

The Distinction Between Orthodox & Heterodox Churches

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Introduction

In accordance with God's Word, we firmly maintain a twofold doctrine: first, that God does not only have His children in the orthodox Church, that is, in the visible fellowship where God's Word is preached in all its truth and purity; but that children of God are also to be found in heterodox fellowships where God's Word is not preached in all its purity, but truth is mixed with error. Secondly, however, we also maintain the great difference between orthodox and heterodox churches. What a great difference, according to God's Word, exists between orthodox and heterodox churches will be more exactly set forth in the following Theses. Even we forget this difference only too easily. Indeed, it also happens in our own midst that people who move to other areas and find no orthodox church there, join heterodox churches. Why is that? One cannot always say that these people have already fallen away from the true doctrine in their hearts. But they have forgotten the difference between orthodox and heterodox churches. By taking up membership in heterodox churches, they commit sin and place their souls in danger. Even Lutherans join sectarian churches, or would like to do so, because the sects, for example, have more beautiful churches, are more popular people, and the like. Why? These Lutherans do not rightly and faithfully take note of the existing difference between orthodox and heterodox churches; they do not see the wonderful glory of an orthodox church. Even we pastors and teachers of the Church at times lose courage for work within the Lutheran Church when we observe the greater number and the externally more attractive conditions within the heterodox churches. That happens also because we view these things on the basis of our reason instead of judging the orthodox and heterodox fellowships according to God's Word. Therefore, it is very timely that in these sessions we consider the theme:

1. Every man's first and principal concern should be, that he belong to the Communion of Saints, that is, to the Invisible Church.

II. The Divinely ordained external form of the Church is its orthodoxy. Heterodox church bodies have their existence only by God's permission.

III. It is, therefore, not a matter of indifference which church group a Christian joins; but he has God's earnest command strictly to distinguish between orthodox and heterodox churches, and, avoiding all church fellowship with the heterodox, to adhere only to the orthodox Church.

IV. Likewise, only in the orthodox Church is God given the honor which He requires; and, only in it are souls rightly cared for. Fellowship with heterodox churches militates against God's honor, and is a constant danger for the soul.

V. We should, therefore, regard membership in the orthodox Church not only as our duty, but also as the greatest privilege and highest honor, even when the orthodox Church outwardly bears a very humble form.

VI. The reasons which have been advanced for joining heterodox church bodies, and for remaining in them, partly sound very pious; but they are considered in the light of God's Word, altogether invalid, and originate in our blind, conceited, self-willed, and presumptuous flesh.

I. Every man's first and principal concern should be, that he belong to the Communion of Saints, that is, to the Invisible Church.

All people are by nature under God's wrath because of their sins, and are therefore children of eternal damnation. A terrible condition! But a part of mankind is delivered out of this terrible condition. Although they, too, are sinners, they are, nevertheless, no longer under the wrath of God, but they have God's grace. And, because they have God's grace, or forgiveness of sins, they are also no longer children of damnation, but heirs of eternal life. Who are these fortunate people? They are those who believe in Christ, in a word, the believers, the members of the Christian Church.

This is the Communion, the Church, outside of which there is no salvation. Why? Because without faith in Christ nobody can be saved, as it is written: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." John 3:36. Again: "He that believeth on Him (God's Son) is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already." John 3:18.

Whoever, therefore, desires to escape the wrath of God and eternal death, which he has incurred by his sin, and become partaker of the grace of God and eternal salvation, which have been gained for him by the incarnate Son of God, he must let it be his first and principal concern, that he belong to the Communion of Saints, to that blessed class of people who from the heart believe in Christ as their Savior. This faith is kindled and maintained through the Gospel by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who have acknowledged themselves before God as sinners.

These believers are scattered locally over the whole earth; they are found wherever the seed of the Gospel is sown. They are very different according to education, culture, language, and customs. They do not know each other personally. And yet, they are most intimately connected with one another; they are more closely related to each other than the closest relatives; for the One Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of them all. All have the same faith, namely, that they are saved by God's grace in Christ; all have the same mind, they are one and all subject to Christ. Daily they make the same discoveries, namely, that they are lost sinners, and that God for Christ's sake richly and daily forgives them all sins. They will afterwards also in eternity all have the same experiences, for their lot will be the fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore at the right hand of God. This is the wonderful fellowship of the Christian Church. This Church is invisible in this life. Why? Because we cannot see that which makes a person a member of the Church, namely, faith. Only God, who knows the hearts, can see that. Visible this Church will some day be in yonder life, where its members will walk

no longer by faith, but by sight, where they will be glorified by seeing God, and where they will shine as the brightness of the firmament.

This is the Christian Church spoken of in Matthew 16:18, where we read: "On this rock (namely, on the confession of Christ) I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Again, Eph. 1:22-23: "God set Him (Christ) to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all." So also in Eph. 2:19-22, the members of this Church are described as "fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Corner Stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

The only, absolute requirement for salvation is membership in the Invisible church. In this essay we will deal with the difference between the orthodox and heterodox churches, and in that connection, also of the necessity of outwardly affiliating with the orthodox Church. But this affiliation is not absolutely necessary, indeed, under certain circumstances not at all possible. Take the case of a man who just before his end comes to faith without being able to join a visible church as a member. This circumstance, then, that he did not belong to a Christian congregation, does not at all deprive him of his salvation. Furthermore, it can happen that a Christian lives in a locality where no orthodox church can be found. To join a heterodox congregation is forbidden him by God's Word, but love hinders him from leaving the locality. A prisoner can also be in such a situation, that he must forego fellowship with an orthodox Christian body; and yet, he has, if he is in the faith, God's grace and salvation. The outward membership in a Christian congregation is not absolutely necessary, as if thereby faith first would become true, saving faith. But under certain circumstances outward membership is necessary as a confession of faith.

John Gerhard recognizes a twofold entrance into the Church. The one is the joining of a visible Christian fellowship through the outward confession of faith; the other is the joining of the Invisible Church. The latter occurs through faith in Christ, and is accomplished in that moment when faith in Christ is kindled in the heart of a person by the operation of the Holy Ghost. The latter must occur in every person who wants to be saved, the former need not.

Yes, without saving faith in Christ all outward fellowship with the Church, even with the orthodox Church, avails nothing. Moreover, all outward fellowship without faith makes one a hypocrite. Also those who outwardly belong to the orthodox Church, who have zeal for it, who with their reason strictly distinguish between orthodox and heterodox fellowship are, if they do not truly believe, an abomination to God; they are outside of the Church of Christ and in the domain of the devil. This, too, we must constantly preach; of this we must also constantly remind one another. As also the Apostle Paul exhorts the members of the Corinthian congregation: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith." 2 Cor.

13:5. And, when in this document we insist that a Christian should stay away from all false churches and adhere alone to the orthodox Church, then this also serves the purpose: that we by no means suffer shipwreck concerning our faith, and thus fall away from the fellowship of that Church outside of which there is no salvation.

Of the One Invisible Christian Church it is said in the 7th Article of the Augsburg Confession: "Also they teach that One Holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of all saints." (Trigl., p.47.)

Luther wrote (V.1792) on Psalm 118: "Whoever does not have the right faith and is not holy and righteous, he does not belong in the Holy Christian Church." He who has living faith belongs to the Church; he that does not, whoever or wherever he may be, does not belong to the Church.

Our Confessions warn us not to regard the Church as an earthly association with religious rites, so that all, even the godless, who take part in these rites would be members of the Church.

The Apology says: "For it is necessary to understand what it is that principally makes us members, and that, living members of the Church. If we will define the Church only as an outward polity of the good and wicked, men will not understand that the Kingdom of Christ is righteousness of heart and the gift of the Holy Ghost, (that the Kingdom of Christ is spiritual, as nevertheless it is; that therein Christ inwardly rules, strengthens, and comforts hearts, and imparts the Holy Ghost and various spiritual gifts)." (VII, VIII, Trigl., p.231.)

The Large Catechism says in the Explanation of the Third Article, especially of the words, "I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints": "This is the meaning and substance of this addition: I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms." (Trigl., p. 691.)

In this Communion of Saints there is only one faith and no schism. All Christians are united by one faith and one love. We not only admit that there are children of God in heterodox church bodies, but we maintain also that these children of God are one with us in the faith. They are agreed with us in the central doctrine of Christianity, namely, they believe that they are by themselves lost, but are God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. Therefore, it says here: "In one faith, mind, and understanding." If you ask: how, for example, is this possible under popery, then Luther replies, that in the Pope's church, besides Baptism, there remained also the text of the gospels. Whoever now in faith grasps and holds the Word of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, he belongs to the children of God. If the priest afterwards comes with his preaching of papistical errors, the believer does not accept them.

In his commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, Luther says: "The Church is everywhere in the world, wherever the Gospel and the Sacraments are." And shortly before: "Therefore the Church is everywhere holy, also in those places where even the Enthusiasts and factious spirits rule, insofar of course as they still do not utterly deny and reject Word and Sacrament. For those who altogether deny these things are no Church anymore. But wherever Word and Sacrament essentially remain, there remains a Holy Church." (On Galatians, VIII: 1588ff.)

John Gerhard says, concerning the necessity of joining a visible communion: "If such a time comes, when the visible glory of the Church is lost, then it is not absolutely necessary for salvation to join a visible local congregation; but it suffices that by true faith a person is a member of the universal Church, for of this Church alone it is said properly that outside of it there is no salvation." (L. de ecclesia, par. 101.)

If one claims that for salvation more is necessary than faith in Christ, then the central doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of justification by grace, is denied. For what does this mean, to become righteous, and gain salvation by grace? It means to be declared righteous, and gain salvation through no work done by man, no matter what it is called. Whoever therefore says that the outward joining of a visible church body is unconditionally necessary for salvation, he says thereby, that man becomes righteous and gains salvation not only by grace through faith, but also through this work (joining a church). Thus the Pope ties up salvation with belonging to his realm. Similarly, they err who think that for salvation more is necessary than this, that one by faith belongs to the Communion of Saints.

This first Thesis, it was yet stated, is of the greatest importance. If it is not rightly taken to heart, everything else will do no good. Yes, then one will apply everything that follows in the other theses to his harm; For this we have terrifying examples. At a colloquy in Buffalo the followers of Grabau were confronted with the charge, which was also admitted, that they always proclaimed an unconditional necessity of belonging to the orthodox Church. To clarify the matter, Dr. Walther said to a Buffalo colloquist: "If I heard correctly, you hail from the United Church (a union of Reformed and Lutherans in Germany). You claim that already therein you came to faith." The person addressed acknowledged this. Then, Dr. Walther added: "If you had died at that time, would you not certainly have been saved?" The answer was "No." Most terrible? According to that, faith in Christ would avail nothing unless a man would complete his outward joining of the orthodox Church.

II. The Divinely ordained external form of the Church is its orthodoxy. Heterodox church bodies have their existence only by God's permission.

If a man has become a Christian, and if God does not take him immediately from earth into heaven, he should then not want to stay alone by himself but seek the outward fellowship of other Christians. That is God's will. Consider the time of the Apostles. Wherever these men preached, those who had come to faith by the preaching of the Apostles entered into an outward fellowship with one another. And these communions which developed in the various localities, the Holy Scriptures called churches or congregations. Paul speaks in 1 Cor. 16:19 of the "churches in Asia"; 2 Cor. 8:1 of the "churches in Macedonia"; 1 Cor. 1:2 of the "church of God at Corinth"; Acts 8:1 of the "church at Jerusalem"; yes, in Rom. 16:5 of a "church in the house" of Priscilla and Aquilla. These are the so-called local congregations.

These are not something alongside, or outside, of the universal Christian Church, but they, together with the individual believing souls who are cut off from all outward fellowship with others, make up the universal Christian Church. These local congregations are founded by Christ. And to every local church, Christ has given all spiritual treasures and rights, as we see plainly, for example, in Matt. 18:17-20: "Tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." Here the universal Christian Church is not meant, for you cannot call it together, but the local congregation, as Christ expressly says: "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them."

Every Christian should, if he has the opportunity, join such a local congregation. With respect to the local congregation, Heb. 10:25 says expressly: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." Regarding fellowship in the local congregation, Acts 2:42 speaks with praise: "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship." And verse 44: "And all that believed were together." That Christian sins most grievously who does not join a Christian congregation when he has the opportunity, for such affiliation is God's will. He who refuses to join a Christian fellowship, although he could, resists God's will. After intensive and continued instruction he must finally be told: It is all a lie when you say that you have faith. Yes, the failure to join a Christian congregation can under certain circumstances just as clearly reveal unbelief as when a man is a drunkard, an adulterer, or the like.

Accordingly, it is God's will that a Christian should join a Christian congregation. But if we now look at the congregations which call themselves Christian, we see

that they do not all agree in confession of faith. The question confronts the Christian, which visible church should he join? Or, if he already is a member of a church, as is often the case, should he remain in this fellowship or look for another one? A Christian should and will govern himself in all things according to God's Word. In order to answer this question, we set up, in accordance with God's Word, the general proposition:

"The Divinely ordained external form of the Church is its orthodoxy. Heterodox church bodies have their existence only by God's permission."

God desires to have only an orthodox Church, or, in other words, it is God's will that all Christians should belong only to an orthodox church. This truth is flatly denied nowadays. This accounts for the fact that even Lutherans speak of sectarian churches as "sister congregations." They say, that as God desires to save people out of all nations, so He also desires to have various churches with various faiths. False reasoning is also employed for the purpose of calling the truth of our Thesis into question. They argue: If there are true children of God in heterodox churches, as you yourself concede, then it cannot be true that only the orthodoxy of the Church is pleasing to God. The Holy Scriptures, however, everywhere testify to the truth of our Thesis. Let us here present just a few basic reasons.

That God desires only an orthodox Church is manifest already from the fact that God has given us the Holy Scriptures, and in them has revealed all articles of Christian doctrine. Now, as surely as God has revealed all doctrines in order that they be accepted in faith, yes, under threat of His wrath has forbidden us to add or subtract anything from them, so surely God wants the Church to be orthodox and that alone; For an orthodox Church is one that believes and confesses all the doctrines revealed in Holy Scripture. The correctness of our Thesis is further proved by all passages of Scripture in which it is said that all Christians, no matter of what nation, should have only one set of beliefs, the one revealed in God's Word. In the well-known words of 1 Cor. 1:10, we read: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." There are many differences among Christians in those things which belong to natural life, in culture, manner of living, etc. Christians may also establish different external forms of church liturgy. But in one thing, among Christians, whether they are white or black, educated or not, there should be no difference but the most complete uniformity, namely, in beliefs, in doctrine. This Eph. 4:3-6 also proves: "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Accordingly, as certainly as all Christians should have only the one creed as revealed in Scripture, just as certainly God also wants the Church to be orthodox, and that alone. In Eph. 4:11-14, the Apostle says that Christ gave

some to be Apostles, some to be prophets, etc. For what purpose? That all might come to the unity of the one faith in, and confession of, the Son of God.

That God wants the Church to be orthodox in its external form, is evident also from the commission to the Divinely ordained office of the ministry. For every command of God in Scripture to preach the Word refers only to the preaching of the pure Word. When Christ the Lord says: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), He expressly adds, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:20.) In Jer. 23:28, the Lord speaks to the preachers: "He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." The praise of a true preacher according to Scripture is therefore this, that he preaches God's Word purely, that is, without admixture of his own thoughts. In 2 Cor. 2:17, St. Paul confesses of himself: "For we are not as many which corrupt the Word of God." But those preachers who depart from God's Word, who mix the truth with error, are threatened in Scripture with God's wrath. We read in Jer. 23:31-32: "Behold I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord."

That God wants the Church to be orthodox is evident also from the description which Scripture gives us of Christians. Christ says of them: "My sheep hear My Voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27.) According to the Scriptures, it belongs to the make-up of a Christian that he obeys only the voice of Christ, by faith adheres solely to God's Word. Insofar as the Christians depart from the Word of Christ, they follow another, and deny Christ. In praise of the Jerusalem congregation, it is said: "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." (Acts 2:42.)

Furthermore, all Christians are expressly warned to guard themselves carefully against false prophets. "Beware of false prophets," Christ exhorts them in Matt. 7:15. And St. John impresses upon them, 2 John 10: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine—namely, the doctrine of Christ—, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed," that is, as a brother in the faith. Yes, the orthodoxy of the Church is such a serious thing with God that in the Old Testament, when He employed bodily punishments in the Church, He commanded His believers to stone the false prophets who led the people away from the Lord's commands, even when that false prophet was the nearest relative. Thus we read in that noteworthy passage of Deut. 13:6ff.: "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou has not known, thou nor thy fathers; namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; thou shalt not

consent unto him; nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: but thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die."

Thus God had ordained it in the Old Testament. In the New Testament this bodily punishment is expressly done away with. But with this law in the Old Testament, God has shown what a most serious thing the orthodoxy of the Church is to Him. In the New Testament, Paul expresses something similar when, in Galatians 1:9, he pronounces the curse upon all who stubbornly falsify God's Word.

That God desires to have only an orthodox Church is evident also from the names which are given the Church in the Holy Scriptures. In I Tim. 3:15, it is called "the house of God," a spiritual house that God has built for Himself, and in which God alone is Master. As otherwise in an orderly house, the master's word prevails, so also in the Church, God's house, God's Word alone should rule, rule in everything that it says. The preachers must therefore preach the Word of God alone. He that sets God's Word aside deposes God from being Master of the house. The preachers, as stewards in God's spiritual house, must demonstrate their faithfulness by not preaching their own wisdom, but the pure Word of God. Therefore, we read in I Pet. 4:11: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."

The Church, moreover, is called God's and Christ's kingdom, (John 18:36). As in the domain of an earthly king his word rules, so also in the spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of Christ, Christ's Word alone should rule. For Christ has made His Word the law in His kingdom. He says in John 8:31-32: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." In Isaiah 8:20 we read the well-known words: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them!"

Furthermore, the Church is called the Bride of Christ. She should therefore cleave to Him alone. This is done, first and foremost, in this way that she gives heed alone to the Word of Christ, in faith adheres alone to His Word, and permits nothing to separate her from that Word. Insofar as the Church listens to the word of another, she becomes unfaithful to Christ. Hence, the Israelitic Church, insofar as she fell away from God, is often called an adulteress. Therefore the Church is also exhorted in Psalm 45, verses 10 and 11: "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him." And St. Paul warns the Corinthians, 2 Cor. 11:2-3, against false doctrines by reminding them how the Church, as the Bride of Christ, should not allow herself to be led away from God's Word, and in that way be defiled. In brief, wherever you look in the Scripture and whatever side of the Church you may consider, this truth always confronts us: God wants the Church to be orthodox in

its external form. This truth must really become a living part of us. Then we have the right foundation for judging orthodox and heterodox church bodies.

Luther always comes back to this, that in the Church only the true doctrine should be proclaimed, that is, that the Church should therefore be orthodox. On I Peter 4:11 he writes: "If any man speak, let him speak it as the Word of God: that is a very necessary doctrine in the Church. And if it had been maintained until now, the world would not have been filled with Antichrist's lies and deception.... For in Christendom, affairs are not so conducted as in earthly government and in those things which concern external matters and goods. In the latter men rule as they understand it and as their reason teaches. They have the right to establish law and order and, in accordance with them, command, punish, receive, and give. But in the Church we are dealing with a spiritual government where consciences are bound by God. And what is spoken, taught, commanded, or done there, must be carried out in such a way that you know that it is valid and stands in God's sight; yes, that it proceeds and moves before Him, so that you can say: God Himself has said and done that. For in this house where He lives and rules, He should and will, also as the rightful Master, say and do everything Himself, even though He uses the mouth and hand of men to accomplish it. Therefore, first and above all things, both preachers and hearers must here see to it that in matters of doctrine there be clear and sure proof that such teaching really is the true Word of God, revealed from heaven to the holy patriarchs, prophets, and Apostles, confirmed by Christ Himself and commanded by Him to be taught. For it cannot by any means be tolerated that the doctrine is handled as each individual pleases, or to suit his own fancy and to harmonize it with his human reason and understanding, or to toy and juggle with Scripture and God's Word, so that it is explained, directed, stretched, and patched at will for the sake of pleasing the people or for the sake of peace and unity. For in that case there would be no sure and abiding foundation on which the consciences could rest." In the Church only God's Word should be proclaimed. Insofar as man's word is proclaimed, the Church is no Church at all.

Luther writes concerning the above-mentioned passage, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God": "If anyone wants to speak, let him keep his own words to himself; let them count for something in the earthly government and in the home. Here in the Church he should speak nothing but the Word of the mighty Master of the house: otherwise it is not the true Church. Therefore the rule must be: God speaks. It has to be that way on this earth. If a prince wants to rule, then his voice must be heard in his country and home. Now if that is the case in this miserable life, so much the more should we let the Word of God be heard in the Church and in eternal life. All subjects and governments must be obedient to the word of their lord. This we call administration. Therefore a preacher is God's steward by virtue of His command and office, and dare say nothing else than what God says and commands. And though one does much babbling outside of God's Word; still the Church is not in the chatter, no matter if they should become mad and absurd. They only cry 'church, church, you must

hear the Pope and the bishops.'" (Sermon on the 1st Pentecost Day, XII, 1413 ff.) Insofar as in the Church not God's Word but man's word is proclaimed, the church is no longer God's house, but the devil's. It is a terrible defilement of the house of God where God's Word is not preached in its purity in the Church; and God will severely punish such defilement of His house.

Luther, in the above mentioned reference, writes further: "For this cause we must look to Christ and hear Him, how He describes the true Christian Church against their false hue and cry. For you should and must rather believe Christ and the Apostles, so that you speak God's Word, and do as St. Peter and Christ the Lord here declare: Whoever holds to My Word, there is My dwelling. There is the Master Builder: My Word must remain in it, or it shall not be My house. Our papists want to do it better; let them therefore remain in the danger. Christ says: 'We will make our abode with him,' and there the Holy Ghost operates. It must be a people that loves Me and keeps My commandments. That, in brief, is what He wants.... On the other hand, under earthly government the Christian hears something different, how men should punish the evildoers and protect the good, and of stewardship. But here in the Christian Church it should therefore be a house in which only God's Word is proclaimed." Under earthly government it is indeed different. The citizens of different kingdoms can obey the most widely differing laws. But every citizen is guided by the country in which he lives. If he finds himself in America, he complies with American law; is he in China, then he lives according to Chinese law. It is not thus in the Church. As there is only one Church, one kingdom of Christ on the whole earth, so there is for all citizens of this kingdom, whether they are Americans or Chinese, only one law, the Word of Christ, as it is revealed in the Scriptures. Therefore, Luther also says that it is vain for them to cry "church, church," if God's Word is, nevertheless, not even preached among them.

When Luther discusses this subject, he can never exhaust it to his own satisfaction. Yet another passage may therefore be presented: "From this you can now answer those criers and spewers who have nothing in their big mouths but 'church, church.' Now tell me, dear Pope, what is the Church? Answer: The Pope and his Cardinals. Why listen here, you self-deceived and foolish man, where is it written in God's Word that Father Pope and Brother Cardinal are the true Church of God? Or do you say this perhaps because the fine-feathered parrot and the black jackdaw have babbled this? Christ tells you and me something far different, namely, that is My Church where My Word is preached and maintained pure and unadulterated. Therefore St. Paul warns that we should flee and avoid those who want to lead us away from God's Word. For whoever defiles God's temple, which we are, him shall God in turn destroy, I Cor. 3:17. Now St. Peter also says, I Peter 4:11: Watch yourself, if you desire to preach, then you should preach nothing but God's Word, otherwise you will defile God's Church." (Taken from the same quotation.)

But now there actually exist many heterodox churches, that is, such church bodies which do not in all parts remain with the truth which God has revealed. That there would be such church bodies is foretold in Scripture. This fact should therefore not seem strange to us. St. Paul says to the elders of Ephesus, Acts 20:29-30: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." And these men who will speak false doctrine will succeed in gaining a following. In I Cor. 11:19 the Apostle actually says: "There must be also heresies," that is, parties which will spread false doctrine, "among you."

Now we ask: What is God's will concerning these heterodox church bodies? Especially in our time, as already indicated, it is generally said that it is according to God's will, that there are different churches with different faiths. The different confessions, it is said, are the necessary consequences of this, that God leads persons and nations of differing abilities into the Church. Therefore the different tendencies in the Church, they say, have equal rights. It is said of us that we demand too much when we maintain that all Christians should have the same faith. This view is as wrong as it is widespread. As surely as God has revealed only one doctrine in the Holy Scriptures, and as surely as He commands all Christians to accept this one doctrine, and forbids every departure from it, so surely it is not pleasing to God that there are heterodox church bodies. That such church bodies exist is not desired by God, but only permitted. God's providence (rule of the world) has no more to do with the existence of heterodox church bodies than with every other sin. And this does not contradict the truth, that there are still dear children of God in heterodox churches. God, so to speak, just makes the best He can out of the heterodox church bodies. Also in these church bodies children are born to Him, insofar as in them parts of His Word are still preached. But God does not want them to exist as heterodox church bodies, or insofar as they depart from His Word. This we must firmly maintain on the basis of God's Word. We must remember what these heterodox church bodies, as such, are, namely, churches which have inscribed false doctrine on their banner, and have established a separate communion. The Reformed, as an example, have founded a separate church body by writing on their banner false doctrine concerning Baptism and the Lord's Supper; namely, that Baptism is not the washing of regeneration, and that in the Lord's Supper the true body and the true blood of Christ are not present. That such a church body exists is only by God's permission.

But then, why does God permit heterodox church bodies to arise? The Word of God answers that. Not as though God wants to have heterodox bodies together with orthodox bodies for the sake of variety in the garden of His Church, but in order that the Christians keep their distance from heterodox church bodies. I Cor. 11:19, indeed, says: "There must be also heresies among you." But he does not add: God wants it that way in the Church, and now you have free choice to belong to any kind of group; but rather: "That they which are approved may be

made manifest among you." Thus, God permits the formation of sects also for this purpose, to test His own, whether they are sincere and honest about His Word, whether they will hold fast to His Word also then, when, under very deceptive circumstances, they are perhaps tempted to depart from His Word, and cling to error. We find proof for this in Deut. 13:3. This passage says in respect to a false prophet, even when he comes with signs and wonders: "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." Thus, these are times of trial for the Christians when God permits false prophets to come. God then tests the obedience of His Christians. For it is not God's will that the Christians should join with false prophets, but that they should keep away from them, follow the voice of their Shepherd alone, and reveal themselves as the lambs of Christ, as Luther says in his writing against Hans Wurst: "When it happens that people disagree in doctrine, it has this effect, that it separates them and reveals who the true Christians are, namely, those who keep the Word of God in all its purity and excellence." (Erlanger Ed. 26, 28.)

The same author writes: "These are not the words of an angry judge, but they are fatherly words. As though He wanted to say: I have given you My Word that you accept it with a good and peaceful heart, and hold to it; but I will send false apostles and will try you out, whether in all seriousness you will love Me and My Word." (W.I, 2299.)

III. It is, therefore, not a matter of indifference which church group a Christian joins; but he has God's earnest command strictly to distinguish between orthodox and heterodox churches, and, avoiding all church fellowship with the heterodox, to adhere only to the orthodox Church.

If, as we have seen in the Second Thesis, it is true that God wants only orthodox churches, and if the existence of heterodox churches is to be traced back to Divine permission only, then, as stated now in the Third Thesis, it is "not a matter of indifference which church group a Christian joins."

Many Christians suppose that it makes no difference which church group a Christian joins, and they act accordingly. When they come to a place where any kind of Protestant church is found, they join it as members. There are people who were successively Reformed, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, depending upon the place where they lived. And we should not be surprised when this happens among the sects, for they are not certain about their distinctive doctrines, because they are not grounded in God's Word.

But even such who want to be Lutherans, and who confess that the doctrine which they have learned from the Lutheran Catechism is the correct one, often have few misgivings about joining heterodox congregations. They, therefore, also act accordingly, as though it makes little difference to which church group a Christian belongs. But this is altogether wrong. Only then would this be a matter of indifference if, before God, there were no difference between orthodox and heterodox churches. But, now, there is a great difference, as we have seen in our Second Thesis, — a difference so great that God wants only the orthodox Church, and, on the other hand, in His Word clearly condemns heterodox churches. Therefore, it is the duty of every Christian who wants to be guided by God's Word alone to distinguish strictly between orthodox and heterodox churches. Before he joins a church group, he must answer the question: Is this church orthodox or not?

God also expressly requires that of Christians. "Beloved," we read in I John 4:1, "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits; whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." And the Lord Jesus exhorts all Christians (Matt. 7:15): "Beware of false prophets." So, those Christians who do not want to distinguish between true and false prophets, and, consequently, also not between orthodox and heterodox churches, are disobedient to an express command of God.

In our day, people either do not make this distinction at all, or at least not in the right manner. They not only fail to declare it the Christian's duty to distinguish between orthodox and heterodox church bodies, but they even declare it to be a

Christian virtue when people pay no attention to the doctrinal differences. Yes, they call it presumptuous when a church body maintains that in all articles of Christian faith it has the revealed truth of God's Word. Thus, we are ridiculed in the General Synod, yes, even in the Council, because we make a strict distinction between orthodox and heterodox churches. The sectarians, indeed, also speak of the "orthodox," that is, right-teaching preachers and church bodies. These, however, are not people who adhere to all doctrines of the Christian faith, but such who, in the general falling away, at least still confess a few important doctrines. They call such church bodies "orthodox," which perhaps still believe that the Holy Bible is God's Word, and that Christ is God's Son; also that through conversion man comes to God, and through faith in Christ can be saved, even though they at the same time deny other doctrines clearly revealed in God's Word. But that can never be called the right manner of distinguishing between orthodox and heterodox church bodies. Whoever judges on the basis of God's Word can call only those teachers and church bodies orthodox which are obedient to God's command, adding nothing to His Word and taking nothing away from it.

If you therefore ask on what basis a Christian must distinguish between heterodox and orthodox churches, the answer is: On the basis of beliefs, on the basis of doctrine. Only on that basis can a true judgment be reached; not on the basis that outwardly a Christian life appears to prevail in a congregation or that the minister gives the impression of being a pious man. That can all be sheep's clothing which conceals the errorist, as Christ the Lord says in Matt. 7:15: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing." Moreover, you cannot judge on the basis that a man appeals to Scripture and quotes Scripture; but Christians must examine whether the doctrine of Scripture is really also being taught. The devil, too, in the temptation of Christ, quoted Scripture.

Yes, Christians should not even be influenced by signs and wonders, for those wonders may likewise be only seeming wonders, deception, and Satanic delusion. Already in the Old Testament, God called the attention of His believers to this. In the passage already quoted, Deut. 13:1-3, it is stated: "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." This is a very powerful passage to show that in judging church bodies and teachers we should look alone at the doctrine to see whether they teach God's Word purely and clearly. Even signs and wonders are not infallible distinguishing marks. These can look outwardly like wonders, but in reality be deception, or an effect produced by the devil. Signs and wonders should influence us only then when they are accompanied by the correct doctrine. If false doctrine is present, we should call him who presents it a false prophet, even if he would show us things that are ever so astounding. The

Pope's coming, according to 2 Thessalonians 2, is after the working of Satan with all kinds of lying power and signs and wonders. Of the Last Times, Christ the Lord says, Mat.24:24: "There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Accordingly, the Christians have the duty on the basis of doctrine to distinguish between orthodox and heterodox churches.

But can they do this? Certainly! For Christ the Lord tells them to do this, and this at the same time implies that by God's grace they can do it. Many suppose that only pastors are in a position to distinguish between orthodox and heterodox churches. But this is altogether wrong. Precisely all Christians, and not only the pastors, are exhorted by Christ the Lord, in Matt. 7:15: "Beware of false prophets." And John says: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1); this passage is likewise addressed to all Christians alike. Christ the Lord has so arranged it, that all His dear Christians, the unlearned as well as the learned, can distinguish between truth and falsehood in spiritual things. He has revealed all doctrines in perfectly clear passages, in passages which can be understood by the unlearned as well as the learned. The Holy Scriptures are such a testimony, that makes wise also the simple (Psalm 19:7). When, therefore, a Christian simply holds to the Word of Scripture, then he can very well distinguish between truth and error.

That the Christians sometimes are confused and imagine that they do not know which is the true doctrine, is due to the fact, that they lose sight of the Word of Scripture, that they want to judge this matter with their blind reason, and not with God's Word, which refutes all errors as soon as it is brought into the discussion. Thus, for example, there once was a dispute in a Methodistic gathering concerning perfect sanctification of a Christian already in this life. Most of them claimed that a Christian, already here on earth, can be entirely without sin. Then, one man arose and said that he had committed no sin for years! Another arose and, instead of making a long reply, simply quoted 1 John 1:8: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." By this one passage all were silenced. Before the eyes of all, the error was condemned by the clear Word of God. And so it is with respect to every doctrine.

The Christian who knows his Small Lutheran Catechism can defend himself with this knowledge against all errors, for the fundamental articles of Christian doctrine are the very ones against which the errorists offend.

Gerhard writes: "As the Church differs from secular associations which are outside the Church through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, so it also differs from heretical communions which are in the Church through the pure preaching of the Word and the correct administration of the Sacraments." (L. de ecclesia par. 131.)

We distinguish between erring churches, and the godless mass of people outside of the Church. The latter are those communions that, though they still call themselves churches, nevertheless no longer teach anything of the saving Gospel, or as our older teachers expressed it, have no essential parts of the revealed saving truth at all anymore. In such church bodies, insofar as their doctrine is concerned, nobody can come to saving faith. Such communions in our day are the Unitarian groups. These teach no Triune God. Consequently, they also do not teach that Jesus Christ is true God and as true God became man, to redeem mankind by His substitutionary life, suffering, and death. Consequently, nobody within this communion can come to faith in Christ as the Savior of sinners; accordingly, this group and similar ones no longer merit the name of "Christian fellowship." They are altogether outside of the Christian Church, as it is also confessed by our Church in the first article of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession. We do not place these wholly un-Christian groups on the same level with heterodox churches. In all these heterodox churches it is still confessed that Christ is God's Son, and that He died for the redemption of man, though indeed at the same time many errors are also being preached. But, nevertheless, souls can still come to faith in these churches. Now, we are not dealing here with the difference between the orthodox Church and the world, but with the difference between the orthodox and the heterodox Church, that is, between churches which confess the revealed truth in all articles of doctrine, and such churches which reject the truth and support error in a number of teachings.

Therefore a Christian can and should distinguish between orthodox and heterodox churches. He should then also act according to this knowledge. While avoiding all fellowship with the heterodox, he should adhere only to the orthodox Church. This God's Word declares in all passages which admonish the Christian not to listen to false prophets, but to flee from them. For by belonging to heterodox congregations you listen to their preachers, the false prophets, and thus do the very opposite of that which Christ has commanded regarding false teachers. The passages already quoted, therefore, belong here: Matt.7:15: "Beware of false prophets"; and 2 John 10,11: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine" - the doctrine revealed in God's Word, the doctrine of Christ - "Receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed," namely, as a brother in the faith. That you should not become a member of a heterodox fellowship is set forth also in Acts 20:30,31. Here the Apostle says: "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." And for that time he gives the warning: "Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears," that is to say, abide in the true doctrine which in the last three years I have taught you with such great labor and care, and do not adhere to those who speak "perverse things."

Then, 2 Cor. 6:14-18 says most expressly: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ

with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come Out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Objections have been raised against the use of this passage as proof that God has forbidden fellowship with heterodox churches. The objectors claim that this passage speaks of unbelievers, and not of erring believers. But erring churches are, to the extent that they err, also unbelieving. They are unbelieving with respect to quite a number of Bible passages. And to this they add the terrible sin, that on the basis of their errors they have established sectarian communions in the Christian Church. Thereby they split up Christendom and oppose, fight against, the orthodox Church. Word for word, the passage, 2 Cor. 6, applies to the erring churches insofar as they are such.

It says: "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" To preach false doctrine, and to believe false doctrine is the greatest wickedness there is, a sin against the First Commandment. Luther stresses this so frequently. He always repeats: "False doctrine is a sin against the First Commandment." Whoever sets aside God's Word, twists God's Word around, puts his own meaning into God's Word, he does not permit God to be his God, he acts unrighteously. God often says in His Word: "Thou shalt not steal." But just as clearly and even much oftener we find it said in Scripture: You shall not believe false doctrine, you shall not preach false doctrine, you shall not listen to false doctrine. Now, just as he is unrighteous who steals, contrary to God's command, so especially also is he unrighteous who, contrary to the equally clear command of God, preaches, accepts, or promotes false doctrine, and that in any amount whatever. When God says you must not steal, then you should not steal even a little bit. The same holds true in respect to hearing and preaching false doctrine. You already become a partaker of unrighteousness by spreading and advancing only one doctrinal error. The first part of Christian righteousness and Christian life is the trusting acceptance of the whole Word of God.

We read further: "What communion hath light with darkness?" But false doctrine is darkness, just as true, revealed doctrine is the light in this world. "What concord hath Christ with Belial?" All false doctrine is a work of the devil. It is lying in spiritual things against God. And the real father of this lying is the devil. Whoever supports false doctrine is doing the devil's work. "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" The Church is God's temple, and it is His temple for the very reason that God's Word is proclaimed therein. Insofar as man's doctrine, error, is preached in the Church, you teach the worship of a different god than the true one who has revealed Himself in Scripture. Yes, insofar as a different doctrine than God's Word is proclaimed in the Church, you really turn

God's house into a temple of idols. That the coming out from among them, of which 2 Cor. 6 speaks, applies in particular to separation from the heterodox, is set forth in Rom. 16:17, where we read: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."

The objection is raised: "You yourselves admit that also in heterodox bodies there are still dear children of God, and yet by separating from these churches, you separate yourselves from these children of God; yes, you condemn them by avoiding these heterodox churches. In that case, isn't it better to practice fellowship with the heterodox?" First of all, we answer: No! It cannot be better, because God expressly forbids us to do this. Moreover, we do not even separate ourselves from the children of God among the sects, but from the sects as such. Rather, the sects separate these dear children of God from us. They hold those who belong to us — for children of God are determined to accept the whole Word of God — captive among themselves. So these believers must outwardly support the wicked cause of the sects while in their hearts they belong to us. These children of God would at once come over to an orthodox congregation if they were better informed. It is also for the benefit of the children of God among the heterodox that we refuse church fellowship to these churches. Thereby we are constantly reminding them that they are in the wrong camp. According to God's Word, Christians do not belong in the company of those who openly contradict some doctrines of Christ. Many a person for this reason also steps out of the wrong camp into the right one.

It must also by all means be held, that we do not cause any divisions in the Church when we avoid fellowship with the heterodox. According to Rom. 16:17, they cause divisions and offenses in the Church who teach doctrines besides the revealed truth. According to the Word of God, the situation is this: Whoever adheres to false teachers, and thereby strengthens their cause, cooperates in the division of the Church. But he that avoids false teachers and their followers, and practices no fellowship with them, is engaged in the holy work of preventing divisions within Christendom. But, sad to say, the devil has been successful here in falsifying the concepts and the language. The destroyers of unity are called the promoters thereof, and, on the other hand, the promoters of unity are called the destroyers thereof.

Now, what is included in avoiding all fellowship with the heterodox? It does not include that you avoid also all civil association with the heterodox. It also does not include that you should not occasionally, opportunely, speak with the heterodox about spiritual matters. We should rather do as St. Peter exhorts in 1 Peter 3:15-16: "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ." From our association with them, the heterodox should also notice that we have no passion

for quarreling and condemning, but that we are God-fearing, truth-loving, peaceful people who act as we do only because we respect God's Word. — By the Command of God, which forbids fellowship with the heterodox, everything is forbidden whereby we strengthen the evil work of the heterodox body.

Christians, therefore, should not become members of heterodox bodies, indeed, under no circumstances. If in a certain place no orthodox church is found, the Christian must be content with private, home worship, for God has nowhere given release from this word: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." Rom. 16:17. That divinely commanded avoiding of heterodox churches includes also this, that a Christian under no circumstances contribute to the building funds of sects, or even to the expenses of the Roman Church, for thereby he promotes heterodox churches. And a Christian should then, when he is approached for such a contribution, briefly and earnestly give the reason for refusing his support. He should openly state that according to God's Word he is obliged to reject the false doctrine which the heterodox church teaches and therefore cannot help to bring it into house and home. You should in such cases not brush off those who desire an offering, perhaps by saying that you have no money, etc. Then they think that you are merely too stingy to give them something. No, here is the opportunity frankly and openly to confess your faith.

The following testimonies were pointed to as a confirmation of what was set forth in Thesis III.

After the Apology makes the concession that also the Baptism performed by unbelieving pastors in the name of the Church is effective, it continues: "Impious teachers are to be deserted (are not to be received or heard) because they do not act any longer in the place of Christ, but are antichrists. And Christ says Matt. 7:15: Beware of false prophets. And Paul, Gal. 1:9: "If any man preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed. " (Trigl. p.243-5, par. 48.)

Smalcald Articles: "Paul commands that godless teachers should be avoided and execrated as cursed, Gal. 1,8; Titus 3,10. And 2 Cor. 6, 14 he says: Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what communion hath light with darkness? To dissent from the agreement of so many nations and to be called schismatics is a grave matter. But divine authority commands all not to be allies and defenders of impiety and unjust cruelty." (Trigl. p.517, par. 41.)

Furthermore: "Because Paul, Gal. 1.7f., enjoins that bishops who teach and defend a godless doctrine and godless services should be regarded as accursed." Trigl. p.525, par. 72.)

Luther says: "Whoever knows that his pastor teaches Zwinglianism, should avoid him, and rather forego receiving the Sacrament all his life than to receive it from him, yes, rather also die and suffer all things." (Warning against Zwinglianism. XVII, 2440.)

IV. Likewise, only in the orthodox Church is God given the honor which He requires; and, only in it are souls rightly cared for. Fellowship with heterodox churches militates against God's honor, and is a constant danger for the soul.

God's Word revealed in Scripture is God's honor. As God in His Word has revealed Himself to us human beings, so He wants to be honored and worshiped by us human beings. As men take their stand toward God's Word, so they take their stand towards God. This we dare not forget. We mortal beings have God here on earth only in His Word. When by God's grace we have arrived in yonder life, we will see God face to face. Whoever seeks God here on earth, must seek Him in His Word; whoever wants to keep company with God, must keep company with God's Word; whoever claims that he loves God, must prove his love by loving God's Word, as Christ our Lord expressly says: "If a man love Me, he will keep My words." John 14:23. Therefore, we also say: Whoever would honor God, must honor Him in His Word. And what does this include? He must accept all of God's Word as inviolable truth. He must accept God's Words as they read and not take the liberty to explain things away, or misconstrue them, because the clearly expressed sense of a passage is against his reason. Neither does he have the right to make a selection of the doctrines revealed in God's Word and accept some, but reject others. God's honor demands that we accept and keep all His Words.

Let us now apply this to the difference between orthodox and heterodox churches. In the orthodox Church all of God's Word is respected as truth to be kept unbroken, all Words of God are accepted, as they read, without any pet personal interpretation; all doctrines revealed in the Holy Scriptures are believed and confessed. Thus in the orthodox Church God is honored in all His Words; to Him alone is given that honor which He demands. In the heterodox churches, on the other hand, all of God's Word, revealed by God in the Holy Scriptures, is, as a matter of fact, not accepted. God's Word is tampered with, in order to gain a sense that is pleasing to man's reason. Of those doctrines revealed in Scripture, some are denied altogether, others are twisted; doctrines are also set forth as divine which are not at all contained in God's Word. Thus, in heterodox church bodies God's honor is diminished, yes, disgraced.

But right here the leaders of heterodox church bodies assure us, that they place God's honor above everything and seek to honor God in all things. Let us firmly maintain this over against them, that God is honored or despised to the same degree that His Word is honored or despised. They must demonstrate that they honor God in all things by letting God's Word as it reads be the deciding factor in all doctrines. If they assent to God's Word in all doctrines, good! Then, indeed, they truly honor God; then they also cease to be heterodox. But if they continue

to misconstrue God's Word, to twist God's Word, and cast it away, then they, in spite of their assurances to the contrary, should not be allowed to talk us into believing that they honor God. That is the case even with the honor of an earthly king. His subjects must demonstrate that they honor him by submitting to the laws which he issues. If they pay no attention to his decrees, and at the same time with fine talk act like loyal subjects in the presence of the king, then that is hypocrisy. Now Christ is King in His Church, in His spiritual kingdom. He has made His revealed Word, the Holy Scriptures, the law of His kingdom. He requires of His spiritual subjects, that they accept all of His Word. Now when you explain away His Word and in part reject it, then you are in rebellion against Christ as the sole Ruler in His kingdom. And if, in this connection, you act very humble and pious, then that is either great ignorance or pure hypocrisy.

Let us by no means forget that God is either honored or else despised by man's attitude toward His Word. We are only too easily inclined to lose sight of this truth. We rather put at the head of the list certain outward, striking marks among those works by which we are to demonstrate our Christianity. The works of charity towards the needy and forsaken are regarded above others as signs of genuine piety. Of course, these works also must be found in a Christian's life. He that does not do them, although God calls upon him to do these particular works, too, will some day hear from the mouth of Christ the words: "I was hungry and ye gave Me no meat," etc. "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Matt. 25. But the first and foremost work whereby a person is to give proof of his Christianity is, and remains, surely this, that he from the heart respects God's majestic Word, believes it, submits to it, does not deny any of it, but confesses it wholly and fully. The Lord says: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word." Is. 66:2. "If a man love Me, he will keep My Words." John 14:23. To accept God's Word in humble faith is obedience to the First Commandment. As surely as the First Table of the holy Ten Commandments precedes the Second, so surely the trusting acceptance of His Word is also the first part of God-pleasing piety. This first part of piety is also the basis for all other good works. Without a sincere reverence for God's Word, all external works, even if they appear to others to be ever so impressive, are of no value before God. Let us not forget what Luther so often says: False doctrine, the departure from God's Word, is a sin against the First Commandment. To the extent that a person departs from God's Word, to that extent he separates himself from the authority of God, follows after other gods, and profanes God's name.

The objection, indeed, is raised that the heterodox church bodies mean no evil. Of course, the Christians in these churches intend no evil: it is due to their ignorance, that they do not confess the whole Word of God. But the founders and leaders of sects have evil intent; and the devil, the originator of all false doctrine, wants to rob God of His honor, and souls of their salvation. But, if you say: In the heterodox churches they are only indifferent to God's Word, then we should answer: Indifference to God's Word is disrespect for God. A Christian should not

be indifferent to God's Word; rather, God's Word should rate higher in his estimation than everything in the world. Christ says: "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 5:19. We must say with Luther: "I feel that every Word of God makes the world too narrow for me." That is rightly honoring God!

Luther writes concerning this matter: "God says: Their worship is idolatrous and false who use My name only with their mouth. Indeed I hear My Name, says He. They call Me Creator of heaven and earth, but altogether in violation of the Second Commandment. For they do not in sincerity thus call Me Creator; yes, what is more, they corrupt the worship with commandments of men. 'They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.' Is. 58:2. But I will not be worshiped with such service and teaching which men have chosen. But in fear before Me you shall serve Me, that is, that you accept My Word in faith, as it is written in the last chapter of Isaiah, v. 2: 'To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word'; such people shall serve Me. Likewise Isaiah in chap. 8, v.13: 'Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. And He shall be for a sanctuary.'" (St. L. Ausg. II, 721 to 1 Mos. 31, 33-55.) And (1,1538): "However, let none ever fear God except alone in His Word, as it is written in Exodus 20:3,4: 'Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.' Where God reveals Himself in His Word, there serve Him, there show Him honor; then you are truly God-fearing, as you should be. Therefore we tread upon, reject, Pope, factions, and sects, we are not afraid of them; neither do we honor those who establish a worship of God of their own invention, outside of and against God's Word, those who condemn the true religion and correct teaching, and call it heresy. Therefore they fear where there is no cause to fear; and where there is cause for fear, they do not fear at all."

Let us, additionally, show by the contents of several doctrines how by falsifying them God's honor is diminished. God's Word teaches that Christ has redeemed all people and that God would have all men to be saved. To honor God rightly, we must accordingly believe that God desires the death of not a single sinner, but that according to God's will each sinner should, by faith in Christ, obtain eternal life. See, therefore, how God is dishonored, and what a false picture is drawn of Him by the false teaching which claims that God has redeemed, and wants to save only a part of mankind through Christ. No, we should think thus of God: As the light of the sun is universal and shines on all people, so also in Christ the Divine sun of grace is risen upon all people, without exception, giving them light unto spiritual and eternal life.

Furthermore, God's Word teaches that those who obtain salvation are converted and saved alone by God's grace in Christ, so that no human being can glory in himself above others, but each one must confess: "That I now am converted, that Thou alone hast done." But the synergists, that is, certain false teachers, claim

that a man by his own efforts, by his good conduct, etc., brings it about that he, in preference to others, is converted. They thereby do not allow God alone the glory for their conversion and salvation, but ascribe this glory partly to themselves.

The Reformed, and all Reformed sects, deny the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Through this they detract from God's honor. Apart from the fact that such do not accord Christ the honor of believing His Word, consider how gloriously the love of Christ beams on us poor sinners when we in accordance with His Word firmly hold that He even gives us as a seal His body and blood for the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins! Whoever vitally understands this will, in his heart, really sing praises to God. Whoever, on the other hand, regards the Lord's Supper as a mere memorial feast in which there is nothing else present than bread and wine, no such praise of God will be found in his heart.

Furthermore, also this is a difference between the orthodox and the heterodox Church, that only in the orthodox Church are souls rightly cared for, while fellowship with the heterodox churches is a constant danger for souls.

No doctrine in Holy Scripture is given us by God without a purpose, but with each doctrine God has our salvation in mind, namely, that we should come to faith in Christ, be kept in faith, and thus by the power of God through faith be preserved unto salvation. Thus we read in John 20:31, at the end of John's Gospel — and what applies to this Gospel applies to all of Scripture —: "These (things) are written, that ye might believe," etc. Whoever, therefore, cuts off a part of Bible doctrine, cuts off a part of that which should bring him to faith and keep him in it. We read, furthermore, in 2 Tim. 3:16: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." And in Romans 15:4: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime (namely all Scriptures of the Old Testament) were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Thus, all doctrines revealed in Scripture relate to our salvation. They serve this purpose, that they correctly reveal God's will regarding us human beings, so that we might in faith know God as a gracious God, that in temptation we might have rich comfort, that patience might remain with us in affliction, and that we might firmly cling to the hope of eternal life. Whoever, now, detracts from the doctrines revealed in the Scriptures or falsifies them, takes away from the saving doctrine, detracts from the comfort so necessary for us poor sinners and intended for us by God.

Let us make this clear by considering several examples. Whoever falsifies that doctrine, that only by grace for Christ's sake through faith in Christ we have forgiveness of sin and eternal life; whoever, then, ascribes the obtaining of God's grace in whole or in part to our works or our better conduct, makes it impossible for us to be sure of God's grace and our salvation. For he who has an awakened conscience, and knows a little about himself, must confess with Paul that in him,

that is, in his flesh, dwelleth no good thing. Now, if grace and salvation rest, even only partly, on our own worthiness, then we can never become sure of them, but must spend all our life in doubt and uncertainty.

The doctrine of the free grace of God in Christ, however, is denied not only by the Pope, but is also corrupted by all the sects. How soul-destroying the doctrine of work-righteousness is, as it is promoted by the papacy, we can see in Luther. In spite of his honorable and strict life, he sank ever deeper into doubt concerning God's grace. And he would have been ruined altogether in body and soul if he had not, by God's grace, come to the realization that the forgiveness of sins does not rest on our works, but altogether on God's mercy in Christ. With this knowledge the certainty of grace entered into his heart.

But most of the time, the sects teach in such a way, that the grace-hungry souls can have no sure comfort. The almost universal practice of sectarian preachers is to offer the comfort of the Gospel only then when sinners have first ceased from sin and changed their ways. Whereas, a true Christian knows, that there can be no change in a person as long as he does not believe the grace of God.

A person who has come to the knowledge of his sin needs much comfort. For that reason, God has opened many different channels of comfort in the Means of Grace which He ordained. Not only through the preaching of the Gospel does He grant us forgiveness of sins, but also through holy Baptism, and through the holy Supper, He bestows upon and seals for each sinner in particular the forgiveness of sins. Even as it is written, that we are baptized "for the forgiveness of sins," and that in the Lord's Supper Christ gives us His sacrificial body and shed blood as a seal that we through the suffering and death of Christ have forgiveness of sins. Yes, Christ the Lord has, in addition, also ordained Absolution in the words: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them," so that a poor sinner, when he hears the Absolution out of a fellow human being's mouth, can be certain his sins are forgiven before God in heaven. But now the sects not only deny these Means of Grace, they also declare it to be misleading and productive of carnal security if one tries to become certain of the forgiveness of sins through Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution. So they stop up the channels through which Christ wants rich comfort to flow to His people.

It is, of course, true: if someone on the basis of the preached Gospel, yes, on the basis of only one passage (for example, "God so loved the world," etc., "The blood of Jesus Christ," etc.) believes in the forgiveness of sins, he really has forgiveness of sins and, in general, all the spiritual gifts merited by Christ, and can die saved. His faith which is based on only one Gospel passage has a divine foundation. For that reason also, many within the sectarian churches are saved, although they are prevented by sectarian doctrine from making the right use of their Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution. They should, however, make use of that which Christ has richly supplied His own. Thus, in the heterodox churches the rich comfort meant for them by Christ is spoiled, and therefore such

churches are not the right dwelling place for them. Souls are not rightly cared for among the sects.

There is, of course, a great difference between those who grow up in heterodox churches and out of ignorance remain in them — they can with their unrecognized sins be saved —, and those who from childhood on have learned the truth, but join a heterodox church in order to please others, for the sake of convenience, or perhaps even on account of some rebuke administered to them in the orthodox Church. These commit a wilful sin, which becomes a hindrance to their salvation. That even in the heterodox churches people can be saved cannot benefit us who know that a Christian should not be found in heterodox churches.

The harm of union between orthodox and heterodox churches can be made clear by an example. Three neighboring farmers each have a brook; the one brook has clear, pure water; the second has cloudy, muddy water; and the third has stagnant, impure water. The proposal is made to combine the three brooks in order to form a bigger, more impressive-looking stream. "No," says the owner of the pure water, "I want to keep my clear water; if you wish clear water, then get it from me; I'll still have enough." Thus the orthodox Church ought also to refuse union with the heterodox Church, in order that the water of life may not be mixed with any deadly ingredients.

The danger of staying in a heterodox church becomes clearly evident also when considered from still another viewpoint. For a Christian, it is necessary above all that the Word of God remain for him immovably and incontestably certain. Therefore David prays, Ps. 119:38: "Stablish Thy Word unto Thy servant." When a sinner is in temptation and peril of death, when the waters of Belial roar about him, and the Foe accuses and assails him with the charge: "You are a disgraceful sinner and therefore damned," then there is only one means of deliverance. At such a time, words such as these must be impressed upon him: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John 1:7. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acception, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." 1 Tim. 1:15. If a sinner accepts these words as they read and regards them as sure and certain words, then he is confident in the midst of death, and his heart becomes peaceful in the mightiest storm of temptation. But in heterodox churches the Word of God is constantly made uncertain for the Christian. That is to say, in order to justify their false doctrines, these churches must constantly pervert God's Word, they must disregard God's Word as it reads, they must continually practice all kinds of tricks with the Word of God. Several examples should make this clear.

Those who claim that Baptism is not a Means of Grace, no washing of regeneration, must continually deny these words of Scripture, Gal. 3:27: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." Also, Acts 2:38: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Again, Titus

3:5: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Whoever denies the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper must pervert the words of institution where Christ the Lord, speaking of that which He gives His Christians to eat, says: "This is My body," and, speaking of that which He gives to them to drink, says: "This is My blood." Likewise, the Words in 1 Cor. 10:16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"

Whoever does not make conversion and salvation dependent solely on the grace of God, but also on the conduct of man, he must actually cross out hundreds of Bible passages. He must strike all passages which testify to the spiritual death, the thoroughly corrupted nature of man, its enmity against God, etc.: Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13f.; Gen. 8:21; John 3:5; Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14. Furthermore, he must cross out all those passages which ascribe faith to the grace and work of God alone: Eph 1:19-20; Phil. 1:29; Col. 1:3-5. Moreover, he must strike all those passages which declare that we are righteous alone through faith, Rom. 3:28,24; 1 Cor. 4:7; and that we are kept by the power of God unto salvation, 1 Pet. 1:5; Phil. 1:6.

Thus in heterodox churches, in order to defend false doctrine, God's Word must continually be denied. It is rightly said: "It costs nine lies to maintain one lie." Whoever allows himself such liberties with the Word of God, let him beware, lest the devil also make this clear Word doubtful for him in the hour of death: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John 1:7. Therefore, staying in heterodox churches is a very dangerous thing for the soul. You must avoid them, so that you may retain a firm and certain Word of God. As those two hundred, who in their simplicity went with Absalom, had to share the danger of the rebels, so also the Christians among the heterodox must share the danger for the soul which false doctrine brings to it.

Furthermore, consider this: All doctrines of the Bible are connected with one another; they form a unit. One error draws others in after it. Zwingli's first error was the denial of the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. In order to support this error, he had to invent a false doctrine of Christ's Person, of heaven, of the right hand of God, etc. If one error is firmly held, the whole Word of God logically falls, and it is alone by God's grace if then not all Divine truths are torn out of the heart by the devil.

Luther tellingly answers the objection of the Zwinglians, that they erred in only one point, and that, therefore, fellowship should not be denied them: "'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.' Gal. 5:9. This is a warning which St. Paul regards as important, and which we, too, especially in our day, should rightly

regard as important. For the factions, which claim that Christ's body and blood are not present in the Lord's Supper, censure us, and slanderously say of us that we are quarrelsome, hard-hearted, and unfriendly, that for the sake of the single article concerning the Sacrament, we offend against Christian love and break up the unity of the churches. They believe, therefore, we should not regard this article so high and great (which, they say, is of little consequence, and that, of course, you cannot be sure about it, since the Apostles have not sufficiently expounded it, as indeed necessity required). For such a cause, they say, we should not let the whole sum of Christian doctrine and general unity of so many Christian congregations be disrupted, especially since they are otherwise really agreed with us in all other articles of Christian doctrine, which are more necessary and of greater importance. — With this argument of theirs, which really is impressive and sounds good in the ears of the general run of the people, they not only cause their followers to become our bitter enemies, but they thereby also persuade many good people to think that we will not make common cause with them out of sheer stubbornness, or else because of some special ill will on our part. But these are all vain and clever tricks, and deceit of the devil, whereby he seeks nothing else than to overturn and destroy not only this article, but all Christian doctrine." (Commentary on Galatians 5:9.)

These are precious words, which should also be taken to heart in our day. It appears strange to many, that we cling so firmly to the pure doctrine; people call this obstinacy, or love for fighting on our part; but our conscience is bound in the Word of God. First, we maintain: The chief part of faithfulness to God is the simple, humble abiding in His Word. Then: Every departure from God's Word, every error, is dangerous to the soul. There is a fearful, diabolical power in error; for every error is the devil's work, and through fellowship with error a person puts himself under the influence of the devil. Here human reason is helpless. The papacy is an example. Although you can already by the light of reason recognize its errors, reason nevertheless does not offer any security against being misled into it. Yes, it is evident, also sophisticated, intelligent people are ensnared and taken captive by the papacy; nor can they free themselves from its bewitching spell. Whoever is not rescued from it by God's strong hand will nevermore get out. Let us therefore beware, lest by practicing fellowship with the heterodox we put ourselves carelessly into danger, and thus lose our salvation.

V. We should, therefore, regard membership in the orthodox Church not only as our duty, but also as the greatest privilege and highest honor, even when the orthodox Church outwardly bears a very humble form.

This thesis is a simple conclusion from the foregoing. If God has commanded fellowship with the orthodox Church — and that is the case, as we have seen — then this fellowship is our duty, a duty under all circumstances, and a duty for every Christian. God has, under no circumstances, given us a dispensation from the First Commandment, and has said to no Christian: You, for yourself, may cultivate church fellowship with false teachers, as though they were your brethren in the faith. Rather, God simply says: "Avoid them," that is, avoid all who "cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned." Rom. 16:17. Accordingly, whoever has church fellowship with the heterodox is disobedient to God.

But we should look upon fellowship with the orthodox Church not merely as a duty, in the sense that it would be a bitter must for us; simply because a true Christian, who has learned to know God as his dear and gracious Father, is happy when he knows that in a certain matter he is doing God's will. When he does what God commands him, the Christian walks as in a paradise, as Luther says. Thus, as we have learned, only in the orthodox Church is God given the honor which He demands, and only there are sinners rightly served, so that they reach the final goal set for man, salvation. Therefore, we should look upon membership in the orthodox Church as a most glorious privilege, as a great proof of God's grace, for which we can never sufficiently thank God. For we ourselves have not provided this treasure for ourselves, but it is the grace of God which has led us into this Church. Therefore we must, if we only reflect a bit, daily thank God on our knees, that we are members of the Church of the Reformation. Think of those Christians who are found within the heterodox Church. Compare our condition with theirs. Note how the souls of those who sincerely seek their salvation are hindered and tortured there, for example, by the false doctrine concerning the identification marks of a Christian, and by the false doctrine which makes the grace of God uncertain for sinners.

But now, even when a soul has found peace in the fact, that God, through His special grace, prevented error from getting a foothold and saw to it that the truth which was still preached in the heterodox Church was impressed upon the heart, there still remains something which must not be underestimated. Heterodox churches are such who cause divisions and offenses in Christendom. (Rom. 16:17.) Such Christians who are found in the heterodox churches support, without intending to do so, those evil works so strongly condemned in God's Word. The heterodox churches, as such, are in a state of rebellion against God,

because they will not follow certain parts of God's Word. Now, those Christians who are in them strengthen, though unknowingly, this rebellion against God.

Finally: heterodox churches are in a continuous state of warfare against the orthodox Church, against that Church which, in conformity with the will of God, confesses all parts of the truth. Heterodox people revile and persecute those who abide by God's Word. Surely, an evil work! For Christ says that He will regard that which is inflicted upon those who confess Him as being done to Him. Now, those Christians who are in heterodox churches take part in this evil work and persecute Christ in His confessors of the truth. It is, for example, very terrible that the Lutheran Church, because it has the true doctrine of Baptism and Lord's Supper, is decried as "Catholic." This attack against the true Church is no small matter. The Apostle, too, at one time before his conversion persecuted the confessors of the truth in ignorance, as he himself admits. But when he came to the knowledge of the truth, this grieved him very much; yes, it plagued him until his death. He says: "I am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." I Cor. 15:9. Therefore, we truly have every reason to thank God daily, to thank Him on our knees, for leading us into the orthodox Church, and for preserving us from the heterodox Church. We must regard it as the greatest favor of God, next to having come to faith in Christ at all when we find ourselves in the orthodox Church.

In the discussion, this also was said: That we are in the orthodox Church by grace and not by merit, everyone should easily understand. What has anyone done about being born of Lutheran parents, educated in Lutheran schools, and acquiring a knowledge of the truth? That this is grace, everyone will understand; but that it is the highest gift of grace, all will perhaps not see. That one enjoys good health, and the like, is, of course, also a gift of God's grace; but what is all grace in earthly things, compared to the grace, that we, as members of the true Christian Church, are virtually overwhelmed with spiritual treasures, and thus rightly provided for in respect to the soul? False Christians, of course, ridicule us when we glorify our membership in the orthodox Church as the greatest gift of grace; our reason often does the same; but the time will come when people will not laugh about this.

Indeed, even the orthodox Church is not in every respect a Pure Church. There are also godless people mixed in with it. Also in it there are hypocrites, people who use the expression "pure doctrine" only with their mouth and only outwardly act as Christians, but in their heart are far from God. These are also in the orthodox Church an abomination to God and to the Church, and when they become manifest, a disgrace for the Church.

Also the upright members of the orthodox Church are and remain poor sinners, who must daily pray the Lord's Prayer, especially the Fifth Petition. But in spite of this, the orthodox Church is clothed with a glory by which it distinguishes itself above all other churches. It has God's Word, pure and unmixed. In the face of all

error, it firmly clings to the truth which God has revealed to man in the Holy Scriptures. It continues in the Word of Christ in every point, as Christ requires of the Church. It can, to the glory of God, boast of itself, that the words of Christ are being fulfilled in it: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed." John 8:31. It is free from the ugly spots which disfigure the heterodox Church before God: it is free of false doctrine. It is therefore — taking the word in the spiritual sense — the precious one among the visible church bodies. To belong to it, we should regard as the highest honor — again taking the word in the spiritual sense. Is such talk offensive to you? If so, you do not realize how glorious the true doctrine, and how detestable false doctrine is to God!

To be sure, the orthodox Church outwardly often bears a very humble form. And this can, even for Christians, when they are not on their guard against their flesh, become an inducement to be ashamed of their Lutheran Church and to hanker after sectarian churches, standing there in outward splendor. But, we ask, what is the reason? Why does the Lutheran Church outwardly often appear so decidedly in the form of a servant? Is it not just because of its faithfulness to God's Word? Is it not the circumstance, that the orthodox Church primarily in its doctrine is serious about God's Word; that it, because of God's command, does not remain silent in the presence of error, but condemns it; that it does not deal traitorously with the Divine truth, does not look upon truth and error as having equal rights? Is it not, furthermore, also a fact that the orthodox Church takes the Word of God seriously in regard to this life, that it impresses upon the poor, as upon the rich, that all who claim the Name of Christ have the duty to depart from iniquity, and that whoever conforms to the world will also be lost with the world? Yes, that is the practice of the orthodox Lutheran Church, and therefore it must often bear a servant's form. Would it not be disgraceful if we would be ashamed of this Church because of its outward lowliness, which under these circumstances is an honor for it? Would it not be disgraceful if we would rather want to hold to heterodox churches, because outwardly they are more attractive and of greater value in the eyes of the world? By what means have the heterodox churches, for the most part, purchased this outward greatness and honor before the world? By their unfaithfulness to God's Word. They deny the truth by not insisting on the exclusive validity of Divine truth, but honoring all kinds of opinions. They flirt with the wisdom of this world, and its godless manner of life.

Some time ago, a respected Presbyterian preacher in St. Louis confessed that if he in his congregation would try to have God's Word rule as it does with us, in four weeks his whole congregation would scatter. The sects owe their outward size mostly to this, that they play church instead of actually conducting themselves as God's Church. Neither do they rightly bear witness of the Law of God to man, nor do they act as true witnesses of God's grace. But, this is what the Lutheran Church does. By God's grace, it is a faithful, incorruptible witness of God here on earth. Let us, therefore, not be ashamed of the external lowliness of the Lutheran Church, otherwise we are ashamed of Christ Himself, and of His holy Gospel! Christ the Lord also walked about on earth in the lowly form of a

poor man. And yet, at that time all were supposed to follow Him. We condemn the scribes and Pharisees, and all those in Israel who did not want to follow Christ because of His outward lowly appearance. Now, let us be careful not to commit the same sin! What Christ taught, that the Lutheran Church teaches; and as He in the days of His flesh bore a servant's form, so also the Lutheran Church. Thus, we dare not let the servant's form of the orthodox Church keep us from joining it with joyful confession. Otherwise, we deny Christ in denying it.

Let us learn more and more to look upon the Lutheran Church with the right kind of spiritual eyes: it is the most beautiful and glorious Church; for it is adorned with God's pure Word. This adornment is so precious, that even though an orthodox congregation were to consist of very poor people, — let us say, nothing but woodchoppers — and met in a barn (as the Lord Christ also lay here on earth in a barn, on hay and straw), every Christian should much, much rather prefer to affiliate himself with this outwardly so insignificant congregation, rather than with a heterodox congregation, even if its members were all bank presidents and assembled in a church built of pure marble. Let us be sure that our flesh, and the talk of others does not darken the glory of the orthodox Church, or crowd it out of our sight.

Also within the Lutheran Church one meets people who, although they still belong to it, nevertheless look upon their Church as a kind of second rate Church, because they have a great respect for the outward prestige of the sectarian churches. The Lutherans in the General Synod, and in part, also those in the Council, consider themselves honored when they are treated by sectarian churches as a "denomination" of equal rank. Whether the sects recognize us or not, we should not think of ourselves as a second rate Church, nor allow ourselves to be pushed into a corner as outcasts who must first apologize for taking the liberty of existing alongside of sectarian church bodies. We should and must remain conscious of this — for God desires it of us —, that we alone, as the orthodox Church, have an express charter from God for our existence.

The sectarian church bodies exist only by God's permission. Therefore, our whole heart should belong to our orthodox Church. We should be glad to belong to it as a member, even under the most humble outward conditions; gladly serve it as preachers and teachers, and, with joyful spirit and restless zeal, work for its extension. We should most earnestly strive, and daily pray, that our descendants may be the heirs of the Church of the Reformation.

Luther confesses of himself, and of the whole church body named after him: "No man can deny this, that we have the ministry and God's Word pure and rich, that we use and teach it diligently, without any addition of our own new human doctrine, just as Christ commanded, and as the Apostles and all Christendom have done. We invent nothing new but rather hold to and remain with the old Word of God, as the old Church had it. Therefore, with it we are the true old Church, a one-of-the-same-kind Church, which teaches and believes the one

Word of God. Therefore the papists again blaspheme Christ Himself, the Apostles, and all Christendom, when they call us Modernists and heretics. For they find nothing about us except only the same old things of the Ancient Church, and that we are like it and one Church with it." (Against Hans Wurst, 1541. E.A. 26,14.)

Luther states further: "The impurity of doctrine which is not God's Word, or is without it, is such a poisonous evil thing that even if St. Peter, yes, an angel from heaven would preach it, it would still be accursed, Gal. 1:8. Therefore false teachers and Anabaptists or fake masters of the Sacraments cannot be or remain in the Church, as Psalm I says, for they not only undermine the life, which the Church must bear, especially where this goes on under cover, but also the doctrine is undermined, which must openly be bright and shine, so that the life can be regulated according to it." (E.A. 26,37.)

VI. The reasons which have been advanced for joining heterodox church bodies, and for remaining in them, partly sound very pious; but they are considered in the light of God's Word, altogether invalid, and originate in our blind, conceited, self-willed, and presumptuous flesh.

The reasons which should be named here were already partly covered in the discussion on the first five theses. Let us yet briefly refer only to a few of them. The reasons partly sound very pious, but considered in the light of God's Word, they are altogether invalid. At times their origin, namely, that they come from the flesh, is written plainly on their face. So, for example, when it is argued that a man out of consideration for his business must belong to a heterodox church. To this we simply say: That is turning one's faith into a business. In other words, we subordinate the question: "What must I do to be saved?" to that other one: "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Others say: Faith does not matter at all, the most important things, finally, are the deeds. That is an altogether heathenish statement. Faith matters so much, that, "He that believeth on Him (Christ) 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." John 3:18. And as for works which are well-pleasing to God, and through which faith should manifest itself, the chief work among them is this, that you firmly cling to the whole Word of God and confess it, and thus adhere to the orthodox Church.

This reason, however, sounds more honorable: "My relatives, yes, members of my family belong to a heterodox church, so I do not want to cause disturbance and disorder in my family by my lone membership in the orthodox Lutheran Church. I love my own too much for that." If you earnestly love your relatives, then in all love and patience bring the testimony of Bible truth to them, that they may in all things give honor to the Word of God, and depart from error. You should not go over to them, but they should come over to you — that is God's will. If you do not succeed, then you must forego the good fortune of being united with your loved ones in one and the same Church. True it is: it hurts, not to be able to have church fellowship with those near and dear to you. But, Christ the Lord has already taken such a case into consideration, and has definitely settled it. He says, Matt. 10:37-38: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me." And Matt. 19:29: "And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life." Therefore, at such a time, and in such a situation, consider this: the Lord, your God, is testing you whether you love Him, whether you love Him more than all others, who is the Savior of your soul and who shed His blood for you.

You may say: "I want to remain in the heterodox church in order to accomplish good in it, namely, to prevent it from losing the truth altogether." If you happen to be in a heterodox church, then first of all, bear witness to the truth clearly and definitely. If they listen to you, good. Under certain circumstances, you can wait a little, to see whether the truth is accepted. But as soon as it is clear that they will not accept the truth, you must separate yourself from that group which holds to the error. If you, nevertheless, remain in it, then you are no longer reinforcing the truth, but rather, the error. It is blindness if you suppose that you are still a witness bearer for the truth, when you continue in fellowship with openly known errorists. It is an absolute contradiction to be both a witness-bearer for the truth, and an associate of false teachers. As Luther says: You "cannot remain in the same stall with others who propagate false doctrine or are attached to it or always speak good words to the devil and his crowd." (XVI I, 1477.)

Again, it is said: If you distinguish so exactly between orthodox and heterodox churches, and want no fellowship with the heterodox, then the Church will be disturbed constantly, and it will suffer more harm than it can receive benefit therefrom. Such words come from the conceited flesh. Surely Christ the Lord knows best what will harm or benefit His Church. He says with respect to the false believers: "From such turn away." 2 Tim. 3:5. "Avoid them." Rom. 16:17. This do, if you want to be a Christian, according to the Lord's Word, and do not presume to rule the Church with your blind thoughts. Besides, this objection is based on an altogether wrong conception of the Church. The Church is the communion of believers, of those who in faith cling to Christ as their Savior. The Church is benefited when only that is preached which works faith, and maintains it, namely, the pure truth revealed in Scripture, and when everything is kept away that hinders faith in Christ, that is, false doctrine. Indeed, if the Church were not the spiritual kingdom of those believing in Christ, but rather an earthly organization, an arrangement to provide a living for pastors, superintendents, and other ecclesiastics, or a society for the support of the civil state, then you would have to anxiously avoid everything that might disturb the outward peace of the Church; then outward peace would have to be bought also by tolerating false doctrine. But now, the Christian Church is an institution of Christ for the preaching of His pure word to save souls.

Another says: "I can very well take care of my soul, also in those church bodies which proclaim error in addition to the truth. Whatever is said there against God's Word, I will not accept." So speaks the presumptuous flesh. He who is really concerned about his soul will not speak that way. Do not trust yourself too much! Error is not such a harmless thing. Your heart is a breeding ground for all sins, also for every doctrinal error. This is proved already by your objection. The objection itself already reveals that you no longer have the right abhorrence for false doctrine. You are already half gone astray. Besides, you absolutely cannot take care of your own soul. That God must do. He wants to do it, and He will do it. He will protect you, so that you will not "dash your foot against a stone," also in

spiritual matters. That He has promised. But this He has promised to do, and He does this, when you walk in God's Ways. That is, when you abide in God's Word, when you avoid the fellowship of errorists, as God has commanded.

If, therefore, we judge on the basis of God's Word, and not according to our own thoughts, then it is certain, that by avoiding all church fellowship with errorists, we walk according to God's will and thereby serve the best interests of the Church in general, and also of our own soul in particular. May God always give us enlightened, spiritual eyes of our understanding, that we may at all times actively recognize the difference between orthodox and heterodox churches, and give us the right, holy love for the truth, that we may at all times act in accordance with this knowledge.

The End
