

Doctrinal Discussions.

The following were submitted to the venerable Synod, written by Dr. C. F. W. Walther and represented by Pastor T. J. Große of Addison

Theses on the certainty of the state of grace

for discussion:

I.

The doctrine of the papists that no man can be completely certain of his state of grace without special [265/1] revelation is an antichristian error. Heb. 11:1; Matt. 11:28-30.

II.

The doctrine of the sects that the assurance of the state of grace consists only in a sweet feeling of grace is a dangerous delusion. Rom. 7:24; 1 John 3:20; Phil. 4:7.

III.

The certainty of the state of grace is based firmly and unshakably on the means of grace alone. John 15:3; 1 John 5:8.

IV.

The Holy Spirit alone works a certainty based on the means of grace in the repentant. Rom 8:16.

V.

The certainty of the state of grace is shaken by every sin, destroyed by mortal sins. 1 John 3:21; Psalm 66:18; John 5:44.

VI.

The certainty of the state of grace also exists in the doubt of the penitent, as long as the person fights against it. (state of [being in] spiritual temptations) Mark 9:24.

VII.

The more zealous a person is in sanctification, the more he has evidence by his love and good works that he is in favor with God. 2 Pet. 1:10; 1 John 3:14.

By way of introduction, the speaker remarked: Although the certainty of salvation and of eternal election is intimately connected with the certainty of the state of grace, our task for this time is not to go into this as well, <page 25> but merely to deal with the certainty of the state of grace; to come to a clear understanding of whether a person can become completely certain and happy here on earth in faith that he is a child of God, that he has forgiveness of all his sins and that God is gracious to him and is his friend and Father. The certainty of this is of the highest importance and full of the most glorious and sweetest

consolation.

That, according to God's will, man should come to the certainty of his state of grace, no one can deny who knows the Scriptures only to some extent; for the same teaches us on almost every page that a man should be certain of God's grace and rejoice in it; so that one must wonder how there can be people who even doubt this. St. Paul speaks not only in his own name, but in the name of all Christians 2 Tim. 1:12: "I know in whom I believe, and am persuaded that he is able to keep my salvation until that day," [265/2]

And Rom. 8:38-39.: "I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Furthermore, all the passages of Holy Scripture show us where the faithful rejoice, where they are joyful in their God, how certain they were of their salvation and their blessedness.

For example, Isaiah exults (chap. 61:10): "I rejoice in the Lord, and my soul is joyful in my God; for he has clothed me with garments of salvation, and arrayed me in the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorned with priestly ornaments, and as a bride in her jewels." And when Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1) prays: "My heart is joyful in the Lord ... for I rejoice in your salvation", this proves how certain she was of her state of grace.

Not only David alone, but the entire orthodox church of the old covenant, assured of divine grace, sang: "Praise the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, his holy name; praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not the good things he hath done thee; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thine infirmities; who redeemeth thy life from corruption; who crowneth thee with grace and mercy; who maketh thy mouth joyful, and thou shalt be young again as an eagle." (Ps 103:1-5)

The unshakeable certainty of the divine promises in the Gospel also clearly shows that a person should and can become certain of his state of grace. Here we distinguish the promises of the law from those of the gospel. As definite and certain as all the promises of God are, the promises of the law can never make a man certain of his state of grace, because they have the condition of a perfect fulfillment with them and our conscience <page 26> testifies to us that we have not fulfilled the law perfectly. But the evangelical promises of the free grace of God in Christ are given to all poor sinners; they are not tied to any condition; therefore they can and should make every poor sinner divinely certain that he is in grace with God. —

Consider further how sure, firm and certain God's promises are. What a vast difference there is between God's promises and the devil's, as well as man's promises! If the devil, in order to tempt people to sin, promises them all kinds of pleasures and advantages, it will ultimately turn out that his promises were not merely uncertain, but lying and deceitful. The promises and pledges of men are

also unreliable; for although they are often made in all seriousness, it is not always in man's power to fulfill what he has promised.

It is quite different with the promises of God, for [266/1] He is the truth himself, and what he promises, he certainly keeps. This is attested to in a large number of sayings. For example, Romans 3:3 and 4: "Should their unbelief nullify God's faith (i.e. nullify his faithful and precious promise)? Let that be far from it. Let it rather remain that God is true and all men false." Furthermore, 2 Timothy 2:13: "If we do not believe, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." 1 John 5:10 says: "Whoever does not believe God makes him a liar." According to this, doubting the divine promise, and thus also the certainty of the state of grace, which is based on the divine promise, is a very terrible sin, because it declares the divine promises to be lying and deceptive, i.e. devilish.

In order to bring us to the fullest certainty of the unshakable firmness of his promises, God has also confirmed them by oaths, e.g. Ezek. 33:11: "As surely as I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his ways and live." God cannot swear higher than by Himself.

Our dear Lord Christ also confirms His promises on oath. He says in John 5:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." And John 8:51: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man shall keep my word, he shall never see death." Now, according to God's word (and daily experience confirms it), the oath puts an end to all strife, so that what has been sworn remains firm (cf. Ebr. 6:16-18): what a powerful influence on the certainty of our state of grace the oath of the great God must have, who for our sake affirms his promises on oath, so that we may have strong, certain comfort, namely the certainty <[page 27](#)> of salvation in him! Hence the ancient Doctor of the Church, Tertullian, exclaims: "O happy ones, for whose sake God swears! We are unhappy if we do not believe the God who swears", and Jerome writes: "God swears so that, if we do not believe the God who promises, we may believe the God who swears for our salvation." Similarly St. Augustine: "What is the oath of the living and true God but a confirmation of his promise and, so to speak, a rebuke of the unbeliever?" and to Ps. 88: "God has said this! God has promised this! If that is not enough, listen: God has sworn this! Therefore, because the promise is sure, not because of our merit but because of his mercy, let us believe and worship him." Our father Luther also follows in the footsteps of these old church teachers, writing in Genesis 22: "God separates papal and carnal doubt from faith by his oath: 'Whoever does not believe God makes him a liar', 1 John 5:10 — yes, not only a liar, but also a perjurer." [266/2]

Since God has assured us of his grace on oath, one would think that there could not be a sinner on earth who would not shout: Praise God, I have forgiveness of sins, God is no longer an enemy to me, he has accepted me in grace and I am now his dear child! Yes, we should praise and sing of the divine

grace that has been bestowed upon us and not let the certainty of this grace rob us. And if all the world, if all the devils and, if it were possible, all the angels would tell us: You are not with God in grace, we should curse them and not make our gracious God a perjurer.

Consider further: for what purpose has God promised, given and bestowed his Holy Spirit on us, if not to make us certain of our state of grace? That is why he is also called the Comforter. We can only have true consolation if we are certain of divine grace. As long as a person still wavers back and forth in doubt and is not certain of divine grace, he will lack true consolation. The Holy Spirit is not just one comforter out of many, but the Comforter, i.e. the only one who brings right, true, constant comfort to our hearts. —

The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of truth. Every doubt belongs to the realm of lies. Since the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth, he must also make us certain of our state of grace and remove all doubt. — All the sayings of Holy Scripture which deal with the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit testify to us that his ministry is directed towards making us certain of divine grace.

For example, Romans 8:14-17: "Those whom the Spirit of God impels are children of God. For you have not received a servant spirit, that you should [<page 28>](#) fear, but you have received a childlike spirit, by which we cry out: Abba, dear Father. The same spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God. If we are children, then we are also heirs."

As long as man is not yet certain of his salvation in Christ, he has a servant spirit and fears God; but when the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts the certain conviction of divine grace towards us, the servant spirit must give way to the childlike spirit, through which we can now pray confidently and with all assurance to our heavenly Father. If we were not certain of reconciliation with God and that the wall of sin has been removed, we would never be able to do so. —

The same thing, namely that the office and work of the Holy Spirit is to assure and seal divine grace to the hearts of men, is taught to us in many other passages. Compare: Gal. 4:6. 1 Cor. 2:12. 2 Cor. 1:21-22. Eph. 1:13-14; 4:10 and so on. From all this we see not only that there really is a certainty of the state of grace, but also that it is God's earnest will that we should also come to this certainty. It follows, however, that this matter is of the highest importance.

Luther recognized this as well, which is why he [267/1] also works diligently to help people attain the certainty of their state of grace. In the "Passion Sermon on the Benefits of Christ's Suffering" he thus writes:

"We all experience how deep unbelief is in our hearts, that we can never be quite content because of our sins, we think forever: Oh, if you were more pious, things would be better for you, you would certainly have hope of grace from God. Where hearts are so doubtful, there must be fear and discontent. On the other hand, if we could firmly believe and trust in God's goodness, our hearts would cling to such comfort even in all kinds of adversity, and be cheerful and in good spirits. But it will not go away. For this reason the pope has set up all kinds of

divine services so that people may put their trust in God and despair all the less of God's help. Hence the invocation of the saints, pilgrimages, buying indulgences, mass and vigils, monastic life and all kinds of idolatry. Those who could get there thought they wanted to be better and enjoy heaven.

"And it is no less; a true preacher should pay more attention to no misfortune and put more diligence into it than how he can bring people to the right confidence and tear such unbelief out of their hearts. But how to do this rightly and masterfully can be seen here from the words of St. Paul, who has a sure testimony from our Lord Christ that he is a true preacher and a chosen and precious instrument for planting the kingdom of God. For this reason we should pay close attention to his words." (XIII, 758; [StL 13. 340-341](#))

In this Luther is quite right; for the most blessed task of the holy ministry of preaching is to bring the hearers to firm faith or to firm assurance of their state of grace. The sacred ministry cannot set itself a higher goal. Unfortunately, we live in a time when the poor listeners are not made certain of their salvation from countless pulpits, but rather are denied or robbed of all certainty of their state of grace. But woe to those who, when it comes to dying and the hour of decision for all eternity strikes, are not certain of divine grace! They are lost.

Thesis I.

The doctrine of the papists that no man can be completely certain of his state of grace without special revelation is an anti-Christian error. Heb. 11:1. Matt. 11:28-30.

This thesis contains two things: (1) it asserts that the papists teach that no man can be completely certain of his state of grace without special revelation, and (2) that this doctrine is an antichristian error. Both must be proven.

1) That the papists really hold [26712] this doctrine that no man can be completely certain of his state of grace without a special revelation is proven by their own writings. Pope Leo X, in a bull of June 14, 1520, condemns the following sentence of Luther: "Sins are not forgiven to anyone unless he also believes them forgiven; for the forgiveness of sin and the bestowal of grace is not enough, but one must believe that it is forgiven." (Smets p. 210.) —

The bishops and fathers assembled at the Council of Trent, in the sixth session, which dealt with justification, declared the following in the ninth chapter, entitled:

"Chapter IX: Against the Vain Confidence of Heretics":

Although it is necessary to believe that sins are never forgiven, nor have ever been forgiven, except by grace, through divine mercy, for Christ's sake, yet "no one who boasts of the confidence and certainty of the forgiveness of his sins, and leaves it at that, may say that his sins are forgiven, say that his sins are forgiven, or have been forgiven, although among heretics and apostates this vain confidence, far removed from all fear of God, may exist, indeed does exist in our times, and is extolled with great contention against the Catholic Church. But even this is not to be asserted, that those who are truly justified ought to suppose, without the least doubt, that they are justified, and that no one is absolved from sins and justified but he who believes for certain that he is absolved and justified, and that by this belief alone [<Page 30>](#) is accomplished, as if he who does not believe this doubted the promises of God and the power of Christ's death and resurrection. For just as no pious person should doubt the mercy of God, the merit of Christ, and the power and efficacy of the sacraments, so also each one, when he looks at himself and his own weakness and disorder, may fear and be anxious about his grace, since no one can know by the certainty of faith, which

can contain nothing false, whether he has obtained the grace of God." (Sess. 6. de justif. cap. 9.)

They also expressly stipulated this in conciliar resolutions.

Canon 13 of the Council of Trent thus reads: "If anyone says that it is necessary for any man to obtain forgiveness of sins, that he certainly and without any doubt believes, because of his own weakness and defective disposition, that his sins are forgiven, let him be accursed."

Canon 14: "If anyone says that a man is absolved from sins and justified because he certainly believes himself to be absolved and justified, or that no one is truly justified but he who believes himself justified, and that by this faith alone is he absolved and justified, let him be accursed." (Smets p. 33. 34.)

Chemnitz analyzes these sentences:

"1. They admit that 'it is necessary to believe that sin is forgiven freely (*gratis* = by grace) through divine mercy, for Christ's sake'. We know that this must be believed because the Gospel presents this promise to faith.

2. But they immediately add: 'yet no one [268/1] who rests in this confidence alone and in the certainty of the forgiveness of his sins may say that his sins are forgiven'. The faith of the Tridentine Council thus believes the promise of the Gospel of the gracious forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake in such a way that it does not dare to rest in this certain confidence; indeed, they are not afraid to say that no one's sins are forgiven who rests in this confidence and certainty of the forgiveness of his sins.

3. They give as a reason: "because a vain confidence, far removed from all godliness, can also take place among heretics".

4. Add that 'not even those who are truly justified can claim for themselves without any doubt that they are justified'.

5. They say that 'it must not be asserted that no one is absolved and justified from sins but he who certainly believes that he is absolved and justified'. They therefore think that men are absolved <page 31> even if they do not believe that they are absolved; i.e. they teach absolution without faith.

6. They declare that the pious in general may not doubt the promises of God, the validity (effect) of Christ's death, the merit of Christ, the power of the sacraments; but as far as the application to individuals is concerned, each one, looking at his own condition, can only tremble and fear* with regard to his pardon. (Who then teaches him to look at his own condition?) 'For no one can know with such certain faith, to which nothing false (no deceit) attaches, that he has obtained the grace of God.

7. Finally, they curse anyone who says that 'it is necessary for every man to believe without doubt and without hesitation, because of his weakness, that his sins are forgiven'." (P. 19V.)

Truly, with this the papists have put a stamp on their whole theology by which one can recognize what it is, namely a theology of doubt. Here we have the proof from their own confession. "Such doubts," says Chemnitz, "can also be taught by

philosophy or any pagan religion." This would certainly not have required the Christian religion.

On the basis of the Tridentine Resolutions, the Jesuit Osorius preached in 1607:

"If someone had lived a thousand years like John the Baptist, raising the dead every day, seeing angels and Christ every day and suffering countless tortures for Christ's sake, and you were to ask him: 'Do you know for certain that you will attain salvation? Do you know for certain that you are in God's grace?' He will answer, 'I do not know. — To the objection that, according to Scripture, the Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirit, he replies. "It may be certain in itself, but we cannot rely on it with certainty, because we do not know for sure that it comes from the Holy Spirit and not from the devil." [268/2]

Carzov, from whose sermons on the glory of the faithful the above is taken, exclaims: "The Lord rebuke you, you Satan! to cast doubt on the effect of the Holy Spirit's grace in such a way that you believe it could well come from the devil!"

That the doubt of the certainty of the state of grace was taught in Luther's time, yes, even by himself, when he was still stuck in papist blindness, he himself testifies to Genesis 27:38:

"Since we were monks," he writes, "we did nothing with our mortification. For we did not want to recognize our sin and ungodly nature; indeed, we knew nothing of original sin and did not understand that unbelief was sin. Yes (which is still more), [<page 32>](#) we also held and taught that one should doubt God's grace and mercy. Therefore, the more I ran and desired to come to Christ, the further he moved away from me. After confession and when I had said Mass, I could never be satisfied in my heart, for conscience can have no right and certain consolation from works." (II, 467 [[StL 2, 320; LW 5, 157](#)])

The same Luther:

"Again, listen, my dear brother. Now when they have persuaded a poor man with their splendid words about monastic baptism and holy orders, that he is thereby as pure as an innocent child coming from baptism, they afterwards turn the tide, and have another doctrine, which is called: *sunt justi, et tamen nescit homo, an odio vel amore dignus sit*. Eccl. 9:1 [The full passage reads: "So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him."] They interpret it thus: Even if a man is pious and righteous, he does not know whether he is in favor or disfavor with God, but everything remains uncertain until the future, the last judgment.

"This saying has gone through the papacy and has frightened and saddened all consciences. For it has ruled over all monasteries, abbeys, schools and whatever Christians are called; as their books and writings everywhere testify, and as I and my peers have miserably experienced, and have also seen many who have languished over it, and finally died in despair, as the insane. For, oh

dear Lord God! If a sorrowful conscience would like to have peace and a gracious God, and would seriously like to be saved, and this saying, Eccl. 9, is in its heart, what else should or can it do but despair? And while it thinks: who knows whether I am in grace or not: the devil is quickly there, and gives the infernal murderous blow and says: Oh, you are out of grace and lost; [269/1] as he pushed Eve, when they began to doubt and dispute. Thus the poor soul perishes, thanks be to the dear holy monk's baptism." (Threefold Appendix of some of Luther's controversial writings. II. Appendix. Against Duke George. XIX, 2314 f. [[StL 19, 1857-1858](#); not in [AE?](#)])

Again Luther says on Gal. 4:6:

"This is why the kingdom of the Antichrist is such that at first they boast in the most glorious way about their laws, ordinances and rules, and promise forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those who keep them. Afterwards, when the poor wretched people have miserably tormented and afflicted their bodies for a long time with vigils and fasting, etc., as given and imposed on them by human laws, they receive this as a reward, that they must first doubt whether God is merciful to them or not. So horribly has the wretched Satan atoned for his lust, and cooled his troubles in the murder of poor souls, to which the papists, as his dear faithful, have confidently helped and served him. For this reason no one should doubt that the papacy is a real torture chamber of souls and consciences and the devil's own kingdom and empire." — [[StL 9, 507](#); [LW26, 385](#)]

But it is not enough that the papists have a special doctrine of [page 33](#) doubting the state of grace: rather, the whole doctrinal edifice of popery aims at leaving the sinner in doubt, indeed, at teaching him to doubt whether he stands in grace with God.

With regard to justification, they claim that man is not justified by an external righteousness imputed to him, but by a righteousness that is inherent and innate in him. If a person feels nothing of this righteousness, he must despair. By mixing works into justification, the natural consequence is that man can never be certain of his state of grace, since his conscience must always testify to him that his poor works cannot make him perfect. Trust in works does not and cannot exist in temptation. Whoever trusts in it is building on a foundation of sand.

In the case of repentance, they do not speak a word about faith, but count as belonging to it: 1) contrition (not as a shock to the conscience, but as a meritorious pain voluntarily worked by the sinner, combined with the intention to amend his life); 2) the confession of all sins before the priest; 3) satisfaction, or the performance of the penitential works imposed by the priest. — The Roman Catechism says of contrition: "For although we admit that sins are blotted out by contrition, who does not know that it must be so violent, bitter and hot that the bitterness of the pain can be compared and equated with the greatness of sin?" (Busse I, 233. Cf. Fick, *The Mystery of Iniquity*, [[Geheimnis der Bosheit](#)], p. 45.; Cp. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* on "Confession" and Confession, pp. 364-365) Concerning confession it says: "The pastors, however, should mainly

teach this, that one must take care in confession that it is whole and complete." — [269/2] It is taught that eternal penalties are remitted by absolution, but not temporal ones. These, if not expiated here, would have to be expiated in purgatory. [CCC, p. 268 f., etc.]

The abominable doctrine of the priest's intention in all official acts is also quite frightening. If, for example, the priest, they teach, does not also intend to perform the act of baptism, it is invalid and the baptized person is not baptized despite the outward act. The same applies to other official acts. Indeed, if the priest thinks anything else about the ministerial acts, they are invalid. In the Tridentine Council it is actually said: "If anyone says that the ministers of the Church, when they prepare the sacraments, do not at least require the *intention* to do what the Church does, let him be accursed." (Canon 11. Smets, p. 41.) Now if a man cannot be certain whether he is rightly baptized, whether he receives the right absolution and the right Lord's Supper, where is the certainty of the state of grace?!

The Council of Trent says of Baptism: "If <page 34> anyone says that all sins committed after Baptism are remitted or forgiven by the mere memory and faith in the baptism received, let him be accursed." (Smets, p. 42.) Hereby Antichrist curses the doctrine of Holy Scripture, that by Baptism the sins which a person has committed after receiving it are forgiven, if he repently and believably consoles himself for his baptism, and thus completely annuls the blessed fruit of holy Baptism.

Holy Communion must also put up with being turned by the papists not into a meal of grace, but into a meal of doubt. *) (* Cf. Lutherbuch by Fick, p. 37-38.) — But when would we be finished if we wanted to prove from all the teachings of the papists that they have made them subservient to their theology of doubt! The whole papacy is built on doubt; it has the one great aim of plunging men into doubt and uncertainty, so that they may not become certain of their state of grace. The real reason for this doctrine of doubt is the purse; for if they preached the certainty of the state of grace, no one would have Mass read and pay for it. Our confessional writings therefore quite rightly call the papist preachers unfaithful preachers, because they do not fulfill the main task of the sacred ministry of preaching, namely, to make Christians certain of their state of grace. They not only shamefully omit the main task of the sacred ministry of preaching, namely to make Christians certain of their state of grace, but actually reverse it.

In the Apology (Art. IV, Müller, p. 108) it says:

"Therefore the adversaries are truly unfaithful bishops, unfaithful preachers and doctors, have hitherto given evil advice to consciences and still advise them evil, that they lead such doctrine, since they leave people in doubt, hovering and hanging uncertainly whether they will obtain forgiveness of sins or not. For how is it possible that those who have not [270/1] heard or do not know this necessary doctrine of Christ, who are still wavering and in doubt as to whether or not they have forgiveness of sins, should stand in mortal distress and last straits and

anxieties?" [par. 119 f.; [Triglotta p. 155](#)]

The great harm of this infidelity is also demonstrated in the Apology. On p. 183 (Müller [XII (V) Of Repentance par. 88-90; [Triglotta p. 277-279](#)]) it says:

"The adversaries, when they preach and teach for a long time apart from this doctrine, leave the poor consciences in doubt. It is not possible that there should be peace, a quiet or peaceful conscience, when they doubt whether God is gracious. For if they doubt whether they have a gracious God, whether they are doing right, whether they have forgiveness of sins, how can they call upon God in doubt, how can they be sure that God respects and hears their prayer? So all their lives are without faith and they cannot serve God properly. This is what Paul says to the Romans: Whatever is not <page 35> of faith is sin. And because they are always and forever stuck in doubt, they never know what God is, what Christ is, what faith is. In the end, they die in despair, without God, without all knowledge of God. The adversaries teach such a harmful doctrine. Namely, such a doctrine by which the whole gospel is done away with, Christ is suppressed, people are led into heartache and torment of conscience, and finally, when temptations come, into despair. —

Luther writes:

"I say all this in order to reject and refute the harmful teaching of the sophists and monks, who held and taught that no one can know for certain whether he is in grace or in disgrace, even if he lives and walks in the very best way. And such an opinion has been held by the whole papacy to be as certain as if it were one of the noblest grounds and articles of faith. But there is no telling what terrible and great harm they have done with this wicked, godless doctrine. For they have indeed suppressed the doctrine of faith, destroyed faith, confused consciences, stolen Christ away from Christendom, obscured and denied all the benefits and gifts of the Holy Spirit, done away with the right and true worship of God, and instead caused all kinds of idolatry, vain contempt of God and blasphemy in the hearts of men. For anyone who doubts God's gracious will and does not believe that he has a gracious God can never believe that his sins will be forgiven, that God will take care of him and save him. ... You young people should flee from this godless error, on which the whole papacy is founded, because you are still untainted by it, and be as afraid of it as of the most poisonous and harmful pestilence that may be there." (Leipzig edition XI, 269.)

The Jesuit Köster asserts:

"Christ does not want us to have a certainty of faith without all doubt." (cf. *Gerh. L. de just. § 81.*) The Jesuit Bellarmin writes:

"It is not beneficial for men [270/2] to be properly certain of their grace, because this certainty produces pride, while uncertainty produces humility." (cf. *Gerh. I. c. § 108.*)

So this is what Christian humility is supposed to be when one makes God a liar and perjurer, but this is what pride is supposed to be when one gives God his glory! Who does not recognize from this the diabolical wickedness of the

Antichrist!

The old Doctor of the Church Augustine speaks quite differently:

"If you would say," he writes, "that you are holy of yourself, you are proud; again, you believers in Christ <[page 36](#)> and members of Christ, if you would not say that you are holy, you are ungrateful. Therefore, that thou mayest be neither proud nor unthankful, say to thy God, I am holy, because thou hast sanctified me; because I have received, not because I have had: because thou hast given, not because I have earned." (On Ps. 85.)

And further:

"All your sins are forgiven you, therefore bring forth nothing of your doing, but only of Christ's grace, for by grace you are saved, says the apostle: therefore it is not presumption to praise what you have received, it is not pride, but reverence." (Sermo 28. de verbis Domini.)

When Bellarmin says above that men cannot ordinarily be certain of their state of grace, he is referring to the Roman doctrine that such certainty of grace or of the state of grace can only be obtained in an extraordinary way or by special revelation. For the papists certainly admit that there have been men who have been completely certain of their state of grace, but they have not attained this certainty by the means of grace, but by special revelation and therefore in an extraordinary way; e.g. the palsied man, whom the Lord assured of his grace; Peter, Paul, all the apostles and many others. But this is nothing but vain deception. Nowhere in Holy Scripture are we referred to special revelation for the certainty of our state of grace, but always only to the certain Word of God which is presented to us in Holy Scripture. And this Word of God alone is the firm foundation of our faith. Faith does not need such special revelations; if it needed them, it would no longer be faith. God's Word teaches us that faith can be and is certain of divine grace even without special revelation.

Heb. 11:1 says: "But faith is a certain assurance of the things hoped for, and not doubting the things not seen." So even without seeing, or, what is quite the same, even without special revelation, faith is certain in its hope, and has the certain assurance that it is with God in grace; indeed, it not only has such an assurance, but it is this certain assurance itself. For it is precisely in the confident grasp of divine grace that the essence of faith consists. Therefore, if it is said that man, in order to become certain [271/1] of his state of grace, needs a special revelation to make him divinely certain, then the essence of faith is completely abolished, namely, it is denied that it is a certain assurance of that which is hoped for, and not a doubt of that which is not seen. <[Page 37](#)>

Why should a special revelation be necessary after the mouth of truth has said Matthew 11:28-30: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." So it is not by special revelation that rest for the soul is to be obtained or, what is the same thing, the assurance of the state of

grace, for by this assurance alone does the soul come to rest; but by coming to Christ as a weary and burdened sinner and allowing Him to refresh you, i.e. by believing in Him. And it is not only a few specially favored individuals who are to come to the assurance of their state of grace, but all who are weary and burdened, and therefore have a desire for grace and mercy, are to be refreshed, i.e. to receive the assurance that God is gracious to them. —

That no one comes to the assurance of the state of grace through special revelation, Paul is a striking proof of this. It is true that Paul had special revelations, but he was not even converted to Christ through them and came to a believing knowledge of Christ, but was directed by the Christ who appeared to him to Ananias in Damascus, so that he might preach the gospel to him. Nor did he first come to the certainty of his state of grace through the later revelations he received; he therefore never refers to these special revelations when he proclaims the certainty of his state of grace, but always to the Gospel and nothing else. He therefore does not claim greater certainty than others, but places himself in a line with other believers who had not had such revelations as he had. For example, 2 Cor. 4:13, 14: "But because we have the same spirit of faith (according to which it is written: I believe, therefore I speak), we also believe; therefore we also speak, knowing that he who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up through Jesus and will present us together with you.

1 Timothy 1:15-16 Paul writes: "This is certainly true, and a precious word, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But then mercy was shown to me, so that in me first of all Jesus Christ might show all patience, as an example to those who should believe in him for eternal life." Thus he not only declares the gospel of Christ to be the only means by which he has the certainty of the divine grace that has befallen him, but he also sets himself up as an example for all repentants, namely that all can and should come to the certainty of grace through the same gospel as he did. <[page 38](#)>

How we come to the certainty of the state of grace will be dealt with in more detail in the 3rd Thesis. [271/2] But the sayings quoted show sufficiently that Paul did not arrive at the certainty of his state of grace through special revelation, nor that we should wait for special revelations in order to arrive at this certainty. —

2. In our thesis it is emphasized that the doctrine of the papists, that no man can be completely certain of his state of grace without special revelation, is an antichristian error. For it cannot be denied that this error actually characterizes antichristianity, because the whole teaching of Christ, the holy Gospel, is thereby overturned, as has already been demonstrated several times in the foregoing. —

Luther writes:

"Even if everything else in the papacy were right and good, as it is not, the fact that they teach people to doubt God's grace and will in this way would be such a tremendously harmful error that it cannot be said. And although it is undeniable that the enemies of Christ teach vainly uncertain things (for, as I said,

they call the consciences doubtful of God's grace), they are nevertheless so full of diabolical fierceness that they condemn and murder us with all certainty as the very worst heretics, solely because they lead people to believe God, who cannot lie, etc., and do so as if they were quite certain that their teaching is right and divine. Therefore we should thank our dear God for eternity that we have been delivered from this desperate error, and can now truly know and believe that the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says, cries out in our hearts and causes inexpressible groaning. And this is our foundation. The gospel does not call us to consider our good works and perfection, but God himself, who makes the promise; item Christ, who has fulfilled and brought to light what was promised. On the other hand, the pope is not called God, who makes the promise, nor Christ, who is our mediator and high priest, but our works and merits; nothing else can follow, except that we become uncertain whether God is gracious to us, and finally despair. For the matter is founded on our works, merit and righteousness, etc.

But if it is based on God's promise and on Christ, the true immovable rock, we are sure of the matter, secure and joyful in the Holy Spirit, because it is based on God, who is faithful and cannot lie or deceive. For thus he says: "Behold, I give my own Son to die, that by his blood he may redeem you from sin and death.

"This is the reason why we can truly know and prove [page 39](#) that our theology or doctrine is righteous and certain, namely, that it does not let us rest and build on our own actions, but leads us from ours, and establishes us on another foundation that is beyond us; so that we do not rely on our powers, conscience, feelings, [272/1] person and work, but on that which is beyond us, i.e. on God's promise and truth, on Christ, who sits at the right hand of God and is our righteousness, which the devil cannot overthrow nor take away from us. i.e. on God's promise and truth, on Christ, who sits at God's right hand and is our righteousness, which the devil cannot overthrow or take away from us. Of this the pope and his crowd know and understand nothing at all, which is why he denies and blasphemes such abominable and unchristian things with his crowd, pretending that no one knows, however pious and wise he may be, whether he is in favor or out of favor with God? Not so, but he who is righteous and wise knows truly and certainly that God loves him: or, if he does not know this, he is really neither righteous nor wise." (VIII, 2419-21. [Commentary on Galatians, 1535; cf. LW 26, 386 f.])

The real reason why the papists do not believe the doctrine of the certainty of the state of grace is because they are dominated by the spirit of Antichrist, who wants to overturn the foundation of faith and all doctrines of faith. — The certainty of the state of grace is a certainty of faith and is found and can only be found in those who have true faith. The Antichrist's work, however, is to rob Christians of their faith under the pretense of offering them true Christianity in exchange, as if the creatures of the Antichrist were true Christians. By suppressing pure doctrine and seeking to gain recognition for his anti-divine

doctrine, the pope sets himself up as the true Antichrist in the place of God and Christ.

God's Word teaches us that we cannot be assured of our state of grace by our works, but by faith alone. But the Antichrist declares this teaching to be harmful and immoral, because such a teaching would lead people to stop doing good works. And according to the Antichrist's teaching, people are to be saved through good works. This teaching is very easy for people to accept because they would like to earn their own salvation. —

To drive people to good works, they need their cursed doctrine of doubt as a spur. A commander, they say, who has to carry out a perilous undertaking, does not give great rewards before going into battle, but promises them to those who win the victory. In the same way, God will not be so foolish as to first give heaven and then allow good works to be done, but will first allow the works to be done and then give heaven as a reward. Thus the Antichrist gives people a false delusion, as if they would then be real zealous Christians if they sought to earn heaven with works, and he abhors as ungodly the teaching that promises heaven as a gift of God's free grace without merit of works. But this is anti-Christian if this [<page 40>](#) workaholism is passed off as true Christianity. This reveals the secret of wickedness.

True faith unites our hearts with Christ. The Antichrist does not accept this. He turns faith into a mere historical knowledge of Christ. It is certain that this does not yet unite us with Christ and that we cannot [272/2] thereby partake of God's grace. According to the Pope's teaching, faith is supposed to be an unreliable means to salvation; but the means he gives for attaining salvation are supposed to accomplish it. In this way the Antichrist gives people false comfort. He condemns justifying faith and a certain assurance of heart to hell. When it is written: "Faith is a certain assurance", he says: This is not true; and when Christ invites all poor sinners to himself, he says: Do not be so bold, you miserable people, to go to him; only do not think that he will look at you; but entrust yourselves to me, give yourselves into my hand, and I will lead you to hell. —

God not only wants to give us poor wretched sinners his grace, but he also wants to make us certain that we have it. To this end go the most glorious means which God in his wisdom has devised for the salvation of men, namely his holy Word and the sacraments, the seals of this Word. Sacraments, the seals of this Word. —

By nature we all fear God and flee from him. Through conversion, however, we turn back to God, into his Fatherly arms. But this conversion to God can only take place if we recognize God's great love for us from the Word and allow ourselves to be brought to faith. Antichrist, however, reverses everything, teaches us not to trust in God's grace, but to doubt. Just as the devil said to Eve in paradise: "Should God have said?", so now he speaks through the Antichrist concerning all doctrines of faith: Yes, should God have said? Although this devil tries to present himself as an angel of light, he is nevertheless a true devil.

Whether the white devil reigns in the papacy or the black devil in the children of unbelief does not change the matter. Both are devils, indeed, those ruled by the white devil are two-faced.

According to God's will, the poor sinner should place his trust solely in the fact that God has given him salvation by pure grace, so that he may be assured of his salvation through faith. But the Pope calls this trust in God's grace presumptuousness. He makes a virtue out of sin and a sin out of virtue. All this proves that the papacy, through all its teachings, but especially through its doctrine of doubt, proves itself to be the true Antichrist. —

Luther writes:

"The holy Christian church (I am now speaking with ours, for with the pabst, or with the heinz, blocks and stones, <[page 41](#)> there is no reason, neither seeing nor hearing) is not a reed nor a penny. Pure, she does not waver or [273:1] yield, like the devil's harlot, the papal church; who, like an adulteress, thinks she must not stand firm with her husband, but may waver, yield, allow, as the fornicator would have it; but she is (says St. Paul 2 Tim. 3:15.) a pillar and foundation of the truth. It stands firm (he says), it is a foundation and firm ground, and not a false or lying ground, but a ground of truth; it does not deceive or deceive, it does not deal in lies. But what wavers and doubts cannot be truth. And what use or need would a church of God have in the world if it wanted to waver and be uncertain in its words, or to set something new every day, now giving this, now taking that? Yes, what use would such a God be if he wanted to teach us to waver and doubt? Papist theology teaches that we must doubt grace; otherwise enough is written about this. For whereas otherwise the papists would have won in all things, they are lost in this main point, since they teach that we must doubt God's grace if we are not first worthy enough through our own sufficiency or the merit and intercession of the saints. There are their books, letters and seals, monasteries, foundations and even their present plates and masses. But because they teach this piece, that they stand on their works and doubts, as they cannot do otherwise, it is certain that they must be the devil's church; for there are and can be no more ways than these two: one that relies on God's grace; the other that builds on our merit and works. The first is the way of the ancient churches and of all the patriarchs, prophets and apostles, as the Scriptures testify; the other is the way of the pope and his churches; no one can deny this, not even the saints and all the devils themselves. There is (as has often been said) testimony, books, bulls, seals, letters, abbeys, monasteries, that one can prove it to all the world." (Of the Protestant Campaign against Duke Henry. XVII, 1680 f.)

Aegidius Hunnius writes:

"Finally, by this word: I believe, papal doubt is expelled from Christianity as wrong and contrary to the faith and condemned to hell. For Scripture opposes faith and doubt as repugnant things. If one wants to praise faith, then the doubts of the papists must perish. But he who calls the doubt of the contrary good and

right, lifts up and destroys faith. Matth. 21:21. says the Lord to his disciples: 'If you have faith and do not doubt, you will say to this mountain, "Be lifted up and thrown into the sea". [273/2] By this Christ wants to teach that having faith is as much as not doubting. As the epistle to the Hebrews describes faith, that it is a certain assurance of things hoped for, and not doubting (says the apostle) of things not seen. Which <[page 42](#)> St. James confirms in the first chapter: 'If anyone among you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to everyone simply and puts no one off, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith (he says) and do not doubt/ From the sayings now quoted, see how faith and doubt are opposed to each other as repugnant things. Therefore, whoever says from the bottom of his heart, I believe, says that he does not doubt. Believing Christians are therefore guilty of striking out with the shield of faith the painful doubts they might have about God, his nature or will, as the devil's fiery darts. And what God promises through the word of his promise, to believe it firmly and steadfastly and not to weaken in it. As it is said of Abraham, he did not doubt the promise of God, but grew strong in faith, gave glory to God, and knew for certain that what God promised he could do; therefore it was counted to him for righteousness." (*Catechism Sermons*, page 125.)

Thesis II.

The doctrine of the sects that the assurance of the state of grace consists only in a sweet feeling of grace is a dangerous delusion. Rom. 7:24. 1 John 3:20. Phil. 4:7.

This thesis, too, contains two parts, as is evident, namely (1) the assertion that the sects teach that the certainty of the state of grace consists only in a sweet feeling, and (2) that this is a dangerous enthusiasm.

That the sects, like the Methodists and Baptists, and in general almost all church parties that have arisen from the Reformed Church, teach that the certainty of the state of grace consists only in a sweet feeling, is obvious to the day. They do not refer people to the word of Christ for the certainty of their state of grace, but to their own feelings and the stirrings of their hearts. No Methodist will consider a man a Christian who cannot say that he feels that he is in grace with God. Hence their standing question, especially at their so-called class meetings: How do you feel? If a person no longer feels this grace, they tell him: "You must pray, struggle and fight until you regain the feeling of grace. The pressing of the feeling, or that a person feels the inner witness of the Holy Spirit (as they call it), is actually the distinguishing mark of the enthusiastic spirit that dominates the sects. On this and that circumstance, through which they have attained a sweet, blessed feeling, they base their certainty that they are in grace with God. But this is vain enthusiasm. [274/1] <[page 43](#)>

In their catechism, the Moravians [*Herrnhuters*] describe true living faith as "conviction and experience of the innermost heart and life". (S. 53.)

When the Reformed declare that he is a dead literalist who bases his faith on

the Word alone, they show that they base their faith on something other than God's Word. They, like all sects, look away from the Word and look to feeling.

Our whole time suffers from this. It cannot be denied that there are some within the sects who would like to come to the certainty of their state of grace; but if they are referred to their feelings, they can never come to a firm certainty which remains unshaken even in all trials, the real touchstone of true faith, but always hover, as it were, between heaven and hell. If they have a blessed feeling, they think they are true Christians; if they lack this sweet feeling of grace, they struggle with despair.

What unfortunate people the Methodists, for example, are in their emotional Christianity, is described in a conversation between a Lutheran preacher and a Methodist preacher, reported in [volume 4 of *Der Lutheraner*, p. 164](#). It reads:

"I once asked a Methodist preacher who had been preaching for twelve years what it meant when the Apologist printed from the report of Mr. Preacher N. N. N.: 'Yesterday (usually after using the penitential bench) ten souls came into the glorious freedom of the children of God.'

Answer: Now they felt the grace of God and the forgiveness of sins in Christ strongly in their hearts and also testified to it aloud with their mouths.

Me: But if they don't feel any of it tomorrow, then how?

He: Well, they must pray and plead earnestly that they will feel it again!

Me: But what if this doesn't help and the dryness increases rather than decreases?

He: You must pray and struggle even more earnestly.

Me: But if they can't, indeed, if in the end conscience and the law rise up against them again and the drought becomes fear, then how?

He: Then they are not thoroughly converted.

Me: But they were at the bench of repentance and grace and in the Apologist it was printed: 'they came into the glorious freedom of the children of God'.

[274/2] <[page 44](#)>

He: Yes! There are also some who fall away again.

Me: Well, you should at least be a little more careful and not always be so hasty and confident in stating the specific number in the apologist, as if you were a man of the heart like the Lord himself and knew exactly what is in man. But this in passing. But to come back to our case: can you not imagine that those spiritually arid souls, or even souls frightened again by Moses, did not fall willfully back into sin and yet cannot regain the feeling of joy in Christ and the comfort of the Holy Spirit after they have prayed for it often and earnestly, indeed, that they can no longer pray properly?

The Methodist preacher was silent for a good while, for it seemed almost unbelievable to him that souls who had perhaps come to the glorious freedom of the children of God at the penitential bench after special groaning and shouting should not be able to pray properly afterwards without having fallen away again.

Finally he said: 'But God is greater than our hearts.'

I replied to him, Right, but where is that to be found but in the Word of God? It is to the comforting promises of the faithful God in the Holy Scriptures that those troubled and afflicted souls must be directed, if one is first assured that sinful relapses have not brought about this state of drought or anxiety; but one must not, as it were as a new law, burden them with this prayerfulness.

Thereupon he said no more, and I went my way." ("Conversations between two Lutherans about Methodism. First conversation". — By Dr. Sihler.)

We do not deny that God also gives his children glorious feelings of his closeness to grace. This happens primarily when the sinner is converted and comes to God. Then God often gives a taste of the exuberant riches of his grace out of great mercy. These are the heavenly Father's kisses of love. For when the prodigal son came home to his father in repentance, his father embraced and kissed him. The heavenly Father does the same, and he does so in order to tear the sinner away from the world all the more decisively. If the poor sinner experiences the grace of God, is transferred from the shame of sin to glory, from hell to heaven, from death to life, how could he not rejoice? That would be a beautiful Christianity if there were no gratitude and sense of grace! So we also work so that the grace of God may be tasted and felt, that the Christian may rejoice and sing: "Praise the Lord, my soul, and all that is in me, his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and do not forget the good things he has done for you."

But woe to him who builds on this feeling the certainty of his state of grace!

<page 45> For this feeling of grace is not always found among Christians; often the Christian feels no other way than as if he had been abandoned and cast out by God. The certainty of the state of grace can therefore [275/1] not depend on the feeling and perception of grace. That a Christian does not always feel the most blessed sensations of divine grace in his heart is shown quite clearly by the example of the apostle Paul, who exclaims in Romans 7:24, which is appended to our thesis: "Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This is the same apostle who at another time joyfully and triumphantly says: "I know in whom I believe, and am sure that he is able to keep my salvation until that day." (2 Tim. 1:12) Why did he cry out so piteously for salvation? Because his whole sinful ruin was before his eyes, because he realized vividly what a wretched creature he was. Although Paul did not have the sweet sensation of grace when he groaned, "I wretched man," etc., he was nevertheless in grace and was certain of his state of grace in all this. 1 John 3:20 says: "That if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart." These words also testify to us that those who are certain of their state of grace often feel nothing but condemnation in their hearts.

Whoever has read the Book of Job and the Psalms must confess that not only those who feel and taste the closeness of the Savior's grace are converted. For therein it is excellently written for eternity that the true children of God often felt nothing but death and damnation within themselves. A few passages from the Book of Job may serve as proof.

Job was certain of his state of grace, and yet he laments (Job chap. 3:20): "Why is light given to the weary, and life to the afflicted?" and (vv. 24-26): "For when I shall eat, I shall sigh, and my weeping shall come out like water. For that which I feared has come upon me, and that which I cared for has befallen me. Was I not happy? Was I not finely still? Did I not have a good rest? And does such restlessness come?" Further (chap. 6:4): "For the arrows of the Almighty are in me, the fury of the same drinketh out my spirit, and the terrors of God are upon me"; and (chap. 7:1): "Must not man always be in strife on earth, and his days be as the days of a day laborer?" (v. 11.) "Therefore I will not refrain my mouth, I will speak of the anguish of my heart, and will tell of the sorrow of my soul." (v. 21.) "And why do you not forgive my transgression and take away my sin? For now I will lie down in the ground, and when they look for me tomorrow, I will not be there." These last words in particular prove that he was tempted because of the forgiveness of his sins. This great temptation is also shown in the words [page 46](#) (chap. 19, 21): "Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me." Nevertheless, despite all his inner spiritual distress and temptation, Job adds: "I know that my Redeemer lives" etc.

The fact that one feels the grace of God in one's heart at times is a blessed fruit of faith and a delicious addition, but it does not belong to faith itself. Just as good works follow [275/2] faith, so do the sweet sensations of grace; but here too the difference must be well noted that good works are a necessary fruit and consequence of faith, whereas the sensation of divine grace, or the sweet feeling of grace, may or may not be present with faith. Faith and evil works are not compatible, but true faith can be present and the feeling of divine grace absent. Whoever makes the feeling of grace a part of faith completely overturns the doctrine of faith, for "faith is a certain assurance of things hoped for, and not a doubting of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1) What I cannot see, feel or perceive, I am to believe. Christ's words to Thomas also teach us what faith should be like: "Blessed are those who do not see and yet believe." If we pay attention to the guidance of the saints, we will recognize that God has given certain promises to individuals, and has guided them in such a way that they have felt the exact opposite of these promises. The example of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob teaches us this. God promised them the land of Canaan, but they were strangers in it all their lives, and were finally led out again to Egypt. Nevertheless, they believed the divine promise, and this is precisely what is praised about them in the Holy Scriptures. Christ himself predicts to his disciples that they would have to suffer great tribulations despite the many glorious promises given to them, precisely so that their faith would cling to the word of promise despite all outward feelings. Such faith will then always be gloriously crowned.

Our Church has always taught and confessed that faith should not be based on feeling. In the Formula of Concord it says of this: "The presence, operation and gifts of the Holy Spirit should not and cannot always be judged *ex sensu*, as

and when one feels it in one's heart, but because it is often concealed and approached with great weakness, we should be certain from and according to the promise that the preached and heard word of God is an office and work of the Holy Spirit, through which he is certainly powerful and active in our hearts." (Declaratio. Art. 2. On Free Will.)

<page 47>

Our church sings in its glorious hymns:

"Whether it felt like he didn't want to,
Don't let it scare you;
Because where he is best with,
He doesn't want to discover it;
Let His Word be more certain to you.
And whether your flesh spoke a loud no.
So let not thine heart be troubled."

(St. L. Gesangb. 237, 12.)

[276/1]

And:

"I believe what Jesus' word promises.
Whether I feel it or I don't feel it."

(234, 10.)[TLH 373, missing v. 10]

Luther writes:

"So you say: What do you preach and believe? If you yourself confess that it cannot be felt and perceived, then your preaching must be nothing and a mere dream. For if it were otherwise, experience would have to show something of it. Answer: This is what I say, that it is bad to believe beforehand that which is humanly unbelievable, and to feel that which one does not feel; so that in the very fact that the devil is my master according to feeling, he must be my servant, and if I lie below and all the world is superior to me, then I lie above.

"How so? If it is to be true, must experience ever come to it and be felt? Yes, indeed; but it is said that feeling must come afterwards, but faith must be there first, without and above feeling. So my conscience, in that it feels sin, and fears and is afraid of it, must become a master and victor over sin; not in feeling nor in thought, but in believing the Word, and thereby comfort and sustain itself against and over sin, until sin must go away altogether, and is no longer felt." (VIII, 1168 f.)

Very important is also the saying quoted in our thesis, Phil. 4:7: "Let the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ." For here we are taught that this peace that has been established in God's heart through Christ transcends all sensual perception and cannot be grasped by reason. Of this peace writes

Luther:

"Peace is twofold, in God and in one's neighbor. It is in God: for it makes men of good conscience, and is founded on the mercy of God; but it sometimes surpasses all sensitivity and sensuality when it is stupefied, and hides itself from

God, and turns away its face and leaves conscience to itself." (IX, 331.)

Luther again:

"I always say that faith should have nothing but the word for itself, and should suffer neither reasoning nor thought; otherwise it is not possible for it to remain and be preserved. For human wisdom and reason can go no higher or further than to judge and conclude as it sees and feels before the eyes, or comprehends with the senses; [page 48](#) but faith must conclude above and against such feeling and understanding, and cling to that [276/2] which is presented to it through the Word; it cannot do this by reason and human ability, but is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart; otherwise it would not be able to grasp faith or the Holy Spirit, if it could grasp it with reason, or should see and conclude according to it what does or does not rhyme with it." (VIII, 1164.)

Many misunderstand the word "peace of God"; they think that only when they feel peace within themselves and their conscience does not accuse them are they partakers of it. But this peace is primarily in God; it consists in the fact that God has made peace with you, that he is reconciled with you. You must first believe this, then God will also give you a taste of this peace here and there.

Luther:

"Now a question arises here: Since Christ has taken away death and our sin and made us righteous with his resurrection, why do we still feel sin and death in us? Because the sins still bite, the conscience stings us, and the same evil conscience makes for the fear of hell.

Answer: I have often said before that feeling and believing are two different things. Faith is of the kind that feels nothing, but drops reason, closes its eyes and surrenders itself badly to the Word, following it through death and life. Feeling, however, goes no further than what one can grasp with reason and the senses, such as what one hears, sees and feels, or recognizes with the external senses. Therefore, feeling is contrary to faith; faith is contrary to feeling.

"Therefore the Master of the Epistle to the Hebrews 11:1 describes faith as a certain assurance of what is to be hoped for, and looks to what does not appear. For if one were to see Christ visibly hovering above in heaven like the bodily sun, one would not believe it; but now that Christ died for our sins and rose again for our righteousness, one does not see it, one does not feel it, nor can one comprehend it with any reason; Therefore, we must abandon our feelings and take the word into our ears, and then write it in our hearts and cling to it, even if it does not seem that my sins are gone from me, even if I still feel them within me. One must not look at the feeling, but firmly insist that death, sin and hell have been overcome, even though I may well feel that I am still in death, sin and hell. For although the feeling of sin still remains in us, it is only for this reason that it should drive us to faith and make our faith strong, so that we receive the Word against all feeling, and then continually tie our hearts and consciences to Christ. Thus faith [277/1] leads us quietly, against all feeling and [page 49](#) understanding of reason, through sin, through death and through hell; then we

see redemption before our eyes, and only then do we fully realize what we have believed, namely, that death and all misfortune have been overcome." (XI, 857.)

The same:

"Faith does not require knowledge, science or certainty, but free surrender and joyful trust in God's unsensed, untried and unrecognized goodness." But Luther says how difficult this is with the following puffing words: "With the faith of forgiveness of sins, it is just as if someone were aiming at you with a loaded rifle and now wanted to shoot at you, and you should still say and believe that it is nothing."

He says again:

"This is one reason why I say that those who are to become truly pious must first despair of themselves and all their works, so that they may seek and obtain God's grace. The other reason is that faith is a certain assurance of that which is to be hoped for, and is directed toward that which does not appear. Now faith cannot take place unless everything that I believe is hidden and invisible, for what I see I do not believe. But a thing cannot be more deeply hidden than if it seems contrary to sense and I see, feel and grasp it differently in experience than faith shows me. So God does in all his works; if he wants to make us alive, he kills us; if he wants to make us pious, he strikes our conscience and makes us sinners; if he wants to raise us to heaven, he first pushes us into hell, as the Scripture says: "The Lord kills and makes alive, he leads into hell and out again. 1 Sam. 2." (Leipzig edition XIX, 26 [*Bondage of the Will*; cf. LW 33, 62])

The same on the words of John 16:10:

"And ye shall not see me henceforth: "This is the manner and nature of faith, that faith neither feels, nor gropes, nor desires to know, but rejoices to believe those things which it cannot feel, nor discern with all its power, inwardly or outwardly. For Paul says, "How can I hope for that which is seen? This is why the Lord says: And you will not see me any more. As if he wanted to say: This course of the work will not be seen or perceived with the senses, but believed." (Leipzig edition XIII, 616.)

He said: "Thus we have it everywhere in Scripture that faith is such an unspeakably great thing that one can never preach enough of it and obtain it with words: one hears it and does not see it; therefore one must believe it alone. For the nature of faith is that it feels nothing at all, but only follows the words it hears and clings to them. If he believes, he has; if he does not believe, he has not." (Leipzig edition XIII, 643.) [277/2] [<page 50>](#)

Brenz:

"For the attitude of Christ toward us must not be judged according to the feelings of our hearts, but according to the promises and the word of the gospel of Christ." (V, 774.)

The best touchstone that teaches us to recognize that we must not base our confidence or the certainty of our state of grace on our feelings, but on God's Word alone, is temptation.

Of this Luther writes:

"Therefore, in anxieties and temptations, when conscience feels nothing but vain sin, and thinks nothing else but that God is angry and Christ is indeed turned away from us, we should not follow the feelings of our heart, but God's Word and consult it, which says that God is not angry, but graciously shows himself to the wretched and brokenhearted, and fears for his word, Isa. 66, and that Christ will not turn away from those who are weary and burdened. Matth. 11." (On Gal. 5, 5.)

That the Lutheran Church has at all times insisted, against the swarming spirits, that faith should not be based on feeling, we can also see from what H. Müller writes:

"If you do not feel the joyful movement of the Spirit, do not let it spoil you. This feeling is not exactly necessary for salvation. Christ says: He who believes shall be saved. Marc. 16, 16. Now faith is not based on feeling, but on the promise of God; indeed, this is the highest power of faith, when without and against all feeling it nevertheless holds firmly to God's promise, as it is written of Abraham in Rom. 4, 18, that he hoped without hope, even against hope. And for this very reason God often reveals his sweet consolation, that he may test faith to see whether it holds fast to his word." (Heaven's Kiss of Love, C. 13, § 59.) —

The Enthusiasts are also inconsistent when they teach that a person can only be certain of his state of grace when he feels grace in his heart; for consequently they would also have to teach that as long as a person does not yet feel the wrath of God over sin in his heart, he is not yet under wrath. But if it is necessary to say to such a sinner, who walks in safety for a long time without feeling sin, 'Even if you do not feel your sin as a heavy burden, you are still under wrath and perish, for God's Word testifies to this, then it is also necessary to say to the one who holds on to the divine promise in faith, 'Even if you do not feel the sweet, blessed feeling of grace in your heart, you are still a blessed man.

Luther therefore makes this conclusion:

"God forgives guilt in two ways: secretly and that we do not feel it; just as he imputes and retains guilt to many people who do not feel or respect it at all. Secondly, publicly, and that we feel it, just as <[page 51](#)> he imputes guilt to some, [278/1] that they feel it, as through punishment and terror of conscience. The first forgiveness is always necessary; the other is sometimes necessary, lest a man should perish..." (Luther does not, of course, mean to say that there is a different kind of forgiveness, but only to indicate that there are different effects).

"The first forgiveness is bitter and difficult for us, but it is the noblest and very best; the other is easier, but all the less. The Lord Christ shows both to Mary Magdalene. The first, when he turned his back on her and yet said to Simon: 'Her many sins are forgiven', she was not yet at peace; the other, when he turned to her and said, 'Your sins are forgiven, go in peace', she was satisfied. So the first cleanses, the other makes peace. The first works and brings, the other rests and receives. And there is an inordinate difference between the two. The first is only

in faith and earns much. The other is in feeling and receives the reward. The first is used with those who are high, the other with those who are weak and lifted up." (On Luke 7:47-50)

The doctrine of the Lutheran Church is therefore that no one may base the certainty of his state of grace on feeling, not even on the feeling produced by the Word. But the enthusiasts do not even base their confidence on the feeling produced in them by the Word. For example, if someone at a Methodist camp meeting experiences great sadness or a joyful feeling, this does not always come from the Word and through the Word, but often, or more correctly, in the vast majority of cases, from a completely different source. For we certainly do not want to deny that, since God's Word is still preached among them, the Holy Spirit still has His work there too, for the Lord reigns in the midst of his enemies. In most cases, however, these feelings are caused by nervous stimulation or sympathetic influence. For since their feelings are worked upon by all their preaching, sadness as well as their excessive joy is a natural consequence. Just as cheerful, merry music makes a man joyful, and sad music sad; just as an enthusiastic orator carries away his hearers to the same enthusiasm, or moves them to tears by a speech delivered with a sad, lachrymose affect: so the same thing takes place with the enthusiastic treatment of feelings. — It cannot be denied that for the inexperienced there is great danger in the activities of enthusiasts. For when some simple-minded Christians look at them, they can easily get the idea that they will find what they are looking for there, namely certainty of their state of grace [278/1] and peace for their souls, and they will be woefully deceived. Therefore, let us be zealous against all sectarianism and warn most seriously against its enthusiasm, for it is indeed extremely dangerous. —

[<page 52>](#)

The sects cause three kinds of damage with their enthusiasm. For

First of all, they lead to a completely false Savior, namely to their feelings and sentiments; for as soon as a person builds the certainty of his state of grace on his feelings, whether they are of his own making or also those wrought by God's Word, he no longer bases himself on Christ and His Word alone. Such a person can then no longer say: "There is salvation in no other, nor is there any other name given to men by which we must be saved." Relying on feelings amounts to pure unbelief. Luther therefore quite rightly writes: "But what does the same unbelief do? It sees no more than it feels: it does not feel life and security, but the waves over the ship and the sea that holds death and all peril. And because they feel these things and pay attention to them and do not turn away from them, the terror, trembling and fear do not cease; indeed, the more they look at them and feel them, the harder death and fear drive them and want to devour them every moment. But unbelief cannot let go of such feelings and cannot think otherwise for a moment, for it has nothing else to hold on to and to be deceived by; therefore it cannot have peace and be quiet for a moment. So it will also be in hell, that there will be vain fear, trembling and terror, and never any cessation."

(Leipz. Ausg. XIII, 371.) Through such emotional impulses, man easily comes to the point where he creates a false consolation for himself, and drives away his security.

Dr. Burk writes:

"We must first learn to trust God, then experience it, first take the food into our mouths, then let it taste good. Otherwise it comes out for itself. Afterwards, however, God also gives a taste and we now trust all the more. But the reason why some unfaithful souls sometimes draw the important conclusion too soon (that they have forgiveness) is precisely this: through the strict pursuit of assurance it happens that afterwards, when one thinks one has obtained something like this, one eagerly falls on it, considers it a robbery and calms down in it." — "Not even the testimony (of the Holy Spirit) is constant. One does not always bear witness to something for a long time, but only when it comes into doubt, when it is disputed." (Book of Justification. §§ 13. 14. 30.) [279/1]

A second great harm is that the enthusiasts turn many people into hypocrites with their emotional Christianity. Not infrequently they feign a good feeling; for since a Christian does not have the same good feeling every day, and yet, although they do not have this good feeling, they do not want to appear as unchristians, it is quite natural that they learn to feign and lie against their conscience. Ask <[page 53](#)> those who, by the grace of God, have come out of the enthusiastic sects, whether they have always felt as they have confessed? — Oh, how terrible it is to be almost constantly hypocritical, lying and deceiving in God's name!

A third great harm done to feelings by such activity is that honest souls are driven to despair and despondency. Those who feel the misery of sin cannot understand how others can boast of such blissful feelings. They finally come to the conclusion that because you cannot have such sweet feelings, the Spirit of God is preventing you, you are a lost person, you are not chosen, therefore you cannot "come through". That is terrible. Such people then go away in the most terrible despair, no comfort and peace comes into their hearts. — Oh, how blessed we are, on the other hand, who can come to firm faith through the Word of God and rejoice: I am with God in grace, in spite of all my oppressive feelings!

Albrecht Bengel rightly writes:

"The insistence on assurance of justification can first make honest souls misguided and despondent and drive dishonest souls into an unauthorized cacophony. But there can be no greater insistence than to deny justification to a soul or to cast doubt on it, unless it can declare its assurance with a full mouth." (Abriß der Brüdergemeine. p. 478.)

Luther:

"If you want to judge yourself according to what you see and feel, and if, when God's Word is held up to you, you want to hold your feelings against it and say: You tell me a lot, but my heart tells me much differently, and if you felt what I feel, you would also say differently: then you do not have God's Word in your

heart, but it is muffled and extinguished by your own thoughts, reason and reflection.... In short, if you are no longer willing to accept the Word, because all your feelings, eyes, senses and heart are in it, then you must be lost and you can no longer be helped. Therefore, you must be guided by the Word alone, regardless of what you feel or see. I also feel my sins and the law and the devil on my neck, that I lie under them as under a heavy burden. But what shall I do? If I were to close myself to such feelings, I and all people would have to despair and perish. But if I want to be helped, I must truly turn around and look to the Word and speak according to it: I feel the wrath of God, the devil, death and hell, but the Word says otherwise, [279/2] that I have a gracious God through Christ, who is my Lord over devils and all creatures." (VIII, 1164 [[StL 8, 1103](#); [LW28, 70](#)])

The reason why the fanatical sects do not base their faith on the Word alone is because they basically subscribe to the Calvinist <[page 54](#)> doctrine of election by grace. For according to this doctrine they accept a secret counsel of God, according to which he wants most people to be damned; he therefore has no grace for them and has not allowed them to be redeemed. They cannot deny that God speaks in his words of a general grace and a general salvation; but, in order to maintain their opinion, they say that God speaks differently in his words than he thinks in his heart; in his words, they say, the will of his pleasure is not expressed, for he who is not chosen hears the word of God, but God thinks: you should not believe me in the word, it should rather serve you as a deep trap. Such teaching tears people away from the word of God. What could be more natural than for them to seek the certainty of their state of grace in themselves, in their feelings? —

The error of the sects is spiritually related to the error of the papists; indeed, it is quite the same, only in a different form. Antichrist says: you cannot be sure of your state of grace without special revelation; if you have none, then go our way and try it with works, but you must doubt in all this. This is the way to despair. The enthusiastic sects, especially the Methodists, say: you cannot become certain of your state of grace in any other way than by feeling the certainty. If you do not feel it, pray, wrestle, struggle until you do. If you cannot come to this feeling — well, you must despair. It comes down to one thing: the solid ground of certainty is missing. —

Thesis III.

The certainty of the state of grace is based firmly and unshakably on the means of grace alone. John 15:3; 1 John 5:8.

In the previous theses it was shown that a person, in order to become certain of his state of grace, must not base this certainty on his works, nor on his feelings and the inner experiences of his heart. For the devil can monkey with our feelings and make our best works such a disgrace to us that nothing good remains of

them. We need a firmer and surer foundation.

The foundation on which alone we can base the certainty of our state of grace must be something apart from us — something which God has given and ordered, which we can see with our eyes, hear with our ears and on which we can rest with certainty. Our thesis shows us the right solid foundation of this certainty. These are the means of grace. The ultimate foundation [280/1] of God's grace towards us sinners lies in the heart of God. Since God foresaw our plight, into which the human race would [\(page 55\)](#) fall as a result of the fall of man, he decided even before the foundation of the world to take care of the poor, lost human race, and in that time also brought forth his counsel of salvation through his Son. But what would we know of his mercy if he had not revealed it to us through his Word? From his revealed Word alone can we know that there is grace for us. It is true that God's voice also speaks in our conscience, but this voice only preaches to us God's righteousness, that he must condemn the sinner. It is the voice of the Law. God's mercy, on the other hand, is only preached to us by the Holy Spirit, the true Comforter, through the word of the gospel. But the heart of man, as Scripture says, is a defiant and despondent thing. Defiant, because it does not want to recognize its sin. But when it comes to recognize its misery and need through the preaching of the law, then despondency sets in; no consolation will remain in the heart. The merciful God has found a way to assure people of his grace so firmly that they can rely on it despite the devil, the world, the flesh, the law and the voice in their conscience that accuses them.

The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, does not lead us to special revelations, nor to the feelings of our hearts, but to the eternally certain Word of God, which will remain even if heaven and earth pass away. Baptism and Holy Communion also serve to ground us firmly and unshakeably in grace, for they seal us in the grace preached in the Word. The word of the gospel preaches to the poor sinner how God is disposed towards him in his heart, proclaims to him redemption through Christ, and that God will forgive him all his sins for Christ's sake, and God even swears to this. Of course, this should make the poor sinner certain of divine grace.

But God knows how difficult it is to bring the despondent human heart to faith; therefore he has added baptism to the Word, and because this was not yet enough for him, he has also given us Holy Communion, and in it he gives us not merely a testimony of his grace, but a pledge of the forgiveness of sins, the ransom itself, which Christ paid for us, namely his body and blood.

From this we recognize: God has done everything and continues to make our hearts certain of his grace, while the devil is out to make us uncertain of it. How have we earned such great grace? What have we done to deserve that we can recognize this grace of God before others and become so certain of it, while others continually doubt it? What are we by nature better than papists and enthusiasts, that God has entrusted this glorious treasure to us? —

Let us recognize this treasure well, thank God [280/2] for it and use it rightly,

and also use it to pull as many [page 56](#) as possible out of error and uncertainty and help them to the certainty of their state of grace.

Our thesis says two things: 1) the certainty of the state of grace is based solely on the means of grace; 2) it is based on them firmly and unshakably.

1) Without true faith in Christ we have neither divine grace nor can we be sure of it. Now by what means we attain to the possession of divine grace, by that alone can we also attain to the assurance of our state of grace. This cannot be denied. But since it is only through the word of the gospel (including baptism and the Lord's Supper) that we can attain to faith and thereby to grace, it is also only through these means of grace that we can attain to the assurance of our state of grace. Therefore Christ himself also testifies

John 15:3: "You are now clean because of the word that I have spoken to you." So it is on the word, and indeed on the word which he has spoken, i.e. on the gospel, that the Son of God himself builds the fact that his disciples live in the state of grace, and thus teaches that through it alone they can also come to the certainty of their state of grace.

Luther writes about these words:

"But he speaks clearly: by the word which I have spoken to you, you are clean. This is nothing else than the whole preaching of Christ, how he was sent into the world by the Father, that through his suffering and death he paid for our sins and reconciled the Father, so that all who believe in him may not be condemned nor perish, but may have forgiveness of sin and eternal life for his sake. This word makes a man clean (where it is grasped in the heart through faith), that is, it brings forgiveness of sin, and makes us acceptable to God, so that for the sake of this same faith, by which alone such a word is received and grasped, we who cling to it are counted pure and holy to God and held holy, even though we are not yet pure enough by nature and life, but sin, weakness and infirmity, which are still to be cleansed, remain with us while we live on earth. Thus with this saying he teaches the right main part of Christian doctrine, how and by what means the person becomes and remains pure and righteous for God, so that this purity, which is to be valid for God, is not at all to be given and imputed to our deeds or sufferings against sin, even though it is done by those who are Christians and is now called right, good, pure fruit. For here he is speaking to his dear apostles, whether believers or Christians, and says: "You are clean, not because you bear good fruit, but because of my word. How is this so? How are they not pure and yet pure at the same time? If they are clean, why does he say that [page 57](#) they must always be cleansed? Or why do they pray the Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our trespasses! [281/1] Again: Thy will be done, etc., that they may ever confess that they still have sin and are unclean. For he is not called pure who asks for forgiveness of sin and complains that God's will has not been done. But again, they are unclean and still need to be cleansed, so how does he call them clean? How do the two rhyme together? Answer: Just as I have said, that a man is first cleansed by the word of God for the sake of Christ

in whom he believes. For by such faith in the word he is enrolled in the vine of Christ, and clothed in the same purity, so that it is imputed to him as if it were his own, and as perfect and whole as it is perfect and whole in Christ. All this happens through the Word, if it is received and grasped in faith, in which I hear God's will and promise that he will forgive my sin for Christ's sake, and that he will count me clean and keep me clean. And so when I receive the word by faith, such a word (through the Holy Spirit, who works through it) makes my heart and mind new, which hold fast to it and do not doubt, live and die by it. Because I cling to it, whatever is still impure and sinful in me is not imputed to me for its sake; but the same weak, partial, incipient purity is counted as complete purity, and God makes the cross over it, and does not count the rest of my impurity. Now where such purity is in faith through the Word, God adds to it, impels and exercises it through the cross and suffering, so that it may become stronger and more complete, so that faith may increase, and the rest of the impurity and sin may decrease from day to day, and be purged out to the pit. That is, the branches that are in the vine and are now clean through the word are always pruned and cleansed, as he said above. ... This is the Christian doctrine of righteous purity, which no unchristian, papist, or riotous spirit can understand. For it is not possible for them to put the two together, that a Christian should be both clean and unclean, for they do not know or recognize the power of Christ and his word, how we are made clean through the word for his sake (as he is clean), even though we are still unclean in ourselves because of our sinful nature. For the devil will not reprove the Word, nor punish lying, nor make Christ unclean; but because the Word remains right and true and Christ pure, let us also remain pure and holy in it, and let no one make us unclean or sinners, and yet so that, in addition to such purification, good fruit may also be produced in us, as he has said." (Leipzig edition X, 103.)

Another glorious passage which teaches us that [281/2] we must base the certainty <[page 58](#)> of our state of grace on the means of grace alone is 1 John 5:8: "There are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three are together." By Spirit the apostle means the word which the Holy Spirit gave to the holy writers, through which he testifies and wants to work forever. Under water is the holy baptism. Baptism and by blood the holy Communion is to be understood by blood. Word, baptism and communion bear witness on earth. The Father, the Word (the Son of God John 1:1) and the Holy Spirit bear witness in heaven, as the previous verse says. But how could a person know anything about this testimony of the Holy Trinity, how could he be certain of his salvation and blessedness, which the triune God so earnestly desires, if the Holy Trinity did not also bear witness on earth? Therefore follows: "There are three who bear witness on earth" and so on. Through these three witnesses God makes known his will of grace and what he has done for our salvation, which otherwise no one could have known; thereby God steps out of his darkness, into which no man can see. On nothing else can and should we

therefore build the certainty of our state of grace than on these three witnesses given to us by God: the Word, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Note also the final words of this passage: "and these three are together" or, according to the basic Greek text: "they come together as one." Modern theology endeavors to indicate a difference in the effects of the individual means of grace. Something different is to be worked through the Word than through Baptism, something different through Baptism than through Holy Communion, and something different through Holy Communion. But this is a foolish endeavor. Since God is merciful, he gives us three witnesses instead of one, all of whom testify to one and the same thing, for "these three go to one", i.e. they have one final purpose. That I, a poor sinner, am accepted by grace for the sake of Jesus Christ, and Holy Baptism and Holy Communion also tell and testify to this. This is also the teaching of our symbolic books.

In the Apology it says:

"For outward signs are used for this purpose, that by them hearts may be moved, namely, by the word and outward signs at the same time, that they may believe when we are baptized, when we receive the Lord's body, that God truly wants to be gracious to us through Christ, as Paul says: faith is by hearing. But just as the word enters the ears, so the outward sign is for the eyes, to stir up the inner heart and move it to faith. [282/1] For the word and the outward sign have the same effect in the heart, as St. Augustine said in a fine word. The sacrament, he says, is a visible word. For the outward sign is a painting, by which the same is signified that is preached by the word <[page 59](#)>; therefore both work the same thing." (Art. 13. Müller, 202. f.)

That Holy Baptism and Holy Communion are not distinct means of different graces from the Word of God is evident from the fact that the same Word of God is connected with the outward signs of the sacrament, so that when we base our faith on the sacraments, we also base it on the Word itself. —

It is in all of our hearts by nature that we do not want to build the certainty of our state of grace on the means of grace alone. Some people think they can trust in the works and feelings of their heart. And the consequence of this is that he never comes to the certainty of his state of grace. Those who rely on works give themselves a false comfort. Usually such a person, when he sees that he cannot keep the law perfectly, comforts himself by thinking that God will not take it so seriously after all, that he will be satisfied with what we can just do.

To this Luther rightly replies:

"A man who imagines that he will obtain mercy by doing as much as he can, heaps up sin with sin, so that he receives double condemnation." (Heidelb. Disp. 1518. XVIII, 59. Th. 16. [[StL 18. 38](#); [LW31. 40](#)]) —

All works must be excluded from the ground of assurance; for although good works give an outward testimony of the existence of the state of grace, yet the assurance of the state of grace must never be founded on these good works, but solely on the firm and certain Word of God. Hence St. Paul also writes in Romans

4:5: "But to him who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith" (which is wrought by the Word and is based on it) "is counted for righteousness." —

It is just as dangerous to rely on feelings, for if the good feeling disappears, the certainty of the state of grace based on it must necessarily also disappear.

Luther:

"Now, if there were any other way to heaven, he would have set it well; now there is no other; therefore let us cling to the words here, let us set our hearts firmly on them and lean on them, and let us close our eyes and say: If I had the merit of all the saints, the holiness and purity of all the virgins, and St. Peter's piety, I would give nothing to my cause. Peter's piety, I give nothing to my cause; but I must have another ground to build upon, namely, these words: God has given his Son, so that whoever believes in him, whom the Father sent out of love, may be saved. And you must stand firm on this, that you must be preserved, and must [282/2] boldly base yourself on his words, which no devil, hell or death can suppress; but the Father tears the word <page 60> through hell, devils and death, and everything that clings to it. Therefore, be it as it may, say: There stands God's word, that is my rock and anchor, on which I build myself, and that remains; and where that remains, there I also remain. For God cannot lie, and heaven and earth must fall into ruins before the least letter or tittle of his word should remain." (Leipzig edition XIII, 716 ff.) —

It is not wrong to say that the certainty of the state of grace is based on the witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart, for "the Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God." By this witness of the Holy Spirit, however, nothing else is to be understood than the Word made alive in us by the Holy Spirit; for by nothing else but the Word does he bear witness to our heart. If, however, by the witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart one were to understand any effect of the Holy Spirit that is not produced by the Word, or that is only separated from the Word, this would be nothing but vain enthusiasm. But this is precisely the great error of the Reformed and the sects, that they separate the Spirit from the Word. This error is the mother of all enthusiasm.

Luther:

"I beg you, Christian reader, to see to it that I will, God willing, reveal to you the devil in these prophets, so that you may grasp him: after all, what I write is for your own good and not mine. And this is how it goes:

"Now when God has sent forth his holy gospel, he deals with us in two ways. Once outwardly; the other inwardly. Outwardly he deals with us through the oral word of the gospel and through bodily signs, such as baptism and the sacrament. Inwardly he deals with us through the Holy Spirit and faith together with other gifts, but all this in such a measure and order that the outward things should and must pass away and the inward things come afterward and through the outward things, so that he has decided not to give anyone the inward things without through the outward things; for he does not want to give anyone the Spirit or faith

without the outward word and signs that he has appointed for this purpose, as he says in Luke 16:29: Let them hear Moses and the prophets. Hence St. Paul may also call baptism a bath of new birth, in which God abundantly pours out the Holy Spirit. Tit. 3, 5. 6. 7.

"Pay attention to this order, my brother, it will depend entirely on it. For although this riotous spirit presents himself as if he thinks highly of God's Word and Spirit, and boasts of an excellent fervor of love and zeal for God's truth and righteousness, it is his opinion that he is turning this order upside down and establishing a perverse one out of his own iniquity and is conducting the matter in this way: [283/1] <page 61>

"First of all, what God ordains outwardly to the spirit inwardly, as has been said, oh how scornfully and mockingly he casts it to the wind, and first wants to enter into the spirit. Yes, he says, shall a handful of water cleanse me from sin? The Spirit, the Spirit, the Spirit must do it inwardly. Shall bread and wine help me? Should breathing on the bread bring Christ into the sacrament? No, no, one must eat Christ's flesh spiritually: the Wittenbergers know nothing about it, they steal faith from the letters, and much of the glorious words, so that whoever does not know the devil may well think they have five Holy Spirits with them.

"But if you ask them how you can enter into the same high spirit, they will not point you to the outward gospel, but to the land of the sly monkeys and say, 'Stand in boredom as I have stood, and you will know that the heavenly voice will come and God himself will speak to you. If you continue to ask about boredom, they know as much about it as Dr. Carlstadt knows about Greek and Hebrew.

"Do you see there the enemy of divine order? How he opens your mouth with the words: Spirit, Spirit, Spirit, and yet at the same time outlines both bridges, footbridge and path, ladder and everything by which the Spirit is to come to you, namely, the outward order of God in bodily baptism, signs and the oral word of God, and wants to teach you, not how the Spirit is to come to you, but how you are to come to the Spirit, that you are to learn to ride on the clouds and ride on the wind; and yet he does not say how or when, where or what, but you are to learn for yourself as they do." (Against the heavenly prophets of images and sacrament. Erl. Ed. 29, 208-210).

Luther on the Gospel on the 1st Sunday after Epiphany:

"God will not suffer us to rely on anything else or to cling with our hearts to anything that is not Christ in his Word, however holy and full of the Spirit it may be. Faith has no other ground on which it can stand. ... We must seek Christ in that which is of the Father, that is, that we adhere strictly and only to the word of the gospel, which rightly shows and reveals Christ to us. And only in these and all spiritual trials, if you want to comfort others or yourself properly, learn to say with Christ: "Why is it that you run to and fro and wear yourself out with anxious and sorrowful thoughts, as if God no longer wanted to have mercy on you and as if there were no Christ to be found, and you do not want to be satisfied before you find him with yourself and feel holy and without sin; nothing will come of it, it

is vain wasted effort and labor. Knowest thou not that Christ will not be, nor be found, [283/2] but in that which is the Father's? not in that which thou, or all men, are and have? It is not the fault of <page 62> Christ and his grace; he is and remains undefiled and can always be found. But it is lacking in you that you do not seek him properly, because you follow your feelings and think you can seize him with your thoughts. Here you must come, where it is not your business nor the business of some people, but God's business and reign, namely where his word is, there you will meet him, hear and see that there is neither wrath nor disgrace, as you fear and hesitate, but pure grace and heartfelt love for you.... But it will be difficult before it (the heart) comes to this and grasps such things: it must first begin and experience that all is lost and sought in vain for Christ, and yet in the end there is no counsel, except that apart from yourself and all human consolation you surrender to the Word alone." (XI, 623-625 [StL 11, 454])

2. The certainty of our state of grace is based solely on the means of grace, but it is also firm and unshakeable.

This certainty is even assured to us on oath in the Word and is sealed to us through the sacraments. Seals are used to make a written document irrevocably firm and certain. Baptism and Holy Communion are also such seals that are intended to seal God's grace proclaimed to us in His Word. A Christian should therefore learn to rely on his baptism. The devil will of course persuade him: You have transgressed your baptismal covenant. The garment of Christ's righteousness that you put on in baptism is soiled. But do not be misled by such and similar whisperings of Satan: for on God's side the covenant made in baptism remains firm. God testifies in Isaiah 54:10: "The mountains shall be removed, and the hills shall fall, but my mercy shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed." God does not break what he has promised, but remains eternally firm and certain. Therefore it is good for man that, despite all sin and unfaithfulness, he may return through true repentance, so that he can speak with confidence: I have been baptized, and even though I have transgressed the covenant made in baptism, I am still firmly on God's side, and therefore God accepts me again in grace.

Furthermore, how sweet and comforting is Holy Communion! If a person considers Holy Communion properly, it is impossible for him not to be made certain of divine grace through it, that he will not depart from Holy Communion joyfully and confidently. For in Holy Communion are the outward signs, bread and wine, and the almighty and true God promises me that when I approach the altar and eat the bread and drink the wine, I shall also eat the body of Christ and drink his blood. All this so that [284/1] I may be sure that Christ has given his body for me and shed his blood for me for the forgiveness of my sins and has redeemed me. For he <page 63> himself, the Son of God, expressly says that he gave his body for us, yes, for us, and shed his blood for us for the forgiveness of our sins. But here too many allow themselves to be led astray by the devil and allow the thought to arise within them: You are not yet what you ought to be; first become

pious, then go to Holy Communion. Or someone feels empty, cold and dry just when he wants to go to Holy Communion. Should a Christian then think that everything is now uncertain? No, not at all; for Holy Communion was instituted precisely to assure him of divine grace, to bring him to a firm and unshakeable certainty of his state of grace.

How precious here, in order to arrive at the certainty of the state of grace, is also the right doctrine of the inspiration of Holy Scripture, namely that every word of Scripture is God's word and therefore certain truth!

When the Reformed say that you do not have to take this and that in Holy Scripture as the letters read, this amounts to nothing more than robbing you of the Word of God itself and thus also of the certainty of your state of grace. And if the unbelievers are indifferent to the Word of God, the reason for this is none other than rationalism and unbelief. Go where you will, and you will find that outside the orthodox Lutheran Church the devil is everywhere practicing the art of making God's Word uncertain. And if he only succeeds in making this or that seemingly unimportant thing, e.g. what relates to the genealogical registers and of which one thinks that not much can depend, uncertain, then the door is open to make the whole of Scripture uncertain. Whoever allows a word of Scripture to be taken away from him no longer has any certainty. —

God has ordained the holy ministry of preaching, baptism and Holy Communion so that He Himself might work powerfully through them. Therefore, if I am absolved at Christ's command, I should not look to the man who speaks it, but to God's word. We should increasingly come to rely firmly on this word. Even if the one who preaches it is a poor sinner and a clumsy preacher, I should not look at that, but at Christ who speaks to me through him. Only then can we be certain of our state of grace and rejoice.

Luther:

"Therefore we should learn that God is not an uncertain, doubtful or changeable God, who [284/2] has many meanings and is like an uncertain reed; but who has only one meaning and is completely certain, who says: I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: I absolve and absolve you from your sins, and so on. There God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit do not err, are not driven to and fro by the wind, but are like a hard rock and selah; as God is often called in the [Psalms](#), that he is sure, on whom thou mayest surely rely and say, I am holy and blessed, a child and heir of God, for I am baptized.

"And the doubts of the monks should be put far behind, not saying, 'Behold, I have done what I ought to have done, but whether it pleases God or not I do not know. We should not run into the unknown, or as those who run into the air, as Paul says in 1 Cor. 9:26. Our walk should be sure and steadfast, so that we may say with certain confidence, "I sleep in the name of the Lord, knowing that my sleep also pleases God. But when I awake and do my usual work in my profession, writing, reading, meditating or contemplating and praying, I have no

doubt that such work is also pleasing to God, and if I knew that it would be displeasing to Him, I would much rather abstain from it. But I am certain that I please God with all my work, not for my own sake, who do it, but for the sake of God, who has mercy on me, forgives my sins, loves me, guides me and governs me with the Holy Spirit. This assurance and *πληροφορία* (as it is called in Greek) should be kept. For otherwise baptism, absolution and also the custom of the Lord's Supper are useless and in vain. Just as it has happened to us in the papacy, as Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:7: They are always learning and can never come to the knowledge of the truth. For it was an abominable blindness and error, which is to be condemned in all ways, even if there had been nothing else wrong or sinful in the teaching of the papacy, namely, that they taught that we should always go to and fro in doubt, wavering, being uncertain and doubting our salvation. For such uncertainty or doubt takes away my baptism and God's grace. I am a Christian in vain, laboring and living in vain.

"Therefore the prophet prays in the 51st Psalm, v. 12: Give me a new and holy spirit, i.e., give me a true and holy faith that does not waver on both sides, as the Baalites did, who had many meanings in their worship and were unstable in it: they worked, sacrificed, hurt their bodies, crucified their flesh, and yet were uncertain whether they were pleasing to God." (Interpretation of the 41st chapter of Genesis. v. 32. II, 1985-87 [[StL 2, 1354](#); [LW7, 154-155](#)])

Luther also writes in his writing about the keys:

"Therefore consider that the keys or the forgiveness of sins does not stand on our repentance or worthiness, as they [285/1] teach and practice; for that is entirely Pelagian, Turkish, pagan, Jewish, Anabaptist, fanatical, and end-Christian; but, again, that our repentance, work, heart, and whatsoever we are, should build upon the keys, and confidently rely upon them with all our reasoning, as upon God's word, and in body and soul <[page 65](#)> loss, not doubting what the keys tell and give you, let it be as certain as if God himself spoke it; as he certainly speaks it himself; for it is his command and word, and not the word or command of man. But if you doubt, then you are deceiving God, perverting his order and building his keys on your repentance and worthiness. You should repent (this is true), but that is why the forgiveness of sins should become certain and confirm the work of the key, that is, abandon faith and deny Christ.

"He wants to forgive and give you sin through the key, not for your sake, but for his own sake, out of pure grace. ... Christ says: What you bind on earth, etc. Notice here that he has certainly, certainly promised that what we bind and loose on earth shall be bound and loosed; there is no false key here. He does not say: What I bind and loose in heaven. you should also bind and loose on earth, as the teachers of the false key fool. When would we know what God binds or loosens in heaven? Never, and the keys would be in vain and of no use.

"Neither saith he, Ye shall know what I bind and loose in heaven: who will or can know? But thus saith he, If ye bind and loose on earth, I will also bind and

loose in heaven: if ye do the work of the keys, I will also do it: yea, if ye do it, it shall be done, and it is not necessary that I should do it after you. What you bind and loose (I say), I will neither bind nor loose, but it shall be bound and loosed without my binding and loosing; it shall be one work, mine and yours, not two; one key, mine and yours, not two; if you do your work, mine is already done; if you bind and loose, I have already bound and loosed. He commits and binds himself to our work, indeed he commands us to do his own work; why should we make it uncertain, or turn back and pretend that he must bind and loose in heaven beforehand? Just as if his binding and loosing in heaven were different from our binding and loosing on earth, or as if he had other keys above in heaven than these on earth, when he says clearly and plainly that they are the keys of heaven and not the keys of earth... But such thoughts of two keys come from the fact that one does not take God's word for God's word, but because it is spoken through [285/2] men, one looks at it as if it were man's words, and thinks that God is high above and far, far, far away from such a word that is on earth, gazes up to heaven and makes up other keys. ... Let not the Pharisaic babble here deceive you, so that some may fool themselves as to how a man can forgive sin when he cannot give grace or the Holy Spirit. Stick to the words of Christ and be sure that God has no other way of forgiving sin than through the oral word, as he has <page 66> commanded us men. If you do not see forgiveness in the word, you will look to heaven in vain for grace or, as we say, for inward forgiveness. But if thou sayest, as the riotous spirits and sophists do, that many of the keys bind and loose, yet do not turn to them and remain unbound and unloosed, there must be something else than the Word and the keys: the Spirit, Spirit, Spirit must do it. But do you think that he is not bound who does not believe the binding key? He shall know in his time that because of his unbelief the binding was not in vain, nor did it fail. So also, if anyone does not believe that he is loosed and his sin forgiven, he will learn in time how surely his sins have now been forgiven, and that he did not want to believe it. St. Paul says in Romans 3:3: God will not fail us because of our unbelief. So we are not talking about who believes the keys or not; we know almost certainly that few believe, but we are talking about what the keys do and give. He who does not accept it certainly has nothing; therefore the key is not missing. Many do not believe the gospel, but the gospel is missing and therefore does not lie. A king gives you a lock: if you do not accept it, the king has not lied about it, nor done wrong, but you have deceived yourself and it is your fault; the king has certainly given it... For it is God's command and word, which the one speaks and the other hears; both are obliged, for the salvation of their souls, to believe it as surely and firmly as all other articles of faith." (XIX, 1172-77 [[StL 19, 943-947](#); [LW40, 364-368](#)])

Thesis IV.

The Holy Spirit alone works a certainty based on the means of grace in the repentant. Rom 8:16.

Having shown in Thesis III the reason for the certainty of our state of grace, we are now taught in this Fourth Thesis how a person can come to this blessed certainty. Our Thesis shows us 1. the author of this certainty, the Holy Spirit, who is active in our hearts through Word and Sacrament and wants to bring us to the certainty of our state of grace. Secondly, the heart is also described, in which alone [286/1] the Holy Spirit can work this certainty.

Just as no one can come to true faith without the Holy Spirit, neither can he come to the certainty of his state of grace.

That the Holy Spirit works the assurance of the state of grace is taught us by the saying in Romans 8:16 attached to our thesis: "The same <[page 67](#)> Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

This passage teaches us not only that the Holy Spirit makes us certain of our sonship to God, but also to whom he gives this witness, namely to our spirit, which is described in the previous verse as one that was previously in terror and fear because of its sin and therefore was in servile fear of God. The whole context of the letter to the Romans also teaches that only in the heart of a penitent can the assurance of the state of grace be worked. First the apostle makes all men sinners, i.e. he teaches them to recognize their sin, then he preaches the gospel and finally says that the Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God. —

As long as man still walks in safety, does not yet feel God's wrath against sin in his heart, does not believe that he is by nature a cursed and damned sinner, still loves sin, is not yet broken in himself and does not yet despair of himself, it is impossible for him to come to the certainty of his state of grace and to speak: I am with God in grace, etc. This can only happen with those who are crushed in heart and weighed down by the heavy burden of their sins, who fear God and his wrath against sin and who now begin to ask with eagerness for salvation: What must I do to be saved? For only then can the Holy Spirit, having first worked a true knowledge of sin in the heart through the preaching of the law, work true faith and the assurance of the state of grace.

Those who have grown up within the Christian church, but have gradually fallen away from Christ inwardly, and sometimes outwardly as well, nevertheless easily entertain the false hope that they are in a state of grace with God, and hope to be saved in spite of the sin that reigns over them; but they are under a diabolical delusion, and if they do not come to the realization of their sinful misery and to an ardent desire to be delivered from such misery, they are lost.

We do not want to shake anyone's certainty of his state of grace, but neither should we give anyone false comfort or encourage him in his false delusion. Anyone who has never been shocked by his sin, who has never despaired of

himself, and yet believes that he is in God's good graces, is indulging in a vain delusion, an empty dream. —

We are not speaking here of degrees of [286/2] repentance, that a person must have felt so much sorrow over his sins, so much fear and terror of God's judgment, before he may dare to take comfort in divine grace; nor must this be understood as if a man could prepare himself for this grace by the terror of repentance which he feels; but this we teach, that the doctrine of the gospel can only be grasped by such a heart <[page 68](#)> which has recognized its misery of sin and is terrified at God's wrath against it. Let us ask: What would a person lack if he had been unrepentant, but in whom the Holy Spirit had nevertheless worked true faith? We would have to say: if he had true saving faith, he would lack nothing at all; for our salvation is based on God's grace and Christ's merit, which is grasped through faith. But here it must be remembered that the Holy Spirit does not work faith in the impenitent, because they resist his effect of grace precisely through their impenitence. The effect of grace of the Holy Spirit is not an effect of his omnipotence, but of his grace. (Cf. Formula of Conc., Art. 2, especially pp. 602 and 603. Muller's edition [[Triglotta 903-904](#)]).

Since without knowledge of sin and without true repentance of it the Holy Spirit can neither give nor work true faith nor (which is basically the same thing) the assurance of grace, the preaching of the law must by no means be omitted. For although it is true that we are justified before God by faith alone, and that faith is not wrought by the preaching of the law but by the preaching of the gospel, the preaching of the law must first prepare and prepare the heart so that the Holy Spirit can work faith in it. —

By working repentance through the law and faith through the gospel, the Holy Spirit leads us along the blessed path, by which alone we can come to the certainty of our state of grace. — Indeed, this is also the only way in which man can attain to the blessedness of heaven. Just imagine if it were possible for a person to enter heaven even without true repentance; would such a person be comfortable in heaven? — No, no, he would soon say: I don't like it here. That is why it is a necessary requirement that God should first make us recognize the great misery of sin, so that the blessedness of heaven may be a blessedness for us.

Luther writes with regard to the content of our thesis:

"Therefore the Holy Spirit is given to none but those who stand in affliction and fear: there the gospel produces benefit and fruit; for this gift is too high and noble, therefore God does not throw it to the dogs and swine, who, even if they fall on hearing it preached, eat it up and know not what they eat. There must be such hearts that feel and see their misery and cannot come out: for the Holy Spirit [287/1] must be wriggled, if he is to come and help; and let no one take it into his mind that it will be otherwise. We also see this here in this story: the dear disciples had been sitting in fear and terror until then, and were still discouraged, and had no courage, and were still in unbelief, so that they immediately

despaired that <[page 69](#)> Christ had much trouble and labor with them to raise them up again, and yet there was no other infirmity than their own foolish hearts, so that they feared that heaven would fall on them; that the Lord Himself could not comfort them enough until He said to them: The Holy Spirit shall come to you from heaven, and he will put me in your hearts, that you may know me, and then through me also the Father. Then your hearts will be comforted and strengthened and filled with joy, just as it has been fulfilled in them today." (*Church Postil*, on the epistle on the 1st day of Pentecost. Erl. VIII, 311. 312.)

Furthermore:

"So in the storm and adversity God shows mercy, as it is written in Isaiah 41:3: 'God persecutes them, and so he walks peaceably in them. And the prophet Nahum, chapter 1, 3: 'God is a Lord whose ways are like thunder, lightning and tempest, and his footsteps are like thick clouds of powder', as if to say: God, whom he wants to favor, attacks him in such a way that he brings all calamities upon him, inwardly and outwardly, so that man thinks he will perish before a great storm and temptation. And those who do not suffer his works and ways drive his grace from them, and cannot greet God who meets them, nor understand his greeting, nor give thanks. For his greeting is terrible at the beginning, but comforting at the end. Just as the angel Gabriel terrifies Mariam in his greeting, and yet comforts her again in the sweetest way. Therefore, repentance practiced with peaceful thoughts is hypocrisy. There must be great earnestness and deep sorrow if the old man is to be cast off." (XV, 1794.[cf. LW 6, 32, 40])

Thesis V.

The certainty of the state of grace is shaken by every sin, destroyed by mortal sins. 1 John 3:21; Psalm 66:18; John 5:44.

This thesis contains two propositions: (1) the certainty of the state of grace is shaken by every sin. 1 John 3:21. (2) It is destroyed by mortal sin. Ps 66:18; John 5:44.

The certainty of the state of grace can therefore be shaken, even destroyed. When the devil tries to plunge us into all kinds of sin, his ultimate purpose is to destroy the certainty of the state of grace in us, but in the meantime to shake it. But we are not only in danger of losing this certainty when we are tempted by the devil to commit gross sins, but rest can also become dangerous for us; for through it we easily become careless, so that we no longer [287/2] take sin so seriously, no longer engage in daily penance, one sin after another, which could and should have been avoided if we had walked carefully, <[page 70](#)> is committed; and if the conscience is hardened against sins of weakness, sins of wickedness are not avoided either. It is true that sins of weakness do not cast us out of God's grace, but we must not take the sins of weakness lightly, for they also shake the certainty of our state of grace.

The passage at 1 John 3:21, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have joy toward God," teaches us that we have joy or a confident heart toward God when our heart does not condemn us, that is, when our own conscience does not testify to us that we have sinned against God. On the other hand, this joy in God is shaken and the awareness of the state of grace is darkened if our heart testifies that we have sinned against God. —

Here in this passage we are talking about the born-again and the faithful, and who would not know from experience how easily even such a one is provoked and becomes angry, for example, by some insult that happens to him? But if this is the case, who can pray a joyful Our Father? Who has not experienced, when we want to ask for something and seek access to the Father, how difficult this is? When an inner voice tells us: God must punish you? Another consequence is that we refrain from praying and flee from the Father. — But if our heart does not condemn us, then we can pray with joy and confidence and be sure of God's promise. As long as one has not silenced the accusation of conscience through true repentance, one cannot step forward with joy; but once this has happened, this joy returns and is found where one walks with caution and sanctification. But if we no longer walk so carefully, this certainty and confidence begins to waver again. —

When it is said in the Thesis that the certainty of the state of grace is shaken by every sin, this is meant to refer only to deliberate sin as shaking the certainty of the state of grace. If it were said: "The state of grace is shaken by every sin", this could be said absolutely of every sin, even of unrecognized sins, even of original sin, namely in itself; however, since we are talking about the certainty of the state of grace, it can only be shaken by deliberate sins. This is also shown by the saying quoted in 1 John 3:21: "If our heart does not condemn us, we have joy in God." However, the condemnation of the heart can only take place where sin has been knowingly committed out of weakness (not out of willfulness, despite the warning of the Holy Spirit through the Word, for this would be a mortal sin), or where the unknowingly committed sin comes to consciousness.

Even then <page 71> sins committed unknowingly shake the certainty of the state of grace if the ignorance is not insurmountable, especially if the ignorance is only *ignorantia concomitans* (i.e. an ignorance in which [288/1] someone does not know that what he is doing is sin, but would do it if he also knew that it is sin) or even *ignorantia consequens affectata*. (i.e. someone simply does not want to know that what he is doing is sin, although he could know it); but these ignorant sins are essentially the same as knowing sins (cf. *Baieri Comp.; theol. pos. P. II. c. 3. § 11.*).

Of course, all sins, even unrecognized sins, are contrary to certainty, but that does not mean that they shake it. Since our theses have as their subject one who is truly in the state of grace, we can only speak of a shattering of the certainty of the state of grace if the sinner, even if not quite clearly, becomes darkly aware that he is sinning. Even if unknowing sins shook assurance, a Christian could

never be without shaken assurance; but assurance of the state of grace presupposes that the Christian is certain that his sins are forgiven, not that he has none. But the assurance is shaken by deliberate sins, for they grieve the Holy Spirit in him, even if they consist only in idle chatter. Eph 4:29, 30.

A true Christian knows that sin forms a wall of partition between him and his God; he therefore has an extremely tender conscience; as soon as he realizes that he has transgressed a commandment of God, his cheerful conscience is gone and with it the certainty of his state of grace is shaken.

"The power of sin," writes Luther, "is that it accuses, blames, condemns, bites, torments and tortures us, and leaves the heart no peace, and brings us the wrath of God, hell, etc." (V, 731.)

He also experienced this in himself, which is why he further writes: "An evil conscience is hell itself, and a good conscience is paradise and the kingdom of heaven." (X, 2236.)

The fact that unconverted people know nothing of this horror of sin, nor can they understand why a Christian is so anxious not to consent to sin and would rather die, is because they have not yet realized how terrible sin is. However, this does not only refer to particular external gross cases, but also to the inner movements of the heart. A Christian also pays attention to his heart, to his inner walk before God. An evil thought in his heart, which he catches, can have such consequences for him that he thinks he has lost grace. <[page 72](#)>

Luther:

"Conscience is too weak for sin, indeed there is no sin so small that conscience could resist it, even if it were as small as laughter in the church." (XI, 1351.) [288/2]

The same:

"A heart that knows itself guilty is also afraid of a good rumor. For it is customary to say: *Conscientia mille testes* (conscience is like a thousand witnesses)." (II, 2344 [[StL 2. 1596](#)])

He said: "Christians must daily experience and feel for themselves the power of sin and death. For this sting comes not only to gross sinners, as adulterers, fornicators, slayers and murderers at the time of repentance, but also to pious people before the world, who must bite themselves in the heart with their sins, because they have not feared God, have not believed and trusted in him, have not served him. ... I have very often had to taste and feel such a sting, spit and poison, i.e. the remorse in my conscience, that it has made me break out in a cold sweat.

"The same groaning in the heart and conscience, whether from gross outward sins or from subtle, inward sins, such as unbelief and blindness, etc., St. Paul calls the sting of death, because death strangles a man by such groaning, even if he is healthy.... Sin is the sting of death; that is, the evil rebuke in the heart, as I said, is the real poison that kills a person. When sin awakens and the rebuke comes and says: You are a child of death, you are lost and condemned,

then the person goes over it if he is not helped. ... For if it lasts long, man must not only die, but also despair." (Erl. Ex. 19, 176. 177.)

The second part of our thesis teaches us that mortal sins destroy the certainty of the state of grace. What then are mortal sins? All such sins by which a person, when he commits them, passes from the kingdom of God into the kingdom of the devil; sins in which it is impossible to stand in faith, whereby faith and a good conscience are lost. These include the works of the flesh mentioned by the apostle Paul in Galatians 5:19-21: "Obvious are the works of the flesh, such as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, sexual immorality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, envy, anger, quarreling, dissension, rioting, hatred, murder, drunkenness, gluttony, and the like, of which I have told you beforehand and say still beforehand that those who practice these things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Every sin can even become a mortal sin. It is not the magnitude of the sin itself, but the nature of the sin, whether it is done out of weakness or out of malice, that determines whether something is a mortal sin or not. Anyone who knows that such and such a thing is sin and yet does it deliberately, despite all the punishment of the Holy Spirit, is committing a mortal sin. This is also taught to us by the saying added to our <[page 73](#)> thesis in Psalm 66:18: "Where I would do wrong in my heart, the Lord would not hear." Here David speaks of deliberate and willful sins and wants to say: If I were to undertake to do something [289/1] against God's law, I would cease to be a child of God, for faith could not stand. —

The certainty of the state of grace stands and falls with faith. What annuls faith also annuls the certainty of the state of grace. If faith cannot exist in the case of willful sin, then the assurance of the state of grace must necessarily be destroyed as well.

Luther writes:

"If a man is in sin against his conscience, i.e. if he knowingly and willingly acts against God, as an adulterer or an evildoer who knowingly wrongs someone, etc., as long as he knowingly keeps such a will, he is without repentance and without faith, and is not pleasing to God. As long as one man keeps another man's wife with him, there is no repentance, no faith, no holiness; that is public. For where there is faith, by which we are justified, there must also be a good conscience. And it is quite impossible that these two things should stand together, faith that trusts in God and evil intent or, as it is called, an evil conscience. Faith and calling on God are delicate things and may easily be a very small wound of the conscience, which pushes away faith and calling, as every practiced Christian must very often experience. Therefore Paul puts these pieces together 1 Tim. 1:5: This is the sum of the doctrine: love from a pure heart and a good conscience and unstained faith; item 1 Tim. 1:19: Keep the faith and a good conscience; item 1 Tim. 3:9: Keep the secret of the faith with a pure conscience, etc. These and other such sayings indicate that where there is no

good conscience, there is no faith and no holiness." (X, 1997.)

When Luther says that it can also be a very small wound of the conscience that pushes away faith, he means that mortal sin need not always be an overt sin, but that it can happen entirely in secret, e.g. secret ambition, a conscious impurity or dishonesty, such as the unrepentant allow themselves in business life. Here the conscience receives a wound. If there is no true repentance, this wound, the sin that is considered small, continues to fester and finally brings death. —

Even committing a mortal sin once overturns the certainty of the state of grace. You often hear people say: "Once is not once." People do not want to be punished for a one-time sin if they have otherwise always lived righteously; they think that God will not judge them so precisely. But the very fact that they still want to defend their sin [page 74](#) shows clearly enough that they are no longer in the faith and that the certainty of the state of grace has been destroyed. —

John 5:44 says: "How can you believe, who take honor from one another? And you do not seek the honor that is from God alone." So here [289/2] the Lord tells the Pharisees that it is impossible for them to believe because they seek honor from one another and want to be esteemed and respected before others; they are therefore, because such sin prevents them from believing, children of death because of this sin. — We sometimes wonder at the fact that some German theologians, called Lutherans, of whom we hear that they are dear, pious, humble and godly people, and who, if we only know them in their homes, are thought to be the best Christians, — that these same gentlemen, when they come to the pulpit, sometimes find fault with this, sometimes with that in the Scriptures. The reason is this: they seek their own honor among the people. They want to be heroes of science, and they would have no science if they stuck to the letter of Scripture. The honor they seek is a stumbling block. Because they seek their own honor and not God's, they lack the fear of God and his word. — But there is not only a scientific arrogance and ambition, there is also a clerical arrogance, a teacher's arrogance, a peasant's arrogance and others. All these conceits, if tolerated, rob God of His glory, and faith and the assurance of the state of grace cannot stand.

In his *Schola Pietatis*, John Gerard interprets the saying quoted in John 5:44 as follows:

"How can you believe and seek God's glory through faith if you take glory from one another? It is because you seek your own honor and do not seek the honor that is God's alone. Seeking your own glory is a great sin, for St. Paul (Rom. 1:30) includes among the greatest sinners preachers of fame, that is, those who, out of a desire for their own glory, boast much and want to be praised as if they were something special, and yet they are nothing. 2 Tim. 3:2. He puts those who think highly of themselves among the stingy, disobedient, unspiritual, unchaste and the greatest transgressors. All honor is due to the Lord God alone, because we have everything from him, but it is not for us to seek our own honor,

because we have nothing of our own. Ps 115:1: 'Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory. If you truly and from the bottom of your heart esteem yourself as nothing, and do not seek your own honor, the Lord God will honor you; this is far greater honor than all the world can give you. John 12:16 says Christ: "If anyone serves me, my Father will honor him." But no one can serve Christ righteously unless he renounces his own glory and denies himself. From this it follows that <page 75> whoever renounces his own honor, the Lord God himself will honor him. John 8:50 says Christ: "I do not seek my own honor, but one who seeks and judges it eats. From this it follows that the honor of him who does not seek his own honor will be sought by God Himself." (p. 365.) [290/1]

What mortal sin is, and that the certainty of the state of grace is thereby destroyed, may be taught us by considering a few examples.

Adam and Eve were conscious before the fall that they were God's dear children; but as soon as they had fallen into that terrible mortal sin, all confidence in God was gone, for they fled from him, hid themselves, no longer liked to hear his voice, and thus proved that they no longer had any confidence in God, in short, that the certainty of the state of grace was destroyed in them. —

David probably dreamed for a while after his terrible fall that he was in God's good graces. Nor will he have stopped his worshipful exercises. But he himself confesses afterwards that it was all an empty delusion: "For when I wanted to conceal it," he says, "my bones languished through my daily weeping. For His hand was heavy upon me day and night, so that my sap dried up as it withers in summer. Sela" [Ps. 3:1-2] — Nathan does not say to him, "Now, behold, you have sinned grievously in your rashness, but you are still in favor with God; the certainty of your state of grace has been shaken, but not destroyed; but he declares to him dryly, 'You are the man of death.'" that is, you have lost salvation, you have lost salvation. —

As long as Saul walked in obedience to God, he was sure of his state of grace; but when he himself sacrificed against God's command, because Samuel delayed, his conscience immediately struck him. His whole conduct, since he did not repent of his wrongdoing, changed completely as a result. He wanted to make up for what he had sinned at his own discretion through zeal for the Lord's service, but only fell deeper and deeper into sin. Instead of returning to God through true repentance, through a resolute confession: I have done wrong, God have mercy on me! he rather persisted in his impenitence, and a restless spirit from the Lord came upon him, as the Scriptures report.

Mortal sins do not necessarily have to be gross external sins through which a person immediately sinks into spiritual death, but can also happen in a similar way to physical death. One person dies in an instant, for example by lightning or some other misfortune, while another suffers from consumption for years until finally all vitality is exhausted. A person's spiritual life can also gradually come to an end in this way: God blesses a Christian in the earthly, he is loved and honored in <page 76> the church, and behold, he becomes secure, he allows

himself to do this and that which he formerly considered sin and which he would therefore not have done at any price. He gradually comes to such a state that he loses faith and a good conscience. He is also aware that things are no longer as they used to be, but instead of calling for mercy, he tries to appease his conscience and lull himself deeper [290/2] and deeper into security. Such a person has already fallen from grace, while others may still consider him a particularly brave Christian.

Luther writes with regard to this:

"The more superfluously a person enjoys carnal goods, the more unhappily his soul is crushed, because his conscience is constantly shaken. For the more he sins, the more he loses his trust in God, and the more doubts, bites, restlessness, terror and consternation of conscience increase; and if from the outside it seems as if everything is going according to his wishes and that he is growing with pleasure, then from within, as it were, the marrow is sucked out of his bones, namely the strength of good confidence; and when all his powers are exhausted, everything is brought to the ground in the most miserable manner, so that he must finally and inevitably despair forever." (IV, 1123 [[StL 4, 908](#)])

Luther warns against the self-deception in which so many who are in spiritual death or are approaching it find themselves: "Therefore, let each one go home to his heart and examine himself to see how he stands, and do not rely on such thoughts: I have been baptized and am called a Christian, have heard God's Word and am going to the sacrament. For in all this he himself separates false Christians from righteous Christians, as if to say: If you are true believers in me and have my treasure, it will be well shown and seen: if not, do not think that I will recognize and accept you as my disciples; and you will have deceived and defrauded no one but yourselves, to eternal ridicule and harm: the gospel and Christ will remain undeceived and undeceived. He must admonish this, and it must always be practiced in Christendom, because we see how many of them there are among us at all times. In short, he does not want to have or know any false Christians, as he testifies in Matthew 7:23, where he pronounces a terrible judgment on them and says that he will say to them on that day, "Depart from me, all evildoers; I have never known you. For such false people would be just as much pagans and unchristians; yet they would not harm Christianity with a terrible example, to the shame and blasphemy of the holy name of Christ and his word." (Interpretation of the 15th chapter of St. John on verses 10-12. VIII, 339. f. [*sic: 399 f.; StL 8, 550-551*])

[<page 77>](#)

Thesis VI.

The certainty of the state of grace also exists in the doubt of the repentant sinner, as long as man fights against it. (Mark 9:24)

In Thesis V we heard that the certainty of the state of grace is shaken, but

not destroyed, by the sin that still clings to Christians; but the question is whether a Christian can still be certain of [291/1] his state of grace when he is challenged by all kinds of doubts, e.g. whether he is really a righteous Christian, whether he is really in grace and whether this and that sin is forgiven him, etc.? Our thesis answers: Yes, even then this certainty remains, as long as the person fights against these doubts. Of course, if the struggle against it were to cease, the certainty of the state of grace would also cease. For such doubt is just as much a sin as any act against God's law; indeed, this doubt is even a cardinal sin, although it is often thought that it is not a sin, or at least not a particularly great sin. Doubt is a secret enmity against God, a secret fear of him, and a secret anger with God; but what more terrible sin can there be than this? As long as a person fights against this sin of doubt, it is a sin of weakness, which therefore shakes the certainty of the state of grace, but does not destroy it. These doubts are a heavy burden for the inward new man, which he would like to be rid of; this is revealed by his struggle against them. The battle against doubt is also a battle of the spirit against the flesh. It is true that the Christian who is in a state of temptation believes that he no longer has faith; but it is precisely through his struggle against doubt that he actually proves that he stands in faith, and that therefore the certainty of his state of grace also continues. Such doubts never come from the new man, but from the flesh through the devil. The new man, who is created from God and filled with the Holy Spirit, cannot doubt at all. If all kinds of doubts come to the Christian through the flesh that is still in him, this cannot make the new man uncertain of God's grace. As long as he fights against such doubts, the certainty of the state of grace remains, even if it does not seem so to man according to his feelings.

Burk writes:

"In the state of temptation it may sometimes happen that, just as a man who is nevertheless alive lacks the *actus reflexus*, or the real perception of his life, in sleep or fainting, so in all kinds of *spiritual fainting* a child of God <[page 78](#)> becomes insensible to his faith and state of grace." (Epistle Sermons II, 617.)

We have an example from which we should learn how to fight against doubt in the father of the epileptic boy Mark 9[:22]. His doubt was expressed in the words: "But if you can, have mercy on us and help us." But when the Lord said to him, "If you could believe, all things are possible to him who believes," the child's father immediately cried out with tears and said (v. 24), "I believe; help thou mine unbelief." This man hoped that Christ would help his son, which is why he had brought him to Him, but at the same time he was also plagued by grave doubts. He wants to rely on the goodness and kindness of his Savior in faith, but at the same time his heart is filled with doubts about the power of Christ. Through Christ's help he finally triumphs over all doubts and [291/2] experiences the mighty help of the Lord. —

A wonderful example to show how faith, and therefore also the certainty of the state of grace, endures even in the greatest temptation, indeed, is made

strong and great precisely by it, is found in the Canaanite woman. Her struggle with Christ is a picture of how Christ still deals with His own today. Just as Christ at first remained completely silent in response to the poor woman's pleading cry, so it often seems that when we cry out to Him for mercy and for the forgiveness of our sins, He is far away from us and does not want to hear us, while He is nevertheless close to us. Just as the Lord then seems to deny help to the Canaanite woman, who is completely unworthy of it, so we too must often experience that God makes us feel our unworthiness, that we are challenged as to whether we belong to the elect; indeed, that in the end we think we hear nothing but condemnation from the mouth of God. But despite all these temptations and the doubts that arise in us, which the Canaanite woman will not have lacked, we should do as she did and fight the good fight of faith. And if faith stands firm in the fight against all doubts and temptations, despite everything we feel, it will finally win the victory and be gloriously strengthened and crowned; indeed, then Christ will also say to such a one, as he did to the Canaanite woman: "Your faith is great; be it done to you as you wish.

In his Church Postil, Luther presents Mary at the wedding in Cana as an example of how "faith stands in the right struggle". Christ is unkind and hard, but she does not interpret it in her heart as anger or against his goodness, but she remains firm in her mind that he is kind and gracious, and thinks: "I want to eat up the defeat and become ashamed; he is sour, <[page 79](#)> but he is sweet, I know that." Then Luther adds: "Let us do likewise, so we are true Christians." (Leipzig edition XIII, 351.) —

In a comforting treatise from 1522, in which Luther declares it to be "the highest of all God's commandments" that we should imagine and visualize his dear Son Jesus Christ, he also speaks about what we should do with the thoughts that come into our hearts during temptation because of sin. After he has shown that they are "certainly the devil's fiery darts and arrows", he goes on to say, among other things: "We must be contentious and always let go of our thoughts. If they fall in, let them fall out again, just as one quickly spits out when dung has fallen into his mouth." (Leipz. Ausg. XXII, 517.) So must one also do with all doubts about the certainty of the state of grace. —

The Romanists teach, as we saw in the first thesis, that one must doubt the certainty of the state of grace: this error they also sought to impute to the Lutheran doctrine, because we teach that confidence is often weak. To this they reply

Chemnitz: [292/1]

"We also want to confess that true faith is not perfect in this weakness of the flesh, but is often challenged by many and various doubts, so that confidence is often very weak with trembling during temptations. We teach, however, that one should not give in to doubt, but should constantly fight and pray against it: I believe, Lord, but help thou mine unbelief, Marc. 9:24, and: Lord, increase our faith, Luke 17:5 ... And of course, it is not because we look at our weaknesses or

our new (good) qualities and virtues that we fast in the confidence that we have certainly been accepted by God for eternal life. For there we expressly confess with Paulo: In this I am not justified." (*Ex. Conc. Trid. Loc. IX. de fide, p. 192. Ed. Preuss.*)

It was also noted that when we are tempted, we should not look to ourselves, but to what God has given us, to which we should adhere according to his will. Even if our faith is weak and imperfect, what it holds on to is perfect, namely God's grace and Christ's merit, which is communicated to us through the means of grace. A piece of gold remains a piece of gold whether it is held by the hand of a weak child or a strong man. Therefore, as long as I hold on to divine grace, even if only with weak faith, the certainty of the state of grace remains. —

Christians are not immune to temptation. Why else would the sixth petition, "Lead us not into temptation", be put into their mouths if all kinds of temptation did not come against the Christian? But the [<page 80>](#) most serious temptation of Satan is without question when he tries to fill our hearts with doubts about the grace of God and whether we have forgiveness of sins. And it is precisely such temptations that the best Christians are exposed to, which is why Luther rightly says: "The holier the person, the greater the temptation." (VIII, 2727.)

It is also worth taking to heart what Luther writes in the Large Catechism on the sixth petition:

"The devil is now coming to this, inciting and blowing everywhere. But he is especially active in matters of conscience and spiritual things, namely, that both God's Word and work may be cast to the wind and despised, that he may tear us away from faith, hope and love, and lead us to unbelief, false presumption and stubbornness; or again to despair, denial of God and blasphemy, and other innumerable and abominable deeds. These are the cords and nets, indeed the real fiery darts, which not flesh and blood but the devil shoots into the heart in the most poisonous way. These are indeed great and severe trials and temptations that every Christian must bear, even if each one were alone; so that we may ever be driven to cry out and pray every hour, because we are in this shameful life, where we are being harassed, hounded and driven on all sides, lest God let us grow weary and faint and fall back into sin, [292/2] shame and unbelief; for otherwise it is impossible to overcome even the slightest temptation. Now this is not called entering into temptation, when he gives us power and strength to resist, but the temptation is not taken away nor removed. For no one can avoid temptation and irritation, because we live in the flesh and have the devil around us, and nothing else will come of it; we must suffer temptation, indeed be in it; but we pray that we may not fall into it and drown in it. Therefore it is quite another thing to feel temptation, and to consent to it, or to say yes to it. We must all feel them, though not all at the same time, but some more and more severely;

"As, the youth especially from the flesh; afterward, what grows up and grows old, from the world; but the others, who deal with spiritual things, i.e. the strong Christians, from the devil. But such a feeling, because it is against our will and

we would rather be rid of it, can harm no one. For if one did not feel it, it could not be called a temptation. But to grant it is to leave it in check, not to stand against it and ask." (Erl. ed. 21, 125. f.)

Concerning the tempted, Luther writes:

"Therefore it is a marvel that he who has no sin feels it and has it, and he who has sin does not feel it and has none, for it would not be possible for him to complain about and against sin if he did not live in righteousness and grace. For one devil does not cast out another, Luke 11:18. <[page 81](#)> Sin does not accuse its own kind, nor does one wolf accuse another; yet it is impossible that he who cries out against it should be without sin. For he must not speak before God with fictitious words; it must be true that he has sin as he says, and yet also true that he is without sin, and so, just as Christ was both alive and dead, so at the same time they must be full of sin and without sin who are true Christians." (IV, 2295 [[StL 4, 1682](#); [LW14, 157 f.](#)])

Luther says:

"God loves temptations and is angry with them. He loves them when they provoke and impel us to prayer, but He resents them when they cause us to despair. But it is said: The sacrifice of praise sanctifies me, Ps 51:19. Therefore, if you are well, psalm and praise God with a beautiful song; if you are ill, i.e. if temptations come, pray." (XXII, 150.)

Luther also describes the reason why God sends such temptations to his saints:

"Why does God allow such things [[293/1](#)] to happen to his loved ones? Certainly not without cause, and not out of anger or disgrace, but out of great mercy and kindness, to show us how kindly and fatherly he is to us in all things, and how faithfully he cares for his own, and so governs them that their faith may be exercised more and more and grow stronger and stronger. But he does this especially for the following reasons.

"First, that he may keep his own from presumption, so that the great saints, who have especially high grace and gifts from God, may not fall into it and rely on themselves. For if they were always so strong in spirit and felt nothing but vain joy and sweetness, they would ultimately fall into the miserable devil's hope, which despises God and defies himself. Therefore they must be salted and tempered so that they do not always feel vain strength of spirit, but that their faith occasionally trembles and their hearts are troubled, so that they see what they are and must confess that they can do nothing unless God sustains them by his pure grace. Thus he keeps them in humility and knowledge of themselves, so that they do not become proud or confident of their faith and holiness, as happened to St. Peter when he presumed to lay down his life for Christ, John 14:37. For this reason such temptation is all the more necessary and needful for the saints than eating and drinking, that they may remain in fear and humility, and learn to keep themselves in God's grace alone.

"Second, God allows such things to happen to others as an example, both to

frighten the secure and to comfort the foolish and frightened. The reprobate and impenitent may be reflected in this, that they may learn to mend their ways and beware of sins, because they see how God also deals with the saints in such a way that they come into such fear that they feel nothing but wrath and disgrace and fall into such terror as if <[page 82](#)> they had committed the most serious sin that a man could ever have committed. If pious hearts are overwhelmed by such heavy and almost unbearable terror and fear, what will happen to the others who lie and persist in right sins without reproach and who only earn and gather God's wrath? How will they stand if they are suddenly overcome by fear, as they may be every hour?

"Again, such examples serve to comfort frightened and anxious consciences when they see that God has attacked not only them but also the highest saints in this way and has allowed them to suffer such temptation and terror. For if we had no example in Scripture that the saints also suffered in this way, we would not be able to bear it, and the foolish conscience would always lament thus: "Yes, it is I alone who am in such suffering. When did God allow the pious [293/2] and the saints to be tempted in this way? Therefore it must be a sign that God does not want me. But now that we see and hear that God has dealt in this way with all the saints, we have this teaching and consolation that we should not despair in such suffering, but keep quiet and wait until he helps us out, just as he has helped all the dear saints.

"Thirdly, the real reason why God does this is that he wants to teach his saints how to seek consolation and to prepare themselves to find and keep Christ." (XI, 618 [[StL 11, 450 f.](#)])

A Christian is like a good tree rooted in good soil. If he looks beneath him, his roots, i.e. his faith, are founded in God's unchanging Word; if he looks within himself, he finds the enduring sap, the Holy Spirit, and if he looks above himself, he sees the branches with all kinds of fruit. But he sees all this only outside the state of temptation. In the state of temptation, on the other hand, the Christian appears like a tree in winter, barren and frozen. He feels and senses nothing of the all-pervading sap (i.e. of the effects of grace of the Holy Spirit), he sees no fruit (i.e. good works); but he is nevertheless rooted in good ground (i.e. his faith is nevertheless grounded in God's Word). When the winter (i.e. the state of temptation) is over, he also feels the sap rising up in him again (i.e. how the Holy Spirit works in him), then the fruit, the good works, also appear again. Therefore, as long as the Christian still holds on to God's Word, he still stands in faith and in the grace of God despite all his counter-sanctified feelings.

Thesis VII.

The more zealous a person is in sanctification, the more he has evidence by his love and good works that he is in favor with God. 2 Peter 1:10. 1 John 3:14.

[<page 83>](#)

When a Christian is zealous in sanctification or regeneration, he testifies that he has broken with sin and the world and has gone over to God's side. For when a person converts, he thereby turns away from the world and towards God. It is therefore impossible for a believing Christian not to show love and do good works. The more his faith increases, the more his love increases and the more zealous he becomes in his godly walk. This walk of love is then a testimony to the fact that he is in favor with God. The reason for this can be found in

2 Peter 1:10: "Therefore, brethren, be diligent to make your calling and election sure. For if you do this, you will not stumble." The apostle Peter immediately begins his second epistle with an exhortation to a godly walk. And after he has shown in verses 3 and 4 what God has done for people, he writes in verses 5-7: "Apply all your diligence to this (namely, according to verse 4, to flee [294/1] the fleeting lust of the world) and in your faith present virtue, and in virtue modesty, and in modesty temperance, and in temperance patience, and in patience godliness, and in godliness brotherly love, and in brotherly love universal love." He then shows in the following verses that faith must prove itself in this way, and continues in verse 10: "Therefore, brethren, be diligent," and so on. By this he means: practice a godly walk, so that you may have a testimony that you are certainly in God's favor and that the Holy Spirit dwells in you.

When it is said that we are to apply ourselves to sanctification in order to make our calling and election firm, this is not to say that our calling and election to God will become firmer as a result. No, never ever! The election made in eternity and the calling made in time are unshakeably firm on God's side; but with me the calling and election are to be made firm; I am to become ever firmer and more certain that God has called and chosen me to salvation. This is done by making an effort to sanctify myself. All whom God has chosen, he has chosen to praise his glorious grace; to this end he has also called them. But if God's glorious grace is praised and glorified through my walk, it follows that I must also be one of the elect, so that zeal in sanctification is a testimony not only to my faith but also to the certainty of my state of grace.

Luther writes about this passage in 2 Peter 1:10, 11:

"So you see what this apostle gives to the fruits of faith. Although these belong to the neighbor, that he may be served thereby, yet the fruit does not remain outside, that faith thereby becomes stronger and does more and more good works. So this is a much different power than the bodily one. For the latter decreases and is consumed if one uses and does one thing too much; but this spiritual power, the more one practices and does it, the stronger it becomes, and

decreases if one does not do it. This is why God first led, drove and exercised Christianity in the fight of faith, in shame, death and bloodshed, so that it would become strong and vigorous, and the more it was pressed, the more it was overcome. This is what St. Peter means, that faith should not be allowed to rest and lie still, because it is so skillful that it becomes stronger and stronger as it is driven and exercised, until it becomes certain of its calling and election and cannot fail.

"And here a goal is also set as to how one should act with providence. There are many frivolous spirits who have not felt much about faith, who fall in, bump up against it, and worry about this thing for the first time, and want to find out by reason whether they are provided for, so that they may become certain of what they are. But stop soon; it is not the time to do so. [294/2] But if you want to become certain, you must come to it by this way that St. Peter suggests to you here. If you take another, you have already failed; your own experience must teach you. If faith is well exercised and practiced, you will finally be sure that you are not lacking; as now follows:

'For if you do these things, you will not fall.'

"That is, you will stand firm, not stumbling nor sinning, but walking right through and fresh from places, and everything will work itself out right. Otherwise, if you try to do it with your thoughts, the devil will soon plunge you into despair and hatred of God.

Verse 11: And so the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly supplied to you.

"This is the way by which one enters the kingdom of heaven: therefore let no one take it into his mind to enter by such dreams and thoughts of faith as he himself has devised in his heart; it must be a living faith, well exercised and practiced. Help God, how have our deceivers written, taught and said against this text: whoever has the least degree and only a spark of faith, if he should die, will be saved. If you want to save yourself for this, and come to such faith so suddenly and quickly, you will have persevered too long. Do you hear that those who are strong have enough to send. Although one should not despair of such weak ones. For it may well happen that they will come through, but it will be hard and difficult and cost much effort. But he who practices it well in life, so that faith is driven and strengthened by good works, will have an abundant entrance, and will enter into that life with <page 85> good courage and confidence, so that he will die in defiance and despise life, and go along as it were with splendor, and leap in with joy. But those who enter otherwise will not enter with such joy, the door will not be so wide open to them, nor will they have such an ample entrance; but they will become so narrow and sour that they will falter and would rather be weak all their days than die." (Interpretation of the 2nd Epistle of St. Peter Cap. 1, V. 10. 11. IX, 846-48 [[StL 9. 1353 f.](#); [LW 30. 158 f.](#)])

It is extremely important that Luther points to the right preparation for the last hour, for then the devil will once again try to rob us of the certainty of our state of

grace. Blessed is he who even then can step forward and say: You know, my God, that I have walked before you with a sincere heart according to your commandments and have professed sanctification; yet this shall not be my consolation, but I rely solely on your grace and on the merit of my Savior; I will take comfort in this.

Another saying which teaches us that through love we have witness to our faith and the assurance of our state of grace is 1 John 3:14: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who [295/1] does not love his brother remains in death." According to this saying, then, all Christians know for certain that they have come out of death into life; and what is the testimony that confirms this certainty? — It is brotherly love, "for we love the brethren". In this love for the brethren, which no man has by nature, the Christian has a testimony of his state of grace.

Luther writes about this saying:

"Well, how do we know that we have come from death into life? Therefore, he says, 'for we love the brethren'. What is that? Is not this our doctrine, 'that he loved us first' (as St. John himself says), 'since he died for us and rose again before we loved him'? Where this is believed, only then does love go to both God and neighbor. Why then does he say: 'We have come from death to life, because we love our brothers'? But it is because of the word: we know; for he clearly says: "Therefore we know that we have come out of death", i.e. by this one can feel and recognize where and which people are, since faith is righteous; for St. John has written these epistles primarily against the false Christians, as there are many who also boast of Christ (like faithless Cain), and yet remain without fruit of faith. Therefore he does not speak of how and by what means one passes from sin and death to life, but by what one recognizes this: *Non de causa, sed de effectu* (Not from the cause, but from the effect). For it is not enough for us to boast that we have come from <page 86> death to life, but it must also be shown and seen. For faith is not such a thing that it lies there all empty and dead; but where it lives in the heart, its power must also prove itself; where it does not, the glory is false and nothing. But this proves, if one feels the fruit, that a man's heart, infused with the comfort and certain trust of divine grace and love, is moved to be kind, friendly, gentle, and patient toward his neighbor, envying and hating no one, but gladly serving everyone and, where necessary, helping with life and limb.

"Such fruit proves and testifies that such a man has certainly come from death into life: for if he did not believe this, but doubted the grace and love of God, he could not have such a heart to love and thank God and to show his love to his neighbor." —

Here Luther shows where it comes from that man becomes willing to practice love, namely because he knows for certain that God is reconciled with him. This makes him happy to serve not only God, but also his neighbor for God's sake. But as soon as a person doubts whether he is in God's good graces, he also

lacks love and has no desire to walk in God's commandments. This is why David also says in the 119th Psalm, v. 32: "If you comfort my heart, I will walk in the way of your commandments." —

Luther continues:

"But where this faith is and recognizes such great grace and good deed that he has been helped from death to life, his heart is thereby inflamed to [295/2] love again and to do all good (even to his enemies), as God has done to him.

"So it is rightly said and understood that St. John says: 'We know that we have come from death, because we love the brethren. So that the reason may remain: 'that we may be justified by faith alone, that is, redeemed from death'. This is the first part of the Christian doctrine. Then there is another question: whether faith is righteous or false, or whether it is a false appearance and a vain glory of faith? Therefore he clearly says that we are not saved from death by love; but now that we are saved from it and have been given life, we know and see that it works this in us, that we are no longer, like Cain, arrogant, arrogant about ourselves, despising our neighbor, full of envy, hatred, bitterness, but glad to see everyone helped and, as much as is in us, serve him and do all good." (Church Postil on the Epistle *Dom. II. p. Trin. Erl. B. IX*, p. 48. 49.)

The same says:

"Works do not make a person righteous, but the person who is righteous also does righteous works, and yet works do such things that faith is thereby exercised and increased. ... Thus St. Peter 2 Epist. I, 10, that we should make our calling and <[page 87](#)> election firm and sure by good works. For they are a testimony that God's grace is strong in us, and that we are called and chosen." (I, 1692.)

Luther again:

"But if you want to know whether you have gone to the sacrament fruitfully, you can do no better than to be careful how you show yourself to your neighbor. You must not think about how much devotion you have had or how good the words taste in your heart. They are good thoughts, but they are not certain and you may lack them. But in this way you will be sure that it is powerful for you to see how you stand toward your neighbor. So if you find that the words and the sign or sacrament soften and move you, that you are kind to your enemy and take care of your neighbor, and help him bear his sorrow and suffering, then you are doing right; otherwise, if you do not do this, you will remain uncertain, even if you enjoy the sacrament a hundred times a day with great devotion, that you will weep for joy; for such strange devotion before God is nothing that enters in like this, and is probably as dangerous as it is good. Therefore we must above all things be sure of this in ourselves, as St. Peter says in 2 Peter 1:10: 'Make every effort to establish your profession by good works. The Word and Sacrament are indeed certain in Himself, for God Himself testifies about them with all the angels and pious men, but it is still lacking in you whether you also give the same testimony. For even if all the angels and the whole world testify of you that you

have taken the sacrament usefully, it is still much weaker [296/1] than the testimony you yourself give. But you cannot come to this, for you look at your nature to see whether it shines forth and has worked in you and produced fruit." (II, 818 f.) —

It is a very unjust accusation that the papists make when they claim that Lutherans teach that we do not need to do any good works at all. They do, however, always insist on works, but not primarily on those commanded by God, but on works of their own devising. Since they do not know the true Christian faith and do not understand the nature of it, they cannot even insist on truly good works that please God. Their whole activity is only concerned with appearances; their works, even the best of them, are only apparently good works, because they do not come from the right source, from faith, but are done out of compulsion. They use their theology of doubt, which leaves people uncertain about the certainty of their state of grace, as a spur to drive them to good works. Such works, which are not freely done out of faith but are forced, cannot be a testimony to the certainty of the state of grace. Where there is real, true faith, these works follow of themselves, as Luther says so exquisitely in the preface to the Epistle to the Romans: [<page 88>](#)

"O it is a living, active, mighty thing about faith that it is impossible that it should not work good without ceasing. Nor does he ask whether good works are to be done; but before you ask, he has done them and is always doing them. But he who does not do such works is a faithless man, groping and looking around for faith and good works, and knowing neither what faith nor good works are, yet washing and babbling many words about faith and good works."

These good works, which faith does, have the repercussion that they testify to us that faith, which has such good works as fruits, must also be of the right kind. But if faith is attested by works, then the assurance of the state of grace is also attested.

The example of the thief on the cross teaches us that sanctification always follows faith and thus bears witness to faith. It is not infrequently presented as if the thief had been saved by faith which, because the opportunity to do so was lacking, did not prove itself by good works, which would have been the case in any case if he had had the opportunity. But just take a good look at this thief and you will see that as soon as he had come to faith, he spent the few hours he had left to live in vain good works, that he had become a living saint through faith. For what did he do? First, he punished his fellow journeyman, so he had a heartfelt love for him and would therefore like to bring him to Christ. Secondly, he made a glorious confession of Christ, that he was the Son of God, even though the chief priests and the nobles [296/2] of the Jewish people blasphemed him. Thirdly, he also prayed with heartfelt fervor, turning to his Savior and saying, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. All this was a fruit of his faith. The Lord God will one day show this zeal in sanctification to those who thought that he had attained salvation through faith without sanctification. It is true that no

one is saved through sanctification, but not without it either, because where there is true faith, through which alone we become partakers of salvation, this fruit of faith is also certain to be found. Thus sanctification is by no means the ground on which we are to base the certainty of our state of grace; but it is a sure testimony of the existence of the state of grace, both for ourselves and towards the world. As soon as someone relies on his works for salvation, the state of grace itself immediately ceases; for the merit of works and grace are incompatible. But we hear about this

Luther, in a sermon on 1 John 4:6-21, says thus:

"This is just the difference, as I have always taught from the Scriptures: when it comes to the main joy by which I am to stand before God <page 89> against my sin, if he wants to keep account with me, my life, work and love will never be perfect or sufficient; but I must have another man for this, who is called Christ, sent from the Father, as St. John said before, to make atonement for our sin. John said before, for the atonement of our sins. This I call the chief joy, or the chief glory and highest consolation, who alone must do and keep it, when God's judgment comes and stand against his wrath, whereby all my life and deeds must be condemned to hell. So he himself has called it above Cap. 2:28, where he tells us to remain with Christ, so that when he is revealed we may have joy and not be put to shame before him and in his future. This is also what he means by the preceding words in v. 15: 'Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. But above this we must also have glory, not only toward God, but also before God and before Christendom, toward all the world, so that no one can condemn us, nor accuse us with truth; as St. Paul Acts 24, 16. 24, 15, 16. before the governor, he boasts against his accusers, saying: "Having believed, and having hope in God that the resurrection of the dead is to come, I endeavor in this to have an unblameable conscience in all things, both toward God and toward man," etc., that is, to live in such a way that no one can be offended or angry with me. Item, 2 Cor. 1, 12: 'Our glory is this, that our conscience bears witness that we have walked in simplicity and godly integrity in the world, that is, that no one can accuse us of hypocrisy and evil deeds'." (IX, 1289 f.) [297/1]

A Christian lives in the world so that it seems as if he should earn his salvation by works, and yet he does not build it on his works, but his only consolation is that Christ died and rose again for him. If a Christian can say even at the hour of death: I have endeavored to have an unscathed conscience, he will still say with Paul, 1 Tim. 1:15: "This is certainly true and a precious word, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost", and sing with the orthodox church from the bottom of his heart:

The reason I am founding,
Is Christ and his blood,
That makes that I find
The eternal true good.
About me and my life

Is nothing on this earth,
What Christ has given me,
That is worthy of love.

(St. Louis Hymnal 366, 3.[TLH 528:3])

[<page 90>](#)

From all our discussions we have thus seen that the assurance of the state of grace is connected with faith; indeed, that the assurance of the state of grace is really nothing other than that one is certain in faith. As soon as this is clear to us, every single thesis is [297/2] clear and certain. What can be said of the one can also be said of the other:

Just as no new revelations are necessary to come to faith, so no new revelations are necessary to come to the certainty of the state of grace;

Just as it is dangerous to build faith on feeling, it must also be dangerous to build the certainty of the state of grace on it;

Just as faith is based solely on the means of grace, so the assurance of the state of grace can also be based solely on the means of grace;

Just as faith alone is obtained through the Holy Spirit by those who repent, so also the assurance of the state of grace;

by which faith is strengthened, shaken and destroyed, by which the certainty of the state of grace is also strengthened, shaken and destroyed;

As long as faith exists, the certainty of the state of grace also exists; and

whereby faith is sealed and testified to, thereby also the certainty of the state of grace is sealed and testified to.

Whoever has faith also has the certainty of the state of grace.

We must not lose sight of this connection, otherwise we will lose all clarity and begin to waver, which will shake our faith and the certainty of our state of grace, and may even destroy it.