

CONVENTION ESSAYS - 1996

JUSTIFICATION IS BY GRACE

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Introduction

A woman who had been visiting my congregation for a number of weeks came to me one Sunday after worship service and said: "You know, I've been a member of a Pentecostal church for twelve years and have visited many other churches, and this is the first time I've ever heard of grace." She did not mean to say that she had never heard the term grace before, but that she had not had the concept of grace explained and applied to her as we in the Evangelical Lutheran Church explain and apply it. My delight over her statement was dispelled however, several months later when this same woman—who had consequently begun Adult Instruction and had her five children baptized—expressed concern to me that we in the Lutheran Church spoke "too much about the grace of God and not enough about what man has to do." She has since left our midst because she felt that our Lutheran concept of grace could lead people into a false security by making the Christian faith a license to sin.

I mention this woman as a very real example of what I believe is one of the fundamental struggles of the Christian faith—the struggle to come to terms with the grace of God. Not only is the concept of grace hard for the believer to grasp and understand, but the application of grace in the life of the man who is *simul iustus et peccator* is extremely difficult, as Luther himself says: "To appreciate grace is the supreme and most difficult art one can find on earth, so that even St Paul must confess and say that it is an unspeakable gift (2 Cor. 9:15)."ⁱ

In addition, we are finding that we live in a world and at a time where visible Christendom itself seems to have lost its way regarding the grace of God, that is at the same time increasingly apathetic to sound doctrine and godly living, and increasingly hostile to the gospel. With their catch-cry of "deeds not creeds," many of the "Christian" churches today are so busy trying to put into place all of the secular sales techniques that they have been taught to use in their quest to vie for the public's attention and support, that they have little time or inclination for doctrinal discussions. Should we be all that surprised, then, that the woman mentioned above had never heard of grace even though she had been a member of a "Christian" church for twelve years?

We, as members of the CELC, are facing enormous, and very real, challenges in presenting and applying the biblical view of justification by grace through faith to the people of the twentieth century—both within our churches and without. It is for this reason, then, that such discussion regarding the foundation of our faith—justification by grace—is so vitally important for us. And it is with this in mind that I am very pleased to be present here today, although I cannot but feel overwhelmed by the task set before me. It is not my intention to present a strict doctrinal thesis on justification by grace—that has been done all too well by men far superior in learning to me. Rather, as a novice to the public ministry, I thought I would touch on those facets of the doctrine of justification by grace that I have found to be of greatest comfort and spiritual benefit to me in my own personal pilgrimage of faith.

In addition, since all doctrinal discussions are, to some degree, polemic, our attention must naturally be focused on those aberrations that are causing the greatest concern to us and to our people as we struggle to maintain the truth of justification by grace in increasingly ungodly times. It is my prayer that this will give us the opportunity, not only to get together and compare notes (which is essential), but especially enable us to sharpen each other in our faith,ⁱⁱ spiritually and

intellectually, in order that the help and support that we gain here at this conference may be brought to the people of our congregations and respective nations.

The Necessity of Grace

To discuss the topic of God's grace, we must begin first by discussing man's relationship with God. Ever since Bonhoeffer, I believe, in discussing man's precondition before God the question the church has been asking is "Who are you?" But Scripture observes that the question God asks in the garden is not "Who are you, Adam?" but "Where are you?" In other words, God is asking: Where are you now in your relation to God? Where are you now in your relation to your neighbor? This is the question that must be answered before we may begin to have our eyes and hearts opened to the truth of God's grace, for we will have no higher love for the grace of God than when we appreciate fully our predicament, our dis-location from the God who created us.

This dis-location with God is the root, not of man's alienation from God, but of his deep enmity with God, which thus shows itself in natural man's intense hatred of both God's law and his gospel. While it is true that natural man has a hostility towards God's law because he doesn't like being told what to do, his natural hatred of the law is only surpassed by his natural hatred of God's grace in the gospel. The thing that is most hateful to our natural, religious selves is the freedom and the grace of God. Consider how the Israelites responded to the grace of God as they walked through the wilderness on their way to the Land of Promise after they had been liberated from slavery. They responded to God's grace in three ways—they complained about God's way, they complained about God's food, and they were continually wishing that they could be back in slavery. The problem is that, as Dostoyevsky's character of the Grand Inquisitor asserts in *The Brothers Karamozov*, mankind doesn't want this freedom of the gospel.

What natural man hates about it, first, is that to be a recipient of the free grace of God, this fellow—the flesh—must be crushed. This is not a matter of suicide—self-imposed humility. That man is willing to do as the steady growth of such law-oppressive religions as Islam and Mormonism readily attest. As I heard a pastor aptly put it: "Monasticism is a good patriarch." The way of grace is that God crushes us.

Second, what we hate about the grace of God is that it shows that we are, and always will be, as Luther noted, nothing but beggars. We can never get beyond "Lord, have mercy on me" and "Blessed are the poor." This is the kind of poverty where we have lost our claims to anything before God. The only thing we can stake our life on is that God is not a liar when he tells us that he saves us, loves us, and makes us his own—that is, that God justifies us by his grace.

While I was in Peru last year at an ELS Missionaries' Conference, this story was related to me by one of the Peruvian missionaries, a professor at the seminary in Lima. One of his former students, now a pastor, was speaking to him about the topic of justification and said: "The day you taught us in class about God's justification by grace, I had to put my head down on the desk to hide my tears. It was the most stirring thing I had ever heard, that God would save such a wicked person as myself. I thought, what a blessing to be a part of a church that teaches God's grace as it truly is. I am so thankful to God that he has saved me by his grace." While appreciating this gentleman's joy over finding a gracious God, I also felt somewhat ashamed that Dogmatics class did not have the same impact on me (tears were shed only at exam time!). It brought to mind the weeping of the woman over the feet of Jesus in the home of the Pharisee, and the consequent statement by Jesus: "Her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved very much. But he who has little forgiven loves little" (Lk. 7:47).

Without the revelation of God's grace, natural man is driven by the law to try to save himself. For within the heart of every man is the *opinio legis* (the opinion of the law) by which man views the law as the instrument for merchandising with God. Inherent in this thought is the belief that when man comes to God with good works, God must reward him. This may also be called the Law of Retribution—good is rewarded, evil is punished—and natural man, and indeed all of the world's religions, are driven by it. In order to get the sun to shine and the crops to grow, in order to find

happiness and success, in order to be rich, natural man thinks he must somehow earn something with God, which God is then obliged to repay.

The Roman Church takes this Law of Retribution even further with their doctrines of *meritum de congruo* (a reward from God corresponding to man's use of his natural abilities) and *meritum de condigno* (the reward due the person who, in the "state of grace," performs divinely prescribed works). Boiled down this means that if you can earn enough grace through your natural good works, then you can work out your own faith and save yourself. To put it another way, grace in the Roman Church (and much of Protestantism) is a celestial substance, like a heavenly Uranium 238. And what we all need is a little shot of it in us, and once we have it, it radiates through our entire being. Thus, according to Rome, while it is natural that you think a religious thought, when you get grace, you will think a higher religious thought. While it is natural that you love God, when you get grace, you will now love him a lot. But grace is not a bonus put on nature. In fact, as Luther says: "To want to merit grace by works which precede faith is to want to appease God by sins; which is nothing but adding sins to sins, laughing at God and provoking him to wrath."ⁱⁱⁱ

What natural man is unable to see is that both the wrath of God and the grace of God are revelations—disclosures by God—and not conclusions that can be drawn from a rational set of arguments. For while man insists that his natural predisposition is to the good, or that he is at least morally neutral, the revelation of the Scriptures tells us that man's precondition is to be ungodly (Rom. 3:23; 5:8). Luther, in speaking of this original sin, states: "This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature that reason cannot understand it. It must be believed because of the revelation in the Scriptures (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12ff; Exod. 33:20; Gen. 3:6ff)."^{iv} This revelation of the wrath of God, the very antithesis of grace, is paradoxically, the necessary precondition to prepare the heart for the reception of God's grace.

And yet, in a certain sense, we find natural man acknowledging that the world is indeed damned. Have you ever noticed how many people acknowledge the wrath and condemnation of God? You don't have to go very far to realize this—just go to any place of work, or drinking, or playing. Go out into the field with the farmer who is trying to fix the combine. Turn on any movie made in Hollywood in the last ten years. Walk into a bar or go to a sporting event, and you will hear the curse of God everywhere. Have you ever gone to a gas station and the mechanic dropped a wrench on his foot? Did he bless the wrench? What man is revealing by this constant cursing is the simple fact that everything is under a curse, as Scripture says.^v They are joining God in speaking to Adam: "Cursed is the ground because of you" (Gen. 3:17).

What natural man can not acknowledge is that the consequence of the curse is condemnation. Since no man may escape this condemnation by himself or his own works, we in the Lutheran Church speak of the necessity of grace. By this we do not mean that it was necessary for God to give and apply his grace to man,^{vi} but that grace was necessary for man in order to escape the curse. Without grace, we all stand cursed and condemned, from the least to the greatest. But into this damned world God brings his grace. To Adam and Eve hiding in sin in the garden God pronounces his promise of a Seed who will crush Satan's head (Gen. 3:16). To Abram God said, "I am going to bless you" (Gen. 12:2). This was not a conditional blessing, as though God said to Abram: "If, how, or when you get your life straightened out, then I'll bless you." Instead God said, "I'm going to make you a blessing. You will be blessed, and in your Descendant all the nations of the earth will be blessed." That is grace. And Abram believed God, and God made a judgment on him—"There is a righteous man."

Abram's righteousness was not something inherent in his nature, but a declaration made by God while he was still ungodly. That natural man, who cannot meet God's standard of righteousness (and is cursed and damned in the process), is at the same time declared righteous and given the righteousness of Christ freely is at the heart of Luther's discovery of the grace of God. Paul Tournier, the Swiss psychologist and author, himself a member of the Reformed Church, is nevertheless quite perceptive in his evaluation of Luther's discovery of grace:

Luther, an impetuous man, driven to despair by the feeling of guilt, after vainly plunging into penances and mortifications, discovered afresh in his turn that salvation is not earned, but is a gift from God, free and offered in advance to the sinner, and that it is sufficient to accept it by faith. From his cry of relief, the Reformation was born, like an explosion, at a time when the Church was insisting on works, merits and indulgences, all of which laid the cost of salvation upon men's souls.vii

Initially, Luther understood the "righteousness of God" as a quality in God in which he is righteous and holy, and demanded righteousness of mankind. Luther confessed that he hated the term the "righteousness of God" for it was a continual reminder to him of how far removed he was from that righteousness. It was only when the Holy Spirit revealed to him that the "righteousness of God" was not so much a quality of God but the declaration of God towards him on account of his Son that he tasted the full sweetness of God's grace. This then is the reality of the relationship between the law and grace, that "those who are the most desperate about themselves are the ones who express most forcefully their confidence in grace."^{viii} In other words, those who are most pessimistic about man are the most optimistic about God; those who are the most severe with themselves are the ones who have the most serene confidence in divine grace.

The Essence of Grace

What, then, is the grace of God? That in his own unmotivated love, God chose, by the most horrendous exchange, to make your sin and hatred of him be borne by himself in his Son, in order to give you in his name everything that is right, holy, and true forever. When the blood of Jesus was shed, God was doing the work of fully killing, fully paying for the sins of unjust, ungodly sinners. Or to put it more eloquently: "A death sentence hung over all humanity, and the death of God was the only way out from under the sentence. Mankind was in bondage, death's hostage. And so death had to die. But life itself was the price—the life of God embodied in the human flesh of Jesus. There was no way around death for Jesus. He came, he insisted, for this very purpose: 'to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45)."^{ix} On the basis of that death, everything the Father owns, you now own, for he has made it yours!

From this we see that grace is not a change in man, but, anthropopathically speaking, a change in God.^x It has nothing to do with man's works but solely with the work and mercy of God, a change from dis-favour to favour, as Luther says: "Grace signifies that favor with which God receives us, forgiving our sins and justifying us freely (*gratis*) through Christ. Do not consider it a quality (in man), as the sophists dream it is."^{xi} This change did not take place as if God one day simply changed his mind so that he decided not to punish us but to grant us grace. God's disposition towards mankind was always one of loving concern, even prior to the creation itself, as St. Paul says: "Before he made the world, his love led him to choose us in Christ to be holy and blameless in his sight. In the kindness of his will he appointed us long ago to be made his sons by Jesus Christ. He did this in order that the glory of the grace which he bestowed on us in his dear Son might be praised" (Eph. 1:4-6).

I know for myself personally, who was first introduced to the true grace of God as an adult, the concept of the exclusivity of God's work in salvation—the unmerited favour of God (*Favor Dei*)^{xii}—was the turning point in my relationship with God from unbelief to a true and living faith. I remember clearly the day when the pastor had me open the Bible at Ephesians chapter 2 and I read for the first time verses 8 and 9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God not of works, lest anyone should boast" (NKJV). Initially, I couldn't believe that the Bible was so clear on this point, for I was convinced that Christianity was a religion of works. And yet here it was in black and white for all to see. This text was to be my "Romans 1:17," where God opened my eyes to his grace in all its beauty and splendor. As I look back now, I sometimes wonder whether I had a clearer view of God's grace then, at that moment of revelation, than I do today even with my superior learning and experience. There is so much that can cloud one's view.

Furthermore, when we talk about grace, we dare never stop talking about Christ, for grace can never be divorced from his person and work. Pieper writes: “As grace is denied when human merit is united with it (Rom. 11:6, ‘is no more grace’), just so grace is abrogated if it is severed from Christ’s vicarious satisfaction.”^{xiii} Indeed, Luther continues: “These promises of grace are all based on Christ from the beginning of the world, so that God promises this grace to no one in any other way than in Christ and through Christ.”^{xiv} From this we see that true grace, far from being free, involved a great cost—the death of the Son of God. Luther states that it is a characteristic of heathen religions that they would believe in God without the “cost,” without the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: “Faith in God alone is not sufficient, but the cost (die Kosten) must also be there. The Turks and the Jews also believe in God, but without the means and the cost. What then is the cost? . . . Christ here [in the gospel] teaches us that we are not lost, but have eternal life, that is, that God so loved us that he was ready to pay the price of thrusting his only, his dearest Child into our misery, hell and death, and having him drink that up. In that way we shall be saved.”^{xv} This, then, is true grace. that in Christ God turns his face to us and shines on us and says, “I love you.”

Finally, one cannot talk about grace without talking about its universality. That is, that grace is for all, and therefore is for me. This leads us into discussion on how grace may be applied to us personally.

The Application of Grace—the Use of the Means of Grace

It is important that we keep in mind that for Luther and the Reformers, to whom we owe our great Lutheran heritage, the doctrine of justification by grace was not just a matter of theoretical reflection. It was the issue of the Christian faith and the pastoral ministry. Luther’s deep concern for the souls under his care sprang from his own experiencing of the grace of God, and must be identified as the major theological issue in the Reformation. As one Lutheran theologian notes: “In a real sense, the 95 theses owe their existence to a crisis in pastoral care. Luther was induced to take up the question of indulgences more from a pastoral concern than by scholarly considerations. A cheap grace, which was really no grace at all, was being substituted.”^{xvi}

A cheap grace—“which is really no grace at all”—is still being substituted in our churches today, and so the warning of Jude still holds for us: “It is necessary that I write to you and urge you to fight for the faith once entrusted to the believers. There are some people who have sneaked in among you . . . ungodly persons who turn the grace that our God has for us into unrestrained lust and who disown our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (v.4).^{xvii} It was this very real danger that the woman I mentioned in the introduction had regarding our Lutheran concept of grace. And not without some justification, it seems, for even as early as three weeks ago a member of my own congregation, during a Bible study on the book of Galatians, responded: “If what you say about salvation by grace alone is true, then I can do anything I want and still be saved?” To which I replied, “Yes, but who are you and what do you want?”

In addition, while we have to face and combat this danger of the cheapening of grace, at the same time we also must contend against those who, like the Judaizers of old, turn the grace of God into “another Gospel which is really not ‘gospel’ at all” (Gal. 1:7). These are those who would turn the sublime purity and freedom of grace into another law, as we read in the following statement in a Seventh Day Adventist publication: “The Scriptures declare that ‘God is love’ (1 Jn. 4:8). He reaches out to humanity ‘with everlasting love’ (Jer. 31:3). The God who extends the invitation to salvation is all-powerful, but his love necessitates his permitting each person to have freedom of choice in responding (Rev. 3:20,21). Coercion, a method contrary to his character, can have no part in his strategy.”^{xviii} The message is subtle and persuasive—God’s grace is there for all, but the individual must choose to receive it. So while God’s grace is presented, it is effectively overruled by an appeal to law—that of the self-decision of the individual to whom it is offered.

Both these errors spring from the misapplication of grace (Walther—the law and gospel not being rightly divided). The former error misuses grace to justify sin, the latter to turn sinners back to the

law. Both errors are rife in our Lutheran churches, for a number of reasons. First and primary, I believe, because of the ever-increasing use of unbiblical counseling by our pastors and lay people. I don't mean to say by this that all counseling is bad. What I am saying is that the essence of much counseling—including much that is labeled "Christian counseling"—is the blatant denial of sin and guilt by either negating the reality of sin, or by fostering the very popular habits of blame-shifting, excusing, and rationalization. In addition, much counseling stresses the individual's need to change himself, to love himself, to feel good about himself, and basically to work out his own salvation. In my own limited experience, it seems the more a person has been exposed to counseling, the more they are able to explain why they committed a certain sin, but the less they are able to take ownership of that sin or make specific confession of it. It seems to me (and I stress seems) that as the use of professional counselors increases there is a corresponding decrease in the use of or perceived need for confession and absolution, which is nothing less than the daily application of law and gospel in the life of the Christian. The result is, as Koehler states, that "Those who fail to deal concretely with their sins are in danger of eventually losing the seriousness of sin altogether."^{xix}

As Christians, our work in confession is not to talk about what our father was like or what our mother was like or what our spouse is like, but what we are like. This involves more than acknowledging our sinfulness in vague generalities—it means being specific. Someone once said that God knows men's backsides better than he knows their faces because they are always running away from him. That is the natural response of sinful man to a holy God. It is only in the light of justification by grace that the contrite sinner will run to God with his sin rather than away from God. And when he runs to God, he runs to confess, and to receive grace—"In confession we come to a place where we realize how small we are and how great God is. That is a good setting for forgiveness."^{xx} Thus in confession we learn to be true human beings by stopping all the self-deception, the lies, the hiding, the blaming, the excusing. In confession we learn to be real sinners.

I do not intend this to be a side-track away from the point at hand—justification by grace. Indeed, I believe that this is critical to the discussion. I have found, in my own congregation, that while the need for pastoral counseling has risen dramatically (I would estimate that I have had at least one fourth of my members come to me with some specific counseling problem), there is little, if any, corresponding need for private confession of sins. In fact, there is the perception that private confession, if necessary at all, is only needed for "serious" sins. In other words, it is perceived to be the exception, rather than the rule. When I suggest that perhaps the problem for which they come to me stems from an inner guilt that needs to be confessed, I am looked at "as a cow looks at a new barn door." And when I do finally get someone to the point of making confession, they have a great deal of difficulty knowing how to go about it. This is the result, I believe, not only of an ignorance of the mechanics of confession, but most importantly, because they are scared to confess, because they don't really know the grace of God. But, I agree with Tournier who writes: "General affirmations about the forgiveness of God have not at all the effect of a categorical, personal, individualized word pronounced with conviction on behalf of God and addressed to the man who has confessed his sin."^{xxi}

So we need to teach our people about the importance of confession—not only public confession in worship, but also individual confession among themselves, and private confession to the pastor. They need to be taught first and foremost that confession of sins, while never an end in itself, is the means to an end, that of taking hold of the grace of God. In addition, as Lutherans whose doctrinal heritage is firmly rooted in the role of the Word and Sacraments in conveying the grace of God, we need to stress to our people that the absolution is more than just the promise of forgiveness, or the assurance or reassurance of God's grace, but the very act of application of grace to the sinner. It is the work of God himself effecting the remission of sins purchased by Christ for the individual. As such, the essence of the absolution is independent of the human worthiness of the person making confession. The cause of our forgiveness is not the sincerity of our confession or the depth of our contrition or anything else in us. Rather, the cause of

forgiveness is the grace of God—that God speaks to us in the wounds of his crucified, risen, and ascended Son and announces peace and forgiveness to us.

This is a call to faith that our people are finding more and more difficult to believe in the face of Reformed and Evangelical literature, which echoes the words of the Pharisees that it is blasphemous to say that God forgives sins on earth out of the mouth of a man. But if we want to promote the proper applications of grace in the lives of the people of our congregations, then I believe we need to get them out of the counseling mode and back into the confession and absolution mode. We need to be retaught that it is at confession that we are, in fact, living the victorious Christian life, and that the absolution is God's power for true Christian living.

Another factor that is fostering a misapplication of grace in the life of the Christian is the misuse of the doctrine of prayer. For much of Christendom the focus of man's relationship with God and the means through which grace is thought to be received is prayer. But prayer is always the result, not the cause, of grace. When we were children, we learned to talk by imitating our parents. Our parents spoke, and we responded. True prayer is like that—our Father, God, and our Mother, the Church, speak to us and bring us grace through the Word and the Sacraments, and we respond with prayer. Indeed, the only person who is really qualified to tell us who our Father is, is our Mother. So it is that the Church, which shows us and tells us who our Father is, at the same time teaches us how to talk to him. Thus I must know God as my Father first, before I will come to him as Father. I must first hear and believe that God is merciful to me before I can come in prayer to ask mercy of God. I must first be taught the grace of God before I come to him in all the filth of my sin imploring for that grace. Therefore, true prayer is always based on the promises of God, which are found in his Word spoken by the Church through the Means of Grace.

Grace thereby discloses our true relationship with God and reveals that we are not, as one Lutheran pastor I heard so eloquently put it, "spiritual bastards" in this world. We have a heavenly Father who loves us with a love that can hardly be understood, but can be believed because of the revelation of the Scriptures. I think that the child-Father relationship needs to be stressed in our day particularly, with the wide-scale breakdown of the family and the growing up of so many children today without fathers. They need to know that they have a Father! And our Father God has not only demonstrated his grace by means of the person and work of Christ, but also in that he continues to offer his grace to us through his own divine instruments. In the Lutheran Church the Word, holy Baptism, and the Lord's Supper are the "giving means"xxii whereby grace is continually offered to and received by man. They are the application of grace to the sinner in such a way that he is able to take hold of God's grace and the forgiveness, new life, and salvation that go along with it.

Special emphasis needs to be placed on these sacraments today by the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as we battle for the hearts and minds of our people with those enemies who would empty the sacraments of their grace-bestowing power. Our people need to be continually instructed and comforted with these truths: 1) that the Word of God is not dead but "living and active" (Heb. 4:12)—moving, creating, judging, killing, making alive, drying up, refreshing; 2) that in Holy Baptism it is God, not man, who is working by bringing, offering, and sealing his grace in Christ to us. Since Scripture tells us that when we are baptized with Christ, we are buried with Christ into death (Rom. 6:4), we state categorically that the doctrine of justification by grace is therefore found just as clearly in the doctrine of Holy Baptism as it is in the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed; and 3) that in the Lord's Supper, once again it is the high, majestic God, beyond whom there is nothing and no one, who joins himself with the lowest and the simplest of his own creation and gives that blessed union to us to eat and to drink. In all three ways God continues to apply and bestow his grace on us.

Man's Response to Grace

According to St. John, the Christian life is not lived in word and speech only, but in deed and in truth (1 Jn. 3:18). So the concluding question to ask is: How, then, shall we, as God's children, respond to his grace? I believe the answer to this question, while not a simple one, is tied up in

Christ's response to the woman caught in adultery in John 8:11: "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more" (KJV). Here we have our Lord himself showing us the relationship between justification by grace and the response of faith. The essence of justification by grace is non-condemnation—"Neither do I condemn you." God's law says to the adulteress: "Kill her!" The only way Jesus can dare say this is if he himself is going to bear the brunt of the condemnation of the law. That is the authority of Jesus to forgive sins. Then he gives her a life of freedom—"Go and sin no more."

The power of grace to dominate in the life of the believer is the power of the Word of the gospel to forgive sins. In the latter part of the eighth chapter of John Jesus says: "Everyone who keeps on sinning is a slave to sin. A slave does not stay in the home forever; a son stays forever. If, then, the Son sets you free, you will certainly be free" (vv. 34-36). In the light of this text, Jesus' words, "Go and sin no more," mean, I believe, first, that on account of God's grace in Christ, sin does no longer dominate me—it is not my lord and I am no longer its slave. Second, the sin that is present and active in the life of the believer—not only externally but also in the heart—is to be confessed, for Christ has said, "It is mine." And third, with that sin that remains and that is confessed, I do what Jesus tells me to do—I deny it. This is not denial in the psychological sense as if I never said or did it. Rather, this is denial in the sense that as a sinner who has confessed it and has had grace applied by the Word of absolution, I deny that this sin owns me. This is the ongoing work of Holy Baptism, in which the first denial we make is to renounce the devil and all his wicked works and all his wicked ways.

This, then, is the essence of justification by grace—that what God has done and continues to do in his means of grace is to kill us, justly and rightly with Christ, and to raise us up by grace in the glory of his resurrection. To practice using that in our baptism, in holy absolution, and in the reception of the Lord's Supper is to teach each other how to trust that word of grace, so that the damned corruption of our sin that dogs us day by day may be divorced from us day by day. The shape of the Christian life, therefore, is the shape of the cross, which is a great offense, both to the world and to the majority of visible Christendom. What is so offensive is that, as Senkbeil notes: "All complex theological argument and intellectual debate recede in the face of the cross. You don't argue your way to this truth. You don't arrive at this conclusion by rational debate. Human wisdom will always consider this message foolishness and weakness. 'But the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength' (1 Cor. 1:25)."xxiii To teach our people, and ourselves, how to live in the freedom of this grace, then, is our sacred and most difficult task. It is also an urgent one for this world grows steadily more ungodly and the "love of most grows cold" (Mt. 24:12). Like the prophet Isaiah, we are given the word of grace, not only for our own comfort, but also that we may:

"Comfort, comfort my people,"
says your God.
"Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins" (Is. 60:1,2).

But while justification by grace is God's way of setting man free from wrath and the curse, it also involves the death of our sinful nature, which is neither pleasant nor comfortable. Our response to God's grace, therefore, will always be imperfect—a mix of doubt and joy, of fear and peace. As man has only one hope for justification—God's grace—so he has only one hope for sanctification, and in this grace he finds the blessed freedom to "serve God in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness." As the heart of man is continually prepared for this grace by the law, so it is that the heart needs to hear and to apply the word of grace continually through the Means of Grace in order to lay the conscience to rest and assure the sinner that he does indeed

have a gracious God. This is the heritage that we cling to and continue to fight for, as we triumphantly sing:

By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless;

My soul, believe and doubt it not.

Why waver at this word of promise?

Has Scripture ever falsehood taught?

So then this word must true remain:

By grace you, too, shall heav'n obtain.

By grace God's Son, our only Savior,

Came down to earth to bear our sin.

Was it because of your own merit

That Jesus died your soul to win?

No, it was grace, and grace alone,

That brought him from his heav'nly throne.

By grace! Oh, mark this word of promise

When you are by your sins oppressed,

When Satan plagues your troubled conscience,

And when your heart is seeking rest.

What reason cannot comprehend

God by his grace to you did send.

By grace to timid hearts that tremble,

In tribulation's furnace tried—

By grace, despite all fear and trouble,

The Father's heart is open wide.

Where could I help and strength secure

If grace were not my anchor sure?

By grace! On this I'll rest when dying,

In Jesus' promise I rejoice.

For though I know my heart's condition,

I also know my Savior's voice.

My heart is glad; all grief has flown

Since I am saved by grace alone.

SOLI DEO GLORIA!

End Notes

- i Pelikan, J. (Ed.) *Luther's Works: American Edition*, 1967. Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis MO, Vol. 52, p. 199.
- ii "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens the wits of another" (Proverbs 27:17).
- iii Plass, E., *What Luther Says: An Anthology*. Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, MO, 1959, Vol. II, p. 604.
- iv Tappert, T. G. (Ed). *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Smalcald Articles, Part 1, para. 3, p. 302.
- v "There is a curse on all who depend on doing what the Law says, because it is written 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the Law'" (Gal. 3:10).
- vi "A 'necessity' of grace must not be ascribed to God, grace is necessary for sinful man if he is to come into possession of salvation. The theory of speculative theologians and philosophers that the redemption of the world by Christ represents a necessary evolution of the divine essence is a pagan (pantheistic) speculation. According to Scripture, God extends His mercy in Christ to mankind freely (John 3:16; Luke 1:78) . . . Dogmatically this

- has been expressed thus: God is a *causa libera* of our salvation” (Pieper, F., *Christian Dogmatics*. Vol II. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis MO, 1951, p. 6).
- vii Tournier, P., *Guilt & Grace*. Harper & Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1973. p. 194.
- viii Tournier, p 159.
- ix Senkbeil, H. L., *Dying to Live: The Power of Forgiveness*. 1959, Concordia Publishing House: St Louis, MO, 1994, p. 43. Vol. II, #1837, p. 603.
- x “Those who are not My people I will call ‘My people,’ and those who are not loved I will call ‘My loved ones’; and where they were told, ‘You are not My people,’ they will be called sons of the living God” (Hosea 2:1,23; 1:10).
- xi Plass, p. 604.
- xii Luther: “According to the usage of Scripture, grace signifies that favor of God which wishes us well and justifies us” (Plass, Vol. II, p. 603).
- xiii Pieper, Vol. II, p. 19.
- xiv Plass, p. 604.
- xv Pelikan, I. (Ed.) *Luther’s Works: American Edition* 1967. Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, MO. Vol. 51, p. 349.
- xvi Koehler, W. J., *Counseling and Confession: The Role of Confession and Absolution in Pastoral Counseling*. 1982 Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, p. 39.
- xvii All Scripture quotes—unless otherwise noted—are taken from the New Evangelical Translation (GWN).
- xviii Ministerial Association. *Seventh Day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*. General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists, 6840 Eastern Avenue NW. Washington, DC 20012, p. 108.
- xix Koehler, p. 45.
- xx Koehler, p. 41.
- xxi Tournier, pp. 204,205.
- xxii Pieper, Vol. II, p. 6.
- xxiii Senkbeil, p. 49.

JUSTIFICATION IS COMPLETE

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Introduction

Thank God for this opportunity to talk about his grace. It always is a privilege to speak God’s Word. I’ll try to do the best, trusting totally in his grace. So, in his name, trusting in the complete forgiveness of sins performed by Christ in the cross, I begin this paper.

The first time I saw my assignment for this conference I thought, “Is it possible for someone in the CELC meeting to believe that his justification is not complete?” But, certainly there is a great diversity among Christians. Some are strong in their faith, while others are weak Christians. Some have an excellent knowledge of Christian doctrine; others are woefully deficient in this respect.

Speaking in general, George Gallup and George Barna, the famous pollsters, spend a lot of time looking for and studying trends in today’s Christian churches. In a recent poll, George Barna found that 32 percent of all Americans believe that there are certain sins that God never forgives; 28 percent of Protestants believe this. The percentage of Catholics who believe this is roughly the same. And about 40 percent of unchurched Americans believe that there are sins that God cannot forgive. So, there is a great number of people who think that justification is incomplete.

But I want to think that all Christians, at least Lutheran Christians, here and now, are one in believing that God forgives their sins, completely and by grace, for Christ's sake, without any merit of their own. For us Lutherans a renewed consideration of the teaching of justification should be as natural as it is for us to breathe. Certainly this teaching is the characteristic doctrinal feature of our church. Webster's Dictionary, when defining the term "Lutheran," says, "The cardinal doctrine is that of justification by faith alone." Our justification is complete by faith alone.

Otherwise, to think about his sins as only partly forgiven, how is it possible to live under that condition? If God forgives half, then all the passages in the Bible speaking about the all-sufficient redemption through the blood of Christ will be uncertain. If God forgives half, then we have a half redemption from Christ; that means Christ died half for us. But how about the other half? Unaware of the complete forgiveness of our sins, we are and remain without peace of heart. Not having this peace, it were better we had never been born.

I. Justification Is Complete Because the Holy Scriptures Say So.

To live believing that Christ died half for us is to live under fears, doubts, uncertainties, and condemnation. Then faith loses its life-line and the Word of God its contents. For one thing is clear: it is the complete forgiveness of our sins as the Scriptures testify. But how do we understand what the Apostle says in Romans 8:1: "There is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus"? Why does the Apostle say no condemnation? The reason is because justification is complete. On the other hand, Paul says to the Philippians: ". . . continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12b). At first these words might seem to have a strange ring to Christians. They might even lead us to wonder if Christians, after all, have to work to earn their own salvation for the reason that it is not complete yet. But that cannot be true. Paul uses the word "salvation" here in a broad sense. He refers not only to believers' coming to faith and receiving the gift of eternal life, but also to their continuing in faith until they enter into eternal life. The believers must continue to live in this sinful world while they await the completed salvation in eternity. It is to such waiting believers, who are still coping with all the challenges and temptations of life in the world, that Paul directs the encouragement, "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Dr. Preuss says: "Of course, this does not exclude that one may fall from grace, that one may be cut out of the olive tree, if one does not, by watching and praying, continue in his goodness. . . . It follows indisputably from this text that as long as a man abides in Christ Jesus through faith (Gal. 3:26)—so long, not longer, but surely so long—the word applies to him: 'No condemnation to thee.'"¹

In Paul's epistles condemnation and justification are antitheses. If there is light, then there is no darkness and vice versa. So, where there is no condemnation at all, there is complete justification.² We learn that when Paul says, "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life. . . ." (Romans 8:33,34).

A. In Scripture we never find half or partial justification.

1. We read that in Matthew 18:24-35.

Thank God the righteousness of Christ is just as indivisible and complete as the law of God; it is either entire and complete or not at all. God's law says: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all commandments" (Jas. 2:10). Therefore, to whom one sin is retained, all are retained. We have a lot of instances in the Holy Scriptures that speak of complete forgiveness: the king who takes account of a servant and finds that he owes him ten thousand talents (Mt. 18:24). That was the exact amount of his debt, not a penny less, not a penny more. The king, purely out of grace, forgives him, not one-half, not two-thirds; no, the king forgave all the debt, immense as it was. When one reads this parable, who dares to speak of incomplete forgiveness? And, then, when that servant demanded the twelve dollars of his fellow-servant, could his Lord then say: "Half of my gift shall be taken from you as punishment, the other half you may keep for the present?"—Of course not; God doesn't work that way. Before his

tribunal the sentence is either “damned” or “free.” But never half-damned, or half-free. Never half-forgiven.

There are only two states for a person to stand before God, either justified or condemned. Whoever introduces a third state between justification or condemnation in this life must also invent one for the next. Purgatory is that third state for many persons. And this third factor is not taught in Scripture, nor by Christ and the apostles.

2. We read that in Luke 15:11-32.

Here, in the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus pictures the full grace of God in a wonderful manner as being ever ready to pardon completely the repentant sinner. As if he were constantly watching the road, the father sees the son while he is in the distance. Then, the father runs and falls upon his son’s neck, covers his face with kisses. The entire act displays the fact that the prodigal is already and completely pardoned before he utters a single word of confession. Here we can see the sinner’s complete absolution, the complete pardon, the complete justification, adoption (reception to sonship), the complete reconciliation, all rolled into one.

B. The Scriptures never mention either a partial or conditional forgiveness.

We are speaking about justification, not sanctification. The Apostle Paul says to the Philippians: “. . . Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Phil. 3:12). Paul, like us, was still living in a sinful world. He, like us, was still a sinner, still troubled by the weaknesses and failings of his sinful nature. Though he was a child of God by faith, he had not arrived at the point where he could perfectly serve God or enjoy the fullness of the blessings of God. But he, like us, was completely justified before God. Meanwhile, he lived this life as a Christian in a constant striving for holiness. As Spener says: “Concerning the question whether a man grows more righteous and holier, we, too, concede this in respect to the inherent righteousness, which, of course, grows and must grow, so that we become more and more perfect. . . . But this does not pertain to justification, but to sanctification. . . . Hence he who by imputation has received the righteousness of Christ by faith has it wholly; for it is indivisible, and he cannot have a more perfect righteousness of Christ after twenty or thirty years than he received in the first moment.”

Justification and forgiveness are the same thing. Justify means to absolve (Triglotta, 793), and forgiveness, in John 1:7, is described as perpetual, the words reading: “For the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sins.” It cleanseth us perpetually because we perpetually have sins. And Paul begins Romans 4:7 with the words: “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered,” but then he proceeds, v. 8: “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute (logivshtai) sin.”

C. Our Lutherans Confessions explain what Scripture says.

Our Lutheran Confessions, speaking about the word justify, say: “Accordingly, the word justify means to declare righteous and free from sins, and to absolve one from eternal punishment for the sake of Christ’s righteousness, which is imputed by God to faith, Phil. 3:9. For this use and understanding of this word is common in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament. Prov. 17:15; Is. 5:23; Rom. 8:33, ‘It is God that justifieth,’ that is, absolves from sins and acquits” (Concordia Triglotta, p. 921).

In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. Art. IV (II) we read: “To attain the remission of sins is to be justified³ . . . Therefore, we are reconciled with the Father, and receive remission of sins when we are comforted with confidence in the mercy promised for Christ’s sake” (Concordia Triglotta, p. 151). On the other hand, our complete justification, our full forgiveness, has a strong base in Christ, as The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, III Righteousness of Faith, says: “Our righteousness rests not upon one or the other nature, but upon the entire person of Christ, who as God and man is our Righteousness in his only, entire, and complete obedience. . . . It is the obedience not only of one nature, but of the entire person, it is a complete satisfaction

and expiation for the human race, by which the eternal, immutable righteousness of God, revealed in the Law, has been satisfied, and is thus our righteousness, which avails before God and is revealed in the Gospel, and upon which faith relies before God (cf. Rom. 5:19; 1 John 1:7; Hab. 2:4). . . . Thus neither the divine nor the human nature of Christ by itself is imputed to us for righteousness, but only the obedience of the person who is at the same time God and man” (Concordia Triglotta, p. 935,937).

So, it is clear that our justification, the forgiveness of our sins, is complete because the work of Christ was complete. He is our righteousness not according to his divine nature alone, nor according to his human nature alone, but according to both natures; that therefore the righteousness of faith is the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, because the obedience of Christ is imputed for our righteousness.

D. Justification is complete. This the Lutherans fathers believed.

Luther said: “If only this article (Justification by Faith) remains pure on the battlefield, the Christian Church also remains pure, and in godly harmony without any sects; but if it does not remain pure, it is not possible that any error or fanatical spirit can be resisted.”

How does God forgive sins? The answer is: “Fully and perfectly.” And Luther says: “Now we well know what forgiveness of sins means. If he forgives, he forgives everything altogether and leaves nothing unforgiven. Now, if I am rid of and free from sin, then I am also rid of death, devil, and hell and I am a son of God and a lord of heaven and earth” (St. Louis Ed., XX, 751). In another place he says: “For this reason it is called forgiveness of sins, because we are, before God, real sinners, and nothing but sin is to be found in us, although we may have all human righteousness. For where he speaks of sins, there must be real and great sins, there must be real and serious sins, just as also the forgiveness is not jest, but a real and serious matter. Therefore, if you look at this article, you have both facts: sins take away all your holiness, no matter how pious you may be on earth, and vice versa, forgiveness removes all sins and wrath, so that your sin cannot hurl you into hell, and your piety cannot lift you into heaven” (St. Louis Ed., XI, 1721). Luther teaches the same doctrine wherever he touches on this subject (St. Louis Ed., XIX, 995; II, 1457; XI, 1703 ff., 1933).

Martin Chemnitz, the second great Martin of the Lutheran Church, calls this article the citadel and main defense armament of the whole Christian doctrine and religion. If it is obscured or falsified, you cannot keep the other articles pure; if it is kept intact, then all idolatries and superstitions and whatever other adulterations in other articles may have occurred will disappear (Cf. Loc. theol. II, 200).

Balthasar Meisner calls it the center of true theology, to which everything tends, the sacred ocean where all the streams meet, the rock of faith which keeps everything safe and unharmed.

Others theologians as Henry P. Hamann, Jr., speaking about St. Paul and the redemption in Christ Jesus, in Rom. 3:21-26 says: “The decisive word in this passage is propitiation—*iJlasthvrion*—and without entering at this point further into detail of interpretation, it will be admitted that it is only because Christ has the character or power of being perfect and complete propitiation that there is revealed in him divine righteousness, the revelation of which is gospel for sinners. Hence to comprehend *iJlasthvrion* or propitiation as to who is comprehended in it, is to have the only key to this gospel.”⁴ The result is: Mankind, all men, are perfectly reconciled with God. No man need do or suffer anything additional in order to reconcile God, to obtain righteousness and salvation. And Holy Scripture testifies to this expressly; we read 2 Cor. 5:19: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.”

II. Justification Is Complete Because It Proceeds from God.

A. The Holy Scriptures affirm that.

1. We see that in 2 Corinthians 5:18 21.

Certainly all of us believe the whole earth has been forgiven since the death of Christ on the cross. It is possible to study many Bible passages in order to show this doctrine (Justification is complete). But it is also possible to present this doctrine by means of one single passage, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. This passage shows the close connection between the doctrine of redemption and the doctrine of complete, objective justification. As Professor Gerald Hoenecke said: “. . . without the doctrine of objective justification the gospel would cease to be gospel.”

The Holy Spirit, writing by the Apostle Paul, said:

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God, for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Katallaghv is one of the words which calls for our attention. According to the Theological Dictionary of The New Testament, of Gerhard Kittel, (vol. I p. 254 ff.): “In the New Testament it is only Paul who uses the word of the relation between God and man, and katallavssein is used only of God, katallagh~nai only of man. God reconciles us or the world to himself in 2 Cor. 5:18f. He is not reconciled. Nor does he reconcile himself to us or to the world. On the other hand, we are reconciled to God in Rom. 5:10, or reconcile ourselves to him in 2 Cor. 5:20. Thus God and man are not on equal terms in relation to reconciliation. Reconciliation is not reciprocal in the sense that both equally become friends where they were enemies. The supremacy of God over man is maintained in every respect. . . . We are reconciled by the death of Jesus. As he was made sin for us, we were made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21). To this extent reconciliation is parallel to justification. . . . The God who reconciles us to himself is always at the same time the God who judges us. For this reason reconciliation includes justification in 2 Cor. 5:21.”

Luther rendered the word katallavssw and other derivatives of the verb ajllavssein, reconcile, in Matthew 5:24, “be reconciled (diavllavghqi) to thy brothers”; Romans 5:10f., “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled (kathllavghmen) to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled (katallagevnteı) we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also have joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation (katallaghvn).”

Etymologically iJlavskesqai and katallavssein both present reconciliation from differing viewpoints. iJlavskesqai is derived from i{lewı, “gracious,” and presents reconciliation as an act by which the grace of God is gained. An entirely different picture is presented by the word katallavssein which by way of the verb ajllavssein can be traced to a[lloı, “another.” In all the verbs derived from this word the idea of change is more or less emphasized. ajllavssw means “change” (cf. Ga. 4:20), “transform” (1 Cor. 15:51f.); “exchange” (Ro. 1:23); ajntallavssw, “give in exchange,” from which in the New Testament is derived ajtavllagma, “the ransom,” (Mt. 16:26). Since ajllavssw means “make different,” “change,” ajpallavssw because of the apo means: “to change by taking away or by separation”; Christ through taking away sins changed the relation to death of those who had been slaves of death, i.e., he freed them from the fear of death.

We read in 1 John 2:2: “kai; aujto;ı ijlasmovı ejstin peri; tw~n ajmartiw~n hJmw~n, “He is the atoning sacrifice (propitiation), for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” ijlasmovı used here and katallavssein used in 2 Cor. 5:18ff. are used in different ways to say the same word, “reconciliation.” katallavssein does not as iJlavskesqai point to the way in which reconciliation was brought about, and in what it actually consists. It says rather that the relationship between two parties has been fundamentally changed. God changed his relationship with the world. But, God didn’t change his mind, his holy will, when he spoke about the punishment and death for sins. He was serious, and he punished completely sins of all the world.

Man didn't change his evil nature and suddenly become good and holy. God changed the relationship between both of them by Christ. And from other passages we know what kind of relationship there was previously between the two: as children of wrath (Eph. 2:3) men were under the curse of the law (Ga. 3:13). God was offended by sin, was incensed against sinners with a wrath that burned to the deepest hell.

Actually verse 18 reads: God has reconciled us to himself, and the persons designated by "us" are every human being. So, what Paul says here he continues to explain in the next verse. Verse 19 speaks of the world, the kosmos, of which it has never been true and never will be true, that it on its part is entirely reconciled with God. Certainly God has reconciled the world with himself. Thus forgiveness has been obtained completely for every human being.

We must underline that in *katallavsswn* the subject is always the offended party. Atonement designates a change in the relationship through which what we call reconciliation comes about. The world is unable to change the relationship existing between it and God, anymore than this is the case with a person who has offended another.⁵ The world never was the party which initiated the reconciliation. This belongs to the offended one. He is therefore also in every case the one who reconciled the world with himself, the one in whom the reconciliation must become a reality. That is the reason why justification is a complete and perfect act of the grace of God.

What was the way and manner in which God made himself the reconciled one? According to 2 Cor. 5:19, the first part said: "That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting . . . mh; logizovmenoi . . ." If we now were to assume that *logizovmenoi* is to present the way and manner in which God made himself the reconciled one, the resultant thought would be: He changed his mind in that he overlooked the sins of the world. This, however, contradicts not only all clear conceptions of a reconciliation, in which the non-imputation of the guilt is conceivable only after appeasement of the offended one, but it at the same time poses the possibility that God has suppressed his holiness with its principal opposition against sin and his righteousness with its irrevocable demands for punishment.

Paul expressly teaches how this reconciliation of God came, through Christ. But when we speak of God's grace, the foundation of our justification, we are speaking about something that exists from everlasting to everlasting. How did God's grace carry out its benevolent design to provide for us the help we need? There we must remember two attributes of God which seem to be in conflict. These attributes are the justice and the love or grace of God. This apparent conflict God resolved through the work of Christ. In Christ the divine justice is satisfied; and, behold, divine love triumphs too. Sins are paid for; God speaks the great word: The human race now is justified; it possesses righteousness; the sins of all men are forgiven.

2. We can see that in Romans 5:12-31

Professor Stoeckhardt comments that Rom. 5:12-31 is the *locus classicus* (the central point) of objective justification. Speaking about this section (Rom. 5:12-31), Professor Stoeckhardt says: "Christ by his death and blood not only earned the righteousness which avails before God, the forgiveness of sins, but established and presented it. The glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the solemn, public declaration of justification and absolution, which God has pronounced upon the sinful world, and through which he has sealed the effect of Christ's death. Yes, through Christ's righteousness the justification of life has passed upon all men. The many, all men, are presented as righteous through Christ's obedience. The obedience and righteousness of Christ, as the sin and disobedience of Adam, has been imputed to all men. God is the justifier of the ungodly. Therefore in Christ there is present for all men the righteousness which avails before God."⁶

The Holy Scriptures overflow with terminology that says "justification is complete for Christ's sake" and uses different words to say it. Iniquity forgiven, sin covered, sin not imputed; this means God forgave the sins of the world for Christ's sake.

The doctrine of justification, as Paul presents it, finally leads to the secret which we cannot resolve. For, on the one hand, the apostle testifies that justification of life has passed upon all men; on the other hand, that all the world is guilty before God and deserves eternal punishment.

That is not contradictory. The one time the world is considered in Christ, and the other time outside of Christ. Outside of Christ God is angry with sinners; in Christ he looks at the sinful world with pleasure. The one is a judgment of the law, the other a judgment of the gospel upon sinners. The object of redemption and justification is the entire sinful humanity, considered apart from the relation of individuals to Christ and the gospel.

B. Justification is complete because it is not dependent on us.

Just think for a while how the justification of individual persons would be if it were dependent on their feelings, or their grade of faith. Half condemned one day, half absolved another day. And as little as a defendant in a human court of justice remains half in prison while the other half is set free, just so little does God justify half and condemn half.

What we have just now considered is called objective justification. The term signifies that apart from the attitude of individual human beings, in a very objective way God has declared that the world is justified, that sins are forgiven, that all mankind has been redeemed. Another term used for this great act of God is universal justification, a justification that extends to everybody. This doctrine, the doctrine of universal, so-called objective justification, sets forth that the Lord God by grace because of Christ's redemption actually forgave sins to all men, to the whole world. This is apart from the receiving or not receiving this justification by faith. It is not dependent on our attitude, not on our believing, nor on our conversion, nor on our emotions or feelings. Our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for all the world. Pieper says: "The objective reconciliation of all men to God through the work of Christ compels the proper understanding of the Gospel and of faith." The Gospel can be nothing else but the message and offer of the forgiveness of sins won by Christ, and faith can be nothing else but the mere acceptance of the forgiveness of sins won by Christ.

III. Objective Justification and Objective Reconciliation □ Are the Same Act of God in Christ

Though we distinguish between objective and subjective justification, it does not occur to us to separate them. To be justified completely, once and for all, in the cross and to be completely and personally justified, these two facts are not to be separated. Certainly, we don't speak of two justifications; objective and subjective justification refer to the same act of God.

Reconciliation is actualized as justification; justification involves reconciliation. With reconciliation the actual absolution of the world's sins has taken place. When Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:19: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," this is followed immediately by "not imputing their trespasses unto them." A comparison with Rom. 4:6-8 makes it clear that this negative sentence, "not imputing sin," is equivalent to the positive sentence "imputing righteousness."

A. Complete justification happened 2,000 years ago.

That is, at that time, almost 2,000 years ago, when Christ fulfilled the law for men, God reconciled man to himself. Christ died on a certain day, at a certain hour in time. But this counts for all time: for the entire future time, for all the prior time. We must fix our eyes upon these simple, clear words of Scripture and let them work on us. God no longer imputes our sins to us. He has absolved us of our sins. He has forgiven us. He has justified us. We speak of objective justification as well as of objective reconciliation. Both terms refer to the same act of God in Christ. For Pieper, for instance, "objective reconciliation" and "objective justification" are practically interchangeable terms. The two terms correspond to each other and designate the same event. The term "justification" is taken from the sphere of law, the term "reconciliation" from the domain of personal relationships. Their material identity is clear from the fact that Paul at one time (2 Cor. 5:14-21), as we saw, can proceed from reconciliation to justification and at another time from justification to reconciliation.

1. The Complete Justification Happened on the Cross: "IT IS FINISHED" (John 19:30) TETELESTAI.

The perfect of a completed state (tetelestai) denotes an action brought to its termination. It's like a line that ends in a point. Jesus speaks this word to the Father who sent him, uttered it with a

loud voice; it is also intended for all men to hear. What is it that is here brought to an end? The death of Jesus finishes his perfect and complete redemptive work, the work of reconciliation and atonement. His redemptive shedding of his blood, done perfectly, completely, and for all, is finished and stands as finished forever (Heb. 7:27; 9:12 and 26; Rom. 6:10).

2. Justification is complete in Christ.

The completeness and all-sufficiency of the work of Christ on the cross cannot be stated too strongly. The work of Christ is complete in itself and is extensive and complete for all the world. Actually, Christ suffered for the whole world, for all men. His work is intensively complete: by Christ's suffering and death the world was actually reconciled with God; that is, God's wrath against the world was actually done away with, was satisfied and removed. God no longer imputes to men their transgressions. And finally God has ratified the whole of this work, has declared it perfect and complete by raising Jesus from the dead. His raising was complete for our complete justification. In other words, "The account is closed." And not only for our complete justification, but for justification for all the world. The Scriptures shine with the "all," the universality of justification.

B. Complete justification took place since the foundation of the world.

There certainly was forgiveness of sins in the times of the Old Testament.⁸ Now, when Hebrews 9:15 says: "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from sins committed under the first covenant," it clearly states that the death of Christ took place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament. Then vs. 26 continues explaining the text, Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. If justification wasn't complete, then the sacrifice of Christ must be repeated from time to time in order to atone for our sins; then this would have been necessary also several thousand times before the advent of Christ, yes, from the foundation of the world, because before the advent of Christ, too, there was sin and forgiveness of sin. But the complete and all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ has forgiven the sins of the fathers and the sins of the saints now and for ever.

Rev. 13:8, reads: "The Lamb," namely Christ, "was slain from the foundation of the world." What does it mean? Christ was not literally slain from the foundation of the world, but only once, under Pontius Pilate. The passage doesn't say: "before" but "from the foundation of the world." Consequently, the text is speaking of the fruit of the sufferings of Christ. Only in this sense can it be said that Christ died from the foundation of the world. From the foundation of the world there was in the mind of God the death of Christ for the complete justification of the world.

We are so blessed with this knowledge that we must continually thank the Lord for the blessings of his grace in our lives. The whole world of sinners has been completely and totally justified in Christ Jesus. That is the central teaching of Scripture. And the primary purpose of Scripture is to bring individual sinners to faith in Christ, so that they share in his perfect righteousness and inherit eternal life. If these truths are lost, there is no Christian faith left, and there is no salvation. We must say: "Thanks, Lord, for your grace in my life. Make me your instrument to bring this news to all the world."

End Notes

1 Theological Monthly. Vol. VIII. SEPTEMBER, 1928. No. 9. Full Forgiveness.

2 Justification is, above all, forgiveness of sins. AC IV 1,2; Ap IV 40,41,76; SA III 13; Ep III 4,7; SD III 9,10,17,62. If justification is the forgiveness of sins, then justification is a declaring righteous, a forensic act. The same conclusion is demanded by the identification in the confessions of justification with the imputation of Christ's righteousness, or of his merits, or of his obedience. Ap IV 305 f; XXI 19; SD III 56.

3 Ps. 32:1 "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven." This is by faith alone in Christ.

- 4 James Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London: Honder and Stoughton, 1917), p. 152
- 5 Cf. Zahn, *Komm. z. Roemrbr.*, p 258, note 23: Object of *katallassein* and its derivatives or subject of its passives is never the one who suffers the hatred or enmity, but the one who caused the break of peace, mankind which rebelled against God, which in the warfare between God and sin is on the side of the latter and wars against God (Rom. 6:13) as *theomachoi*; in other words, the entire rebellious world of men, 2 Cor 5:18-20; Col 1:20-22. So the wife who offended her husband by more or less willful desertion, 1 Cor 7:11; so also the man against whom a brother believes he has cause for complaint, through whom the brother feels himself wronged, Mt. 5:24
- 6 *Epistle To The Romans Vol. 1* by Dr. George Stoeckhardt, p. 76f.
- 7 For Henry P. Hamann, Jr. "The term 'objective justification' is not a good one. 'Objective justification' is merely a mistake for 'objective reconciliation.'" (*Justification by Faith in Modern Theology. Concordia Theological Monthly, April 1958.*)
- 8 Ex. 34:7; Num 14:1.18-20; Ps. 32:1.5; 78.38; 85:3; 99:8; 103:3; Micah 7:18; Ps. 31:6; Is. 29:22; 43:1; 44:23.

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- 3 *The Abiding Word*, Volume II, Concordia, by Wm. Arndt.
- 4 *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, volume 72, number 4, October 1975. "Redemption and Universal Justification according to Second Corinthians 5:18-21."
- 5 *Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, by G. Stoeckhardt. Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, Missouri, 1952.
- 6 *Concordia Triglotta, The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church*, January 1, 1955, The Mott Press Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- 7 *Epistle to the Romans Vol. 1 & 2* by George Stoeckhardt. Translated by Erwin W. Koehlinger. From the original *Commentar ueber den Brief Pauli an die Roemer*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press. Fort Wayne, Indiana.
- 8 *Concordia Theological Monthly*, January–April, 1958. "Justification by Faith in Modern Theology," by Henry P. Hamann.
- 9 *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, Editor. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Volume I.
- 10 *Interpretation of Second Corinthians*, Lenski.
- 11 *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, by Harlyn J. Kuschel. *The People's Bible*. Northwestern Publishing House. 1986.
- 12 *The Greek New Testament*, by Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martin, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren. 1966, 1968, 1975. American Bible Society.

JUSTIFICATION IS FOR ALL

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The theme of my essay is, "Justification is for all." I would like to develop this theme according to the outline as shown below:

- I. Justification is God's grace given not to the righteous, but to sinners.
- II. The Savior was promised to all people.

- III. Jesus himself declared the gospel to the whole world.
- IV. The history of the early Christian Church proves this theme.
- V. Together we confess that this truth is biblical.

I. Justification Is God's Grace Given Not to the Righteous, but to Sinners.

A. The Definition of Justification

1. "Dr. Luther declared: 'Where this single article remains pure, Christendom will remain pure, in beautiful harmony, and without any schisms. But where it does not remain pure, it is impossible to repel any error or heretical spirit . . .' The Article of Justification by faith is 'the chief article of the entire Christian doctrine'" (FC III 6, p. 540). Dr. John T. Mueller in his book, *Christian Dogmatics*, defines justification as follows:

Justification does not consist essentially in the inward transformation of the sinner, or in his sanctification, but rather in the divine act by which God declares a sinner righteous for Christ's sake. That is to say, justification is not essentially a change by which man is made just, but a change whereby he is declared just on account of the perfect righteousness of Christ which he appropriates by faith (*Christian Dogmatics*, p. 374).

2. We can also find the definition of justification in our Confessions. I will quote some of them to you, because they are useful to understand the meaning of the word "justification."
 - a. "To be justified means to make unrighteous men righteous or to regenerate them, as well as to be pronounced or accounted righteous" (Ap IV 72, Tappert, p. 117).
 - b. "To be justified is to be reconciled with God or to be made acceptable before God" (Ap IV 181, p. 132).
 - c. "Justify means 'absolve,' that is, pronounce free from sin" (FC Ep III 7, p. 473).
 - d. "Justify means to declare free from sins and from the eternal punishment of these sins on account of the righteousness of Christ which God reckons to faith" (FC SD III 17, pp. 541,542).
3. The definitions of Dr. Mueller and of our Confessions are in accordance with the Bible. They teach us correctly that justification consists in the divine act and that justification is God's gracious declaring of sinners righteous on account of Jesus' atoning death on the cross. Jesus came to the world "not to call righteous people but sinners" (Matthew 9:13), "to look for and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). In the letter to the Romans the apostle Paul also testifies, "The ungodly," that is, sinners, "are justified freely by grace, through the ransom Christ Jesus paid to free them" (Romans 4:5; 3:24).
4. Quoting Luther's words, Dr. Mueller refutes the false doctrine that God can justify only those who really are just. He writes as follows:

Luther rightly called this doctrine "the venom of Satan" and "the most pestilential pest," since it deprives the sinner of all true consolation and robs God of the honor which is due him as the gracious Lord, who freely forgives sin for Christ's sake (*Christian Dogmatics*, p. 375).

B. All human beings are sinful by nature.

5. Adam and Eve were made in God's image (Genesis 1:26). God's image is not a physical body, because he is a spirit (John 4:24). "Man was created holy and sinless" (W. H. Franzmann, BHC, OT, p. 31); (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24). At the very moment that they broke God's law, however, Adam and Eve were polluted by sin. Sin-pollution has not stopped with them. After the fall they had children in their image (Genesis 5:1-4). This shows all human beings are sinful by nature. Paul comments on this, "One man brought sin into the world" (Romans 5:12). Luther writes in his *Commentary on Romans*, "Paul is clearly speaking

of original sin" (p. 93). Jesus, as well as King David, speaks of original sin (Psalms 51:5; John 3:6).

6. Professor E. H. Wendland says in his book, "Original sin is a serious malady." It is "revealed only in the Word and comprehended only by faith" (ILCW Ep-A, p. 127). "From the moment of Adam's transgression, he was spiritually dead, and the germ of physical death was in his nature" (ILCW Ep-A p. 126). No other germ which scientists have found in the past or may find in the future is more malignant, more contagious, and longer-lived than original sin. It results in temporal and eternal death for all people. Concerning this Paul said, "One man brought sin into the world, and his sin brought death; and so because all have sinned, death spread to all people" (Romans 5:12).
7. Therefore babies and adults, men and women, you and I, Mary and every famous saint, and even the Pope are all sinful by nature (Luke 1:48; Romans 7:15-24a). All people of all times are sinful from their birth. Though original sin is enough reason to be sentenced to eternal punishment by God, it also produces actual sins like bad thoughts, words, and deeds in our lives. If someone says, "I don't have any sin, he deceives himself, and the truth isn't in him" (1 John 1:8). All people are "people with whom God was angry" (Ephesians 1:8). "God's holiness, justice, and truth cannot allow him to overlook the sins of mankind, or treat him as if he had not sinned" (Rev. Erwin Ekhoﬀ, Lutheran Synod Quarterly, March 1995, Vol. 35 Number 1, p. 38). The barrier between mankind and God can never be taken away without the cleansing of all sin. Sin-polluted mankind can not get into the kingdom of heaven and would have to be punished in hell forever. But "no one is justified before God by doing what the law says" (Gal. 2:16; 3:11). Therefore God has shown mankind his righteousness. It comes without the law, but only by believing in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21,22). Everyone needs to receive this righteousness to be saved. Everyone is an object of God's justification. God, through Paul, clearly says that "he wants all people to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4; Rom. 5:18,19).

II. The Savior Was Promised to All People.

A. The Testimony of the Old Testament

8. It was right after the Fall that God promised the Savior to Adam and Eve. There the Savior is called "the woman's Descendant" (Gen. 3:15). That was the sunrise of "the Sun of Righteousness" who heals sinners by God's grace and love. Just as the sun is not glaring at first, but by getting higher and higher, it becomes brighter and shines on more and more people. It may seem that, in Genesis 3:15, "the Sun of Righteousness" was not meant to shine on all human beings. As time goes by, however, it becomes clear that the Savior will shine on "the whole world" with the light of God's grace and love.
9. The promise God gave to Abraham is the effective passage in order to prove that "justification is for all." "In you all the people in the world will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3c.). Later God said to Abraham, "Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). Though God said "in you" to Abraham, Galatians 3:8 and 3:16 help us to understand the meaning of Gen. 12:3 and 22:18. "The Bible foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith" in the Savior who would be born as a descendant of Abraham (Gal. 3:8). "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but to your seed, meaning one person, Who is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). Because of the Holy Spirit's inspiration which was given to Paul, we can be sure that, not Abraham, but the Savior would bless the nations. The Savior was promised not only to the Israelites, but also to all nations. Romans 3:22 also testifies: "God's righteousness comes to all who believe, just by their believing in Jesus Christ. There is no difference" (cf. also 2 Cor. 5:18,19).
10. It is repeatedly written in Isaiah that God invited all people to his saving grace. "Turn to Me to be saved, all you most distant parts of the world," the Lord God said in Isaiah 45:22. Dr.

August Pieper has a good comment on this passage: “The invitation includes the ends of the earth, all nations without exception” (Isaiah II, Translated by Erwin E. Kowalke, p. 287).

11. Isaiah 49:6 is also worth remembering. There the Lord said to his Servant, the Savior: “It is not enough that You’re My Servant to raise the tribes of Jacob and bring back those in Israel who have been preserved. I have also made you a Light for the nations that My salvation might reach to the most distant parts of the world.” Dr. Pieper goes on to say:

The high point of the message of verse 6 lies in the second half. The Servant is to accomplish more than just the deliverance of Israel. The Lord made Him to be a Light unto the gentiles to bring His salvation to the end of the earth. This is that mighty prophecy, already contained in Noah’s blessing, in the promise to Abraham, and which was confirmed to David and Solomon, repeated and expanded by nearly every prophet, but especially by Isaiah, that the gentiles should be received into the kingdom of God. This prophecy is the basis of the mission command of the risen Savior (Matt. 28; Mark 16) who gave his Gospel to us of the gentile world (Isaiah II, p. 360).

B. The Testimony of the New Testament

12. It seemed that “the Sun of Righteousness” was covered with “the cloud of the Intertestamental Period” for 400 years. When he emerged from behind the cloud, however, “the Sun of Righteousness” had almost reached the highest point and the light of the gospel shone on sinners more brightly than ever before.
13. The birth of the Savior was declared to the shepherds by the Lord’s angel. The message of the angel was “a great joy to all people” (Luke 2:10). Forty days after the Jesus’ birth, his parents took the Christchild to the temple of Jerusalem. There was in Jerusalem a man by the name of Simeon. He was waiting for the One who would comfort Israel. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple. When he saw the Christchild, he took him in his arms, praised God, and said:

Lord, now You are letting your servant go in peace as you promised, □because my eyes have seen Your salvation □that You prepared for all people to see, □a light to shine on the Gentiles, □and the glory of Your people Israel (Luke 2:25-32).
14. Not only to Israel did God announce the birth of the Savior. “By the leading of a star he also brought Gentile wise men to Bethlehem to kneel before their Savior. Thus, at the very beginning of Jesus’ life, God made it plain that he is the Savior of all men” (Paul E. Eickmann, *The Wonderful Works of God*, p.25-D).

III. Jesus Himself Declared the Gospel to the Whole World.

A. By the Words on the Cross

15. When “the Sun of Righteousness” reached the apex, the gospel message reached the climax. That happened on the cross at Golgotha. On the cross, Jesus spoke the seven famous words. Let us note the first, second, and sixth word. The first word is, “Father, forgive them: they don’t know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Jesus prayed, “to ask forgiveness for those who are inflicting death upon him” (Victor Prange, *The People’s Bible*, Luke, p. 250). “Jesus showed a Savior’s concern for others who are not his followers. Jesus prayed for his enemies, for the eternal welfare of their souls” (BHC NT Vol. 2, pp. 788,894). By the second word, “I tell you the truth. Today you will be with Me in Paradise,” Jesus declared the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to the criminal who repented of his sins and believed in Jesus as his Savior (Luke 23:43).
16. The sixth word is, “It is finished.” Prof. Franzmann explains this short but important passage as follows:

- a. That was the solemn report that Jesus made to his Father: "I paid the full ransom for all sinners of all times."
- b. That was a proclamation that all present on Golgotha that first Good Friday were to hear. Moreover, the Holy Spirit saw to it that Jesus' shout of triumph could be heard by all men everywhere. He had his sacred writer record it in the Scriptures. As a result, our Redeemer's cry of "Victory!" has gone ringing down the corridors of time until at last it has reached our ears and hearts.
- c. With that shout Jesus declared for all to hear: "I have paid the debt in full for you, leaving nothing for you to pay."
- d. With that shout Jesus directed all sinners to himself as their only and sure refuge (BHC NT Vol. 2, pp. 926,927).

B. By the Great Commission

- 17. Jesus said to the Canaanite woman, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). "During his ministry here on earth as he worked out mankind's salvation, Jesus' preaching and teaching was for the most part restricted to the Jews. Now, however, having accomplished man's redemption, his gospel message was to be preached to all people" (Harold E. Wicke, PB, Mark, p. 239). "Go everywhere in the world and preach the good news to the whole world" (Mark 16:15). With clear words the risen Lord gave that privilege to all disciples. Thus "on the basis of Jesus' Name, repentance and forgiveness of sins was to be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).
- 18. Matthew 28 vv. 19 and 20 have more details on the Lord's Great Commission. Jesus, who has been given all power in heaven and on earth, spoke to the disciples: "Go and make disciples of all people: Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have commanded you." Not only were the disciples ordered by Jesus to baptize, they were to teach those who would be baptized to do everything Jesus had commanded. Therefore, justification which had been prepared by Jesus for all people should be defended and taught to all nations until the Last Day. Through baptism, the forgiveness of sins is given even to babies.

IV. The History of Early Christian Church Proves This Theme.

A. The Holy Spirit Comes Down on the Disciples

- 19. The 50th day after Passover, on the day of Pentecost, "there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. Jesus' disciples were also all together in one place" (Acts 2:1,5). "Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house they were sitting in. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:2,4). Prof. R. D. Balge in his book explains this event: "The apostles' speech was coherent and intelligible speaking of foreign languages" (PB, Acts, pp. 23,25). The disciples were now equipped and prepared for carrying out the assignment to be Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:46-49).

20. Prof. Balge goes on to say:

The Holy Spirit had equipped the apostles to proclaim God's great saving work in many languages. The confusion of tongues which resulted at Babel when men tried to glorify themselves by building a great tower (Genesis 11:1-9) was reversed on Pentecost.

Then the Spirit moved men to glorify God in languages that were understood by all who heard. This 'reversal of Babel' still occurs when missionaries learn new languages in order to declare the wonders of God to people in world mission fields (PB, Acts, p. 25).

- 21. "On the day of Stephen's martyrdom a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts

8:1,4). “Now Jesus’ foretelling began to happen, as an indirect and unintended result of persecution” (PB, Acts, p. 89).

B. Jesus’ Chosen Instrument to Carry His Name before Many People

22. Paul, who was breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples, was converted by the Lord as he neared Damascus on his journey. Jesus spoke to Paul, who could see nothing but the sudden flashing of a light from heaven: “Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. “Ask for Paul,” Jesus told Ananias. He could not obey the Lord’s order willingly at first because Paul was a persecutor. “But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their Kings and the people of Israel’” (Acts 9:1-15).
23. Then Ananias visited Paul. “Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again” (Acts 9:17,18). Paul repented and was baptized. According to God’s promise, through baptism, the free gift from God was given to the persecutor, and his sin was forgiven and he was saved. Once again I would like to introduce you to Prof. Balge’s comment here:

Amazing grace! A Pharisee who had persecuted Jews for believing in Jesus would carry Jesus’ name to the Gentiles. He who had believed that salvation is in doing the works of the law would teach that salvation is by faith in Christ alone. Saul did carry Jesus’ name to the Gentiles, Gentile rulers and his own people. Much of the book of Acts tells the story. He would witness to Jesus’ salvation before governors and kings, including Caesar himself (PB, Acts, p. 102).

C. Peter Saw a Vision

24. By means of a vision, the Lord taught Peter that “God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34,35). Peter saw something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. There were ceremonially unclean animals and birds in it. The Lord ordered Peter to kill and eat them. But Peter answered, “Oh, no, Lord! I’ve never eaten anything common or unclean” (Acts 10:14). Then Jesus told Peter, “Don’t make unclean what God has made clean” (Acts 10:15).
25. “What Jesus taught Peter about food was going to apply to people. Neither Peter nor anyone else was to regard them as unclean” (PB, Acts, p. 113). Having understood that teaching correctly, Peter confessed that Jesus Christ was Lord of all (Acts 10:36). “When Peter went up to Jerusalem, those who still believed in circumcision disagreed with him and said: ‘You visited uncircumcised men, and ate with them’” (Acts 11:2,3). After he had told them the vision, Peter asked them, “If God gave them the same gift he gave us when we began to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I—could I stop God?” (Acts 11:17). “When they heard this, they kept quiet. And they praised God, saying, ‘Then God has given repentance also to non-Jewish people so that they will live’” (Acts 11:18).

V. Together We Confess That This Truth Is Biblical

26. One of the most remarkable characteristics of the Bible is its consistency. According to the testimony of the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Lord himself, and the history of the early Christian Church, the testimony that justifying grace is universal is consistent. “Christ is the Savior of the whole world (John 3:16; 1:29; 1 John 2:2; 1 Tim. 2:4; Titus 2:11). God earnestly desires that each individual person be saved (2 Pet. 3:9; Ezek. 33:11; 18:23,32). Salvation has been secured even for those who reject the grace of God and are thus lost on account of their unbelief (Matt. 23:37; Acts 7:51; 1 Cor. 8:11; 2 Pet. 2:1)” (Mueller, CD, p.

248). It is surely a biblical truth that Jesus' atonement is for all. The word, "world," in the above passages means not merely the elect, but all men without exception.

27. Our Confessions also add as follows:

The passage, "Many are called, but few are chosen," does not mean that God does not desire to save everyone. The cause of condemnation is that men either do not hear the Word of God at all but willingly despise it, harden their ears and their hearts, and thus bar the ordinary way for the Holy Spirit, so that he cannot work in them; or, if they do hear the Word, they cast it to the wind and pay no attention to it (FC Ep XI 12, p. 496).

28. Reminding us of Jonah who did not want God to forgive the repentant Ninevites, Prof. Wendland asks us this question in his book: "Jesus' death on the cross and his glorious resurrection were accomplished for the salvation of all people. Does this make us angry? Are we, too, unwilling to preach repentance to them?" (ILCW OT-B, p. 81). Of course, together all member churches of the CELC will reply to this question: "We are not angry with that at all. Jesus has atoned for the sins of all mankind. With God and the angels we rejoice in the sinners' salvation."

29. Together we confess that "Jesus Christ, the God-man, was sent by the Father to humble himself for the redemption of mankind and that he was exalted as evidence that his mission was accomplished. Jesus came to fulfill the law perfectly (Matt. 5:17), so that by his perfect obedience all men should be accounted righteous (Rom. 5:19). He came to bear the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6), ransoming us by his sacrifice for sin on the altar of the cross (Matt. 20:28)." Together we confess, "He is the God-appointed Substitute for man in all this: His righteousness is accepted by the Father as our righteousness; his death for sin, as our death for sin (2 Cor. 5:21)." Together we confess that "Jesus' resurrection gives full assurance that God has accepted this atonement in our behalf (Rom. 4:25)" (Ernst H. Wendland, *Missiological Perspectives*, p. 78, para. 3).

30. Thus, together "we believe, teach, and confess that the Savior-God reconciled the world unto himself, that God declared his verdict of righteousness to all sinners. Upon this objective truth we build our message. We proclaim an unconditioned gospel, saying with Paul: We therefore are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:20,21)" (E. H. Wendland, *MP*, p. 94 #3).

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Abbreviations

Lutheran Confessions (all quotes from the Tappert Translation):

| | |
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| Ap | Apology of the Augsburg Confession |
| FC Ep | Epitome of the Formula of Concord |
| FC SD | Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord |

JUSTIFICATION IS RECEIVED THROUGH FAITH

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Justification is received through faith

We believe that God has justified, that is, declared all sinners righteous in his eyes for the sake of Christ. This is the central teaching of Scripture upon which the very existence of the church depends. It is a message relevant to people of all times and places, of all races and social strata, for “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men” (Romans 5:18). All need justification before God, and Scripture proclaims that all are justified, for “the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men” (Romans 5:18). We believe that the individual receives this free gift of forgiveness through Christ. not by works. but only by faith (Ephesians 2:8,9).

This We Believe, p. 11

As This We Believe affirms, faith has a central position in all Christian teaching. Through faith Christ reestablishes the lost union between God and man. This union is proclaimed in the gospel. This gospel is accepted by faith. Faith is, thus, the bond between the sinner and God.

In view of this importance of faith, the essays at this conference emphasize the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. We who gather here call ourselves not only Christians but Lutheran Christians. We are a part of the Lutheran church. We call ourselves after the name of that man Martin Luther. The question might be asked, “What is a Lutheran Christian?” Why do we choose to call ourselves by the name of Lutheran? Why did we join in fellowship with this body of Lutheranism? What makes a Lutheran church “Lutheran”? It seems today that fewer and fewer people know why they are part of a certain church or denomination and still fewer know what their church stands for and why it stands for something. Fellow Lutherans, let us not forget that we are gathered here because of the common faith we share. We believe that the only way to eternal life is by faith alone—*sola fide*. This is the discovered truth of the Reformation. Unfortunately, many Lutherans today have also lost sight of the vital importance of justification by faith alone. But as we shall see, the Bible teaches it. Our Lutheran Confessions reaffirm this. This is what each one of our church bodies united in one true fellowship teaches. As confessional Lutherans, let us constantly review this important teaching lest we lose this only truth to life eternal. In this essay, let us rediscover the truth of

Saving Faith—The Hand That Receives God’s Forgiveness

To rediscover this truth today, we shall be seeing how the Bible and our Lutheran Confessions answer three vital questions:

1. What is saving faith?
2. How does saving faith happen?
3. How does saving faith save?

1. What is saving faith?

The English language can pose problems on the subject of faith for those learning English. The noun “faith” is completely different than the verb “believe.” And yet in the New Testament, both the Greek noun and the verb are in the same family: noun *pistis*, verb *pisteuoo*. *Pistis* means trust, having confidence in a message or promise. The writer of Hebrews 11:1 defines the noun faith as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” The Apostle Paul has the same thought when talking about the verb *pisteuoo* as he writes in Romans 4:19-21, “Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God has power to do what he had promised.”

Faith always has an object. We see an example of this in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” A person can believe in, or have faith in, many different things—friends, parents, government, etc. But saving faith always has as its object the words and promises of the Bible. St. Paul points out the object of saving faith when he says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . . for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it written: The righteous shall live by faith” (Romans 1:16,17).

Faith, however, includes more than just trust or confidence. Faith requires knowledge. And saving faith requires knowledge of what God through his Son Jesus Christ did to forgive our sins—that he suffered the punishment of all sins of all people of all time. Paul points to the fact that there can be no faith without knowledge when he says, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14).

More than trust and knowledge, faith is also agreement (traditionally called “assent”) with what has been heard. Saving faith is believing what we hear from God’s Word. The Lord Jesus spoke of this necessity of agreeing with what the gospel says when he told Nicodemus, “I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony” (John 3:11). The Apostle John points out the positive when he speaks of people who do accept what has been told them in 1 John 5:10, “Anyone who believes in the Son has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him into a liar, because he has not believed [i.e., accepted] the testimony God has given about his Son.” The Apology to the Augsburg Confession focuses its discussion of faith on the word “acceptance” as well, “The forgiveness of sins is a thing promised for Christ’s sake. Therefore it can be accepted only by faith, since a promise can be accepted only on faith” (IV, 84, p. 119).

To complete our study of what the Bible says faith is, it should be noted that sometimes the Bible uses faith in a slightly different sense. Paul says that Judean Christians had heard this message about him after his conversion, “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy” (Galatians 1:23). Here the word “faith” means “the faith which is believed” (traditionally termed *fides quae creditur*, from the Latin for that phrase) rather than the trust itself—“the faith by which it is believed,” (traditionally termed *fides qua creditur*).

2. How does saving faith happen?

It is God the Holy Spirit who creates a relationship between God and fallen mankind by putting his claim upon the sinner through his Word as he does in Baptism. This relationship grows in man as he hears God’s Word of forgiveness and life and as he gains more information about Christ through that Word. Faith cannot comprehend everything, “for faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). And since faith, although it is something that man does, is entirely the work of God—there is no room for boasting. “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by

works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians. 2:8,9). Thus, while faith is an act of man—it is man who believes—it is a work of God, that is, it is God who causes a man to believe.

The Formula of Concord (S. D. III, 9, pp. 540,541) expresses the same idea that faith is a free gift from God, that all boasting should be ruled out. “Concerning the righteousness of faith before God we believe . . . that a poor sinner is justified before God without any merit or worthiness on our part . . . by sheer grace, solely through the merit of the total obedience, the bitter passion, the death, and the resurrection of Christ, our Lord, whose obedience is reckoned to us as righteousness.”

Regrettably, many individuals and churches have fallen away from this biblical truth that God and God alone is responsible for the faith that is in a person’s heart. Pelagianism (common in many African churches) declares that man is morally neutral and able to choose good or evil and thus earn his way to heaven by good works. Semi-Pelagianism (in the Roman Catholic Church) says that man is deprived of the ability to perfectly love God and do good works, but that God gives man final ability, through infused grace, so that he is able to earn his way to heaven by good works. Synergism (common in Reformed churches) teaches that man is depraved, but with a spark of good in him by which he can choose to believe. At least such churches teach that a person attains heaven through God’s forgiveness rather than his own works. The Formula of Concord points out the error of all three teachings in Article II, paragraphs 75-77 (S.D., Tappert, p. 536). Finally Calvinism (found in the Church of Central African Presbyterian) says that man is totally depraved, with no spark of good—so far, so good. But they go on to say that God creates faith in him through irresistible grace which he does not use with all people.

What is the Bible’s teaching (and thus ours as confessional Lutherans) about how saving faith happens? The Bible’s teaching can be summarized as follows:

- All people are spiritually dead.
- God’s call to repentance is the same and goes out to all.
- Some reject this, and it is their own fault.
- Some by God’s grace do believe.
 1. The law brings contrition.
 2. The gospel brings faith.

The Bible very clearly tells us that all people are spiritually dead. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins” (2:1). Being spiritually dead, all people by nature are enemies of God, unable to obey his commands. “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Romans 8:7). More than this, Paul says that the spiritually dead person cannot understand or respond to the message of the gospel. “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them” (1 Corinthians 2:14). That is why Martin Luther explains the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed with the words, “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him.” The Epitome of the Formula of Concord likewise teaches, “In spiritual matters man’s understanding and reason are blind and . . . he understands nothing by his own powers.”

The invitation of God for people to repent is the same and goes to all sinners. When the Lord commissioned his disciples with the gospel, he commanded them to go to every nation with the gospel. He sent them out with the words, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. . .” (Mark 16:15,16). The gospel is meant for all—black or white, brown or yellow, children and adults. As Peter declares, “[The Lord] is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

But why are not all people saved since the invitation goes to all people universally? It is unbelief—“whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). It is not that God chose

some to go to hell and some to eternal life. That is not what Scripture says. It says, “[God] wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). From these passages we see that the invitation to repentance goes to all and that those who do not repent have no one to blame but themselves. They are like the people of Israel, who “always resist the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51).

By God’s grace, there are those that believe. These will be the people who will form so great a multitude in heaven that no one will be able to count them. They will come from “every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9).

God uses his law to make sinners aware that they are sinners and deserve eternal punishment. “Through the law we become conscious of sin” (Romans 3 :20). The law works fear or contrition in the heart of the sinner. The Augsburg Confession thus defines contrition as “terror smiting the conscience with a knowledge of sin” (XII, 4, p. 34). When the sinner has been crushed by God’s law, he sees the need of a Savior who will forgive his sins. And the gospel shows the sinner who the Savior is. The power of the gospel creates faith in the heart of the contrite sinner. The sinner then is converted. The unwilling is made willing. He is now a child of God. He lives for God. Again the Lutheran Confessions point to the work of both the law (in creating contrition) and the gospel (in creating faith) as being necessary in conversion. “The chief function or power of the law is to make original sin manifest and show man to what utter depths his nature has fallen and how corrupt it has become. . . . Thus he is terror-stricken and humbled, becomes despondent and despairing” (S.A. Part III, II, 4, p. 303). “To this office of the law the New Testament immediately adds the consoling promise of grace in the gospel” (S.A. Part III, III, 4, p. 304).

Other synonyms for conversion are: repentance (John 1:13), enlightenment (1 Peter 2:9), regeneration (John 3:3-5) and illumination (2 Peter 1:19). These are not to be viewed as steps to becoming a child of God. They are different pictures to show us what the Holy Spirit does when he makes a believer out of an unbeliever, so that we pass from death to life (1 John 3:14).

3. How does saving faith save?

The Bible tells us that faith does many things:

- “Your faith has healed you” (Matthew 9:22; Luke 8:48). “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done” (Matthew 21:21).
- “Your faith has saved you” (Luke 7:50).
- “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25).
- “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:28; see also 5:1, Galatians 2:16).
- “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8).
- “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:5).

Faith is not a condition or cause of forgiveness or any of the other blessings listed in the passages above. Faith is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). A sinner is not saved because he has faith. Otherwise faith becomes a good work. Salvation is by grace alone. The way the holy writers connected faith with justification in Greek points to this. They either use the preposition *ek* with the genitive or *dia* with the genitive or an instrumental dative. They never use any form (such as *dia* with the accusative) which would indicate that we are justified because of faith.

The current New Testament translation in Chichewa has a big problem because it often translates such passages inconsistently. For example Romans 5:1 is rendered,

“Mulungu watilungamitsa chifukwa
God makes us righteous because of
cha chikhulupiriro chathu.”
the faith ours

Obviously the “makes us righteous” is also a problem about which the LCCA—Malawi Conference has written to the United Bible Societies along with the “because of” problem and we are happy to report that our suggestions on both issues have been accepted and will be incorporated into the new Bible which will be released next year.

Quite possibly such faulty translations result from inaccuracies that appear in the UBS Translator’s Handbooks. For example in the Romans volume (commenting on 3:28), it says, “In some languages means such as are expressed by the phrases through faith . . . may be expressed more specifically as cause—for example, ‘a man is put right with God only because he believes. . .’ (p. 70). In Ephesians (commenting on 2:8), “through faith” may be expressed as “this was possible because you trusted” (p. 47).

The true teaching of the Bible pictures faith as a receiving hand. God makes his promise to all and the promise becomes ours through faith. The blessings of salvation come through faith and never because of faith. In the words of the Solid Declaration, “Faith does not justify because it is so good a work and so God-pleasing a virtue, but because it lays hold on and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy gospel” (III, 13, p. 541).

In July the Lutheran Bible Institute will conduct Continuing Education for Pastors classes. One of these classes will be a review of the doctrine of justification. Why? Because it is our confessional Lutheran heritage. Because it is the Bible’s truth. Because without it, we are lost. Because without it, our churches will preach an empty message.

May the almighty God keep each of us and all of our churches faithful to this central teaching of the Bible—that faith is the hand that receives God’s forgiveness.

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JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH PRODUCES SANCTIFICATION

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Introduction

The number of papers assigned for this CELC convention is seven, the “holy number.” Seven, starting with creation week in the Bible’s first chapter, is associated with the holy and gracious

work of God. Both justification and sanctification are certainly that: God's gracious and holy work. Six of the seven papers deal with God's work of justification, his act of declaring sinners innocent and holy because sinless Jesus served as their substitute and paid the penalty for all sins himself as the Holy Lamb. One of the seven papers deals now with sanctification, likewise a gracious work of our holy God in which he accomplishes renewal and holy living within those who know their justification.

The author of both justification and sanctification is the same holy and gracious God, as the seven papers are showing. But as this presentation continues, we will be reminded of some of the distinctions between these two doctrines whose holy Author is the same. A glance at the titles of the six papers on justification already suggests some of those differences. Notice especially the titles of papers #2, #3, and #7. We can not substitute the word "sanctification" for "justification" in those three titles and claim the name "Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference."

The Words "Sanctify" and "Sanctification"

According to Young's Analytical Concordance, the English noun "sanctification" and the verb "sanctify" appear some 135 times in the Old and New Testaments of the King James Version. The Old Testament Hebrew verb behind the translation "sanctify" is *vdq kadash*, whose root meaning has to do with being "set apart." The New Testament Greek verb behind the English verb "sanctify" is *hagiazō*, "to make holy"; Greek nouns with the same root as the verb are *hagiasmos*, meaning "holiness, consecration, sanctification," and *hagiosune*, "holiness."

Definition of "Sanctification"

Following its use in Scripture, we employ the term "sanctification" in two senses, a wider and a narrower sense.

In its wider sense "sanctification" refers to the entire gracious work which God the Holy Spirit performs through his Word, from bringing sinners to faith and continuing through keeping believers in that faith until they reach eternal life in heaven. In this broad sense sanctification includes God's work of "justification through faith." The presenters of the other six papers were therefore also writing on a part of sanctification. This wide use of the term is seen in 2 Th 2:13: ". . . from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth." (See also Ac 26:18; Eph 5:26; 1 Pe 1:2.) Luther at times uses the term sanctification in this broad sense in his catechisms; and so do we when we speak of the extensive work of the Holy Spirit in the Third Article of the Creed as sanctification.

In its narrower sense sanctification refers to the Holy Spirit's work which follows justification through faith and consists of renewing the believer and bringing forth in him works of renewal. Some terms that mean the same as sanctification in this narrower or strict sense are the following: renewal, renovation, transformation, restoration, the new life, godly life, holy life, and spiritual growth. Some synonyms for the acts of the new life that are also a part of sanctification in the narrow sense are these: fruits of faith, fruit of the Spirit, good works, and godly acts. The narrower sense of the term is seen in Scripture in 1 Th 4:3: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality. . . ." The Greek in that verse which the NIV translates "be sanctified" is the noun *hagiasmos*, literally, "sanctification." (For other NT verses that refer to sanctification in its narrower sense, see for example Ro 6:19,22; 2 Co 7:1; 1 Th 4:7.)

From the above it may be evident that properly speaking we divide even the narrow sense of sanctification into two aspects: 1) the inner renewal of the Holy Spirit in the Christian, and 2) the living out of that inner renewal in the Christian's new life of good works. There is obviously a "cause and effect" or "antecedent and consequent" relationship between the two aspects. Aspect #1 is the new spiritual nature fashioned by the Spirit when he creates the faith that lays hold of justification; and aspect #2 involves the good works that are the result and evidence of that Spirit-created holiness. That distinction within the narrow sense of sanctification can be seen in Gal 5:25: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

Since two people may perform the same or similar acts (e.g. Cain's and Abel's sacrifices), but for one it is a work of sanctification and for the other in God's eyes it is not, we need to know what Scripture means by good works or acts of sanctification. God the Holy Spirit, faith in Christ, Christ within, love, and the Word as guide are the elements that build the definition. The following Scriptures speak of those elements and reveal the meaning of works of sanctification. "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Eph 2:10). "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Php 2:13). "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11:16). "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Gal 5:6). "Christ's love compels us" (2 Co 5:14). "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word" (Ps 119:9). A catechism therefore offers this simple definition: "A good work is whatever a believer does according to God's Word out of love and thanks for all of God's goodness" (Luther's Catechism, NPH, 1982). Although we could add the other elements included in the above verses, that basic definition is certainly workable.

It is the narrow sense of sanctification that is the topic of this paper. Even in this sense sanctification is a big subject. But as the assigned title of the paper has directed, we are limiting ourselves and focusing on the relationship between justification through faith and sanctification. We will not drift far from the central thought that justification through faith produces sanctification.

The Order of Justification and Sanctification

We come to the critical question immediately. What comes first, justification through faith or sanctification? The answer to this basic question affects all of theology. The response that we would all give naturally, apart from divine revelation, would be dead wrong; and we would be spiritually dead because of it. It is only by the grace of God's gospel revelation that we can shout the answer to our question from the mountain tops with all joy-filled confidence.

Paul writes: "We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Ro 3:28). Can there be any question about the order there? Justification does not have to await the works of the sinner before it arrives on the scene. The psalmists' words also show the order: "But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared" (Ps 130:4). And again: "I will run the way of your commands, for you have set my heart free" (Ps 119:32). Our Savior says it so clearly: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" (Jn 15:5). Justification through faith, which is none other than being grafted to Christ through faith and thereby receiving the forgiveness of sins, comes first! God in his undeserved love counts us holy heirs of salvation for Christ's sake alone; and we receive that gracious state freely through the faith God himself gives us. Our marvelous status does not hinge in any way on what we do. It is all based on what he already has done. And that cannot be undone any more than Christ can be un-crucified and un-raised. Any talk about sanctification must start at that gracious revelation from God's Scripture. Our previous five papers have certainly established on the basis of Scripture this wonderful truth. We'll say it again. Justification comes first, and sanctification comes second as a consequence.

All the natural religions of this world have the order dead wrong. With only two choices of what comes first, we might be tempted to think that the law of averages would lead somebody to get it right. But it never happens. The reason that natural man consistently reverses the order and thinks that performing some kind of good acts must come first before man can find himself in something of a satisfactory state before God is the deeply ingrained "opinion of the law" (*opinio legis*) or work-righteous attitude. Look at all human-devised religious ideas and you will see "the opinion of the law" as an unquestioned principle. Look at the desperate ancients seeking to earn favor with their deities by their actions so that their crops will grow, plagues will be averted, or their afterlife will be assured. First they must perform, and then their gods' satisfaction will follow. See parents sacrificing their children to Molech so that a human action can create a fortunate state between them and a god. Analyze the basic assumptions of any of today's religions and

cults and there it is, the opinion of the law. Man must first perform good acts, or submit himself, or get himself in tune with a “force,” or raise himself up by meditation, or please some intermediaries; and then he will find himself in some sort of acceptable condition.

It may seem unfair in this context to recall Luther’s early frantic attempts to make himself righteous before God. But the principle under which the desperate monk operated was the same as that of all man-made religion: I must first do something through my actions in order to create a state in which God can tell me that he’s at peace with me. First me and my deeds, then God’s pleased attitude toward me. The difference between Christianity and manmade theology is explainable simply through the question of order. What comes first, justification or sanctification? Sadly, much of visible Christianity remains confused about the order. The clash between “the opinion of the law” and the revelation of Scripture seems to leave many as bewildered and theologically wobbly as a boxer who has just taken a solid right to the head. And doubly tragic is the fact that a large part of the visible church officially rejects the scriptural order. May the clear Scriptures in the hands of God’s dear people in these churches lead them to see the order that their leaders are confused about or deny.

Even confessional Lutherans who know well the doctrine of justification are likely to be tripped up at times and, at least in unfortunate expressions, place a life of good works before justification. While our New Self knows and delights in the proper order, our Former Self with his old natural opinions at times speaks up and gurgles through the waters in which he is being daily drowned. Christian parents in disciplining their Christian children can slip and exclaim in their frustration something like this: “How can God ever be pleased with you the way you’re behaving?”

If we preachers were to listen to tapes of all of the sermons we have delivered, how many unfortunate, misleading statements could we find concerning the order of justification and sanctification? Much of C. F. W. Walther’s *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* centers on helping preachers avoid the pitfalls of reversing that order. Walther’s Thesis VII reads: “In the third place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when the Gospel is preached first and then the Law; sanctification first and then justification; faith first and then repentance; good works first and then grace.” In his “Eleventh Evening Lecture” Walther presents a sermon outline about which he says, “This outline is simply horrible.” The backward cart-before-the-horse outline is this:

True Christianity. It Consists

- 1) in Christian living
- 2) in true faith
- 3) in a blessed end

Francis Pieper in his *Christian Dogmatics* warns: “And even theologians who theoretically define the relationship of faith and works correctly are tempted to lose sight of this relation in practice” (Volume III, p. 13).

The two men named above were professors of this essayist’s grandfather and father respectively. My forefathers were taught well. I wish that what they learned from Walther and Pieper could have been passed on to me naturally through their genes and that I could likewise pass them on naturally to my offspring. But because of inherited sin and the *opinio legis*, each generation of Lutherans must ponder the clear Scriptures for itself, rejoice in its Reformation heritage, stand guard, and teach its children well. The “opinion of the law,” the right hand of our Old Nature, keeps knocking at the door to coax us back to the old reversed order.

What is the result when the order of justification through faith and sanctification is deliberately and consistently reversed? Simply stated, a person has neither! “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse” (Gal 3:2). They have refused their justification; and they have no sanctification, because it is present as a product of justification. The life of a person without justification through faith can be, in God’s eyes, only a life of sin, outward display of decency, or despair (Ro 7:5; Lk 18:11-12; Ac 16:27). It cannot be a life of sanctification in any scriptural sense of the term.

Is it important to have the right order firmly in mind and heart? It's a matter of life and death for us and the people we serve. Because of God's loyal love for his church, we know the proper order revealed in his Word. It is our heritage through the Reformation. May the Spirit, who has first shown us our justification (1 Co 2:9-10) and is now sanctifying us, direct us in the practice of what he has revealed.

Justification and Sanctification Are Inseparably Joined in a Cause and Effect Relationship

When we say that justification through faith comes first and sanctification follows secondly, it is in the logical sense, the "cause and effect" sense, that we are using the words "first" and "secondly." In reference to time, however, they take place simultaneously. Nowhere do the Scriptures speak of justification existing for a time by itself without sanctification. Nowhere do the Scriptures speak of sanctification existing apart from justification. Where there is no sanctification, there is no justification through faith. Where there is justification through faith, there is also sanctification. They are not mingled, but they are inseparably linked. Jesus said just before his death and resurrection: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). Our Confessions therefore say: "Faith and good works well agree and fit together [are inseparably connected]; but it is faith alone, without works, which lays hold of the blessing; and yet it is never and at no time alone" (FC, SD III, 41, Triglot p. 931). Again our Confessions say: "After a person has been justified by faith, a true living faith becomes 'active through love' (Gal. 5:6). Thus good works always follow justifying faith and are certainly to be found with it, since such faith is never alone but is always accompanied by love and hope" (FC, Epitome, Article III. Righteousness. Tappert p. 474). As soon as justifying faith exists, sanctification exists. Simply stated, faith immediately produces sanctification.

Spirit-Worked Faith and Sanctification

How is it that faith, which lays hold of justification and gives us our holy status, also has the power to produce sanctification? The basic answer is that faith is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word and is therefore powerful, dynamic, life-giving, productive. Previous papers have cited the Scriptures that reveal faith to be the gift of God, particularly of the Spirit (Mt 10:16,17; 1 Co 12:3; Ro 5:5), worked in us through the means of grace (2 Th 2:13,14; Ro 10:17; 2 Ti 3:15). And he does not quickly slip out the back door of our hearts as soon as he fashions faith. He remains powerfully present through the Word, building up that faith which he causes to produce in us love, gratitude and all of the fruit of the Spirit on the tree he has made alive. We therefore confess with the hymn writer:

"O Holy Ghost, Thou Fount of grace,
The good in me to Thee I trace" (TLH 375, 5).

Luther in his "Preface to Romans" writes of the great power of that Spirit-generated faith that produces sanctification.

Faith, however, is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God, John 1:12,13. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. Oh, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Yet he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works.

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times. The knowledge of and confidence in God's grace makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all creatures. And this is the work which the Holy Spirit performs in faith. Because of it, without compulsion, a person is ready and glad to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, out of love and praise to God who has shown him this grace. Thus it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light from fire.

There may be such a thing as “dead orthodoxy,” that is, people knowing intellectually the doctrine of justification by faith without believing it. The hymnist expresses that thought.

'Tis all in vain that you profess
The doctrines of the Church, unless
You live according to your creed,
And show your faith by word and deed.
Observe the rule: To others do
As you would have them do to you.

(The Lutheran Hymnary, #406, v 2)

But there cannot be such a thing as “dead justifying faith.” That is impossible, a contradiction. “Every good tree bears good fruit” (Mt 7:17). A “good tree” is a person who is planted through faith in Christ and his Word. “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither” (Ps 1:3).

The faith alone principle of the Reformation does not detract from or minimize sanctification. Quite the opposite! It exalts it, because it places justification through faith, the power that produces sanctification, in its rightful scriptural place. Sanctification is alive, flourishing, and yielding its fruit wherever justification through faith is cherished and seen as the doctrine by which the church either stands or falls.

Look at Abraham to see justifying faith producing sanctification. In Genesis 15:6 we have that Old Testament passage where we see justification through faith just as plainly as we see the noon-day sun on a clear day in Puerto Rico: “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” Now look at what that faith produced in Abram in the area of sanctification.. When called by God to leave his country and his father’s household and go to a strange land, he simply went, even though he didn’t know where he was going (Ge 12:1; Heb 11:8,9). See him as the peace-maker and man of unselfish heart when quarrels arose between his herdsman and those of Lot (Ge 13). Observe him as the rescuer of Lot and others and the protector of their property. Watch him passionately praying, pleading before the LORD for the deliverance of the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah. See him willing even to offer up his only son through whom the Promised Seed would come, if God so commanded. A commentary on Genesis therefore says: “Abram’s trust in God’s promises didn’t simply lie in his heart ‘like foam on beer,’ to use Luther’s earthy comparison. Abram’s trust in what God promised powered him to respond to God’s call” (The People’s Bible: Genesis, p. 125).

Think also of Rahab’s justifying faith and what it produced in her new life. The former prostitute, now the owner of Spirit-given faith, welcomed Israel’s spies, showed them kindness, gave them lodging, hid them and advised them. Her living faith and consequent acts are noted in Jos 2, Jas 3:25, and He 11:31.

The New Testament examples that we could cite of justifying faith obviously producing sanctification are legion (Zacchaeus, Mary anointing Jesus, the woman at the well, the apostles, etc.). God-given faith always produces born-again hearts and fruits of the Spirit. And when we speak in the spirit of giving all glory to God, we do not have to be shy about saying this about the people gathered here: As surely as God has given you faith in your Savior and made you an heir of heaven, your Spirit-produced faith and its love and thankfulness are producing sanctification with its wonderful fruits of the Spirit. It is not a mere wish that we be sanctified when given the gift of faith. It is a gracious, immediate reality assured by the Spirit and revealed in Scripture. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come!” (2 Co 5:17). “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10). “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:22-24). These passages do not speak of sanctification only as what God wants for us and what

we hope will happen in us. They speak of what already is being produced in us by God as a product of justification through faith.

Sanctification Is a Continuing Process

Paper #2 emphasized that “justification is complete.” At this point a glaring difference is apparent between justification and sanctification. God does not justify or forgive sins liter by liter and barrel by barrel. He justifies at once completely, like a judge in a courtroom simply declaring the criminal “not guilty.” “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies” (Ro 8:33). “Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins” (Ps 103:3).

Sanctification, however, involves growth, is a continuing activity, is an ongoing process of the Spirit in us, is a matter of “more and more,” as the following Scriptures reveal: “Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more” (1 Th 4:1). “Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love . . .” (Eph 4:15,16). “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col 3:9,10). The image of God, lost through sin, is not instantaneously restored. But the process is in motion.

We mentioned two Old Testament believers above and their acts of sanctification. Though completely justified through faith, though walking in sanctification as a result of faith, they also sinned. Moses and the author of Joshua tell us about their sins without questioning their justification. Abraham lies twice about Sarah being his sister and is reprimanded even by unbelievers. Rahab, in the middle of her deeds of faith, also lies. Their sanctification is far from complete. The Bible likewise reveals the sins of other heroes of faith such as Sarah, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Mary, and Peter and the other disciples. John, a justified believer writing to other justified Christians, therefore says: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8). The Scriptures obviously do not speak of a “perfection” in sanctification as being present or possible in this lifetime.

Our Confessions teach: “For since we receive in this life only the firstfruits of the Spirit, and the new birth is not complete, but only begun in us, the combat and struggle of the flesh against the spirit remains even in the elect and truly regenerate men; for there is a great difference perceptible among Christians not only in this, that one is weak and another strong in the spirit, but each Christian, moreover, experiences in himself that at one time he is joyful in spirit, and at another fearful and alarmed; at one time ardent in love, strong in faith and hope, and at another cold and weak” (FC. SD. II. Of Free Will. Triglot p. 907). We Lutherans confess in the Small Catechism that “we daily sin much.” Again, Luther says:

A will entirely given to God (*tota voluntas*) does not exist in this life. That is why we are constantly sinning while we are doing good, although less at one time and more at another. It depends on how impetuous the flesh is with its impure desires. . . . Therefore the righteous man is like a rust-eaten tool which God has undertaken to polish; it cuts badly as long as it is rusty and until it is perfectly polished (quoted in Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*, v. I, pp. 236-7).

This life is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness; not health, but healing; not being, but becoming; not rest, but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it; the process is not yet finished, but it is going on; this is not the end, but it is the road; all does not yet gleam with glory, but all is being purified (Holman translation, Vol III, p. 31).

The Scriptures do not explicitly answer the question of why God does not sanctify believers instantaneously and perfectly at the same time that he declares them completely holy. But the

question is certainly answered in terms of drawing us to Christ, to our justification through faith, so that we are not caught gazing upon ourselves in self-pride; and it is answered in terms of causing us to long for heaven where our fight with our old nature is over and our sanctification is complete. Paul's confident conclusion, after relating the war that continues between his new and old self, and after crying out, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" leads us to that answer. He shouts: "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Ro 7:25; cf. also 1 Co 15:57). Luther says:

It is true, the Holy Spirit at times allows Christians to err and stumble and allows sin to remain in them. And he does so for the very purpose of keeping us from taking pleasure in ourselves, as if we were holy on our own account. Rather, we are to learn what we are and from whom we have our holiness; otherwise we would become too arrogant and presumptuous (quoted in Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*, vol. I, p. 237).

What purposes are served by the teaching that our sanctification is a continuing process, unfinished this side of heaven?

- It prevents arrogance and pride in ourselves, preserving Christian humility in us, as Luther's words above remind us.
- It comforts us, preserving us from despair. Some of the devil's strongest arguments start with the words, "You call yourself a Christian and you did that?" We call ourselves Christians not by virtue of a completed sanctification but by virtue of our justification. Even our spiritual acts of sanctification are tainted and are not the basis of our justification. I'm glad I don't have to prove to the devil that I belong to Christ on the basis of my life. I'm glad I'm a Lutheran Christian who can make this statement together with you:

We also believe, teach, and confess that, although the genuinely believing and truly regenerated persons retain much weakness and many shortcomings down to their graves, they still have no reason to doubt either the righteousness which is reckoned to them through faith or the salvation of their souls, but they must regard it as certain that for Christ's sake, on the basis of the promises and the Word of the holy Gospel, they have a gracious God (FC, Epitome, Article III. Righteousness. Tappert, p. 474).

I have served in three churches represented here. Membership in none of those three CELC bodies has caused me to be perfectly sanctified. (I can almost hear a chorus from several nations, tribes, and languages saying, "He's got that right, at least!"). Neither are the other members of those bodies perfect. In whatever country and culture we are doing God's gospel work, his people in their weakness slip, fall, and slide into old sins. We ourselves are also those people. But we are still his by grace. And for his service he continues by his Word and sacraments to polish us, his rusty tools, rather than discard us as useless.

- It keeps us from a judgmental spirit in regard to others. The weakness of others does not mark them as unbelievers outside of Christ's kingdom any more than our sin does. A recent study of USA students in Lutheran schools in grades 6-12 indicated that these students "are far less involved in drinking-and-driving, binge drinking, and sexual relationships, for example, than their public school peers" (Metro Lutheran). While we rejoice in such statistics, we know that Lutheran schools, Lutheran churches, and Lutheran homes are not exempt from the sins of the flesh. Sins, yes, shocking sins of weakness from Christians, will continue to come to light. During the days when the writing of this paper was in production, several disappointing examples of weakness in sanctification came to light in the case of fellow confessional Lutherans. Yet our attitude toward fellow believers who have sinned and repented can be that of John: "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn 2:1,2).

- It exhorts us to continuing progress in our walk of sanctification. We are running a lifelong race. We dare not presume to stand still. There is progress to be made. Despising God's will for our lives and rejecting his power to sanctify has disastrous consequences (Hebrews 10:26-27; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 1 Cor 6:9ff). Willful sin can strangle our faith and cause us to fall from the race. But in his means of grace God equips us for the race and empowers us to progress, even as he did those who ran before us. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith . . ." (Heb 12:1,2).
- It draws us continually to our justification through faith for assurance and motivation. There alone we are guaranteed our forgiveness and status by grace before God. There alone we are renewed and motivated for progress in holy living. The Scriptures say it often and clearly. What God has done for us inspires and produces sanctification. The thesis that is the title of this paper finds its support in the following (and many more) passages. Some of them simply state the fact that justification through faith produces sanctification; and others exhort sanctification on the basis of justification because it alone, through the Spirit, has such power.

"If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins,
O LORD, who could stand?"

"But with you there is forgiveness; □therefore you are feared" (Ps 130:3,4).

"He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Co 5:15).

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . ." (Ro 12:1,2).

"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Co 5:14,15).

"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:1,2).

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:11,12).

"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

Cooperation in Sanctification

In conversion to justifying faith, we are completely passive. But in sanctification, we truly cooperate with the Holy Spirit. This is obviously another of the great distinctions between the two doctrines. Is this surprising to Lutherans to hear that man cooperates with the Spirit in sanctification? Not at all. It is the language of Scripture and therefore our Confessions. The Scriptures speak of converted man according to his new nature truly wanting what God wants. The Formula of Concord in this regard quotes Psalm 110:3, Romans 8:14, Galatians 5:17, and this passage: "For in my inner being I delight in God's law" (Romans 7:22). The Formula then says:

From this it follows that as soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit, even though we still do so in great weakness.

Such cooperation does not proceed from our carnal and natural powers, but from the new powers and gifts which the Holy Spirit has begun in us in conversion, as St. Paul expressly and earnestly reminds us, "Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain." (See the Tappert footnote concerning this quotation from 2 Co 6:1.) This is to be understood in no other way than that the converted man does good, as much and as long as God rules him through his Holy Spirit, guides and leads him; but if God should withdraw his gracious hand, man could not remain in obedience for one moment. But if this were to be understood as though the converted man cooperates alongside the Holy Spirit, the way two horses draw a wagon together, such a view could by no means be conceded without detriment to the divine truth (FC, SD, Article II. Free Will. Tappert, p. 534).

The hymn writers voice the cooperative spirit of our new nature:

I long to be like Jesus, Meek, loving, lowly, mild
I long to be like Jesus, The Father's holy Child.

(TLH, 652, v. 4)

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

(TLH, 400, v. 1)

This cooperation in sanctification, of course, in no way contributes to justification through faith, which hinges on nothing but God's accomplished acts of grace in Christ.

God himself is always the author of the justified believer's cooperation, his willing attitude, and the works of sanctification that follow. "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Php 2:13). (Note the FC quotation above concerning the cooperation not being like two horses drawing a wagon together.)

Sanctification and the Preaching of the Law

While the gospel is the only motivation for sanctification, the law is also to be preached to Christians as we grow in our new life that has resulted from justification by faith. We have only to look at the repeated pattern in Paul's letters to see this truth demonstrated. First will come a section that tells what God by grace has accomplished for us. Then comes the word "therefore," (the Greek word *oun*) as a transition. And then follows a section directing the Christian's grateful response according to the "third use of the law," the law as guide or rule. Paul is thereby saying the following. "This is what your gracious God has done for you. Now this is how God himself wants you to thank and glorify him. Here are the very things that he wants, not things that you might invent or guess to be pleasing to him. This is his will, his law, that is now your delight since you have been freed from its condemnation."

Examples in Paul's letters of moving from justification, to transitional word or statement, to "third use of the law"-directed sanctification can be seen in Romans 12: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world. . . . Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought. . . . Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. . . ." Again in Ephesians 4: "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient . . . He who has been stealing must steal no longer . . . Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths. . . . Be kind and compassionate to one another. . . ." Or again in Colossians 3: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above. . . . You must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander. . . . Do not lie. . . . Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness. . . . Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another. . . ."

Why do we say something that is so obvious from Scripture, namely, that Christians need the preaching of the law according to its third use (as well as its first and second uses as curb and mirror)? It is because "antinomianism" is continually sneaking around. Sometimes, perhaps, it is not a crass form of antinomianism, but simply a neglect of needed law preaching.

Our Confessions say:

We believe, teach, and confess that the preaching of the Law is to be urged with diligence, not only on upon the unbelieving and impenitent, but also upon true believers, who are truly converted, regenerate, and justified by faith (FC. SD. VI. Triglott, p. 805).

If we were 100% new man, it is true that we would not need the law at all. We would know instinctively God's will and follow it perfectly. But we are not 100% new. Our new self "is being renewed" (Col 3:10).

Luther wrote powerful words about the necessity of preaching the law to Christians in their lives of sanctification.

My friends the Antinomians preach exceedingly well—and I cannot but believe that they do so with great earnestness—concerning the mercy of Christ, forgiveness of sin, and other contents of the article of redemption. But they flee from this inference as from the devil, that they must tell the people about the Third Article, of sanctification, that is, of the new life in Christ. . . . They are excellent preachers of the Easter truth, but miserable preachers of the truth of Pentecost. For there is nothing in their preaching concerning sanctification of the Holy Ghost and about quickening into a new life. It is proper to extol Christ in our preaching; but Christ is the Christ and has acquired redemption from sin and death for this very purpose that the Holy Spirit should change our Old Adam into a new man, that we are to be dead unto sin and live unto righteousness, as Paul teaches Rom. 6,2ff., and that we are to begin this change and increase in this new life here and consummate it hereafter. For Christ has gained for us not only grace (*gratium*), but also the gift (*donum*) of the Holy Ghost, so that we obtain from Him not only forgiveness of sin, but also the ceasing from sin. Anyone, therefore, who does not cease from his sin, but continues in his former evil way must have obtained a different Christ, from the Antinomians. The genuine Christ is not with them, even if they cry with the voice of all angels, Christ! Christ! They will have to go to perdition with their new Christ (Luther in his treatise "Concerning Councils and Churches." Quoted in Walther's Law And Gospel, p. 122ff.).

Strong words indeed! They show that in Luther's mind justification through faith and sanctification are tied tightly together. If we are going to call ourselves "Lutherans" and not "antinomians" we had better preach both in the balance of Scripture, earnestly, powerfully, clearly, continually!

Walther then goes on to comment on Luther's words:

Luther has given an extreme description of Antinomian preaching. None of you will readily imitate that method, but it is easy to fall into something like it. . . .

Luther's remarks about Easter and Pentecost preachers deserve to be remembered. It is well if on Easter Day you emphasize with great force, and expatiate on, the victory of Christ over sin, death, devil, and hell. But you must also be good Pentecost preachers and say to your hearers: "Repent; for then the Holy Spirit will come with His grace and comfort, enlighten, and sanctify you." We shall never attain to perfect sanctification in this life, but we must make a beginning and progress in this endeavor. For he that does not increase, decreases, and he that decreases will ultimately cease entirely using what God has given him. Finally, he will be a dead branch on the vine.

Concerning the third use of the law, the hymn writer reminds us:

To those who help in Christ have found
And would in works of love abound
It shows what deeds are His delight
And should be done as good and right. (TLH, 295, v. 3)

The Value of Works of Sanctification

Works of sanctification do not contribute to salvation, which is "the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph 2:8,9). Furthermore, none of our works are completely holy, but are

tainted by the sin of our old self that is mingled with them. What then is their value in addition to their obvious worth to someone helped through Christian kindness?

1. Works of sanctification have value because God wants them, paid a great price to produce them, and accepts them for Christ's sake.

Paul says: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified" (1 Th 4:3). The justified child of God will certainly not think little of what his gracious Father desires.

In fact, an explicit purpose of Jesus' work, a purpose of justification, is sanctification, as the Scriptures declare. We are not only saved from sin, Satan, and hell but for sanctification in this life and perfect service forever in heaven. Zechariah in his song says: "He raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David . . . to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days" (Lk 1:69,74,75). Paul writes: "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Co 5:15). "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph 2:10). Peter also writes: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness" (1 Pe 2:24).

Furthermore, "although they are still imperfect and impure, (works of sanctification) are acceptable to God through Christ" (FC. SD. VI, 23. Triglot, p. 969). Peter says that Christians are "offering sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ" (1 Pe 2:5). From Hebrews 11:4ff it is clear that God freely accepts the acts of those who live "by faith." What God accepts must have value to him.

2. Jesus says that our works of sanctification result in praise and glory for God. "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Mat 5:16). "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (Jn 15:8). Whatever results in God's praise and glory is of inestimable value. Our prayer therefore is:

Lord, grant that I in every place
May glorify Your lavish grace
And serve and help my neighbor. (TLH, 429, v. 2)

3. They are of great value to the believer because they are a way of saying thank you to God for his gift of justification through faith. Gratitude craves expression and finds it in acts of love accepted by our Savior, who assures us, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40).

4. God uses our lives of sanctification in evangelism and mission work to gain a hearing for the doctrine of justification through faith. A Christian's life is not a means of grace, but it may lead to a hearing for the gospel which is. From the time of the first Christians to the present, believers demonstrating "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness" and other fruits of the Spirit have led to this question from unbelievers: What is "the reason for the hope that you have?" (1 Pe 3:15). In days of persecution when these fruits were noted in the face of martyrdom, the blood of the dying Christians became seed. Only in heaven will the value of deeds of love in regard to evangelism and mission work be clearly seen.

5. Works of sanctification give outward evidence of justification through faith. This last point brings us directly back to the title of this paper, "Justification through faith produces sanctification." Sanctification provides evidence of the justification from which it flows. Justifying faith is invisible, but what it produces is not. When Jesus says to you on the Last Day, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40), he will be saying in effect that you have demonstrated the justifying faith which he freely gave you and through which alone you receive eternal life. By pointing to

what you did, he will be showing you and all others the faith through which you are justified. (See Ja 2:18.) The hymn writer says it poetically:

Faith to the cross of Christ doth cling
And rests in Him securely;
And forth from it good works must spring
As fruits and tokens surely;
Still faith doth justify alone,
Works serve thy neighbor and make known
The faith that lives within thee.

(Hymnary, 205, v. 10)

Acts of love that reflect justification are thus something of great value. They point to that great “doctrine by which the church either stands or falls,” which is the topic of the seventh and final paper of our conference.

JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH □ GIVES INNUMERABLE BLESSINGS

Prof. Martin Hoffmann
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At this second meeting of the CELC we let the dearest part of faith be put before our eyes: “Justification by grace through faith.” It was recovered in the Reformation. The Lutheran Church lives from this source. Everywhere this dogma stands on the front page: in the service, children’s lessons, Bible studies, at the work with youth, adults, and elderly people—in the ministerial work in general.

But in spite of all this we are not able to understand the greatness of this message. Our heart is too small to comprehend this marvel. It would like to explode because of this pleasure. And yet, it cannot hold this message by its own strength. We have to hear it again and again—for a lifetime. Let us be guided to this source by a man who was specifically appointed to do so, the apostle Saint Paul. What he particularly explains in the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans one can sum up as the following:

Justification through faith gives innumerable blessings

I. THE RECONCILIATION OF THE CROSS AND ITS □ BLESSINGS

It created:

1. peace — with God
2. justice — before God
3. reconciliation — from God
4. life — out of God

II. THE MESSAGE OF FORGIVENESS AND ITS BLESSINGS

Because of this:

1. God’s love — is poured out
2. Faithful confidence — is awakened
3. Christian love — is kindled

III. THE CHRISTIAN CROSS AND ITS BLESSINGS

Under that:

1. Faith — is kept

2. The good fight — is led

I. The reconciliation on the cross and its blessings

1. Peace—with God

Saint Paul writes: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have PEACE WITH GOD through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ro 5:1). At this point Saint Paul does not mean the peace of the soul or conscience. He does not say that we have given up our enmity against God. Here he says that God has given up his enmity and anger.

Do we know what a blessing that is? We will draw a comparison. A war is going on in the country. Families lose their fathers. Men do not find their wife and children. How much the people would like to have peace! Before Christ died on the cross, there was war between God and us. We human beings had risen against God. However, he did not take it, but punished us sinners. Since that time the earth is full of death. There is no hope that we could ever win this war! We have to admit that it serves us right. We have trampled God’s goodness under foot. But our misery is even greater. Our end on this earth is only the beginning of eternal punishment. That already is visible today: infirmities, sickness and epidemics,—war, misery and catastrophes,—hate, enmity and murder are the forerunners of Judgment Day. Nobody can escape from that.

Then God’s Savior Jesus Christ stepped forward, died on the cross, and made peace. We were as bad as before. God still was the Almighty, Holy, and Righteous One. Nevertheless, now he holds out his hand. The one who grips it in faith has peace. He still lives in a world which is affected by the war between God and sinners. But he himself does not have to be afraid that even one part of God’s punishment will hit him. He is sheltered. Peace was proclaimed from one who does not vacillate in his promise. This promise is not founded on our achievement or our good behavior, but on Jesus’ death on the cross! In this way peace is indestructible and everlasting.

2. Justice—before God

Saint Paul describes why that peace is indestructible: “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him” (Ro 5:9). For this reason peace has a steady basis. The holy and righteous God did not simply turn a blind eye. That would be incompatible with his holiness. Rather, he managed a real way out. His Son has balanced our debts on his account: “Having canceled the written code, with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us, he took it away, nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:14). Nevertheless he had to pay in “severe currency.” His life was the currency: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45).

Can we fathom what that means? Also in daily life one can fall into debt. Woe to the person for whom the debts get out of control! Such debts threaten misery and stress. Great is the joy if someone substitutes for him. What good fortune to find such a helper! But we sinners could not hope that God would help us! Should he ask his Son to sacrifice his life? And yet he did it! What fortune! But our situation was even more hopeless! The one who has been helped out of debts does not want to make new debts. He would never find a helper for a second time! How could we stand before God? If God would have forgiven our past debts only, we would not have been saved. Who could in the future love God with all his heart and completely keep his commandments? Also we Christians have to admit: “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Is 64:6). What a blessing that Jesus Christ has redeemed the guilt of our entire life. Yes, 2000 years ago he redeemed the guilt even of those human beings who ever lived or will live on this earth. We can always look at the cross. There our guilt was paid. Something that no one would do in daily life—God did it. Does he not deserve the right to expect that we avoid everything that would offend him?

But still we do not grasp everything we won through Jesus Christ. He did not only take on our guilt, but at the same time he gave us his divine righteousness. Now we come before God as righteous ones: "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (Ro 5:18f).

How blessed is our situation! The one who is freed from his debts has reason for joy. But he is also ashamed. All his friends know: he is a poor wretch! His debts were freely canceled. He himself does not have anything to offer! God could look at us in disdain. Because of Jesus we do not have any more guilt before God. What does he think about us? With Saint Paul we have to admit: "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Ro 7:18f). How miserable are we as we stand in front of God! But something incomprehensible happened. Jesus Christ made us "presentable." He gave us the fullness of his love, righteousness, and holiness. If we in faith step in front of God, we do not appear to him as unpleasant. Instead of filthy rags we wear the white robes of righteousness. This is how we will one day enter heaven. Saint John was allowed to get a glimpse of this: "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. . ." (Rev 7:9,13f).

Is that not a real comfort? Of course, we do not have anything to offer. But what we are missing was given to us. Because of Jesus we have a place in the community of the holy angels and the crowd of the redeemed. We will always cherish this dress of righteousness and will not soil it frivolously.

3. Reconciliation—from God

But it is even more what Jesus did on the cross! He touched the Father's heart! He sacrificed himself for us criminals. He threw his innocence onto the scales for us. In the Old Covenant God allowed animal sacrifices. This was how he wanted to let himself be reconciled. But now no animal died. God's Son gave himself into death (cp. Jn 1:29; 1 Pe 2:24): "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Is 53:4-7). With that Jesus Christ won his Father's heart for us. Saint Paul states: ". . . when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son" (Ro 5:10). God's enmity against us made way for a new sentiment—not cool neutrality, but loving affection (Ro 5:2). This happened once for all. Now we have free entrance to him (cp. Eph 2:18; 3:12): "Through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand" (Ro 5:2). Now in faith we can step in front of him at any time. Being a Christian also means embracing God's grace and peace.

Can we estimate what that means? With a little bit of good fortune people who failed escape the line of fire. Their debts are paid. They also receive money again. But no decent human being wants to have anything to do with them. Who knows what one will go through with them in the future! That is what could happen to us. Still there is nothing good in us. Everything that we have to show about ourselves is from God. And even that we pull through the dirt. God cannot rely on us. How could God come to like us? But that happened! On account of Jesus he serves us with exceeding kindness. He is attached to us in love. Everything must serve for our best (Ro 8:28)! That will not change in the future because our Savior always stands up for us. For that reason God's friendly sentiment will never change. He, the master of the world and our life, has in mind now and in eternity only what is good for us.

4. Life—from God

Life and blessedness are given to us through Jesus' death: "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Ro 5:10). What the apostle here writes is an important thing! We will be "saved" and "blessed" by God's anger!

But how can it happen that God's anger inflames? How can death and damnation still overtake us? Is not the whole world saved? Is God not really satisfied? Indeed, that is true because of Jesus' sacrifice for all human beings—and that is complete. But one can gamble away salvation. The one who does not take Jesus and his sacrifice in faith, but refuses it with indifference, pride, and unbelief, tramples God's mercy under foot. At the end God's anger will strike him. Instead of finding eternal blessedness, he will be destroyed in hell. God will not let himself be mocked.

This truth scares us. Still, in spite of good intentions, we always fail. We despise God's mercy with not really believing him, with sin, and with a lack of love. Does God not have to push us away? Not at all. Saint Paul comforts us by referring to Jesus' sacrifice. If God was able to do something like that because of his love, we do not have to be afraid that he might be too weak to forgive us. This is even common among human beings. Parents forgive their children. Should God not be able to manage that on behalf of his children? Believing in our Savior we are and we remain saved. The Apostle Paul assures us: "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6).

Our blessedness will remain, brought by our God and Redeemer. Now our time will not be sufficient to describe this blessing of justification in its full splendor. But at least we want to listen to what the Apostle John writes: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away'" (Rev 21:14). Is that not the most magnificent blessing that could be acquired through Jesus' sacrifice?

Justification through faith gives innumerable blessings

The justification of the sinner which took place on Golgotha through Jesus Christ's sacrifice causes a whole new situation for us. For all people, without any exceptions, a plentiful blessing is therefore brought about.

THROUGH GOD WE SINNERS HAVE A BEAUTIFUL AND INDESTRUCTIBLE FUTURE:

- * PEACE,
- * JUSTICE,
- * RECONCILIATION, AND
- * ETERNAL LIFE.

II. The message of forgiveness and its blessings

This blessing of justification which God brought about 2000 years ago for all the world has to be spread among the people since this is God's will. This is why he lets the gospel of Jesus Christ be preached in the entire world. Saint Paul writes: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. . . . We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. . . . We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Co 5:18-21). That message of our justification brings along with it all the blessings which we just considered. Whoever accepts it in faith is saved. So the Apostle Paul calls to the warden of the prison in Philippi: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household"

(Ac 16:31). As the message of our justification comes to us human beings, its blessing develops in our life.

1. God's love—poured out

Saint Paul writes literally: "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Ro 5:5).¹ What does Saint Paul mean in this section with the words: "the love of God is shed abroad"? Two possibilities are taken into account: first is the love we have for God, and then the love that God has for us. Which is correct can only be shown by the context. The love we have for God arises as an answer to the love we experienced from God. But Saint Paul does not talk about that yet. Not until the next chapter will he deal with that. But at this point and in the following verses Saint Paul presents what God did and still does for us because of his great love. That is why "the love of God" can only mean that love which God himself has for us. So with "the love of God is shed abroad in our heart" Saint Paul says: the message of what God did for us out of love fills our heart. It becomes overloaded from what it hears. It cannot comprehend what love God gave us at a time when God was still our enemy. At this time God tore his Son from his heart. Hearing that, we can only be astonished, rejoice, and worship.

This pouring out of God's love happened and still happens through the Holy Ghost: "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Ro 5:5). What a marvel that is! Our hearts cannot realize God's love on their own. By nature we are enemies of God (Ro 8:7). If a human heart hears something about Jesus' death, it can only mock it (1 Co 1:18). God's Spirit has to make our hearts capable of understanding (1 Co 12:3). He does that when a scared sinner hears the magnificent message of God's grace: "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Ro 10:17).

Can we realize what a blessing that is? We have not been any different from the people around us. They do not want to know the Trinity. Either they only live for the next day and reject belief in a superior being at all. Or they build up their own gods. For them a sermon about Jesus is laughable and stupid. This is how our heart was by nature. For this reason we belonged to those who fell to God's anger. But then God's Spirit came and opened our heart for the gospel. Then we did not want to mock Christ's cross anymore. Now we can only be astonished at God's love and worship it. The message about Christ's cross is now the biggest treasure we have on earth.

But the marvel is even greater! God did not only send his Spirit through the preaching of justification to kindle faith. He came to stay with us. God's Spirit is poured into our hearts. He has chosen our poor, weak, and sinful hearts as his home. He did not come to punish our sins and infirmities. He came to forgive, to dress, and to hallow us. This is why he strongly attests in word and sacrament that God loved sinners like us in Jesus Christ and that he acquired salvation. From this we become completely sure of our salvation!

2. Faithful confidence—awakened

Wherever God's Spirit enters, nothing stays the same. By nature ungodliness, selfishness, and unbelief ruled in us. But now the Holy Ghost terrifies us through God's law. We recognize our sins. Filled with fear and despair we look for help. Jesus Christ shows it in the gospel. This is how he comforts us and awakens faithful confidence. Saint Paul describes now how the Holy Ghost deeply settles this emotion in our hearts. He allows an important point to become apparent: "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. . . . Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Ro 5:6,9).

First the Holy Ghost puts the greatness of God's love in view. For that he produces irrefutable proof. With the words "when we were yet without strength" Saint Paul recalls the former times. Before Christ redeemed us we were in a bad condition. We were at that time by no means heroes in the fear of God, in believing, or in charity. We were incapable: "dead in transgressions and sins" (Eph 2:1). "Hostility" determined our relationship to God (Ro 8:7). Then God sent his Son at the time he previously determined (Ga 4:4). He died for us—then still godless people.

In a small sentence Saint Paul makes plain how astonishing that was. Martin Luther translates: "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good matter someone might possibly dare to die" (Ro 5,7).² At best human beings risk their life for a "noble thing." Individuals again and again risk their life for their idea of a "righteous world." Doctors, for example, sometimes put their own lives in danger. But they do not do that to stand up for "righteous" people. They help because of a "good thing." They want to save human lives. That happens. But where does anybody sacrifice his life for someone else because the other one is "righteous"? That would happen only if it serves a "noble thing." But with God it was totally different! He risked his Son's life for us human beings. The reason was not a "noble thing." On the contrary! Good and righteous it would have been if he had punished us as godless, ungrateful people and rebels! The reason was not a "righteous human being." We were not righteous, but sinners. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro 5:8).

What kind of love God proved! But that is not only an event in the past. This sacrifice is still worthy today and will be forever in the future! This is why Saint Paul says: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro 5:8). When the Holy Ghost reveals this godly love to us we cannot hold back because of joy and amazement: "Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation" (Ro 5:11).

With that God's Spirit laid the foundation-stone upon which he can build, to help us out of troubles of conscience, being afraid of the future, death, and despair. Now he shows what results from the deliverance: "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. . . . Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Ro 5:6,9). This conclusion overcomes our doubt.

Even when our sins always come into our minds, one thing remains true. Jesus Christ also died for that. He has paid all debts. He gave us life. After his death we are no longer debtors, enemies, apostates, unjust ones—but justified, friends, even God's children. Should not he now more than ever show us his love? Out of his hands—can there come anything else but forgiveness, care, faith, and eternal blessing? If this is so, we do not have to be afraid of God's anger anymore. We can trust him as children trust their father. Then there is no longer any reason to be afraid of death and eternity. Eternal life in God's glory is our future. Saint Paul makes clear the effects of the Spirit in the following words: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Ro 8:15-17). So we boast in "hope of the glory of God" (Ro 5:2).

Where the Holy Ghost awakens confidence through the message of the gospel, life looks totally different. Instead of guilt, discord, fear, loneliness, senselessness, powerlessness, despair, and death there is forgiveness, justice, peace, confidence, community, life, and blessings. When Luther recognized in his pangs of conscience God's grace, he felt he had entered paradise after being in hell. As radically as that life had changed for him. What he went through everybody will experience who is brought to faith in the justification of the sinner.

3. Christian love—kindled

When the Holy Ghost shows our heart God's love and awakens confidence in Jesus Christ, then even more blessings come to us. Saint Paul shows how out of baptism grow the strength and motive for a new holy life. Through baptism we are taken into Christ's death and resurrection: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in

your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. . . . For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace” (Ro 6:3f,11f,14).

Just as Christians turned from being God’s enemies to being God’s children, the Holy Ghost also changed their hearts and lives. They cannot be amazed enough about God’s love for them. This love became their rescue. For this they take refuge in faith. They live by this. This has consequences for their lives. They who once fled from God and only lived for themselves and their wishes, turned towards God, now talk to him, thank him, and praise him. Our whole new life can be a thankoffering to God: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will” (Ro 12:1f).

This also has consequences for our association with people. Out of the richness of godly love from which we draw, our heart is able and willing to share. Christians start turning to their fellow creatures for Christ’s sake, to forgive offenses, to requite evil with good, even to love their enemies. Where we live out of God’s love, love, reconciliation, peace, community, and life come from us. Wherever they can, Christians serve their neighbors with the gifts which God entrusted to us. But most of all they share the message of the gospel with other people.

This is how the “harvest of righteousness” which is given to us for Jesus’ sake shows in life with God and human beings (2 Co 9:10). Are not these glorious blessings of our justification? We do not have to watch silently and inactively how God made us rich in his love. We are allowed to serve him and our neighbors with hearts, mouths, and hands out of sheer gratitude.

Justification through faith gives innumerable blessings

God allows the message of our justification through Jesus Christ to be delivered through the gospel in word and sacrament. Where this message readies our hearts, it works rich blessings.

OUR HEART RECEIVES NEW LIFE THROUGH THE GOSPEL THERE

- * GOD’S LOVE — IS Poured OUT.
- * FAITHFUL CONFIDENCE— IS AWAKENED.
- * CHRISTIAN LOVE — IS KINDLED.

What a wonderful thing! We realize this much better with a comparison. When doctors are able to help sick people, they come back to life with new strength! Modern medicine is able to do things we once only dreamed of. Is a heart weakening? A pacemaker is given. Is it totally used up? It is replaced by a new one. With that one can compare what happens to us under the gospel. The Bible itself speaks about getting a “new heart” through God’s Spirit (Ez 36:26), putting on the “new self” (Eph 4:23f), “rebirth” (Titus 3:5; 1 Pe 1:3,23).

With that comparison we find: the Holy Ghost puts human medicine to shame! Doctors insert pacemakers to help a tired heart to keep on working. For God our old sinful heart was “dead”; it could only be replaced by a new one. Doctors get their “new” hearts from healthy people who lost their life by a tragic accident. But the Holy Ghost could not fall back on a natural human heart. He had to renew completely our senses by his strength. What a blessing when a human being realizes the greatness of God’s love through the preaching of the gospel, so that he comes to faith and receives a totally new life.

III. The Christian cross and its blessings

Now we have learned from Saint Paul how the blessing of justification from the cross on Golgotha pours out into our heart and gives us a share in real life with God, which will one day find its completeness in eternal glory. But with that, the blessings of our justification before God are not exhausted. They are especially visible in the sorrows and needs of everyday life. Something

astonishing happens under the blessing of our gracious justification. Even troubles become praiseworthy: “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us” (Ro 5:3-5).

People boast about their achievements, their success and their luck. Nevertheless, this boasting has no place before God. What people boast of they either received from God (1 Co 4:7) or is in truth to their shame (Phil 3:18f) because they live in opposition to God. Christians know they boast of something else: “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’” (1 Co 1:27-31). We cannot praise our Savior enough for his love and grace and our heavenly home.

This we praise. But to whom would it come to mind to praise the misery that affects him? However, the Holy Ghost shows us that for redeemed sinners even troubles become a reason for praise.

1. Faith—keeping

“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us” (Ro 5:3ff). With these words the Holy Ghost discloses an error. We think misery takes away courage and leads to despair. But it is different. Whereas the Holy Ghost kindles faith through the forgiveness of sins, distress helps it to get ahead.

We have seen that faith has a glorious certainty: God has given up his anger; sin is eliminated; the debts are paid. There is peace. God is the dear father of his children. No Christian can have any doubt about that, because God raised our Savior from the dead on the third day. From this faith draws its confidence. But it always happens that misery, grief, fear, and pain oppress us. We doubt God’s love, care, and fidelity. How come? The cause is our heart. The human heart is “deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jr 17:9). Its old way is still in Christians. It does not want to be under God’s commandments. It thinks it has enough strength to face life. This old heart always gains ground. But at the same time our faith becomes weaker. In this way we place ourselves in grave danger.

Now God comes to our assistance. With his Word he calls us to return. He shows us our sin. Often he underlines this call to repentance with external misery. Frightened by this, a Christian realizes his helplessness. He feels that he cannot escape God’s arm. He considers his life and finds refuge under Christ’s cross. “Hardship helps to understand the message,” Luther translates a sentence of Isaiah (Is 28:19). So in the middle of misery a Christian’s faith is not destroyed but tested and purified. When he has newly found the Savior, he knows that his misery will have an end. Because: “in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Ro 8:28). Above all, the hope of eternal blessedness appears more and more attractive and interesting in front of the believer’s eyes. So happens what Saint Peter places in view for our comfort: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Pe 1:6f, cp. Ps 66:10-12; Is 48:10).

Do we realize how God helps us especially through misery? We learn from God’s Word and experience it in our life: a Christian’s misery does not destroy faith but purifies and strengthens it. Is that not also a wonderful blessing of our justification?

2. Fights—enduring

“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us” (Ro 5:3ff; cp. Jas 1:2f). In this way Christians prove good in life: They fight the “good fight of faith” (1 Ti 6:12) and overcome what wants to bring them down.

First of all this applies in hardships. We can make this clear with sacred history: A woman found Jesus and asked him for help (Mt 15:21ff). Her daughter was tortured by the devil. How severe it must have been for her that Jesus did not even seem to hear her! Indeed, he roughly rebuffs her. He would be there only for the Israelites. But she was by nature a heathen. One would not take the bread away from the children to give it to the dogs.

How it must have been in the woman’s heart! She had thought this Jesus would be the promised Messiah. He would not reject “all who are weary and burdened” (Mt 11:28). But Jesus only seemed to increase her misery. Her poor daughter was at home. Here she was turned away. Was her faith a mistake? No, she did not know anyone else who could help her. She had to keep on asking Jesus. Eventually he would listen. The woman was not mistaken. At the end Jesus praised her steady faith (Mt 15:28).

Why then did Jesus hesitate so long with his help? He tested her faith in order that the woman would hold onto him even more firmly and with greater determination. In the end he helped her just the way she had believed he would. How happy the woman must have been. Above all she learned one thing: it pays to pray continuously (cp. Lk 18:1ff). Even Jesus does not help instantly. He never rejects faithful prayers. So the woman received double help. Her daughter was healthy and her faith came away strengthened from this hardship.

That is also how we can learn patience under burdens. When doubt comes about whether our faith is justified, we look at the cross! That is what Jesus Christ took on for us. Should we ever think he would leave us in trouble? Because of our justification we remain confident even in hardships.

But misery and burdens strengthen us in following Christ also. Saint Peter writes: “He who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God” (1 Pe 4:1f). While Christians in misery give up their own plans, despair of their own power and while they have to adjust to God only, they let themselves be bound firmly to God. They learn that they cannot presume a supposed “right” from God. As sinners they only live by grace. Sheltered in grace they find the strength and will to accept in faith even the dark courses on which they are led by their Lord.

Saint Paul is a good example of that. Three times he had prayed to God with all his heart that he would take the burden off him. He was beaten with fists by the devil’s angel. But this prayer was not fulfilled the way he hoped it would be. Instead, he heard: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Co 12:9). There Saint Paul learned: “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” What a great work he was able to do in this way as a missionary to the gentiles!

So also for us, in the end affliction becomes a blessing. And we become useful tools of God through which he can help others in physical and spiritual misery. In the Epistle to the Hebrews it says: “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (He 12:11).

Justification through faith gives innumerable blessings

The justification of sinners through faith is such a sublime possession that even misery and distress become a blessing for a Christian.

TRUSTING IN JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE THE CHRISTIAN’S AFFLICTIONS BECOME A BLESSING.

THROUGH THIS A CHRISTIAN LEARNS:

* FAITH — KEEPING AND

* FIGHTS— ENDURING.

* * *

We have seen what a blessing lies in the sinner's justification by grace. In our justification we received everything we needed: salvation and certainty of salvation. We agree with Stöckhardt when he writes:

"We Christians often think too little of our present possession. We regard our justification through Christ as only the first step on the way to salvation, the final goal lying far distant: . . . But that is not the case. The greatest and most important has already happened. . . . We are reconciled to God through Christ's death, . . . our account with God has been settled, our eternal lot is decided. . . . The essential thing is that God is for us. The other is less essential, whether we joy in our God here amid the tribulations of this time or there in the blessed life of glorification. But the latter will follow since the essential is determined. . . . However, the right way to this goal is not to look forward to the future but with mind and thoughts to become absorbed in the present grace, in the grace of justification. The more firmly we become rooted in this, the closer we are to heaven" (Römerbrief, p. 232).

End Notes

1 JH ajgavph tou~ qeou~ ejkkevcutai ejn tai~i kardivaii hJmw~n dia; pnevmatoi aJgivou tou~ doqevntoi hJmi~n.

2"Nun stirbt kaum jemand um eines Gerechten willen; um des Guten willen wagt er vielleicht sein Leben."—Movlii ga;r uJpe;r dikaivou tii ajpoqanei~tai uJpe;r ga;r tou~ ajgaqou~ tavca tii kai; tolma~/ ajpoqanei~n.

JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH □ IS THE DOCTRINE □ BY WHICH THE CHURCH EITHER STANDS OR FALLS

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Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, esteemed members of the Confessional Ev. Lutheran Conference,

Two things make this meeting a special occasion. First of all, as Christian representatives from across the globe we are privileged to assemble in one place during the holy Easter season to celebrate Christ's resurrection and our life in Christ (Romans 6: 4). But secondly and above all, we came to listen to God's Word concerning the doctrine of the Christian faith that is based on the Easter message—the news that we sinners are justified freely by God's grace alone through faith in Christ Jesus.

Because the doctrine of justification stands at the center of Christian life, Lutheran confessors insist that this teaching be clearly taught for one reason only. The message of justification is nothing else than the holy gospel by which the Christian church throughout the world lives. The church does not live by being moral, by the knowledge and observance of God's law. Nor does the church live by religion, by lofty experiences of the divine and an awareness of the mysteries of God. The church does not live by the results of its preaching—by a pious life or by doing right according to God's law, as important as these are for the life of faith.

The church lives solely by the forgiveness of sins. And that faith rests squarely on the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said of the Scriptures, "These are the Scriptures that testify of me" (John 5:39). Justification by faith in Christ alone is the special insight that Martin Luther by God's grace brought to the church after years of confusion about the meaning of the righteousness of

God. It is our intention in this final essay to highlight the importance of this teaching for the life of the church and our mission in the world.

A. The standing church

But if the message of justification is so simple and so clear, where does the problem lie? Why has the Christian church throughout the centuries struggled to identify the central truth to which it owes its existence? More serious still, what happens to the church when the life-giving work of Christ is covered over, neglected, even abolished by the church itself? Why does the Lutheran Confession at Augsburg make the point that justification is “the main doctrine of Christianity [which] especially serves to bring a clear, correct understanding of the entire Scripture and alone points the way to the unspeakable treasure and true knowledge of Christ and alone opens the door to the entire Bible” (CA Apology, IV, 2)? Simply put, what do Lutheran confessors mean when they call justification by faith the article by which the church either stands or falls (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*)?

1. Built on a rock

To understand what is meant by the standing or falling church, Scripture leads us to think of the church as built on a rock. The Psalmist says, “The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge” (Psalm 18:2). In his great confession the Apostle Peter identifies the rock as Christ Jesus, the LORD. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Peter stated in childlike faith. And Jesus commended Peter that by God’s revelation he had blessedly come to recognize the rock (*pevtra*) on which the church rests (Matthew 16:18). Already before Peter in Old Testament times, the church rested on the Christ, present in the Promise. St. Paul reminds the Jews how their forefathers in the wilderness “all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4).

One of the most striking modern paintings of the Christian church is the picture of the Rock of Ages. In this painting the artist portrays a woman in a stormy sea, clinging with both arms to a rock which is the shape of a cross. There on the Rock of Ages, the woman, representing the believer or the church, finds refuge from the waves that are about to pull her down to a sure death. There on the Rock of Ages she also finds safety and security from the storm. For that Rock is Christ.

But sad to say, the Rock of Ages which provides salvation can also cause faith to shipwreck. St. Paul warned his fellow Jews not to be offended at Jesus by citing an old prophetic word about the church, “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame” (Romans 9:33; also 1 Peter 2:8). The prophet Simeon in the Temple likewise understood the place of Jesus in the life of the church. As he cradled the baby Jesus in his arms, he prophesied, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against” (Luke 2:34). Why did Simeon say “the falling and rising of many in Israel,” that is, the falling and rising of many in the church? And what did he mean by the “sign to be spoken against”?

Simeon knew his Bible. It was not a set of principles that some itinerant philosopher passes by us to flatter our intellect, to excite our emotions, or to strengthen our will. The Holy Scriptures put us face to face with God, under the veil of God’s inspired words, so that we might know that God’s truth is not divorced from the person of God, from that tiny baby whom Simeon held in his arms. As a Jew, Simeon knew that his people were sign-seekers. They had been trained by miracles, ceremonies, and prophecies to look for signs of the Messiah. But when the Messiah came, many continued to look only for the signs that Moses and the prophets had told them about. In disbelief, they overlooked the fact that these signs were fulfilled in the person of Jesus, the baby in Simeon’s arms.

What Simeon foresaw in the baby happened. When Jesus began his public ministry in Galilee, he identified his work in personal terms. After performing a miraculous sign by feeding over 5000

people with a few barley loaves and two small fish, he informed the people that he was that Bread of Life come down from heaven. This glorious news won some to faith. But it caused others, even some of his intimate followers, to fall from faith. Old Simeon had foreseen things rightly. And St. John records that “from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” (John 6:66). This is hardly an inspiring mission text for building the church. Or is it?

2. Faith shipwrecked

What happened? What caused faith to shipwreck after the miracle? We can understand that Jesus’ own playmates and townspeople rejected him. Jesus himself explained that a prophet is not accepted in his own country. But to be deserted by one’s own disciples—why? They had been Jesus’ followers, people who clung to him, who had studied with him, and believed his Word. What suddenly turned them off so that they quit school on this famous Rabbi?

Simply stated, they fell into a fatal error. They never really got over believing Jesus to be a new Moses. In fact, they had followed Jesus just because they thought he was another Moses. Like Moses, Jesus brought spiritual precepts in legal form and explained them with reference to the Almighty God. Like Moses, he did great miracles and signs to show them his sayings were true. But the breaking point came when Jesus explained the miracle of the loaves and fishes. They still followed Jesus when he claimed to be a divine messenger, “I am the bread of life come down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever.” But when Jesus flatly stated: “This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”—that was too much for them to stomach. Why?

They wanted a master who merely taught them divine truths which they could put into practice. But when Jesus told them that he was the truth, that the truth of God was anchored in this flesh-and-blood person standing before them, they were perplexed. At the words of Jesus, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:53), they left. Little did they realize that the church was built on the flesh and blood of Jesus, that is, on the incarnate Son of God who became fully human to suffer and die for the sins of the world and rose again for our justification (Romans 4:25). Without this faith the church would fail.

3. The foundation must stand

It was given to Martin Luther to bring the truth of justification by faith in Christ back to the church with a clarity that had been lost for hundreds of years. Certainly the church in Luther’s day kept remnants of the Good News of justification. In its liturgy it still proclaimed the gospel message when it sang: “Oh, King of majesty tremendous, Who does free salvation send us.” And it continued to announce forgiveness to sinners by absolving them “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” This Word kept the church alive.

But the church’s penitential practice obscured the gospel and threw people back on their own efforts. The gospel turned into a law when the priest demanded that we complete our forgiveness by doing penitential works. The believer was thrown back upon himself (*incurvatus in se*). No longer is it the message of justification by faith in Christ alone. Free salvation is no longer free when we need to add our righteous works to the righteous work of Christ. The church’s teaching fell into confusion. And confusion is Satan’s work to undermine the foundation of the church, the life-saving work of Christ.

In his Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness (LW 31: 297ff), Luther aimed to undo this confusion. He drew a line that the church had not clearly drawn when it confessed in the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.” To clarify what forgiveness really means, Luther pointed out that there are two kinds of righteousness in Christian life that need to be distinguished with utmost care. The first is Christ’s righteousness. This is a righteousness that is not part of us. It is the righteousness that lies outside of us (*extra nos*) and comes to us from the outside in, not from the inside out.

Luther calls this righteousness an alien or foreign righteousness because it is not ours by nature but belongs to another. It is the righteousness that Jesus won for all mankind by his suffering and death on the cross. In an unforgettable passage the Reformer explains what it is: "This righteousness, then, is given to people in baptism and whenever they are truly repentant. Therefore a person can with confidence boast in Christ and say: 'Mine are Christ's living, doing, and speaking, his suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as he did.'" And then using Scripture's bridal imagery, the heart of the doctrine of Christ and faith in the (mystical) union of Christ and the church, he continues: "Just as a bridegroom possesses all that is his bride's and she all that is his—for the two have all things in common because they are one flesh [Gen. 2:24]—so Christ and the church are one spirit [Eph. 5:29-32]" (LW 31:297).

In the Smalcald Articles, Luther describes this righteousness as the foundation of our faith, without which the church will fall. With firm and unyielding conviction, he states: "Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised. . . . On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world" (SA II, I, 5). What this rock-solid testimony is Luther puts in Scripture's own words:

The first and chief article is this, that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, "was put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25). He alone is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). "God laid on him the iniquities of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Moreover, "all have sinned," and "they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, by his blood" (Romans 3:23-25).

But there is a second righteousness, as Brother Martin had indicated—equally important because what Christ did he did not for himself but for you and me. The other is the righteousness that we possess by faith. Luther labels the second a proper righteousness, that is, a righteousness that properly becomes our own by faith. This righteousness is based on Christ's work, that primary righteousness, and it does not come to us by anything we have done or can do, but by faith alone. This faith activates our Christian life. "The second kind of righteousness is our proper righteousness," Luther explains carefully, "not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness. This is the manner of life spent profitably in good works. . . . This righteousness consists in love to one's neighbor, and . . . in meekness and fear toward God" (LW 31:299).

If teaching justification in this way seemed to deaden and deactivate the church because it is the work of a foreigner, the dear Doctor objects. Luther was of the firm conviction that justifying faith works. Not faith and works, as if the two could be disjoined. Such an expression would be as foolish as saying about a glowing lamp, "Light and shines"—which doesn't make sense! No, light shines, unless it has gone out. And faith works, unless it is dead (James 2:26).

The Apostle Paul was the teacher here also. The same apostle who identified primary righteousness by saying that we are "justified by faith apart from" our activities also described our proper righteousness by writing that the faith which makes us alive also works in our life. He said as much when he instructed the Galatians, "The only thing that counts is faith which works by love" (Galatians 5:6). And Paul reminded believers of the fact that personally, as a Christian, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." What does this mean? It means that "the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 3:20). In this way faith in Christ does not make us idle or unconcerned but activates our life.

In the Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, Luther spells out how the church lives by the preaching of justification. He describes the dynamic of faith within the church in terms that every instruction class needs to learn: "Faith is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God, John 1 [12,13]. It kills the Old Adam and makes us altogether different people, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works

incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them” (LW 35:370).

In this clear and colorful way Luther sharply distinguished between what we do before God and what Christ has done for us, between Christ’s righteousness and our righteousness. His own experience in the church taught Luther how foundational that distinction is for the life of the church. In simple biblical terms Luther spelled out the difference between Christ’s work and our works, between faith in Christ and our life of faith. In doctrinal terms, he clearly distinguished between justification and sanctification, between the gospel and the law.

With Luther we are indebted to the Apostle Paul for clarifying the gospel in his instruction manual to the Romans by concluding: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith (alone) apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:28). All other teaching confuses the hearers and leads to a law-bound gospel. And that is “another gospel,” which must be condemned (Galatians 1:8).

B. The falling church

Are we able to keep that clarity today in our insensitive world? Do the temptations for success in the church drive us to rely on other strategies than preaching, teaching, and confessing the two kinds of righteousness as the Bible carries them out? Are we still convinced on the basis of God’s Word that the preaching of Christ and the cross and repentance and faith work? Is the precious teaching of justification by faith alone still central to our work and mission as a Christian church? In short, do we believe that the doctrine of justification is the article of faith whereby the church stands or falls?

1. Reworking the foundation

Walter Altmann in his book, *Luther and Liberation: a Latin-American Perspective*, suggests the time has come in our history to reassess the central teaching Luther won from the Scripture. According to Professor Altmann of the Escola Superior de Teologia in Sao Leopoldo, Brazil, Luther’s words and ideas fit his times and circumstances. But our cultural contexts in the Western world today demand that we modify the doctrine of justification. “Much of Luther’s liberating and revolutionary impact has been lost” today because of its social ineptness, Altmann maintains. It just does not work. What once was a liberating theology in a personal and churchly sense needs to be made applicable on the grander scale of social and political life (Altmann, viii-ix).

The problem, as Altmann sees it, is a matter of emphasis. For Luther justification involved personal guilt and a passive reception of the gift of Christ’s righteousness. Freed by faith, Luther saw the individual Christian as an instrument of love in the world. But the question arises “whether Luther’s emphasis on passivity [that is, being inactive] in justification would also lead to ethical passivity and, therefore, to the denial of the task of liberation” (ibid., 38). In simple terms, would the justified sinner, freed by Christ, become insensitive to and inactive in the quest for social justice? “When we emphasize the passivity in justification we may—without wanting to, perhaps—be justifying a comfortable ethic,” Altmann maintains, and then explains himself, “The passivity of Luther’s experience of justification is used to justify not participating in the task of liberation” (ibid.).

For Altmann the position of Luther during the Peasants’ War is a case in point. For cause Luther “rejected the attempt of the peasants to use the Bible to legitimate their political and social demands.” “He was afraid,” Altmann says, “that the hard won victory over [Catholic] religious control of political power would be reversed, and that the gospel, distorted into law, would be lost” (ibid., 39). Therefore despite the peasants’ social grievances, Luther sided with the princes over against the peasants for the sake of political order.

But things are different now. “Today,” Altmann indicates, “it is important to emphasize that political will is exercised from the bottom up. The people, specifically the oppressed, are the new historical subjects who seek transformation of current situations and systems of social justice” (Altmann, 10). Christian freedom now has a different ring, a decidedly social and political ring to

it. "Today, our emphasis must be different," Altmann affirms and gives the reason why. "It is important that life under grace, a life of compassion, not be understood as an individualistic life, a mere inner peace, but rather a communitary, collective life that takes concrete form in our societies" (ibid., 39).

What then is to be done today? We must see to it, the professor says, "that the realm of God must become visible by means of signs that are made visible by those who follow Jesus" (ibid., 39; emphasis mine). The way to do so is to modify the doctrine of justification by adapting the biblical terminology to our times. He suggests we get away from the juridical words used to preach justification and use words more compatible to life in the 20th century.

Drawing on Paul Tillich, Altmann asks us to substitute the word acceptance as a more appropriate term than justification for the problems of our time, namely, social liberation. In a context of domination and dependence, the term acceptance means more in the lives of those who long for liberation. And "the term 'liberation' is particularly well-suited to express the 'wholeness' of salvation and its character as a process as well as its personal and its historical dimensions. 'Liberation,'" the critic emphasizes, "also communicates the biblical dialectic of being free from (a slavery) and free for (a service), weaving God's gratuitous action together with our human ethical commitment" (ibid., 41). If this reader understands correctly, God's work and our works are woven into one expression by this process.

2. Christian freedom

The critical words of Altmann make us pause to reflect on what he says, in the light of the two kinds of righteousness of which Scripture speaks. To get our bearings we need to throw his suggested modern modification of justification against the rock. Luther once admitted when there was a hard nut to crack, he threw it against the rock, which is Christ.

There is no question that Christians are to be lights in this world by the way they live and act and face problems in society. Jesus indicates that Christian activity is a visible sign to an unbeliever of our Christian faith. He admonished his followers to "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Our sanctified life of faith shows in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22f). But this fruit is not the source or foundation of our faith. The source does not lie in weaving together our work and Christ's work into an outward corporate community. Nor are the visible works of Christians the outward sign on which the church rests.

The sign by which the church is built and on which it stands is Christ, who said of himself distinctly and exclusively, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). All outward visible signs are vanity without faith in Christ Jesus, the LORD, no matter how good they seem. The Pharisees tried this route. No, the infallible visible sign of the church is the flesh-and-blood Jesus who justifies us freely by his grace. Plugged into this light, faith shines. For the light is Christ, who said clearly and unmistakably concerning himself, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5).

Being sensitive to the social needs of others is indeed the fruit of Christian faith. Christian love and concern for the neighbor and all mankind follows Christian faith, as surely as the second kind of righteousness is born of the first and primary. In his pamphlet, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520)—usually the first of Luther's works to be translated when put into a new language—Luther clarifies what makes a Christian tick in very simple words: "A Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love" (LW 31:371).

This simple summary statement of Christian life rightly and clearly distinguishes the heavenly source of Christian liberation from its earthly results in the everyday activities of love. At its source the Christian preaching of justification is not individualistic, even though Christ died "for you and for me" personally. Christ's work of justification of the sinner has a timeless global dimension.

The Holy Scriptures indicate that the work of Christ is unlimited and embraces all people in every society and culture on earth, no matter what their circumstances in life might be. He is the Savior from sin, which has enslaved all peoples, nations, and tribes and deprived them of life with God. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The marvel is that this righteousness came to all people by the work of One man, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:15-19). The truth of the matter is, as Paul told the Corinthians, that "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ," and then explains that this means, "not counting men's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

3. More than acceptance

Therefore, the appropriate name for justification, as the Scripture testifies, is more than acceptance on God's part—or on ours. Acceptance overlooks the One who stands between the sinner and the righteous God, Jesus Christ. To suggest that justification in our historical circumstances be modified by using the term acceptance in its stead skews the picture of what is really and truly happening between God and the world. To say that "God accepts" has a different ring to it than to say "God justifies." It conceals the fact that justification is a judicial act on God's part.

Here is the situation from Adam's time on. Sinners of every nation stand before the law court of God's justice, guilty as charged. We are sentenced to death. But God commutes our sentence and declares us free for the sake of the Right One who took our sin and the sentence of death on himself. This is the Good News. The holy God and righteous judge accepts the Son's substitution. He raises the Vicar from death on Easter morning. By faith in the Substitute, we sinners walk free and are raised to a new life with him. It is a gift. By God's Spirit in and through the great cleansing of baptism, believers are freed from captivity to sin and become slaves to Christ's righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). The believers are freed to serve and to offer their life as a living sacrifice in thanks to God and in love to others (Romans 12). Those who walk away from Christ in unbelief continue to live in bondage to the law and under the sentence of eternal death.

In the light of Christ's work, Altmann's suggestion that we substitute the word acceptance for justification is more than a modern modification. It is a substantial change. Acceptance alone easily passes over the great cost that it took for our justification. It cost God's own Son his life. The sacrificial death of God's Son on the cross cannot be obscured in the words which we use. Surely, God accepts us as pure and holy for the sake of Christ's righteousness. But the work of Christ must remain central to our preaching and mission.

Wilhelm Maurer points out that Luther's rediscovery of the gospel already countered a medieval emphasis on acceptance. He writes: "Luther viewed divine forgiveness as the action on which the acceptance or nonacceptance of the sinner depended. . . . The decisive thing is not the measure of human merit but a declaration of acquittal that rests on Christ's righteousness. Where Luther saw himself differing from the acceptance theory of late medieval authorities was in his conviction that God forgives sinners out of a free and gracious attitude. Only when acceptance is understood in its biblical context can the concept be used as an expression of the doctrine of justification" (Maurer, 337).

Luther explains his insight in his own words: "It is the sweetest righteousness of God the Father that he does not save imaginary but real sinners, sustaining us in spite of our sins and accepting our works and our lives, which are all worthy of rejection. . . . When therefore he pardons, he neither accepts nor does not accept, but he pardons" (LW 31:63,64). This "entirely gracious acceptance on the part of God" Luther calls imputation of the righteousness of faith (LW 25:36). Following St. Paul's lead, he explains God's gracious forgiveness with the negative expression, as not reckoning our sins against us, and with a positive expression, as reckoning the righteousness of Christ to us. Like Abraham, we become righteous through the imputation of this faith apart from our cooperation and worthiness (Romans 4).

For this reason we easily confuse people by turning justification into mere acceptance. It confuses Christ's work with ours. More seriously, it can turn Christ's righteousness into a new law. In a social-oriented gospel Jesus Christ becomes a new Moses. Where such is the case, the church no longer lives by the forgiveness of sins alone. It lives by its work and impact on society. The flesh-and-blood Jesus fades into the background and is no longer central to the church's faith and life.

When faith loses hold of Christ, the solid Rock, the church falls. It sinks into the shifting sands of human commitments to earthly justice. We lose the sure confidence in Christ and with him the faith that works as salt in society. In trying to remake the world, we depart from the center of Christian faith, the holy gospel. In unbelief, we set aside our justification before God through faith in Christ Jesus, our LORD. And in the process we sidestep the revolutionary power of the gospel, which is able to change hearts and minds (Romans 1:16).

An afterword

Before we close this brief excursion into the doctrine of justification, allow one last comment by the person who by God's grace has taught us the central importance of the gospel in the life of the church and its mission. Speaking on the article of justification by faith in Christ alone, Martin Luther writes in prayerlike contemplation:

This doctrine is the head and cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God. And without it the church of God cannot exist one hour. . . . For no one who does not hold this article—or, to use Paul's expression, this "sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1)—is able to teach correctly in the church or successfully resist the adversary. . . . This is the heel of the Seed that opposes the old serpent and crushes its head. That is why Satan, in turn, cannot but persecute it (WA 33:82).

To this we say, Amen!—as we pray, "Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word" because the gospel of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone is the rock on which the church in every age stands! There is a picture of the Rock of Ages even more striking than the first. In this picture the artist portrays the woman clinging to the Rock with one arm, while the other is reaching out to draw someone else to the Rock. This is our God-given privilege and mission.

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