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Perpetual Forgiveness.

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(Continued.)

True, it has been noted that there is a difference between the first forgiveness and perpetual forgiveness. This we admit, just as there is a difference between the first breath of a new-born child and its breathing after that. And furthermore, with justification as it takes place for the first time other things are connected. It is, however, important to see clearly wherein this difference consists and wherein it does not consist, lest the foolish talk gain ground in our midst that a person is justified but once in his life and that after that there is nothing but sanctification. The first and foremost difference concerns the person who is justified. At the time of the first justification he is an enemy of God, who is under the power of darkness and in the bondage of sin; afterwards he is merely a sinner, for also the greatest saints remain sinners to the grave. From this follows the second difference: the first justification translates from the state of wrath into the state of grace, from guilt into favor; perpetual justification keeps one in favor. The third difference is this: the first forgiveness which one obtains coincides with regeneration; perpetual forgiveness does not. On the other hand, the difference does *not* consist in the nature of the divine operation; it is the same act by virtue of which God regards Saul at Damascus and Paul at Philippi righteous. Nor should one say that the first act of God is called justification and the second simply forgiveness; for justification and forgiveness are one and the same thing. For when Paul calls the man blessed "unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works," he, in order to prove this statement, appeals to the word of the psalmist: "Blessed are they whose . . . sins are covered." Rom. 4, 6. 7. So Paul understands what David says of forgiveness as referring to justification. And Acts 13, 38. 39 he declares: "Be it known unto

you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses." Here, too, forgiveness of sins is nothing else than justification. Paul says, Rom. 5, 9, that we are *justified* by the blood of Christ. St. John expresses this truth in the words: "The blood of Jesus Christ *cleanseth us from all sin.*" 1 John 1, 7. So justification and forgiveness are the same thing.

If one nevertheless wishes to call only the very first forgiveness which one obtains justification, then he must at least limit this term to Baptism. For in Baptism we were delivered from the power of darkness and were translated into the kingdom of Christ; in it we were washed, sanctified, justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. Col. 1, 13; 1 Cor. 6, 11. It would, however, be altogether senseless and contrary to the Scriptures to call only that forgiveness which one obtained at any time after severe inner conflicts absolute justification. This amounts to a denial of the power of Baptism and at the same time creates the foolish delusion that henceforth justification need not be continued, but that only sanctification is necessary. When the Word of God speaks of persons who are justified, it does not mean people who at some time in their life obtained forgiveness and thereafter served the flesh, but it means believers, *i. e.*, persons who first were translated from the state of wrath into the state of grace, but to whom since then their perpetual faith, born of repentance, is perpetually imputed for righteousness. Therefore we say with Hollaz: "We distinguish between first and continued justification. The first justification is the act of grace by which God for the first time completely absolves the sinner who is guilty of eternal death in view of the merit of Christ, which he apprehends by faith, of all sins and all their punishments. Continued justification, however, is the act of grace by which God perpetually regards as righteous the penitent sinner who in true faith perpetually asks for forgiveness." 1)

This, then, is the course of our pilgrimage: In Holy Baptism

1) Quomodo distinguitur justificatio? Justificatio distinguitur in primam et continuatam. Illa est actus gratiae, quo Deus peccatorem reum aeternae mortis, sed conversum et renatum, intuitu meriti Christi vera fide apprehensi a peccatis eorumque poenis primum absolvit et gratiosa aestimatione justum reputat. Haec est actus gratiae, quo Deus hominem, poenitentem et vera in Christum fide jugiter remissionem peccatorum expetentem, in statu justitiae conservat. (Hollaz, *Examen*, p. 379.)

all our sins are forgiven;²⁾ if we continue in His goodness, God continuously sees us wholly pure in the blood of His Son and is unto us "a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat and a place for a refuge and a covert from storm and rain." Is. 4, 6. His perpetual justification, however, flows from the fountain of the first justification in Baptism.³⁾ So we never possess our righteousness in *ourselves*, but always in Him. For in us there is nothing but sin, unrighteousness, and foolishness. Therefore we unceasingly rend our hearts, Joel 2, 13, and perpetually plead for mercy.⁴⁾ And as surely as our sin is ever before us, Ps. 51, 3, just so surely the righteousness of Christ is ever over us, and before it would wither or lose its power, the Danube would flow back into its source. In this matter we do not trust in the faith which we had or in the forgiveness which we obtained in the past, Ezek. 33, 13, else we should be like people who attempt to preserve the sunlight in bags; but we always trust in the ever-present blood of Christ, which perpetually cries for mercy. This blood we continuously present to the Father in perpetual repentance. Therefore we do not consider it to be too much if we receive forgiveness of sins early Sunday mornings in the confessional service and again, half an hour later, in the main service, after the confession of sins, and once more at twelve o'clock in Holy Communion. Yes, we would not consider it to be too often if we received forgiveness of sins twenty times every hour.⁵⁾ I ask, not the sticklers for pre-

2) Eos etiam, qui dicunt, inquit, baptisma non omnia peccata delere, condemnamus; quia scimus plenam purgationem per ipsa mysteria conferri. Hoc dicimus et nos; sed parvulos quoque per ipsa mysteria primae nativitatis et obnoxiae successione vinculis solvi, non dicitis vos. Propter quod de ecclesia Christi, quae hoc antiquitus tenet, oportet, ut sicut alii haeretici segregemini et vos. (Augustine, *Contra Duas Epistolas Pelagianorum*, I, 41.)

3) Luther. St. Louis Ed., XII, p. 1143.

4) *Appendix ad Cat. Maj. Brevis Admonitio ad Confessionem*. Book of Concord. Mueller's Ed., p. 774.

5) Est autem hoc etiam expendendum: An haec justificatio tantum semel sit quaerenda; aut: an sufficiat, si quis post gravem lapsum eam quaerat, sicut David post commissum adulterium et homicidium jacuit coram arca et flebiliter reconciliationem cum Deo quaesivit. Nequaquam, sed est talis doctrina, quae quotidie in praxi est exercenda. Uti enim panis quotidianus resumendus est, ita etiam, quia justus in die septies cadit, Prov. XXIV, 16, quotidie iteranda est illa petitio: Dimitte nobis debita nostra, atque per eam justificatio quaerenda. . . . Et licet ubivis orare, Joh. IV, 23, etiam domi in cubiculo, Matth. VI, 6; tamen singuli precum domi mane et vesperi non debent oblivisci. Sed quia verendum est, multos, sive simpliciores, sive crassiores, illud negligere, prodest, ut singulis diebus Solis in ecclesia conveniamus, ibi ex auditu verbi divini hanc doctrinam primum repetamus, postea addita peccatorum confessione et audita absolute eandem exerceamus. Et hoc stadium decurrere debet Christianus, quamdiu in hoc mundo vivit, donec vitam aeternam apprehendat. (Pol. Leyser, in *Harmonia Evangelica*, I, 1791 f.)

scribed forms, if there are such, but the aged women in the closet, Is this true or not? This doctrine, the doctrine of perpetual forgiveness, and none other, protects against [carnal] security. For he who regards justification merely as a stepping-stone to sanctification can easily come to the viewpoint of the clergyman in Pomerania who was given to strong drink. He held that the grace of justification, but not the grace of sanctification had been bestowed upon him. On the other hand, he who thinks that he can protect himself from security with the doctrine of gradual forgiveness is not much different from the monks who grievously tortured themselves and yet never found peace.

But suppose the life of the Christian does not run its course according to this rule? Suppose he falls into unchastity and murder? Does God's perpetual grace cover such sins too? Never! For there is a mighty chasm between mortal sins and venial sins. Of course, in itself no sin is trivial or venial; on the contrary, all sins are damnable. But in so far as some sins, for example, evil lust or sinful thoughts, do not destroy justifying faith, God does not impute them to us, but graciously covers them. On the other hand, sins against the conscience destroy faith and cast us out of the very middle of the stream of forgiveness into the desert of damnation.⁶⁾ The Scriptures know of such cases and describe them in terms that are by no means mild. 2 Pet. 2, 20—22 we read: "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them

6) In hunc usum veteres et necessarium discrimen inter peccatum veniale seu non regnans et inter mortale seu regnans peccatum tradiderunt; non hoc sensu, quasi quaedam contra legem Dei peccata essent tam levicula peccatilla seu viciola, ut pro illis nos ipsi iudicio Dei satisfacere possemus, sed hoc voluerunt distinctione illa peccati mortalis et venialis indicare: quod in conversis (de illis enim accipienda est haec distinctio, quum in non renatis omnia peccata sint mortalia) quaedam sint peccata, per quae nec poenitentia nec fides nec Spiritus Sanctus excutitur, atque ita nec iustitia nec salus amittitur, sed retinetur bona conscientia, quae certa est, se Deum habere propitium. Tale peccatum est originalis depravatio habitans in carne, unde pullulant cogitationes et concupiscentiae, illicientes et sollicitantes nos ad vitia. Quando vero pravis illis concupiscentiis per Spiritum repugnamus, actiones carnis mortificamus, nec eas regnare permittimus, ut perficiantur, sed fide petimus sordes illas tegi et non imputari, tunc retinemus iustitiam et salutem. Ratio vero est, quia tunc manet in nobis poenitentia, hoc est, detestatio peccati, manet etiam fides quarens, apprehendens et retinens Christum. Sed quando renati pravam illam radicem peccati in carne non curant, non repugnant, sed delectantur concupiscentiis carnis, [et] captant occasiones, ut perficiantur; tales certum est rursus lapsos esse et nec iustitiam nec salutem habere. (*Repetitio Corporis Doctrinae Ecclesiasticae*, pp. 117—119.)

than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it happened unto them according to a true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Such people as depart from the living God, Heb. 3, 12, are fallen from grace, Gal. 5, 4, and all their righteousness that they have done shall not be mentioned, Ezek. 18, 24. Now, if they do not wish to be cast into hell, they must be converted again; 7) they must "buy gold tried in the fire and white raiment that they may be clothed"; 8) that is, they must come with weeping and with supplications, Jer. 31, 9, and God will have mercy on them again for the sake of the covenant which He made with them in Holy Baptism. 9) So, whether you from the beginning remained steadfast in baptismal grace, or whether you found your Savior after grievous falls, hold fast to Him in the Word; for there He perpetually justifies you, provided you believe perpetually.

(To be continued.)
