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(Pastor Martin Hoffmann, Leipzig)

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Recognizing and Preserving the Comfort of Justification

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1. THE LUTHERAN DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION - today

1.1. The Lutheran Doctrine of Justification today - critically questioned

Highly honored synod delegates, revered guests, dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Many will ask, "Have you really done yourself a favor with this topic? Justification of the sinner - that doesn't interest anyone today! Okay, this past year provided an exception. The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church have made a "Joint Declaration". After 500 years they wanted to settle the dispute concerning this matter. However, the topic of 'Justification' doesn't really sweep anyone off his feet."

Indeed, people today are looking for other answers:

- In view of conflicting social, economic and environmental demands, we need to find pathways into the future - both nationally and internationally. How can we help poor countries, without overstraining the industrial nations? Can peace be secured without giving free rein to dictators who show contempt for humankind?
- The welfare systems of our land need to be adjusted to the demands of competition, without giving them up. Can our provisions for the elderly remain secure? How can we make medical benefits available to all, without having the costs go through the roof?
- Our country stands in the middle of an upheaval of values. For example, what standards should apply in modern medicine and genetic engineering? How important should we rate the protection of unborn life? Should we hold on to marriage as the only pattern for partnership lifestyles – or should other patterns be placed along side marriage?

These questions interest people; the topic of justification hardly!

In the sphere of one's personal life it doesn't seem any different. There people ask:

- Will I be able to receive an education and find a job? Should I change jobs?
- Will I marry? Is it certain that I will be able to remain with my partner my whole life long? According to what principles will I bring up my children?
- How will I react when loneliness, sickness, disability, unemployment, old age or death enter into my life? Where will I find help in times of crisis?

All this presses hard on a person. Will a person be able to meet these challenges? If the demands become greater than one can handle, one's self-assurance will start to dwindle away.

Only in this connection, in many people's opinion, might the Lutheran doctrine of justification still have meaning today. Above all, it could be useful for self-discovery. If that works, one can more easily survive through crises. Horst Hirschler, who was formerly the leading bishop of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany¹, wrote,

The message of justification and the doctrine of justification, which clarifies it, have to do with the basic question of our human existence: How does a person live up to his calling in life? In all ages the simplest answer has been this: my life gains fulfillment through my deeds. I receive my worthiness and dignity through what I do, and I show my unworthiness when I fail in what is demanded of me. The problem with such an everyday rationale for one's existence is that my deeds only count some of the time as a proof of the legitimacy of my existence. For what is the case if I fail, if I become sick, if I myself or some cruel fate ruins it for me? We're asking too much of deeds, if they're supposed to justify our existence.²

He then offers this solution to this basic human problem:

The message of justification by grace alone, which is only received by faith, is thus the great alternative. The cross is the sign from God that God is also with him who is only able to scream out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' The Christian community after Easter understood that we can have the certainty that we, with our guilty and empty hands, are accepted by God because of the cross of Christ. Aside from all our deeds, we - I myself and my neighbor - have above all a worth which God has promised to us and made our own.

Apparently the person of this age is in view. It's supposed to be made clear to him what 'justification' means in the frame of his thinking. This message will certainly be gladly accepted by many who have gone through a crisis. They have experienced this thought: 'I am fundamentally worth something, regardless of what I have done or accomplished.' We must ask, however, if this is really also what the Holy Scriptures teach about the justification of the sinner!

1.2. The Lutheran doctrine of Justification today – forever pertinent

If we look in the Bible we are surprised. From the Scriptures one can't ensure a person who has collapsed in life or who is hard pressed that, 'God thinks you're good and valuable!' apart from deeds and accomplishments. The very opposite is true!

As God observed godly Noah and his family after the flood, he concluded even with them - and to be sure, this was a general observation concerning all people - "every inclination of [man's] heart is evil from childhood" (Ge 8:21). Jesus states the reason for this: "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (Jn 3:6). Here Jesus is using the word 'flesh' in contrast to God and his Holy Spirit, as Paul also writes, "the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Ro 8:7). Thus we realize the reason why God calls us "evil from childhood". We by nature don't accept God and his will. Since the fall into sin³, human parents pass this corrupted character⁴ on to their children (original or inherited sin). Therefore we are all under God's wrath from birth on.⁵

If we go through life in this manner, it will inevitably have repercussions in our thinking, speaking and doing. We transgress God's will (actual sin). John writes, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn 3:4). Whatever is not done out of love and in obedience to God - however impressive it may appear - it is done from an attitude which God despises. For that reason it is lawlessness. That is what Paul means when he writes, "everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Ro 14:23). When God examines us, his verdict falls upon us disastrously - "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Ro 3:10-12).⁶

This condition cannot go on without consequences. God not only requires of us that we be holy and perfect like himself⁷; he even judges and punishes those who are not holy! That is how he revealed himself to his people Israel - "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me..." (Ex 20:5). God's retribution strikes the sinner already in this life. Some sinners are overtaken by difficult outward hardships under God's wrath. Above all, however, they find no inner peace.⁸ With death⁹, that is, at the universal judgment on the last day of the world¹⁰, comes God's accounting of all people, living and dead.¹¹ They, along with everything that they have done, will be measured by what is good and perfect according to God's standard. Paul warns, "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God 'will give to each person according to what he has done.' To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous" (Romans 2:5-13).¹² Then all who cannot stand before the incorruptible judge will hear, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!" (Matthew 25:41). Having been cast away from God, they will have to bear eternal wrath and punishment.¹³ That will be their hopeless situation.

Accordingly, what should be said to the outlook that with the doctrine of justification the crux of the matter is answering the question, "How does a person live up to his calling in life?" There is a wonderful alternative to the customary answer, that "I receive my worthiness and dignity through what I do, and I show my unworthiness when I fail in what is demanded of me." However, that alternative is this: "Aside from all our deeds, we - I myself and my neighbor - have above all a worth which God has promised to us and made our own."

When the doctrine of justification is reduced to this version, in order to accommodate the thinking of the modern person, one fails to mention what really matters in three points:

When the question is asked, "Am I living up to my calling in life?" it is not stated to whom we are responsible. Ultimately, how the question is answered in my view or in the judgment of other people isn't what matters. God's judgment is authoritative. We have come from him and we are responsible to him. This interpretation of the doctrine of justification also does not point out the fact that God has given to humankind, as his creation, gifts and responsibilities. Having been created holy and perfect, humankind, therefore, should also live as holy and perfect. This doesn't only mean that we should "fear, love and trust in God above all things"¹⁴. We should also love our fellow human beings; for God has committed them to us. We find the guidelines for this behavior in God's commandments by way of the Holy Scriptures. When one considers this, one comes to the very conclusion that was rejected in the understanding of justification which was cited at the beginning: "I receive my worthiness and dignity through what I do, and I show my unworthiness when I fail in what is demanded of me." Finally, the interpretation of the doctrine of justification that is offered above also doesn't mention the fact that everyone who will not be able to stand in God's sight has earned and can expect his wrath, physical death and eternal punishment.

In view of the Biblical witness, it is therefore inexcusable to transform the Lutheran doctrine of justification in such a way that it is no longer offensive for people today. Humankind throughout all ages rebels against the message that God is an incorruptible lawgiver and judge.¹⁵ Whoever tries to side-step this response inevitably falsifies the Biblical message.

As John the Baptist and Jesus himself did 2000 years ago, so must we also proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Mt 4:17). People need to repent today just as well, if they don't want to be eternally lost. Certainly, we need to meet them where they are at in their thinking! If someone is depressed about how easily one's good fortune in life can fall to pieces - through human weakness, sickness, guilt or outward demands - then we will not only show the person our sympathy, but rather also point to the deeper problem. God shows us by many different ways that we are doomed to failure if we cut him out of our lives. He didn't only create us. He desires to be the Lord of our life at all times. Because we have forsaken him, our world is afflicted - in big and in small ways - by hardships, distress and death. But that's not all! Eternal damnation awaits everyone who does not love, honor and obey God above all things. Therefore, on his own, a sinner is "without hope" (Eph 2:12).

But, ah! there is still time to turn around. God has provided a way of salvation! The message of the "justification" of the sinner has to do with precisely this salvation - and nothing else. Here there is no reason to tread lightly, in order not to stumble. The message of how God saves sinners is always a stumbling block and offensive. Paul writes, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Co 1:18).

It's incomprehensible! The holy God, from whom we have revoked our honor and obedience, lets grace predominate over justice, in order to give life back to his enemies - now and in eternity: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph 2:4-9).¹⁶ And with that we have already heard how God has shown us grace - through Jesus Christ.

But why did God choose Jesus Christ¹⁷ to be mediator between himself and us? The holy and righteous God¹⁸ neither wanted to nor could be unfaithful to himself. The unrighteousness of his creatures had to be atoned for; his wrath over sin needed to be appeased. Therefore he had his Son come down from heaven and become human. That

took place through the virgin Mary, as the angel Gabriel testifies, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Lk 1:35).¹⁹ And John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:1-3, 14). There is a two-fold reason why God's Son became our brother in Christ. Our redemption rests upon it.

Paul says this about the matter, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Ga 4:4f.). God's Son voluntarily placed himself under the law. He thereby carried out what he himself wasn't required to do. For the Lord of the law certainly isn't subject to the requirements of the law. But if he voluntarily places himself under it and fulfills it completely, then he has achieved something, of which he himself has no need. He lets it benefit his human brothers, so that they, clothed in the white robe of his righteousness,²⁰ can be with God as his dear children, as citizens of his kingdom. In order to accomplish this, God's Son had to become human.

The second reason why God's Son had to become human is related to the first. God's Son was to pay for our guilt and suffer our punishment, as Isaiah prophesied, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Is 53:4f.). Paul writes, "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" (Ro 8:3f.).²¹

We completely marvel at God's mercy and the love of our Savior. The Apostle John holds this miracle of divine love before our eyes in an especially vivid way: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). No one can truly comprehend this with his reason! Even our hearts are too small to fully appreciate this love. All we can do is worship and praise the Lord. In view of the God-child in the manger Paul Gerhardt composed these words: "With joy I look upon you, Lord; my eyes cannot stop looking. And since I nothing more can do, I stand here you adoring. O that my mind were fathomless, my heart and soul a deep abyss, that I might fully grasp you!" (LKG 102,4 [TN* *Lutherisches Kirchen-Gesangbuch* - the hymnal of the ELFK. The translation of both hymn stanzas is my own.]). That which we don't understand confronts us clearly and unmistakably when we open up the Holy Scriptures: the Son of God went about, preached and healed, suffered and died – all as a genuine human being. Yet this human being was God himself: the things he said and did testify to this fact just as much as the holy apostles and prophets do. – When we then look to the cross, we find ourselves singing forth praise with the same composer: "Ne'er from my thoughts I'll let you flee so long my days continue, and just as you have done to me with loving arms I'll grasp you. You will be the light of my heart and when indeed it breaks apart, yet you, O Christ, my heart remain. I now commit myself to Thee as your possession constantly, rejoicing in your glorious name" (LKG 138,5). For here under the cross and nowhere else can a troubled heart find comfort, peace and salvation.

In view of these points, what evaluation should be given of the rendering stated above, which is regarded as a timely interpretation of the message of justification? That interpretation, again, reads thusly: "The cross is the sign from God that God is also with him who is only able to scream out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' The Christian community after Easter understood that we can have the certainty that we, with our guilty and empty hands, are accepted by God because of the cross of Christ. Aside from all our deeds, we - I myself and my neighbor - have above all a worth which God has promised to us and made our own."

Two things need to be said. First of all, if someone knows what the Biblical message about Jesus Christ and his work is and reads that into these words, then there is much that is correct in this rendering. That our contemporaries, though, - who aren't acquainted with the traditional doctrine of justification - have that much background knowledge of the Bible and can read all that into these words is certainly doubtful.

* translator's note

Secondly, the decisive factor, however, is this: the central declaration of these sentences has nothing to do with the Biblical message of justification. Justification of the sinner doesn't have to do with human worth. That was warranted and remains in existence through something entirely different than Jesus' death on the cross - through creation! God created humankind as the only creature in his own image. Even though this image was destroyed through sin, yet on the basis of the way God created us we have a worth that remains. After the fall into sin it consists in this, that God still wants to communicate with humankind - as opposed to all of his other creatures - on a "person to person" basis.²² Justification has to do with something else: the broken relationship between God and us. Will war continue to rage between God and us or will peace be reestablished between us as it was before the fall into sin? The message of justification proclaims the declaration of peace through Jesus Christ. Paul writes, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ... God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Co 5:19-21).

And so the attempt, which we have observed, to formulate the message of justification into a timely interpretation doesn't hold up to the truth of the Bible. Since it ignores the deadly seriousness of the situation we are in because of sin, it cannot be speaking of God's reconciliation between himself and the world of sinners. Thereby the sad condition of a theology is revealed which carries the name of Lutheran, but misses by far what Luther proclaimed in accordance with the Scriptures. Therefore the true message of justification is needed by all people, in order for them to find salvation and life! – So let's take a look into this comforting message!

2. JUSTIFICATION - It has been completely acquired.

God has completely furnished salvation in the justification of the sinner! That is such a powerful truth, that a person can only comprehend it when the Holy Spirit opens his eyes. Satan tries all he can to prevent us from spreading this message. Only then can he keep people in condemnation.

2.1. Justification - It has taken place for all sins.

In the Bible we find a well-known example of the way in which the devil persuades sinners to think that there is no forgiveness from God for their great guilt! When Cain murdered his brother, he said, "My sin is too great to be forgiven" (Gen 4:13²³). Or we can think of Judas (Mt 27:3-5). He was loaded down with tremendous guilt because he had betrayed Jesus to his enemies. When he came to the realization of what he had done, he was sorrowful over what he did. However, he didn't see any way out of it, and so he killed himself. Scripture describes this characteristic of our heart in this way, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jer 17:9). First sin entices us to throw to the wind the warnings that come from God's Word and from our conscience. Then, once the evil deed has been done, the devil portrays our evil deed as being so great, that we do not even dare seek refuge in God's mercy. In view of this deceitfulness let us consider what God's Word says – Christ has completely acquired our justification. It has taken place for all sins.

Jesus himself explains that he has completely redeemed all people. That is made clear, for example, by the way in which he speaks about it from the cross: " 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (Jn 19:30). With that he is announcing that the purpose for which he was sent is fulfilled, about which the Baptist spoke, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). He was only acknowledging what God had proclaimed through Isaiah concerning the coming servant of God, who would atone for the sins of all humankind: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed... After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities" (Is 53:5,11).

What Jesus accomplished on the cross is a sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. In this way he reconciled us to God. Now he didn't make use of any animal sacrifice, like the priests did in the old covenant, but rather, he sacrificed himself as lamb without blemish of sin. The letter to the Hebrews states, "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his

enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (He 10:10-14).

The Apostle John also confirms that our sin is completely atoned for: “The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” – “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn 1:7-9; 1 Jn 2:2). With that it is clear – there is no sin for which Jesus did not suffer and which is not atoned for before God!

2.2. Justification - It has been acquired for all sinners.

Even in this point the devil tries to prevent people from believing. He persuades one person that God’s grace certainly doesn’t apply to him. He doesn’t come from a Christian family; neither has he ever had anything to do with church. Maybe he even mocked and harassed Christians in the past. But these thoughts are all wrong. Jesus has acquired salvation for all sinners.

The devil works in yet other ways. In the last 100 years he has whispered in some people’s ear, that Christendom is only important for those culture groups in which it has traditionally been found. In other areas of the world, God gives salvation through religions, which are native to those areas – such as through modern Judaism, Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism.

These thoughts are wrong, however. At Pentecost Peter called out to people from all over the world, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). And John shares with us, “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist...” (1 Jn 4:2f.).

That salvation for all sinners is found in Jesus Christ is an age-old truth. Already in the Garden of Eden, right after the fall into sin, God announced the Savior.²⁴ He also told Abraham expressly that this Savior would be for all people – “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Ge 12:3).²⁵ This is also the message of the prophets. Isaiah gives the words of God directed to the coming Messiah when he writes, “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Is 49:6).²⁶ John the Baptist points to Jesus and says, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29).

Jesus himself says to Nicodemus, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (Jn 3:14-18). Or we can think of how Jesus said to the Emmaus disciples, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations” (Lk 24:46f.). The great commission itself makes sense (Mt 28:19f.)²⁷ only because Jesus has acquired salvation for all people.

Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles, does not grow too weary to cry out, “Just as the result of one trespass” – Adam’s - “was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness” – that is, done by Jesus - “was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous” (Ro 5:18f.).²⁸ And John writes that Jesus Christ “is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn 2:2).

And so it is clear: There is no person in the world who has not already been redeemed through Jesus! That is the glorious message of the Gospel. It applies to everyone who does not yet know Jesus Christ: acquaintances, neighbors and relatives as well as all people in far-off countries! Isn't that wonderful? They only need to hear it. God already has salvation ready and waiting for them. Therefore let us gladly answer his call to be his witnesses!

3. JUSTIFICATION – It has been freely obtained.

God grants salvation completely for free in the justification of the sinner! That is the good news about Jesus Christ. Whenever a lost sinner grasps this gospel by faith, he is saved, just as Paul says to the jailer in Philippi, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household" (Acts 16:31). That God really grants salvation completely for free and without any contribution of our own is such a powerful truth, that we can also only grasp this wonder if the Holy Spirit opens up our eyes. Here also, the devil tries all he can to destroy this faith, in order to thus keep people in condemnation. He whispers to us that we can and must contribute something ourselves to our salvation (synergism²⁹).

Besides the heathen religions,³⁰ there are also variations of this within Christianity, as well. In such cases, while one trusts strictly in Christ for salvation, the truth, however, is falsified in two decisive points:

1. through a false understanding of how one obtains justification:

A person believes that he can draw nearer to God and to salvation - or even attain it - by one's own strength (cooperation in conversion).

2. through a false understanding of the nature of justification itself:

A person believes that justification consists in proving oneself as virtuous before God through love and good works, with the help of grace (justification as an ethical process).

Both errors are found in a crass way not only in past ages,³¹ but also today in the Roman Catholic Church. It was no different in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation last year.³²

In the question of conversion, such errors are found in, among others, Methodism, Pietism, the Evangelical Alliance, and the Evangelical Movement - in which these movements overlap to a great degree. Even the doctrine of the justification of the sinner itself is cast in a false light in these movements. On the one hand, all human merit in justification is rejected. However, then justification is portrayed in such a way that love, spiritual gifts, virtues and good works do indeed play a certain role in justification. The Christian is instructed, for example, not to trust only in the fact that God is gracious to every sinner for Jesus' sake. Christians should above all also ask themselves if they are really converted and are living a life with God and according to his will. Only when they have evidence of this can they be certain that they will be saved.³³

The first question reads as such: Can a person, by his own strength, draw near to God or at least contribute something to this purpose? We will come back to this question later.³⁴ First we turn to the second question: Is a person justified before God in that he, with the help of grace, proves himself as virtuous before God through love and good works? In other words, is justification a process, by which I continually learn how to better love God and do good - whereby my deficiencies and sins are covered up through forgiveness? The Catholic Church still declares today that good works earn salvation.³⁵ The answer of the Holy Scriptures is clear.

3.1. Justification - It has been obtained without any human contribution.

No work, no accomplishment and certainly no merit on the part of a person comes into play when a sinner is justified before God and is saved. On the contrary, this possibility is expressly excluded. Paul lays out the principles and says, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through

faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Ro 3:22-28). He illustrates this with the example of Abraham: "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-- but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him'" (Ro 4:1-8). Or in the letter to the Ephesians Paul writes, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith³⁶--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph 2:8f.). With these verses it is made unmistakably clear that, according to the Scriptures, human works contribute nothing to one's justification.³⁷ God grants salvation to the sinner completely for free, without any human contribution.

That raises another question. Does God, in justification, perhaps receive sinners completely by grace, but with this one condition: that they prove themselves worthy of this grace and live holy lives? This thought is in Roman Catholic doctrine, according to which God infuses his grace (his grace-power) into a person's heart, so that he is enabled to live a holy life and thus to acquire merits toward eternal salvation.³⁸ Calvin's doctrine leads (misleads) to this same error in a subtler way. Whoever comes to faith by power of God's election has done so in accordance with God's will. While the person is certain of his election through faith, yet the person only receives proof of this fact by looking at his life and noticing good works and signs of his new life.³⁹ According to Calvin, certainty of one's salvation is attained finally not through Word and Sacrament, but rather through one's sanctification.⁴⁰ However, that makes it necessary for Christians to apply themselves with all their strength to striving after a new life, in order to arrive at inner peace. Nevertheless, that is not attainable; one attains, at most, to self-delusion and self-righteousness.

Highly honored synod delegates, revered guests, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us take warning not to include the works or the standing of our sanctification in the question of how a person is saved. Jesus Christ has gained for us full redemption. He receives us without any condition. We can think of how the paralytic was brought to Jesus. They had to lower him through the roof in order to place him before Jesus. There wasn't any other way. Now the Lord doesn't immediately heal him, but instead, when he sees their faith, says, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (Mt 9:2). He doesn't mention any conditions here! Someone might here object and say, "Sure, here Jesus doesn't make any conditions! But in other passages he says sure enough, 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'"⁴¹ Certainly, but let's not deceive ourselves. These words are no condition! With those words he didn't mean to say, "I forgive you, but only if live a holy life from now on!"

To attach conditions to gifts is indeed essentially possible. That takes place time and again among people. Someone gives \$500 [TN - 1000 DM] to a person in debt and says, "I'm giving you this as a gift, but only if you promise to be more careful in the future!" That is precisely not the case with God's forgiveness. We can think of the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Mt 18:21-35). The one servant misappropriated ten thousand talents, a sum of millions of dollars! He was to go to jail until he paid it all back. Then the man pleads, "Be patient with me and I will pay back everything"

(Mt 18:26). And then it reads -- "The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go" (Mt 18:27). Jesus portrays our heavenly Father with this king. Our lives belong to him. We owe him our service and obedience; however, we innately misappropriate it all. So God demands that we pay our debt. But who could ever pay it? We would never be freed from his prison but would be eternally damned. Yet God forgives everyone his debt - everyone who calls on him in Jesus' name. He doesn't attach the condition: "But you have to pay me so and so much back annually!" He doesn't postpone our payment. He forgives our debt completely.

The call to go and leave a life of sin means this: when Jesus forgives, he is acting like parents who welcome their child with open arms after a long quarrel. They might say, "Now don't go running off again like that!" That is, though, neither a condition nor an oppressive demand. They are rather reminding their child not to so frivolously gamble with his home again. It would be something altogether different if the parents stood at the front door and

said, "We'll let you in now, but only if you promise not to run away again." Incidentally, that illustration of a child returning home comes from Jesus himself. We think of the Parable of the Lost Son (Lk 15:11-32). What happens when the son returns? While he was still a long way off - "his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate." And the father said to the older brother, "'this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'" Here, too, Jesus portrays our heavenly Father. God joyfully receives as his child and lavishes his heavenly treasures upon everyone who repents of his sin and seeks forgiveness - without any prerequisites.

Now someone could ask, "Is that really true in every respect? God doesn't attach any conditions before he forgives? He only forgives if a person repents of his sins and, in faith in Jesus Christ, asks for forgiveness!" - It is true. No one finds salvation, unless he turns to God and takes hold of Jesus by faith. That is nevertheless no condition, in the sense that the person has to do or prove something in order to receive salvation. For a sinner can neither turn to God nor believe in Jesus by his own power. Both are completely God's gift. We will deal with that further later on.⁴² In any case it remains true: the justification which Jesus has acquired becomes the sinner's own only by grace and excludes every human effort! With that, God's love puts everything to shame that people would do in a similar situation. Such is the mercy that God has with us sinners. He knows that we couldn't have been helped by any other way.

Now if in the justification of the sinner every human effort is excluded, how at all is it brought about? How does a sinner, who is under God's wrath, become a child of God? How can this take place if the basis for this change is not to be found, even in part, in human performance?

3.2. Justification - It has been obtained through a judicial act of God.

In the New Testament the word δικαιώω [dikaióō] is used repeatedly.⁴³ In the Luther-Bible [TN - 1984 Revidierte Lutherbibel] it is rendered by the words "rechtfertigen" [TN - "justify"] or "gerecht machen" [TN - "make righteous"]. It is important to know what the Greek word means. It originates from judicial language. When a judge acquits the accused party, he justifies him. Therefore it has nothing to do with an evil person being changed into a good person. In justification God pronounces a judgment upon the sinner, namely this one: "You are holy and righteous. You are my dear child!" The justification of the sinner is a judicial act.

But what is the basis for God's judgment? Where does God find the righteousness which prompts him to acquit sinners? This acquittal does not take place in the normal manner, the way justice is pronounced in our human courts. In our human courts the judge looks at the accused and verifies whether the person is guilty or innocent. If the person is innocent, he is acquitted. By this system, however, God couldn't acquit any single human being.⁴⁴ The pronouncement of justification does not come about by God analyzing the condition of a person's heart and life (not an analytical judgment).

With regard to people whom God justifies, he pays attention to only one thing: that they have faith in Jesus Christ. If he finds this to be true, he doesn't test their works and life. Now sin and unrighteousness are found in Christians, too, of course. Yet God lets grace predominate over justice. Paul clarifies this way of dealing by pointing to Abraham: "What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Ro 4:3-5). It is not our deeds, our pious thoughts or the attitude of our heart which must prompt God to be kind to us sinners. Our faith is credited to us as righteousness.

But how can that be? God is a righteous judge.⁴⁵ He has to punish sin! How can it be that God declares sinners to be righteous, without acting unjustly? It is because of Jesus. In the second letter to the Corinthians Paul writes, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Co 5:21). Since God placed the load of our sins upon his Son and let him bear the punishment, he sees us as people who no

longer have any guilt. For the law has been satisfied through the punishment that Jesus suffered. Incidentally, it's the same way in our judicial systems. If a criminal has completed his punishment, he is deemed to be innocent in the eyes of the court. Since Christ has suffered our punishment, we sinners are deemed to be righteous in the eyes of the righteous God. Because Jesus died for us, God lets grace predominate over justice, without acting unjustly.

Concerning this Paul writes (Ro 3:24-28), "[We] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." That means: the basis is not what WE have done, but his grace. The righteousness which we lack by nature comes to us through what JESUS has done. How exactly does that work? Paul goes on, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith..." Literally: "God presented him for faith as a mercy seat in his blood." Here Paul is referring to the cover of the Ark of the Covenant and what took place there on the great Day of Atonement. This pointed ahead to the Savior from sins, Jesus Christ. On the Day of Atonement the high priest would sprinkle the blood of a ram on the mercy seat, on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. That had deep significance. God impressed upon the Israelites that he was enthroned upon the ark.⁴⁶ But in the ark lay the tablets of the law.⁴⁷ They condemned the people as covenant-breakers. Israel had forfeited its life. Yet God had established the great Day of Atonement for the redemption of his sinful people.⁴⁸ According to this system the blood of a ram – sprinkled on the ark – satisfied the demands of the law.⁴⁹ Israel retained its life. Its covenant-breaking was atoned for.

Do we now understand what Paul means, when he writes, "God presented him for faith as a mercy seat in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."? What occurred in the Old Testament for Israel in the Temple on the great Day of Atonement took place on Golgatha for the entire world: the blood of an innocent sacrificial lamb satisfied the demands of God's law against us sinners. This finds expression in God's forgiveness of sins, that is, that he no longer imputes them to the sinner.

This atonement covers not only all the sins that have been committed since Christ's death, but also those that have been committed since the beginning of the world. Even the sacrifices of the Old Testament had the power to atone for sins only by virtue of the coming sacrifice of Jesus. This is how God demonstrates his righteousness: he doesn't let unrighteousness simply go unpunished; rather, he provides atonement. God's Son gave up his life for our guilt. God also demonstrates his righteousness, though, by justifying - by declaring righteous - everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. Paul then continues joyfully, "Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." Therefore it is clear: the justification of the sinner isn't about improving the life of the sinner. God saves sinners from their deserved punishment by declaring them righteous for Jesus' sake. His Son Jesus Christ already suffered the punishment which our sins deserve. The pronouncement of justification, therefore, consists of this: God imputes the sacrifice and the righteousness of his Son to the believer (synthetic judgment⁵⁰). God declares the sinner righteous for Jesus' sake!

Do we realize what a wonderful - indeed, what an incomprehensible - way God has to save sinners? To us who are undeserving he gives the righteousness of his Son as a gift, by imputing it to us! What great kindness! Whoever has come to realize the depth of his own weaknesses, sins and frailty cannot praise God enough, for God has laid the foundation of our salvation entirely in Christ - and not at all in us. Justification of the sinner is not a change in the person's nature but rather in the person's status before God: an enemy of God is placed into the position of a child of God.

4. JUSTIFICATION - It is received through faith.

One sometimes hears today, "Actually, everyone needs to believe in something. One can better survive distress if one has faith." We might even hear that quite often; yet it is wrong! An arbitrary faith in something cannot help us when it really matters. Satanists, for example, look to the devil in faith. That certainly won't help them one bit; rather, they will only fall all the deeper into ruin.

Now many would say, "I mean - believing in God." But even that isn't right. A general belief in some higher being doesn't help one find salvation at all. The words of Paul (Ro 1:18-23) expose all the conceptions of God that are in circulation today. People feel well enough that there is a God, but they do not honor him: "Although they claimed to

be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (Ro 1:22f.). They well enough have an inkling of God, but they fashion this thought into an idol! For that reason all people will be lost if they only rely on a general faith in God. Even if someone would know the true God - that would still not help him. James writes, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder" (Ja 2:19).⁵¹ What matters is whether we are God's friend or his enemy.

We can see how the devil leads us astray also in this matter. We might think that we've already received the help we need. We have a faith. But it is not the faith that saves sinners. Whoever thinks this way will be lost. So what is the faith that saves for eternity?

4.1. Through faith - which is trust in Christ

We learn what saving faith⁵² is from these words of Jesus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him" – literally, 'whoever trusts⁵³ in him' - "shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Jesus Christ is the object of saving faith. This faith is no nebulous hope, but rather a firm trust and a confident knowledge. The letter to the Hebrews shows this with the words: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (He 11:1).

It cannot be otherwise. Whoever is alarmed over his life and his sin senses that he is eternally lost. Therefore he seeks after salvation and deliverance. When he then hears the gospel of Jesus Christ, he learns that the sins of the entire world – and therefore also his own sins – have already been atoned for. He holds on to this with all his heart and adheres by faith not only to this message but also to the Lord Jesus Christ himself. His life has thus been changed; for faith is not just some vague speculation, but certainty. With the Apostle Paul he can then confess, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Ga 2:20).

The Christian faith thus does not grasp blindly into the air. It is not simply directed in a general way towards some divine higher being. It is a reliance upon Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who for our sake came down from heaven in order to redeem us through his death on the cross. This saving faith incorporates two elements. First, we need to have heard something about the triune God and his Savior, before we can trust his Savior (Ro 10:14,17). Then faith also includes the fact that we assent to what we have heard (1 Jn 5:10). Whoever doubts the news about Jesus Christ does not trust in him. Knowledge and assent - these two factors are included in the Biblical concept of "faith". – Now what function does this faith have?

4.2. Through faith - which takes hold of salvation like a hand

Paul writes, "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Ro 3:22). That means, by trusting in Jesus we receive what we ourselves do not have – complete righteousness. God presented Jesus to sinners, so that in him they might have hope (Ro 3:25). When sinners' whole salvation and hope rest in Jesus, "Where, then, is boasting?" – Paul answers, "It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law?" In other words - on what basis is boasting excluded? Is it that God takes our works into account? "No, but on that of faith" (Ro 3:27). It works completely differently in the justification of the sinner. Human works are not weighed. God looks at a sinner's faith in Jesus Christ: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Ro 3:28).

A chapter later in the letter to the Romans Paul states, "However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Ro 4:5).⁵⁴ Paul briefly says the same thing at the beginning of the epistle: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Ro 1:16). Wherever the gospel awakens faith, it also effects something else: lost sinners are saved. Paul writes in the letter to the Galatians, "Consider Abraham: 'He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness'" (Ga 3:6). Here too Paul isn't just talking about faith in the true God, but faith in the coming Savior of sinners. Abraham believed God in everything that he promised him, and from the very beginning this included the announcement of a very particular descendant – the Savior.⁵⁵

The opposite is also true. Wherever faith is lacking, salvation cannot be received. Jesus states this when he sends the disciples into the world, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:15f.). This is also found in the answer which Paul and Silas give to the jailer in Philippi. He had asked them what he needed do in order to be saved. They explain, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (Acts 16:31).⁵⁶ That means, a person cannot be saved where there is no faith. – Thus faith is the instrument, the tool, the means or the hand by which a sinner takes hold of God’s salvation.⁵⁷

4.3. Through faith - which alone receives salvation

We have now heard what kind of role faith plays when a person is saved. It fixes itself on Jesus Christ⁵⁸ and is the instrument by which we take hold of salvation.⁵⁹ Jesus’ righteousness is credited to it.⁶⁰ So, haven’t all the important things already been said? We might say, “Yes.” But the devil doesn’t yet give up. He starts up a new attempt to rob people of salvation. What they have come to realize from the Scriptures he tries to twist in such a way that they yet lose their salvation. He says, “Certainly, Jesus Christ has acquired salvation. Sure, you are credited with his righteousness from God through faith. But that’s not everything! In order to be saved, you have to complete what you are capable of completing by God’s grace.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches this outright. It maintains that whoever believes in Christ receives from God, by pure grace and mercy for Jesus’ sake, such powerful gifts and powers that he is able to live a holy life. When God looks at the person, he determines that he has a righteous person before him. A Christian overcomes the shortcomings he still has through striving after sanctification. Serious backslides are purged through the sacrament of penance!⁶¹ In this context indulgences play a large role.⁶² A distinguishing mark of this view is the claim that good works earn salvation with God.⁶³ And so a Christian’s good works are brought into play in a massive way in the issue of how a person is saved.

The same teaching is often found in subtler ways. Someone says perhaps, “A Christian receives salvation from God freely for Jesus’ sake. However, in order to remain in it, a person also needs to lead a Christian life.” This view is found in the range of Methodism, Pietism, the Evangelical Alliance and Evangelicals. But we ourselves are also inclined to such expressions, when we stress that a person cannot be a Christian without sanctification. Indeed, it is true: without sanctification “no one will see the Lord” (He 12:14). Nevertheless, we dare not speak falsely about this matter. The impression should not be given that living a life according to God’s will also plays a role in how we are saved, next to Christ’s work and God’s forgiveness.

What the Apostle Paul writes to the Galatians urges us to use great care in how we speak! Some teachers came onto the scene there who wanted to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, they maintained that whoever wanted to be saved must be circumcised and must keep the Mosaic regulations. So they proclaimed a message which taught that besides Christ and grace, some human performance was necessary, in order to be saved. Paul took a stand against this teaching. He asked the Christians of these congregations by what means they had received salvation: “by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?” (Ga 3:2). Naturally, by believing what they had heard. Then he showed them that what is at stake is an “either-or”. Either one stands upon the foundation of the law, in which case a person, with all that he has done in life, has to pass God’s examination; or one stands before God in faith in Jesus Christ, in which case all his doings in life are not even taken into account.

However one decides, one must bear the consequences:

Whoever tries to pass God’s examination on the basis of the law is lost: “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’ The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, ‘The man who does these things will live by them’” (Ga 3:10-12). It is completely different, though, for all those who are established upon grace. They will receive the salvation that was already promised to Abraham, and they will be saved together with believing Abraham: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit” (Ga 3:13f.).

Paul explains, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (Ga 5:1-4). Whoever even makes just one point of human good conduct a condition of the reception of salvation stands completely – whether one wants to or not – on the foundation of the law. But no sinner will be saved by this way! Besides this "either-or" – either works or grace – there is no third possibility. Certain preachers wanted to convince the congregations in Galatia of a third possibility. But Paul warns, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Ga 1:6-9).

From this we learn that, as soon as we add to faith anything that we must do in the justification of the sinner, we lose salvation completely. A person is saved by faith alone. The Scriptures testify to this in various passages, such as in Romans 4:5-7: "However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered,'" or in Ephesians 2:8f.: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast." Do we comprehend how wonderfully kind God is? We wouldn't even have a chance in being saved if we had to contribute something to our salvation. Who could even show forth one single day in his Christian life, on which he proved worthy of salvation by his works! No, Christ alone has accomplished - and had to accomplish alone - what was necessary for our salvation. Salvation belongs to us through faith alone!

Because there is only this "either-or", we have to pay careful attention to how we depict the way to salvation. When the matter at hand is the question - 'What is the foundation of our salvation?' or 'Where should a sinner look to, when he seeks salvation?' - there is only one answer: Jesus Christ and his work alone. Here sinners find deliverance from God's wrath, forgiveness, life and salvation. Whoever teaches people concerning this matter to also look to their own works is pointing out a path that in actuality doesn't exist and is leading people into ruin. A person is saved through faith alone.

4.4. Through faith - which is a gift from God

Now the devil, of course, cuts in again: "Ok, but how does faith work? Something goes on within the heart of a person! Don't we at least have to do this work ourselves?" This argument falls on fertile soil. We can always hear someone say, "No, we can't earn salvation ourselves. Jesus did that. God just expects one thing from us. We need to believe in Jesus Christ." Or we might hear the call: "Jesus gave everything for you. Now make your decision for him!" This can at least give the impression that humankind has the power to approach Jesus with love and trust. That is often even expressly stated. But is that true? Does a person have the power and capability to convert oneself, or to at least cooperate in a positive way in one's conversion? We have already heard that we encounter this view not only in the Roman Catholic Church, but also in Methodism, Pietism, the Evangelical Alliance and the Evangelical camp.⁶⁴ However, it is still wrong.

Paul states clearly and explicitly that faith is not a work done by a person: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph 2:8f.). Why it cannot be otherwise Paul states before this. We are spiritually "dead in [our] transgressions and sins" (Eph 2:1) as long as we are not converted. All people are by nature blind in matters that pertain to God and faith: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Co 2:14). Paul says even more. We are not only completely powerless and dead in spiritual matters; we are even completely opposed to God: "the sinful mind⁶⁵ is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Ro 8:7). Humankind, by nature, is completely incapable of and unwilling towards conversion.

Therefore the cause of our conversion⁶⁶ is entirely in God alone. JESUS says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn 6:44). And PAUL admonishes, “[Joyfully give] thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:12-14). Here Paul ascribes conversion and faith entirely to the working of the Father. He doesn’t maintain that the Colossians were pushed back and forth by God like dead logs. No, they turned to God with all their heart. However, this turning about wasn’t effected through inherent powers in themselves, but through God. You have been “buried with [Christ] in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins” (Col 2:12f.). Paul also elsewhere ascribes conversion completely to God: “Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Co 12:3).⁶⁷

⁶⁸ God alone converts a person.

When God effects conversion, he doesn’t choose to do so directly (im-mediately), but rather through certain means. God’s Word produces faith, as James writes, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created” (Ja 1:18); or as Paul writes, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Ro 10:17).⁶⁹ When we take a closer look, we realize that this takes place in a very particular manner.

The law does not convert sinners, but rather prepares the way for conversion by startling them out of a false security and causing them to seek after deliverance. The Apostle Paul writes, “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (Ro 3:19f.).

Faith comes through the comfort of the gospel. Let’s just look at the Apostle Peter’s Pentecost sermon. He first of all explained to the amazed people what had happened: ‘God has poured out his Spirit, as it had been promised for the time of salvation (Acts 2:15-21); for the time of salvation has come. God has sent the Messiah. The Jews executed him through the Romans, but God resurrected and exulted him. And now he has given the promised Spirit (Acts 2:22-35).’ And he closes, “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). That was nothing else than revealing the sins of the people and of their leaders: the preaching of the law. It had its effect: “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). That was not yet trust in Christ; that was terror and horriification over what they had done! Faith was aroused through the gospel. Peter then presented the people with the gospel: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.’ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation”’ (Acts 2:38-40). On that day about three thousand people came to faith!

Faith was produced here through the good news about God’s salvation in Jesus Christ. Yet God’s Spirit doesn’t just work through the heard Word. In his Pentecost sermon, Peter also points to the other means through which God converts people to himself: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). God gives his Spirit, and with him salvation, through baptism as well. Paul writes, “[God] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:5). Now the preached gospel and baptism are in essence not two different things. They are two different ways by which God brings the gospel to lost sinners in order to convert them. What the message of Jesus Christ first of all proclaims to all people⁷⁰ in a general way, baptism from the outset impresses upon a certain individual and makes it his own. Therefore Christians throughout their entire lives experience wonderful strengthening of their faith through baptism. So baptism is also included in what Paul writes in Romans 1:16: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”⁷¹

God converts people – not im-mediately, but rather through the means of grace. From this it is made clear: faith is not something like a minimum requirement asked of us, after God’s Son has achieved redemption. We don’t have to

bring justification to a finish through our faith by retaining the gift of salvation through our own strength. Faith itself is God's gift. The Holy Spirit awakens and renews the hearts of lost sinners through the gospel in the proclamation of the Word and in baptism. And so he creates even the tool or the hand through which we take hold of and accept salvation.

Let us not obscure this truth! Whoever presents faith as a work which people need to accomplish by their own strength leads people to overestimation of themselves and to haughtiness. Despair awaits them in the end. Whoever learns to recognize – perhaps after a particular failure – the abysses of sin in his own heart can very easily be plagued with doubts concerning his conversion. 'If I commit sins like that, maybe I haven't really been converted yet.' Questions like this one can befall any Christian. Then whoever has the belief that he made the decision for God no longer finds any peace. 'Did I really fully decide?' The person starts over and tries again. Yet there always remains a little bit of uncertainty whether one has really already found salvation. That is the consequence when one teaches that conversion and faith are things that sinners can decide for by their own strength, or that they are things in which they can at least cooperate.

It works completely differently wherever one teaches according to the Scriptures. If a frightened sinner asks how he can be saved, we may point him to Jesus. He has accomplished everything. That frightened sinner is reconciled to God. Heaven is open! We can testify, "Don't look to yourself, to your weakness and your failures. Salvation isn't found in you, but in Jesus!" Our heart finds secure footing and a firm comfort in this news. Through this message the Holy Spirit awakens, establishes and strengthens faith anew. An additional decision by one's own strength is superfluous. Certainly this Christian as well will feel that sin and weakness press hard upon him. However, the Christian knows his Savior. In times of fear he runs to his Lord. Here the Christian finds not only rest and peace but also strength for a new beginning!

Out of the concern not to illegitimately curtail God's grace in justification and to ascribe too much to faith, an argument arose in our church at the beginning of the past century, whether faith may be at all described as an active doing of a person ("taking hold of grace"), or as a purely passive thing, receiving.⁷² After struggling for year over this matter it came to clarity. Since a person applies the message of God's grace to himself and trustingly takes hold of it, one can indeed speak of a "taking hold of grace". Scripture also speaks in an active sense of people who "became obedient to the faith [that is, the message of the gospel]" (Acts 6:7). It is contrary to Scripture, though, to ascribe powers to the natural human self, through which one is able to draw near to or even achieve faith. Therefore faith cannot, even in part, be described as human performance.

5. JUSTIFICATION - It renews life.

If the devil can't destroy the comforting realization that God accepts us sinners completely freely, out of pure mercy, then he pursues a different way to make us fall. He lulls people into a false sense of security. If a Christian lets himself be ensnared by this, he becomes content with the forgiveness he has received and thinks that everything that is important has already taken place. He becomes lethargic and negligent. His own sins hardly alarm him. In the questions of life he asks less and less about God. He lives for the day and only strives after fulfilling his own visions and wishes. In the end, faith is something in his head, but has little to do with his heart and life. James warns against this: "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (Ja 2:17).

To escape this danger, some have already called out, "Not just faith, but also good works and a Christian life are necessary for salvation." If we took that route, however, we would fall right back into the grave, against which God's Word has already warned us.⁷³ Nothing else may be placed next to Christ and his work in the matter of justification; otherwise we forfeit everything. Therefore the question is raised concerning how we should correctly speak about sanctification,⁷⁴ which inseparably belongs to the life of a Christian.

5.1. Justification and Sanctification - They are like a tree and its fruit.

Justification and sanctification belong together. There exists an indissoluble union between the two. Although we are saved by faith alone, faith never remains alone, but is accompanied by works of faith. That is as certain as burning and illumination cannot be separated from fire. For saving faith awakens a person to a life of good thoughts,

words and deeds just as naturally as a good tree bears good fruit. (Ja 2:26). Jesus says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). A person who has been justified therefore lives by the power of his heart, which has been renewed by the Holy Spirit. Throughout his life, however, the person is instructed that God’s Spirit preserves him in faith and motivates him to a good, Christian life. Paul writes, “Therefore, my dear friends... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Phi 2:12f.).

It is a new and wonderful way of life to which a person is freed through justification. Although the person strives to please God, he doesn’t intend to earn God’s good pleasure that way (Lk 17:10). He has already found this in Jesus Christ. Rather, by striving to please God, the person is expressing his thankfulness to him.⁷⁵ And thus people who are justified enter into a situation that is entirely unknown by all other people. Whatever a person thinks, says and does in this new way of life doesn’t bring about God’s anger, but pleases God⁷⁶ and has God’s blessing.⁷⁷ That is because it takes place according to God’s will⁷⁸ and for his glorification;⁷⁹ it coincides with his commandments;⁸⁰ it is motivated by true love⁸¹ and it pleases God for Christ’s sake, although it is yet mixed with sin.⁸²

These works also have great significance for the people around us, though, because they give testimony⁸³ before others to justifying faith and help to create a hearing for the message of justification.⁸⁴

5.2. Justification and Sanctification - They must be clearly distinguished.

The devil also uses this glorious new life, which has been given by God, as an occasion to confound Christians. He whispers in their ear, “If God has freed you to a new life, then one can clearly see from your life whether you truly are a redeemed child of God or not. But you have so much sin and weakness! Give up on God!” In this way he tries to get us to topple into despair and unbelief, in order to pull us back into perdition.

There is certainly one thing that is true in these thoughts: If a person on a continuing basis openly holds on to sin and does not repent to God, then he is no longer a Christian.⁸⁵ However, it is just as true that no Christian will ever be sinless in this life.⁸⁶ It is therefore good to note the difference between justification and sanctification.

Justification

- changes a person’s status before God⁸⁷
- excludes all human works⁸⁸
- is complete through Christ⁸⁹
- is in effect for all people⁹⁰ and only needs to be believed⁹¹ in order to belong to them⁹²
- assures of salvation⁹³
- precedes sanctification in the order of cause and effect⁹⁴

Sanctification

- changes a person’s heart and the way in which he deals with God and with others⁹⁵
- is comprised of good works, which God enables⁹⁶
- is not complete in this life⁹⁷
- is only present in Christians⁹⁸
- is evidence of faith,⁹⁹ but can never make a person certain of salvation¹⁰⁰
- follows justification as its fruit¹⁰¹

This is what a person is like who has been fully justified for Christ’s sake through faith – while he in his heart is at the same time righteous and sinful:

He has in reality been renewed through God’s Spirit to live a holy life, as Paul writes, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Co 5:17).¹⁰² Nevertheless, the old self still remains in him – for as long as he lives in this world – and not only desires to lead him into sin, but it also accomplishes this again and again. Concerning this Paul laments, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Ro 7:18).¹⁰³ For that reason John warns against self-delusion: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:8f.).

So we Christians also continue to need God's law,¹⁰⁴ so that the devil does not make us sluggish, lull us into a false sense of security and lead us into a life that serves sin and no longer the Lord Christ. What function does God's law have here?

God's commandments hold a mirror before our face and show us our sin (the law as a mirror). But they cannot give power to do good works, as Paul writes, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." (Ro 3:20). Our conscience only finds peace when we turn to God and receive forgiveness under the cross of Christ. Through the gospel the Holy Spirit fills up our heart anew with thankfulness for God's grace and for our Savior's love. In this way our desire to serve God and our fellow human beings with love grows again. Paul writes, "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Ga 2:19f.).¹⁰⁵ The holy will of God, as it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, is here an essential help for the new self. In it the new self finds prescribed the works in which it can live in order to thank God (the law as a guide). The Apostle John writes, "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" (1 Jn 5:3).¹⁰⁶

We can here see how law and gospel work together to promote sanctification:

Although the law is very valuable for sanctification, it can not produce it. It only makes the necessity of sanctification explicit (mirror) and shows us what true good works are (guide). Only the gospel in Word and Sacrament renew the heart and give power to live a life that is dedicated in love to God and other people.

Therefore whoever tries to produce sanctification through the law will not accomplish anything. He will at most produce works that outwardly correspond to the will of God, but which lack faith or love as the motivation (legalism). But wherever faith is awakened and nourished through the gospel in Word and Sacrament, new life enters in.

6. JUSTIFICATION - It is the article by which the church stands or falls.

Highly honored synod delegates, revered guests, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, - we have seen how powerful the message of the justification of the sinner is.

Since the time when sin entered this world and corrupted us even to our very foundation (Ep 2:1; Ro 8:7f.) enmity has reigned between God and us (Ro 5:10). For since then we have rebelled against him and have provoked his wrath (Ep 2:3). Misery, distress, sickness, death and all the plagues of this world are punishments of God (Ro 6:23; Is 48:22; He 2:14f.). Eternal torment and punishment in hell threatened every sinner after death (cf. Ps 14:3; Is 64:5 with Jn 5:28f.).

Yet God has prepared salvation for us. Jesus Christ reestablished peace with God through the cross (Ro 5:1) His sacrifice reconciled us to God. Through this sacrifice life and salvation have been won back (Ro 5:2,10). Since God's Son suffered our punishment, we may approach God as righteous ones (Ro 5:8,18). We have thereby attained an eternal freedom. Nothing need threaten or enslave us again, for the almighty God is again our Father and God's Son is our brother (Ga 5:1-4).

Just one more thing needs to take place now. Every lost sinner needs to hear about this. Therefore Christ lets the gospel be proclaimed throughout the entire world. Wherever this message reaches the heart of a frightened sinner, that heart is filled with the love of God, which encounters him in Christ (Ro 5:5). Where strife, fear and death once reigned, the Holy Spirit causes faith and sincere trust to come to life (Ro 5:6,9). In this way sinners become God's children and heirs of eternal salvation (Ga 4:4f.) The Holy Spirit dwells in them (1 Co 3:16; Jn 14:23) and awakens them to a new life (2 Co 5:17), so that they begin to love God and other people from the heart. Through the gospel he not only preserves them in faith, but also lets them triumph over the struggles that are certain for their lives (Ro 5:3ff.).

God's Spirit doesn't just work all this in us. He does this everywhere in the world and thus leads God's people out of ruin. He gathers God's people into the holy Christian church. All who believe in Jesus as their Savior are "built on

the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Ep 2:20; cf. also Mt 16:18; 1 Co 3:11). Luther writes about this in the explanation to the third article: "The Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."¹⁰⁷

Do we see how powerful and central the justification of the sinner is? It brings with itself immeasurable blessing! Wherever the message of the justification of the sinner in unknown, no one can be saved. There is no Christian church. However, wherever this message penetrates through to the people, they are torn from perdition. Heaven opens up. God receives them and gives them a life that will never be destroyed in all eternity (Jn 11:25f.). Everything depends on this message and its acceptance, as Jesus says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (Jn 3:16-18).

For that reason, the devil does whatever he can to at least twist this message, if he can't suppress it altogether, for that way he is able to keep people under his power. Therefore Paul pronounces a curse upon everyone who changes this message: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!" (Ga 1:8). For as soon as our trust is directed also to our capability and doing, alongside Christ and his work, all is lost (Ga 5:4). A sinner is saved by God's grace alone, through faith alone. Thus the doctrine of the justification of the sinner is the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. Therefore our confession signifies the message of the justification of the sinner as the chief article of faith in Jesus Christ:

"That Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification,' Rom. 4, 25.

'And He alone is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, John 1, 29; and God has laid upon Him the iniquities of us all,' Is. 53, 6.

'Likewise: All have sinned and are justified without merit [freely, and without their own works or merits] by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood,' Rom. 3, 23 f.

Now, since it is necessary to believe this, and it cannot be otherwise acquired or apprehended by any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us, as St. Paul says, Rom. 3, 28: 'For we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law.' Likewise v.26: 'That He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Christ.'

Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered [nor can anything be granted or permitted contrary to the same], even though heaven and earth, and whatever will not abide, should sink to ruin. 'For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved,' says Peter, Acts 4, 12. 'And with His stripes we are healed,' Is. 53, 5. And upon this article all things depend which we teach and practise in opposition to the Pope, the devil, and the [whole] world. Therefore, we must be sure concerning this doctrine, and not doubt; for otherwise all is lost, and the Pope and devil and all things gain the victory and suit over us."¹⁰⁸

May God help us through his Spirit, that we may hold on to the glorious message of the gospel - against all falsification, through which the devil seeks to rob people of salvation. This message gives an answer to a question that is more important than anything else that affects our times.

Amen.

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¹ As the Bishop of the Evangelical-Lutheran State Church of Hannover. On 9-4-1999 Dr. Margot Käßmann succeeded him as state bishop.

² State Bishop (Landesbischof) D. Horst Hirschler: "Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre. Verständigung oder Verrat?" in *Evangelische Verantwortung*, February 1998.

³ At that time, humankind lost the image of God, the holiness and righteousness in which we were created (Gen 1:26f., 31; Gen 5:1-3; Ps 51:5; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10).

⁴ cf. Eph 2:1; 1 Co 2:14.

⁵ cf. Eph 3:3.

⁶ cf. also Job 14:4; Ps 143:2; Ps 14:3; Is 64:5; Ro 5:12-20.

⁷ cf. 1 Pe 1:16; Mt 5:48.

⁸ cf. Is 48:22.

⁹ cf. Gen 2:16f.; Ro 6:23.

¹⁰ cf. Acts 17:31; 2 Co 5:10.

¹¹ cf. 1 Co 15:15f.; He 9:27; Jn 5:28f.

¹² cf. Also Jn 5:28f.

¹³ cf. Mt 22:13; Rev 20:13,15; Is 66:24.

¹⁴ Luther in the Small Catechism, in the first commandment.

¹⁵ cf. Ro 4:15.

¹⁶ cf. also Ro 3:24; Ro 4:16; Tit 2:11; Tit 3:5.

¹⁷ 1 Ti 2:5; He 9:15 (mediator of the covenant).

¹⁸ Cf., e.g., concerning his holiness: Jos 24:19; Is 6:3; Is 47:4; Da 9:4; - concerning his righteousness: Ps 11:7; Is 5:16; Da 9:7; Rev 16:5-7

¹⁹ Cf. also Ge 3:15; Is 7:14; Mi 5:3; - Mt 1:23; Mt 16:16; Jn 8:5; Ro 8:3f.; Ga 4:4f.; Phil 2:6-8; He 2:14.

²⁰ Cf. Rev 7:9-17; Mt 22:11.

²¹ Cf. also 2 Co 5:19-21; Eph 1:7; 1 Pe 2:24; He 2:14; He 7:26f.

²² A special protection is granted by God even to fallen humankind (Ge 9:6; Ja 3:9) with the reason being that it was created in God's image, even though it no longer possesses it (God's image = existent in the original condition of humankind; = a remaining designation in humankind's fallen condition).

²³ [TN - In this endnote, Hoffmann explains that Luther's translation, which I have reproduced here with my own translation of Luther, is to be preferred to the 1984 Revised Luther-Bible, from which he elsewhere quotes. The 1984 Revised Luther Bible corresponds to the NIV translation.] This text is from Luther's unrevised translation. One shouldn't follow the '84 revision here – "My punishment is more than I can bear" [NIV]. The Hebrew word for 'sin' is generally used in the sense of 'sin-guilt', but in no passage is it used as 'punishment for sin'. Only in one single

passage is there even the possibility of translating it 'punishment for sin'. But even in that passage it is rather improbable as a correct translation (cf. Moeller, *Der Anfang der Bibel*, 31997, 43f.).

²⁴ In God's words to the snake, Ge 3:15.

²⁵ Similarly in Ge 22:18. That the promise of the Savior is truly found in this passage is also made clear by Jesus' words to the Jews – "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (Jn 8:56).

²⁶ Peter makes reference to this passage when he witnesses to the Gospel before the gentile Centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:43). At Jesus' birth the angels rejoice over it (Lk 2:10,14), as well as the pious Simeon (Lk 2:29-32).

²⁷ Cf. Mk 16:15; Lk 24:46f.

²⁸ Cf. all of Ro 5:12-19; - or also Ro 3:23-30 and 2 Co 5:19-21.

²⁹ Synergism: a person is justified before God in that he works alongside God in the obtaining of his salvation and in his justification.

³⁰ A person seeks to gain salvation by living his life in the right way and by performing certain religious acts. Examples of this are Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism (Pantheism)...

³¹ Pelagianism (Pelagius, ca. 400 A.D.): All people have a free will. They are capable to choose either the good or the bad. Original sin is denied. God's grace only strengthens one's free will. Forgiveness is only needed for actual sins. Semipelagianism (halfway or toned-down Pelagianism - 5th/6th century A.D.): People are so weakened by original sin that by their own strength they cannot choose God or the good; yet a seed of good still remains in them. - The spectrum: (a) by one's own strength a person can make the beginning towards faith and sanctification - but then the help of grace is needed (= 529 rejected by Rome at the Synod of Orange); - (b) grace must first fan into life the seed of good; then the seed, together with grace, can choose God and the good (= still believed and taught today in the Roman Catholic Church).

³² Cf. Martin Hoffmann, "Einig in der Rechtfertigung?" in: THI 1999 vol. 4, pp.2-11 and 2000 vol. 1, pp. 2-14.

³³ Arminians: Faith is understood as a moral act, which also encompasses obedience.

Methodism: Good works are not only a fruit of faith, but also a condition for being saved (reaching complete sanctification is seen as being possible and should be striven after). Assurance of salvation is thus sought through one's sanctification and not alone in Christ.

Calvin: Believers can only be so certain of their election that they establish their faith through good works (cf. the expounding of Calvin in the section "JUSTIFICATION - It has been freely obtained." under the point "Justification - It has been obtained without any human contribution.").

Pietism: Justification is not taught as purely a judicial crediting of Christ's righteousness which is simply grasped through faith. Rather, a person is always to be referred to his sanctification. With that, one's rebirth becomes, quasi, a sign of recognition of one's justification. Assurance of salvation thus rests not on Christ alone, but rather on one's sanctification and conversion.

On Lutheran ground, Melanchthon and Osiander are to be mentioned. Melanchthon, in later times, named three causes of conversion: next to the Holy Spirit (originator) and the Gospel (means) he lists the human will. Besides the possibility to reject grace (in accordance with Scripture) he attributed to the human will a certain capability to apply itself to grace. The Formula of Concord condemns the human will as a third cause of conversion (FC II). - Osiander: According to him justification is not allocated to the sinner through trusting in Christ extra nos (Christ's work of accomplishing salvation), that is, through the crediting of Christ's righteousness alone, which is outside of us, but

rather through the indwelling of Christ as a consequence of rebirth and faith. As a result of this, assurance of salvation can only be based upon spiritual experience, that is, signs of one's sanctification. His teaching was condemned in the Formula of Concord (FC III).

³⁴ Cf. below under the point "JUSTIFICATION - It is received through faith." and the subpoint " Through faith - which is a gift from God".

³⁵ Cf. endnote 63.

³⁶ Unrevised according to Luther. [TN - Hoffman mentions here that this quote is taken from the unrevised version of Luther, which reads "durch den Glauben" - "through faith" or lit. "through the faith". This is in opposition to the 1984 revised version, which reads "durch Glauben" - "through believing".]

³⁷ Two notes to this point: (1) Since God does not look at all at our works in justification, but only receives us by grace for Jesus' sake, therefore justification cannot be a process by which we acquire a constantly greater measure of righteousness (cf. further under the point "Justification - It has been obtained through a judicial act of God."). – (2) With this rejection of the meritoriousness of human works, it is, however, not disputed that a Christian does good works and makes advances in his Christian life; - on the contrary: God equips and calls every Christian to do just that. Sanctification, though, is neither a foundation nor a component of justification (cf. under the point "JUSTIFICATION - It renews life."). Good works, according to the Scriptures, are fruits of justification (cf. the Parable of the Talents: Mt 25:14-30; a Christian's readiness to forgive, for example, grows out of the forgiveness that one has experienced in justification: Mt 6:14f.; the parable of the branches, which can only bring forth fruit if they are connected to the vine – that is, when Christians are connected to Christ through faith and are thus justified, they have power for sanctification through this connection: Jn 15:1-8; cf. also the context under the point "JUSTIFICATION - It renews life.").

³⁸ meritum de condigno [merit according to worthiness; = earned merit]

³⁹ Cf. Alfred Adam, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, EVA Berlin 1973, vol. II, pp. 341-363: The Theology of Calvin (especially pp. 346-352: Justification and Sanctification) and Bengt Hägglund, *Geschichte der Theologie*, EVA Berlin 1983, pp. 201-206: Calvin. Cf. also the article about Calvin in the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie (TRE, Studienausgabe ["Academic Edition"]* Part I, vol. VIII, de Gruyter 1981) and in the *Gestalten der Kirchengeschichte*, edited by M. Greschat (vol. 6, *Die Reformationszeit II*, Kohlhammer 1993) and the commentary by H. Thielicke in his *Theologische Ethik* (vol. 1, Tübingen 1958, §§ 614-621).

Calvin's errors lie in three areas:

(1) His thinking is crucially shaped by God's will, honor, holiness and omnipotence. This is mirrored in his doctrine of double predestination: according to Calvin, God did not only know about the fall into sin beforehand, but he even willed it. With regard to humankind, he chose and predestined some to salvation and others to condemnation.

(2) Due to his humanistic background, he did not recognize the corruption of original sin in the same depth as Luther.

(3) As a result of both of these points, his distinction between law and gospel is lacking. The Old Testament law is for him a "grace" of God and a "figura Christi" that serves the purpose of "directing one's heart heavenward" until Christ's return. The content of the law is the gospel in the form of a promise. The moral regulations given in the new covenant apply in exactly the same sense. Calvin recognizes the threefold use of the law: mirror, curb and guide. For him, the third use is the most important. As opposed to Luther, he never understood that a sinner can only despair before God's law, unless he is saved completely by God's mercy. Sinners must abandon themselves of all their own doing.

⁴⁰ This conclusion has become a hallmark of Calvinism, known as "syllogismus practicus".

⁴¹ Jn 5:14; Jn 8:11

⁴² Cf. in the section “JUSTIFICATION - It is received through faith.” the point “Through faith - which is a gift from God”.

⁴³ Cf., e.g., Mt 12:37; Lk 18:14; Acts 13:38f.; Ro 2:13; 3:4,20-30; 4:2,5; 5:1,9; 6:7; 8:30,33; 1 Co 4:4; 6:11; Ga 2:16f.; 3:8,11,24; 5:4; 1 Ti 3:16; Tit 3:7.

⁴⁴ Cf., e.g., Ro 3:2-24; Ga 3:22; Ecc 7:22*; 1 Ki 8:46; Ge 8:21.

⁴⁵ Cf., e.g., Deut 32:4; Da 9:7,14; Neh 9:33.

⁴⁶ Ex 25:10-22

⁴⁷ Ex 25:16-22; Ex 40:1; 1 Ki 8:9

⁴⁸ Lev 16:1ff. – cf. especially v.15.

⁴⁹ For according to God’s Word a sinner has forfeited life (Deut 24:16; Ez 18:20). However, God placed the blood of animals at the disposal of his people Israel as a substitute for the life of the sinner (Lev 17:11).

⁵⁰ The acquittal takes place by God imputing to the sinner the extrinsic [extrinsic to the sinner] righteousness of Jesus.

⁵¹ Cf. the testimony of the demons concerning Jesus: “Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” (Lk 4:34).

⁵² Concerning the linguistic usage of the word ‘faith’: The word ‘faith’ can express two different things: (a) faith as reliance upon Jesus (*fides qua creditur*): Ga 2:20; (b) faith as the content of the Scriptures, as the object of one’s reliance (*fides quae creditur*): Ga 1:23; Acts 6:7. – Occasionally the words ‘realization’ or ‘knowing’ is used in the same sense as ‘faith’ (Jn 17:3).

⁵³ The original text has a form of the word πιστεύω [*pisteúo*]: to believe, trust.

⁵⁴ Cf. also the whole context of Ro 4:1-8.

⁵⁵ God’s promise to Abraham: first of all Ge 12:1-3; and then again and again, e.g., Ge 26:4. Paul refers to this in Ga 3:16; cf. Jesus words (Jn 8:56).

⁵⁶ Cf. also 2 Pe 2:1f.; Mt 23:37.

⁵⁷ Organon lepticon. – Concerning the question as to how one should describe this organ, whether purely passively or also actively (“taking hold of grace”), there was a serious wrestling in our church in the years 1901-1917 (cf. G. Herrmann, *Lutherische Freikirche in Sachsen*, EVA Berlin 1985, pp. 326-333). Cf. the pertinent comments in the section “JUSTIFICATION - It is received through faith.” under the point “Through faith - which is a gift from God”.

⁵⁸ Cf. the point “Through faith - which is trust in Christ” in the section “JUSTIFICATION - It is received through faith.”.

⁵⁹ Cf. the point “Through faith - which takes hold of salvation like a hand” in the section “JUSTIFICATION - It is received through faith.”.

⁶⁰ Cf. the point “Justification - It has been obtained through a judicial act of God.” in the section “JUSTIFICATION - It has been freely obtained.”.

⁶¹ Here human performance (works of penance as necessary payment of temporal punishments for sin) again steps up next to God's forgiveness.

⁶² Indulgence: the payment of temporal punishments for sin through having a share in the treasure of good works (fed by Christ and the saints), which the Church supposedly has administration of.

⁶³ Meritum de congruo [according to appropriateness; = unearned merit]: works which have been done before the reception of grace; - meritum de condigno [according to worthiness; = earned merit]: works which have been done by the power of grace.

⁶⁴ Cf. above under "JUSTIFICATION - It has been freely obtained."

⁶⁵ [lit. 'the fleshly mind'] With this term the sinful quality is meant, which we inherit from our parents since the fall into sin (cf. Jn 3:6).

⁶⁶ Synonyms for conversion: "being reborn" (Jn 3:5); "being made alive" (Eph 2:4f.); "being enlightened" (2 Co 4:6); "being called" (Ro 8:30); "repenting" (Lk 15:7).

⁶⁷ Cf. also 2 Co 4:6; Phil 1:29.

⁶⁸ The conclusion that God bears the guilt when people do not come to faith is indeed logical, but is contrary to Scripture (Mt 23:37; Acts 7:51; Hos 13:9).

⁶⁹ Cf. also 1 Th 2:13.

⁷⁰ And which, of course, applies and should be spoken to every individual.

⁷¹ That baptism is not to be first reached to adults, and then the message of the gospel, is not only derived from the example of the apostles (cf. Pentecost). We come to the same realization when we consider how God deals with us. He has the Word preached to us. He intends to win over our hearts through the message of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in the conversion of adults, preaching and baptism can only go together in such a way as that preaching precedes (cf. the order of preaching and baptism with the Ethiopian eunuch: Acts 8:26ff.). - With small children, however, we baptize before instruction, because: a) Christ gave the command to baptize "all nations" (Mt 28:19ff.); b) conversion is never a work of human power or reason, but it is rather God's work and gift alone (see above; even little children can believe: Mt 18:6).

⁷² The Herrmannsburg Confusion (1900-1908). Pastor Wilhelm Hübener, Kollberg, thought that faith could only be designated as passive. Cf. G. Herrmann, *Lutherische Freikirche in Sachsen*, EVA Berlin 1985, p. 331. - cf. also endnote 57

⁷³ Cf. the point "Through faith - which alone receives salvation" in the section "JUSTIFICATION - It is received through faith."

⁷⁴ Sanctification in the wide sense is everything that God does for the salvation of the sinner (2 Th 2:13; Ep 5:26). - Sanctification in the narrow sense consists in that God renews and enables people to lead a new life (Ro 12:1f.; 1 Th 4:7). That latter is spoken of here.

⁷⁵ Mt 25:40; Col 3:17; Ro 14:6-8.

⁷⁶ He 11:6; Ro 14:23.

⁷⁷ Da 12:3; 2 Co 9:6.

⁷⁸ Jn 15:8; 1 Th 4:3.

⁷⁹ Mt 5:16; 1 Co 10:31.

⁸⁰ 1 Sa 15:22.

⁸¹ Ro 13:10; Mt 22: 36-40; Ja 2:10.

⁸² 1 Pe 2:5.

⁸³ Ja 2:18.

⁸⁴ 1 Pe 3:14-16.

⁸⁵ If sin reigns, then it is clear that the person is lost (Mt 7:18: like the tree, so fruit; - reigning sin excludes a person from the kingdom of heaven: Ro 1:28-31; 1 Co 6:9-10; Ga 5:19-22; Ep 5:5f.). 1 Jn 3:9 speaks of sin that "reigns", - and 1 Jn 1:8 speaks of sin that doesn't "reign".

⁸⁶ Cf. the Bible passages in the following summary.

⁸⁷ Ro 4:5.

⁸⁸ Ro 3:28.

⁸⁹ Ro 3:3f.; Ro 7:24 - 8:1.

⁹⁰ Jn 1:29

⁹¹ 2 Co 5:19f.

⁹² Acts 16:31

⁹³ Tit 1:2

⁹⁴ Ro 3:28; Jn 15:5.

⁹⁵ 2 Co 5:17.

⁹⁶ Ga 5:22.

⁹⁷ Phil 3:12ff.; Ro 7:18f.

⁹⁸ He 11:6; Jn 15:5.

⁹⁹ 1 Jn 3:14.

¹⁰⁰ For (a) sanctification is incomplete: Phil 3:12ff.; Ro 7:18f.; (b) hypocrites can also do works which outwardly appear as fruits of faith (Mt 23:27; Mt 13:26f., 24f.).

¹⁰¹ Jn 15:5.

¹⁰² Ro 7:22; 1 Jn 3:9; Jn 15:5.

¹⁰³ Cf. all of Ro 7:14-24.

¹⁰⁴ For a change in meaning of the law for the Christian:

The law, which was given to people in order to bring life, brings death ever since the fall into sin (Ro 7:1). However, in Christ we have been freed not only from sin, death and the devil, but also from the law, in order to serve God without fear (1 Pe 2:5; Ro 8:1f.). This freedom from the law consists of this: that the law can no longer condemn us (Ga 3:13); that the Mosaitic laws no longer apply (Ga 3:15-25; Acts 15; Col 2:16f.); and that human traditions and rules may no longer take us captive (Mt 12:1-14; Mt 15:8f.). - This freedom includes that the justified live "in the law" out of their own free will (1 Co 9:21), that is, that they gladly do God's will from the heart. Yet since Christians continue to bear the old sinful self in themselves, they not only need the law as a curb (1 Co 9:27) and mirror (Ro 3:20) as all other people do, but also, above all, as a guide (Ps 119:9; 1 Jn 5:3).

¹⁰⁵ Jn 15:5.

¹⁰⁶ Ps 119:9; Ro 12:1f.

¹⁰⁷ The Small Catechism, Faith, No. 6 (BSLK 512) [TN - the German] is quoted from: *Was wir glauben. Luthers Kleiner Katechismus erklärt von Henry Schwan*, commissioned by the Pastoral Conference of the Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche, EVA Berlin 1987. [TN - English quoted from the explanation to the third article of the Apostle's Creed, p. 5 in *Luther's Catechism - The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther and an Exposition of Children and Adults Written in Contemporary English*, by David Kuske. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1998.]

¹⁰⁸ Smalcald Articles, Part II, §§ 1-5 (BSLK 415f.) [TN - German] quoted from Horst Georg Pöhlmann, *Unser Glaube. Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, Mohn Gütersloh 1986, 450f.; -cf. also the Apology art. IV, §§ 2-4; Solid Declaration art. III, §§ 6-8. [TN - English quoted from the *Concordia Triglotta*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921. 2nd Reprint - Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House. pp. 461,463.]