will keep my Word."* And just before he said: *"If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments."* Keep his Word or commandment – that is what the soul must do who loves Christ, who understands and appreciates what he gets from Christ; no one else will love him. He speaks here not of Moses' word or the declaration of the Law, but of the proclamation of the love and grace which Christ has shown us by taking our sins upon himself and offering for us his body and blood, and by doing this from pure grace, that we might ,be comforted and thereby learn to know in real experience his love. And if we believe it, he requires nothing more of us than that we should be thankful for it and should continue in faith and confession, and out of love and honor to him seek the welfare of his kingdom by word and deed.

26. This loyalty to Christ's kingdom is now considered a simple thing by the presumptuous and inexperienced spirits who deem themselves so holy and so strong in the faith as to be able easily to do what they hear, and who think that the Word of God is something that is obeyed as soon as it is heard. For everyone who has not yet had the experience of grace thinks, Who would be so wicked as not to love Christ, nor to keep his Word which speaks of the grace of God? Just so did the people of Israel in the wilderness when Moses told them all the words of the Lord (Exodus 24:3); they all cried out with one voice: "All the words which Jehovah hath spoken will we do." But when they were to do these words, their conduct was such that, on account of it, they were obliged to remain in the wilderness forty years – until they all had perished. Yes, if Christ bestowed gold and silver by means of his Word, or conferred honor and reputation upon our

holiness and wisdom, then everyone would cheerfully keep the Word and hold it fast. But it is none of those things for which a man on earth has any desire; on the contrary, he is such an unlovely figure that all the world is offended and flees from him.

27. Experience, therefore, teaches how difficult it is to keep this Word, for the holy cross has been laid upon it. Not only do our own flesh and the old nature resist, in accordance with its disposition, and prefer that which is easy and agreeable, but also, when one begins to confess the Gospel, then the devil, with all his followers and confederates, bears hard upon one and everywhere attacks him by means of the persecutions of the world and by all kinds of temptations. He opposes him inwardly, with unending conflicts and fears of the heart, and outwardly, with constant danger of body and life, until one must cry to heaven for help. Experience certainly teaches that it is not such an easy, simple thing to keep the Word of Christ as it is to observe the juggling of Jewish ceremonies, of a man-made divine service, monkery and the like.

28. Therefore, Christ says that the heart must cling to him and love him, for it cannot otherwise survive in the world, which is the devil's kingdom and is opposed to Christ. The Church upon earth must strive and contend with weakness, poverty, misery, fear, death, shame and disgrace. By necessity the Christian is driven to step out of himself and not to rely upon the advice, help or strength of men. He must love Christ in his heart, and must hold his name, his Word and his kingdom more precious than all things of the earth. Whoever does not do this, but seeks his own honor and glory, or the favor and friendship, the pleasures and enjoyments of the world, and who loves his own life more than Christ – to such a one it is useless to speak of these things. Jesus shortly afterwards says: *“He that loveth me not keepeth not my Words.”*

29. Christians, to whom Christ here speaks as to those who know him and know what they have in him – they, I say, should be moved to this love by the love and friendship which he has shown us in delivering us from sin, condemnation and eternal death, laying them upon his own shoulders. He thus surely deserves that we should love him. Therefore, shortly before, he reminded them of this when he said: “If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments;” as if he would say: If ye know and feel that I have deserved this at your hands, then in turn do me the favor of loving me and keeping my Word; for if ye believe this and consider it, then ye will surely also love me.

30. But “to keep his Word” does not mean simply “to love” with words; the living work and proof of love must be present. It is the love which battles and conquers. Such is the real nature of love that it does everything for the sake of the beloved, and nothing is too hard for it to suffer and bear, and do it even cheerfully; as we see also in the natural love which God has implanted in fathers and mothers toward their children, which is an image

of his divine love toward us. Such love is spent altogether freely upon those who are undeserving and is impelled to do them good. So Christ, when he dwelt in divine majesty, eternal God and Creator, showed the highest love toward us – toward us poor creatures, when we as yet had no kinship with him and deserved nothing but wrath and condemnation.

31. Since love does these things for those from whom no love had been received and who had deserved no love, and since we, aside from this, would still be in duty bound to love him as our maker and God, even although he had not otherwise so greatly deserved it: how much more should we love ‘him because he so greatly loved us and loved us first. If we would take this inexpressible kindness to heart as we should, then, of course, nothing that we might be called upon to endure and bear for his sake would prove irritating or too hard for us, so long as we might continue in his love. This, then, would not only be hearing his Word willingly, but also holding it fast and conquering.

III. THE PROMISE.

“And my Father will love him.”

32. There need be no sharp discussion here concerning the question why Christ speaks thus: “If a man love me” etc. – whether or no we had to love him first, It is certain that he first loved us, as is plainly stated in John 4:10: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Yes, if he did not begin to love us, we could never begin to love him. For no one can love God unless he believes that he was first loved by him and that he is a merciful God; otherwise the heart flees before God and inwardly hates him, as if he would cast us into hell, as was stated above.

33. What Christ says here: “He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father” etc., is said concerning the manifestation of love. He indicates this when he says: I will manifest myself unto him; and again: We will come unto him. That is, if we continue steadfast in this love against the wrath, hatred and persecution of the enemies of Christ and the Church, namely, the devil and the world, then we shall experience the certainty that he will faithfully and firmly stand by us with his love, and will help us in such conflict and need and give us the victory. This is probation, or experience which comes from patience in suffering, as St. Paul says in Romans 5:4. In such times, as has been said sufficiently, God’s love toward us so conceals itself that nothing but the opposite is felt; it seems as if God had altogether forgotten us and his grace and love had been changed into anger.

34. He that perseveres in these things and continues in this love, shall experience that God is true, and shall feel the comfort of divine love in certainty poured out into his heart, helping him to overcome all things. St. Paul again says in Romans 8:37-39: “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This is the victory and redemption through which we experience the truth of what we have believed – that he loves us.

35. Christ purposely uses the words: “My Father will love him,” in order that he may draw us upward and reveal to us the Father’s heart, portraying it to us in that tender way which poor, distressed consciences can greatly appreciate. It is exceedingly difficult for the human heart to expect with certainty everything good of God and to appreciate all grace and mercy. Indeed, it is altogether impossible except through Christ the mediator. Coarse and impious hearts may be very strong and haughty at this point, bearing themselves hard in much conceit, and thinking that what they do is all very precious in the sight of God. Yes, they may do this until they come upon the peril and terror of death, brought about through the clear revelation of the Law; then there are upon all the earth no people more dejected and despairing. When their hour has come, they go down suddenly and no one can raise them up again.

36. Much better and safer and more comforting, therefore, is the state of those who are constantly striving and struggling with terror and fear of God’s wrath, and who are so afraid that when they hear the name of God mentioned the world becomes too strait for them. Just for these has this comfort been uttered; yes, for their sakes God has at all times declared the promise of his grace and of the forgiveness of sins, and to that end has given his Son and all the good in the whole world, overwhelming it with blessings, in order that they, by all means, may learn to know his grace and goodness which, as Psalms 52 and 36 say, endureth continually, and reacheth unto the skies. The fact that a Christian lives and that he possesses a sound member is due solely to the visible grace and help of God. For the devil, in whose kingdom the Christians are, here upon earth, is such a wicked, malicious spirit that he aims at nothing else, day and night, than to murder and destroy them.

37. But however great, both in word and deed, God’s promise of grace is toward those that fear him, yet they cannot lift up their hearts and joyfully look upon God. They are still constantly harassed with anxiety and fear lest God may be angry with them on account of their unworthiness and the weakness which is theirs. If they hear an angry

word from God, or recall or learn of some fearful example of God's wrath and punishment, then they tremble and fear lest it strike them. The other class, on the contrary, who indeed should tremble before God, stiffly and proudly despise these things in their security, and comfort themselves with the carnal notion that God cannot be angry with them. Very difficult is it for the human heart to so balance itself that it will not become secure in success and prosperity, but remain humble, and again, in times of fear and misfortune, enjoy comfort and confidence toward God.

38. Christ, everywhere in his utterances, speaks of comfort, that he may show the Father's loving-kindness, and himself as a faithful, well-meaning and gracious mediator. Gladly would he impress this upon our hearts. No one may doubt it if only he feels love and longing for Christ and can hold fast to his Word and believe that he has borne our sins and freed us from all wrath, sin and death; and if he furthermore continue therein with a sincere confession that Christ, without doubt, possesses the true, fatherly divine heart, full of unspeakable and boundless love toward him, and that it is his earnest will and purpose that the Christian should fear and be terrified at nothing, but should expect from God everything that is best and most lovely.

39. It is, indeed, glorious comfort, in which you may well exult, as in the kingdom of heaven, and leap incessantly for joy – that Christ has assured and certified to you that, when for his sake and out of love for him you endure the persecutions of the devil or the world, it is pleasing to God the Father in heaven, and is the most acceptable thing that you can do for him. And such love from God toward yourself you will also experience in help and victory from above. This comfort Christians should know; they should call to mind the treasure that is theirs in the Gospel and in the knowledge of Christ, to the end that they may praise God for it and be thankful. This promise of love he continues to explain still further, and says:

IV. FURTHER ILLUSTRATION OF THIS PROMISE.

“And we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

40. This will be a really glorious and new Pentecost and an excellent manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit; a heavenly assembly or council for the hearts which are enlightened and aflame with love to Christ through the Holy Spirit, wherein the love of Christ and the Father shines and beams upon them. God and man will cleave unto each other as friends, for the Holy Spirit himself prepares the heart of man and consecrates it as a holy house and dwelling, a temple and dwelling-place of God. What a glorious,

noble, loving and precious guest and house-companion does man receive – God the Father and the Son and certainly with them also the Holy Spirit!

41. Great glory and grace is this for men, that they are accounted worthy of being such an honored dwelling, castle, hall, yes, Paradise and kingdom of heaven, in which God dwells upon earth – they who are such poor, dejected, timid hearts, who feel nothing but sin and death, and who fear and tremble at the wrath of God, thinking that God is farthest from them and the devil nearest. Yet, these are the people to whom such things are promised, and they may freely comfort themselves with the thought that they are the true house of God and the true Church, not anointed with the foul oil of the consecrating bishop, but consecrated by the Holy Spirit himself, where God desires to rest and remain. The prophet Isaiah says concerning these, in chapter 66:1-2, directing his words against those who were proud and puffed up in the thought of their own holiness and divine service: *“What manner of house will ye build unto me? and what place shall be my rest? For all these things hath my hand made, and so all these things came to be, saith Jehovah: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my Word.”*

42. And where else should God dwell? He finds no other habitation upon earth. Those self-constituted saints in their own estimation excellent, high and great, are much too proud, much too high, wise, prudent and holy. They have passed up through and far beyond heaven, so that they could not be his habitation upon earth, although they boast of themselves as being the only church and people of God. So also God is far too great and holy to dwell with such proud, ambitious saints as these, who, like the devil, their idol, wish to be equal with God and boast before him of their own holiness. Though they appear in all the pomp and glory and ornament of their fine self-made holiness, yet he does not do them the honor to look at them. He is found, however, in the humble cots of such as are poor and despised, who fear and believe the Word of Christ and would gladly be Christians, but who feel themselves to be very unholy and unworthy sinners.

43. This is, certainly, a sublime, beautiful promise, and, as St. Peter (Peter 1:4) says, one of the precious and exceeding great promises granted unto us poor, miserable sinners, that we through them should become partakers of the divine nature, and should be so highly honored as not only to be loved of God through Christ Jesus and to enjoy his favor and grace – as the highest, the most precious and sacred thing – but should even have the Lord himself dwelling completely in us. For it shall not, he would say, be love – simply that he turns his wrath from us and shows a gracious, fatherly heart toward us – but we are also to enjoy that love; otherwise, his love to us would be vain and useless, as says the

proverb: To love and not to enjoy etc. We are to find great benefit and treasure in his love, which shall be assured to us in its manifestation of deeds and gifts.

44. These are the two things which Christians receive from God, namely, grace and gift, as St. Paul distinguishes them in Romans 5:15. Grace takes away sin, secures comfort and peace for the conscience, and places man in the kingdom of divine mercy; the kingdom of loving-kindness, as it is called in Psalm 117:2: “For his loving-kindness is great toward us, and the truth of Jehovah endureth for ever.” But the gift or grant is this, that the Holy Spirit inspires new thoughts and creates a new mind and heart in man and grants him comfort, strength and life.

45. That is what he means here when he says: “We will make our abode with him.” The effect of God’s grace and love must be that it makes the heart of man a throne and seat of the divine majesty, better and nobler than heaven or earth; as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:17: “The temple of God is holy, and such are ye;” likewise in 2 Corinthians 6:17: “We are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them.” These things are accomplished in this way: In addition to the grace by which a man begins to believe and to hold fast to the Word, God also rules in man through his divine power and agency, so that he constantly grows more and more enlightened, becomes richer and stronger in spiritual understanding and wisdom, and better fitted to understand all matters of doctrine and practice. He furthermore makes daily progress in life and good works, becomes eventually a kind, gentle, patient man, ready to serve everyone with doctrine, advice, comfort and gifts; is useful to God and man; through him and because of him men and countries receive benefit; in short he is a man through whom God speaks, in whom he lives and works, and such a man’s words, life and doings are God’s. His tongue is God’s tongue, his hand is God’s hand, and his word is no more the word of man, but God’s Word.

46. His doctrine and confession as a Christian are not of men, but of Christ, whose Word he has and holds. So also the office of a Christian which he exercises is not of man’s ability, but of God’s. He holds it by the command, authority and power of God; it is granted of God through the Holy Spirit, as St. Peter says. In all things, then, he does only good, even as he has received every good from God; and outwardly, also, his body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:19. A Christian, good and true, brings forth only good fruit – does good and profitable works – resisting and avoiding evil.

47. Observe now, what a worthy being the man is who is a Christian, or who, as Christ says, keeps Christ’s Word. A wonderful man, indeed, is he upon earth, who is of more

value in the eyes of God than heaven and earth; yea, he is a light and Savior of the whole world, in whom God is all in all, and who in God is able to do all things. But to the world he is hidden; he is unknown. Moreover, the world does not deserve to know Christians. It holds them as its doormats, yea, like St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:13: “As the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things,” because of whom the earth and inhabitants are cursed and must perish, and who, the sooner the better, should be executed, as a service to God and as purification of the world.

48. Oh, what mockery must it have been to the ears of the Jewish saints and priests and Pharisees when they heard the words that declare how God will make his habitation only with those who hear the words of this man! They were only a little handful of timid, poor, despised people. As if God did not have a better and more glorious habitation, becoming his majesty, in the saints and superior persons who were the bright lights and the eminent ones among God’s people, in the holy city of Jerusalem! And the glorious temple and divine worship – did not the Scriptures and the prophets themselves call them the holy city and dwelling-place of God, the chosen place where God would rest, Psalm 132:14, and that forever? Of this they boasted very haughtily, and claimed that their kingdom, their priesthood and divine worship, should never fail.

49. But here Christ ignores all these things as if he were totally indifferent to them, and utters the remarkable saying that the place of his own and his Father’s abode – their habitation and their Church – is where a Christian is found, who keeps Christ’s Word. Thus he discards the old habitation of Judaism and the temple of Jerusalem, and builds a new, holy, glorious Church and house of God, which is not Jerusalem or Judaism, but is spread abroad throughout the whole world, without distinction of person, place or custom. Jews, Gentiles, priests or laymen – it matters not. This house of God is not of stone or wood, made by the hand of man, but newly created of God himself, namely a people that loves Christ and keeps his Word.

50. It is true that up to this time God was still the master of the house among the Jewish people; he had his hearth and fire there, as he says in Isaiah 31:9, but this was for the sake of his Word, proclaimed through the prophets, which was still there and which was always believed in by a few, and for the sake of the true Church of God, the land and the city were preserved. But now, since Christ himself has come, and the people do not want to hear his Word, but they persecute his apostles and the Christians and drive them out of the land, until no Christian can remain there – now the temple, the city and the land of Judaism must be desolated and ruined, the priesthood forever rejected, never again to be restored. For Moses and the prophets had before declared unto them that if they did not

keep his Word they should no longer be nor be called his people, and this city and temple should no more be his city and temple. Deuteronomy 32:21; Hosea 1:9.

51. Here, now, you have the definition and the answer to the muchdisputed question as to what the Church really is and whence is its power. We rightly and in truth say that it is ruled by the Holy Spirit. Christ says that the Father and the Son dwell with it, and what it says and does is said and done through them; everyone at the risk of his salvation is bound to hear the Church. So far are we agreed, as the basis of this and other promises, that there is a people upon earth which is called God's people, where he desires to be master in his house, prince in his castle, God in his Church; a people so precious and highly esteemed before God that he did not deem his very heaven above so great as to keep him from coming to his Church in this vale of sorrow and remaining with it until the end of the world. He would not have man to gaze up in vain and seek his Church in Paradise. He would have him find it here until the other life begins.

52. There is, therefore, no dispute as to whether or not there is a Church upon earth to which we owe allegiance. She is, as it were, the sovereign or queen through whom God speaks and works. But the disputed question is, who and what is the Church? To decide this question and to discover the one rightful Church, one must not, says St. Augustine, judge according to men's words and opinions. We become sure of the case when we hear how Christ the Lord, himself, portrays it in his Word. Now, he designates it as the little company that believes in Christ and keeps his Word, for thereby one knows and feels such love. The Word, which is called the Word of Christ, must be the rule and touchstone by which the Church is to be discerned and by which it must govern itself. There must be a certain rule by which the Church shall measure its conduct. It will not do for individuals to formulate their own ideas of conduct, act accordingly and then say that the Church is led by the Holy Spirit.

53. Therefore, Christ binds the Church to his Word and makes that the distinguishing mark by which must be measured the teaching, the preaching, the rule of conduct. Is all done out of the love of Christ? Where you find conformity to the Word in these things, there you have discovered the right Church, and you are in duty bound to obey it. You certainly have warrant for concluding that God dwells therein and speaks and acts through that Church.

54. St. Peter lays down this rule, as we have heard above in his epistle, where he says in 1 Peter 4:11: "If any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth." That is, whatever a member of this household shall do or say, let him see that he does and speaks that which is God's work and Word; otherwise, let him abstain from doing and speaking. Let him

rule in his own house if he cannot measure his conduct by the rule of God's house. Without this house, the world has its own word and work. Lords, emperors, princes, heads of families, each rules in his own dominion. In a rightly ordered household all things are guided by the will of the master of the house. Although the servants may in other things play the knave and be wicked, yet the master's bidding must be done, and things are ordered as he commands, So, in this house where God is Lord and ruler, it is his desire to be supreme, to be in all things implicitly obeyed. Only his commands are to be regarded and his work executed. It is his intent that everyone may know his will and in certainty rely upon it.

55. This is the beautiful promise concerning the superabundant glory of Christians, namely, that God troubles himself so deeply for their sakes and comes so near to them; he does not manifest himself anywhere except in them and through their word and conduct. Thus God greatly distinguishes them from all other people. One single Christian, however lowly he may be, receives distinction and is more highly honored of God than all kings, emperors, princes and the whole world combined; for they have nothing of such reputation and honor. Moses says in Deuteronomy 4:7: "For what nation is there that hath a God so nigh unto them, as Jehovah our God is whensoever we call upon him?" There is reason, then, to look with favor upon the Word of the Gospel. We have every encouragement to cling boldly to it and for its sake leave everything in the world.

56. But we must remember, as I have said, that among Christians upon earth there is still weakness in the things of the Word and faith. Christians well have need to cry to God and pray for the help and strength of the Holy Spirit. A beginning has been made in Christ's kingdom. Christians are indeed called and made the habitation of God, and in them God speaks and rules and works. But the work is not yet complete; it is an edifice on which God yet works daily and makes arrangement. It shall be completely prepared and perfected in his own good day. Wherefore, Christ here does not say, We shall find our abode prepared with him, but, "*We shall make our abode with him.*"

57. Christ brings with him all kinds of spiritual material that may be necessary for building, ornamenting and completing the dwelling. The Word and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are materials with which he builds. Though the dwelling is not altogether completed, yet through his grace and love it is accepted of God. Then the Christian becomes his house, and, through the operation of the Word and the Holy Spirit, is constantly being prepared and improved, growing stronger in knowledge, wisdom, faith, gifts and virtues. That which remains of the old birth, still rough and uncouth, is being hewn off, or mortified, through the cross, through temptation and suffering and there is constant progress in grace and in the work of the Holy Spirit.

58. Therefore, no one should despise a brother Christian nor despair concerning himself when he sees in another or feels within himself great weakness, enticement, inclination to unbelief, impatience etc., although at times he may even err and stumble, as did Peter when he denied Christ and was for that reason forsaken of God and rejected as a worthless instrument; but the Christian should again raise himself up through repentance and faith in the Word, and should comfort himself with the thought that he is of the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of grace, which is far mightier, than sin. Romans 5:20. The Holy Spirit is given, not only as a means of imparting courage and strength, but also to comfort the stumbling one in weakness, and to make of him the habitation of God, in which God's love, which covers up such infirmities and imputes it not, constantly abides.

59. Accordingly, as the prophet Zechariah, in beautiful words, in chapter 12:10, says, the spirit of grace and of supplication is poured out in the kingdom of Christ. This is the Holy Spirit, who together with the Father and the Son, lives in believers, speaks and works through them, and gives them comfort and the power to remain steadfast against sin, death and the devil's power. This he does not through a mere demonstration of his almighty power; but, in their consciousness of sin and unworthiness, he bears with them, and shelters and comforts them with grace and forgiveness in Christ. Being conscious of great weakness in this conflict, they are moved by him to pray and cry for help and strength; thus, the Spirit, through such praying and crying, conquers in them. These things St. Paul declares concerning the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:16 and 26: "*The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God;*" and: "*The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity and maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*"

60. Great saints often lament that they do not have enough comfort, joy and strength; they find that, in this state, they must comfort themselves with grace and sustain themselves through prayer and endeavor. St. Paul, himself, in many places complains of his weakness, as in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, where he says that there was given him, through the messenger of Satan, a thorn in the flesh, which so pierced and tortured him that he could not feel the Spirit's strength and power, and in anguish he besought the Lord three times that it might be taken from him. But he was told: "My grace is sufficient for thee." His crying and prayers were indeed heard, yet he was not relieved of his weakness. The spirit of grace within him, however, comforted and sustained him in the conflict so that he should not sink under it to him was given the assurance: My power is made perfect, or overcomes, in the weak.

V. CHRIST ADDS A DECISION TO THIS PROMISE.

“He that loveth me not, keepeth not my words.”

61. There you have a short, vigorous decision, Whoever would be a Christian must love. To love means, cheerfully and willingly to keep God’s Word. Either do this or nothing. We must sincerely desire and love Christ, or else abandon him altogether. For he that seeks his own in Christ, and does not sufficiently love him to be willing for his sake to sacrifice his own honor and reputation and righteousness, and to abandon everything earthly, is of no value to Christ’s kingdom. It is not given to all to be Christians, though they may indeed boast of themselves in this respect. St. Paul says, 2 Thessalonians 3:2: “For all men have not faith;” for they have not yet known nor tasted his grace and love. Hence, they cannot love him nor obey the injunction of his Word, that they should be willing to risk or to leave anything for its sake.

62. From this decision now follows the opposite phase of the question. Christ speaks of the alternative course and its consequences. In words short and concise, he declares that whoever does not keep his Word, certainly does not believe in him; furthermore, he dare not presume upon any love from God, but is already disunited from the kingdom of grace, and continues under everlasting wrath and judgment. John 3:36 says: *“He that obeyeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.”*

63. Such souls must suffer the loss of all things. They cannot be God’s habitation, nor have the Holy Spirit; they are not deserving of the grace that God should speak and work through them. Since they despise God’s Word, God also despises them, and they are thus left without protection from the devil, who drives them about according to his will. ‘In his wicked power, they can neither will nor do God’s pleasure, but, as St. Paul says in Titus 1:16, are “unto every good work reprobate.” They can only bring harm and misfortune into Christendom. It avails not how much they may claim for themselves in respect of holiness, divine service, good works etc., nor that they imagine themselves nearest and dearest to God. Although they may otherwise be superior and highly endowed with wisdom, understanding etc., yet they have not the grace to effect anything good and pleasing to God or worthy of his blessing. All their attempts to work righteousness will be productive of evil. Psalm 109:7, says: “Let his prayer be turned unto sin” etc. On the other hand, in the kingdom of Christ, although those who love him have some sins and weaknesses remaining, yet these very things shall be made to prove helpful, and all things must work together for the good of these, his children. Again Psalm 37:24 says: *“Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for Jehovah upholdeth him with his hand.”*

64. Among the Jews, in Christ's time, the most prominent class comprised such unhappy people. They were esteemed as most holy and wise, and made claims to be God's people above all others. Afterwards, in the Church there were heretics, schismatics and false brethren, who likewise professed great spirituality, love of truth and holiness, and yet through them the devil introduced misery and ruin. Such too, only worse in degree, is, at the present time, the whole rabble of popedom. They not only knowingly despise utterly God's Word, but also without any compunction whatever, persecute its heralds and oppose its preaching. They are people completely possessed of the devil, and in whom neither God, Christ nor the Holy Spirit can dwell. Their lives are openly of such a character that they are nothing but scandals and stains of shame in Christendom, as testifies the epistle of Jude (verse 13). Yet they desire forcibly to silence those who have the name and honor of the Church.

65. That they are not the Church of Christ needs no further proof. It follows clearly enough from this saying of Christ that whoever does not love him does not keep his Word; whoever does not keep his Word, is no member of his Church, and has no part in his kingdom, as stated. That they do not keep Christ's Word nor love Christ is itself testimony against them, crying unto heaven. They continue in this evil until the present day, so blinded as not to heave one sigh of Christian repentance for the error and abomination of which they are convicted, and of which they must be conscious, and by which they have led so many souls into ruin. Nor are they at all anxious that for the future God's Word might be rightly preached and that poor souls find help. On the contrary they resist with might and main and would rather see the country and its people, yea, the whole world, drenched in blood than that they should correct even one of their errors. From all this it may be seen how completely they are in the power of the devil, and that God's wrath must eventually reach them.

66. Christians are set apart from all other people upon earth, not by certain outward signs or certain works which all non-Christians and hypocrites may likewise do, but only by this, that they love Christ and keep his Word. Therein faith and love to Christ are made manifest. Those who do not love Christ and keep his Word, and do not desire to, thus separate and cast themselves out. Love to Christ, as has been said, cannot remain secret and hidden, but it must manifest itself in word and deed. So, likewise, must unbelievers manifest themselves. Notice that it is not enough to hear the Word; it must be kept; that is, one must bear witness before all the world in deed and in confession, and must stand by the faith, even though it should mean the loss of everything on account of it. One's sincerity or hypocrisy will surely reveal itself.

67. Now it should be plain why Christ, at the beginning, said that he would manifest himself, not unto the world, but unto those who love him. The world has no inclination to accept Christ in the character he has shown himself on the cross and in his unattractive earthly form. He does not bring the things it desires – worldly power, honor and riches, and praise and approval of its own wisdom, its holiness etc. It is completely sunk and submerged in lust and love of riches. Wherever it does not find these things, there it perceives nothing further, and will not be attracted. On the contrary, it retreats lest it be robbed of its earthly treasures. Especially does it repel the suggestion that worldly reputation and honor, temporal wisdom, virtues and holiness should be denounced and reduced to sin and shame before God.

68. Therefore, the kingdom of Christ must remain hidden to the world and the Gospel be concealed; the world's heart must be blinded by the devil. People of the world can know neither Christ nor the Father, and he can make no abode with them, that they might experience some comfort from his Word and some power from his work. So the Gospel and the knowledge of Christ certainly remain a revelation, and, as St. Paul says in Romans 16:25 and 1 Corinthians 2:7 – a mystery, a hidden, secret thing. Not that it has not been declared publicly enough to all the world and clearly brought to the light, but the world despises it, and deems it foolishness and an offense compared with its own wisdom. Hence, it is believed only by a few simple people, who are not offended at the unattractive figure of the cross of Christ, hidden under which are comfort, strength, victory, life and salvation, treasures which are theirs through faith. The others do not deserve to know about this Gospel, for they do not desire it. Christ says in Matthew 11:25: “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes.” “And the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me.”

69. Here, you see, he speaks of the oral Word, which they heard of him; and he so magnifies it that whoever despises and rejects it, has not despised the man who utters it but the divine majesty. Again, he comforts those who keep his Word with the assurance that thereby they are doing the will of God the Father. He does not want to let the matter rest with himself alone, but, as said, he wishes to draw us upward through himself to the Father. This he does everywhere in the Gospel of St. John, to shield us against great and dangerous temptation, wherein the devil is a master. It is in pious, suffering hearts that the devil labors most, that he may separate Christ from the Father. It is his intention that one who hears Christ's Word may yet, in thought, undertake to find the will and heart of God outside of Christ.

70. For the devil is content if one holds only to the man Christ and goes no further; yes, he is also willing that the word that Christ is truly God should be preached and heard. But what he opposes is, that the heart should unite Christ and the Father so intimately and inseparably as to be convinced that the Word of Christ and the Word of the Father are altogether the same Word and heart and will. Uninstructed hearts think- Yes, I, indeed hear how Christ in friendliness comforts troubled consciences, but who knows how I stand before God in heaven? This is not believing God and Christ as one, but it is making for one's self another Christ and another God. It is missing the true God, who would be found nowhere except in this Christ. Christ says concerning this, to Philip, in John 14:9: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." So, also, Christ says in John 7:16: "My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me." That is precisely what he says here: What you hear from me is assuredly my Father's Word and will, and you need not search any further, nor be anxious, as though God were angry with you or had evil thoughts toward you; but you are to be positive that God is gracious and favorable toward you, for he has sent me from heaven to declare this unto you.

71. Therefore, beware, by all means, of other thoughts or suggestions that may move you to doubt this, or that may direct you to look for another revelation of God's will concerning you, aside from this Christ. In such search you must surely fail, yes, even meet with harm and destruction, if you think of finding the divine majesty elsewhere. Or you may be deceived by the devil, who, instead of God, offers his own phantom. For he possesses the art of representing himself in the majesty of God, even as he did before Christ, inducing souls to worship and obey him. If this scheme fails, he confuses his victim with all manner of thoughts and imaginations, in an attempt to tear him away from this Christ. Against this, a Christian needs to be fortified, and skilled in wisdom; he must learn to bind his heart and his thoughts alone to the Word of Christ, that he may not wish to know or hear any other God than him. This I have elsewhere treated at length.

THE OTHER PART OF THIS GOSPEL.

IV. THE FOURTH PROMISE.

"These things have I spoken unto you, while yet abiding with you. But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you."

72. These, now, are closing words which Christ speaks to his disciples – a conclusion to his sermon, his utterances of comfort. He wishes to part from them; he thus takes his leave and directs them to further future comfort, when the Holy Spirit shall be given

them, who shall teach them to understand all these things and to experience this comfort in very deed. As if he would herewith say: So far I have been with you, and have done for you what I should and could do. I have given you my Word, and have comforted you by word of mouth, to which you are to hold when I depart from you. It is true that the comfort of the words which I have spoken is indeed great and sublime; but while I am still with you, you do not take them to heart that you experience their sweetness and power. They remain only as the Word that I speak to you, and are as yet nothing more.

73. But they are not to continue simply as my words and speech, but are also to become a part of your own experience; not a mere empty sound or echo, but a living comfort in your hearts. This however cannot be so long as I am with you, for ye now possess only the bodily and physical comfort of my presence; therefore, I must be taken from you, in order that this comfort may become effective in you and that the Holy Spirit may teach you these things. When ye have lost me and are left alone in danger, need and fear, then, for the first time, ye will realize the need of comfort and of praying for it. Then will the Holy Spirit find you to be really teachable pupils. He will prove to be your helper and reminder. Through his aid you may perceive to what end I said these things. Then shall your hearts experience the comfort and power of the fact that I manifest myself and the Father unto you, and so abide in you that others may also learn of this comfort through your word.

74. And note well this text, how Christ here binds the Holy Spirit to his Word, and fixes his limit and measure, so that the Spirit may not go further than his Word. Everything which I have said he shall remind you of, publishing it further through you. Thereby he shows that in the future nothing else shall be taught through the Holy Spirit in all Christendom than what the apostles had heard from Christ, but which they did not yet understand, until the Holy Spirit had taught them. So the teaching may always proceed from the mouth of Christ, then be transmitted from one mouth to another, and yet always remain the Word of Christ. The Holy Spirit is thus the school-master who teaches these things and brings them to remembrance.

75. Secondly, it is shown here that this Word precedes or must be spoken beforehand, and that afterwards the Holy Spirit works through the Word. One must not reverse the order and dream of a Holy Spirit who works without the Word and before the Word, but one who comes with and through the Word and goes no farther than the Word goes.

76. Thirdly, the example of the apostles show how Christ rules his Church in her weakness; the Holy Spirit does not dwell in Christians at all times, nor so soon as they have heard the Word does he come with such power and effectiveness as to enable them to believe it all and rightly to understand and grasp it. And in our case there is a great

difference between hearing the Word and feeling in it the power and effect of the Holy Spirit. For although the apostles are so far advanced – the Holy Spirit working so much in them – as to hear Christ’s Word willingly and to have begun to believe, yet even they can not take these words of comfort to heart until the Holy Spirit teaches them after the departure of Christ.

77. So it is at present. We hear God’s Word, which is in fact the preaching of the Holy Spirit, who is at all times present with it, but it does not always at once reach the heart and be accepted by faith; yea, in the case of those who are moved by the Holy Spirit and gladly receive the Word, it does not at once bear fruit. One may not, indeed, for a long time feel that he has been made any better or comforted and strengthened, especially where as yet he has experienced no fear and danger, but only peace and rest. This was the case with the apostles before Christ was taken from them; they thought of nothing more than of preserving bodily comfort. Therefore, it must, in our case, come to this: In need and danger we look about and sigh for comfort; then the Holy Spirit can perform his office of teaching the heart and bringing to its remembrance the Word preached.

78. It is then profitable always to hear the Word and to train one’s self there with, even if it does not at once reach the mark, in order that in time of need the heart may recall what it has heard, and may begin rightly to understand it, and to feel its power and comfort. As an illustration, the embers that have lain under the ashes for a time will burn again and kindle if one stir and blow upon them. One should, therefore, not look upon the Word as ineffective or as having been preached in vain, nor seek for another because its fruit is not at once apparent.

79. It is not worth while here to answer the papists, who, in this text “He shall teach you all things” etc., want to find support for their figment and so foolishly say that Christ has not taught the apostles all that they needed to know, but has left and reserved much for the Holy Spirit to teach them. Such drivel is sufficiently destroyed by the text itself, which declares in clear, plain words: “The Holy Spirit shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you.” So, also, before this, he directed them everywhere to his Word alone, as he says: “If a man love me, he will keep my Word. ” *Likewise, in John 16:14, he says concerning the Holy Spirit: “He shall not speak from himself but he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you.”*

80. But it is a sin and a shame to hear and suffer such pretension in Christendom as this, that the Holy Spirit should teach – I will not say something adverse only, such as the pope, as the live Antichrist, with the open abominations of his doctrine, teaches, things directly against Christ, namely, those things which the pope urges most as merit of

personal work, the offering of the mass, denial of the cup, celibacy, calling upon departed saints, lies of purgatory and fictitious power – but that he should teach something different and better than Christ the Son of God has taught, who himself is the teacher, sent from heaven for that purpose. Or that Christ should have omitted something more needful, which it was necessary to reveal and teach by means of the councils. Excepting the first councils, wherein the Scriptures established against the heretics the one doctrine concerning the deity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, the councils dealt only with the lesser matters of doctrine, which pertain merely to things of human arrangement and ordinances, for which the Holy Spirit's power is not needed, either to promise or to give anything. Ah! he has much higher things to teach and to reveal, things concerning which human councils can neither order nor establish anything: how one may escape God's wrath, conquer sin and death, trample the devil under foot. Christ alone teaches these things and he says that whoever would accomplish them must keep his Word.

81. If these perverted, shameful glosses of the papists were not otherwise faulty, one should condemn and curse them as the devil's poison and lies because they tear hearts from the Word of Christ. If one thinks Christ has not taught everything, then eyes and ears are at once wide open to gaze and listen elsewhere and one thinks: Oh, there must be still something great, not taught by Christ, which the Holy Spirit is still to teach! Oh, if I could but hear and know this, then I should surely be saved!

82. The result of this is harm and mischief: one does not attach importance to the Word of Christ, and when he afterwards hears anything new, he deems it a precious thing and necessary unto salvation. Christ, in order to warn us against everything that is not his Word, as if against the devil's poison, not only binds the Holy Spirit to his Word, that he should not teach anything else, but he, himself, in his preaching appeals to his Father's command and says: It is not mine, but my Father's Word. How, then, can one sanction councils in teaching or ordering some new thing when they can never present any authority for such action? The apostles have the command from Christ and the Holy Spirit that they should teach nothing but the Word of Christ, as they, themselves, testify; hence; councils and all men are in duty bound to abide by the same command and to show that what they teach is the same doctrine.

V. THE FIFTH PROMISE.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”

83. This is bidding them a friendly good night. Christ was willing and able to speak with his disciples in the most loving manner. Well, I must away, he says, and cannot speak much more with you, therefore ye have my good night, and let it be well with you. I wish and give you nothing else but peace, that is, that it may be well with you. (For, according to the Hebrew language, “peace” means nothing else than to give and to bestow all good.) That is to be my last farewell. Ye shall suffer no hurt nor want because of my departure. I will richly repay you, for ye shall have from me, in my stead, the best that ye can wish, the peace and good of the fact that in my Father ye have a merciful God, whose thoughts toward you are those of a father’s heart and love. And in me ye shall have a good, faithful Savior, who will do you all good, and not forsake you in any need, will defend and stand by you against the devil, the world and all wickedness, and in addition will give you the Holy Spirit, who shall so rule your hearts that you find in me true comfort, peace and joy.

84. That is what is meant when he says, My peace is given you and left with you. Not as the world gives peace; for it is not able to give such peace and blessing, all its peace and good being not only transient but also uncertain and changing with each hour. The world bases peace and comfort only upon transient things – gold, possessions, power, honor, the friendship of men etc. When these are gone, then peace and confidence and courage are gone. Though it were in the power of the world to give and preserve all these, yet it has not, nor can it have, true eternal peace, so that a heart enjoys God’s favor and is certain of his grace and of everlasting life.

85. But since this is not the world’s peace, the holy cross is laid upon it; then, measured by reason and by our feelings, it means no peace, but distensions, anguish, terror, fear and trembling. Christ says in John 16:33: “In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world;” that is to be your peace. Therefore, ye are not to think that ye will have a kingdom and power and ease in the world, or that men will receive your preaching, since ye do not proclaim and bring to it what it seeks and enjoys. But only hold fast to my Word, then ye shall have peace against the devil and the world. This they shall not take from you with their distensions.

86. Observe, thus Christ has secured and satisfied his Church with peace, a peace that abides in the midst of thorns and briars, that is, of tribulation and temptation. The devil and the world, for the sake of the Word and of confession of Christ, will sting, torture and

plague you; so that, as the Word is a Word of grace, love and of the peace of God and Christ toward us, so is it here in the world a Word of wrath and trouble. Therefore, when the heart feels oppressed, in anguish and even terrified and as if a fugitive before God on account of the devil's suggestion, this peace must be fixed in faith, the heart may inclose and secure itself in the Word of Christ and say: I know, nevertheless, that I have God's pledge and the witness of the Holy Spirit, that he wants to be my kind Father and is not angry with me, but assures me of peace and all good through Christ, his Son. If he is my friend, then let the devil and the world, so long as they do not want to smile, be angry and rave with their affliction.

“Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful.”

87. This is the real, friendly, personal voice of the faithful Savior; he would gladly write upon the hearts of his Christians that they should have and expect from him nothing else but peace and every good. He well knows how difficult it is to retain this peace and comfort of the heart, and how the devil opposes here; even if a man is courageous and able to despise and overcome the wrath and enmity of all the world, Satan tries to drive him into terror and fear before God. Yes, Christ knows this well – that natural flesh and blood shudders and that no one laughs when it goes ill with him, when all that he has is taken and he is delivered to the hangman; much less when the devil actually seizes the timid heart and mangles it between the spurs, so that it can scarcely get its breath for anguish.

88. But hear ye well, he wishes to say, what I say unto you for the sake of my Father, that he does not want you to be fearful, nor are ye to be concerned about any affliction or fear. Ye are to know that it is only the miserable spirit of lies, the devil, who wishes to make you fearful, and who, under the name and appearance of God, wants to blind and deceive pious hearts. As a devil he does nothing publicly, for he knows that where he is known his cause is already lost. Therefore let not your heart be taken, but be only the stronger and the more undismayed, and this from love and obedience to my Father and myself, but for the confusion and vexation of the devil and the world.

89. If one could believe these words, and could see how they are the words of Christ the Lord, he would surely be comforted, and be able to despise what all hell may do to terrify him. For whom should he fear who knows that Christ, and God through him, together with the Holy Spirit, give him the pledge of grace and peace, and command him to be joyful and without fear? It is only because of our weakness that we are not able here to believe Christ, and that our flesh and blood, feeling their unworthiness, believe the devil

and his false fears rather than the true and gracious Word, in which God if only we begin to believe on Christ, announces unto us forgiveness of sin and perfect salvation.

“Ye heard how I said unto you. I go away and I come unto you. If ye loved me, ye would have rejoiced, because I go unto the Father for the Father is greater than I.”

90. All is intended richly to comfort the disciples and to strengthen them in view of his departure; therefore he speaks very plainly with them, saying: “If ye loved me” etc., and yet he means it beyond measure most kindly, even as the dearest friend would feel toward another. I have told you, says he, and it is true, that I must leave you. Ye do not like to hear this, for ye know that, so long as I am with you, joy is your only portion in me. But, my dear disciples, if ye have heard the one message, then hear the other likewise, and listen to what is said, that I will again come to you with better and greater ‘comfort and joy than ye so far have had in me.

91. Yes, if ye rightly loved me, as ye think, ye should be glad that I now go away from you, for it is in truth to your best interest, and from the heart ye should be pleased, both for your sake and mine, and should not want to see it otherwise. For my departure does not mean that ye will lose me, or that I or ye shall suffer any hurt; but it is alone for your sake that I should enter into my glory, in my Father’s kingdom, and, sitting at the right hand of the Father, should become a mighty Lord over everything in heaven and upon earth, where I can protect and help you against everything that seeks to injure you. This I cannot do now, upon earth, in my humility and littleness, where I have been sent to suffer and die.

92. For what he says – the Father is greater than I – is not said of the personal, divine essence of his own nature nor of his Father’s as the Arians have falsely interpreted this passage, not wishing to see why or whereof Christ so speaks here; but concerning the difference between the kingdom which he shall have with his Father and his service or servile state in which he was before his resurrection. Now I am small, he wishes to say, in my work and station as a servant; as he says in Matthew 20:28: “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” That is making one’s self little, and, as St. Paul says in Philippians 2:8, humbling one’s self, or casting one’s self beneath all things and letting sin, death, devil and world tread upon one. But this littleness shall not continue, he says, for that would be a complete undoing; it shall only be a passageway, the way and means by which I come to the Father, where I shall no longer be little, but great and powerful, as he is, and where I shall rule and reign with him forever.

93. That this is the plain, simple meaning of this text appears from the fact that he is speaking here properly of that which he calls going unto the Father. It is not a change in his person or essence. In that sense we do not say of him that he goeth unto the Father, or that he went forth and was separated from the Father, for he is and remains one with the Father, in one divine essence, without beginning or end, to eternity; he dare not ascend higher nor grow greater. But he is speaking concerning the change of office, from his state of service to that of glory and eternal dominion.

94. Therefore, what is said here about going to the Father and about the Father's being greater, means nothing else than the glorification of Christ, and is said that it may appear what and who he is; not what he in his person should or could be, for that he was already and from eternity, though it was not yet revealed and could not be known, since he was still in the servile, suffering, dying state. The Father was greater than he; not according to the essence of the two persons, by which God is Father and Christ is the Son, but according to dominion and glory. As the schools state it: not by the first act but by the second etc.

95. Therefore, he says, ye should much prefer to see me lay aside this little, humble state and this form of a servant and enter into my own dominion in the character of ruler, which I have enjoyed with my Father from eternity. For this present state upon which I entered through my incarnation of the virgin, necessitates suffering and abasement; but there I shall enjoy supreme authority, with all things under my feet.

96. Now this was said not alone to the disciples, but also to all Christians; for the experience of the apostles is that of Christendom at all times. Christians find themselves in fear and anguish, without comfort and help; with the apostles, such a state would be called a going away of Christ. Such going away grieves in truth; and doubtless the apostles were sorely hurt; they fell into such despair that they all denied Christ and were scattered. This is the hour of deep mourning, when laughter and joy are precious, and there is nothing but need and misery. Here, says Christ, we should rejoice and be glad. Yes, if any one could do it. Flesh and blood, of course, cannot. St. Paul confesses in 2 Corinthians 7:5, that in the flesh he had no rest even though he rejoiced in spirit and in faith and boasted o/f tribulation and of his weakness. And Christ himself says concerning this, in Matthew 26:41: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." The flesh cannot judge nor think otherwise than it feels, and it prefers not to feel, but to get rid of all that oppresses and torments it.

97. If you would learn the art of dominating your feelings and living above them, you must listen, and hear and grasp the word which Christ utters: Dear Christians, do believe

me, it will not be to your injury, but for your good. My departure does not mean that ye will be forsaken by me, but that I, through this going away, shall conquer, and that ye may experience my power and might as I, seated at the right hand of the Father, rule over your sin and over your enemies, the devil, death and hell; then none of these shall touch you by a hair's breadth, except at my will, and shall not hurt you, but rather serve and benefit you. Therefore, do heed my Word above your feelings. If I have told you the truth, saying that I shall go away, which ye shall now be able to prove, so also will I not deceive you in the other matter of my coming again; ye shall be able to say: I did not believe that my Lord Christ would be so near to me and would have helped me in such a wonderful manner; now I could not wish that he had not gone from me.

98. Behold what comfort it is in the hour of greatest need, when Christ seems altogether lost, that one may have the victory if he still holds on to the Word of Christ as to a life saving plank, until he gets out of danger! Thus, he does not sink when the flood of trouble overwhelms horse and wagon. That is what it means, then, to rejoice over the departure of Christ; according to the flesh, altogether a weak and very secret joy. Yet, in so far as faith holds fast to the Word, it is nevertheless joy, until faith overcomes and the experience follows that Christ has not forsaken us, but, seated at the right hand of the Father, protects and helps us out. But none can know this except he experiences it. As the saying is, when the water runs into his mouth, he must learn to swim. *“And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe.”*

99. This, of course, is said concerning experience. I, indeed, say it to you now in words, but it does not at all enter into you, nor become effective, as yet. I say it in order that ye may, nevertheless, have a little comfort when ye think of it and recall that I had told you beforehand that thus it must be; when ye have once been helped, your faith will be strengthened and ye may also contend further and overcome. *“I will no more speak much with you, for the prince of the world cometh: and he hath nothing in me; but that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.”*

100. Come, then, says he; now we must part. The devil is coming on. He will seize me and think that if he only gets me, then it will be a sorry case with you. As prince and lord of the world, he has destroyed so many that he thinks to continue lord and prince over you. He will also get me between the spurs and undertake to vanquish me. But he shall fail and shall find me to be another than he supposed. With others, he has indeed a claim upon them; he finds them in sin and guilty of eternal death. But in me he has no right of claim and thereby he passes judgment upon himself that, with death and hell, he must lie at my feet, and, moreover, secure nothing from those who are mine.

101. Thus, in the hour of his greatest conflict, he gathers courage and boldness for himself from the strength of his innocence and his advantage over the devil and death, wherein they must meet their ruin by him and forfeit their claim upon those who believe in him and for whose sake he surrenders himself. Thus, by his blood and his death, he takes revenge on the devil for all other blood and death. This blood, which cries for vengeance, is, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says (Hebrews 12:24), far different blood from that of Abel, which cried to God against the murderer. That is a type of this blood which pronounces condemnation upon the devil and death for all the shed blood of his believers since the beginning of the world. Thus Christ seeks, not alone by his divine power, but also by the weakness of his suffering and death, to despoil the devil of his power and dominion over the Christians, so that he must be cast out, as he says in John 12:31, and leave him the prince and captain of salvation.

102. Why, now, does he do and suffer these things? The devil has no claim upon him and he could easily escape him or could vanquish him. But it must be done, says he, that the world may realize that I love the Father and fulfill his commandment. This is the comforting word by which he reveals to us the Father's will and heart, that we may see all this which he does and suffers for our sakes was so determined by the Father's good will; that thus he, as the true, faithful mediator, might appease all of the wrath and displeasure of God, and assure our hearts of his fatherly grace and love. For how should God yet be angry with or condemn us, since he has so earnestly commanded his Son to divest himself of all his divine glory and might and, for our sakes, cast them under the feet of the devil and of death? But oh, Christ says, if the world but knew and believed that I do not do this of myself, but out of great love, giving my body and life remains of the old birth, still rough and uncouth, is being out of obedience to my Father! Whoever can believe that, is saved already, rescued from the devil and death.

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