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## Perpetual Forgiveness.

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

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(Continued.)

And as regards the theologians, with whom shall we begin? With Clement of Rome?<sup>1)</sup> or Augustine? or Luther? Luther says: "Therefore it is the same righteousness which is given unto men in Baptism and at all times in true repentance." (St. Louis Ed., X, 1264.) And in another place: "Since sin eternally inheres in our flesh as long as we live on this earth, and since we never cease to sin and err, we must verily also have an eternal and perpetual forgiveness." (St. Louis Ed., V, 1094. Also XI, 719. 584; XVI, 1194 f.) Martin Chemnitz has the same clear conception of the matter. If a person wishes to be completely cured of the erroneous doctrine of Martensen, he need only read that part of Chemnitz's *Examen* which treats of justification; for by justification he always understands God's perpetual judicial act of regarding the sinner righteous, and nothing else. We really ought to quote the entire article, which covers fifty-three quarto pages. But that being out of the question, we choose half a dozen passages at random, no matter which: "God does not give us the benefit of justification only once in this life, namely, when we are baptized."<sup>2)</sup> Again: "The papists limit justification to a single moment, when a sinner is at first made righteous. It is obvious that this opinion is in direct conflict with the Holy Scriptures; for when they teach that we become righteous by grace, for Christ's sake, without works, they are not only speaking of the first conversion. The justification which the Scriptures teach is not a

1) Clemens Romanus. *Ep. ad Cor. I, 32*: Δικαιούμεθα διὰ τῆς πίστεως. Present tense, and yet he had been baptized long ago.

2) Neque etiam semel tantum in hac vita, quando scilicet baptizamur, Deus nobis offert, communicat et applicat beneficium justificationis. (*Wacamen*, 184, B.)

justification which takes place once and then is done." 3) — Then follows the example of Abraham and the proof from Ps. 32. And further on: "Habakkuk does not only say: 'The just *lives* by faith,' but: 'He *shall* live by faith.' So, then, it is one and the same justification which we receive when we are at first converted and by which we finally enter into eternal life." 4) "Not even in the regenerate does God find perfect righteousness; on the contrary, many and various sins. So God regards them righteous freely and by grace if they acknowledge their sin and by faith apprehend mercy in Christ." 5) We see that the soul of Chemnitz knew nothing of this curious order of salvation: to-day justification, to-morrow sanctification; he rather teaches that God regards also the most advanced Christians righteous *perpetually* and by grace, for Christ's sake.

Also Flacius faithfully stands by the others in this matter. The godly, he says, are *perpetually justified* through faith. Paul treats of this perpetual justification Rom. 8: "It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" For this *perpetual justification* we ask in the Lord's Prayer.<sup>6)</sup> And elsewhere: "Justifica-

3) Restringunt ad unicum momentum, quando homo primum ex impio fit justus, ut in uno tantum et primo illo momento primae conversionis gratis propter Christum sine operibus justificemur, postea vero per totam vitam justificemur propter nostra opera. Quod autem haec opinio adversa quasi fronte pugnet cum Scripturae sententia, non est obscurum. Neque enim de principio tantum conversionis loquitur Scriptura, quando tradit, nos gratia, propter Christum, sine operibus justificari coram Deo ad vitam aeternam; ut illa justificatio unius tantum momenti sit. (L. c., 175, A.)

4) Habakkuk non tantum dicit: Justus ex fide vivit, sed ζήσεται, vivet; una igitur et eadem justificatio et in principio conversionis et qua tandem pervenimus ad vitam aeternam. (L. c., 175, A.)

5) Judicium Dei non invenit in nobis in hac vita, ne in renatis quidem, talem tam perfectam et tam puram justitiam inhaerentem, qua ita possimus coram Deo consistere, ut propter illam justificemur ad vitam aeternam. Secundo invenit autem in nobis, etiam in sanctis, in hac vita multa et varia peccata, imo ipsum peccatum habitans in carne, rebellans legi mentis etc. . . . Quarto ibi vero Deus gratis per suam gratiam justificat, hoc est, a sententia damnationis absolvit, justos reputat illos, qui peccata sua agnoscunt et confitentur et fide promissionem misericordiae in Christo propositam apprehendunt. (L. c., 157, B. 158, A.)

6) Pii perpetuo per fidem justificantur, hoc est, a peccatis absolvuntur, nempe quoties remissionem peccatorum petunt et accipiunt. De qua assidua justificatione inquit Paulus Rom. VIII: "Deus est, qui justificat; quis est, qui condemnet?" Hanc perpetuam justificationem assidue petimus in Dominica Oratione, ubi etiam impetramus, ut perpetuo nobis fides ad justitiam imputetur. (M. Flacius, *Nov. Test. cum Glossa*, 1210, B.)

tion does not take place only once or seldom, but continuously. For this *perpetual justification* we beg [*erbetteln*] at all times in the Lord's Prayer, for Christ's sake." 7) And Aegidius Hunnius writes: Was not Abraham justified already before Gen. 15? Most certainly. For he obeyed God by faith when he was called out of Chaldea. Heb. 11, 8. Why, then, is it suddenly said of him that God justified him? Was his justification perhaps made more complete? No; for the justification of a sinner in the sight of God knows no plus and no minus. The reason is this: as the forgiveness takes place and is renewed day by day because we daily sin much, so also justification. For justifying faith is imputed unto us for righteousness not only in the first moment of our reconciliation to God, but *perpetually*. 8) Almost the identical words are used by John Gerhard, who writes: "As the forgiveness of sins, so also our justification is renewed from day to day, and faith is imputed for righteousness to him that believeth not only in the beginning, but daily." 9) And in another place: "Through faith in Christ we receive forgiveness of sins. However, justifying

7) Nec semel tantum aut raro illa justificatio peragitur, sed subinde. . . . Illam perpetuam justificationem nos per mediatorem nostrum fidei precatione omnibus horis mendicare, jussit Filius Dei, dicendo: "Remitte nobis debita nostra." (M. Flacius, *Clavis Scripturae*, 576.)

8) An non Abraham justificatus fuit, prius Dominus illi diceret: "Sic erit semen tuum"? Omnino. Nam statim quum ex Ur Chaldaeorum evocaretur, fide obedivit vocanti Deo, Hebr. IX, 8. Ergo fidem justificantem habuit et ex illa quam plurima bona opera hucusque fecit. Quomodo igitur demum justificatus scribitur hoc XV. capite? Num forte justificatio in ipso incrementa sumpsit, ut ratione ejus augmenti haec a Mose scribantur? Justificatio hominis coram Deo non recipit magis aut minus, quia non consideratur respectu operum, virtutum et donorum in nobis, . . . sed spectatur in ea Dei reconciliati gratia, meritum Christi, fides. . . . Quod autem Abrahamo, prius etiam justificato, nunc fides ejus in promissionem novam imputari dicitur ad justitiam, sciendum est, sicut remissio peccatorum, in qua consistit justificatio, fit et renovatur in dies, siquidem quotidie peccamus etiam justificati, unde oramus quoque in dies: "Remitte nobis debita nostra," sic et justificationem nostram non quidem augeri in dies, in dies tamen innovari. Nam fides justificans non tantum in primo momento nostrae cum Deo reconciliationis imputatur nobis ad justitiam, sed semper et quotidie, praesertim quando justificam illam *ἐνέργειαν*, nempe fidem intuitum in promissionem de Christo, actu exserit; sicut Abraham faciebat, quum audiret: "Sic erit semen tuum"; ubi Dominus fidem ejus, qua et prius erat justificatus, jam quoque illi ad justitiam imputare pergit. (Aegidius Hunnius, *Opera*, III, 1548 sq.)

9) Ut remissio peccatorum, ita quoque justificatio nostra renovatur in dies, ac fides non tantum in primo initio, sed quotidie imputatur credenti ad justitiam. (John Gerhard, *Locii*, III, 396.)

faith apprehends the forgiveness which is offered in the Gospel, not as past, but as always present, and in that way makes it its own." 10) And Henry Hoepfner writes: "We speak of our justification not only as regards the time when first all our sins were forgiven for Christ's sake, but also as regards the remainder of our lives, in which God continues our justification." 11) "For although our justification before God has neither grades nor degrees, it is, nevertheless, continued. This follows from the very nature of forgiveness, which does not abolish sin, but covers it. Even the example of Abraham shows this, for he was made righteous through faith in his Savior, not only in his conversion, but also afterwards." 12) Also Quenstedt teaches the same when, following Aegidius Hunnius and Gerhard, he writes: "As the forgiveness, so also our justification is renewed day by day, and faith is imputed for righteousness to the believer not only in the beginning, but daily. In this way our justification is continued." 13) Luetkens,<sup>14)</sup> going more into detail, says: "We obtain forgiveness of sins through faith, without any assistance on the part of good

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10) *Credendo in Christo accipimus remissionem peccatorum. . . Fides igitur justificans respicit peccatorum remissionem in verbo evangelii oblatam, non ut praeteritam, sed ut praesentem, eamque apprehendendo facit suam.* (John Gerhard, *l. c.*, 424, B.)

11) *Consideratur justificatio nostri non tantum circa primum statum reparationis, quando per fidem in Christum omnia peccata antecedentia remittuntur, 1 Tim. I, 15, 16, sed etiam circa reliquae vitae Christianae tractum, dum justificationem Deus vel continuat.* (H. Hoepfner, *De Justificatione*, p. 55.)

12) *Quamvis enim justificatio coram Deo non recipiat gradus et incrementa, ita ut quis possit justior fieri justitia imputata, tamen recte dicitur continuari. . . Patet hoc ex natura divinae remissionis peccatorum, quae peccatum quoad existentiam non tollit, sed illud tegit et non imputat, ita ut per alienam, nempe Christi, justitiam homo fidelis sit justus, licet in se habeat peccati reliquias, nec ipsi inhaeret perfecta justitia, quum lex semper inveniatur in illo, quod damnare possit, si secundum justitiam inhaerentem judicari deberet. Exemplo est Abrahamus jam multo ante conversus, qui tamen postea non alio modo justus est apud Deum quam fide in Messiam. Rom. IV, 13.* (H. Hoepfner, *Disputationes Theologicae*, p. 424 sq.)

13) *Ut remissio peccatorum, ita quoque justificatio nostra renovatur in dies, et fides non tantum in primo initio, sed quotidie imputatur credenti ad justitiam, atque ita justificatio nostra continuatur.* (Quenstedt, *Theol. Didact.-polem.*, III, p. 527.)

14) Franz Julius Luetkens; died 1712 as professor of theology and court preacher in Copenhagen. His chief writings are: *Collegium Biblicum* and the tract *On the Usefulness of Private Confession*.

works, not only in the first beginning of justification which is bestowed upon us, but justification is also continued in the same manner. When the grace of God is given to us through faith for forgiveness of sins, we must not hold that now its divine activity in our behalf ceases; but as long as we keep the grace of God by faith, so long our justification flows continuously from grace which perpetually shines over us. This must not be understood as though he who is justified should or could in this grace obtain a higher or more perfect degree of forgiveness. However, as regards the time he who is justified by faith can still be made righteous or his justification, or forgiveness of sins, can be continued and is continued." 15) Fresenius, becoming still more explicit, writes: "*Justification continues throughout the whole life*, provided that a man remains in the state of grace. The meaning of this proposition is that justification continues without interruption as it took place in the beginning. For there can be no state of grace without perpetual justification, for the following reasons: He that is justified carries the root of sin in his bosom as long as he lives, neither can he, though he be ever so careful and cautious, ever succeed in reaching the point where he will be without sins of infirmity which, of course, are also truly sins. But where there is sin, there is also guilt. If, therefore, sin, which perpetually adheres to believers, is not to harm them, they must perpetually be absolved of them. And furthermore, faith is not a thing which is alternately present and not present in man, which now comes to him and then vanishes again, but it is something persistent and perpetual, as long as man does not maliciously reject it. But where there is faith, there is also justification; and justification continues as long as faith is present. Faith is the perpetual principle of life (*Lebensprinzip*) in the heart. It is, however, not in this quality that it manifests its first and chief power, but its chief function is the apprehension of the righteousness of Christ. Hence justification is necessary throughout the believer's whole life, for faith is continuously necessary. And it actually does take place perpetually because faith is indeed perpetually present in the soul which is blessed. Paul calls this 'continuing in His [God's] goodness' when one by faith perpetually clings to God's goodness as to true goodness and grace, just as one apprehended it the first time. Rom. 11, 22. Justification, however, is continued in respect to all its component parts, so that the merit of Christ is perpetually imputed to the believer,

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15) Franz Julius Luetkens, *Collegium Biblicum*, p. 533 sq.

his sins perpetually forgiven, and the title to all graces and treasures of salvation perpetually conveyed to him. Whoever is in Christ by faith perpetually lays all his sins at His feet, and His entire merit is imputed unto him. The penitent acknowledgment and perception of individual sins is necessary in order that, having come to a deeper conviction concerning the entire cause of perdition, one may be made more desirous of grace and more circumspect in one's conversation. So, then, the fact remains that justification continues throughout the believer's entire life, that the merit of Christ is at all times imputed unto him, that all sins, also those which he does not expressly know, Ps. 19, 12, are forgiven and all treasures of salvation perpetually conveyed to him, and that therefore he is perpetually prepared to die a blessed death. *From this we also see that, as regards man, there is indeed a state of justification, but as regards God, it is rather a continuous, constant, and ever uniform act of justification throughout the Christian's whole life.*"<sup>16)</sup> F. H. R. Frank, in his *Theology of the Formula of Concord*, speaks in the same strain: "The consciousness of the believer comforts itself with the knowledge that he obtained, *and continuously obtains*, his full and complete justification in Him who of God is made unto him Righteousness. 1 Cor. 1, 30."<sup>17)</sup> All these men, and with them many others, clearly confess God's perpetual forgiveness.

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*(To be continued.)*