

["IN NO OTHER WAY CAN THE HEART LOVE OR HAVE ANY LOVE; IT MUST BE ASSURED THAT IT WAS FIRST LOVED."]

Sermon for the Day of Pentecost; John 14:23-31 (2nd sermon)

A Sermon by Martin Luther; taken from his Church Postil.

## I. THE INTRODUCTION TO THIS SERMON OF COMFORT, TREATING OF CHRIST'S LOVE.

1. In today's Gospel Christ says plainly and bluntly: "If a man love me, he will keep my Word; he that loveth me not, keepeth not my words." The text stands there clear; whoever loves God keeps his commandments, and on the contrary, whoever does not love God, does not keep his commandments. Christ here simply casts out of his kingdom all who do not keep his commandments with pleasure and love. Let us thoroughly understand this. It is briefly pictured to us here who are and who are not Christians. No one is a Christian unless he keeps Christ's Word, as he here says. And no one can keep it, unless he first loves God. God had tested the plan of making people godly by means of force. For, in olden times, God dealt severely with his people, so that they were forced to keep his Word, and not to blaspheme God; to observe the Sabbath and to obey all the other commandments. To this end he threatened to afflict and punish them, severely, as is written in Lev 26 14ff. Thus, God from without coerced the people to be pious by means of the fear of punishment; but their hearts were not obedient. The result is the same in the present day. Therefore, to keep God's Word is a thing that can be accomplished only by divine love.
2. Accordingly, in the New Testament, God ceased to punish and only administered the Word; for the means must yet come to the point that the divine love be present. Neither the stake, nor bulls nor bans help in the least. Where this love is not, all amounts to nothing, do as we will. If one were to take all the swords in the world in his hands, he would not bring a single heretic to the faith. The people may, indeed, appear to accept the Word, but in their inward hearts there is no faith. Hence God has abolished the sword in this matter and his plan of salvation aims to possess the heart. The bishops are commanded first to take the heart captive, so that it may find love and pleasure in the Word, and the work is then accomplished. Hence, he who wishes to be a true bishop, arranges all his administration to the end that he may win souls and develop a love for and a delight in God's Word and be able to oppose the false babblers with sound teaching, and to stop their mouths. Titus 1, 11. This will never be accomplished by means of commandments, bans and bulls.
3. Thus the true spiritual leaders fight. They strike Satan dead and rescue souls from him; for to pierce Satan to death is nothing else than to rescue from him a human being whom he has taken captive by deceitful teaching. And that is the right kind of spiritual tactics. But in case people will not outwardly obey the Word, their parents should educate their children, and the civil government its subjects, to obedience. However, by this method, none are yet brought to believe. For it is affirmed in our text: "He that loveth me not keepeth not my words." Thus you hear what a Christian life is, namely to love God; it is not to storm about, eat flesh, destroy pictures in churches, become monks or nuns--neither a married nor a single life avails here. It means to love, and they do this who keep his Word.
4. Now, what is God's Word? It is that we love one another as Christ loved us, and that we believe on him. If one truly possesses the Word, it must break forth out of the heart from pure love. One may possess the words and commands of man, even if he does not love; he may receive the command of a superior and execute it. But the only thing that will keep God's commandments and Word is love. Therefore, observe how foolishly our princes and bishops act, in that they coerce and constrain the people to believe by means of force.
5. How does one now acquire this love? The human heart is so false that it cannot love unless it first sees the benefit of loving. When, in the Old Testament, God struck blows among the people as if among dogs, and he dealt severely and fearfully with them, they naturally had no love for him. Then God thought: I must show my love to you and be so affectionate that you cannot help but love me. Then he took his Son and sent him into our filth, sin and misery, pouring out his mercy so freely and fully that we had to boast of all his treasures as if they were our own. He thus became a loving Father, and he declared his mercy and caused it to go forth into all the world that whosoever believes this and

lays hold of it with his heart shall have a gracious and merciful God, who never becomes angry nor deals blows, but who, instead, is kind and affectionate. Now, where a heart believes and experiences this, and gets glimpses of so much, then it must place all its confidence and affection in God, and deal with its neighbour as God has dealt with itself. As a result the Word of God goes forth out of the heart, and his commandments will be kept with pleasure. Thus, first, there is no other God; secondly, man calls upon the name of the Lord; and thirdly, he lets God reign--God can do as he will, and he possesses his soul in quiet and observes the Sabbath. In this way, the commandments of the First Table are fulfilled. Henceforth, he is kindly and humbly disposed toward all persons, he honours his father and mother and serves his neighbour as his highest pleasure and with all the love of his heart. His thought is ever this: I will do to my neighbour, as God has done to me. Thus love alone is the fulfilment of the Law, as Paul says to the Romans (13, 10).

6. Now, no man can bring this love into the heart. Therefore, God struck in among the people with the Law that man might experience and feel that no human being could love the divine, righteous, just and holy Law. In view of this he gave us his Son, thus graciously poured out his greatest treasures, and sunk and drowned all our sins and filth in the great ocean of his love, so that this great love and blessing must draw man to love, and cheerfully be ready to fulfil the divine commandments with willing heart. In no other way can the heart love or have any love; it must be assured that it was first loved. Now, man cannot do this; therefore, Christ comes and takes the heart captive and says: Learn to know me. Then the heart replies: Aye, who art thou? I am Christ, who placed myself in your misery to drown your sins in my righteousness. This knowledge softens your heart, so that you must turn to him. Thus love is awakened when one learns who Christ is.

7. And a Christian should glory in this knowledge, as God says in Jer 9, 23-24: "Thus saith Jehovah, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth in this, that he hath understanding, and knoweth me, that I am Jehovah who exerciseth lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith Jehovah." So also, Peter in his Second Epistle (3, 18) says: "But grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." In all the prophets and especially in the Psalms and in many places in the Bible there is much written about this knowledge. It is this knowledge of Christ that must convert or it will never be accomplished. No one is so hardened that he will not be converted and made tender if once his heart knows Christ. And the same knowledge causes one to steadfastly live a godly life. Isaiah says, The time will come when this knowledge shall flow forth like a deluge. This came to pass in the time of the apostles. Therefore, whoever loves God will keep his commandments, and that love brings a knowledge of God. Now Christ says, further, in our Gospel: "And my Father will love him."

8. It comes to pass in this way: I know first, that Christ has served me by his whole life, and that Christ is God; thus I see that it is God's will that Christ should give himself for me and that the Father commissioned him to that end. Thus, I climb to the Father through Christ. Then my confidence in him begins to grow, so that I esteem him as a loving Father. Christ here means to say: Man must begin with my love and then he will come to the Father; Christ is a mediator. Therefore, I must first be loved--must first feel the great treasure and blessing in Christ. Hence, God takes the very first step and allows his dear child to die for me, before I ask him to do so, yea, before I ever know him. Then a confidence in and love to God grow in me; this I must feel. Christ also says here: "And my Father will love him;" that is, the convert will feel that he is placed with me in the same kingdom and coinheritance, and will, through me and with me and with my voice, say to the Father in comforting confidence: Dearly beloved Father. Then the text continues: "And we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

9. When I come to the point of knowing that God is my Father, then I let him rule in my heart according to his pleasure, and allow him to be all in all. Therewith, my heart becomes a quiet, humble abode of God. Thus, God is a co-labourer with me and assists me as he says in Isaiah 66, 1-2 and in Acts 7, 49-50: "Thus saith Jehovah, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: 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." The heart must come to the point where it knows God's glory, God's power and God's wisdom, and lets God rule in everything. It knows that all is God's work; therefore, it cannot fear anything, cold, hunger, hell, death, Satan, poverty or any like thing. Then the heart says: My God, who has made his abode in me, is greater than Satan, death and all the powers of hell.

10. Thus there develops in man a confident defiance of everything upon earth, for he has God and all that is God's. He does all that he is now required to do, and fears not. On the contrary, where there is no love of God, that heart does not keep God's Word; and if the heart does not keep God's Word, the hand never will. There God will never enter and make

his abode. There the devil dwells, until the weak and despairing soul will even fear the sound of a driven leaf, as Moses says in Lev 26, 36. Man cannot endure the gnawing of conscience. The conscience can never know any peace when oppressed by sin, nor can it experience a joyful confidence in God; yea, it will sink lower than hell, while confidence is higher than the heavens. There is then nothing but despair and fear for that heart. All creatures are above it. Such is a picture of the kingdom of Satan. Christ continues by saying: "And the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me."

11. These words Christ speaks only in order to bring us to the Father, either in a gracious or ungracious way, either with pleasure and love or with fear, for all must lean and depend upon him. Hence, whoever will not understand these words scorns God. Then no teaching, no words nor anything else will help in his case. Now Christ comes and says: "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."

## II. THE SERMON OF COMFORT.

12. Here Christ says, The Father will send you the Holy Spirit, who will bring to your remembrance what I told you, and the same Spirit will explain it to you. In other words: Your hearts are as yet rough and untutored and you cannot understand what I have spoken to you; but when the Holy Spirit comes he will make all so plain to you that you will experience the assurance that it is as I told you before. Thus, the Holy Spirit, and he alone, has explained the Scriptures and Christ, and made them clear. This knowledge, then, is sufficient for me and enables me to fulfil God's commandments. Beyond this, however, I have no obligations. Christ comforts his disciples further, and says: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

13. As if he had said: I shall now leave you. Farewell! It was a common greeting among the Jews, in the Hebrew language, when they met or parted, to say: Peace be with you! That is as much as to say: Take good care of yourself, be of good spirits, hope you may prosper; as we in German say: God greet you (Gott grusze euch), or God bless you!

14. And the Lord adds the kind of peace he wishes them to have, and says: My peace I give unto you; not as the world is in the habit of giving peace. In plain words he distinguishes between his peace and the peace of the world. The disciples, however, did not understand it, just as they did not understand what it was to love and to keep God's commandments. Now, it is the nature of the world's peace that it consists only in outward things, in eating and drinking and dancing; its pleasure is in the flesh. Christian peace, however, is in the heart, although at the same time the heart may suffer great persecution, fear, want and opposition. The Lord had told them of all these things in the words: "Ye shall weep and lament. The world will persecute you, will reject your teaching, will scourge, banish and finally put you to death; but in the midst of all ye shall have peace and rejoice. Cling only to me and my Word!"

15. And his words were soon fulfilled. When they had received the Holy Spirit, Luke writes in Acts 5, 41, Peter, John and the other disciples, though scourged and forbidden to preach, departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name. But the disciples did not at this time understand and they were troubled because of the Lord's discourse. Therefore, he gives them further comfort and says: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful."

16. These are consoling words, but for the time they are not effectual. Be not afraid, he says, for you have my peace. No one will harm you; only cling to me. The words they indeed hear, as do we, but without seeing their significance. Therefore he says in clearer language: "Ye heard how I said to you, I go away, and I come unto you."

17. As if he said: Be not fearful because I said to you I go away from you: I will come again to you; yea, it is especially for your sake that I go away, that afterwards when I return to you, you may be the happier and be of good spirits. But neither did they understand this until the Holy Spirit later interpreted it to them. Just so it is with us in the time of temptation: we do not then understand what God intends to teach us; but later, when grace and comfort return, we understand it very well. The Lord says to the disciples: "If ye loved me, ye would have rejoiced, because I go unto the Father."

18. His words mean: The only failing you have is that you do not love me, or do not understand what it is to love. If ye loved me, ye would gladly let me go; yea, ye would laugh for joy, because I depart from you. And the more you are visited with ill-fortune and adversity, the happier you should be. But human reason does not understand this. It is

certainly true that the more a Christian suffers persecution from without, the happier he is in heart, and the more peace he possesses. The reason is that he loves Christ. This St. Paul well understood from his own experience when he wrote to the Corinthians in the second epistle (4, 4-10): We are pressed on every side, yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body." And again, he says, in verses 16 to 18: "Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

19. This is the experience of the Christian heart when the Holy Spirit has entered it. St. Paul writes more about this later, in the sixth chapter of Second Corinthians. It made an impression upon the heathen when they saw the Christians thus hastening to death; they thought the Christians were foolish and intervened to spare their lives. The Gentiles did not understand what it meant; but the Christians very well knew whence it came. Therefore the Lord adds: "For the Father is greater than I."

20. Even if I should tell you many things, ye would not understand them; they reach no farther than the ears and never enter the heart. However, when I return to the Father, then I will take upon myself the power to send into your hearts the Holy Spirit, through whose help ye may understand all that I said to you. For the present I am in the service of my ministry upon earth; I only speak and preach the Word as it has been commanded me by my Father. The Arians paid no attention here to the words: "I go to the Father," which means nothing more than, I go and receive the honour the Father has. It is as if the Lord had said to his disciples: I have two offices. At present I am upon the earth, where I am performing my office of preaching, for which I was sent by the Father. When I come to the Father I will fulfil the other office, namely, this: I will send the Holy Spirit into your hearts. The disciples could not understand this, and neither do we understand how he administers the gift. He concludes by saying: "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe."

21. The meaning is: I know very well that you do not understand this now; but I tell you it now so that, when it comes to pass as I have told you, you may remember that I declared it to you before, and you can then say: It is true. In what follows now in this Gospel, the Lord speaks of the hour of his suffering, that it is at hand, and says: "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."

### III. THE CONCLUSION OF THIS SERMON OF CONSOLATION.

22. In other words: The time of my suffering and death is at hand. The prince of this world, the devil, is present in his adherents, and will seize me. But he will accomplish nothing, for he will unjustly lay hold of me, desiring to crush me. His tactics will fail; I will triumph over him, and I will do it justly.

23. One may reply: Did not Satan conquer Christ? Did he not put him to death? Christ himself answers this and says that he dies for the very purpose of satisfying the will of the Father. It is not due to the power of Satan that Christ dies, but to the will of the Father, who would blot out sin through the death of his only begotten Son. Hence, it does not rest in the power of the world nor of Satan to put to death either Christ or any of his followers. But it does rest in the will of the Father, who reveals his power through our weakness, before all his creatures; as St. Paul says in I Cor 15, 27. In view of this, Christ here says to his disciples: I will indeed die, but I will rise again. I die to the end that the world may know that I love the Father and that I do what my Father hath commanded me. I seek the Father's glory in this, who wills that I should so do. And all this for the sake of your salvation and blessedness. Therefore, be of good cheer and let not your heart be troubled; for you will have great joy because of my death and my leaving you.

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