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## Of Faith.

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

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The righteousness of Christ, then, has been procured; but, as the apostle says, it comes "unto all and upon all them that believe." Rom. 3, 22. He who keeps this in mind will be spared the vexations which the Wurttemberg superintendent Burk experienced. It seemed to him like a faulty circle: "I am to believe and thereby become righteous. But what am I to believe? This, that I am righteous. However, I cannot believe this before it is so. And yet it is not so, for I am first to become righteous." God be praised, the case is different. *This* we must believe, that Christ *has* redeemed us. And as God said to His covenant people through Isaiah: "I *have* redeemed thee, I *have* called thee by thy name; thou *art* Mine," Is. 43, 1, even so does He tell us through His apostle: "The handwriting that was against us is blotted out," Col. 2, 14; "He *purged* our sins," Heb. 1, 3; "We *are* reconciled," Rom. 5, 10. Eternal peace reigns; all strife is ended. Col. 1, 20. That saving faith apprehends *this* and nothing else St. Paul teaches in those texts in which he expressly and officially treats of justification. Rom. 4, 24, 25 he says that we are justified "if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus, our Lord, from the dead, who was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification." And 1 Cor. 15, 1—4 he declares that one is saved by believing "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." And lastly, Gal. 2, 20, he describes his own faith as "the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." This is also the doctrine of the Augsburg Confession (Art. XII) and of the theologians.

"To believe" — what does that mean? Does it mean to take the death and resurrection of Christ for granted as one takes the battle of Pydna for granted? Most certainly not! Although it would be quite agreeable if Messrs. Strauss and Renan were ready

to do even this. "To believe" means "to take"; "to believe in Christ's merit" means "to take Christ's merit" as the lungs take the air. Although the air surrounds you on all sides, yet it will do you no good if your lungs do not inhale it. Just so the all-sufficient merit of Christ will not help you if you do not apprehend it. St. Paul writes, Col. 2, 6: "As ye *have* therefore *received* Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk ye in Him." Yes, St. John uses the expressions, "to receive Christ" and "to believe" as equivalents. He says in the first chapter of his Gospel: "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on His name." John 1, 12. And Christ Himself says, John 17, 8: "I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they *have received* them . . . and *have believed* that Thou didst send Me." *Vice versa*, Scripture describes unbelief as the act of not receiving Christ. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." John 1, 11. Therefore we say with Chemnitz: Saving faith is nothing else than the apprehension of Christ (*Est igitur apprehensio, acceptio seu applicatio promissionis gratiae formale fidei justificantis*); he who will not receive is not justified (*Qui non accipiunt, non justificantur*). And with Oeder: Faith is nothing less and nothing more than the instrument with which we appropriate a foreign righteousness. In truth, as long as we are on this earth, no one sits in the ship, but we are all lying in the water. Therefore we must constantly cling to the rim of the boat in which Christ is sitting. The prayer, "Suffer us not to sink in the bitter pains of death," and the other, "Suffer us not to fall from the comfort of true faith," are one and the same. By what other organ than by faith could we possibly become partakers of the merits of Christ? Mental remedies are received in no other way. A father believes his son to be dead. When you tell him, "He lives!" he hears the message, but lacks faith. What will it profit him? Or a guilty conscience has driven a child away from home. The mother publishes advertisements, "Return! You are forgiven!" But the child does not believe it. So wrath abideth upon him. John 3, 36. That is what Christ means when He says: "He that believeth not is condemned already." John 3, 18.

Redemption was indeed accomplished for all, but some remain in prison although bright daylight shines through the shattered gates. Rom. 8, 32; 2 Cor. 5, 14, 15; 1 Tim. 2, 6; Heb. 2, 9; 1 John 2, 2; 2 Pet. 2, 1. To such the words of Christ apply: "Ye would not!" Matt. 23, 37. This not willing to believe is the only

sin which damns under the Gospel dispensation. Therefore Christ does not say: "He that sinneth," but: "He that believeth not shall be damned." Mark. 16, 16. And the Holy Ghost was sent to "reprove the world of sin because they believe not" on the Lord Jesus, John 16, 7. 8; of no other sin, because all sins remain where this one remains, and all are remitted when this one departs. Luther says: "Nothing damns but this, that one does not accept this Savior and refuses to have Him who takes sin away. For if He were there, there would be no more sin there. Therefore the world is no longer reprov'd of . . . other sins, because Christ blotted them out, but in the New Testament only this remains sin, that one will not know and receive Him." (St. Louis Ed., XI, 868.) So much do the eyes of God consider faith.

So we believe, and God justifies. Which of the two comes first? Our faith, it seems. At least St. Paul says: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Rom. 4, 3. Ancient and modern errorists have concluded from this that God regards us righteous on account of the excellent qualities of our faith. Neither the one nor the other is correct; for the clear testimonies of Scripture which call *Christ* our Righteousness, Jer. 23, 6 and 1 Cor. 1, 30, are against it. And what sense would there be in Rom. 10, 4: "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth," if God regarded us righteous for the sake of any virtue? And Is. 45, 24. 25: "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength," and: "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory." And what would become of all the testimonies concerning the atonement effected through the death of God if our faith effected it? And does not the same apostle who taught about faith as mentioned above most anxiously separate his own righteousness from the righteousness which is of God? Phil. 3, 9. How, then, dare he be charged with having considered his faith meritorious to become righteous before God? The import of the imputation of faith will become clear if we compare Acts 15, 9 with 1 John 1, 7. Acts 15, 9 it is taught that faith cleanses us; 1 John 1, 7 this is attributed to the blood of Christ. Now either John contradicts Peter in this point, or else the blood of Christ is the remedy and faith the taking of the remedy. Thus the two texts are in consonance. In fact, the Scriptural term "faith" contains both — kernel and shell. Christ's merit is the kernel; our apprehension, the shell. The shell is indeed necessary to hold the fruit on the tree, but the nourishing power of the fruit comes from the kernel. And the Holy Spirit

has especially this kernel in mind when He speaks of faith. Thus Gal. 3, 23: "Before faith came, we were kept under the Law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." Christ is here meant in so far as He is apprehended by faith. (Note: Our faith did not indeed make us free from the bondage of the Law, but Christ.) Likewise it is said Rom. 12, 6: "Let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith," of course, according to the content which is believed, not according to our taking. And Eph. 4, 5: "One Lord, one faith, one Baptism." That here, too, all emphasis is to be laid on the proclamation which is apprehended by faith is shown in v. 14: "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Jude 20 we are even exhorted to build up ourselves on our *most holy faith*. Why do we not speak of our most holy love wherewith we help the poor, or of our most holy repentance? For the simple reason that the emotions of our soul do not merit such high praise; neither does our faith. But this is our most holy faith, "that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." Also such texts as Acts 6, 7 belong here: "A great company of priests were obedient to the faith." This certainly means nothing else than this: they were obedient to the Gospel. Now we understand why Paul uses two words: "To him that *believeth* . . . his *faith* is counted for righteousness." Rom. 4, 5. For the faith which is counted to him for righteousness is the merit of Christ. True, faith, in the New Testament, never means the Gospel in so far as it is *not* believed, but always both: the Gospel *together* with faith which apprehends it. Likewise does the word "hope" in Scripture always embrace both: our hoping *and* God's promise. Only in so far does hope not make ashamed, whilst hope of another kind makes a fool of many a one.

Whoever, therefore, teaches that God imputes our faith for righteousness errs. (*Falsa est interpretatio, quod fides pro actu credendi sumta nobis imputetur, quia imputationis hujus unicum objectum est justitia Christi.* — Hoepfner.). Our unbelief is indeed the fundamental unrighteousness of which the world is reprovèd; the righteousness, however, which God offers to the world is not its faith, but Christ's obedience. The Lord says: "And when He [the Comforter] is come, He will reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness" — probably that they shall believe? No, but — "because I go to the Father, and ye see Me no more," John

16, 7—10. So, then, our unbelief is our unrighteousness, but our righteousness is not our faith, but Christ's going to the Father, that is, His innocent suffering and death, yes, His entire obedience. (*Transitus Christi ad Patrem est nostra justitia. Repetitio Corporis Doctrinae Christianae.*—Luther: "This word, 'That I go to the Father,' embraces the entire work of our redemption, . . . namely, the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ." St. Louis Ed., XI, 897.) Luther says: "This going is the right eternal righteousness. Of this the world knows nothing; not a letter concerning it is found in all other books. Christ here does not say a word of what I must do or not do, but He speaks solely and only of His work that He does. That is to be our righteousness and nothing else." (St. Louis Ed., XIII, 592.) We are, therefore, not righteous for the sake of our faith, but for Christ's sake. 1 John 2, 12. But we are indeed righteous *through* faith. Rom. 3, 25, 30; Gal. 2, 16; 3, 4; Eph. 2, 8; 3, 12; Rom. 3, 28. That a diamond ring is worth a hundred dollars is caused by the stone, not by the setting, although one needs the setting in order to wear it on the finger.

But Abraham,—how is it with him? Christ's righteousness could certainly not be imputed to him, and yet he became righteous. For does not Scripture say of him: "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body, now dead, when he was an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness"? Rom. 4, 19—22. Here it is clearly written: God promised Abraham offspring; Abraham firmly relied in the fulfilment of this promise, and God imputed *this* to him for righteousness. Therefore—so we conclude with Bellarmine—faith is a heroic act for the sake of which God regards us righteous.

Not so fast! First that legion of texts would needs have to be plucked out of the Bible which safeguards the imputed righteousness of Christ, especially the chapter of the Epistle to the Romans immediately preceding this one. Meanwhile it might be permitted to explain the second sentence of a letter by means of the first, in our case, the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans by means of chapter three. For here Paul describes the curative treatment by which God makes *all* whole, by saying: "All have sinned, . . . being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is

in Christ Jesus." He, in His blood, is the Propitiation [*Suehnmittel* = means of propitiation], which is apprehended by faith. Rom. 3, 23—25. In this way God saved Abraham before all others. He, too, believed, not in God in general, but in that God who justifies the sinner, Rom. 4, 5; and that "was counted unto him for righteousness," Rom. 4, 3. In the following verses the apostle explains how this is to be understood. Rom. 4, 4—9. But we must apply everything that is said in these six verses of justification also to the justification of Abraham, yes, especially to Abraham's justification. For it is the beginning (Rom. 4, 2. 3) and the end (v. 9) of the entire passage. So, then, it applies to Abraham, and to Abraham first of all, that righteousness without works was imputed to him. Rom. 4, 6. Pray, which righteousness? His own? Then grace were no more grace. So, then, a foreign one. But if a foreign one, which other one than Christ's, who, according to the expressed testimony of Scripture, died also "for the transgressions that were under the first testament." Heb. 9, 15. For this righteousness, as Paul has taught a few lines above, is "being witnessed by the Law and the prophets." Rom. 3, 21. 22. But in order to remove all doubt, it is further declared that this imputed righteousness consisted in nothing else than the forgiveness of sins. Rom. 4, 7. 8. Shall we perhaps invent a new way of salvation for Abraham? Shall we say that he believed, and that, as a reward for this, God forgave his sins? This way is also barred by v. 4 with its "Grace — not of debt." Rom. 4, 4. Then nothing remains for us but the confession: Abraham's faith was imputed to him for righteousness because it apprehended Christ. Thus Abraham was saved in the same manner as we are. For this reason, and for this reason only, did St. Paul exemplify the doctrine of justification, which he unfolds in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, in Abraham. First doctrine, then example. Yes, here is more than an example; here is the original (*Urbild*). For we are not commanded to believe as, among others, Abraham believed, but we are to believe after his pattern. For the history of his justification "was not written for his sake alone, . . . 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. In this sense Abraham is the father of all them that believe, not only of the circumcision, but also of the uncircumcision, Rom. 4, 11. 12. 16, because they all became righteous before God through the same righteousness as he. If he were nothing more than a model of vigorous faith, then the Mohammedans would be his most excellent children. (*To be continued.*)