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GRACE.

For establishing whatever there is vital in personal Christianity, as well as for determining the exact doctrinal position of a teacher of Christianity, such Biblical concepts as "grace," "faith," and "righteousness" call for a careful inquiry and analysis. For these concepts are theological quantities of paramount value and importance that enter into the *articulus stantis atque cadentis ecclesiae*.¹⁾ Justification must remain a term of undefined extent as long as its coefficients are not exhibited in the full Scriptural value of their divinely intended meaning. According as a Christian understands, and a theologian explains, the meaning of these terms, he will hold as a net result of his efforts either a living spiritual reality, full of joy and solace, or a fantastic shadow that mocks his efforts at embrace. If the keynote of every genuine Christian hope for peace here and beyond has really been sounded, and the overshadowing issue of the Church's mission to fallen mankind has been fully stated in that momentous conclusion of the apostle: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith

1) "Above other matters in the Holy Scriptures the term grace, in particular, requires an explanation, not only because it is so widely used, but also because it is used in setting forth a matter by far the most important, namely, the article of justification, and, lastly, because ignorance of (the import of) this term has, before this time, occasioned the most pernicious errors." (Flacius, *Glossa*, ed. ultima, Basel, 1617; sub voce gratia, p. 370 a.)

WHAT IS LUTHERAN AND WHAT CALVINISTIC DOCTRINE IN THE ARTICLE OF ELECTION AND PREDESTINATION?

VI. PERSEVERANCE.

We have thus far shown how the articles of redemption and calling through the Gospel are spoiled by Calvin's predestination theory. The doctrines concerning the means of grace and conversion may be omitted here, because, in as far as they are affected by Calvin's doctrine of predestination, they have been treated of in preceding chapters. To complete our essay it is yet necessary to mention two points: perseverance in grace and the certainty of election.

Calvin, as a matter of course, teaches that only the elect are truly converted, though non-elected persons sometimes experience what he terms the "inferior operations of the Spirit." Of the elect he teaches that, when once converted, they can never again fall from grace. The stamp of adoption is in conversion indelibly fixed upon them, and they are brought into such a condition as to exclude every possibility of their ever again losing the grace of God. As they are absolutely elected and absolutely called, so they are absolutely secured against falling away. Hence the Calvinistic maxim: "Once in grace, always in grace." Even though the elect after conversion should neglect the means of grace and live in the most shameful sins and vices, they nevertheless, according to Calvin's theory, possess the grace of God. The seal of adoption may be obscured and weakened in them, but never totally lost. Calvin says: "We deny, however they (the elect) may be afflicted, that they ever fall and depart from that certain confidence which they had conceived in divine mercy." (Vol. 1, p. 507.) Again he says: "Nor is it to be doubted, that when Christ intercedes for all the elect, He prays for them the same as for Peter, that their faith may never fail. Hence we conclude

that they are beyond all danger of falling away, because the intercessions of the Son of God for their perseverance in piety have not been rejected. What did Christ intend we should learn from this but confidence in our perpetual security, since we have once been introduced into the number of His people?" (Vol. II, p. 186.) After stating that the elect "can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace" the Presbyterian Confession says: "Nevertheless they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalence of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sin and for a time continue therein." (Chap. XVII, § 3.)

Our Lutheran Church does, indeed, also teach that of the elect none can be finally lost; for God's "eternal purpose can not fail or be overthrown." If elect persons do fall away, they turn to repentance again, like David and Peter. Our church does therefore not teach that elect persons, when once converted, could fall no more, but we distinctly teach that elect persons may, and often do, temporarily fall from grace. "Here are condemned such as teach, that those who have once been justified, cannot fall again." (*Augsburg Conf.*, Art. XII.) Much less, then, does our church teach such detestable doctrine as if such persons could be God's beloved children who despise the means of grace and live in sins. "Many receive the Word with joy; but afterward fall away. Luke 8, 15. But this is not because God would not grant unto those, in whom He has commenced this good work, His grace in order to perseverance; for this is contrary to St. Paul's declaration, Phil. 1, 6; but it is because they maliciously turn themselves away from the holy command again, grieve and offend the Holy Spirit, intermingle themselves with the filth of the world, and decorate the habitations of their hearts for Satan again. The latter condition of these is worse than the former." (N. M., 2d ed., p. 718.)

Hence the difference of doctrine is this:

1. Calvin teaches that in conversion the elect are brought into a condition which excludes the possibility of falling in *this* life.

We teach that not *in*, but only *after* this life the elect are in a condition which excludes the possibility of falling.

2. Calvin teaches that the elect always remain children of grace, even though after conversion they despise the Word of God and walk in the service of sin.

We teach that all who despise God's Word and walk in sin, hence also the elect, when and so long as they do this, are children of wrath.

3. According to Calvin's doctrine the righteous who turns from his righteousness shall not die.

According to our doctrine the righteous who turns from his righteousness shall die.

In support of his doctrine Calvin appeals principally to the Lord's prayer for Peter, Luke 22, 32: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Footing on the first part and leaving out the second part of this passage, Calvin manifests himself a perverter of the Scriptures; for the Lord does not say Peter would not fall; He says Peter would fall, but would turn to repentance again, and then he should strengthen his brethren. Much less does the Lord say that Peter would be a temple of the Holy Spirit at the same time while he was denying his Master with cursing and swearing. Certainly, if Peter was converted again, he must have fallen, he must have lost the grace of God. So this passage refutes Calvin's, and proves our Lutheran doctrine. To David Nathan did not say: Thou art the man who by premeditating, planning, and perpetrating murder and adultery didst to some extent obscure the seal of grace which is in thee; but he said: "Thou art the man that shall surely die," 2 Sam. 12, 5. 7.

The falsity of Calvin's doctrine is very manifest also from the fruits which it must produce. If it were true that

a man once converted could no more lose the grace of God, then it would only be necessary for a man to convince himself that he was once converted in order to hope for heaven while walking after the flesh. An evil doctrine will bring forth evil fruit.

VII. CERTAINTY OF ELECTION.

May we Christians be certain that we, even we, are of the number of God's elect children? May we be so positively certain that we shall not perish, but have everlasting life as to live cheerfully in this world, and to look forward to eternity with joy and gladness? That is a question of paramount importance; a question which most deeply affects the whole life of a Christian; for, since the elect only will attain to bliss,—and this no one yet believing the Bible can or will deny,—it is evident, if we could not be certain of our election we could have no certainty of salvation whatever, but must walk in darkness, looking forward to death and eternity with apprehension and fear. Therefore it is highly necessary to define our doctrine on this point, that everyone may know what certainty of election we Lutherans teach, and to show whence this certainty is obtained.

As there are three distinct doctrines of election, so also three distinct doctrines concerning the certainty of election: the Synergistic, the Lutheran, and the Calvinistic, and these three doctrines are of such a nature that anyone teaching the one of them must reject and condemn the other two. As the Lutheran and Calvinistic doctrines of the Lord's Supper are antagonistic to each other, so that the one excludes the other, even so the doctrines of the certainty of salvation. This appears so soon as these doctrines are defined and compared. To describe the three simply by giving them a name we would denominate them thus; The Synergist teaches a certainty of reasonable knowledge; the Lutheran, a certainty of faith; the Calvinist, a certainty of sensible experience. The Synergist bases his

certainty, or rather, uncertainty, on human works or performances; the Lutheran bases his certainty on the Word of God; the Calvinist bases his certainty on his heart's experience. The Synergist says: I cannot know whether I am elect and will be saved, because I do not know whether I will persevere unto the end; the Lutheran says: I know that I am elect and will be saved, because the Word of God tells me so; the Calvinist says: I know that I am elect and must be saved, because I have experienced the effectual calling of the Spirit. The Synergist teaches a conditional or doubtful certainty, with a promise like that of the Law, which promises life with the proviso: "This do, and thou shalt live;" the Lutheran teaches a positive and infallible certainty, because he teaches a certainty of faith; the Calvinist teaches an absolute certainty, because he teaches a certainty which is independent of the means of grace. We ask the reader to make a note of this last distinction, because it is decisive. The Lutheran teaches an infallible, but not an absolute certainty; the Calvinist teaches an absolute, but not an infallible certainty. The Lutheran has an infallible certainty, because based on an infallible foundation, the Word¹⁾ of God; the Calvinist has only a fallible certainty, because based on a fallible foundation, namely, his own experiences.

When we hear that Calvin teaches an absolute certainty of election and salvation, a certainty which cannot be affected by any contingencies, but which renders man absolutely sure that in no case he can be lost, but in all cases he must be saved, this might very easily make the impression of being sound and godly doctrine; for this is certainly true, the more certain a Christian is of his eternal salvation the better it is, provided only it be the right, true, divine, and not a false, deceptive certainty. But

1) If the Lutheran lets go the Word, he of course loses that infallible certainty, and no longer has any certainty at all.

when we come to examine Calvin's doctrine, we soon find that he does not teach the right, but a false certainty, which, after all, is only deceptive and which, when applied in practice, proves a very uncertain certainty.

Calvin derives his doctrine of an absolute certainty of election from the doctrine of an effectual calling and an inamissible grace. He does frequently speak as though a Christian must derive his hope of salvation from the Word of God, but he sets this aside again and manifests as his real meaning that a man is to judge of his election, not actually by the Word itself, but by the *effect* which the Word produces in him. He says: "Few, therefore, are chosen out of a multitude that are called, but not with that calling by which we say believers ought to judge of their election." (Vol. II, p. 187.) He says, believers ought to judge of their election by their effectual calling. Now Calvin himself teaches that the calling through the Word is common to all. How, then, does the effectual call which Calvin teaches distinguish itself? What is in it by which a believer can and ought to judge of his election? Calvin states it in this wise: When treating of "common faith,"¹⁾ as he styles it, he says: "But very different is the meaning of 'full assurance' (*πληροφορίας*), which is always attributed to faith in the Scriptures, and which places the goodness of God, that is clearly revealed to us, beyond all doubt. But this cannot take place, unless we have a real sense and experience of its sweetness in ourselves." (Vol. I, p. 505.) So, then, the final mark is, a man is to judge of his election by "a real sense and experience of the sweetness of God's goodness." Calvin bases the certainty of election on the experiences of man's heart. But what stability can the feelings and sensations of the heart afford? Is that an immutable foundation? May there not be a deceptive sensation of sweetness? May not the devil, transforming him-

1) Calvin distinguishes between common faith and full assurance faith.

self into an angel of light, also cause sweet experiences? May not nervous excitement produce peculiar emotions and sweet sensations? The Scriptures say, Jer. 17, 9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." And Calvin himself confesses: "The heart of man has so many recesses of vanity, and so many retreats of falsehood, and is so enveloped with fraudulent hypocrisy, that it frequently deceives even himself." (Vol. I, p. 499.) In these words Calvin gives testimony on his own doctrine that he teaches not a certain certainty, but a very uncertain certainty, a certainty which may satisfy hypocrites and infatuated fanatics, but not those afflicted hearts that want an immutable foundation to stand on. This uncertainty Calvin renders still more uncertain by teaching that the reprobate often have similar experiences as the elect. He says: "Experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected with emotions very similar to those of the elect, so that, in their own opinion, they in no respect differ from the elect. Wherefore it is not at all absurd, that a taste of heavenly gifts is ascribed to them by the apostle, and a temporary faith by Christ: not that they truly perceive the energy of spiritual grace and clear light of faith, but because the Lord, to render their guilt more manifest and inexcusable, insinuates Himself into their minds, as far as His goodness can be enjoyed without the Spirit of adoption." (Vol. I, p. 500.) If the reprobate experience emotions which lead them to think that they are elect, who, then, can know if not perhaps he be one of these reprobates who deceive themselves? That is certainly tearing away everything and leaving nothing definite and certain for the Christian to be led by. Against this fact Calvin could not altogether close his eyes; therefore he adds: "If anyone object that there remains, then, no further evidence by which the faithful can certainly judge of their adoption, I reply, that although there is a great similitude and affinity between the elect of God and those who are endued with

a frail and transitory faith, yet the elect possess that confidence which Paul celebrates, so as boldly to cry: Abba, Father." Is, then, the difference to be only in the degree of boldness? Is not this building on a foundation of sand?

Our Lutheran Church does not base the certainty of election on such an uncertain foundation. It teaches that the Christian derives his certainty of election and salvation from the Word of God. We are certain of our election and salvation by believing and holding fast the Word of promise. If we hold fast the Word, we have the infallible certainty of salvation; if we let go the Word, we have no certainty whatever. We Lutherans do, of course, not deny experimental religion, we most emphatically teach it, but the question is: What is the right kind of experimental religion? and shall we found the hope of our salvation on the experiences and sensations of our own heart, or on the infallible and immutable Word of God? 2 Pet. 1, 16. 18. 19 we read: "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy." Peter argues from the smaller to the greater. The Word of prophecy, he says, is more sure than eye-sight and ear-hearing. We build our hopes on the Word of promise, which is more sure than the observations of the senses and the sensations of the heart. Therefore, whether our sensations be sweet or bitter, our feelings good or bad, this we know, when heaven and earth will pass away the Word of the Lord will abide.

But here an adherent of Calvin's doctrine might object and say: Have you never read in the Bible of the witness of the Spirit sealing the adoption on the hearts of the elect? Answer: We have read in the Bible of the witness of the Spirit, and we have also read in the Bible that the witness of the Spirit is always connected with the Word of Jesus

Christ. If the witness of the Spirit is not resulting from, in agreement with, and directing to, the Word of Christ, then the spirit witnessing in us is not the Spirit of God, but the spirit of man or the devil. The Spirit of God does not teach men to base their hopes on experiences, sensations of sweetness, and similar emotions; the right Spirit brings to remembrance the words which Jesus Christ has spoken. Of the Holy Ghost the Lord says: "He shall glorify me; for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you," John 16, 14. Therefore our Lutheran Church teaches Christians to build their hopes on the Word of the Gospel, which cannot lie or deceive. That Word tells us that Jesus Christ is made unto us righteousness; that He which hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ; that He hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Holding the Word of divine truth in faith we have the certainty that the everlasting God is our Savior; for His own Word is our security. If, indeed, we let go the Word, then we have nothing save only a very certain uncertainty. But we let go the Word so soon as we want something else beside it to build on. Calvinists looking to themselves and their experiences want sensations of sweetness to judge by and to build on, but what foundation these afford we have before shown. But we Lutherans teach that we are not to look to ourselves or anything in us and of us, but to the Word, and if and in as far as we do look to the Word, we have divine and infallible certainty. When synergists want the certainty of reasonable calculations and Calvinists the certainty of sweet sensations, we Lutherans reject and condemn both alike and say: The Word of our God shall be sufficient unto us; this we will believe and not doubt. That this is the doctrine of our church the Confessions do not leave in doubt. Concerning the salutary use of the doctrine of election they say: "In reference to this point we should not judge according to our reason, or to the Law, or to any external

appearance; nor should we attempt to scrutinize the concealed, the hidden depths of divine predestination, but we should attend to the revealed will of God. For He has made known unto us the mystery of His will, and brought it to light through Christ that it might be preached." (N. M., 2d ed., p. 714.) What kind of certainty is derived from the Word is described in the Confessions in this wise: "In order that the hearts of persons may entertain a consolation and a hope, which are real and infallible, we refer them, as Paul does, to the divine promises of grace in Christ, and teach them that they must believe that God grants them eternal life, not on account of their work, or the fulfillment of the Law, but for the sake of Christ." (p. 210.) That faith itself is certainty the Confessions also testify: "It is faith alone in the heart that regards or takes into consideration the promises of God; faith alone is the assurance upon which the heart rests with certainty that God is merciful." (p. 184.) Hence the difference of doctrine may be summarized thus:

1. Calvin teaches an absolute certainty of election; we teach a certainty of faith.
2. Calvin bases the certainty of salvation on the experience of the Christian; we base the certainty of salvation on the divine Word of promise.
3. Calvin's doctrine is certainly productive of fanaticism; our doctrine confines men in the limits of the written Word of God.

We close our essay in the hope of having succeeded in making it plain to the reader that Calvin's doctrine of an absolute predestination unto life and unto death is essentially, radically different from our Lutheran doctrine of an election of grace, and of grace only.

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