

The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference



The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century

Article II.

Justification

TO THE READER

On April 23-25, 1996, the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) met in Quebradillas, Puerto Rico, for its second triennial meeting. Seven essays focussed the conference's attention on the scriptural doctrine of justification.

Rev. Mark Tuffin (Australia) presented the essay, *Justification Is by Grace*; Rev. Oto Rodriguez (Mexico) presented *Justification is Complete*; Rev. Takeshi Nidaira (Japan) *Justification Is for All*; Rev. Daison Mabedi (Malawi) *Justification Is Received through Faith*; Rev. Adolph Harstad *Justification through Faith Produces Sanctification*; Rev. Martin Hoffmann, (Germany) *Justification through Faith Gives Innumerable Blessings*; Rev. Arnold Koelpin *Justification by Grace through Faith is the Doctrine by which the Church either Stands or Falls*.

The CELC constitution stipulates that its five-man Commission on Theology "shall prepare a position paper on the theological topic treated at the last convention." The result of the Commission's labor is before you, produced under the co-chairmanship of Rev. Wilhelm Petersen (ELS) and Rev. Lyle Lange (WELS), with the able assistance of Rev. Egil Edvardsen (Norway), Rev. Salimo Hachibamba (Zambia) and Rev. Gottfried Herrmann (Germany).

We commend to you their booklet, *Justification*, which is Article II in the series, *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century*.

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CELC president

THE ETERNAL WORD: A LUTHERAN CONFESSION FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

ARTICLE II

JUSTIFICATION

I. JUSTIFICATION IS BY GRACE

All people, by nature, are sinners who deserve nothing but the anger and condemnation of God.

Adam and Eve were created in the image of God.

When God created the first man and woman he said: “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). In contrast to all other creatures man and woman were created in the image of God. Adam and Eve had a likeness with God which no other creatures had. This image of God consisted in a perfect knowledge of God (Colossians 3:10) and in a perfect righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24; Ecclesiastes 7:29). All thoughts of man, all his feelings and works reflected the mind of God. When God had finished his creation in making the crown of his work, the human being, he looked at everything which he had done and said that it was “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

Adam and Eve knew God as their loving Creator. They lived in a blessed harmony with him. There was nothing that separated them from God, no fear, uncertainty or bad feelings. They delighted to be in the presence of God. Adam and Eve also had a perfect knowledge of the will of God. Their will corresponded completely with God’s will (holiness), and they were able to carry out his will (righteousness). Their own thoughts, words, and deeds were in conformity with the will of God.

That the will of man was not opposed to the will of God can clearly be seen also from the fact that man was entrusted with the dominion over all the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). Man’s will was to please God, and whatever man planned and did was good in the eyes of God. Man didn’t want to destroy anything of God’s creation. He exercised his dominion over the earth in harmony with the plans of God.

Adam and Eve lost the image of God by falling into sin.

The immediate result of man’s fall into sin, described in Genesis 3:6-13, was the loss of the image of God. Having fallen into sin, man was no longer holy. His will did not correspond to God’s will. The blessed relationship and harmony with God was broken and replaced by a bitter slavery under the devil (1 John 3:8). Safety was replaced by uncertainty

and fear of God (Genesis 3:8-10). Adam distrusted God, lied to him, and tried to blame God for his own sin (v. 12). Man had become an enemy of God (Romans 8:7), and was now spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1).

Since the fall into sin, all men are born in sin.

The children of Adam and Eve were not born in the image of God, but Adam had a son “in his own likeness, in his own image” (Genesis 5:1-3). Seth inherited the image of his sinful parents. Thus the fall of Adam didn’t have consequences for himself only, but for all humanity. His fall brought distress and misery on all his descendants. Christ says: “Flesh gives birth to flesh” (John 3:6). “There is no one who does not sin” (1 Kings 8:46). (See also Psalm 14:2-3; Psalm 143:2; Galatians 3:22). This means that every human being on earth must confess together with David, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). No matter how “religious” human beings are, no matter how seriously they try to live right and serve God, they are doomed to fail because they are sinful.

This sin, called original sin, consists in an inherited guilt and an inherited corruption.

The inherited guilt is the condemnation all deserve because of Adam’s sin. When Paul writes that “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men” and that “through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners” (Romans 5:18-19), he clearly expresses the fact that the guilt of Adam is imputed to all his descendants. This is proved from the fact that because of Adam’s fall all men must die (Romans 5:15; 1 Corinthians 15:22). Guilt entails punishment, and in this instance the punishment is death. “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). That the guilt of Adam’s sin is charged to us, is also proved by the fact that the punishment which Adam and Eve had to suffer because of their transgression (Genesis 3:16-19), is suffered by all men and women to this day.

The inherited corruption is that people lack the righteousness that God demands and have a lust for sin. In the same way as children inherit certain characteristics from their parents, and sometimes bodily weakness and illness, all men have inherited a spiritual corruption. By nature man is incapable of loving God and fulfilling his demand for righteousness. There is nothing good in him (Romans 7:18). Man is corrupted by his deceitful desires (Ephesians 4:22). The heart of man is inclined to evil, not to good (Genesis 8:21). Man covets, because by nature he is covetous (Colossians 3:5). He sins, because by nature he is sinful. The corruption is so deep that even “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).

The Lutheran Confessions state:

It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all men are

full of evil lust and inclinations from their mother's wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit (AC II:1-2).

Original sin is an inexpressible impairment and such a corruption of human nature that nothing pure nor good has remained in itself and in all its internal and external powers, but that it is altogether corrupted, so that through original sin man is in God's sight spiritually lifeless and with all his powers dead indeed to that which is good (FC SD 1:60).

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 (Psalm 51:5, Romans 5:12ff, Exodus 33:20, Genesis 3:6ff) (SA III, I:3).

Concupiscence is not merely a corruption of the physical constitution, but the evil inclination of man's higher capacities to carnal things (Ap II:25).

The consequences of original sin:

Because of original sin all people are by nature objects of God's anger.

Original sin is truly *sin*. It does not excuse sinners. Paul emphasizes that we are "by nature objects of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). It means that we stood condemned by God even before we were able to perform a single sin in thought, word, or deed. Our nature is such that it condemns us. By nature we are not what we should be according to the will of God, since we cannot produce a true fear of God and a true love for him. Therefore the wrath of God rests on all men.

Because of original sin, all people are born with the idea that they can save themselves (*opinio legis*).

Even after the fall into sin man still has a knowledge of the law (Romans 1:32). The law is written in the hearts of men (Romans 2:14-15). The Lutheran Confessions state, "Human reason naturally understands the Law (since it has the same judgment written in the mind)" (Ap IV:7). In the same way natural man has a guilty conscience because of the transgressions of this divine law. The heathen "know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death" (Romans 1:32). Therefore they try to reconcile themselves with God by means of good works and moral efforts. They think they can win the good will of God by keeping the law. "This legalistic opinion [*opinio legis*] clings by nature to the minds of men, and it cannot be driven out unless we are divinely taught" (Ap IV:265).

Because of original sin, all people are born spiritually blind, viewing the gospel as foolishness.

Even if man after the fall has a certain knowledge about earthly matters, he is completely unable to understand spiritual things. By nature man considers the gospel as foolishness. By nature man “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). Therefore Scripture describes the intellect of natural man as “darkness” (Ephesians 5:8; Isaiah 9:2). The wisdom of God (*sophia theou*) which is the gospel of Christ, crucified for the sins of the world, is hidden from and unknown to natural man (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

Because of original sin, all people are born spiritually dead, unable to believe in God or do anything to save themselves.

Scripture describes natural man as spiritually dead (*nekros*). “You were dead in your transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1; cf. also Colossians 2:13; Romans 6:13). After the fall man is neither half-dead nor only apparently dead, but completely without any spiritual life. He has no possibility of attaining the grace of God by his own power, because such power does not exist in him. In the same way as Lazarus, who could be raised to life only through the all-powerful word of Christ, natural man is just as dead, spiritually speaking, and can be raised to spiritual life only through the almighty Word of God.

Because of original sin, all people are enemies of God and hostile to his will.

After the fall, natural man is in opposition to God’s law. He isn’t indifferent or neutral to God’s law, but he has a hostile attitude toward it. “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God” (Romans 8:7-8). Because of sin man has a guilty conscience and cannot do otherwise than be afraid of God and consider him as his enemy. “He wished there were no God” (Luther, as quoted in Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* Vol. I: p. 545).

Because of original sin, the hearts of all people are desperately wicked.

Jeremiah wrote, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Jesus said, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander” (Matthew 15:19).

Scripture teaches that the natural state of all people is “separate from Christ, ... without hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

Left to himself the sinner is unable to achieve eternal life. This fills him with hopelessness and despair. Although man was created by God and has a certain knowledge of God’s existence (Romans 1:19ff), he neither can nor will serve God. He “lives his life on earth as a practical atheist” (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p. 521). Thus the works of natural man and all his offerings are of no use. Scripture describes the worship of the heathen in this way: “The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God” (1 Corinthians 10:20).

The Confessions state:

Man is so corrupted that in divine things, concerning our conversion and salvation, he is by nature blind and does not and cannot understand the Word of God when it is preached, but considers it foolishness; nor does he of himself approach God, but he is and remains an enemy of God until by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word which is preached and heard, purely out of grace and without any cooperation on his part, he is converted (FC SD II:5).

God, by grace, for Christ's sake, has justified the world.

Grace is God's unmerited love in Christ.

Grace is a personal attribute or quality in God, which manifests itself in his attitude toward man. Grace is *favor Dei propter Christum* – the good will of God toward men, for Christ's sake. God *loves* the sinner (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9). He is *merciful* and *good* to him (Titus 3:4-5). With these words we are led into the Father's heart (Luther, St. L. XI:1096). Our misery touches God's heart and moves him to act.

The saving grace of God can never be separated from Christ. Grace is not the exercise of God's absolute power, but is grace in Christ, for Christ's sake, gained by Christ's substitutionary satisfaction (*satisfactio vicaria Christi*). The apostle says that we are declared righteous "freely by his grace," but this grace has its basis in "the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). God's gracious will toward men has its foundation solely in the ransom which Christ has paid for the sins of the world. This ransom consists in Christ's *active obedience*, that is, his fulfillment of the law in our stead (Galatians 4:4-5) and Christ's *passive obedience*, that is, his innocent suffering and death in our stead (Galatians 3:13). Therefore the apostle says that the grace of God is given us in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:4).

Luther says:

"Grace" means that God is merciful to us, that He deals graciously with us for the sake of Christ our Lord, forgives us all our sins, and that He does not impute them to us or punish us with eternal death. Grace is the forgiveness of sin for Christ's sake, the covering of all sin. That is grace (LW 22:139).

Grace excludes human merit or works.

God's grace is not in the least motivated or influenced by anything in us. Man cannot be saved partly by the grace of God and partly by his own merit. According to the Bible, man's merit and God's grace are incompatible. "If by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:6). With Luther we confess:

My own good works availed me naught,
No merit they attaining;
My will against God's judgment fought,
No hope for me remaining.
My fears increased till sheer despair
Left naught but death to be my share
And hell to be my sentence (*Christian Worship* 377:3).

Scripture says that salvation is a gift, and a gift isn't something we receive because we have deserved it, but only because the giver wants to give it to us. Otherwise it wouldn't be a gift, but a reward. The apostle writes: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The grace of God is universal.

God's grace in Christ is not limited to a part of mankind, but extends over all men without exception. Scripture rejects all kinds of particularism in salvation. When it is stated that God loved "the world" (*kosmos*) (John 3:16), this cannot be limited to the "world" of the believers or the "world" of the elected only, because according to John 3:16-18 also the unbelievers belong to "the world." "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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." God's grace includes even those who perish (2 Peter 2:1). His gracious will includes all men (2 Peter 3:9). The Lord says about stubborn and unbelieving Jerusalem, "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37).

Justification, the forgiveness of sins, is a forensic act.

Justification means that God has declared the world righteous for Christ's sake. In Scripture the word "justification" is regularly used in a forensic sense. The verb *dikaion* ("justify") means that God has passed judgment and declared man righteous. This is also the case in the Old Testament. *Hitsdiq*, which is the Hebrew word corresponding to the Greek *dikaion*, means "declare righteous, acquit." Generally the verb is used to designate the official verdict of a judge (Deuteronomy 25:1; 2 Samuel 15:4). According to Isaiah 53:11 the Messiah brings about an acquittal (*jatsdiq* = "declare righteous, bring about an acquittal") for "many" by bearing their iniquities himself.

Justification is therefore not a moral change in man, but a forensic, that is, a declarative act (*actus forensis*) which takes place outside man. It means a change in the sinner's status, not in the sinner's nature. God declares the sinner to be righteous and

acquits him of all sins in that he imputes to the sinner the righteousness of another, namely the righteousness of Christ (Romans 3:21-22, 24-28). Here all human boasting is excluded (Romans 3:27). In man there is only unrighteousness and sin (Romans 3:9-18). But man is given a righteousness which God can accept. In Romans 4:5 the apostle speaks about faith in God “who justifies the wicked.” In Romans 4:6-8 he uses several synonyms for “crediting as righteousness” (*dikaiosisune*): “transgressions are forgiven,” “sins are covered,” “not counting sin against him.” Every expression indicates that justification is an *actus forensis*.

“*To be justified*” here [James 2:24] does not mean that a wicked man is made righteous but that he is pronounced righteous in a forensic way (Ap IV:252).

In this passage [Romans 5:1] “justify” is used in a judicial way to mean “to absolve a guilty man and pronounce him righteous,” and to do so on account of someone else’s righteousness, namely, Christ’s, which is communicated to us through faith (Ap IV:305).

Concerning the righteousness of faith before God we believe, teach, and confess unanimously, ... that a poor sinner is justified before God (that is, he is absolved and declared utterly free from all his sins, and from the verdict of well deserved damnation, and is adopted as a child of God and an heir of eternal life) without any merit or worthiness on our part, and without any preceding, present, or subsequent works, 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 (FC SD III:9).

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 (Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 374).

The basis for God’s justification of the world is solely Christ’s substitutionary life and death.

Good works and human merit dare never be included in justification. Justification is, according to Romans 3:24-28, a free gift which is received by faith alone without works of the law. It takes place without any human merit (*dorean* – “as a gift”), and its basis is “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (*apolytroseos tes en Christo Iesou*). Christ has paid the ransom (*lytron*) to redeem all people (Matthew 20:28). This ransom consists both in his perfect keeping of the law in the place of all people (Galatians 4:4-5) and in his suffering and death on the cross in the place of all people (Romans 5:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; 1 John 2:2). The foundation for God’s justification is therefore Christ’s life and death, his

atonement and redemption. In no respect is the basis for God's justification human merits. Salvation is "not by works" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

To emphasize this truth the Bible in several passages uses exclusive expressions (*particulæ exclusivæ*), that is, words that exclude any human works – "without law, without works, by grace." These words show how important it is to exclude all human merits in justification (FC SD III:7 – Cf. Luther in the Small Catechism: "without any merit or worthiness in me").

Natural man cannot conceive of any other way of being justified than by works. But Scripture explicitly says that "justification by faith" means "justification without works." The apostle Paul says: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Romans 3:28). No works, neither the "good" works of unbelievers, nor the truly good works which flow from faith, can justify a man before God.

This doctrine is treated at length in article III of the Formula of Concord. This article rejects the Osiandrian heresy, which said that justification consists of an inward transformation in the believer as a result of Christ's indwelling in him. Andreas Osiander emphasized Christ *in* us, and not Christ *for* us. In modern times we find such ideas in the opinion that a transformation in man's character is the basis for justification. Against this the Lutheran reformers state:

If the article of justification is to remain pure, we must give especially diligent heed that we do not mingle or insert that which precedes faith or follows faith into the article of justification, as if it were a necessary or component part of this article, since we cannot talk in one and the same way about conversion and about justification. ... The only essential and necessary elements of justification are the grace of God, the merit of Christ, and faith which accepts these in the promise of the Gospel. ... Good works are excluded from the article of justification so that in the treatment of the justification of poor sinners before God they should not be drawn, woven, or mingled in (FC SD III:24-25, 36).

Rome and others have tried to make a distinction between Paul and James stating that while Paul is teaching justification by faith, James is teaching work-righteousness. But we must keep in mind that James is speaking of works, not in so far as they justify before God, but in so far as they are an evidence to man of our faith, which can be shown only by works (James 2:16-26). James "condemns the idle and smug minds who dream they have faith but do not" (Ap IV:248).

How much better is James' teaching! For he does not omit faith nor exalt love in preference to it, but keeps it lest Christ the propitiator be excluded from justification. Just so Paul includes faith and love in presenting a summary of the Christian life (1 Timothy 1:5). The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith (Ap IV:245).

James is correct in denying that we are justified by a faith without works. When he says we are justified by faith and works, he certainly does not mean that we are regenerated by works. Nor does he say that our propitiation is due in part to Christ and in part to our works. Nor does he describe the manner of justification, but only the nature of the just who have already been justified and reborn (Ap IV:250-251).

Justification takes place outside of man. God declares a man righteous who is not in himself righteous, but unrighteous, “wicked” (Romans 4:5). The righteousness which the sinner receives by grace through faith is a foreign righteousness (*aliena iustitia*). It is imputed to the sinner, not inherent in the sinner. This righteousness is Christ’s perfect righteousness, gained for us by his active and passive obedience in our place. The apostle says that God made the righteous Christ “to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

We must seek our entire righteousness apart from our own and all other human merits, works, virtues, and worthiness and that our righteousness rests solely and alone on the Lord Christ (FC SD III:55).

Therefore we confidently sing:

Jesus, your blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Mid flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head (CW 376:1).

Good works are not the basis of justification, but the fruit of justification.

In several places in Scripture it may seem that good works are the basis for justification. (Cf. e.g., Matthew 6:14-15; 12:37; 25:34-40.) But in all these places the good works are mentioned only as fruits of faith. In the parable of the true vine in John 15:1-8 Christ says that nobody can do good works if he does not remain in him as a branch on the vine. “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

In a certain respect Scripture also teaches a justification before man on the basis of works. Justification before God (*enopion theou*) is always by faith alone, without works (Romans 3:28). But this justification is invisible because faith is invisible. Therefore God wants us to judge according to what we can see, namely the fruits of faith, the works. Good works are an evidence of faith. In Luke 7:36-50 the sinful woman is justified by God through faith (“Your faith has saved you; go in peace,” v. 50). But this justification is proved by her works (“Her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much,” v. 47). She was justified before other people by her works.

By teaching justification on the basis of works, Scripture is teaching and confirming justification by faith alone. For the works which Scripture has in mind are works

which flow from faith, which presuppose faith. They are thankofferings for the remission of sins which faith has already received; they are works performed by men who have been justified by faith alone (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* Vol. II, p. 544).

Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone and rests in Him unceasing;
And by its fruits true faith is known,
With love and hope increasing.
Yet faith alone doth justify,
Works serve thy neighbor and supply
The proof that faith is living (*The Lutheran Hymnal* 377:9).

In view of what the Bible teaches, we must reject the following errors:

- 1. That human beings are not thoroughly corrupted by original sin, and are thus capable of contributing to their salvation.**

Pelagianism denies original guilt and maintains that sin is not by propagation, but by imitation. Sin is not transmitted but is entirely a matter of the will and of the individual. Only the body is traceable to the parents. The soul is a new creation of God and therefore inclined to be good. Therefore every man has the power to create his own destiny and to choose as he will with perfect freedom. A life without sin is possible. Every man can be justified before God by his own strength and reason.

Semi-Pelagianism is the teaching of Rome. According to this teaching the spiritual powers of man have been greatly weakened by the fall but not destroyed entirely. There is enough good left in man so that he can cooperate with God's grace and thus be saved. Man is not dead in trespasses and sins, but is able to cooperate with God.

Arminianism also rejects the biblical doctrine of original sin because it teaches that spiritual powers, though they are dormant, exist in fallen man. These powers can be awakened by the help of God. Those who are saved have salvation because they cooperated in their conversion by means of these powers (decision theology). The Arminians also regard certain sins as excusable in themselves which deserve only temporal punishment.

Synergism is an attempt to offer a solution to the problem why only some men come to faith, while others are lost. Synergism presupposes that man after the fall is not dead, but only half dead. Man is able to apply himself to grace (*facultas se ad gratiam applicandi*), and has a certain ability to make a decision for Christ. Unconverted man must ask Jesus to come into his life.

2. That grace is not the unmerited favor of God but a quality God places in human beings by which he enables them to work out their own salvation.

Good qualities and good works are worked by God's grace in the believers, but are not the basis of their salvation. Rome teaches that men are justified in part through grace poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and inherent in them (*gratia infusa*). Because there must be, they think, a difference between those who are saved and those who are damned, they have also invented the difference between faith as "free or unearned merit" (*meritum de congruo*) and faith as "actual or earned merit" (*meritum de condigno*). They say that Christ's merit enables man to earn his own salvation, first *de congruo*, later *de condigno*. If man does what he can do by nature, e.g., externally hear and read God's Word (*meritum de congruo*), it is fitting that God gives him grace (*meritum condigni*).

3. That human beings can appease God by their own works (the belief of pagans).

4. That justification is an ethical process, that God justifies people because of the transformation that takes place in their lives, that sanctification is the basis for the sinner's justification.

We must reject these errors because they rob sinners of comfort and the assurance of salvation. They can also lead people to think they need no Savior from sin. The Bible warns that those who rely on works have fallen from grace (Galatians 5:4).

II. JUSTIFICATION IS COMPLETE

The doctrine of justification is the central teaching of Scripture. It distinguishes the Christian religion from false religions, all of which teach salvation by works. It gives enduring comfort to penitent sinners and gives all glory to God. No wonder that Luther said, "Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed" (SA II, I:5).

The nature of man and the nature of God.

In order to understand and appreciate the doctrine of justification we must, first of all, know and believe what the Bible says about the nature of man and the nature of God. As a result of the fall of Adam and Eve into sin all men are born with original sin and are subject to death and eternal damnation. Scripture does not depict sin as merely a weakness or a deficiency, as is the prevailing attitude of our time. It has been noted by Prof. Kurt Marquardt that "one of the prime deficiencies of our ... age is an almost total absence of a sense of sin. Luther's 'terrors of conscience' and his quest 'for a gracious God' are perceived today, patronizingly, as something scarcely comprehensible, something from another, and strangely antiquated, world. The 'modern' instinct is to assign the problem to the level of

chemo- or psycho-therapy for guilt-*feelings*!” (*Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, March, 1978, p. 46).

The Bible, however, teaches that sin is utter corruption, a complete falling away from God and therefore man is spiritually dead, blind, and an enemy of God. In the Smalcald Articles Luther wrote: “This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature that reason cannot understand. It must be believed because of the revelation in the Scriptures” (SA III, I:3). As we sing in one of Luther’s hymns:

Fast bound in Satan’s chains I lay;
Death brooded darkly o’er me.
Sin was my torment night and day;
In sin my mother bore me.
Yet deep and deeper still I fell;
Life had become a living hell,
So firmly sin possessed me (*Christian Worship* 377:2).

Therefore by nature man is totally unable to save himself from this lost condition, and to complicate the situation the Bible describes God as holy and just and therefore he must punish sin. Being holy, God cannot have fellowship with unforgiven sinners, and, being just, he must condemn the guilty sinner. His holy law demands perfection and will not settle for anything less. Therein lies man’s dilemma. However, God is also loving and merciful and in his boundless mercy he has revealed a way whereby his wrath and justice have been satisfied. Therefore he can and does forgive sinners.

This way, or plan, was conceived in eternity and revealed in time when sin entered into the world. Appearing to our first parents and Satan in the Garden of Eden the Lord God said to the devil, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15). In time someone would be born of a woman who would destroy Satan’s power over man. This was fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and on the basis of his redemptive work God has justified the world, and this is a complete justification.

Terminology used in the doctrine of justification.

The terminology in presenting the doctrine of justification is, *By Grace, For Christ’s Sake, Through Faith*. The Formula of Concord says, “The only essential and necessary elements of justification are the grace of God, the merit of Christ, and faith which accepts these in the promise of the Gospel” (FC SD III:25).

By Grace

The term “by grace” is the *favor Dei*, that is, the undeserved favor of God. Grace denotes God’s gracious disposition which for Christ’s sake he cherishes in himself toward

sinful mankind and by which he in his heart does not charge men with their sins, but forgives them. Luther describes grace as follows: “Grace in this sense has some synonyms in Scripture which also express God’s feelings in Christ toward lost mankind, namely God’s love, mercy, and kindness.” These terms, as Luther says, “lead us into the Father’s heart” and “make God sweet to us” and “we ought to go to sleep and arise with these words.” Grace was the refrain of Luther’s theology. He wrote: “A good song bears repetition. ‘Grace’ means that God is merciful to us, that he deals graciously with us for the sake of Christ our Lord, forgives us all our sins, and that he does not impute them to us or punish us with eternal death. Grace is the forgiveness of sin for Christ’s sake, the covering of all sin” (LW 22:139).

The term *grace* in Scripture sometimes signifies the gifts which are conferred upon us by benevolence. It designates something in man, namely good qualities and good works, which God works in man. For example, the apostle Peter writes: “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:10-11). Here the grace of God is the gift received; not the *favor Dei* forgiving sins, but the ability which God gives, the ability inhering in the Christian to teach what is right and to serve others. Grace in this sense is a gift of grace, grace residing in the individual.

But grace in this sense is never regarded in Scripture as a cause which moves God to save sinful man. For this, Scripture knows only one cause: divine grace, and when Scripture speaks of this cause it clearly places the grace of God in opposition to all works of men. The sharp distinction between divine grace (*favor Dei*) and the gifts of grace is very important in the doctrine of justification. To base justification, in whole or in part, on grace in the sense of infused grace is really basing it on salvation by works and the Christian doctrine of salvation by grace is cast aside, as St. Paul wrote to the Galatians: “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (Galatians 5:4).

For Christ’s Sake

This saving grace is not an absolute grace, or a fiat of the divine will, but it is a grace *for Christ’s sake*, a grace gained by his vicarious satisfaction. Paul wrote to the Romans, “And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). God’s gracious disposition springs entirely from the redemption of Christ. Christ’s merit and God’s grace are indissolubly joined to each other. Outside of Christ, God “is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). Grace without Christ’s satisfaction is a *non-ens* (no such thing). F. Pieper says that whoever believes in such a grace “is living in an air castle and is dealing with heathen concepts” (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, II:19). A characteristic of heathen religions is that they want to believe in God without “the cost,” without the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Regarding the cost Luther says: “I have often said

before that faith in God alone is not sufficient, but the cost must also be there. The Turks and Jews also believe in God, but without the means and the cost. What, then is the cost: That the Gospel shows. ... Christ here 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 cup. In that way we shall be saved" (*Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. 3, p. 342-343).

We cannot, therefore, speak of the grace of God and our salvation apart from the price which our Savior paid for it. This redemption is the very basis of our salvation and the forgiveness of our sins. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). The prophet Isaiah also wrote of the cost, "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" (Isaiah 53:45). Commenting on this passage Luther writes, "On His shoulders, not on mine, lie all my sins. For 'the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all' and 'for the transgressions of His people He was stricken' (Is 53:6, 8). Therefore when you say that I am a sinner, you do not frighten me; but you bring me immense consolation" (LW 26:37).

The saving grace concept fails if Christ and his work do not occupy the center of our theology and that is why Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). To speculate as to whether God could be gracious by virtue of his divine sovereignty is foolish. Here again Luther has good advice, "Will you prescribe to God how he should do things? You should leap for joy that he does it, in whatever manner he will, only that you obtain it" (LW 37:140). All who teach a grace of God apart from Christ's work have renounced the Christian faith. Article IV of the Augsburg Confession teaches "that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight."

Through faith

Through faith designates faith as the empty hand that receives the forgiveness of sins. We do not say that we are saved on account of our faith, for that would make faith a cause of our justification, but we are saved through faith. Faith is the instrument which receives what God gives and this faith is also a gift of God's grace, worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. As Lutherans we confess in Article V of the Augsburg Confession: "That we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel" (V:1-2).

This triad *by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith* affirms that “we must seek our entire righteousness apart from our own and all other human merits, works, virtues, and worthiness and that our righteousness rests solely and alone on the Lord Christ” (FC SD III:55). This truth must be maintained against Roman Catholic theology, or any theology, which injects works of any kind into our justification before God – which makes “infused grace” together with Christ’s merit the cause of justification. It must also be maintained against all enthusiasm and decision theology, against those who base justification on the “Christ in us” rather than the “Christ for us,” and against any false theology which would eliminate Christ’s vicarious satisfaction.

Justification

The verb “justify” in the Greek, when speaking of God’s plan of salvation, signifies a forensic act. It means to regard as righteous, to declare righteous, not to infuse righteousness. Justification, therefore, is not a physical or medical act by which the unrighteous man is changed by an inward transformation into a righteous man, but it is a judicial act by which a person who is in himself unrighteous is declared righteous.

While justification is a judicial act, it differs from declarations handed down in human courts wherein the judge pronounces the innocent man innocent and the guilty man guilty. If a human judge pronounces the guilty not guilty, then he is an abomination in the sight of God. But this very thing which the judge does not do God does when he justifies a man through the Gospel and faith. God pronounces the “ungodly” righteous, as Paul writes in Romans 4:5, “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” Our Confessions also call attention to the difference between the forensic act in the divine justification and in the civil courts. Commenting on Romans 5:1, the Apology says: “In this passage ‘justify’ is used in a judicial way to mean ‘to absolve a guilty man and pronounce him righteous,’ and to do so on account of someone else’s righteousness, namely Christ’s, which is communicated to us through faith. Since in this passage our righteousness is the imputation of someone else’s righteousness, we must speak of righteousness in a different way here from the philosophical or judicial investigation of a man’s own righteousness” (Ap IV:305-306).

The reason a holy and just God can do this is because of the redemptive work of his Son. Jesus willingly placed himself under the law, became our substitute, and was made the one great Sinner by imputation. Therefore he became the greatest of all sinners for he took the place of all sinners. Thus he became guilty of all sins of the world, was cursed and condemned in our stead, paid the penalty of the law for us by suffering and dying on the cross, and even suffered the torment of hell for us (the great exchange, that is, he took our sin upon himself and gave us his righteousness). And when this was all done, when divine justice was satisfied, he was released again. God raised him from the dead, thus putting the divine stamp of approval upon his work. And because of this saving work of his Son, God has justified the ungodly; he has pronounced every sinner to be guiltless and holy, or, in other words, he has forgiven all sin.

Note that the justifying does not follow the believing. If it did, it would be a conditional justification, and the meaning would be that if the ungodly believes, then God will justify him. But that is not what the Bible says. Besides, how can I depend or rely on anything that is not a fact, that has not taken place. No, first God justifies the ungodly, and then the ungodly have something to believe. Without a justification before faith there can be no justification by faith.

The statement “God justifies the ungodly” is not cumbered with any conditions; there are no ifs or provideds, none whatsoever. God justifies the ungodly regardless of his behavior and therefore the ungodly is justified whether he believes it or not. Justification is an accomplished fact. Therefore Jesus uses the past tense: “For God so **loved** the world” (John 3:16) and “The Son of Man **came**” (Luke 19:10). Likewise, St. Paul: “God **was** reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:19). So when the ungodly believes in Christ “his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:5). He is in possession of the righteousness which God demands, the perfect righteousness that opens the door of heaven. With the apostle Paul he can say that he is in possession of “the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” (Philippians 3:9b).

It is therefore Scriptural to say “God justifies” and “faith justifies.” These two statements denote the same thing, only from different viewpoints. God, on the basis of Christ’s saving work, pronounces and declares the ungodly righteous, and faith accepts that declaration. Thus the believer applies it to himself and now faith possesses that righteousness for its own. So faith justifies, as Paul says, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:28).

Andreas Osiander denied, shortly after Luther’s death, the true biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. He called it a “horrible doctrine” to teach that justify means “to declare righteous.” He held that it means “to make righteous” and in so doing he was teaching Roman Catholic doctrine, even though he called himself a Lutheran. Like Rome, he based the assurance of forgiveness, in part, on sanctification and good works. Luther’s Scriptural doctrine of justification was based on Christ “for us” while Osiander based it on the Christ “in us,” the indwelling of Christ’s divine nature. Luther summed it up as follows: “It is certain that Christ, or the righteousness of Christ, since it is outside and foreign to us, cannot be laid hold on by our works; ... but faith, which is poured into us by the Holy Spirit through hearing Christ, this faith apprehends Christ” (LW 34:153).

Scripture emphasizes the truth that the justification of sinners before God is by faith alone, apart from the works of the law. Hence justification is not partly by faith and partly by works, but by faith alone, as confessional Lutherans teach.

The term “by faith alone” does not exclude God’s grace, Christ’s merit, or the means of grace, but on the contrary, includes these as prerequisites. But because we are justified by grace, for Christ’s sake, therefore we are justified by faith alone, to the exclusion of works. Faith is always the instrument that receives what God offers and gives. Faith is the poor

sinner's hand which merely grasps and makes one's own what is already prepared and at hand.

This "faith alone" which justifies the sinner in the sight of a holy God is also a gift of God's grace worked in the heart by the gospel. The gospel is a powerful means of grace, for it is not only an invitation, but also transportation, that is, it actually brings us to faith and in possession of the righteousness of Christ which covers all our sins. This is of great comfort to the individual. If salvation depended in the least upon the works of the law we could never be certain of it.

Objective justification (it is a fact that God has declared the world righteous, whether people believe it or not) and objective reconciliation are one and the same.

We speak of objective justification as well as an objective reconciliation. Both terms refer to the same act of God in Christ, in fact the two terms correspond to each other; they are practically interchangeable. St. Paul sums it up nicely when he writes: "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 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! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation" (Romans 5:9-11).

The apostle says the same thing in his second letter to the Corinthians: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation ... God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:17ff).

It is this central doctrine of Scripture – justification by grace through faith alone – which Rome officially condemned at the Council of Trent, a council that began in 1545. In the Sixth Session which deals with justification it is stated in canons 11 and 12:

If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema (canon 11).

If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema (canon 12).

It is therefore mind-boggling that the Lutheran World Federation in 1999 declared that the differences in the doctrine of justification between Roman Catholics and Lutherans are no longer a cause for division or condemnation between the churches. Dr. Robert Preus in his book *Justification and Rome* correctly observes “that after all the many Lutheran/Roman Catholic negotiations and dialogues, the controversy has not been settled ... but there has been a settlement of a different kind. The settlement is an amalgam of the old Lutheran and Roman Catholic definitions, or rather, a pasting together of the two disparate sets of definitions (Preus, *Justification and Rome*: p. 111).

One of the greatest sins of the Roman Catholic Church is that by its doctrine of justification it keeps distressed consciences in perpetual doubt, hindering them from being certain of salvation. In a letter to an Augustinian friar named Spenlein, who was in great agony concerning his state of grace, Luther wrote as follows: “Therefore, my dear Friar, learn Christ and him crucified. Learn to praise him and, despairing of yourself, say, ‘Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, just as I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not.’ Beware of aspiring to such purity that you will not wish to be looked upon as a sinner, or to be one. For Christ dwells among sinners. ... Meditate on this love of his and you will see his sweet consolation. For why was it necessary for him to die if we can obtain a good conscience by our works and afflictions? Accordingly you will find peace only in him and only when you despair of yourself and your own works. Besides, you will learn from him that just as he has received you, so he has made your sins his own and made his righteousness yours” (LW 48:12-13).

What Luther wrote to his troubled friend is the most beautiful gospel that can be preached. For it declares that Christ has come in behalf of everybody, that he has borne every man’s sins, that he calls everyone to believe on him, to rejoice and rest assured that his sins are forgiven and that in the hour of death he will depart saved.

There are no degrees in justification.

Justification is not a gradual process, as Rome teaches. According to Roman Catholic theology, justification is a process extending throughout man’s life on earth and beyond that into purgatory. Faith is merely the beginning or root of justification and belongs with numerous other acts merely to the preparation for justification. The Roman doctrine of justification may be summarized as follows: Christ’s merit enables man to earn his own salvation, first as a reward earned by free will (*meritum de congruo*); later as a reward earned by a work prompted by the Holy Spirit (*meritum de condigno*).

Because the Roman Catholics confound justification with sanctification they teach that there are degrees of justification. While there are degrees of sanctification, there are no degrees of justification. God does not forgive partially, but the Bible teaches that when God justifies a man, he justifies him completely. If God forgives only partially, then all the texts which speak of the all-sufficient atonement through the blood of Christ become uncertain. If

there is anything taught clearly in God's Word it is God's full and free forgiveness. 1 John 1:7 says, "and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

Our Confessions also teach a complete justification. "Justification is the approval of the entire person" (Ap IV:222). The Smalcald Articles say: "By faith ... we get a new and clean heart and that God will and does account us altogether righteous and holy for the sake of Christ, our mediator. Although the sin in our flesh has not been completely removed or eradicated, he will not count or consider it" (SA III, XIII:1).

The fact remains that justification, as the imputation of the perfect righteousness of Christ, is incapable of growth or degrees, but from beginning to end is perfect in itself. There are indeed degrees of faith, but no degrees of justification, because also the weak faith apprehends the righteousness of Christ, which needs no perfecting through our faith or our works.

It is this truth that the Formula of Concord has in mind when it says, "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 Ep III:9).

The *Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism* gives a beautiful summary of what it means to be justified: "To be justified means that God by grace imputed to me the righteousness of Christ, and acquitted me of the guilt and punishment of my sin, so that he regards me in Christ as though I had never sinned" (*ELS Catechism*: p. 143).

We reject the following errors:

1. That there is only a partial justification.
2. That justification is dependent on man's faith.
3. That justification is a gradual process rather than a forensic act.
4. That there are degrees of justification.
5. That justification is not complete until God infuses grace into man thus giving him the ability to do good works which completes justification.
6. That a Christian cannot be certain of his justification.

III. JUSTIFICATION IS FOR ALL

Justification is not only complete but it has also been obtained for all people, not one single person excluded. Because of the atoning work of his Son, God has by a forensic act

declared the whole world to be righteous, justified, not guilty. St. Paul writes, “[All] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). And again, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The testimony of the Old Testament.

When sin entered into the world, God in his justice could have condemned mankind to eternal perdition, but in his grace and mercy he promised our first parents and their descendants a Savior. That promise, given in the Garden of Eden, was repeated by the prophets down through the years and finally fulfilled in the birth of the Savior in Bethlehem. The Lord said to Abraham, “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3b), and later he said to Abraham, “Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed” (Genesis 22:18).

The Savior was promised not only to the Israelites, but also to all nations. The prophet Isaiah invited all people to God’s saving grace when he wrote, “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth” (Isaiah 45:22). Prof. August Pieper in his commentary on this passage says, “The invitation includes the ends of the earth, all nations without exception” (*Isaiah* II:p. 287). Thus it is very clear from the Old Testament that the promise of a Savior was intended for all people. The same is true of the New Testament.

The testimony of the New Testament.

What the Old Testament prophets foretold about the Savior of the world was fulfilled in the New Testament. The angel announced the birth of the Savior to the frightened shepherds, “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10).

Forty days later his parents, Joseph and Mary, brought the Christ Child to the temple in Jerusalem. When Simeon, an Old Testament believer who was waiting for the fulfillment of the promise, saw the Christ Child, he took him in his arms, praised God, and said, “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).

The apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5). Jesus himself declared the gospel to the whole world by his words on the cross when he cried, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He thereby declared that he had finished the work of redemption. By his perfect life he had fulfilled the law in man’s stead and by his death on the cross he suffered the punishment which mankind deserved and thus paid the penalty for the sins of the world.

Christ's redemptive work is the basis for universal justification.

It is on the basis of Christ's redemptive work that God the Father declared the world forgiven. It is true, however, that this forgiveness will not benefit us unless we believe it, but the fact remains that we have been forgiven. What God told Isaiah to proclaim to the people of his day will be true until the end of time, namely, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:1,2). The apostle Paul echoes the same truth when he writes, "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Romans 5:20).

Refusal to believe that you have been forgiven forfeits your personal possession of this forgiveness, but it does not change the fact that you have been forgiven. The worst thing a person can do to himself is to reject this precious gift, for in so doing he deprives himself of that forgiveness which has been obtained for him. It is sad, but true, to say that people who die in unbelief lie in hell with their sins forgiven; the reason they are there is because they rejected the forgiveness which had been won for them. Luther put it this way: "A king gives you a castle. If you do not accept it, then it is not the king's fault, nor is he guilty of a lie. But you have deceived yourself and the fault is yours. The king certainly gave it" (LW 40:367).

In the *Explanation of Luther's Catechism* under the heading "The Forgiveness of Sins" we have this question and answer which sum it up well: "How can God declare sinners righteous?" The answer, "God can declare sinners righteous because, on the basis of the redemptive work of Christ, he has acquitted all men of the guilt and punishment of their sins, and has imputed to them the righteousness of Christ; he therefore regards them in Christ as though they had never sinned" (*ELS Catechism*: p. 143). As Paul writes "He [Christ] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

The same *Explanation of the Catechism* has this question and answer: "How do you receive this forgiveness or justification?" "I receive this justification when the Holy Ghost through the means of grace leads me, the sinner, to believe that God has forgiven all my sins for Christ's sake" (*ELS Catechism*: p. 144). As Paul writes, "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). This is known as personal or subjective justification.

God the Father proclaimed that all men are righteous on account of the work of Jesus Christ. The fact of universal justification is a clear teaching of Scripture. It could not be expressed more clearly than in these words of St. Paul, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). The benefits of this reconciliation are extended to everyone in the world, and when they are appropriated by faith, then the individual is personally justified before God.

The enduring comfort of knowing and believing that justification is for all.

Dr. Edward Preuss in his monograph on *Justification* has some excellent quotations regarding this matter that justification is for all. We share some of these with our readers: “Forgiveness of sins has no plus and no minus; God freely forgives all, exhibiting to all the same fullness of mercy. Therefore, Scripture testifies that all who are justified, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, those of little faith and those of strong faith, are just as righteous as Abraham, the father of all them that believe” (Henry Hoepfner). “The forgiveness of sins in this life is perfect, so that no condemnation remains. Consequently also justification is perfect, it being nothing else than the forgiveness of sins” (Scherzer). “Just as the merit of Christ is conveyed to the believers in its entirety and at the same time, so also all sins are forgiven at the same time” (Fresenius) (Preuss, *Justification of the Sinner Before God*: p. 58, 59).

In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession Melancthon calls the doctrine of justification “the main teaching of Christian doctrine, which, when understood rightly, illumines and magnifies the honor of Christ *and brings to pious consciences the abundant consolation that they need*” (Ap IV: 2). Luther, in the Smalcald Articles on the office and work of Christ or redemption, says, “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 has laid upon 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). ... Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised [nor can any believer concede or permit anything contrary to it,] even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed. For as St. Peter says, ‘There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12), ‘and with his stripes we are healed’” (Isaiah 53:5) (SA II, I:1-3,5).

To Luther the centrality of the doctrine of justification is essential to the work of the theologian. He writes, “There is only one article and one rule of theology, and this is true faith in Christ. Whoever doesn’t hold this article and this rule is no theologian. All other articles flow into and out of this one; without it the others are meaningless. The devil has tried from the very beginning to deride this article and to put his own wisdom in its place. However, this article has a good savor for all who are *afflicted, downcast, troubled, and tempted*, and these are the ones who understand the gospel” (LW 54: 157).

It is of utmost importance that we hold to the chief article of our faith, namely that God justifies the unrighteous. God, reconciled to all the world by the blood of Jesus, in the gospel offers to everyone who hears it, the forgiveness of sins. Out of undeserved grace and without the slightest condition, one need only believe in his heart and be fully assured that he has forgiveness of all sin and is saved.

Juxtaposition is a good word to describe “the blessed exchange” which our gracious Lord made. He positioned his Son next to each one of us. He took our sins and placed them on Christ. He took Christ’s righteousness and placed it on us. Luther put it this way: “If the sins of the entire world are on that one man, Jesus Christ, then they are not on the world. ... Again, if Christ himself is made guilty of all the sins that we have committed, then we are absolved from all sins, not through ourselves or through our own works or merits but through him” (LW 26:280).

Dr. S. C. Ylvisaker described the comfort of justification in these words: “The Biblical doctrine of justification is simply this that when Christ died for our sins, that is, for the sins of the whole world, God declared the whole world forgiven (justified) and now God wants us to believe this. Others say: ‘Believe and you shall be justified.’ God says, ‘Believe that you have been justified.’ And the thing is as simple as that – but what a difference when death stares a person in the face” (P. Harstad, *Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker: A Commemorative Volume at the Centennial of His Birth*: p. 53).

The doctrine of justification gives enduring comfort to penitent sinners for it assures them that all sins have been forgiven and that they can live confidently and die peacefully. This grant us dear Father in heaven!

We reject the following errors:

1. That God has not declared the whole world forgiven.
2. That forgiveness has been obtained only for believers.
3. That “God purposes to justify those who have come to faith,” that is, that justification is not complete until faith is added.
4. That man’s faith is a partial cause of his justification before God.
5. That a penitent sinner cannot be certain of his justification.
6. That the teaching of universal justification leads to universalism, the belief that all people will finally be saved.

IV. JUSTIFICATION IS RECEIVED THROUGH FAITH

Saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as Savior from sin.

Faith is an attitude of the heart. It is the reliance of the heart on the promises God has revealed in the gospel. Scripture tells us of how God loved all people of the world. He did this by giving his one and only Son so that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Faith is more than mere knowledge of Christ. The Jews of Jesus’ day knew, and Jews of today and many other people know, about Jesus as someone who lived. They speak of the historical Jesus. They see in him a good man. But they do not know him in faith. They do not trust in him with their hearts.

Faith is not only intellectual knowledge, it is confidence in God's reconciliation and remission of sins. Saving faith trusts that God through his Son Jesus Christ forgave all sin. A believer applies the gospel promise to himself. Like Paul he acknowledges that he has been crucified with Christ and that Christ lives in him. His whole life is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved him and gave himself for him (Galatians 2:20).

It is the very nature of the gospel to call for such self-appropriation. Romans 5:18-19, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 and Romans 4:25 proclaim that through the obedience, death, and resurrection of Christ God has justified and reconciled sinners to himself. Christ paid for all their sins. The Second Article of the Apostles' Creed teaches that Christ was born, suffered, died, and rose again. The Apology states, "The faith that justifies, however, is no mere historical knowledge, but the firm acceptance of God's offer promising forgiveness of sins and justification" (Ap IV:48).

Christ is the object of faith.

If the foundation for a building is not secure, the building will collapse. Faith also needs a firm foundation if it is to endure. Jesus spoke of the need for a firm foundation for faith in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:24-27). Jesus indicated that he alone is the foundation for faith. When Peter confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), Jesus responded, "On this rock I will build my church (v. 18)." Jesus is the object of faith. Faith is secure when it rests on Christ alone. Paul declared, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Faith is the instrument for receiving the forgiveness of sins.

We speak of faith as a personal and actual thing in that it is an act of the will and also an attitude of the heart. We remind ourselves that faith is an instrument for apprehending the forgiveness of sins promised in the gospel. It is God who declares sinners righteous. Faith is not the cause of the change in man's status before God. According to Romans 5:1, by faith believers possess peace with God.

Faith is a gift of God.

We can see that there can be no faith without knowledge, for Paul declares, "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). Scripture speaks of faith as knowledge, assent and trust. This is not to be understood as three parts or stages of faith. The same Spirit works faith viewed from three different perspectives. Knowledge, which is true knowledge of the heart, is saving faith. Scriptures speak of it in this way that eternal life is that people know God the only true God and Christ whom he sent (John 17:3). Assent is also saving faith. Scriptures command us to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as

Christ commanded us (1 John 3:23). Confidence is faith in that Scripture declares that whoever believes in the Son will have life, but whoever rejects the Son will not have life, for God's wrath remains on him (John 3:36).

Scripture declares in no uncertain terms that natural man not only is void of any capacity for believing the gospel (1 Corinthians 2:14), but that he cannot come to Christ (John 6:44). Man cannot on his own know the way to Christ. The natural way of man is to resist the gospel (Romans 8:7). Natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God; such things are foolishness to him.

Man by his own power is in a hopeless condition. Paul puts it in these terms, "When we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). There is nothing in man to account for the blessed state in which the Roman Christians found themselves. Where could it be? It was in the love of God. God has demonstrated his love for us. The demonstration of God's love is the gift of Christ, his Son. Paul uses these terms: Christ died for the ungodly, Christ died for us. The apostle focuses on the certainty of man's despicable condition and God's love for man. He then goes on to speak of man's new status before God without mentioning faith, but always speaking of justification as a completed thing. "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" 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!" (Romans 5:9,10).

God alone is responsible for converting the sinner.

The conversion of man, or his return to God, does not consist in his attempt to reform his life or to arouse some sort of religious feelings in himself. The favor of God has been fully secured for all through Christ's work and is offered to all men in the gospel (2 Corinthians 5:19). The sinner's return to God, that is, his conversion, is effected in the moment when, turning away in despair from his own righteousness, he accepts the grace of God offered to him in the gospel, or believes in the gospel. Luther says, "To turn to the Lord means to believe in Christ as our Mediator, through whom we have eternal life" (St. L XIII:1101, as quoted in Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* Vol. II:p. 454). Again Luther says, "Therefore it is necessary, if you would be converted, that you become terrified and die, that is, that you have an awakened and trembling conscience. Then, when this condition has been brought about, you must grasp the consolation. You will find this consolation not in any work which you have done, but in the work of God, who sent his Son into the world to proclaim to the terrified sinners the consoling compassion of God, his grace, which is given freely. This is how conversion is effected; other ways are wrong ways" (St. Louis V:590, as quoted in Pieper, *Op. Cit.*, II:454). Conversion essentially is the transformation of unregenerate man from the state of wrath and sin into the state of grace and faith. The goal of conversion is essentially faith in Christ. Acts 11:21 makes it clear that sinners are converted when they become believers: "A great number of people believed and turned to the Lord."

When a sinner appreciates God's way and turns to him, he can say with Paul, "We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation" (Romans 5:11). He cannot speak of faith as being the cause of his conversion. "To the man who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:5).

The Confessions put it this way:

Man is so corrupted that in divine things, concerning our conversion and salvation, he is by nature blind and does not and cannot understand the Word of God when it is preached, but considers it foolishness; nor does he of himself approach God, but he is and remains an enemy of God until by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word which is preached and heard, purely out of grace and without any cooperation on his part, he is converted, becomes a believer, is regenerated and renewed (FC SD II:5).

God converts through means of grace.

The means of conversion is the gospel, which produces faith. This very gospel, which is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, has the wonderful power to create in man the faith which accepts its promises. Only by hearing, reading, or remembering the gospel is conversion brought about (Romans 10:14-17; John 5:39; 17:20); and no man can remain in the state of conversion unless he continues to use the gospel.

Man must first realize that he is subject to eternal damnation on account of his sins before he can believe the gospel of grace. In other words, man needs to hear the threat and punishment contained in the law in order to be prepared for the message of the gospel. It is right for us to say that "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" (SA III, II:4). This is the teaching of Scripture, for we read that we know our sins from the law (Romans 3:20). Also, the dealings of divine providence serve to impress upon men the preaching of the law (Luke 15:14-18; Acts 16:26ff.; Psalm 119:71; Romans 2:4).

In short, people will be converted to God only when law and gospel are preached in the proper order and with the proper distinction. It is a fact that if we are going to be converted, we need to hear God's Word. It is a gross abuse of the doctrine of divine monergism in conversion to conclude that one may dispense with the hearing of the Word of God and look for a conversion without means (cf. FC SD II:46, 80).

We read in the Confessions,

And it is God's will to call men to eternal salvation, to draw them to himself, convert them, beget them anew, and sanctify them through this means and in no other way – namely, through his holy Word (FC SD II:50).

Again we read,

Prior to man's conversion there are only two efficient causes, namely, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God as the Holy Spirit's instrument whereby he effects conversion. Man should hear this Word, though he cannot give it credence and accept it by his own power but solely by the grace and operation of God the Holy Spirit (FC Ep II:19).

Anyone who does not hold to objective justification is bound to have trouble thinking of faith as only an instrument which receives. Take away objective justification, and faith becomes some kind of quality, a meritorious ethical act, or some moral improvement in man.

We are justified by grace through faith in Christ.

To this are attached those Scriptures which speak of faith as obedience. "Through him and for his name's sake we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith" (Romans 1:5). "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). Lutheran dogmaticians have insisted that faith justifies not as a quality, but as a relationship. Faith justifies not as an act by itself, but because of the object which it grasps. Faith justifies not as a work but as an instrument.

Can we call faith a good work? We certainly can. Luther called it a good work or act. But he separated it from the works and virtues which flow from faith! Commenting on John 6:28-29 Luther says, "The text deals with the work that we are to perform, namely, to believe. Faith is a work that man must do." After calling faith a work Luther continues, "Later Christ tells us about the origin of faith – for no one possesses faith of himself – when he says (John 6:44): 'No one can come to Me unless it is granted him by the Father.' Proper faith is a divine work which God demands of us; but at the same time he himself must implant it in us; for we cannot believe by ourselves" (St. Louis VII:2213, 2214, as quoted in Pieper, *Op. Cit.*, II:441-442).

The Lutheran dogmaticians speak of faith as a work if the word "work" is used in a wider sense. Faith is a work in that it is a movement, an activity in the intellect and will of man. We can call faith a work as long as the word "work" is not taken in the specific sense and meant as something done in response to the command of the law. Faith is a work. Faith is a good work, but not in the meritorious sense. Paul declares, "We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Romans 3:28). "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

It is proper and right to teach that faith is a receiving hand or that it is a hand which takes hold of something. Faith can be understood as both active and passive. It is active in

so far as it apprehends Christ. It is passive inasmuch as it is a free gift of God and not some kind of human cooperation. Jeremiah rightly says, “Restore me, and I will return, because you are the LORD my God” (Jeremiah 31:18). As the Confessions state:

For 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. This merit has to be applied to us and to be made our own through faith if we are to be justified thereby (FC SD III:13).

If justification does not mean that God has declared all sinners righteous and that this took place at Christ’s death and resurrection, then somehow, somewhere, sooner, not later, faith becomes more than a mere instrument, the receiving hand. Subjective faith becomes a cause, a condition, a reason, an explanation why some are saved and others not.

We reject the following errors:

1. That faith is not trust or confidence in Christ.
2. That people can accomplish, or contribute to, their own conversion.
3. That God converts apart from the gospel and baptism (Calvinism, Enthusiasm).
4. That faith is a good work of man which contributes to or completes his justification.

V. JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH PRODUCES SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification is used in a wide and in a narrow sense in Scripture.

The Bible speaks of sanctification in different ways. On some occasions, it speaks of sanctification as all that the Holy Spirit does for the sinner’s salvation. As Paul wrote, “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Martin Luther described this sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed as follows: “The Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (SC II: 6). We call this work of God the Holy Spirit to save the sinner “sanctification in the wide sense.”

The Bible also uses sanctification to refer to God’s renewal of the Christian and the new life he enables Christians to live. It is in this way that Paul used the term when he wrote, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable ... For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thessalonians

4:3-4, 7). We call this work by which God renews Christians and enables them to live new lives “sanctification in the narrow sense.”

God is responsible for both sanctification in the wide and in the narrow sense.

Who gets the credit for sanctification? When sanctification is used to describe God the Holy Spirit’s work of saving the sinner (sanctification in the wide sense), it is obvious that God gets all the credit. The Bible excludes any human merit when it speaks of the salvation of the sinner. God’s grace in Christ alone is responsible for the sinner’s salvation. Paul wrote to the Romans, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:28). God is responsible for our salvation from beginning to end. Paul wrote, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (Romans 8:29-30).

Not only is God the Holy Spirit totally responsible for converting and preserving the sinner (sanctification in the wide sense), he also gets the credit for our renewal and the new life we lead in Christ (sanctification in the narrow sense). Paul wrote, “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). We could not believe in Jesus nor lead a life of good works if the Holy Spirit did not work this ability within us. When Lazarus walked out of the tomb, he did so because Jesus had given him the ability to rise and walk. Apart from the lifegiving command of Christ, Lazarus could not have done anything. In a similar way, we are by nature dead in sin. Only because of God’s work in us can we rise from the death of sin to walk in newness of life.

Christians cannot cooperate with God before or during conversion. After conversion, we can cooperate with God because he enables us to cooperate with him. Paul urged the Corinthians, “As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain” (2 Corinthians 6:1). Our cooperation with God is not, however, on an equal basis. We cooperate with him only because he has enabled us to cooperate.

The Lutheran Confessions put it this way:

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. ... 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 II: 65-66).

Contrasts between justification and sanctification (in the narrow sense):

Justification involves a change in the sinner's status before God.

Sanctification involves a change in the sinner's heart and life.

Justification is forensic in nature. It consists in God's acquittal of the sinner. The sinner remains a sinner, but God declared the sinner "not guilty" because Christ paid the price for sin. God declared the sinner righteous because he credited Christ's righteousness to his account. Paul wrote, "To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works" (Romans 4:5-6). The Apology states, "'To be justified' here does not mean that a wicked man is made righteous but that he is pronounced righteous in a forensic way" (Ap IV:252).

Sanctification, in the narrow sense, on the other hand, consists in the renewal of the sinner and the new life the believer lives. Paul wrote, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The nature of a person is changed in sanctification. Faith replaces unbelief. God works in us a desire to carry out his will. According to the new man, Christians delight in carrying out God's will. As the Formula of Concord states, "Faith is a divine work in us that transforms us and begets us anew from God, kills the Old Adam, makes us entirely different people in heart, spirit, mind, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it" (FC SD IV:10).

Justification excludes all human works.

Sanctification consists of good works.

Scripture excludes all human works from the justification of the sinner. Paul wrote, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Romans 3:28; cf. 3:23-24, 4:5-6, Ephesians 2:8-9). Grace and works are mutually exclusive. If we are saved by grace, we cannot be saved by our works. If we are saved by our works, we cannot be saved by grace (cf. Romans 11:6). In refuting the Osiandrian error which stressed that justification was the result of Christ "in us" rather than Christ "for us," the Formula of Concord stressed,

Here, too, if the article of justification is to remain pure, we must give especially diligent heed that we do not mingle or insert that which precedes faith or follows faith into the article of justification, as if it were a necessary or component part of this article, since we cannot talk in one and the same way about conversion and about justification (FC SD III:24).

When speaking of justification, we speak about Christ's work for us, not about anything that we do.

On the other hand, sanctification does consist in the good works God enables believers to do. Paul wrote, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22,23). When Scripture speaks of good works, it is speaking of God’s work of sanctification in the believer. The Augsburg Confession states, “Such faith should produce good fruits and good works and that we must do all such good works as God has commanded” (AC VI:1).

**Justification is complete and perfect in Christ.
Sanctification in this life remains imperfect and incomplete.**

The sinner has nothing to contribute to his justification. He need contribute nothing, for Christ did everything necessary for our justification. Christ kept God’s law for us, from conception to death. He paid the price for all our sins. Before his death, Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Salvation is complete. Jesus did everything necessary to save us. God gives us salvation as a free gift through the gospel. Even if a person does not believe that God has forgiven sinners, this does not nullify the fact that God has forgiven the world. As Paul wrote, “What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar” (Romans 3:3-4).

The Formula of Concord states,

[Christ’s] obedience consists not only in his suffering and dying, but also in his spontaneous subjection to the law in our stead and his keeping of the law in so perfect a fashion that, reckoning it to us as righteousness, God forgives us our sins, accounts us as holy and righteous, and saves us forever on account of this entire obedience which, by doing and suffering, in life and in death, Christ rendered for us to his heavenly Father (FC SD III:15).

On the other hand, sanctification in this life remains incomplete and imperfect. Christians will never, in this life, be able to keep God’s will perfectly. The Old Adam clings to us and corrupts all we do. As Paul acknowledged, “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” (Romans 7:18-19).

The Confessions also state,

When we teach that through the Holy Spirit’s work we are reborn and justified, we do not mean that after regeneration no unrighteousness in essence and life adheres to those who have been justified and regenerated, but we hold that Christ with his perfect obedience covers all our sins which throughout this life still inhere in our nature (FC SD III: 22).

**God justified the world.
Sanctification takes place only in believers.**

For whom did Jesus die? The Bible makes it clear that Jesus paid for the sins of the whole world. John the Baptist identified Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). In his letter to the Romans, Paul states that, just as sin corrupts all people, so God justified all for the sake of his Son (Romans 3:23). I have the assurance that Jesus died for me because he died for all. As the Apology states, “Therefore men cannot keep the law by their own strength, and they are all under sin and subject to eternal wrath and death. On this account the law cannot free us from sin or justify us, but the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification was given because of Christ. He was given for us to make satisfaction for the sins of the world and has been appointed as the mediator and propitiator” (Ap IV:40).

On the other hand, sanctification does not take place in all people of the world. It takes place only in believers. Only believers can do good works in God’s sight. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). It is only when God can view our works through the righteousness of Christ that our works will be acceptable to him. As the Apology states, “After we have been justified and regenerated by faith ... we begin to fear and love God, to pray and expect help from him.... This cannot happen until, being justified and regenerated, we receive the Holy Spirit (Ap IV:125-126).

**Justification assures us of salvation.
The sanctified life produces evidence of faith, but can never give us complete certainty of salvation.**

Can the believer be sure of salvation? The answer is a definite “yes.” Salvation depends solely on the redemptive work of Christ. That is why Paul could state with confidence as he faced the end of his life, “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8). As we sing in one of our hymns:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
I dare to make no other claim
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand (*Christian Worship* 382:1).

On the other hand, a sanctified life gives evidence of a person’s faith in Christ. John wrote, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers” (1 John 3:14). However, our sanctified life can never assure us completely of our salvation. The minute we rely on some work of ours for salvation, we are confronted with the question, “Are you sure you have done this well enough?” The law demands that we be perfect in

thought, word, and deed. We simply have not met this demand, nor can we meet it. Scripture unequivocally states, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

The Apology reminds us of this when it states, “The law always accuses us, even in good works ... If a conscience believes that it ought to be pleasing to God because of its own work and not because of Christ, how will it have peace without faith? What work will it find that it will count worthy of eternal life, if indeed hope ought to be sustained by merits? Against these doubts Paul says (Romans 5:1), ‘Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God’; we ought to be utterly sure that righteousness and eternal life are given us freely for Christ’s sake” (Ap IV:319-320).

Justification precedes sanctification in the order of cause and effect.

What is the relationship which exists between justification and sanctification? On the one hand, Scripture teaches a cause and effect relation between justification and sanctification. Justification is the cause of sanctification. To put it simply, God’s love for us in Christ moves us through faith to live a life to the glory of God. If one were to say that sanctification is the cause of justification, it would be saying that good works or the transformation of our nature brings about our salvation with God. Scripture clearly excludes this. Paul wrote, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:28).

Jesus uses the illustration of a branch and a vine to illustrate the relationship between justification by faith and good works. He said, “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” (John 15:5). A branch will produce fruit only when it is nourished and energized by the vine. So also, Christians will do good works only because they are moved to do so by God’s love in Christ.

This cause and effect relationship between justification and sanctification must be maintained if this central doctrine of Scripture is to be kept unspoiled. As the Formula of Concord states, “Good works do not precede faith, nor is sanctification prior to justification. First the Holy Spirit kindles faith in us in conversion through the hearing of the Gospel. Faith apprehends the grace of God in Christ whereby the person is justified. After the person is justified, the Holy Spirit next renews and sanctifies him, and from this renewal and sanctification the fruits of good works will follow” (FC SD III:41).

There is an inseparable connection between justification and sanctification.

At the same time that we must maintain an order of cause and effect between justification and sanctification, we must also maintain there is an inseparable connection between the two. There is never a time when works are absent from faith. Faith is living and active. If works are absent, so is faith. The Formula of Concord cites Luther to this

effect: “Oh, faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, so that it is impossible for it not to be constantly doing what is good ... Whoever does not perform such good works is a faithless man” (FC SD IV:10-11).

The thief on the cross was saved by grace alone. Yet, even though God brought him to faith in his last hours, his life was not devoid of works. His confession of Christ gave evidence this man was a believer. Where faith exists, there will be good works. Where good works are absent, faith is absent. James tells us, “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead” (James 2:26). The Formula of Concord states, “It is therefore as impossible to separate works from faith as it is to separate heat and light from fire” (FC SD IV:12). To sum it up, we join the Formula of Concord in citing Luther, “There is a beautiful agreement between faith and good works; nevertheless, it is faith alone which apprehends the blessing without works. And yet faith is at no time ever alone” (FC SD III: 41).

Faith justifies. Faith sanctifies.

Faith has a two-fold function. In the first place, we are “justified by faith” (Romans 3:28). Faith is the instrument through which we receive, as our very own, the forgiveness Jesus won for all. The Formula of Concord states, “For 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. This merit has to be applied to us and to be made our own through faith if we are to be justified thereby” (FC SD III: 13).

Secondly, faith also sanctifies. Through faith God transforms us and empowers us to do good works. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Faith lays hold of the gospel promises and responds with love for God and love for our neighbor. The Formula of Concord states, “Faith is a divine work in us that transforms us and begets us anew from God, kills the Old Adam, makes us entirely different people in heart, spirit, mind, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it” (FC SD IV: 10).

The object of sanctification is the believer, who is, at one and the same time, saint and sinner (simul justus et peccator).

God created Adam and Eve in his own image (Genesis 1:26-27). They had a blissful knowledge of God as their loving Creator. They had a perfect knowledge of his will. They delighted in God’s will and had the ability to carry it out perfectly (cf. Ephesians 4:22-24, Colossians 3:9-10). When they disobeyed God, they lost the image of God. They no longer loved God. They no longer delighted in his will. They no longer had the ability to carry out God’s will. Sin thoroughly corrupted human nature, so that all people by nature are spiritually blind (1 Corinthians 2:14), dead (Ephesians 2:1), and the enemies of God (Romans 8:7). Though thoroughly corrupted, however, people can still be converted and

sanctified. Original sin is “the deep corruption of our nature” (FC SD I:52), not the essence of human nature.

The Christian is a new man in Christ.

Though we are by nature dead in sin, God makes us alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1,5). God gives us new birth through baptism (John 3:5-6). God enlightens us by his Spirit so we believe the gospel message (Ephesians 5:8). Paul tells us the result of the Holy Spirit’s work. He writes, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Christians look on God as their dear Father in heaven (Galatians 4:6). They delight in God’s will and eagerly carry it out (Romans 7:22). They abhor sin and avoid it (1 John 3:9). The Christian abounds in good works (John 15:5; Galatians 5:22-23). Christ’s love is the motivating power in the Christian’s life (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

The Formula of Concord states concerning the new man, “When a person is born anew by the Spirit of God and is liberated from the law (that is, when he is free from this driver and is driven by the Spirit of Christ), he lives according to the immutable will of God as it is comprehended in the law, and, in so far as he is born anew, he does everything from a free and merry spirit. These works are, strictly speaking, not works of the law but works and fruits of the Spirit” (FC SD VI:17).

The Christian still has the old Adam.

At the same time Scripture teaches that Christians are new people in Christ, it also teaches that the old Adam still clings to us as long as we live in this world. Paul wrote, “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. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it” (Romans 7:18-20).

In Romans 7, Paul details the power of the old man and its effect on our sanctified lives. A war goes on between the old man and our new man. It will continue until the day we die (Galatians 5:17). Thus, in the same person we find saint and sinner, old Adam and new man. Concerning this dual nature, the Formula of Concord states, “Since, however, believers are not fully renewed in this life but the old Adam clings to them down to the grave, the conflict between spirit and flesh continues in them. According to the inmost self they delight in the law of God; but the law in their members is at war against the law of their mind” (FC SD VI:18).

Because the old Adam remains with us until the day we die, Christians will never attain perfection in this life. Paul was a mature Christian. Yet, he confesses that he daily must fight his sinful nature which hinders him from carrying out God’s will as he desires to do. He states, “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” (Romans 7:18,19; see also Galatians 5:17).

The Christian has a dual nature.

Because of this dual nature, Scripture must address both the old man and the new man in the Christian. To curb the old Adam, Scripture warns Christians, “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Corinthians 10:12). To nurture the new man, Scripture, at the same time it warns us we can fall, gives us the reassuring words of Jesus, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).

Because of this dual nature, we need to be careful how we describe Christians. People give a faulty description of the Christian when they ignore the Christian’s dual nature. Statements such as, “The Christian is always happy,” or, “The Christian is not afraid of death,” may cause people to doubt they are Christians when they are not happy or are afraid of death.

While the law is useful in sanctification, it cannot produce sanctification.

The law which was intended to give life now brings death.

The original intent of the law was to give life (Romans 7:10). Sin changed things. Because of sin, the law does not and cannot give life. It is not that God’s law changed. Humans changed. The law now brings death, not life. It condemns us for our disobedience to God. The Formula of Concord states, “Strictly speaking, the law is a divine doctrine which reveals the righteousness and immutable will of God, shows how man ought to be disposed in his nature, thoughts, words, and deeds in order to be pleasing and acceptable to God, and threatens the transgressors of the law with God’s wrath and temporal and eternal punishment” (FC SD V:17).

Christians are free from the law.

Christians are free from the law. They are free from the condemnation they deserve because they have broken God’s law. Christ bore that condemnation for us (Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21). Christians are free to serve God without fear. That which drives the Christian to serve God is not fear of punishment but God’s love in Christ. Nor does the Christian need to fear God will punish him because of the imperfection of his sanctification. He knows that, for Jesus’ sake, God accepts his works of faith (1 Peter 2:5; Romans 8:1-2). Concerning both of these matters, the Formula of Concord states, “It is St. Paul’s intention that the law cannot impose its curse upon those who through Christ have been reconciled with God, nor may it torture the regenerated with its coercion, for according to the inner man they delight in the law of God” (FC SD VI:5).

Christian freedom further consists in the New Testament believers' freedom from the law of Moses. Its commandments, given to Israel of old, are not binding on us (Galatians 3:15-25; Acts 15, Colossians 2:16-17). Christ fulfilled the Old Covenant with all of its rules and regulations. Finally, the Christian is free from human traditions and rules (Matthew 12:1-4; 15:9). No person, no church, can bind our consciences by the rules they make, rules which legislate matters in which God has given us freedom of choice.

The Christian still needs the law.

Though free from the law, Christians still need the law. Christians have the old Adam which still needs the admonition, warning, and guidance of the law. The Formula of Concord, warning against the error that the Christian does not need the law (antinomianism) states,

If believers and the elect children of God were perfectly renewed in this life through the indwelling Spirit in such a way that in their nature and all its powers they would be totally free from sins, they would require no law, no driver. Of themselves and altogether spontaneously, without any instruction, admonition, exhortation, or driving by the law they would do what they are obligated to do according to the will of God.... But in this life Christians are not renewed perfectly and completely.... The Old Adam still clings to their nature and to all its internal and external powers.... Hence, because of the desires of the flesh the truly believing, elect and reborn children of God, require in this life not only the daily teaching and admonition, warning and threatening of the law, but frequently the punishment of the law as well, to egg them on so that they follow the Spirit of God (FC SD VI:6,7,9).

Christians still need the law as a *mirror* to reveal their sins. If the law did not reveal daily to Christians their sins, they would imagine they didn't need a Savior. To keep Christians from becoming Pharisees, the law must daily convict us of our sin and show us our desperate need for Jesus. The Formula of Concord states,

Believers, furthermore, require the teaching of the law in connection with their good works, because otherwise they can easily imagine that their works and life are perfectly pure and holy. But the law of God prescribes good works for faith in such a way that, as in a mirror, it shows and indicates to them that in this life our good works are imperfect and impure (FC SD VI: 21).

Christians also need the law to *curb* the desires of the old Adam. Stubborn as a mule, the old Adam understands only the club of the law. When unholy desires rise up in the Christian's flesh, the Christian needs to consider the threats of the law which warn us, "Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21). The Formula of Concord states, "As far as the old Adam who still adheres to them is concerned, he must be coerced not only with the law but also with miseries, for he does everything against his

will and by coercion, just as the unconverted are driven and coerced into obedience by the threats of the law” (FC SD VI:19).

Christians need the law to *guide* them in their sanctified lives. Because the flesh is still present, Christians’ knowledge of the law is imperfect, clouded, and easily misled. Because of the flesh, Christians do not fully know what God really wants of them. They can easily imagine that their own self-formulated works are pleasing to God. The monks in Luther’s day, for example, thought they led a holier life by going to a monastery than by fulfilling their vocations in life. The Formula of Concord states, “Believers, furthermore, require the teaching of the law so that they will not be thrown back on their own holiness and piety and under the pretext of the Holy Spirit’s guidance set up a self-elected service of God without his Word and command” (FC SD VI:20).

The law cannot produce sanctified living.

The law is useful in sanctification. It reveals our sin, curbs our old Adam, and shows us the life God wills us to lead. Though the law shows us the way God would have us go, it does not supply the ability to take us where it directs. A map may show us where to go, but if a car has no fuel, we will not go anywhere. The law demands, but gives no power to obey. As the Formula of Concord states, “The law indeed tells us that it is God’s will and command that we should walk in the new life, but it does not give the power and ability to begin it or to do it” (FC SD VI:11).

Legalism attempts to produce sanctification through the demands of the law. Moralizing tries to improve behavior by appealing to people to do what is good for themselves and others. Yet, while the law may produce civic (mere outward) righteousness, it cannot produce sanctified living. The Formula of Concord states, “The mere preaching of the law without Christ either produces presumptuous people, who believe that they can fulfill the law by external works, or drives man utterly to despair” (FC SD V:10).

Only the gospel in word and sacraments can produce sanctified living.

The gospel alone can enable Christians to lead sanctified lives. God’s love in Christ — Christ’s life, death, and resurrection — what God has done for the sinner’s salvation — this is the message through which the Holy Spirit produces sanctification. The apostle Paul wrote, “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” (Galatians 2:19,20). Again, he wrote, “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” (Romans 12:1).

The Formula of Concord states,

It is also necessary to set forth distinctly what the Gospel does, creates, and works

in connection with the new obedience of believers and what function the law performs in this matter, as far as the good works of believers are concerned. The law indeed tells us that it is God's will and command that we should walk in the new life, but it does not give the power and ability to begin it or to do it. It is the Holy Spirit, who is not given and received through the law but through the preaching of the Gospel (Galatians 3:2,14), who renews the heart. Then he employs the law to instruct the regenerate out of it and to show and indicate to them in the Ten Commandments what the acceptable will of God is (Romans 12:2) and in what good works, which God has prepared beforehand, they should walk (Ephesians 2:10) (FC SD VI:10-12).

It is this teaching that God empowers sanctified living only through the gospel that sets the Lutheran teaching on sanctification apart from every other church's teaching on sanctification. Roman and Reformed theology make the law the driving force in sanctification. Only Confessional Lutheran theology follows Scripture in teaching that justification is the cause of sanctification.

We also need to note the importance of the sacraments in empowering sanctified living. Baptism has daily use in the Christian's life as a comfort that sins are forgiven (Galatians 3:27) and as an empowerment for sanctified living (Titus 3:5, Romans 6). In his Large Catechism, Luther writes, "Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily Baptism, once begun and ever continued ... If you live in repentance, therefore, you are walking in Baptism, which not only announces this new life but also produces, begins, and promotes it. In Baptism we are given the grace, Spirit, and power to suppress the old man so that the new may come forth and grow strong" (LC Baptism: 65,75,76).

Likewise, the Lord's Supper also strengthens faith and empowers sanctified living by giving us Christ's body and blood with bread and wine for the forgiveness of our sins. Luther writes,

Therefore it [Lord's Supper] is appropriately called the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new man. While it is true that through Baptism we are first born anew, our human flesh and blood have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and faint, at times even stumble. The Lord's Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself and not weaken in the struggle but grow continually stronger" (LC Lord's Supper: 23-24).

In concluding this section, we do well to cite the words of Luther, "Accordingly, we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil" (SA III, VIII:10).

Good works are the concrete deeds which make up the sanctified life.

Good works are fruits which flow from faith (Galatians 5:22). Good works are not deeds of self-determined piety which people invent in a vain attempt to win God's favor (Micah 6:6-8; 1 Samuel 15:22). They cannot be determined even by the church (Matthew 15:9). Good works are those deeds which are commanded by God (Romans 13:10; Psalm 119:9). They flow from faith in Christ (Galatians 2:20), are motivated by God's love for us which moves us to love God and our neighbor (Romans 13:10), and are done to the glory of God (Matthew 6:1-5). Though the Christian's good works are still contaminated by the flesh, they are acceptable to God through Christ's righteousness (1 Peter 2:5).

Only believers can do good works (Hebrews 11:6). Unbelievers may do what is beneficial to the well-being of this world (civic righteousness). Their works may be of service to humanity and make this world a better place in which to live. Yet, before God, the works of the unbeliever are nothing more than filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Apart from Christ, they merit only God's judgment, not his favor.

Good works do not merit God's favor. Even if we kept God's law perfectly, we would be doing only what God has the right to expect of us (Luke 17:10). Yet, in his grace, God promises to bless the Christian's works in his own way and at his own time (Daniel 12:3; 2 Corinthians 9:6). On Judgment Day, the Lord will point to the works of believers as evidence of their faith (Matthew 25:34-40). Good works are evidence of justification by grace through faith (James 2:18). They are never, however, the basis of the Christian's faith (Romans 3:28).

In thankfulness to God, Christians will abound in good works (John 15:8). They will encourage each other to do good works (Hebrews 10:24). They will recognize the efforts of others, encourage them to continue their service to God, and glorify God for what he has enabled his people to do (1 Timothy 5:17).

We reject the following errors:

1. That people by their own powers can live a God-pleasing life.
2. That justification is based on the sanctified life, that sanctification precedes justification.
3. That it is possible to achieve perfection in sanctification in this life.
4. That the sanctified life can give us complete assurance of salvation.
5. That repeated, willful sinning will not destroy faith.
6. That the Christian does not need the law (antinomianism).
7. That the law can empower a Christian life.
8. That Lutherans who let the gospel predominate in their teaching are guilty of neglecting good works.
9. That it is possible to teach sanctification without teaching about justification.

VI. JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH PRODUCES INNUMERABLE BLESSINGS

The reconciliation of the cross and its blessings.

Today many people are searching for something. They feel that something is missing in their lives. They suspect that there has to be more than a little bit of happiness in life on earth. They feel that not everything relies on coincidence. They realize that they can not govern their lives in self-determination. We all are born without anybody asking us. The place and time of our birth is not our choice. All of us have to die even though we do not want to. And we are not able to redo anything that happened in our lives. Thus most people live in fear. They are afraid of unexpected blows of fate, illness, accidents, losses. That is why many of them turn to religious practices. They take what Asian, African, or Indian religions and magic esoterical cults offer as so-called help. Through religious practices they want to achieve harmony with themselves and their surroundings or the cosmos.

The apostle Paul teaches us in the letter to the Romans that God reveals himself in the creation (Romans 1:19-20). So every human can see that there is a God. If one does not deny this knowledge, one has to look straight at it. This is the reason for the search of so many people.

But this search alone does not save them. St. Paul continues. "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:21-22, cf. Psalm 14:1). They know that something is missing in their lives. But they are autonomous and want to help themselves. Instead of letting God show them the way to salvation they try to have peace with God through fabricated means. But in this way they find only the strict and judging God, who demands an explanation for their deeds.

Somebody used this illustration: The holy God is like a hot pan on a stove. Whoever touches it, burns his fingers. You can touch the pan only if you use its handle. We sinners can come close to the holy God only if we go the way that is given by himself. Otherwise we burn our fingers on him. Jesus Christ is this one and only way to God. Through him we can "touch" God. God sent his one and only Son to us sinners so that we have entrance again to our heavenly Father through him.

What separates us from God is our sin. Our disobedience and our lack of righteousness stand between us and the holy God. Jesus Christ took the sin and guilt of all people on himself and died the death of a criminal on the cross. This way, he paid our debt. God agreed to this vicarious atonement by awaking his Son from death. The holy God is no longer our enemy. Through Christ we have peace with God (Romans 5:1).

Christ reconciles the Father and us. Now we do not have to live as guilty persons or to look for a way out anymore. We are reconciled with God. He is no longer our opponent but our Friend and Father. We can come to him and live with him eternally. Whoever realizes that, with God's help, comes to peace with himself. One finds real peace already in this life on earth. The focal point of one's life is Christ. The church father Augustine (354-430), who searched for God for a long time himself, wrote about that: *Cor nostrum inquietum est, donec requiescat in te* (Our heart is restless until it finds rest in you, O God).

The message of forgiveness and its blessings.

The forgiveness that Jesus Christ earned for all is given to us as a present by God through faith. God proclaims the message of the salvation through Christ to all sinners. That way he offers the pardon to each human being. Whoever believes is saved (John 5:24). The reconciliation earned by Christ is given to this person. The devil cannot harm such a person. God's Son became our brother.

All this is given to us through faith in Jesus Christ. "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Therefore, many people think of faith as a work, which they have to do, so that God accepts them as justified. But the message of forgiveness is more than just a special offer that you have to take as firmly as possible. Through God allowing the gospel to be proclaimed to us, the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts. The Holy Spirit overcomes our inner resistance against God and his Word. From birth we are enemies of God. The Bible says: "The sinful mind is hostile to God" (Romans 8:7).

The Holy Spirit removes this resistance. Through the hearing of God's Word he enables us to believe and produces faith in our hearts (Romans 10:17). The Bible shows us how much God loves us. God did not spare his own Son (Romans 8:32) in order to save us from hell. Should not we also love and trust in him, who sought us out? All who realize this cannot remain sad or without comfort. Then, the joy over the love and kindness of God that he gave to us through Christ fills our heart. The apostle Paul confesses: "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:5).

This love is a strong force. It changes our life. Where usually guilt, fear, and powerlessness reign, now peace and forgiveness, confidence and trust enter. Whoever receives God's forgiveness through Holy Baptism can live as God's child. Such a person thanks God for his grace and does not have to search anymore for the joys of this world, to get something out of life on earth, anymore. This person does not have to get his own way by treating others inconsiderately to get ahead in life. The person learns to repay bad with good, yes, even to love his enemies. Here is why: "Her many sins have been forgiven — for she loved much" (Luke 7:47). In this case the woman showed love for Jesus because of the love Jesus showed for her.

Usually, we love other people only when they are friendly to us and when they return our love. God loved us even though we were his enemies. This is so special about his love. This love moves us, too. He pours this love into our hearts through faith. This way our hardened and selfish heart turns into a loving one. All this the Holy Spirit works in us through word and sacrament. He enables us to overcome our weaknesses and even to learn to love our enemies.

God himself does not need our love. He can exist without it. But he commands us to show our love for him by showing love to our neighbors. To them we have to show how much we love God and that we are thankful to him (cf. 1 John 4:21).

The Christian cross and its blessings.

Through Jesus Christ, God gave us forgiveness of sins and eternal peace. But still the life of a Christian is no uninterrupted climb to wonderful heights. Christians, too, experience distress and need over and over again, because they still have the sinful nature in them. We have trouble with guilt, sorrows, and diseases. As believers we can accept these difficulties from our heavenly Father's loving hand. Nothing happens without his allowing it to happen. No hair falls from our head without his knowledge.

But here justification is a blessing, too. The cross itself becomes a blessing through God's forgiveness. When there is temptation, it appears hard and unbearable to us. But we should not be overcome by it or let it blind us. God does not want to destroy our faith, but to strengthen and purify it. He wants to teach us perseverance and to trust him more and more. "He who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:13). Jesus Christ already fought the decisive battle for us when he defeated death and the devil. He wants to be with us in the fight for which we are called (1 Timothy 6:12).

The Savior does not spare his believers from such trials, through which they come closer to him. We have to learn that we cannot rely on our own strength if we want to achieve the eternal goal. We have to pay close attention to what Scripture teaches: "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). And we can be comforted by what the Lord said to St. Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The Lord did not just call us to faith, he also wants to keep us in it until our end (Luke 22:32). We can trust in him. He is "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

We reject the following error:

1. That the certainty of our salvation comes from how we feel about God rather than from the assurance of his love for us.

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

This article of justification by faith is “the chief article of the entire Christian doctrine,” “without which no poor conscience can have any abiding comfort or rightly understand the riches of the grace of Christ.” In the same vein 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. And St. Paul says specifically of this doctrine that a little leaven ferments the whole lump. Therefore he stresses the exclusive terms, that is, the terms by which all human works are excluded, such as “without the law,” “without works,” “by grace alone.” He stresses these terms with such zeal in order to indicate how very important it is that in this article, side by side with the true doctrine, we clearly segregate, expose, and condemn the false contrary doctrine (FC SD III:6-8).

We reecho the words of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions when we state that justification is the chief doctrine of the Christian faith, the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* (the doctrine by which the church either stands or falls). This conviction, however, is not merely the opinion of Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth century. It is the teaching of Scripture, which is good for all people of all ages. We who belong to the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference publicly declare before all people our unqualified and whole-hearted agreement with this confession. We also share Martin Luther’s conviction that where this doctrine does not remain pure, “it is impossible to repel any error or heretical spirit.” Let us briefly reexamine why it is that we make this confession.

Jesus Christ is the foundation on which the church is built.

In order for a building to withstand the test of time and stress, it must be built on a firm foundation. If the foundation is not firm, the building will not endure (Matthew 7:24ff). So it is with faith. It also must be built on a firm foundation. Souls are at stake. The Bible tells us that the church is built on Jesus Christ. He is the only foundation for our faith. As Paul wrote, “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11). When Jesus said, “On this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18), he was not talking about building the church on Peter. Jesus is the “rock” on which the church is built. He guarantees that “the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18).

Scripture makes it very clear that Jesus is the only way to heaven (John 14:6). Those who build their hope of eternal life on their own works will perish. When the apostle Paul warned the Galatian Christians against the leaven of the Judaizers, he made it clear that the Judaizer’s doctrine of salvation through observance of the Mosaic law did not lead to heaven. He wrote, “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (Galatians 5:4). It is important to note that Paul

was not speaking of people who were advocating some form of pagan idolatry. He was speaking of people who said that circumcision and observance of the Mosaic law were necessary besides believing in Jesus. Anytime works are introduced into the article on justification, the doctrine is undermined, and faith and salvation are lost. As Paul writes, “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (Galatians 5:4).

On the other hand, the Bible makes it very clear that all who build their faith on Jesus have the assurance of eternal life. Scripture asserts, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned” (John 3:18). By his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus secured salvation for us. No one who trusts in Jesus as his Savior from sin will ever be let down. His righteousness will cover us as we stand before God’s judgment seat. Through Jesus we pass from death to life.

Justification, then, is the foundation for our faith. It is the message of God’s acquittal of all sinners, based on Jesus Christ, who lived, died, and rose again for our salvation. Take away justification by grace through faith, and you take away Christ. Take away justification by grace through faith, and you have no foundation for faith.

Jesus Christ is the center of all Scripture.

The Bible is a unified account of God’s plan of salvation. It begins with creation and the fall. It relates God’s promise of the Savior to Adam and Eve in Eden (Genesis 3:15). The entire Old Testament unfolds the development of that promise. God promised the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that the Savior would come from their line (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). Jacob foretold that the Savior would come from the line of Judah (Genesis 49:10). Later, the Lord promised David that the Savior would come from his line (2 Samuel 7:11-16). The Old Testament spoke of the work of Jesus as prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15), priest (Psalm 110:4), and king (2 Samuel 7:16). The prophets spoke of the Savior’s person (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6), substitutionary death (Isaiah 53), birthplace (Micah 5:2), and of many other intimate details concerning Jesus’ life and work.

The New Testament relates for us the keeping of God’s promise. Jesus, the Savior of the world, came and carried out God’s will to save us. The four Gospels record the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, which form the basis upon which God has justified the world. The Epistles repeatedly stress that Christ’s redeeming work is the central message of the church. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul did not merely preach one doctrine. It was his practice to teach all that God had revealed. As he said to the elders of Ephesus, “I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God” (Acts 20:27). Rather, Paul preached Christ crucified and risen as the focal point of all his teaching. All of his teaching centered on Christ’s saving work.

Christ is the center of all Scripture. Paul wrote, “You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19-20). Just as the cornerstone supplies a building with the lines and angles necessary for an orderly structure, so Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection supply Scripture with its meaning and the church with its mission. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection are the basis for God’s justification of the world. Justification, based on Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, then, is the central teaching of Scripture.

Justification is the heart of scriptural doctrine.

The heart is the organ of the body which sends life-giving blood to the rest of the body. If the heart stops beating, the body will die. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is also the heart of the Christian faith. In the first place, there can be no salvation without it. The apostles stated, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Without the beating heart, there is no life. Without God’s acquittal of the sinner for Jesus’ sake, there is no salvation.

Justification is the power behind the Christian’s sanctified life. Just as there can be no activity of the body without the beating heart, so there can be no sanctified living if it is not empowered by the good news of our redemption in Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote, “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 2:20). Take away the teaching of justification and you have no power for sanctified living.

Justification is the chief message of the church (Mark 16:15-16). There can be no church without this message. The gospel gives life to the church (Romans 1:16). It is the message Christ commissioned the church to proclaim (Matthew 28:18-20). Rejection of this message brings damnation (Galatians 1:8-9; 5:4). Faith in Christ gives salvation (John 3:16).

Since justification is the chief message of the Scriptures, we need to take care, as Luther said, lest we allow it to become obscured or altered. So closely are all teachings of Scripture related to this teaching that any error in biblical doctrine affects the foundation of our faith. When one tampers with Scripture or any of its teachings, one also tampers with Christ, who is the center of all Scripture.

Any error in the area of justification also robs sinners of the comfort of the gospel. When sinners are directed to their own works as the basis for their own salvation, the result will be either pride or despair. Pride blinds those who think they have kept the law sufficiently to earn salvation. Despair envelops those who recognize their sins and can only anticipate the just punishment of God.

Justification is the doctrine by which the church either stands or falls.

In conclusion, then, let us review what the Lutheran Confessions state about this all-important doctrine. The Apology states the following:

In this controversy the main doctrine of Christianity is involved; when it is properly understood, it illumines and magnifies the honor of Christ and brings to pious consciences the abundant consolation that they need.... For since they understand neither the forgiveness of sins nor faith nor grace nor righteousness, our opponents confuse this doctrine miserably, they obscure the glory and the blessings of Christ, and they rob pious consciences of the consolation offered them in Christ (Ap IV:2-3).

Luther in the Smalcald Articles states the following:

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) ... Inasmuch as this must be believed and cannot be obtained or apprehended by any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that such faith alone justifies us.... Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed.... On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubts about it. Otherwise all is lost, and the pope, the devil, and all our adversaries will gain the victory (SA II, I:1,4-5).

Finally, we turn to Luther again for another statement on the importance of justification. He wrote:

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 for 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 aright in the church or successfully to 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 (as quoted by A. Koelpin, *Proceedings of the Confessional Ev. Lutheran Conference*, April 23-25, 1996: p. 141).

The doctrine of justification is our heritage from the Lutheran Reformation. This doctrine, which was obscured for so many years by the teaching of human works, shone brightly and clearly again as a result of Luther’s preaching and teaching. This doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ separates the Lutheran Confessions from all other church bodies and their confessions. In no other confession does the teaching of justification shine so clearly as it does in the Lutheran Confessions.

This indeed is a heritage to treasure. When the doctrine of justification is being compromised or given up by Lutherans who claim to reach an agreement with the very church that anathematized the doctrine of justification, we need to hold ever more fervently to this treasure brought down to us through the Lutheran Confessions. This doctrine is our

treasure, our hope, our assurance, and the life for our churches. If it falls, our churches will fall. When it is taught clearly, the devil with all of his raging will not be able to overcome us. God grant us ever to treasure this heritage from the Lutheran Reformation. God grant us ever to proclaim it clearly, throughout all generations.

We close, then, with the well-known words of Martin Luther's hymn on justification:

Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice,
With exultation springing,
And, with united heart and voice
And holy rapture singing,
Proclaim the wonders God has done,
How his right arm the vict'ry won.
How dearly it has cost him!

"What I on earth have lived and taught
Be all your life and teaching;
So shall my kingdom's work be wrought
And honored in your preaching.
Take care that no one's man-made laws
Should e'er destroy the gospel's cause.
This final word I leave you" (*Christian Worship* 377:1,10).