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Foreword.

In making a survey of conditions as the new year is beckoning to us to gird our loins for another twelve months' service, if such be the will of our heavenly Father, we are again struck by the vast change that has taken place with respect to prominent issues before the Church if we compare our times with those of our fathers forty or fifty years ago. In those days there was a good deal of doctrinal discussion, Methodists arguing with Baptists on their distinctive teachings, Calvinists opposing Arminians, and Lutherans of one synod debating with those of another synod on the positions of their respective bodies. The starting-point invariably was the Bible, and the debate usually concerned itself with the question whether the tenets of a certain denomination were Scriptural or not. Inasmuch as both parties to the debate appealed to the Scriptures as their authority, the interpretation of the Bible became a very important matter, and often there was to be witnessed a thorough investigation of special texts which one or the other of the contestants had quoted in support of his belief. In the last analysis, what kept Protestants apart was a difference in principles of interpretation with respect to the sacred Book, the authority of which all acknowledged, a difference which resulted in disparity of doctrine on an ever-increasing scale, the stream widening as it proceeded on its course. To take an example, the Lutherans and the Reformed agreed in regarding the Bible as true in every word and as a guide to be followed in all religious matters, but they differed as to the interpretation of certain important passages, the Lutherans holding that the words of Scripture must be taken as they read, the exegete using such light as the Bible itself affords (*Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur*), while the Reformed held that reason must be permitted a vote when we determine the sense of a Scripture-passage, an attitude which, of course, resulted in their having two guides to whom they entrusted themselves in establishing the content of divine revelation, namely, the

Perpetual Forgiveness.

Translated from Dr. E. Preuss's *Die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung*, Part VI.

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It has been said that it is a foolish dream to believe that the full and *final justification* from which good works flow automatically, can be obtained by a single flight of the soul up to God. This is true, at least as far as the final justification is concerned. However, I cannot remember having read the doctrine which is here rejected anywhere except perhaps in Martensen's *Dogmatics*.¹⁾ Now, if the danger which threatens our brethren from this erroneous doctrine is formidable, then help them to get away from it. But am I really helping a wanderer who is in danger of falling over the right side of a bridge if I push him over the left side? Of course, the doctrine of the once-and-never-again justification is

1) Martensen, *Dogmatik*. Berlin, 1856. 8vo. — According to Martensen the so-called "great conversion" simply contains justification. After that he knows of nothing else than sanctification. [*Hans Lassen Martensen*; b. 1808; d. 1884 at Copenhagen as bishop of Zealand, the highest ecclesiastical office of Denmark; prominent Lutheran theologian and dogmatician, with a speculative-mystic tendency.] — *Concordia Cyclopedia*, p. 444.]

dangerous and foolish, just as foolish as if one would maintain that it is sufficient for life to have breathed once, at the time of birth, or that at midnight one can still read by the light of the noon-day sun. And it is also dangerous. For if one is justified once for all on Thursday, one need not be so careful on Friday. He who neglects to strive daily for forgiveness of sins because he relies on the forgiveness which he once received, will indeed have peculiar experiences on his death-bed. But from this it does not by any means follow that justification is at any time incomplete; what, however, does follow is this: we must perpetually apprehend God's full forgiveness by repentance and faith, else it will slip away from us. Just examine the doctrine of Martensen in the light of the example of Abraham. According to Martensen everything that pertains to Abraham's justification, from beginning to end, is contained in Gen. 12, for there the patriarch was converted. All that follows pertains to sanctification. God's Word judges differently. It takes Abraham, long after his conversion, when he was already renewed and adorned with many good works, and suddenly declares: "He believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." 2) So at the very seat of this doctrine the term *justification* is *not* used of God's first judgment of justification at the time of conversion. This story rather shows that God justifies perpetually. For if God imputed Abraham's faith unto him for righteousness in the middle of his sanctification, then He always did so.

Should any one still be in doubt about this, let him read Rom. 4, 24. There Paul says of himself and of the Romans that the righteousness of Christ *shall be* imputed unto them. He declares that the story of Abraham "was not written for his [Abraham's] sake alone, that it was imputed unto him, but for us also, *to whom it shall be imputed* if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus, our Lord, from the dead." Rom. 4, 23, 24. Philippi pertinently remarks with reference to this text: "Justification is here described as a divine act continuing in time." 3) In the case of Paul it took place for the first time when he was baptized in Damascus, Acts 22, 16; with the Christians at Rome, when they were converted. The matter did not end here, however, but as long as they believed, so long the righteousness of Christ was to be imputed unto them. Is it possible to teach perpetual justification in words clearer than these?

2) Gen. 15, 6; Rom. 4, 3. Formula of Concord. *Trigl.*, 927.

3) Philippi, *Roemerbrief*, 155.

Add to this Rom. 8. There the apostle declares: "There is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. . . . It is God that justifieth." ⁴⁾ Because God perpetually justifies, therefore there is no condemnation to us. Yes, Paul reaches into the future and says: "Who *shall* lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Neither now nor in the future will any one, not even the devil, be able to lay any charges against us because God *perpetually regards us righteous*. Rom. 4, 6 the apostle does not call the man blessed to whom God *has* imputed righteousness, but the man "unto whom God *imputeth* (*λογιζεται*) righteousness." Of course, there must be a first time when this imputation took place; therefore justification is just as often described also as past. Rom. 5, 1, 9; 1 Cor. 6, 11; Titus 3, 7. Besides these passages, however, there are others in which the verb is in the present tense, in order that all may know that the judgment of God pertains not only to the past, but is perpetually present and active. Is. 43, 25. One need but compare Rom. 5, 1 and Gal. 2, 17. Rom. 5, 1 Paul clearly states: "Therefore, *being justified* by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." In Gal. 2, 17 his words are equally clear: "But if we, *while we seek to be justified* by Christ, ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin?" Now, if justification at first were incomplete, then Rom. 5, 1 would not be true; on the other hand, if it had taken place at one time once for all, then Gal. 2, 17 would not be true. So, then, both propositions are wrong; on the contrary, God's justification is at once *complete* and *perpetual*. Therefore St. Paul can properly say in the same epistle that he possesses Christ and that he is striving to win Christ. Phil. 1, 21; 3, 8, 9. And Rom. 5, 17 he says: "They which *receive* abundance of grace and of the gift of [imputed] righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." He does not say, "which have received," but, "which receive." ⁵⁾ For they might have received it and then may lose it again. Therefore he shall reign who perpetually receives the full glory of the imputed righteousness of Christ unto his end. Heb. 4, 16; Rom. 5, 1, 2.

But just which faith is imputed for righteousness, the present or the past faith? If the past faith is imputed, then a man might

4) Rom. 8, 1: Οὐδὲν ἄρα νῦν κατάκριμα τοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. The thought is taken up again v. 33: Θεὸς ὁ δικαιοῶν.

5) "It is preferable to let it [*λαμβάνοντες*] keep the participle and present-tense meaning, so that thereby the receiving of grace is designated as continuing in time." (Philippi, *Roemerbrief*, 222.)

be a thief and a just man at the same time. If, on the other hand, it is always the present faith which is imputed, then God's justification can certainly not be limited to a minute in your past life. Hence, when the apostle says: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness," Rom. 4, 5, he certainly means: If you believe to-day, then God imputes that faith which you have to-day unto you for righteousness — of course, for the sake of its contents —; if you believe to-morrow, then God imputes the faith which you have to-morrow; if you believe perpetually, then He imputes your perpetual faith continuously. (Compare Acts 10, 43; 13, 39.) And this is perfectly in order. For just as God perpetually imputed the sin of the world unto Christ until His glorious resurrection, so He imputes the righteousness of Christ unto us unto our end.⁶⁾ It would be absurd indeed to say that God pronounces a sentence and then is no more concerned about it. God is not a man who, after having pronounced a sentence, folds up his documents and goes home, no matter what the acquitted defendant may do in the mean while; on the contrary, His eyes perpetually rest upon us. So He perpetually estimates you righteous as long as you abide in Him, and He perpetually condemns those who whore against Him; for He is the living, omnipotent God. And just as little as He retired into solitude after the work of creation was finished, but "upholds all things by the word of His power,"⁷⁾ Heb. 1, 3, so that not even a sparrow falls from the roof without His will, just so little does He for a moment turn His eyes, which regard us righteous for Christ's sake, away from us. For as the preservation of the world is in fact a perpetual creation, so the justification of a poor sinner is a perpetual act of regarding him righteous. We speak of a state of grace, and that is correct. Rom. 5, 2. But this grace wherein we, as the apostle says, stand is not a heap of sand, but a clear, living stream which perpetually flows down upon us from the throne of the Lamb. Rev. 22, 1. Therefore it is said of this grace that it shall reign as a queen through the [imputed] righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ, our Lord. Rom. 5, 21. And just as little as the Rhine would continue to flow for a moment if the living God were to withdraw His hand from it, just so little would the stream of forgiveness flowing from the throne of God refresh our souls if

6) Provided we continue in faith.

7) Luther. St. Louis Ed., I, 61 f.

God would cease to send it. In token thereof God has comprehended the stream of forgiveness in the Word and so leads it into our hearts and homes: "Peace I leave unto you, My peace I give unto you." John 14, 27. "Peace be unto you," and again: "Peace be unto you." John 20, 19, 21. And again: "Peace be unto you." John 20, 26. And through the mouth of the apostle: "Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ," Rom. 1, 7; and again and over and over: 1 Cor. 1, 3; 2 Cor. 1, 2; Gal. 1, 3; Eph. 1, 2; Phil. 1, 2; Col. 1, 2; 1 Thess. 1, 1; 2 Thess. 1, 2; Philemon 3. And once more: "Grace, mercy, and peace from God, our Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord." 1 Tim. 1, 2; 2 Tim. 1, 2; Titus 1, 4. There you have perpetual forgiveness if you apprehend it by faith. "O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." Is. 48, 18.

But on what does God's perpetual absolution rest if not on Christ's perpetual intercession? The one requires the other. There is no perpetual forgiveness if the blood of Christ does not perpetually plead for mercy. And Christ's perpetual intercession is perpetually efficacious. Therefore St. Paul exclaims: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, *who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*" Rom. 8, 33, 34. And Heb. 7, 25: "Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost [Luther: *immerdar*] that come unto God by Him, seeing He *ever* liveth to make intercession for them." Thus He perpetually stands in the presence of God in His bloody garment. Is it conceivable that His perpetual intercession should not procure perpetual justification and forgiveness? 1 John 2, 1; Heb. 9, 24; 4, 14—16. Most certainly not, as just that is His office; for He is a Priest forever. Ps. 110, 4.⁸⁾

The doctrine of perpetual justification becomes indisputable, however, if we remember that justification and forgiveness are *the same thing*; for Rom. 4, 6—8 the apostle explains the former

8) Concerning Christ's perpetual intercession see Luther, St. Louis Ed., 941. 1024 f. 1030. — J. B. Carpov's remarks are very much to the point. He writes: "Uti Christus meritum suum pro nobis praestitit et eodem justificationem nobis acquisivit, ita etiam id ipsum nunc ad dexteram Patris constitutus praesentat Patri ac postulat pro nobis et rogat, ut propterea credentes justificare velit, sicut Rom. VIII, 34; 1 John II, 1; Hebr. VII, 25 id declaratur nobis." (J. B. Carpov, *Disputationes Isagogicae in Chemnicium*, 1096.)

by the latter,⁹⁾ and on the basis of this apostolic word the Formula of Concord testifies: "The word *justify* means . . . to absolve" (*Trigl.*, 793), and it rejects the attempt to separate them as an error. (*Trigl.*, 795. 937.) And forgiveness, in 1 John 1, 7, is described as perpetual, the words reading: "For the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, *cleanseth* us from all sins." It *cleanseth* us perpetually because we perpetually have sin. (See also Ps. 103, 3.) And Paul begins Rom. 4, 7 with the words: "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered," but then he proceeds, v. 8: "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute (*λογισηται*) sin." Yes, the Hebrew text which the apostle here has in mind says: "Blessed is he whose transgression *is being taken away*, whose sin *is being covered up*. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord will not impute iniquity." Ps. 32, 1. 2. From this we, of course, do not conclude that David did not receive actual and full forgiveness; for the fifth verse of the same psalm expressly says: "Thou *hast* forgiven me the iniquity of my sin." Ps. 32, 5. This, however, we do maintain most emphatically: When the Holy Spirit here speaks of "blessedness," He does not only mean a forgiveness which David once received, but rather the perpetual forgiveness which he enjoyed. Eph. 1, 6. 7 teaches the same: "He hath made us accepted in the Beloved. In whom we *have* redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." So, then, we *have* forgiveness of sins; we did not only have it, but we have it perpetually; of course, not within us, but without us, namely, in Christ. And Col. 1, 12. 13 we read: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son; in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." The deliverance from the power of darkness and the translation into the kingdom of Christ took place when we received Holy Baptism, and on the basis of this translation God perpetually forgives our sins. And it is well that it is thus. For a passing forgiveness would benefit us just as little as a mountain stream which is high up in its banks to-day and dried up to-morrow would benefit a boatman.

We are required to believe perpetually; to continue in faith,

9) Apostolus justificationem describit per remissionem peccatorum Rom. IV, 7. 8 ex Ps. XXXII, 1; ergo ubi est remissio peccatorum, ibi justificatio. (John Gerhard, *Loci*, III.)

Acts 14, 22; to live from faith to faith, Rom. 1, 17,¹⁰⁾ as the Apostle Paul did, who confessed concerning himself: "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." Gal. 2, 20. And at the end of his pilgrimage he says: "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith." 2 Tim. 4, 7. To believe is to take. If we believe perpetually, we take perpetually. But how can we take perpetually unless we be given perpetually? So there is a perpetual living relation between our God and us: He gives, and we take; He perpetually gives us the righteousness of Christ, and we perpetually receive it; He perpetually regards us righteous for the sake of His Son, and we perpetually believe. "I believe the forgiveness of sins" does not mean: "I am in possession of it and now take it easy," but: "I take it perpetually." Christ is sitting in the ship; we, the justified not excepted, are not in the ship, but are floundering in the water. Therefore we must cling to the planks of His boat with both hands, yea, if need be, with our teeth, until we safely land in yonder fatherland. This perpetual holding is in every case accompanied by a perpetual turning away from sin. Therefore the Scriptures on every page call to repentance, and Luther is right when he says: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying, 'Repent ye,' etc., intended that the whole life of believers should be penitence."¹¹⁾ Out of such repentance flows faith till death.^{11a)} So, then, these three things are linked together: perpetual forgiveness and perpetual faith and perpetual repentance. None of these is without the other. For how could there be repentance without faith or faith where God does not justify? Rom. 4, 5; Acts 13, 39; 10, 34. And we sorely need these three things because we perpetually have sins. For even the disciple whom Jesus loved confessed: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." 1 John

10) Respectus habetur ad actum fidei continuatum. Quemadmodum 2 Cor. III, 18 dicimur transformari ex gloria in gloriam, ubi illa *ἀναδιπλωσις* perennitatem et continuitatem significat, ita quoque usurpantur in Scriptura phrases de virtute in virtutem, de saeculo in saeculum. (John Gerhard, *Comm. in Epist. ad Rom.*, 38. 39.) Comp. also Hab. 2, 4.

11) Dominus et magister noster Jesus Christus dicendo: Poenitentiam agite! omnem vitam fidelium poenitentiam esse voluit. (Luther's Ninety-five Theses, Thesis I.) [For English translation of the Ninety-five Theses see *Concordia Cyclopaedia*, p. 756 ff.] — The same doctrine is taught in the Apology, *Trigl.*, 213, and in the Smalcald Articles, *Trigl.*, 488.

11a) What the author means to say is that repentance and faith cannot be separated. In fact, how could it be otherwise, since faith is a part of repentance. — Ed.

1, 8. Verily, in our flesh dwelleth no good thing, Rom. 7, 18, and, in addition, we often commit sinful deeds. But if we transgress one commandment, we are guilty of the whole Law. Jas. 2, 10. Therefore, "if Thou, Lord, shouldest mark (רָשָׁעִים) iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." Ps. 130, 3, 4. The Hebrew original says "the forgiveness" (הַסְּלִיחָה), not "a forgiveness." It is perpetual forgiveness because we perpetually have sins. Woe unto us if God would but for a moment cease to regard us righteous for the sake of the blood of Christ! (Luther. St. Louis Ed., IV, 2045.) But just as at the first time, even so perpetually God's justification comes through the Word. Therefore the Lord does not say: "If a man once receives My sayings, He shall never see death," but: "If a man *keep* My sayings." John 8, 51. And Paul exhorts his Philippians to hold the Word of life with both hands.¹²⁾ Phil. 2, 16. James even admonishes us perpetually to receive the engrafted Word.¹³⁾ Jas. 1, 21.

From the viewpoint of this doctrine one understands also Ps. 51. Upon his penitent confession God had forgiven David through the mouth of Nathan. 2 Sam. 12, 13. Nevertheless David trembles and cries: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness: according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness." Ps. 51, 1, 2, 7, 14. For a terrified conscience the point is always *present* forgiveness. Though God forgave you a thousand times in the past, He must forgive you *now*; though you believed a thousand times in the past, you must perpetually believe if you are to have peace of conscience. And that is a very grievous sin, taking another man's wife and becoming his murderer.¹⁴⁾ 2 Sam. 12, 9; Ps. 51, 14. Thus God

12) Ἐπέχοντες, not ἔχοντες. Hence, τὸν νοῦν or τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐπέχειν steadfastly to keep the mind or the eyes fixed upon something.

13) James calls the Gospel a λόγον ἔμφυτον in so far as it was no longer strange to the hearts of his readers, but engrafted into them. And the verb δέξασθε in no way conflicts with this, because the Word through which the new birth was wrought in the Christians is always proclaimed to them anew and must always be received by them anew.

14) Ps. 51, 14 [Hebrew text v. 16] proves that David did not ask for a more complete forgiveness. For a single sin can certainly not be forgiven half. However, concerning this one sin (רַמְיָם) two things are certain; first, that it was already forgiven through Nathan; secondly, that David afterwards still asked that it be forgiven.

forgave David, and forgave him perpetually, especially in response to his plaintive prayer. Ps. 32.

Our God calls Himself "Sun of Righteousness." Mal. 4, 2. When the sun rises, it causes the trees to glisten in brilliant green; but the colors fade away when the sun sets. So it is not enough that the brightness of the righteousness of Christ was once spread over you; God must perpetually shed its rays upon you, else your glory will depart as the colors outdoors fade away when night comes on. Num. 6, 25. Sun of Righteousness, shed Thy rays perpetually upon us, for Thy light is our light.

This is also the doctrine of the Fathers. When the Augsburg Confession says that we *are* justified before God if we believe and that God imputes this faith unto us for righteousness in His sight,¹⁵ it does not speak of a justification which took place in Holy Baptism or in conversion, but of a continuous act of God. Also Carpzov understands the Augsburg Confession thus. In his famous *Introduction to the Confessional Writings of the Lutheran Church* he says: "The Protestants are here" — in Article IV of the Augsburg Confession — "speaking of justification as it takes place and is continued, namely, as it takes place and is continued as far as it is solely by faith."¹⁶ The Apology teaches the same when it says: "Sin is remitted in Baptism, not in such a manner that it no longer exists, but so that *it is not imputed.*" (*Trigl.*, 115.) And again: "They," (*i. e.*, the passages quoted), "clearly call concupiscence sin, which, however, is not imputed to those who are in Christ, although by nature it is a matter worthy of death, where it is not forgiven."¹⁷ So, then, sin remains in us. How long? As long as we live. But it is not imputed unto us. How long? As long as we live. Is this perpetual forgiveness, or is it not? (See Smalcald Articles. *Trigl.*, 499.) Also the Small Catechism joins in this testimony when it says: "I believe the forgiveness of sins." What does this mean? It does not mean:

15) *Gratis justificantur propter Christum per fidem, quum credunt se in gratiam recipi et peccata remitti propter Christum, qui sua morte pro nostris peccatis satisfecit. Hanc fidem imputat Deus pro justitia coram ipso, Rom. 3 et 4. (Trigl., 45.)*

16) *Loquuntur Protestantes de justificatione, prout illa fit et continuatur . . . , prout enim fit ac continuatur, catenus ex sola fide est. (John B. Carpzov, Isagoge in Libros Eccl. Luth. Symbolicos, 202.)*

17) *Haec testimonia nulla cavillatione everti possunt. Clare enim appellant concupiscentiam peccatum, quod tamen his, qui sunt in Christo, non imputatur, etsi res sit natura digna morte, ubi non condonatur. (Trigl., 115.)*

“I believe that certain sins are under certain circumstances forgiven to certain people”; nor does it mean that at some previous time, at my first conversion, all my sins were forgiven to me, but it means, — however, why trouble myself with trying to say what it means since the Catechism itself explains the words by saying: “In which Christian Church *He forgives daily and richly all sins* to me and all believers”? (*Trigl.*, 545. See also Large Catechism, *Trigl.*, 693.) That is what it means. And the Formula of Concord, following the Apology, teaches: “Christ covers all their sins, which nevertheless in this life still adhere in nature, with His complete obedience. But irrespective of this they are declared and regarded godly and righteous by faith and for the sake of Christ’s obedience . . . , although on account of their corrupt nature they still are and remain sinners to the grave.” (*Trigl.*, 923. See also p. 927.) How does the doctrine that God justifies us only once in our life agree with this? (*To be continued.*)
