

PENTECOST MONDAY.

JOHN 3:16-21.

Contents:

Christ's grace and judgment.

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For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

I. THE GLORIOUS GRACE AND GIFT IN CHRIST

1. This is one of the best and most glorious Gospel lessons, such as John particularly wrote. It is worthy to be written in golden letters, not upon paper, but if possible upon the heart; it ought to be made the daily lesson and meditation of Christians, who should repeat it to strengthen their faith and awaken their hearts to prayer. The words make the sad joyful and the dead alive, if the heart only firmly believes them.
2. It also gives instruction on the chief article of Christian faith, on the glory and liberty of Christians, whereby sin, the Law, God's wrath, death and hell are banished from believers and abolished, besides all human wisdom, righteousness and holiness are made futile in that which belongs to God's kingdom. He says: "Whosoever believeth on the Son of God should not perish, but have eternal life," death, the devil, the terror of

the Law, must be banished forever, our merit and worthiness doing nothing to that end. The excellent, great, eternal and divine treasure is thus portrayed here, which we should possess so as to be without fear before the judgment and condemnation of human nature through Adam's fall, and instead have salvation and victory, and every blessing besides. All this is offered and bestowed out of pure grace, and thus represented only as a gift that can be secured solely through faith.

I. THIS GLORIOUS GRACE AND GIFT IN GENERAL

3. In vivid and significant words the evangelist briefly sketches this grace and gift in Christ, that he may magnify it and portray minutely all concerned – the giver, the recipient, the gift, its fruits and benefits. All is so eloquently great that it is indescribable, and it is difficult to believe only because of its very greatness.

4. Before considering this, however, let us hear why and for what purpose Christ so speaks. He expresses it in the following words: "*That whosoever believeth on him should not perish*" etc. Here he would show the world the misery and helplessness in which it lies; that it is entirely lost, and would have had to remain lost eternally, had Christ not come with this proclamation; for all its wisdom, art, doctrine, law, and free-will would not avail in this respect; and in spite of all its teaching and endeavors, it is and will remain lost forever. For, from its very birth, it lies in sin, under the wrath of God, in the devil's kingdom, and under the power of death, unable to help or free itself from this condition. Indeed it is so dazed and torpid that it would never have known nor realized its misery had this not been revealed to it through the Word.

5. Christ teaches the same truth at greater length in the declaration made to Nicodemus, just preceding this text, where he tells him plainly and clearly, that neither he nor any of the Jews of his kind, though they had the Law, and diligently performed works and outward divine services (which were at that time, indeed, the most commendable in the world), could thereby ever get to heaven, or see the kingdom of God. For such life and works are still but the works of man, who, in his natural descent from Adam, is but flesh without spirit, that is without true understanding and knowledge of the divine will, and without genuine and heartfelt obedience to God; in short, it cannot convert itself to God, since it has wholly and fully turned away from God. Therefore, through the Law, man could never liberate himself from sin, the wrath of God and eternal death. Accordingly, if he would see the kingdom of God, he must be born anew, and have an entirely different nature, one that does not proceed from the flesh, as the old one did, but from

the Spirit, and which is spiritual; and to this end another word and declaration must be received than that which they have in the Law, and a power beyond man's ability.

6. That we may become new men, he says, we must first be delivered from the curse of the old birth, that is, freed from sin and death. But since we still have flesh and blood, and live on earth, the old birth continues. Of itself, it must remain what it is by nature. Under its thrall, man, at death, must be damned, for no man is able to appease and remove the wrath and condemnation passed upon him; therefore, no one would ever see God, nor enter heaven. As Christ says: "And no one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven" etc. Hence another way had to be found. It could be only through some heavenly being, righteous and innocent in the fullest sense, pleasing and acceptable to God, who would adapt his perfection's to our human nature, so that the sin and condemnation that was its by birth might be taken away, and it might be reconciled to God and rescued from eternal death, and might turn to God and begin again rightly to know, love and obey him, and thus experience the beginning of the new birth, and eventually, through death, be thoroughly purified of remaining uncleanness of the old man, forever free from sin.

7. Now, the wrath of God against sin is so intense that no creature could have devised means to appease him or effect a reconciliation; the condemnation was so enormous that no angel was mighty enough to remove it, and reinstate life. Therefore, that one Person, even God's Son, had to take upon himself sin, God's wrath, and death, under which humanity helplessly lay, and make the sacrifice for them. Of this, Christ himself says, immediately before this text, that the Son of Man must be lifted up, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, "that whosoever believeth on him should not perish". Here he adds the cause which moved God to accomplish this great work, when he says: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.*"

8. With these words he leads us directly into the Father's heart, that we may see and know that it was the great and wonderful counsel of God, resolved from eternity, that we should receive help through this Son. All had to be fulfilled, that God's truth might stand, even as he had promised afore-time in the Scriptures. It is thus apparent that God does not intend to cast us out, and to condemn us on account of our sins; but that he wills that, for the sake of this Savior and Mediator, if we fear his wrath on account of our sins, and keep in mind and firmly believe this eternal divine will, we should attain to the eternal grace of God and to eternal life.

II. THIS GLORIOUS GRACE AND GIFT IN PARTICULAR

9. Now, let us consider what significant and comforting words these are which depict in their every relation, and in manifold ways, this marvelous work of God, with its inexpressible treasure which is here freely offered us. In the first place, the Giver is not a man, an emperor or a king, nor even an angel; but is the exalted, eternal Majesty, God himself, compared with whom, all men, however rich, powerful and great they may be, are nothing but dust and ashes. Isaiah 40. How shall we describe him? He is incomprehensible, immeasurable, inexhaustible.

10. He is, then, no more a taskmaster, who simply makes demands upon us – as Moses calls him (Deuteronomy 4:24), a devouring and consuming fire – but a rich, overflowing, eternal fountain of grace and of all gifts, who justly deserves to be called Gebhard (a prince or champion of givers). In comparison with him, what are all emperors and kings, with their gifts, gold, silver, land and people? Here the heart should expand and increase with desiring, wishing and expecting that which the Lord God intends to give; for it indeed must needs be something great and valuable that could well become this exalted Majesty and rich God. Compared to such a Giver and gift, everything in heaven and on earth must be very small and insignificant.

11. In the second place, why does he give, and what incited him to it? Nothing but pure, inexpressible love. He does not give because it is a debt or duty, nor because any one has asked or pleaded, but he is moved to do so by his own goodness as the Lord who willingly gives, and delights in giving gratuitously and without solicitation.

12. As there is no greater Giver than God, so there is no greater virtue, either in God or men, than love. One will sacrifice everything for what he loves, even his life. Patience, humility and all other virtues are nothing compared with it, or else are included in its essence. For whom I love, with him I will certainly never be angry, nor injure nor annoy him, nor make myself intolerable to him, but I will be ready to serve, counsel and help him whenever I see that he needs me. In short, I am his fully, as to my body, goods and all my possessions.

13. Accordingly, here, again, the heart shall grow and become strong against all sorrow, because such wealth of unfathomable divine love is set before us, flowing from a fatherly heart and having its source in the highest virtue, which is the fountain of all good, and which, therefore, makes the gift valuable and precious; just as the proverb deems a small gift valuable, when it says: It comes from a loving hand. For where there is love and friendship, one does not look upon the gift so much as upon the heart; it is love which adds great value to the gift. If God had given me only an eye, a hand or a

foot, and I knew that he did it out of fatherly love, it would be much dealer to me than a thousand worlds. Now, since he gave us precious baptism, his Word, absolution and the Lord's Supper, they should be regarded as our daily paradise and heaven; not on account of the appearance of such gifts, which are not great in the eyes of the world, but on account of the great love from which they are given.

14. In the third place, consider the gift itself. It must, without doubt, be something excellent and inexpressibly great, that such a rich Giver gives us, with such sincere and generous love. What does he give? Not great kingdoms, not one or more worlds full of silver and gold, not heaven and earth with all they contain, not the entire creation, but his Son, who is as great as he himself. That is an eternal, incomprehensible gift, even as the Giver and his love are incomprehensibly great. He is the fountain and source of all grace, goodness and kindness; yes, the very essence of the eternal blessings and treasures of God. That is love, not with words, but in deed, in the highest degree, proven with the most precious goodness and wonderful work of which God himself is capable.

15. What more can he do and give? Since he gives his Son, what does he yet withhold, that he does not give? Yes, he gives himself wholly and entirely, as Paul says, Romans 8:32: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" Certainly, everything must have been given with him, who is his only begotten, beloved Son, the Heir and Lord of all creation; therefore, all creatures, angels, devils, death, life, heaven and earth, sin, righteousness, everything present and future, are subject to us. Paul says in Corinthians 3:22-23: "*All are yours: and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's*"; for this Son is all in all.

16. In the fourth place, how and in what manner is the Son given? Look upon him, in what he has done and suffered! For us he becomes man, is put under the Law, that is, under the wrath of God (on account of our sins). He is put to death, even the most ignominious death – lifted upon the cross and suspended in the air. He was condemned (even as Christ shortly before this had said), taking upon himself the wrath and fury of the devil and hell, and contending with them to such extent that it must be said that he was wholly abandoned. Yet he trampled the devil, sin, death and hell under foot, and obtained the victory over them through his resurrection and ascension. All this he gave us that it might be our own, that we might possess both him and all that he accomplished. And this he does in such a way that the gift may not be said to have been conferred upon us, either as wages or on account of merit, nor is it loaned, borrowed or for recompense, but freely given and bestowed out of purely benign grace. The receiver shall and can do no more in this case than to open his hand and take what God so graciously gives him, and what he truly needs, with love and thanksgiving.

17. In the fifth place he portrays the recipient, who is, in a word, the world. This is indeed a wonderful and peculiar case of loving and giving. Here the one loved is in strange contrast to the one loving. How can this love of God for the world be explained? What does he see in the world, that he is so ready to unbosom himself toward her? If it had been that he loved the angels, they are at least glorious and noble creatures, worthy of his love. But what, on the contrary, is the world but a great mass of people who neither fear nor love nor praise nor thank God, who misuse every creature, blaspheme God's name and despise his Word, and are, furthermore, disobedient, murderers, adulterers, thieves, knaves, liars, betrayers, full of treachery and all malice; in snort, transgressors of every commandment, and in every particular refractory and obstinate, adhering to God's archenemy, the abominable devil? Behold, this delicious and gracious fruit! He bestows, as if upon a beautiful and beloved bride and daughter, his dear Son, and with him all things, whereas he would have had more than sufficient reason, at the very mention of the world, instantly to crush her with thunder and lightning to powder, and cast her into the abyss of hell. The word "*world*" is a sound hateful to God beyond expression; and this is a most strange paradox: God loves the world. Here two things that are in the highest degree antagonistic are combined. It is almost like saying: God loves death and hell, and is the friend of his most bitter eternal enemy, the accursed devil.

18. That is indeed a boundless proof of love, and makes the gift inexpressibly great, when the Giver and he to whom it is given are placed side by side, and God is represented as pouring out his whole heart to his hateful, hostile image, whereas he should have visited him only with anger, vengeance and damnation, and when he pays no attention to the fact that the world is full of contempt, blasphemy, disobedience toward God, and stupendous ingratitude for all the gifts he bestowed upon it heretofore, but swallows up all its vices and sins. Though the Giver be ever so great and beneficent, the wickedness and viciousness of the world, which is excessive and immeasurably great, ought to deter and repel him. For what man can even mark and sufficiently realize his own sin and disobedience? And yet this great love so overcomes God that he take away from the world all and every sin and transgression, and remembers them no more against it forever, so that they are dead and gone, and instead he gives his Son, and with him all things.

19. By this, the truths for which Paul and the articles of faith contend, have now been sufficiently and irrefutably demonstrated and proven; namely: That we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life, without merit or worthiness on our part, out of pure grace (*gratis*), and alone for the sake of his beloved Son, in whom God so loved us that this

love has taken away and blotted out all our sins and the sins of the whole world; for there was nothing but sin in us, instead of which he has bestowed his love and forgiveness upon us, even as the prophet Isaiah (40:2) says concerning Jerusalem, and as we ought to preach in the Gospel: *“Her iniquity is pardoned. that she hath received of Jehovah’s hand double for all her sins.”*

20. Therefore, this gift – all of grace – is much greater, transcends and is mightier, than all the sins on earth, so that the unworthiness of any man, yes of all men together, aye the eternal wrath and condemnation which they have deserved, cannot be so great that the greatness of this love and grace, or forgiveness, does not in every particular outweigh, yes, engulf them; as Paul says, Romans 5:20: “But where sin abounded, grace abounded more exceedingly;” and Psalm 103:12 11:12: “For as the heavens are high above the earth...so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” For what else can that be than forgiveness of sin, when he loves the world while it yet lies in sin, abomination and blasphemy? If he could so love the world, his enemy and blasphemer, as to give so much, even himself, for it, how could he be angry with you and not be willing to forgive your sins, if you desire and seek his grace?

21. What heart would not cheerfully render all good things to him who has shown such love as to bestow his dear Son upon wicked and despairing people, that is, upon the whole world, which means all people, who never did anything good, but at all times have done that which was contrary to his commandments? How can people like these expect such great love and such inexpressible riches as a reward? To think of what I have done and what has been my experience in my monastic life, when I crucified Christ daily for fifteen years, and practiced all kinds of idolatry! and yet, notwithstanding the fact that I so sorely provoked him, he loves me so that he no more remembers all my wickedness but reveals to me his Son, and himself, with all grace. This, indeed, may be called incomprehensible riches of unfathomable love.

22. O Lord God, how little the world takes such great and sublime things to heart! Should we not all rejoice and be glad of heart that we have lived to see the time that we can hear such things, and love and praise our God therefor, and in gratitude, not only willingly serve him, but gladly suffer all things and even smile if we should have to die for the sake of his Word and obedience and to allow these bodies – worms of the dust – to be consumed by fire or sword, or suffer any other form of martyrdom? So little thankful is shameful, abominable unbelief, in its great and blind darkness, of which Christ himself later complains, that there are hearts so possessed, rigid and dead that they can hear such things and yet not believe!

23. In the sixth place, we have the final cause why and for what purpose he does all this, and what his intention is. Of course he has not bestowed it that I may have meat and drink from it, or inferior temporal benefit, riches, honor, power; nor has he given it that it may harm and poison; he has not given his Word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper as poison, but that they might be of the greatest benefit to us. As he says, they are given that man may not be lost, but may have everlasting life. It is not for the purpose of giving me many golden crowns and kingdoms, for then I would still remain in sin and death: but that I might be free from hell and eternal death, and not be lost eternally. That is what this gift is to effect; for me hell is wiped out, and the devil cast under my feet, and out of a fearful, sad and humiliated heart a joyful and living one comes forth. In short, God has done all this that I might have an eternal, imperishable life in exchange for eternal destruction and death.

24. It must follow upon the reception of such a great and imperishable gift that, when the Son of God is rightly known and embraced with the whole heart, we have the victory over and are rescued from all evil, and enjoy eternal freedom, glory and happiness; for where he is, there everything must be good. Not that we have earned this, but in his great and eternal love God took pity on us in our misery and helplessness, and gave us his Son that we might be helped; otherwise we would have been lost and would have had to remain eternally lost, and notwithstanding all our workrighteousness and divine services, and never attained to eternal life.

25. He who would now puff up his heart, on account of these facts, has reason enough so to do. For what more glorious and better could heart desire, than that it should be told that eternal life shall be bestowed upon it; that it shall never see death; that it shall never experience want, distress, sadness and temptation, but have pure joy, and a perfect wealth of everything good, and have the assurance that we have a gracious God, and that all creatures will joyously smile upon us? From this it is very evident that it is not God's purpose and intention to deceive and destroy people, as the devil would make timid hearts believe, holding up to them the Law and their unworthiness; but that he would bestow life, and such life as is eternal and blissful. As a pledge and veritable testimony of this, he gives us his only Son, which he would never have done had he not loved us but was still angry and intended to condemn us.

26. This and similar glorious and comforting passages should be rightly treasured and valued by every Christian, above all else in the world, for they are words which no one can exhaust or fathom; and when they are rightly believed, they ought to make one a good theologian, or more – a strong, joyful Christian, who can speak and teach of Christ aright, judge all other doctrines, advise and comfort anyone, and patiently bear all things that he may experience.

27. But here we must pray for the Holy Spirit to impress this upon our hearts, and must daily exercise ourselves in these things, so that we retire and rise with these words in our minds. But now, just as we regard them, so is their effect upon us. If they do not enter our hearts they cannot produce the fruit they ought to; they must bewail the ingratitude of the world, which makes them pass by our ears and hearts without affecting them, while it runs after perishable goods, honor and fame, thus losing this everlasting treasure; for this it will condemn and curse itself in hell eternally.

28. In the seventh place, and lastly, in what manner may we lay hold of such a treasure and gift, or what is the purse or safe in which it may be kept? It is faith alone, as Christ here says: "That whosoever believeth on him, should not perish" etc. Faith holds out its hands and opens the sack, and allows itself to be presented with good things. As God, the Giver, in love bestows this gift, so we are the recipients by faith, which faith does nothing more than receive the gift. For it is not our doing, and it cannot be merited through our work. It has already been bestowed and presented. All you need to do is to open your mouth, or rather your heart, hold still, and allow it to be entirely filled. Psalm 81:10. This can be done in no other way than by believing these words; for you observe that he here requires faith, and faith fully and perfectly appropriates this treasure.

29. Here you may see, also, what faith is and is called. Not simply an empty thought concerning Christ, that he was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered, was crucified, arose, ascended into heaven, but a heart that grasps and embraces the Son of God, as expressed in these words, and positively holds that God gave his only begotten Son for us into death, and loved us so that, for his sake, we should not be lost, but have eternal life. Therefore, he plainly says: "*That whosoever believeth on him.*" It must be a faith which does not look upon its own works, nor upon its own strength and worthiness, that is, its own quality or the inwrought and infused virtue of the heart, of which the blind sophists dream and imagine, but without dependence on itself, holds to Christ, embracing him as its own bestowed treasure, being assured that on account of him God was moved to love us, but not on account of one's own work, worthiness and merit; for these things are not the treasure that God gave, that is, Christ, God's Son, in whom we must believe.

30. Of what benefit is the gift of faith if it is nothing more than such an empty vessel? Of what value unless one looks upon and comforts one's self in the thought of what is comprehended in it, and what alone makes it precious, so that one may say: Faith may be but a little and insignificant monstrance or pix or box, but in it, nevertheless, there is so precious a gem that heaven and earth cannot contain it.

31. Therefore we so teach from the Scriptures concerning faith – that through it alone we are justified and acceptable before God; because it is faith alone that grasps and retains this treasure, the Son of God. If I weigh this gift and my works in the same balance, the contrast and preponderance is so overwhelmingly great that the holiness of all men is nothing compared with the smallest drop of blood Christ gave and shed for us, to say nothing of all he did and suffered; therefore I can, in no respect, depend upon my virtue and worthiness.

32. And why should we boast so much about our efforts when we learn that we are so situated that we would all be lost forever had not this treasure been given for us? Thereby the glory is taken, not only from all human works, but from the entire Law of God; for, though one possessed it all, and according to his ability complied with all its demands, he still has not attained what is necessary to save himself from eternal destruction. What other purpose have these words: “That whosoever believeth on him should not perish” etc? They are a continual testimony that neither Moses (the Law) nor yet the holiness of all men, could redeem from death or give eternal life. Therefore, everything depends entirely upon this only Son of God.

33. Now, you may see what a sublime and significant matter is embraced in this passage, since the Giver, so great and mighty, the Creator of every creature, does not simply say: Good morning! and bestow a friendly smile; but he loves, yes loves, so sincerely that he does not simply give a beggarly gift of perishable goods, but his greatest and most precious treasure, his Son, who is also Lord of heaven and earth. This love he does not show his friends only, but his enemies, and no creature but the devil himself is less worthy this love than his enemies. For no other purpose did he give himself for them than that he might snatch them from death and hell, and render them certain of eternal life. Of what wonder could one speak or think, that is more marvelous in every particular?

34. However great and unutterable all this is, that is still greater and more wonderful in comparison, that the human heart has been enabled to believe it all. That must indeed be a great heart which can embrace more than heaven and earth can hold. Hence it must be evident what a great, sublime and divine power and work faith is, which can do that which it is impossible for nature and all the world to do, and it is therefore no less a wonder than all the other miracles and works of God. It is even more wonderful than that God became man, born of a virgin, as St. Bernhard says. These things, as we have heard, namely the love of the Giver and of him who was given, and the unworthiness of the recipient, placed side by side, are incomparable as to greatness. On the one hand

everything is so great, and on the other, man's heart is so small and narrow and weak that the in-finiteness of difference is startling and amazing.

35. Should I be told that God has granted to me, above all other men, the gift that I should live on earth several thousand years, in the enjoyment of peace and happiness, and all that my heart desired, I would answer: Nay, that cannot be God's word, it is too much to believe. Who am I, that God should give me such things? How much less can the heart of man realize that God gave him such a treasure, his Son, and with him eternal life and salvation! Who can express this amazing fact? How precious and excellent even this temporal life is! And who would give it for all the kingdoms, all the gold and possessions of this world? But the extent of this life compared to eternal life and its blessings is much less than a single moment. In short, eternal life is inconceivable; we can only try to conceive by subtracting from it, or contrasting it with the loss and misery that is called eternal loss.

36. Now, the Christian must eventually acknowledge that the honor belongs to God, and to Christ the Lord; that God's Word is the truth, and it must denounce man's own unbelief as a lie. Where this acknowledgement is made, the Holy Spirit has already begun with his power and work of faith, and the heart is opened, so that it can lay hold of this treasure, which is greater than heaven and earth; true, the heart proceeds in great weakness, and on earth it can never attain such faith as it should, and does not get beyond the longings and groanings of the spirit, for salvation is inexplicable to man, and the heart must cry out: Oh, that it were true! or: Oh, that one could believe it!

37. Nevertheless such sighs and little sparks of faith are of so much account that God recognizes them as complete faith and says: As thou believest, even so be it unto thee, and since thou hast believed it, thou shalt surely be saved. For this word is a power and strength that is mightier than all the terrors of sin and damnation, and this gift is so great that sin and death and hell are swallowed up by it as is a little drop of water in a glowing furnace, or as a little spark on a straw is extinguished when it falls into the great ocean. If only the heart, in temptation, could recall these words, neither devil nor hell could affright it, and it would joyfully say: Of what should I be afraid? Have I not the Son of God. given to me by the Father, in testimony of which he gives me the Word, which I know is his Word? That cannot lie to me any more than he could lie and deceive me, even though I, alas! cannot believe it as firmly as I should:

38. You say: Yes, I would gladly believe it if I were like St. Peter and St. Paul and others who are pious and holy; but I am too great a sinner, and who knows whether I am predestinated? Answer: Look at these words! What do they say, and of whom do they speak? "For God so loved the world"; and "that whosoever believeth on him." Now, the

world is not simply St. Peter and St. Paul, but the entire human race taken collectively, and here no one is excluded: God's Son was given for all, all are asked to believe, and all who believe shall not be lost etc. Take hold of your nose, search in your bosom, whether you are not also a man (that is, a piece of the world) and belong to the number which the word "whosoever" embraces, as well as others? If you and I are not to take this comfort to ourselves, then these words must have been spoken falsely and in vain.

39. And surely, this has not been preached to any other than to humanity. Therefore, beware lest you exclude yourself and give place to the thought: Who knows whether it has been given to me? For that would be accusing God of falsely speaking in his Word. But, on the contrary, make a cross for yourself with these words, and say: If I am not St. Peter or St. Paul, I am, nevertheless, a part of the world. Had he intended to give it to the worthy only, then he would have had it preached to the angels alone, for they are pure and without sin. He could then not have given it to St. Peter, to David, or to Paul, for they were sinners as well as I. No matter what I am, I know that God's Word is true; and if I do not accept it, then I am committing, above all other sins, this sin also, that I blaspheme the Word of God and the truth, and charge God with lying. *"For God sent not his Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him."*

40. In these words you hear even more forcibly and clearly what are the will and intent of God concerning the world, that is, concerning those who are in sin, and who, therefore, are already under judgment and sentence of condemnation. He takes away everything that would terrify us on account of our sins. He says plainly and clearly that Christ was sent, and his kingdom established, not for the purpose of judging and condemning. Such judgment and sentence have already come upon all men through the Law, because all are born in sin, and are, therefore, consigned to death and to the executioner, and there is nothing lacking but for the sword to be drawn. Now Christ steps between, according to God's command, and orders both judge and jailer to halt, rescues the condemned and sets him free. This is the reason why he comes to help the world, which he found already under condemnation. This is also proved by the words he spoke: "But that the world should be saved through him." These words show very clearly that the world was under condemnation, for why, otherwise, was salvation necessary?

41. But at this time salvation was preached to the Jews, and had not yet been heard by the world generally; but they did not believe that they were in such a condition that Christ had to come and save them, a lost and condemned people; they looked for a Christ who should commend and honor them on account of their Law and their

holiness, therefore they could neither believe nor accept his proclamation. In John 8:33, when he told them that the Son of God should make them free, they retorted: “We are Abraham’s seed, and have never yet been in bondage to any man;” as though they would thereby object: “How dare you say that you have been sent to save us? We are not a condemned people, as the heathen are.

42. But now we hear that Christ has been sent to save those who are judged and condemned; that we should know that he has come to save us. who acknowledge and realize this. For there must some be saved, so that he shall not have come in vain. These are none other than those who are oppressed and terrified on account of their misery and condemnation; to them the friendly words are addressed: “For God so loved the world”, that is, those who feel not love, but only wrath and condemnation. And God sent his Son, not to judge, but to save those who are already judged, etc. To those who do not believe that they are sinners and condemned, the Gospel is preached in vain: for much less will they believe that. they are saved through Christ alone.

III. JUDGMENT UPON BELIEVERS AND THE WORLD

“He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

I. JUDGMENT UPON BELIEVERS

43. Here is the verdict which makes the distinction between the saved and the damned. It does not depend upon how worthy or unworthy you are, for it has already been determined that all are sinners and deserve to be condemned; but it depends upon whether you believe in this Jesus Christ or not. If you believe, then you are acquitted, and the judgment and condemnation taken away: if you will not believe, the judgment will remain upon you; yes it will only become greater and heavier than before, because you simply augment sin by not accepting Christ, who is to free you from judgment and condemnation.

44. And this, again, is a comforting passage with which to oppose the temptation and terrors of timid consciences which sigh for consolation and long to know how they stand in the sight of God. Such should hear and take these passages to heart; to them they are addressed, that they should know that God sent his Son not to judge but to save, and that God has already decreed that whosoever believeth in his Son shall not be judged, and shall have no reason to fear any judgment and condemnation, but is freed.

The Law's judgment and condemnation are taken away from him, and God's grace and eternal life are promised and bestowed upon him through Christ, if he only believes these words.

45. On the contrary, a fearful judgment is passed upon those who do not believe this proclamation, but undertake to appear before God and be saved on the basis of their own holiness and merits; for they are at once denied and cut off from all grace, and included in condemnation, from which they shall find no relief so long as they do not believe, even though they may have done many great and important works and walked apparently in eminent holiness. Christ's condemnation is not waiting them, simply, but they have already been judged through the Law of God, because they did not acknowledge their sins and that, by nature, they were under God's wrath. What is still worse, they try to make themselves appear beautiful and pious before God; moreover, they oppose him with the sin of despising the Son of God, who was given for their reconciliation and redemption. Hence, the eternal wrath and curse must come upon them, because they do not seek forgiveness of their sins in Christ, but increase and confirm them by their contempt. This is what John the Baptist also says, John 3:36: *"He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."*

46. Christ gives the reason for this: "Because he hath not believed," he says, "on the name of the only begotten Son of God." Because everyone is already guilty, being under sin and condemnation, therefore God will not liberate any one, nor receive him, except through this Son, whom he gave and set apart for reconciliation; and that means, therefore: Believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, that is, in the Word which the Son preached of him. For faith cannot see what he here gives, neither can it be grasped and realized with the senses; it apprehends no more than the name which has been given him, and the oral Word, heard with the ears. To this he would hold and bind us, that by faith in it we should escape judgment, and be saved. The rest are justly damned, not because they have sin, but because they despise the Son and will not believe in the name that has been proclaimed to them for their salvation and eternal bliss. For to this name, wherever it is preached and believed, all creation and sin and death must yield, and by it the, devil and all the gates of hell shall be frightened and flee away. *"And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil."*

II. THE JUDGMENT UPON THE WORLD

47. Here the contention begins about this name and proclamation of Christ, and the verdict of condemnation against the unbelieving is manifest, because they do not receive this saying, but, on the contrary, oppose God, and wickedly adhere to their own conceit and arrogance in direct opposition to the clear Word of God and the revelation of his will. This can be nothing but darkness, because it is contrary to the light of his Word, which shines publicly before all the world, bringing believers to the knowledge of God and salvation, but uncovering and revealing the thoughts of others, as the aged Simeon prophesied concerning Christ, Luke 2:35, showing that they are not what they make themselves appear to be before the world when they deck themselves with a false appearance of holiness, but they are contemptible, poisonous worms, pernicious and accursed people.

48. From this contrast which Christ makes above in verse 16, you may see what the world, is; I mean the tender, pious, holy hypocrites and eminent servants of God. They are people who are not only in darkness, that is, in error and ignorance (which could be pardoned), but they at the same time love these things; that is, they uphold and defend and adhere to them, to the displeasure of God and his Word. And so perverse and steeped in Wickedness are they that they bitterly hate both God the Giver and the great and precious Gift, his beloved Son, rejecting this divine love and Gift, notwithstanding their unworthiness. These are, forsooth, loving, pious children, who cannot bear and endure the truth, but hate and reject their own salvation.

49. What shall we say of such wickedness of the world? Who could believe that people on earth could be so wicked and possessed of devils, that even when they hear and see the light of such inexpressible divine love and benefaction, which would bestow upon them eternal life through his Son, nevertheless will not endure this proclamation, but look upon it as the most harmful poison and heresy, against which everybody should close his ears? Yea, though this light is so plain that they can. say nothing against it, but must confess that it is the truth, yet they are so bitterly angry that they neither can nor will accept it, but knowingly oppose it. That, I say, no human heart could believe if Christ had not said so; yea, no one would understand these words if facts and experience had not taught and proved them. It should ever be regarded an accursed, hellish wickedness not only never to inquire in the least about God's Word, to despise his love and grace, and not to honor the truth, but, in addition, knowingly to love and seek his own damnation; as Paul says in Acts 13:46, concerning the Jews, that they judged themselves unworthy of eternal life.

50. That is what they do who call themselves God's people, and are the most holy and pious before the world, full of so-called good works and services before God. They will not suffer in the least that their life and works should be called wicked, as Christ does here. Since the Holy Spirit would show them their sins, and lead them to Christ, that they might be redeemed from their sins and condemnation and be saved, they accuse this doctrine of forbidding and condemning good works, and say that it ought not, therefore, to be tolerated. And so God and his Word must bear the blame of their wickedness, although he would correct them and very willingly help them to lead a godly and blessed life. He has done enough for the world, everything that is necessary to do, in that he has permitted his light to shine for it and offered and certified to it his love and eternal life in Christ. What reason can it now offer why it should not be justly condemned according to its own judgment, and on account of its own guilt? *“For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be revealed. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be manifest, that they have been wrought in God.”*

51. Thus it is proved that their works are evil, because they hate the light and will not suffer themselves to be placed openly in the light, that they may be tried, and that it may be manifest whether they are upright or not, but they seek only to appear well and to shine before men. Just so the world acts in its affairs, even as Christ says, and everyone does as he pleases and desires, and yet does not want to be regarded as having done wrong, but would be considered faultless and pious by all. Although a man in his acts is exceedingly rude in the presence of people, yet he seeks to screen and cover his deeds. That is why no one can be condemned unless he be publicly convicted and confuted. Everyone comes before the court to prove himself to be right and his opponent to be wrong; therefore, in order to get at the truth, his conduct must be exposed through public testimony and proof.

52. Indeed, it is in itself sufficient evidence of the fact that there is something wrong, when one will not allow himself to be taken to task, and is afraid of and resists being brought publicly before the light, or will not suffer information to be given and justice to be done. Even as he who lies nude in bed resists and rages before he will allow the covers to be removed; yes, squirms, wriggles and resorts to whatever expedient he can devise that his nakedness may not be exposed; so every wretch, murderer and adulterer, however wicked he may be, even though his own conscience condemns him, wants to be called a man of honor. Much less will the world submit to be judged in the things which reason does not condemn or censure, and when the devil adorns and veils himself with a most beautiful demeanor and appearance. And so everyone who does that which is wicked wants to be considered pious, pure and holy, and therefore persecutes the

Gospel, because it chastises him.; wherefore, God must continue with his light until it may finally become manifest whose fruit they are who persecute Christ, who would help them and all the world. God's Word, which brings them all grace and blessedness, they blaspheme and reject; pious, innocent people, who confess his Word and love Christ, they exile and murder.

53. This, also, is one of the fruits of the Gospel, that it rebukes and convicts evil, and exposes the devil, who formerly reigned in pomp, unhindered, and in the appearance of God himself. Now, however, he raves and rages because he is so exposed that his presence is apparent to all. Now, it must become manifest which is the true and which the false Church. and who are the true, pious children of God, and who are the devil's children and hypocrites, liars and murderers.

54. "*But he that doeth the truth,*" says Christ, "*cometh to the light*" etc.; that is, he who through the Word of God is brought to a knowledge of his sins, seeks grace and loves Christ, and is also made manifest. Yea, he, himself, comes to the light, holds fast to God's Word, honors the truth, and is willing that all his doctrines, deeds and his disposition may be made manifest; he defies all devils and men, and openly and fearlessly lets himself be seen and heard, proved and persecuted. Even so, God be praised! through our Gospel, pious Christians do, in their confession and in their lives; whilst others, on the contrary, cover their doings and try to justify themselves with lies and deceit, and all kinds of knavery, that they might, notwithstanding that they have been put to shame by the light of our doctrines and teachings, give their doings some coloring. Therefore, by their works and manifestations it may be known who is upright, and who in truth performs such works as are done in God, according to his Word and will, and are pleasing in his sight.

[CONTENT PAGE](#)



[First Page](#)