

# The Day of Christ's Ascension;

## Mark 16:14-20

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*Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.*

### **I. THE DISCIPLES' HARDNESS OF HEART.**

1. In few words, St. Mark sums up in this Gospel all that Christ did during the forty days after his resurrection until he ascended into heaven. Not all the words of Christ, as here recorded, were spoken at the same time. Some persons have doubted the authenticity of this chapter because it does not seem to harmonize with the other Gospels. It relates the incident of the Lord's upbraiding the disciples for their unbelief, and that of his commanding them to preach the Gospel, as though the two utterances were spoken at the same time, while the other Evangelists inform us of many things occurring between these two incidents. They tell us that he appeared to all of his disciples, not only once, but often, and that, during these forty days, he ate and drank with them that they might no longer doubt his resurrection. The upbraiding of the disciples took place shortly after his resurrection, between Easter and the eighth day following. After they had all seen the risen Saviour he took leave of them, ascending from the mountain where he had commanded them to meet him.

2. In upbraiding the disciples with their unbelief and hardness of heart Christ charges them with no small measure of weakness. He tells them that they are not only unbelieving but also stubborn to the extent that they obstinately doubt what they have heard from eye-witnesses, namely, that the Lord has risen. On the other hand, Christ shows great forbearance and kindness toward those who are not only disbelieving, but even obstinate. He does not reject or despise them for their hardness, but is patient with them. Eventually he makes them preachers of that which they, until then, did not believe themselves. He knows that, for this very reason, their testimony for him will be the stronger. They were themselves to have the experience of

preaching not only to the ignorant and unbelieving, but also to the hardened, and even to their persecutors. Thus from their own experience they were to learn to bear with others, who might be likewise stubborn, though not with those who should wilfully and maliciously rage against the acknowledged truth.

3. The beloved disciples had, however, cause for their hardness of heart, which others could never have. They were Jews, and the Jewish teaching was that at Jerusalem alone should be founded that kingdom which is called the kingdom of God and of Christ. For this belief they thought they had proof and evidence from the prophets, wherein was stated, in many passages, that Christ should forever reign at Jerusalem, in the house and on the throne of David. The heathen had no promise whatever of such a kingdom.

4. Therefore, it seemed ridiculous to the Jews and incredible, yea, even offensive, that Christ should disregard Jerusalem, the priesthood and everything pertaining to the Jewish nation, and, altogether unmindful of these, send a few poor disciples who had neither a name nor fame out into the world to preach, intending thus to fulfil the glorious prophecy of nearly all the prophets, that, as Ps 68, 11 says, from Jerusalem should go forth the great message and the great hosts of messengers of the Gospel into all the world. This must surely be fulfilled and become true. As Christ himself when he bade them farewell, charged his disciples not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, as St. Luke says in Acts 1, 4-8, "until ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you." And recently on Easter Christ said: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." Lk 24, 46-47. It was universally believed that when the time should come for Christ to proclaim his message to bring the world into his kingdom, he would surely consult the great men, the high priests, the rulers and the council at Jerusalem, and would do nothing without them; for was it not by the Law of Moses that the nation had its very existence? But Christ ignores the representative heads of the nation in calm assurance, and calls to himself a handful of strangers and beggars, brings them to Jerusalem and commissions them to do these things. That was offensive enough to the Jews in general, and even to the disciples; it seemed incredible that Christ should use such lowly means for so exalted a purpose and with such indifference to the opinions, the knowledge and the assistance of Jewish officials.

5. However, the disciples knew, or might have known from the Scriptures, that Christ should not come from the priesthood, but from the house of Judah; so that the religious leaders of Jerusalem need not have looked to the priestly ranks. Nor did the Scriptures mention a citizen either at Jerusalem or at Bethlehem of whom Christ should be the son. Therefore, the Jews should have given God the honor, and thought: we ought to look for him to come not from our own tribe or from any other tribe than the tribe of Judah, from the house of David. They knew the prophecy well enough and upon it had based their records and calculations. We read that the blind man by the wayside (Lk 18, 39), and the Canaanitish woman (Mt 15, 22) cried out, saying: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David." How did this poor beggar and this alien woman know that Christ was the son of David, if it had not been well known among all the people that the Messiah should Come from no other house than that of David?

6. Though Christ did not belong to the house then ruling at Jerusalem, yet the Jews knew that he

belonged to the house of David, and had been brought up in Nazareth, and for this reason they should have accepted him, especially since they heard his teachings and saw his miracles. For all had to confess, that no one else could preach with such power and do such mighty works as he did. They also knew that the time to which the prophets pointed was at hand. The prophet Zechariah had clearly stated that Christ should be lowly, that is, from the ranks of the common people, without great pomp and power, honor and wealth.

7. But as they disregard all this, and will neither hear nor know him, he proceeds to fulfill the Scripture. He gathers a little flock and establishes his kingdom through them, while neither priests nor council in Jerusalem are aware of it. They are left, as it were, gazing and thinking that when Christ should come and establish his kingdom, he would doubtless make them the chief instruments therein. This he does not do. He establishes his kingdom at Jerusalem and charges the disciples to tarry there until the sending of the Holy Spirit upon them, who should continue the same work among them, convincing and compelling them to believe that the predictions of the prophets have been fulfilled.

8. But the apostles are weak and slow to believe this; they do not realize that Christ has appeared in just the manner in which they and all the Jews had hoped and expected. The disciples wondered why, if he really were the Christ - as they considered him - he did not so convince all the people at Jerusalem and organize, prepare, establish and confirm his kingdom so that the entire nation would flock to him, and the whole world sing and proclaim the great power and glory of this king through whom all humanity would be honored, and obtain wealth and salvation. Since he proceeds in a manner so contrary to their expectations, permits himself to be crucified, and dies on the cross, and after his resurrection shows himself to only a few persons, they can never believe that through him the marvelous things of the new kingdom should be accomplished - those things which they had learned from the writings of the prophets.

9. Christ has to bear with such hardness of heart in them, though he upbraids them and instructs their ignorance. As they are gathered together and he is about to depart from them, he tells them how his kingdom is to be entered upon, and how he will accomplish its beginning through them.

It shall

not be by the help and advice of the officials at Jerusalem, nor with their knowledge. It shall not be with temporal force nor power, but shall be felt solely through the message and commission of the ministry with which he charges them, saying: *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned."*

## **II. CHRIST'S MISSIONARY COMMISSION TO HIS DISCIPLES TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE WHOLE CREATION.**

### **I. The Commission Itself.**

10. These are words of the sovereign Ruler, words that are becoming his majesty - commissioning these poor beggars to go forth and proclaim this new message, not in one city or country only, but in all the world, in principalities and kingdoms - and to proclaim it publicly

and cheerfully; to speak before all creatures, so that all humanity might hear the message. That certainly means, to stretch forth the arms and gather unto Christ a great multitude. Indeed, it is such a mighty commission, that the like of it was never issued in the world.

11. The command of a temporal ruler goes no farther than to the confines of his own kingdom; likewise that of a father to his own household: but this commission of Christ concerns all kings, princes, countries and people, great and small, young and old, simple and wise, sinners and saints. With this one message he claims all dominion and power, all wisdom, holiness, majesty and the right to rule on earth with unlimited authority. What else can the world think and say about it than this: What! this one man and his eleven poor beggars dare to assume authority over Moses and all the prophets, yes, even over all people? Even Moses was sent only to Pharaoh and his people in Egypt. Is this man, then, to have the whole world for his field? He is in relation to it no more than a common laborer!

12. It must be a master of no mean authority who dares to exercise the right to send forth messengers not only to one or several crowned heads, but to all rulers throughout the world. Christ does all this as though he possessed full power and authority over them as his subjects, charging his disciples that they should fear no one, no matter how great and powerful he might be, but should cheerfully go forth, continuing to the remotest parts of the world, and preach the Gospel, with the assurance that they could not fail to be heard and that no one was able to hinder them.

13. Thus was it fulfilled. "Beginning at Jerusalem," the kingdom touched the whole world. No other kingdom ever had such power. There never yet lived a ruler who achieved supremacy over even one-half of the world. How is it then, that from Jerusalem to the remotest corners of the earth all men know of this king who is called Christ? And all this was accomplished without a single sword-thrust and without military power; simply through these poor beggars, whom Christ sent forth into so many kingdoms and principalities that resisted them with the sword, with fire and water and with their whole might. If the apostles had been dependent upon their own power, they would have miserably failed before crossing their own thresholds. They had been afraid of their own people, the Jews, and had hidden themselves behind bolted doors. But later on, upon the strength of this commission, they boldly went forth, not only among their own people, but in all kingdoms, through all principalities, and in the face of all the powers and resistance of the world and the devil.

14. Whence did they obtain such courage and strength? Surely not from any king of Persia nor emperor of Rome, Turkey or Tartary. No, it was from the Lord alone, who ascended into heaven and commanded them to go and preach to the whole creation. And as Christ began to set up his kingdom, so it will continue till the end of the world. Certainly he is not Lord in any temporal sense. He is the one to whom all authority in heaven and on earth is given, as he himself declares in Mt 28, 18. To him must be subjected both angels and men, and all creatures, as God also saith to him in Ps 2, 8: "Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." This is the reason why we know and believe in him. Only Christ could have brought the world everywhere to believe in one who was apparently a simple Jew.

15. These words of his command are marvelously powerful. Therein he shows that he is greater than all emperors, kings and rulers on earth, by his own power subjecting unto himself all creatures. He does not commission his disciples to convey his greetings or to ask favors of certain rulers on earth, but in full authority he issues to all rulers a command that they shall accept his message and obey his orders. It is evident, too, that this commander is mightier than any angel. Angels are, indeed, mighty and powerful beings, sent by God to do his bidding with reference to certain of his servants; as, for instance, we see Moses leading his people out of Egypt by an angel. But Christ issues his own command, that shall reach all the world, yea, even all creatures, intimating that all belongs to him. Such authority is given to none else but this son born of the Virgin. He must, therefore, be the one Lord over all things, over angels and men, the only God and Maker of all creatures.

### **III. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL ENJOINED IN THIS COMMISSION.**

#### **A. The Preaching of the Gospel in Itself.**

16. Now this is the commission: "Go ye and preach the Gospel to the whole creation." Christ looks far into the future. He does not want his message hidden in a corner. He does not wish them to have any fear concerning it, neither to go about it secretly nor deceitfully. He wants it proclaimed so publicly that even the sun in the heavens, yea forests and stones might hear it if they had ears. And so it has been proclaimed, though the world has opposed it for so many centuries. It has steadily advanced. There never has been in the world a like force and power; nothing of equal sway and authority. This message, then, must be of divine power. It pertains not to insignificant, vain, or sinful things of the world, such as robbing, stealing, lying, deceiving, murdering, violence, oppression and tyranny, but to pure, heavenly and divine things. Thus it cannot be of human origin but is God's own message. Both word and work, then, harmonize and openly testify to Christ's authority before all creatures under heaven, on land and sea.

17. Christ thus sends forth, not a decree to stir up rebellion in the world, or to overthrow the legal power of kings, princes or other temporal authority, but he simply puts his word and command into the mouths of the disciples that they may carry into effect his own power by their speech and ministry. They shall speak not of worldly institutions, worldly authority or earthly riches, nor of the glory of the Jewish people, their laws, religious rites and priesthood - though it was the expectation of all Jews that these should be world-honored - but the import of the message shall be to teach nobler things, namely how we may be reconciled to God, how to be redeemed from sin, death and all evil, and be saved; how to obtain everlasting righteousness, life and glory.

18. This, indeed, was a new message, of which the world knew nothing. It differs greatly from all other preaching and teaching. Yes, heaven raises it above all that can be taught on earth. All other teaching must give way to it, for it alone ministers the power to be saved. When Christ says, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation," he desires none to be excluded; but he shows that the whole world knows naught of his doctrine: In spite of all its wisdom, it is blind concerning these things, no matter how learned and holy it pretends to be. His own people, the Jews, though they have not the light and knowledge of salvation to which

the prophet Zecharias refers in his Benediction, Lk 1, 77: "To give knowledge of salvation unto his people in the remission of sins." If the Jews had known this before, or could have discovered it for themselves, it would not have been necessary to preach it to them. Christ would not have had to descend from heaven and send forth his servants into the whole world with the message.

19. All the world is here sent to school, to hear and learn of Christ's kingdom and confess that it did not know anything about it. Men may know well how to build, how to care for their property, to rule, to be outwardly pious, and how to lead a decent, honest life, and they may be able to teach others what they know; but of things pertaining to God's kingdom, and how to escape sin and death, they know nothing. Christ sets aside all teachings, even that of Moses, and of the ten commandments. The order is given to the disciples to go forth and tell all men what they do not know - that all must hear and accept, by God's command, this message, if they would be saved.

20. The meaning of this message Christ plainly shows. In the first place, he gives it a worthy name, calling it Gospel-preaching. No doubt he gives it this peculiar new name for a special reason, to distinguish it from all other teaching and preaching. It is something different from the Law of Moses and the teachings of men. A new name would impress itself upon the minds of the disciples. For the word "Gospel" means a new message - a good message bearing joyful tidings, proclaiming something, that one gladly and eagerly hears. Not a law or a commandment, forcing or demanding from us and threatening punishment and condemnation if we do not obey it. Such a message none like to hear. Even if we, to our utmost ability, both teach and obey the law, yet no consolation and joy will result from it; because we can never so perfectly comply with its demands that it will cease to smite and accuse us. Therefore, if we were to be rescued, God had to send us, through his Son, a different message than the Law from which to derive consolation and peace.

21. As to what the Gospel is, and the difference between the Law and the Gospel, enough has already been said. However, we here observe how Christ himself gives the definition, and shows what the Gospel teaches, saying:

*"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned."*

22. This indeed is a kind, friendly and consoling message, and is rightly called a Gospel; here, in one word, you hear *salvus erit*, i. e., he shall be saved - the gates of heaven opened, hell closed, the Law and judgment set aside, sin and death destroyed, and life and salvation granted to all the world if they only believe the message. Oh, if one could thoroughly learn these words: Believe and be saved! They are spelled in few letters yet they are a sermon of such power that the world cannot grasp the glorious grace and unspeakable treasure given us through this message. And all this without any merit on our part since we have done absolutely nothing to earn it, we have not known anything about it. If the world had really believed it, they would, I am convinced, out of pure love have overwhelmed the preachers of the Gospel, particularly the apostles, and come in great multitudes and joyfully kissed their feet and borne them on their hands, praising and thanking God for their having lived to hear a Christian Gospel preacher.

23. The Gospel is faithfully taught and practiced in our day, yet it will continue to be necessary,

as here, for Christ to upbraid his disciples with their unbelief and hardness of heart. Unbelief is still too strong in us, and our hearts are too narrow and too weak to grasp these wonderful words. We are controlled too much by our own desires and feelings when sin troubles us and God's wrath startles and terrifies us, though we desire to be saved. We seek and strive to discover how we may save ourselves by our own works; we try to find within ourselves that, by which we may justify ourselves before God.

24. We must, therefore, constantly learn, preach and exhort about this message of salvation, though it cannot at once enter the hearts of men - that is impossible. But day after day, year after year, the Gospel may the more and more be grasped, to the limit of our comprehension here on earth. The promise is dependent upon the condition. We cannot separate these two things; they must remain together just as Christ joins them and says: "He that believeth shall be saved." As to one part, namely, shall be saved, there is indeed nothing wanting, nor is it uncertain; this is surely a promise in the Word, which is God's unchangeable truth. But as to the other part, our believing, there is indeed much lacking. We do not firmly believe; we do not accept and adhere to God's word of promise. As I have said, the grace and the spiritual treasures offered are so great that the human heart is astonished and overwhelmed when it realizes that the high and eternal majesty opens the gates of heaven so wide, and that he causes his grace and mercy to shine over all the sins and misery of the whole world, and that this great store of grace and spiritual riches is given us through the Word alone.

25. However, this passage stands here and declares both what the Gospel is, - a message concerning faith in Christ, and what power it has, namely to save him that believeth. The Jews have waited until this day for the coming of their Messiah to restore the city of Jerusalem and its temple, and so exalt the Law of Moses that it may be accepted by all the world. But what happens? At the very place and at the very time when their temple services are most glorious, and their best, noblest and wisest men most strenuously observe the Law, the Son of God himself pronounces judgment upon them, commanding his disciples to go and preach throughout all Jewry and all the world that not the temple service nor the Levitical priesthood, not circumcision nor the Law and its observance, which God indeed had given them, will save, but he that believeth shall be saved, be he Jew or gentile. There is no distinction (Rom 3, 23), nor one possessing any special privileges. This Gospel shall be preached to the whole creation.

26. This, surely, was tearing a dreadful hole in the Jewish expectations and ideas - proclaiming himself as alone having authority and that to him all must submit - for neither Moses nor any of the prophets would have dared to do so. They all had to be circumcised and to observe the Law under penalty of loss of body and soul. And now this man Jesus with full authority interferes, and even indifferently sets aside the Law, as though he would know nothing about it. He commands, in few simple words, his disciples thus: You shall not tell the world, in whatever part of it you may be, that the people must go to Jerusalem, or must keep the Law of Moses etc., but you shall tell them all that if they would be saved, which everybody desires (especially the Jews at that time), then they must believe this message of mine, and thereupon be baptized etc. Commence this kind of preaching among my people who desire to be saved by their Law and its temple service, and go forth through the entire Roman empire, and to all the corners of the world. Those that trust in their idols, reprove and condemn, one and all, and tell them that this is the command that I, the Lord of heaven and earth, give them, that they shall believe in me. This

is my message; it shall go through all the world unhindered and unmolested. No matter if the Jews disbelieve and are offended by it, and put you under the ban, consigning you to the devil, and fret not if the heathen endeavor to suppress it by force.

27. This is also a consoling message to us, because we, too, are included in these words of Christ when he says: Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. Herein are inclosed all who hear this message, wherever they may live, be they few or many. "All the world" does not mean one or two parts of it, but everywhere within it wherever people may dwell. Therefore, the Gospel had to be proclaimed according to the command, as it is yet being proclaimed today. Although it is not steadily triumphant in every place, yet it is destined to reach to the ends of the earth and to resound in all places and corners of the world. As it is a general command to preach the Gospel everywhere, to all men, so it is also a general injunction and the Lord's command that all shall believe this message.

28. It was essential for Christ, in his command, to emphasize "all the world." The Jews, who wanted thus to silence the rest of mankind, boasted that they alone were God's people, to whom the fathers and the prophets were given, and that Christ was promised to come from their seed. This boasting Christ had to kill, otherwise they would have overcome us gentiles and compelled us to become Jews and accept circumcision. Directly opposed to their claim is the fact that Christ commanded that the Gospel be preached to all creatures. Christ says, He that believes, belongs to God's people and is saved, be he Jew or gentile, Greek or barbarian, priest or layman, male or female etc. True, God did not give any other nation than his chosen people, the Jews, those special honors and blessings that were theirs in their God-given and mighty leaders and in the miracles he wrought for them, and in the fact that to them first were given the divine promises and the Scriptures.

29. But now we are made one people in the sight of God. None have any preference or privilege to boast of. Christ would have none despised nor rejected. The injunction reads, To all creatures, the disciples shall preach and proclaim it. The greatest, the most powerful, the noblest born, the most learned and the holiest person is not a whit better than the humblest, simplest, most despised on earth. All are brought into one company and fellowship. No one is preferred above another. No partiality is shown. No one is pictured or separated to special honor or advantage; but everything hinges entirely on "He that believeth." It matters not what people, nation or rank or what station in the world they may occupy. There must, of course, be a difference in the physical life of the various inhabitants of the earth, as the creatures are and are called each according to its nature and each is different from the other; sun from moon, man from woman, master from servant.

30. Therefore, as in the world every country and people have their own special laws, rights and customs, so, like in outward temporal appointments, there must also be a difference in the preaching. Every station and office must be responsible and taught in its appointed sphere. But though duty be beautifully and faithfully performed, all Jews perfect in temple service, all temporal government faultlessly administered, all discipline and obedience observed and rendered in the matter of laws and customs - yet all of this is not sufficient to insure salvation to the doer. In this kingdom of Christ all humanity is brought to the same place - all are made into one bread (kuchen) - all must meet the one condition. Not this or that person, who lives in a



certain manner, and is doing a certain thing, shall be saved, but: "He that believeth shall be saved." Here you have it all. No matter if you are Jew or gentile, master or servant, virgin or husband, monk or layman, if you believe, says Christ, then you are in my kingdom, saved and redeemed from sin and death.

31. By this message, Christ's kingdom is clearly distinguished from all other kingdoms of the world. In earthly kingdoms, he who obeys the laws and precepts, does not rob, steal and kill, shall not be punished, but shall be commended, honored and protected as an obedient citizen of the kingdom. It will not do to say: He that believes shall have honor and riches in this temporal kingdom. Such honor and riches would mean temporal, visible requisition. He who is pious and good in the eyes of the world and leads a perfect life, is not, because of that, in the kingdom of God. Something higher and better is necessary. He must believe in Christ, who ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God. A temporal kingdom knows nothing of the spiritual matters of faith. It does not deal in nor control these things. And yet the blind world dares to attempt that which it is not able to understand nor rightly to judge.

32. On the other hand, Christ's kingdom has nothing to do with the kingdoms of men. He permits them to continue in their own observances. Christ commands that the disciples should preach the Gospel to all creatures. The creatures existed before the Gospel came to them. Governments are instituted, and laws formed, by men, through God-given reason and wisdom. St. Peter calls them human ordinances in I Pet 2, 13. They are also called ordinances of God in Rom 13, 2. In such things, Christ would establish no change; he permits them to remain as they are, in fact and in name. But instructs the world concerning his own eternal kingdom; how it is possible for one to be freed from sin and eternal death, how all, without difference, shall be subject unto him, and acknowledge him, through faith, as their Lord.

33. We must examine and rightly understand the words, "He that believeth," in order not to pervert or mar them by additions and glosses. With such the papists becloud and nullify this sublime and powerful passage, attaching to it their sermons, and, saying that here must be understood "good works" with the word "faith," so that it must read: He that believeth, and also does good works, shall be saved. These are the highly learned masters that take Christ to school, correct his language and teach him how to speak, babbling in their blindness whatever they please, though they know not what and whereof they speak concerning these sublime things. But we shall do Christ the honor to keep his Word pure und undefiled. He well knew how to express these things and what he would have the disciples speak when he commanded them to preach his message to all the world.

34. Christ intentionally made the statement thus plain: "He that believeth, and is baptized" etc., in order to set right the delusions and pretensions of the Jews and of all the world regarding salvation by man's own works. On faith and baptism, not on our own but on his works, he bases all. In opposition, the Jews, and the world in general, wish to consider their own pride and glory. They boast of their own holiness, unwilling to be censured and condemned in respect of it. The Jews, because they observe circumcision, the Law and many temple services, these, in their own estimation, sufficient to secure them salvation, will, therefore, not consent that the heathen, who observe none of these, should be considered their equals, be called God's people and be saved, until they also conform to these practices and become Jews. Just so the false

apostles, and many of those who became Christians, with great pretense fought over these things and argued against the teachings of the apostles.

35. What have the heathen, who had not the Word of God nor the true knowledge of him, ever done of themselves, yet they would either hear nor accept the Gospel for the very reason that they did not wish to forsake their idolatry. They claimed that they also served the true God with their offerings and religious rites. They would not listen to condemnation of these things.

36. All who depend on good works, and teach the people salvation through the same, are alike in error. They cannot endure disregard of their works in the matter of salvation. They cannot endorse such a doctrine as Christ here states to be true: "He that believeth shall be saved" etc. Although they receive the Gospel and wish to be Christians, as do our papists, they will not accept this doctrine in its purity but must defile the same with their additions and glosses, claiming that it must be understood thus: He that believes, and does also good works, shall be saved. Their interpretation means that one obtains salvation, not by faith alone, but also by good works. just so the false apostles and disciples from among the Jews also made additions to this doctrine, pretending that not faith alone secures salvation, but the law of Moses must be kept also. They said: "Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved." Acts 15, 1. Thus they confused the true disciples and Christians, and the apostles at Jerusalem had to reject this statement publicly.

37. But you may say: Indeed, you yourself teach that a Christian must do good works; God himself commanded to do them, enjoining the keeping of the Law, and Christ also says: "If thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments," Mt 19, 17. Now, faith alone does not justify and save. This message must be understood as not excluding good works; but Christ here, in addition and beyond good works, also demands faith, which the Jews and heathen did not exercise. Our papists also hold that good works are not sufficient unto salvation for those who have no faith, but that faith and good works must go together. Nor do they mean by "works" the observance of the law of Moses, of circumcision and the Jewish temple service, which are now obsolete; but they mean the works demanded by the ten commandments, which teach the obedience all men owe to God. And in order to prove that these words must be thus understood, the papists refer to Mt 28, 19-20: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them," etc. and "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you." These last words, they say, also belong to the command Christ here gave to the disciples; therefore, this text must be interpreted to mean that it demands not faith alone, but also good works.

38. We answer: All this, as I have said before, is mere babbling, false and perverted comment of blind sophists who understand nothing of this text and of the glorious doctrine of the Gospel, They know not what they say, concerning either faith or good works, nor do they know how properly to distinguish between the two. We also confess, and have always, better and more forcibly than the papists, taught that good works must be done; that they must follow faith, and that faith is dead if good works be absent. Therefore, this doctrine of faith does not denounce good works; it does not teach that they should not be performed. Nor is it the question here, whether or no good works are requisite. But faith and good works differ, and it must be taught with discrimination what is the value of each for and by itself. Each must be considered in its

proper relations that we may understand both what faith accomplishes and receives, and why good works are necessary. This distinction is everywhere taught in the Gospel and was preached by the apostles. It is, therefore, but blindness, if not intentional malice, that these papal sophists, without here making any distinction, in a swine-like manner misconstrue and pervert these passages so that neither of them can be clearly understood.

39. We, therefore, insist that these two passages - this one and that written in Matthew - be properly interpreted in the light of their actual wording and arrangement. In our teachings it is right that we instruct men to observe all that Christ commanded. But we cannot disregard that which Christ here says concerning faith. We must always observe the place and order which Christ gives his words. Now, we find in this text, Mt 28, 19-20, that Christ first commands the eleven to go and make disciples of all nations, and to baptize them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is, they are to preach to them the teaching of the Gospel, how they must be saved - which, as yet, neither the Jews nor the heathen knew - and in this knowledge to baptize them, making the people disciples or Christians. These are the first essentials and thereto the words agree: "He that believeth and is baptized" etc. Then comes the other part, which must follow the teachings of the Gospel, namely, what those who believe and are baptized shall do. These, Christ says, ye shall teach to observe all things that I commanded you, so, that all things shall be according to my Word, and not according to the Jewish law and ceremonies, or any man-made laws pertaining to self-chosen works or religious services.

40. Therefore these two, faith and good works, must not be confused. They must be clearly distinguished from each other. Faith and baptism, as the chief part and foundation of our salvation, must stand first. The other part follows. Both must be taught, but each in its proper relation. As I have often stated, and as is also clearly self-evident, there is a vast difference between the efficacy of our own works and of that which Christ has accomplished for us. In our teaching, the latter must be exalted and made infinitely superior to the former. Now, in these words of Christ: "Teach all nations and baptize them" etc.; and "He that believeth and is baptized" - it is evident that he holds before us not our unworthy works and the demands of the Law, but his own merits and his gift; these we can accept in no other way than by faith. These are the treasures by which we are saved, which were neither earned nor procured by us, but were graciously presented to us by him. For we may never dare to boast that we merit the gift of Christ in whom we believe, or that the baptism which we receive in his name is of our own doing or has been instituted by any human being.

41. To prove my statements, consider this: Christ says plainly and clearly; "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;" as though he would say: If you would know how you can be saved, then this shall be considered the chief and essential condition - to believe and be baptized. The question is not whether or no we must do good works. There is no dispute about that. But there is something more important. The point is not what we are doing ourselves, but where shall we seek with the certainty we shall find that by which we can be saved from sin and death, and can obtain life and salvation? Here Christ clearly explains what shall be the chief doctrine of the Gospel. He bases it entirely on faith and baptism, concluding that we shall be saved for the sole reason that we have Christ by faith and baptism.

42. Believing means: To hold to be true, and with all the heart to depend on, that which the Gospel and all the articles of faith say about Christ; that he has been sent to us by God the Father, that he suffered, died and rose again and ascended into heaven for the sole reason that we may obtain from God the Father forgiveness of sin and life eternal in his name. That our faith may grasp and hold this the more firmly, he gives us holy baptism, by this visible sign to prove that God the Father will accept us and unfailingly give us that which is offered to us in the Gospel.

43. Now, if I am to believe this, then I must not adulterate my faith with belief in my own works. I must not depend upon my own merits, daring to offer them to God, as do the monks and self-righteous Jews. There are two doctrines that will not agree and can never hold combined, namely, the belief that we, for Christ's sake and without our merits, obtain God's grace; and the belief that we obtain God's grace by our own works. For if we could obtain this grace by our own merits, then we should not need Christ in addition. Such confusion and detestable patchwork of the sophists cannot be tolerated - the claiming that Christ, indeed, atoned for original sins and for sins done aforesaid and that he opens the door of heaven, but that we ourselves, by our own good works, must now also atone for sins and merit grace in order to fully obtain salvation. This is to rob Christ of his honor; yea, to set him, his death, resurrection and ascension aside, as if his merit were not sufficient for us, and as if his sufferings and blood are not able to atone for sins. But St. John says he is the only propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. 1 Jn 2, 2,

44. And that the passage we are considering and similar ones must be thus understood, St. Paul teaches in his epistles, especially in that to the Romans, where he proves that we are freely justified by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood Rom 3, 24-25. Here he plainly mentions the word gratis, i. e., freely, without our merits, and not for the sake of our works. Thus, we may have a sure consolation, and not doubt God's grace and salvation though we are truly unworthy and still have remnants of sin in us. If the people be taught thus: If you desire forgiveness of sins and a merciful God, you must do enough good works and possess sufficient merits to overcome and remove your sins - then faith is already nullified. Christ is then of no efficacy, conscience is robbed of all consolation, and man is driven to despair, because he seeks help by and in himself and dares to attempt to accomplish himself that for which Christ was sent and which only he could do for us. Christ came to fulfil the Law, and to earn for us, by his obedience, grace and life eternal.

45. So, our passage on faith, and others like it, must be understood in this light; not perverted and marred by misleading comments and additions, for the purpose of belittling faith and contradicting Christ's meaning. Such error will surely result if the teaching of good works is confused with that of faith; if distinction is not made between the chief doctrine of Christ's Gospel, appropriation by faith alone, and the teaching of the Law concerning good works. As I said above, these two doctrines cannot stand side by side; they are directly contradictory. To believe that for Christ's sake alone grace and eternal life are granted, and yet at the same time to seek and claim to obtain them by our own merits, is absurd.

46. I repeat, Christ would, with these words, condemn the pretensions of the Jews and of all the world, their boasting of their law and works, and would declare that no one will be saved by works, but alone by faith in the Lord. It is written that Christ alone has conquered sin and death, and is now sitting at the right hand of God, etc.

47. From all this explanation you are now enabled to clearly distinguish between these two passages from Matthew and Mark - which the papists, by reason of their ignorance, confound with each other - so that both are vindicated. By the text: "He that believeth and is baptized" etc., our own works and doings, in so far as they are considered as a merit, are not considered with faith but are excluded when we speak of man's justification and salvation before God. Not that good works have no place in a believer's creed, but he must be conscious that by his own worthiness he cannot be saved, that his own works and deeds do not merit for him grace and life eternal; that this has been merited for him through Christ alone, granted him for Christ's sake, and must be apprehended by faith. Then this text, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," is rightly understood.

48. When one understands and believes this text, then the teaching of the other text should follow, namely, that we should also do good works. Yet good works must accompany faith and depend upon faith, which always clings to Christ and pleads before God that he will graciously and for Christ's sake accept and be pleased with the supplicant's life and works, and not impute to him that which might be imperfect and sinful in him. Hereupon follows properly the text, Mt 28, 20: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you." Fail not to observe the first and essential condition; for if faith is absent, all our good works and upright life count for naught before God. Indeed, it is not possible to do truly good works without faith. Christ says in John 15, 5: "For apart from me ye can do nothing" etc.

49. Observe, by making this distinction you can rightly understand this passage. Learn how to apply it and to derive from it consolation in the struggle with a conscience, terrified by sin and death. Only in the experience of such agony can one know the power of faith. This truth is apparent even among the papists and all sectarians, for they also preach these words, although in a superficial and indifferent manner as if they were of no importance. They thus show, by their besmirching additions, that they understand nothing about the subject. Alas, exclaim the papists, that you preach nothing but faith, notwithstanding we are neither unbelievers nor Turks. Well, my good man, if it is so easy, then try it once and see how you will fare in the hour when death overtakes you, or when Satan terrifies and disheartens you, and when your reason and all your senses feel nothing but God's wrath and the anguish of hell.

50. If you are a Christian, as you claim, then you must, indeed, believe and never doubt the statement that Christ died for you, and through his resurrection and ascension conquered for you sin, death and hell; yes, destroyed and swallowed them up. Why is it, then, that you still fear death, flee from God and dread his judgment? This surely is an unmistakable sign that you lack faith, inasmuch as he that has faith cannot be troubled nor terrified by death or hell. Where faith is, there it strengthens and delivers the heart from fear, so that we can cheerfully say: What do I care for sin, death and the terrors of Satan, for I have a Lord and Saviour who sits in heaven at the right hand of God the Father, and rules over all in heaven and upon earth, and who gives me his righteousness and life? Can you thoroughly learn the art to do this? Then I will say, you

are a doctor of all the doctors. However, you will certainly experience, like all others, even the greatest saints, that you are woefully deficient when it comes to a real test and trial.

51. The reason the world cares naught about the preaching of faith is that it lives in false security and in carelessness, having neither knowledge nor experience of the terrors of sin and a troubled conscience. But when death and its horrors overtake it, then it knows of no help and plunges suddenly into, despair. Then it will, indeed, having waited too long, realize what it is to have faith, of which it hitherto knew nothing. It will learn that faith is not a dead letter, not mere words of the tongue, a vague idea or a mere imagination, which the papists call faith, but a fearless and strong courage that, with all boldness of heart, relies on Christ, in defiance of sin, death and hell.

52. In such times, even the best of holy men deplore their weakness, and must confess that their faith is still insufficient, because they are sad and troubled by fear and anguish. As to these words, "He that believeth shall be saved" etc., there is, indeed, no doubt whatever that by them hell is closed, heaven opened, and eternal life and joy granted. But here the chief thing is lacking, namely, that you are not yet the person qui credit, i. e., who believes, or that you are still weak in faith. However, though you are not strong, if you only cling to Christ you will obtain the consolation, power and strength that overcomes all terror of death and hell, which all human power, works and merit cannot accomplish.

53. Here your conscience, burdened by the demands of the Law, will say: You still have sin, and have not kept God's commandments, which under threat of eternal condemnation, you are bound to keep. Answer: All this I know, alas, only too well, and you must not speak to me of it. Wait with your demands of the Law as to what I must do, till I first possess this chief part of my salvation, namely, Christ and his righteousness, Christ who conquers sin and death for me. This, alone, I want to hear now, and it shall transcend the other in importance as much as the heavens are higher than the earth. For at present the question is not, how I must live and what I must do, but how I may overcome sin and death, or, as Christ here says, be saved. But, after having attained all this, and being, in spite of all that is called sin, death, hell, God's wrath, Law and works, in Christ justified and saved, and made heir of life eternal, then I want to know also how I must live here on the earth. Then you may come and teach and admonish me, like a faithful schoolmaster, as much as you tan, but never going further with your Moses than is right and necessary; not teaching me that thereby I can be saved, or can conquer sin and death.

54. Now, this is the message that Christ commands to be preached to all creatures. But that we may know that in his kingdom he would have this message supreme, so that we should never doubt it, nor expect something else, but should altogether depend upon it and know that it shall stand as an irrevocable declaration of this Lord of all creation, Christ repeats the message once more, making it still stronger in the negative form, saying: "*But he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.*"

55. Here you have the final judgment against the boasting pride and self-praise of the Jews and of all the world. As the first part of the text with one word opens heaven, closes hell and sets aside Moses and the threats of the Law for those who believe, so Christ here with one word, closes heaven, leaves open the jaws of hell, permits death to reign and Moses to be an

intolerable tyrant for all that disbelieve. For this there is and shall be no help, though you, like the Jews, torment yourself to death in keeping the Law, even torturing and burdening yourselves, saying: Did I not do many good works and even suffer much? Alas, here you have the decision: *"He that disbelieveth shall be condemned."*

56. Even though man accomplishes all that he possibly can, yet without Christ, everything has already been concluded under sin and God's wrath; as we heard in the Gospel of St. John, that the Holy Spirit will convict the world in respect of sin, because they believe not etc. Jn 16, 8. Here, in the text we are considering, the judgment of condemnation is already pronounced on the world, together with all its righteousness of the Law and religious service. No one on earth can escape this judgment, nor be rescued from condemnation, except by hearing and believing this message, which says that those who believe in this Lord and Saviour shall not be condemned because of their sins, but shall, because of him, have forgiveness of sins and life eternal. Christ says, in John 3, 16, that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish" etc. "For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him." Jn 3, 17. Therefore, "He that believeth on him is not judged," but "he that believeth not," says he, "hath been judged already." Jn 3, 18 This judgment of condemnation remains upon him because of his disbelieving, imputing all sins to him, which cannot be forgiven. Thus he increases his sin and makes his condemnation the stronger; in addition to all other sins, he also despises Christ by not believing in him.

### **B. The Signs Christ Appointed To Accompany This Preaching.**

57. When Christ adds baptism to the first part, "He that believeth," he has in view the established rite among the Christian people. We read in Mt 28, 19, where he puts both parts together, "Make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them" etc. He thus shows, first, that faith, which the Gospel preaches, must not remain concealed; it is not sufficient for each one to go his own way and believe for himself, after he has heard this Gospel message, deeming it not necessary to confess his faith before others. On the contrary, in order that it may become evident, not only where this Gospel is preached, but also where it is accepted and believed, that is, where the church and kingdom of Christ may be in this world, Christ wants to unite and hold us together by virtue of this divine sign, baptism. If Christians were without such an ordinance, if they had no common bond in the way of seal or sign, the organization would neither be expanded nor preserved. Christ wishes to bind us together by a divine communion, to further the spread of the Gospel; that others through our confession, may be brought into the fold. Therefore, baptism is a public testimony to the Gospel teaching, and to our faith, by which the world may know where and within whom the Lord rules.

58. In the second place, Christ has especially ordained this sign to the end that, through the office of the Word and of baptism, we may be conscious of God's work and mighty power in his church; that the Christian, in accepting baptism, might know that, Christ himself being witness, he is accepted by God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is what it means to be baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, in obedience to Christ's command. Thus, baptism is a sign and seal, in addition to the Word or promise, that we have been called and brought into the kingdom of Christ, have become God's children and heirs of eternal life, if, by faith we cling

to Christ. This we have often taught elsewhere with reference to baptism.

59. It is, indeed, wisely ordained by Christ, that in his kingdom, which shall expand into all the world and among all nations, he instituted not many ceremonies, as was the custom among the Jews, nor a diversity of forms among the various countries and nations, peoples and languages; but he ordained only the simplest and most ordinary sign; it is everywhere observed in the same way - just as the preaching of the Gospel is alike in all places, making all, adults and children, rich and poor, great and humble, one and all, in the world, equal before God. Hence, if a Christian from the uttermost parts of the world should come to us and observe our forms, he would have to say, They are the very same Word and sign that I have learned and received.

60. Among the various inhabitants that people our earth, each individual and each nation has its own characteristics. But Christians everywhere may be distinguished by their one doctrine, one language, one sign, even as they have one faith and one confession. Indeed, the kingdom of Christ everywhere is a kingdom of love, unity and peace. But it would be impossible for it to always withstand, steadfastly and in unity, the devils and their wiles, if Christ, by his divine power, did not preserve and protect it. However, we see that although Satan causes many sects and factions to rise up, soon they war among themselves and disappear again. What countless cliques and fanatical tyrants Satan has produced to oppose the Gospel during these fifteen hundred years, endeavoring to rend and destroy the kingdom of Christ! And yet there remains to this day one and the same Gospel message, one faith, one baptism and all; even the world, if not wilfully blind and hardened, might see and feel the strength and power of this Lord.

61. Christ deems it sufficient to say, in the first part of our text: "He that believeth and is baptized," and in the other part: "But he that disbelieveth" etc., not further mentioning baptism. The reason, of course, is that the first part sufficiently enjoins the ordinance and that baptism is commanded elsewhere, namely, in Mt 28, 19: "Make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father" etc. Hence, we have no authority in these for omitting baptism; no reason to hold that because one has faith he needs no baptism. If one becomes a Christian and truly believes, he will surely also gladly accept this sign. He will wish to have this divine testimony and confirmation of his salvation, for strength and consolation throughout life, and also to confess his faith publicly before the world. St. Paul makes plain the Christian's duty when he says: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Rom 10, 10. True, it is possible that one may believe though he is not baptized; and Again, that some may receive baptism though they do not believe.

62. This text, however, must be understood as commanding and confirming baptism: no one shall despise the ordinance but, as has been said, it is the duty of all to accept it. Yet the lines must not be drawn so closely that one should be condemned and lost for the failure to receive baptism if he could not obtain it.



63. As a summary, we derive from this text the following propositions:

1. Some believe, and are baptized, which is in accordance with the general command of Christ, the rule that is to be taught and observed.
2. Some believe, but are not baptized.
3. Some do not believe, and yet they are baptized.
4. Some do not believe, and are also not baptized.

64. This distinction is made by the text itself. (To the first two points belongs, as we have said, that part of this passage affirming and promising salvation, namely, "Shall be saved." Ed. 1546). It has always unanimously been believed that a person dying a believer is not lost, though he be not baptized; for it may happen that a true believer is suddenly overtaken by death before he can receive the desired baptism. (It also occurs that infants sometimes die before, during or immediately after their birth. These, having already been commended to the Lord by the faith and prayers of the parents or other Christians, without doubt Christ will accept, according to his words: "*Suffer the little children to come unto me.*" But as to the other two points, namely, those who do not believe, whether God grant they be baptized or not, judgment of condemnation is pronounced over them. Ed. 1546). Concerning this it is not necessary to speak further.

65. But the troublesome Anabaptist sects speak contemptuously of holy baptism, claiming that no one should be baptized who does not first believe. Their intent is to abolish infant baptism. But since enough has been written against this error of the Anabaptists in former postils and elsewhere. we will not now dwell on this matter. It is enough to know that Christ and the apostles make a distinction between these two points, namely, teaching and baptizing. Baptism is administered but once. We would need many to perform the ceremony if baptism had to be administered as often as we preach and teach. The teaching and preaching are of the most important and must be done constantly.

66. It is not stated here whether baptism should be administered before or after the teaching, but may God grant that the office of preaching should be exercised above everything else; then baptisms will follow. It is evident that he who receives baptism once, does not need this sign again. But the teaching of the Word, by which faith is kindled, strengthened and preserved, we need continually. For this reason, we observe, the office of baptizing was committed to people of much humbler station than was the office of preaching. Christ, himself, baptized no one, as we read in John 4, 2, but commanded his disciples to do so. St. Paul says that he was sent, not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel, 1 Cor 1, 17, and that he himself baptized but few people, though he preached the Gospel among all the heathen.

67. The sum and substance of the lesson, therefore, is, for us to give heed to the Word and teaching, and not to judge whether one truly believes or not. Where the Word is, there we shall also administer baptism, be the people young or old. For we are not commanded to accomplish the impossibility of looking into a man's heart to judge whether he believes or not. This must be left to Christ alone. Neither is it commanded us, in our office of preaching, to seek to know how each one may believe, or who accepts the Word and who does not. It will not do for you to say that you would preach only to those whom you could first know to be ready to believe and

accept the Word. In that case you would never dare to preach at all. The same holds in baptism. You must not wait until you are sure as to who believes and who does not, but give heed to this: Wherever the Word is preached and heard, and baptism is desired, there you are commanded to administer baptism, both to young and old. Where the Word, the all-important thing, is rightly preached, the other will naturally follow. And, again, where the teaching of the Word is in error, all else is in vain; because there is neither faith nor Christ. It is the Word that brings us everything, the sacraments with their power, peace of conscience and even Christ himself; for it is his power and strength, or, as David calls it: "The rod of his strength out of Zion," Ps 110, 2; or, as St. Paul says, "*The power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth,*" Rom 1, 16.

68. Preaching is, then, the chief work that Christ and all the apostles performed and commanded us to do. Christ gives the commission: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" etc. The other work, being inferior in importance, can, indeed, be performed by those who are not charged with the greater responsibility of preaching. It will be recalled that both Christ and the apostles sent many to lay hands on the sick. We may safely assume that, in the instance when, by the preaching of the apostles on Pentecost and afterwards, the number of believers who received the Word and were baptized increased to five thousand, not all of this multitude were baptized by the apostles alone. The apostles had to attend to their office of preaching, as commanded. Baptisms were accomplished by the assistance of others who accompanied the apostles. St. Paul, having already been called to the apostleship, was baptized by the disciple Ananias. Acts 9, 18.

69. Therefore, it depends not on the person, whoever it may be, that administers baptism or that receives it; who it is that preaches the Word or hears it. They may be saints or sinners, believers or unbelievers; if only the Word is preached and taught in its purity, then the ministry is also right, no matter who the minister may be. The office of preaching being first observed, then Christ speaks to you and me who hear the Word and desire to be Christians, admonishing us with this passage: "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*"

70. The Christians filling this office and possessing the talent that must bear interest, are commanded to preach wherever possible, and, together with the preaching, administer also baptism. But as to who may believe or disbelieve, this you must commit to Christ himself, for it is not in the preacher's power to save or condemn, but in the power of Christ alone. He is Lord over life and death, and may, therefore, grant it or withhold it from whomsoever he will.

71. However, Christ is not silent upon the point, to whom will he grant salvation. He says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." And again: "He that disbelieveth shall be condemned." Naught else can help or hinder; no difference of person or station avails; one being is as dear to him as another. Only that one believes and desires baptism, will avail to save. All who are disciples or hearers of this message must so learn.

72. Preachers and teachers must see to it that they preach and teach faithfully, and, as St. Paul says, shrink not from declaring the whole counsel of God, Acts 20, 27, that the hearers may know what God demands and has decreed concerning them. All the world has always desired, searched and sought to know this, but no one ever attained such knowledge, till it was revealed from heaven through Christ. It is embodied in this message. We should no longer seek nor

expect any other revelation. Here it may be clearly perceived that the Gospel itself is witness that the Word of preaching and the sacraments are the means by which you may know God's decree concerning yourself. If you believe the message, you shall be saved. But if you do not believe, then it is also decreed that you shall come under the judgment of condemnation, no matter how earnestly you may have sought, by your works and deeds, to obtain salvation. Though you had accomplished all the works and wonders of angels and men, it would be unavailing. The whole world is hereby divided into two classes, entirely separated from each other, the one for heaven and the other for hell. On the last day no other judgment shall be pronounced than that in accordance with this message, namely, the reward of belief or disbelief.

73. Therefore, we ought to thank God that we belong to those who shall be saved. For we are among those called God's creatures, to whom he commands this message to be preached. And we are, also, thanks to God, baptized into Christ, and have preached and confessed him before the world as the Lord that is sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and is ruling over all the world. Our preaching, faith and confession is, indeed, pure and true; God grant that our lives be according to our faith and confession. All this is said concerning the preaching of the Gospel, which Gospel Christ commanded to be proclaimed in the whole world after his ascension into heaven. Now follows the last part, namely: *"And these signs shall accompany them that believe."*

74. Here the sectarians have brooded over the question of signs, vainly asking why they do not accompany our preaching and whether they no longer can be expected. It is enough to know, that these signs followed as a testimony to, and public confirmation of, this Gospel message. They were especially necessary in the beginning, to further the spread of the Gospel. But with the preaching of the Word in all lands and tongues accomplished, their prevalence became less frequent, and their testimony less necessary.

75. Yet it is true that the same power and efficacy of Christ remains in Christendom. If it were necessary, such signs could even now be performed. It often took place, and still does, that devils were cast out in Christ's name; likewise the sick are healed by prayer in his name, and many receive help in great distress of both body and soul. The Gospel is now being preached in new tongues, where it was unknown before. Signs are given to all Christendom, as Christ says - to those who believe. True, we do not always observe this gift in every Christian believer, and even the apostles did not do these wonders with equal power.

76. These signs are inferior and very insignificant in comparison with the really great wonders that Christ unceasingly works in the world through his divine omnipotence. He makes frequent allusions to them. These are truly great wonders: That Christendom is defended and preserved on earth; that God's Word and faith, or even a single Christian believer, remains on earth in spite of the devil and his angels; that he protects us against so many tyrants and sects, so many false and unthankful people among the Christians, yea, even against our own flesh and blood - all of them raging against Christ's kingdom. Yet the devil, with all his power and the help of all his servants, will never be able - though he has attempted to do so in his great wrath and still attempts it through the pope, the Turk and all his hosts - to remove the baptismal font from the church, the Gospel from the pulpit, to extirpate Christ's name or destroy from out his kingdom in the world the little flock that clings to him. This great wonder, the power of Christ, is

prophesied of and to it praise is given, in Ps 110, 2: "Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies," who are indeed so wroth and bitter that, if they could, in one moment, they would pervert and overthrow all that lives and moves in Christendom. And yet, one single Christian believer, by his preaching and prayer, can be the means of salvation to uncounted multitudes. In spite of Satan's hatred and desire to hinder, many people hear the Gospel, receive baptism and become teachers of the faith; and through the influence of the Gospel, the sacredness of home and country are preserved.

77. This good work may well be called by believing Christians, casting out devils, taking up serpents and speaking with new tongues. Those visible wonders were only signs to the ignorant unbelievers, as Paul says in 1 Cor 14, 22, and for the purpose of bringing them to Christ. But why should we, who know this and believe the Gospel, need such signs? And if they were necessary, we can easily believe they were done, We see that through Christ greater wonders are done among us; the power of Satan and the terrors of sin and death are overcome in our hearts, and many Christians, both young and old, cheerfully die in Christ and by their faith tread Satan under foot. The marvelous power of Christ's kingdom is constantly the theme of St. Paul and the other apostles, and Christ himself lauds it above all other signs and wonders in Lk 10, 19-20, saying: "Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall in any wise hurt you," etc. "Nevertheless in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" etc.

78. Thus, even in our day, are great signs and wonders upon wonders. Here is an example: In a great city a little flock of Christians is kept in the knowledge of God and in true faith, notwithstanding that more than a hundred thousand devils are turned loose upon them and the world is filled with sects, with scoundrels and tyrants. In spite of the opposition of all these, the Gospel, baptism, Lord's Supper and confession of Christ are still preserved. We can see that, for the heathen, outward, tangible signs were necessary. Christians, however, behold spiritual signs, in comparison with which the former ones are but earthly. We need, therefore, not wonder that they are no longer in evidence now that the Gospel reigns throughout the world and among those who aforetime could not comprehend God until he had brought them into the fold by visible signs, as little children are persuaded with apples and pears.

79. Moreover, we should marvel at and extol the great and glorious miracles that Christ is daily accomplishing in his Christendom, wherein Christians conquer the power of the devil and snatch so many souls from the jaws of death and hell. Against their work the devil daily battles in the world and fumes in his awful wrath and rancor. Yet he must flee from the Christian. What though he be cast out of one poor heart, in which he has raged? The whole world still remains helpless in his power unless it is brought to the knowledge of Christ. But wherever a Christian, in spite of the terrors of sin, death and hell, with cheerful heart dies in Christ, there Satan has been truly cast out from his dwelling-place, and deprived of his power and kingdom.

80. The wicked world shall not see nor heed such signs and wonders, but with open eyes and hardened hearts shall pass by and blaspheme them, just as it always despises God's works, blaspheming even the public and indisputable miracles of Christ and the apostles. The world would but the more despise such signs, were they done by us. God must withhold them, since

the Gospel is now revealed everywhere, giving the world only those other signs, by which it is offended and therefore is overthrown and destroyed by the power of God. The Jews so fared when they despised the signs by which Christ manifested his proffered help and blessings. They looked for and demanded other signs. Then he refrained and would give them no other sign than the sign of Jonah, lying, after his crucifixion, for three days in the grave in weakness and death. Afterward he came forth from death and the grave, demonstrating his power by his resurrection and ascension. Now he mightily rules over all the world, and will overthrow and destroy it, together with all its power and glory.

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