

## “We are no longer what we were”

Rev. Dr. C.F.W. Walther (1st President of the Synod)

From an 1870 sermon on a Day of Repentance

*Casual Reden u. Predigten*, CPH, 1889 pp. 172f.

trans. by Pastor Joel Baseley

Rev. Walther diagnosed the problem of the synod, not with the Gospel, but with the misunderstanding and abuse of the Gospel. He preached:

For the condition of this church depends on nothing else than only its connection with the Gospel, that is, whether the church has it or if the church has it, how it understands and uses the same.

So for more that thirty years the sweet Gospel of the free grace of God in Christ Jesus and of justification and salvation without any merit of works, but only through faith, has been preached to us every Sunday and feast day, all the fountains of comfort opened to us in the Word and the Sacrament, and every heavenly treasure of the complete salvation and atonement of Christ in its whole rich measure has been as much as poured into our laps.

And what has happened? It is apparent that we have become used to this comfort and become secure. Finally, more and more, the thought has stolen upon us: Well then, if it is pure grace, why be so tortured with repentance? If it all depends on faith, why still work out your salvation with fear and trembling? If Christ has already atoned for all of your sins and earned forgiveness for them, what need is there to take those sins so seriously? If Christ has already fought and overcome the devil and the world, why should a person himself yet seriously protect himself from flesh, world and devil and why does he need to battle against them?

The thought has snuck in among us: I surely believe and therefore I am righteous and will be saved, even if I am not converted to God. And I remain a saved Christian even if I also do not live in daily contrition and repentance. By this false comfort, girded around us as if it were an iron suit of armor, we come into the church. Now the sharp arrows of serious condemnation and law preaching might ever sound forth from the pulpit, but those arrows no longer penetrate the armor of our false comfort. We think we can know the secret means of being saved without first having to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. So then, those among us who once were zealous Christians become lazy, idle and lapse into the world and its cares, treasures and joys and finally fall into spiritual sleep, impotence and death and the rest, who never truly were converted Christians, remain so without repentance.

This, this misunderstanding and this abuse of the Gospel, and none other, is the reason that we are no longer what we were, even though continually the true, holy and saving Gospel is preached and heard by us.

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