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The Work of Christ.

Translated from Dr. Ed. Preuss's *Die Rechtfertigung des Suenders vor Gott*.
Part I, of which the first chapter is offered here, is superscribed
"On Redemption."

The REV. JUL. A. FRIEDRICH, Iowa City, Iowa.

The bars of our prison are broken, its gates are shattered. What we could not do another one has done: Jesus Christ, true man and true God. The offense of one man brought condemnation; the righteousness of one Man brings rescue. Rom. 5, 18. True, not the righteousness of a *mere* man, for a *mere* man would have died for his own sins and could not have reconciled the Lord of the earth, just as little as a pot its potter. What gave that insuperable power to the righteousness of this Jesus was the fact that He is the true God and eternal Life. 1 John 5, 20.

This Son of David, who at the same time is the Son of God, Jer. 23, 5, 6, bore our sin. Isaiah prophesies this three times: "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all," Is. 53, 6; "He shall bear their iniquities," Is. 53, 11; "He bare the sins of many," Is. 53, 11. John the Baptist testifies to this when he says: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1, 29. If I am groaning under a heavy load and another man comes and takes it on his shoulders, then he takes my place. We were groaning under the load of our sins; then Christ came and took them on His shoulders. Therefore we justly say that He took our place. How earnestly this substitution was meant is shown 1 Pet. 2, 24: He "His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree," that is, on the cross. And there is where they belonged. It is one thing to wear another man's uniform in times of peace and quite another thing to wear it in a battle. He who wears it in a battle is willing and ready to do service in another man's place. But more: Scripture not only teaches that Christ bore our sins, but it directly calls Him, the true God, "sin." 2 Cor. 5, 21. If God made Him to be sin, then He was *sin* indeed. How are we to understand

this? *God is sin?* Yes, just as truly was God sin as the Christians at Ephesus were light. St. Paul writes: "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord," Eph. 5, 8, that is to say, God's light has so enveloped you that nothing else is visible. In like manner was Jesus Christ so covered with the filth of the sin of all men as with a garment that nothing else was visible. True, *in* Christ there was no sin at all, 1 John 3, 5, but *on* Him were *all* the sins of the world. Therefore we teach with Luther: Christ became the greatest of all sinners, for He took the place of all sinners and thus became guilty of all the sins of the whole world although He was holy and innocent.

If that is the case, then it follows that the wrath of God rested upon Him. But who believes that God is so angry, and who fears His wrath? The wicked scoff at it and look upon it as a scarecrow placed in a garden to keep the birds away. But they will know better when He, at His appointed time, will come and reduce things to powder and ashes. For God is angry indeed. Let him who does not perceive the blasts of His anger in history learn to know it from His truthful Word. The Holy Spirit says through the prophet Isaiah: "The name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with His anger. . . . His lips are full of indignation and His tongue as a devouring fire." Is. 30, 27. God pours out His wrath like water. Hos. 5, 10. He executes vengeance in anger and fury upon all who refuse to obey. Micah 5, 15. It is argued that the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath and the God of the New Testament a God of love. That is not true. Also the New Testament bristles with passages which declare the wrath of God. According to Rom. 1, 18 "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." According to Eph. 5, 6 "the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience." And Rev. 19, 15 we read that Jesus Christ Himself "treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." This wrath is nothing else than the revelation of the divine majesty against sin, the repelling power of His holiness. The wrath of God is not made void by the love which is essentially His essence, but is rather established and confirmed by it in its entirety and earnestness. All wrath, then, rested on Him who bore all sin. And therefore the Scriptures call Him "cursed." Gal. 3, 13. Not only that, but they declare that He was "made a curse for us." Gal. 3, 13. Curse is judgment of wrath. He is cursed whom the fierce anger of God crushes down into the depth of hell. "Depart from Me, ye cursed," Christ will say to the wicked on Judgment Day, "into everlasting

fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Matt. 25, 41. St. Peter calls those Christians who, after having been washed, again wallow in the mire "cursed children." 2 Pet. 2, 14. 22. The first curse came upon the head of the serpent, which betrayed Eve. Gen. 3, 14. Yet all these are but "cursed"; Christ, however, clothed Himself with a curse as with a garment, so that nothing else could be seen. Not for His sake, — for compared with Him even the heavens are unclean, — but for our sake, in our stead. He was "made sin for us." Rom. 3, 13. For we all are cursed because we did "not continue in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them." Gal. 3, 10. And as Jesus took the load of sin on His shoulders in order to take it from our shoulders, even so He drew the lightning of divine wrath upon His head that our little hut might be saved from destruction. The intensity of the struggle involved in this substitution is shown by His suffering on the cross, especially by His plaintive cry, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani!*" Matt. 27, 46. This cry was not groundless, for in the mouth of this Man there was no lie, no error. God had indeed forsaken Him; Jesus does not complain of this, but only asks, "Why?" True, God can forsake no one as we forsake one another. He can, however, withdraw His gracious presence; and that is hell. Luther says: In the Garden, Christ overcame death; but hell still had to be conquered. The struggle in the Garden with death cannot be compared with the one on the cross; for the latter meant a struggle of God with God. In the Garden He still had a gracious God, but on the cross God had turned against Him, had forsaken Him. Thus He drank the cup of divine wrath to the dregs and tasted "the second death." Rev. 21, 8. But why? O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, because Thou didst bear the sin of the world; that is why!

It is the wrath of God which in the name of His holy majesty pronounces the sentence of punishment, and it is the wrath of God which executes this sentence. Therefore Christ also bore our chastisement: our griefs and our sorrows. Is. 53, 4. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him." Is. 53, 5. "For the transgression of My people was He stricken." Is. 53, 8. The climax of all sufferings is death. This, too, Christ suffered when He returned His spirit into the hands of His Father. Luke 23, 46. He suffered death, not as the common lot of mankind, but as the wages of sin. St. Paul says that "God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Rom. 8, 3. This condemnation is death. As Christ bore our sin

and the wrath of God in our stead, even so did He suffer death in our place. For sin worketh wrath, and wrath worketh death. After Caiaphas had heard the charges of the Pharisees against Jesus, he judged: "It is expedient for us that one should die for the people and that the whole people perish not. And this spake he not of himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die *for* that nation." John 11, 50, 51. True, "for" in this text means "*for the benefit* of the people," but for the benefit of the people through becoming their Substitute. For if I die in order that my brother need not die, *who otherwise would have had to die*, then I die in his stead. In the light of this testimony we now understand 1 Pet. 3, 18: "Christ hath once suffered for sin, the Just for the unjust," and Rom. 5, 6, 7: "Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die." Thus He satisfied divine justice for us; for He tasted the first and the second death and drank the cup of the wrath of God to the dregs. Our redemption could not be purchased with a smaller price than that. The fact that the Son of God in Gethsemane thrice asked His Father in vain to let the cup of death pass from him proves that this was not possible, otherwise it would have been done. Christ had to suffer these things. Luke 24, 26; Acts 17, 3.

But Christ satisfied the holy will of God not only by His *passive*, but also by His *active* obedience; not only by suffering, but also by doing. Made of a woman, He was made under the Law, Gal. 4, 4, and fulfilled it perfectly, Matt. 5, 17, from His being subject to His parents, Luke 2, 51, to the washing of His disciples' feet, John 13, 4, 5. All His doing, suffering, and dying was done in obedience to God the Father and was to be a vicarious fulfilling of the Law. And this obedience flowed from love.

Verily, "Christ hath loved us and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor." Eph. 5, 2. For the sake of His love toward us He, according to the will of God, gave His blood for us: His flesh for our flesh, His soul for ours. Especially the Epistle to the Hebrews places the sin-offering of Christ under this viewpoint of self-sacrifice, an act of perfect obedience, by saying: "Christ, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God." Heb. 7, 27; 9, 14. No man was able to take His life from Him, but He laid it down of Himself. John 10, 18. Everything He did, from His incarnation until His death, was done in obedience to God the Father. Phil. 2, 8.

And at last, when Christ had done and suffered sufficiently,

“He said, It is finished; and He bowed His head and gave up the ghost.” John 19, 30. But “He was taken from prison and from judgment.” Is. 53, 8. As God declared Him to be guilty of the sins of the world when, on the cross, He numbered Him with the transgressors, Is. 53, 12; Luke 22, 37; 23, 32. 33, so He publicly freed Him, justified Him from all sin, when He raised Him up from the dead. That is what St. Paul means when he says that Christ “was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit.” 1 Tim. 3, 16.

This is the work of Christ. And what are its blessings?

(The second chapter will appear in the next number.)
