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Walther, a Christian Theologian.

II.

Dr. Walther gave undying allegiance to the *sola Scriptura*. The doctrine of the authority and inspiration of Scripture lay close to his heart. But there was another matter which lay—yes, we may put it thus—still closer. The one thing which he stressed above all things, which he had in view in all his theological work, and in the interest of which he fought so staunchly and persistently for the *sola Scriptura*, was the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ. He fought for the verbal inspiration not merely in order to fulfil a duty laid upon the Christian theologian by Scripture. No; Scripture was so sacred to him because it bears the Gospel of salvation. Scripture took him captive by this, that the Gospel of grace took him captive. Dr. Walther was a Gospel theologian. His chief interest lay in bringing the Gospel of grace to the sinner and in training men for this one great work of the Christian Church.

Dr. Walther was a Christian theologian. The theology of the Christian Church is the theology of grace. The Christian people live on the Gospel of grace. Those who base their hope of salvation on their own work and worth, and those who teach and encourage them to do so, "are either Jews, or Mohammedans, or papists, or heretics; for there is no mean between these two righteousnesses, the working righteousness of the Law and the suffering righteousness of Christ. Whoever therefore strays away from the Christian righteousness must fall back into the working righteousness; that is, he has lost Christ and must have recourse to his own works and put his trust in them. . . . They are not Christians, but are and remain work-saints, whatever other name they may bear, Jews, Mohammedans, papists, or Anabaptists, etc." (Luther, IX, 24 f.) The ministry which the Christian theologian has received of the Lord Jesus consists in testifying the Gospel of the grace of God, Acts 20, 24. And that was the ministry of Dr. Walther: faithfully and powerfully he testified the Gospel of the grace of God.

He preached the Gospel of grace in its fulness. He presented to the sinful world and the Christian people all the elements of saving grace—saving grace in that it is for all, saving grace in that it does all. He presented the doctrine of *universal grace* in its full import. "We know that God really and truly would have all men to be saved. He has revealed that to us in His Word. And we can never sufficiently praise God for this, that He is such a tender Father, that He would have mercy even on the most depraved of men." (*Proc. West. Dist.*, 1874, p. 31.) For this he loved the Gospel: "Since all men are reconciled to God and the Gospel is the message thereof, it is such an ineffable grace to come within the sound of the Gospel" (see *Lehre u. Wehre*, 1890, p. 46), and denounced the denial of it as a crime against God and humanity: "Nowadays all Lutheran people know that according to the Holy Scriptures the saving grace of the Father is universal; so is the redemption of the Son and likewise the effective calling of the Holy Spirit through the Word, while the teaching of the Reformed Church on these three points is particularistic; for the Reformed most emphatically contend that God has created the greater part of the human race unto eternal damnation and has accordingly assigned them even in eternity to everlasting death. In the clear light of the precious, saving Gospel this is an appalling, a horrible doctrine." (*The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, p. 126.) It is a horrible doctrine, for it robs God of His honor and deprives the sinner of the needed comfort. "What rich comfort flows from this doctrine that God is Love and would have all men to be saved, to enjoy His love in all eternity! Serious misgivings so often oppress the heart. It deeply feels the wrath of God. It asks, Does God's love extend to me, too? Am I, too, miserable creature that I am, redeemed? In such afflictions we must show that these thoughts dishonor God, who is the eternal Love. But when we overcome these doubts in this way that we constantly keep before our eyes the universal gracious will of God and cling to that in faith, we give God all honor. . . . Satan's chief object is to keep us from trusting in the love of God and thus becoming divinely assured of our salvation. So we see of what inestimable importance and how precious and salutary the doctrine of the universality of God's grace is." (*Proc. West. Dist.*, 1874, p. 38.) Faithfully Walther guarded this priceless treasure. He warded off the Calvinistic speculations on the "sovereignty" of God. He did not yield to the argument of carnal reason that, if it is due to God's gracious will alone that I am saved, it must also be due to God's will that another is not saved. Walther took his stand *on Scripture* and thus was enabled to acquit himself as a Christian theologian, a faithful witness of the grace of God, to proclaim the glorious message: "'The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to *all men.*' Oh, the height and depth, the

breadth and length, of it! Oh, the inexhaustible riches of grace! Rejoice, O my soul; not one, of all that belong to the human race not one is excluded, for the saving grace of God hath appeared 'to all men'; it brings salvation to all, to all of them; God would save all, all of them, despite their sin and unworthiness, freely and without cost, as grace is wont to deal. . . . As the vault of heaven encloses the whole terrestrial ball, every portion and point of it, so the heaven of God's grace encloses the whole world of sinners that inhabits this earth. A man can so harden himself that *he* does not care for grace; but he cannot sin so grievously that grace does not care for *him*." (*Brosamen*, p. 24 f.)¹⁾

Just as clearly and forcefully he proclaimed the *sola gratia*. *We owe our salvation to grace alone*. First, we obtain the forgiveness of sins as a free gift. God does not offer to justify the sinner on condition that he do something to make himself worthy of the forgiveness of sins. God is not waiting for us to reconcile Him to us. Christ has fully taken care of that. God is reconciled, the sins of the world are already forgiven, a free pardon is offered to all. The Jew, says Walther, offers to buy his pardon by observing the Law of Moses; the Mohammedan, by living according to the Koran; the papist, with his contrition and satisfactions; "the Lutheran Church, however, tells the sinner, as the Word of God tells him: *Es ist schon alles getan*; you are already redeemed, you are already justified before God; you need not therefore do anything to redeem yourself, to reconcile God to you, to earn your salvation. All that has already been accomplished. Only believe! Believe that Christ, the Son of God, has already gained all this for you; through this faith you obtain all this and are saved." (*Proc. West. Dist.*, 1874, p. 43.) Forgiveness of sins as a free gift, gained by Christ on the cross once for all (objective justification) and accepted by the sinner by faith (subjective justification) — that is the Gospel in which Walther gloried; for that is the only message that can bring joy to the sinner's heart. "Since all men are reconciled to God and the Gospel is the message thereof, it is such an ineffable grace to come within the sound of the Gospel." "God is reconciled. Accordingly, the Apostle Paul calls on us: 'Be ye reconciled to God.' That means: Since God has been reconciled to you by Jesus Christ, grasp the hand which the Father in heaven holds out to you. . . . Righteousness lies ready; it must not first be achieved by man. If man were to attempt to do so, that would be an awful crime, a fighting against grace and against the reconciliation and perfect redemption accomplished by the Son of God. . . . Having this doctrine, what exceedingly happy and blessed people we Lutherans

1) In the days of Walther men were telling one another, and some believe it to this day, that Walther was a Calvinist in disguise. It is one of the saddest chapters in church history.

are! This teaching takes us to Christ by a straight route. It opens heaven to us when we feel hell in our hearts. It enables us to obtain grace at any moment, without losing time by following a wrong way, striving for grace by our own effort, as we sometimes do with a good intention. We can approach Christ directly and say: 'Lord Jesus, I am a poor sinner; I know it; that has been my experience in the past, and when I reflect what is going on in my heart now, I must say, that is still my experience. But Thou hast called me by Thy Gospel. I come to Thee just as I am; for I could come no other way.' That is the saving doctrine which the Evangelical Lutheran Church has learned from Christ and the apostles." (*The Proper Distinction*, etc., p. 136 f.)

We owe our salvation entirely to God's grace; for, in the second place, this faith by which we accept the forgiveness of sins as a free gift is itself God's work, God's gift. Grace carries through the work of salvation; grace accomplishes it from beginning to end; at no stage is the sinner called upon to contribute something of his own. Conversion is solely and exclusively the work of God. "God the Holy Spirit effects the sinner's conversion because of grace, for Christ's sake; man can hinder his conversion, but cannot cooperate towards it." (*Proc. North. Dist.*, 1873, p. 43.) And what moved God to create faith in my heart? Was there anything in me to attract God's favorable attention? Did He see some spiritual change and improvement in me on the basis of which He could successfully carry on His work or for the sake of which He would bother with me? No, says Walther; He converted me "because of his grace, for Christ's sake." "Who among us, if he is a true Christian, will not declare: I would never have sought the dear Lord if He had not sought me; I would never have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ if the Holy Ghost had not granted me this great gift of faith; I have not earned it through my conduct, through my prayers, through my struggling and striving! . . . Every one who is really converted will speak thus, and one who thinks he has acquitted himself so well in this matter, he has been so willing, he has helped along, and his many labors, many tears, many prayers, counted for something, he is a miserable hypocrite, who is blinded by the devil. Man can do nothing, nothing; God must do all. . . . That is the Scriptural teaching, that is also the Lutheran teaching, and it gives all honor to God, though it is an abomination and offense to all Pharisees." (*Proc. West. Dist.*, 1876, p. 65.) "*Wir wollen dem Menschen keinen Anteil geben an seiner Seligmachung. . . . Das ist unser Interesse.*" (*Proc. Sec. Gen. Pastoral Conf.*, Fort Wayne, 1881, p. 25.) For to have man cooperate towards his conversion or produce the necessary conditions for his conversion would be demanding the impossible of him; for he is spiritually dead, and it would cast him into despair; or it would make of him a self-satisfied Pharisee.

Tenaciously Walther clung to the article that man can do nothing, that God does all in converting, saving, the sinner. He, too, was tempted by his flesh to embrace the Pelagian creed, that man can effect his own conversion, or the Semi-Pelagian creed, that man can claim half the credit, or the synergistic creed, that man can at least make the beginning and give God a chance. He trampled the satanic delusion under foot. Nor would he yield to the arguments of his *rationalistic* flesh. The synergists told him—and his synergistic reason told him—that, if salvation depends entirely on God, God must also be made responsible for the perdition of men; that, since God's grace is universal, the reason why some are saved and not others must lie in man, the reason being that the saved were made of better stuff than the others; that, therefore, in order to save the *gratia universalis*, the *sola gratia* must be qualified, restricted, reduced; if you do not so qualify it, if you exclude man's part in his conversion, you lay yourself open to the charge of Calvinism. Walther trampled the temptation under foot. He was a Bible theologian and said: "Our reason will at once raise the objection: If that is so, if man cannot do the least thing towards his conversion, it must be God's fault that so many are not converted; if God does all, if He must take away our resistance; if the cause of man's non-resisting, of his conversion, does not lie at all in him, God must be the cause why so many are not converted. Thus reason argues; and, in truth, we have here an absolutely incomprehensible mystery. But let it be ever so incomprehensible, ever so contradictory, that does not bother us Lutherans." (*Proc. West. Dist.*, 1876, p. 63.) It does seem that you cannot retain *universal* grace if you maintain *sole* grace. But what does a Christian do in such a case? You have read Walther's article in *Lehre u. Wehre*, 1880, p. 257 ff.: "*Was soll ein Christ thun, wenn er findet, dass zwei Lehren, die sich zu widersprechen scheinen, beiderseits klar und deutlich in der Schrift gelehrt werden?*" Walther had learned the great art of the Christian theologian to set Scripture above reason, and so he had learned the greatest of all arts: to comfort men with the *gratia universalis* and to glory in the *sola gratia*. And how he gloried in it to the glory of God! "When we enter heaven, we shall have no reason to take credit unto ourselves. We shall not say: Well, I am now in glory, but I certainly did all that was in my power to achieve that! No, this cursed self-praise will never be heard in heaven. All the elect and all angels of heaven know nothing but to praise God's grace. It is all, altogether, grace—that, dear brethren, must be the guiding star of our present discussion. We must shudder at the possibility of tolerating any teaching here which robs God of the glory that it is all, all, pure grace and nothing else. I do not hope to be saved because I imagine that I am better by a hair's breadth than the vilest sinner,

but because God has revealed in His Word that it was the good pleasure of His will to make of me, a poor, lost sinner, an everlasting monument of his eternal grace." (*Proc. West. Dist.*, 1877, p. 26.)

Walther, the faithful witness of the Gospel of grace, gave himself up to it entirely. The article of saving grace reigned in his heart. First, it ruled and shaped his theology. He understood and stressed its supreme importance. The only hope of the sinner lies in the article of the grace of God in Christ. Deny this article, and you destroy the comfort of the Christian; violate it in any way, and his comfort is shaken. The insistence on the absolute need of the full grace of God in Christ for salvation is the characteristic of Walther's theology as it is the characteristic of the theology of the Bible. Hear him speak, for instance, of this one phase of saving grace, of the *sola gratia*. The teaching that a man's salvation depends on his self-determination "subverts the whole Christian religion, denies Christ as the sole foundation of our salvation and the only Savior of mankind, repudiates thus the Gospel, disavows the power of the blood and death of Christ and His redemption, takes from God the glory that He alone saves us, and gives this glory partly to man; yea, since salvation and the mercy of God are made to depend 'at bottom and so solely and entirely' on the conduct of man, on his free personal self-determination, it is given to man *entirely*." (*Lehre u. Wehre*, 1872, page 322.)

Furthermore, the importance of the article of saving grace lies in its relation to all the other doctrines of Scripture. It gives them their importance. They would be meaningless without the article of salvation by grace. When, therefore, this article is denied or vitiated, all other articles must be given a new, an unscriptural, meaning. And where this article is honestly held, it will ultimately rectify the error that has crept in elsewhere. "For the devil at all times assaults the grace of God; no heresy can bear the teaching of divine grace." (Luther, 3, p. 163.) . . . Every heresy that has sprung up was caused by the heretics' inability to believe that man becomes righteous in the sight of God and is saved by grace alone. That is the real rock of offense against which all heresies, all false teachers, dash their head." (*The Proper Distinction*, etc., pp. 160. 163.) "On the other hand," says Luther (VIII, 628), as quoted by Walther, "this power inheres in this article, that, if you give yourself to it whole-heartedly and earnestly, it will not let you stray into heresy and fight against Christ and Christendom." (*Die luth. Lehre v. d. Rechtf.*, p. 11.) "This made Luther the invincible Reformer. If he had not stood on this rock, a man like Erasmus could have thrown him easily. But standing on this rock,—'in my heart there reigns, and shall ever reign, this one article, namely, faith in my dear Lord Christ, which is the sole beginning, middle, and end of all spiritual

and godly thoughts which I may have at any time, day or night' (IV, 8),—he laughed at the Pope's doctors, and at Zwingli, too. As often as new deceiving spirits confronted him, he tested them with this article, and if they did not agree with it, he said: Depart—to him who sent you." (*Proc. Syn. Conf.*, 1872, p. 27.) Walther understood the interrelation of the articles of the Christian religion. He put the doctrine of saving grace into the center.

There is the article of justification by faith, the chief article of the Christian religion, and at the center of this article lies the *sola gratia*—"being justified freely by His grace." Since the grace of God culminates in the justification of the sinner, the greatest blessing and the source of all blessings, the article of justification is the chief article, the heart of the Christian religion; but since justification is by grace alone, you can say just as well that salvation by grace is the chief article, the heart of the Christian religion. Says Walther: "The Evangelical Lutheran Church assigns to every doctrine of Scripture the position and importance which Scripture gives it. A. The fundamental and chief doctrine, from which all other doctrines derive their importance, is the doctrine of Christ, or of justification." (*Die Ev.-Luth. Kirche die wahre sichtbare Kirche*, Thesis 18, p. 108.)

There is the article of the distinction between the Law and the Gospel. That is nothing else than the article of salvation by grace alone, applied to the need of the terrified sinner. Walther indicates the close relation of these two doctrines when he points out that the Lutheran Church, understanding the relative importance of the various Bible doctrines, places first (A.) the doctrine of Christ, or of justification, but then urges at once the supreme necessity of distinguishing between the Law and the Gospel. "B. The Evangelical Lutheran Church distinguishes sharply between the Law and the Gospel." (*Die Ev.-Luth. Kirche*, etc., p. 111.) Both doctrines are of the same importance,— "This distinction between Law and Gospel is the highest art in Christianity, which all who boast or accept the Christian name can or should know. For where there is a defect on this point, a Christian cannot be distinguished from a heathen or a Jew, for it is just here that the difference lies" (Luther, IX, 798, quoted by Walther, *op. cit.*, p. 112),—for both treat of the same matter; the Christian has learned this highest art and declares: "According to the *Law*, which charges me with my guilt, I am indeed a lost, condemned sinner; but I appeal from the *Law to the Gospel*, for God has given, besides the *Law*, another word, that is, the *Gospel*, which gives us this grace, the forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness and life, frees me from my terror and damnation, and assures me that all guilt is paid by the Son of God, Jesus Christ Himself." (*Op. cit.*, p. 113.) And, besides, this highest of all arts is not the

Christian's own achievement, but, again, God's gracious gift. Says Luther, says Walther: "Without the Holy Ghost it is impossible to grasp and make this distinction." What place do the means of grace occupy in the divine scheme of salvation? They derive their importance from their relation to the article of saving grace: they are the means which bring to us the grace gained by Christ, confer upon us the forgiveness of sins. And it is of vital importance that the sinner make such use of them. "The Lutheran Church teaches, not only that we are saved by grace alone, that this grace has been gained for us by Christ, the Son of God and Redeemer of the world, that we lay hold of this grace by faith alone, but she teaches also that the good God has instituted certain means into which He has placed this grace and through which He places it into our hands; and those means are the Word of God, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. They contain the grace which was in God's heart from eternity towards us poor sinners, which Christ gained for us; they are the hands by which God bestows it upon us, so that He is all in all and we have nothing to glory in." (*Proc. West. Dist.*, 1876, p. 21.) "It is a useless tale when I am told about a precious treasure which I am to fetch if the way to the treasure is not shown me and the means for lifting it. Such talk will seem sheer twaddle. But that is exactly the fanatics' way of talking about the great treasure that lies concealed in the Christian religion. When they are asked about the way to get it, they cannot tell it. . . . Whoever does not go to these places (Word, Baptism, Lord's Supper) to lift it will not fetch any gold. What he gets may look like gold, but it is mere tinsel. Would that I could press this truth deeply into your hearts and that the sound of my words would not simply sweep past your ears, but bring energy and life to you! Oh, what witnesses you would become by refusing to deny the grace of God in Christ as the fanatics do!" (*The Proper Distinction*, etc., p. 163.)

What is faith, and why does faith justify, faith alone? Unless you teach that grace alone saves, you will harbor and spread Jewish and Gentile opinions concerning faith. Why can faith save? "When Christ says: 'He that believeth . . . shall be saved,' He is telling us: You have fallen away from God through sin, fallen into an eternal debt, which you cannot pay. But be comforted; I, the Son of God, have paid your debt and thereby regained for you the grace of God and eternal salvation, and I offer you all this as a free gift. Now, then, accept this gift, and all will be well. And it is just this acceptance which constitutes the faith of which the Christian religion speaks." (*Lutherstunde*. See *Lehre u. Wehre*, 1890, p. 183.)

And this faith by which the sinner obtains the treasures of God's grace is itself a gift of pure grace. Conversion is in no wise the achievement of man, but altogether and in every respect God's work

in us. Take the *sola gratia* out of the article of conversion, and you will be teaching nothing but Jewish, Gentile opinions on conversion. Was Walther a Christian theologian? You have read above what he had to say on this matter. He was raised up by God to keep the *sola gratia* in the article of conversion. For that he lived and labored. That was the crowning glory of his work.

Walther preached powerfully on sanctification. Powerfully—because he knew, and led men to, the only source from which personal holiness and all spiritual life and power flow. “The grace of God, . . . teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.’ As soon as a man really comes under the grace of God in Christ, this grace takes him in hand and like a faithful mother nurturing her child trains and rears him in the hatred of all ungodliness and worldly lusts. . . . Such a one guards his body as a temple of the Holy Ghost lest it be defiled by sin and watches over his soul as belonging to Jesus Christ, bought with a great price, that it may remain His. He is impelled to do for his neighbor what God did for him, lovingly, gently, humbly; and he finds the happiness of his life in this, that it is spent in the service of God. Finally the grace of God teaches and trains us to look for the glorious appearing of the Savior Jesus Christ. When a man once knows what God’s grace in Christ means, his whole nature and life are changed. Without grace a man clings to this life, the life on earth. Under grace, he looks forward to the appearing of Christ, at death or at the Last Day, waiting for it with the eager expectancy of our children at the approach of Christmas Eve.” (*Brosamen*, p. 26 f.) Where the grace of God is preached, “people will furthermore notice that wonderful things are happening among them. Alas! many ministers do not meet with these wonderful experiences; their hearers remain sleepy; their misers stay stingy. What is the reason? Not sufficient Gospel has been preached to them.” (*The Proper Distinction*, etc., p. 406.)

The uncompromising stand which Walther took in the long controversy on the Church and the Ministry was due not only to his zeal for purity of doctrine in general, but also and chiefly (and at bottom it amounts to the same thing) to his passion for keeping the article of saving grace inviolate. He points out, for instance: “When men make salvation dependent on the communion with any visible Church, they subvert the article of the justification of a poor sinner before God by faith *alone*.” (*Die Stimme unserer Kirche*, etc., under Thesis IX.) “Clearly the teaching that there is a visible Church outside of which there is no salvation and that the validity of absolution depends on the ordination of the administrant, etc., is in conflict with the truth that faith alone saves.” (*Die lutherische Lehre v. d. Rechtf.*, p. 93.) “As soon as you add the qualification ‘alone-saving’

to the Lutheran Church, you detract from the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and confound Law and Gospel." (*The Proper Distinction*, etc., p. 343; cp. pp. 345. 337. 339.) The false teaching on Church and Ministry is not a small matter. When Walther and his brethren had fought their way through to a clear understanding of this doctrine, he declared: "There is no doubt in our mind that, if God in His infinite mercy had not come to our aid, making us to see the Romanizing features of our former doctrine and practise, we should not only have been working towards the destruction of Christianity, but also ourselves should have been lost eternally." (*Lutheraner*, 1857, p. 2; cp. *Lutheraner*, 1845, p. 79.) Note also *this* angle: When the ministry sets itself above the common Christians, it makes light of the surpassing dignity and glory which saving grace, justifying grace, has conferred upon these common Christians. "The minister administers his office and absolves 'in the name and behalf of the congregation.' Our moderns are horrified at hearing this. Administer our office in the name and by authority of peasants and tradespeople! We are royal-Prussian and royal-Bavarian pastors—that is our glorious office! In their blindness they find their glory in their shame, and are unable to realize what a great honor it is to administer the office in the name of the Christians. There are no people on earth more distinguished than they; the angels serve them; above them is the open heaven; God has come down to them; they are clothed with the priestly robe of Christ's righteousness." (*Lehre u. Wehre*, 1876, p. 66.) The following, too, is worthy of note. Replying in 1843 to Grabau's *Hirtenbrief*, G. H. Loeber, Walther and their associates stress this point among others: "Let us, dear colleague, devote our attention above all things to this, *thoroughly to search out and to preach in its fulness the pure Gospel of the free grace of God*, and let us trust God that *through this Word* He will mightily protect His Church in these last perilous times against all the gates of hell. If His Spirit and power were not with the Word, we ourselves could not accomplish anything, not even with our preaching of the pure Word, much less through the weight of our office or the scaffolding of order and ordinances." (See Hochstetter, *Geschichte der Missourisynode*, p. 193.) Nothing, nothing, must take the place of, or interfere with, the preaching of saving grace.²⁾

2) Dr. H. E. F. Guericke, siding with Walther, uttered his warning in these words: "The papistical mischief begins inconspicuously and innocently by exalting indifferent ceremonies, then little by little puts the 'succession of the means of grace,' by which alone the Church is built, into the background, stressing the 'succession of the ministers,' proceeds, consistently, to make 'order' and organization, not doctrine, the all-important thing, in consequence of which *the Gospel is made light of* and human ordinances and institutions are made much of, and finally reaches the papistical

Need we ask how the doctrine of election is related to the article of saving grace? Its very name tells us that—*election of grace*. *Sola gratia* is the heart of the article of election. We owe our conversion to the grace of God alone, 2 Tim. 1, 9, and this grace was bestowed upon us in eternity, in God's gracious election, 2 Tim. 1, 9. When Walther treated the doctrine of the eternal election, all his thoughts revolved about this one thing, the *sola gratia*. He made the statement, quoted above: "*Wir wollen dem Menschen keinen Anteil geben an seiner Seligmachung. Das ist unser Interesse,*" while he was discussing the doctrine of election. Election was his theme when he uttered the words quoted above: "When we enter heaven, we shall have no reason to take credit unto ourselves. . . . It is all, altogether, grace." We owe our election to the *sola gratia*. . . . Thesis 10 of the Thirteen Theses: "We believe, teach, and confess that the cause which moved God to choose the elect is solely His grace and the merit of Jesus Christ and not any good thing which God has foreseen in the elect, even not the faith foreseen by God in them." And we owe our salvation to "His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."—Thesis 11: "We believe, teach, and confess that election is not the mere foresight or foreknowledge of the salvation of the elect, but also a cause of their salvation and what pertains thereto."

The rule applies to every other doctrine: Unless you know its relation to the doctrine of saving grace, you will distort or misapply it. Take the doctrine of eternal damnation—"The Lord never makes mention of hell except for the purpose of bringing men to heaven." (*The Proper Distinction*, etc., p. 404.) In the Christian theology all articles converge upon, or radiate from, the grace of God in Christ. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men"—that ruled and shaped Walther's theology.

form of the Middle Ages, which claims all divine and human rights and presses them into its service." (See Hochstetter, *Geschichte*, etc., p. 233.)—Walther's warning against slighting the Gospel was directed not only to those who placed the strength of the Church in the hierarchical "order." He condemned with the same vehemence every movement and tendency which would supplant the simple preaching of the Gospel with something more powerful. There are men who slur over the Gospel and stress "life and work," relying upon the activities of the Church, the legitimate and necessary activities, to put new life into the Church. Dr. Walther taught us that our first concern must be the study and the preaching of the Gospel of grace. That, and that alone, preserves and builds the Church. Nothing must interfere with, or take the place of, the Gospel. "Through the Word alone the mighty deeds which fill the history of the Church have been performed. Through the Word alone the Church will be preserved in these last evil days unto the end of the world." (*Brosamen*, p. 527.) Where the Gospel is preached abundantly, "people notice that wonderful things are happening among them." (*The Proper Distinction*, etc., p. 406.) Preach "the pure Gospel of the free grace of God in its fulness. Through this Word, God will protect His Church against all the gates of hell."

Next, and necessarily so, it ruled and shaped his policy. As a Christian preacher he knew nothing but Christ crucified and knew that he could achieve the purpose of his ministry — the salvation of souls — in no other way than by preaching the Gospel of grace of God in Christ. And his sole aim as a teacher of Christian theology was to enable and train men to pursue the same policy. At the dedication of Concordia Seminary in 1883 he said: "In this house young Christians shall be fitted to become heralds of the Gospel of Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world, who will confess with the holy twelve apostles: 'We are determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.'" (Hochstetter, *Geschichte*, etc., p. 451.) And he said: "Any other teaching can produce great Pharisees, but not Christians. One becomes a Christian only in this way, that he learns from the Holy Ghost that he is really redeemed, that he has forgiveness of sins, a reconciled heavenly Father, the righteousness that avails before God, and so can cheerfully await his dying hour." (*Proc. Syn. Conf.*, 1872, p. 25.) Do you want to reach men's hearts, win them for Christ? "In accordance with God's will it should be the preacher's aim to *proclaim the Gospel to his hearers till their hearts are melted*, till they give up their resistance and confess that the Lord has been too strong for them, and henceforth they wish to abide with Jesus." (*The Proper Distinction*, etc., p. 406.) Is the Church in need of a reformation? Is her spiritual life at a low ebb? What then is the remedy? There is only one. All other remedies may galvanize a Church into temporary activity. But this is what puts life into the Church: "The weakest graduate, if only he has grasped the doctrine that the grace of God in Christ Jesus has appeared to all men, to be received freely, by faith, can preach to men in such a way that they are assured of their salvation, and that is worth more than all the wisdom and all the possessions and treasures of the world. What is all erudition, as necessary as it is in its place, compared with the wisdom of God which is set forth when but the simple passage is expounded: 'God so loved the world,' etc.? Hearing this, all poor sinners rejoice, all the holy angels are filled with wonder, and the whole world should sink upon its knees and sing 'Gloria' and 'Hallelujah.' If our young preachers preach this, they are the men who can start a reformation in our country as indeed in this way a small beginning has already been made." (*Proc. Syn. Conf.*, 1872, p. 28.) What the world needs and what the Church needs is the preaching of the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ. And that means a preaching in which the gracious forgiveness of sins forms the burden of the message and is continually in the mind of the preacher. The Gospel-preacher treats all the doctrines of the Bible fully, exhaustively, but

he is always hastening towards his real subject, the gracious forgiveness of sins. He does not treat this article only occasionally, when he might feel that now its turn has come in the series of Christian teachings. No, it is always before him, he is always presenting it. He is obsessed with the fear that there might be too little Gospel in his preaching. He does not fear that people might say, as Luther puts it, "he is always harping on one string, he knows only one tune" (IV, 1741). No, says Luther, "a preacher of the right sort puts this article above everything else and preaches it continuously, this article, on which the true knowledge of God and our salvation hinges — this article that whoever has Christ has the Father and all grace, all divine blessings, and eternal life." (VIII, 798.) Says Walther: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching." (Last thesis in *The Proper Distinction*, etc., p. 403.) That ministry is bound to be successful which makes the Gospel of grace the center of the preaching and of all church-work. There people "see wonderful things happening." And: "If you preach the Gospel abundantly, you need not fear that your people will leave your church when some spiritual mountebank comes along and starts an unseemly exhibition in his pulpit. Your people will say: Our minister has given us what we could not get anywhere else. He is a true Lutheran minister and pours out a great treasure for us every Sunday." (*Op. cit.*, p. 408.) Any other kind of ministry, the substitution of any other kind of work for the preaching of the Gospel of grace, will not satisfy your people — nor yourselves; it gets no lasting results. "If you had to preach nothing else than sterile ethics, you might consider that a tedious task, yielding meager results. But if you have experienced in your heart what it means to convey to poor, lost, and condemned sinners the consolation of the Gospel and say to them: 'Do but come and believe,' — I say, if you believe this and ponder the full meaning of this, you cannot but look forward with joy to the day when you will stand for the first time before your congregations to deliver this august message." (*Op. cit.*, p. 137 f.)

The article of saving grace was the one important thing to Walther. That ruled and shaped his policy throughout, for instance, also in his dealing with those who differed from him in doctrinal matters. Says Dr. Pieper: "Walther was disposed to recognize as orthodox not as few, but as many persons as possible. He is stern in passing judgment on people whom he beholds sacrificing *sola gratia*. But people who hold fast this central doctrine gain his cordial good will, and he is confident that this truth which they hold will lead them to put away their error." (*Conversion and Election*, p. 83.)

Finally, the article of saving grace *shaped and ruled his life*. We heard him say, above: "It is such an ineffable grace to come

within the sound of the Gospel." To it he owed the greatest happiness that can come to a human being. You know the story: "They [Walther's associates at the university] founded their hopes of salvation not so much on the grace of God and the merits of Christ as on a certain degree of contrition and repentance to which they must have attained. This brought Walther into deep distress; terrible conflicts of soul resulted. Doubts and uncertainty concerning his salvation brought him to the verge of despair. He says: 'Praying, sighing, weeping, fasting, struggling, was of no avail; the peace of God had departed from my soul.' He was rescued from this awful torment by a pastoral letter from Rev. M. Stephan, to whom he had written for advice. Stephan advised him to hasten to the saving arms of Jesus, and he would find healing under His wings. This Walther did, and the peace of God returned to his heart." (Pastor J. A. Friedrich, in *Ebenezer*, p. 24.) To the unmerited grace of God he ascribed his understanding of the article of saving grace in its full import. (See, for instance, *Lutheraner*, 1857, p. 2) Whatever success he and our Synod had in the work of the Church "was solely and entirely the work of God's great, free grace." (*Brosamen*, p. 564 f.) And the grace of God that brought him salvation and assured him of his eternal salvation was the breath of his life and his stay in trial and tribulation. "All my hopes have come to naught; this one hope, however, sustains me, that our Father in heaven will soon deliver me from every evil of body and soul, property and honor, and finally, when my last hour has come, grant me miserable sinner for my Lord Jesus' sake a blessed end and graciously take me from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven. 'Eia, waer'n wir da! Eia, waer'n wir da!'" (From a letter to a friend. M. Guenther, *Dr. C. F. W. Walther*, p. 230.)

Walther lived on the Gospel of grace, and he lived and labored for it. And his labor was not in vain. The Gospel of the grace of God is the Church's one treasure, and the Christian people of this land and throughout the world owe him undying thanks for guarding it so faithfully. "It was due to him [Dr. Pieper] and Walther that the *sola gratia*, in which and on which the Lutheran Church has ever lived and which she always preached, has now come to be comprehended in the Lutheran Church of our country, also theoretically, in its full import and that thereby clear and clean theological thinking has been promoted." (Dr. M. Reu in *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*. See *Lutheraner*, 1931, p. 262.) Dr. Pieper, Walther's foremost pupil, voices the thanks of the Church in these words: "We cannot but say: As the doctrine of the Church, which had been nearly forgotten also within the Lutheran Church, was again brought to light chiefly through Walther, so it is owing primarily to his testimony that the Biblical doctrine of conversion and election has not been entirely swept away

by the torrent of the adverse teaching." (*Lehre u. Wehre*, 1890, p. 243.) While Pelagianism and synergism have spread far and wide in the modern churches, a great host is proclaiming with a loud and glad voice what all Christians are saying in their heart: We owe our salvation solely to the grace of God.

The Church possesses two great treasures: the Gospel of saving grace and the inspired Word of God. Which is the greater? They go together. The Church needs both of them. And we prize the one because of the value of the other. We love the Bible because it brings the Gospel of grace to us, the one thing needful. But we lose the assurance of the truth of the Gospel if the certainty of Scripture is gone. "The validity of the Christian's hope in the several promises of the Gospel rests on the trustworthiness of the Bible." Let us faithfully guard the treasures of the Church. A grave responsibility rests upon us. The Lutheran Church holds these treasures in trust for the Church. Dr. C. E. Macartney (Presbyterian) wrote the other day: "The two great doctrines which Luther rediscovered and loosed upon the world were, first of all, the Scriptures as the final authority for the Christians and, secondly, justification by faith alone. . . . To-day the Protestant Church stands in sore need of a reemphasis and rediscovery of these two great Reformation propositions. . . . Protestantism, born out of the doctrine of salvation by grace, by faith alone, has been turning more and more back again to the weak and beggarly elements, the ill-favored doctrine of salvation by works, . . . works of charity and philanthropy, and personal character and integrity. . . ." (See *Luth. Witness*, 1934, p. 337.) A grave responsibility rests upon us who have come into the heritage of Dr. Walther. He reemphasized, for our day, the two great Reformation propositions and transmitted the treasures of the Church to our care with the solemn deprecation: May the mouth of that teacher who shall at any time utter one word "against Christ's free grace and against His alone true Word be smitten by God and stopped forever!" (Address at the corner-stone laying of Concordia Seminary, 1882. See Hochstetter, *Geschichte*, etc., p. 445.) Let us acquit ourselves as faithful pupils of Dr. Walther. And "may God grant the whole Lutheran Church, in this land and throughout the world, the grace that she may stand before the world with her escutcheon unsullied and fulfil, for the good of the whole world, her God-appointed mission: to confess the *sola gratia* on the basis of the *sola Scriptura!*" (Dr. F. Pieper, in *Lehre u. Wehre*, 1927, p. 11.)³⁾

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3) The reader is advised to read the series of articles by Dr. F. Pieper: "Dr. C. F. W. Walther als Theologe," in *Lehre u. Wehre*, beginning with Vol. 34, p. 97; "Walthers Verdienst um das *sola Scriptura*," by Dr. F. Bente, in *Lehre u. Wehre*, 57, p. 97 ff.; and "Walther the Lutheran," a series of articles by Dr. A. Graebner, in *Theological Quarterly*, beginning with 15, p. 66; and, in addition, Walther's own articles, essays, and books.