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Full Forgiveness.

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

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All statements of the Scriptures concerning redemption, imputation, faith, and the means of grace rest on God's full forgiveness as their foundation stone. If God forgives half, then all the texts which speak of the all-sufficient redemption through the blood of Christ become uncertain. If God forgives half, then He does not impute the righteousness of Christ unto us in the same manner as He imputes our sins unto Him. If God forgives half, then faith loses its life-line, and the Word of God its contents. For if anything is clearly testified to in God's Word, it is God's full forgiveness. 1 John 1, 7: "The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from *all* sin." [Note. Nobody will claim that this full forgiveness remains in force if one wallows in filth.] Not of some, no, of all. And Col. 2, 13: "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him [Christ], having forgiven you all trespasses." [Note. Evidently Baptism is here spoken of, as in this whole passage from V. 11 on. Also the word *συνεζωοποίησεν*, which is separated from *χαρισάμενος* by only three words, shows this.] Yes, Rom. 8, 1 the Apostle says: "There is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." [Note. Of course, this does not exclude that one may fall from grace, that one may be cut out of the olive tree, if one does not, by watching and praying, continue in His goodness . . . it follows indisputably from this text that as long as a man abides in Christ Jesus through faith (Gal. 3, 26) — so long, not longer, but surely so long — the word applies to him: "No condemnation to thee."] In Paul's epistles condemnation and justification are antitheses which exclude one another like darkness and light. Rom. 5, 18. Where there is no light at all, there is complete darkness; and where there is no darkness at all, there is complete light. So, then, where there is

no condemnation at all, there is full justification. Is that clear enough? And toward the end of the chapter Paul exclaims: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." This question is meant seriously: Who shall dare to quarter the forgiveness or take away but a hair's breadth of it when God justifies? And if any one would dare to do it, would that change God's judgment? It has been asserted that the forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament was incomplete, as could be seen from the fact that the Old Testament describes the forgiveness as a chief advantage of the New Testament. We do not wish to argue about the forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament at this time, but we do demand this, that he who subtracts from it because of the glorious promises which apply to the New Testament must at least not diminish these very same promises in respect to the New Testament. When, therefore, God promises through Ezekiel: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from *all* your filthiness . . . will I cleanse you . . . I will also save you from *all* your uncleanness . . . I shall have cleansed you from *all* your iniquities," Ezek. 36, 25, 29, 33, and through Micha: "He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast *all* their sins into the depth of the sea," Micah 7, 19 — is all of this not to be true of the New Testament also? First you argue that forgiveness under the Old Covenant is fractional because full forgiveness was promised for the New Covenant only, and then you rob the New Covenant also of full forgiveness!

God be praised, the case is different. Even the term "to justify" proves this. "To justify" means "to absolve"; and as little as a defendant in a human court of justice remains half in prison while the other half is set free, just so little does God justify half and condemn half. I wonder how great the difference in the justification of individual persons would be if it were governed by the measure of their faith. And yet, Paul declares right there where he speaks most extensively of justification before God, that it is given *without difference* unto all them that believe. Rom. 3, 22. [Note. "*Οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν διαστολή*" undoubtedly refers to that which immediately precedes." Philippi.] Yes, he bases the altogether equal gift of justification on the fact that all men are, before God, in altogether equal condemnation, Rom. 3, 23, and that they all receive the righteousness of Christ altogether freely

δωρεάν). Rom. 3, 24. [*Note. Πάντες* is the subject.] Indeed all are in altogether equal condemnation. For the Holy Spirit says: "Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all," Jas. 2, 10. [*Note. Πάντων ἔνοχος.* Of course, guilty of all commandments.] Therefore, to whom one sin is retained, all are retained. This word dispels all fractional forgiveness like a storm. In case you still have one unforgiven sin, you are guilty of the whole Law. But if all sins are retained where one is retained, then it follows that all are forgiven to him to whom one is forgiven. The righteousness of Christ is just as indivisible as the Law of God; it is either entire or not at all. This truth is also testified to by the parable in which Christ has described the procedure of forgiveness. A king takes account of a servant and finds that he owes him fifteen million dollars. Matt. 18, 24. The servant pleads for mercy, and the king, purely out of grace, forgives him, not one-half, not two-thirds, no, all the debt (τὸ δάνειον), immense as it was. Matt. 18, 27. Then the servant falls into grievous sin, and the outcome is that *all* the debt (πᾶν τὸ ὀφειλόμενον) is again demanded of him. Matt. 18, 34. So, then, he was at first entirely free, then entirely condemned. The argument that the fifteen million dollars or ten thousand talents designate only those sins which the servant remembered will not stand, for the original text expressly says that the servant was "a debtor of ten thousand talents." Matt. 18, 24. That was the exact amount of his debt. Not *he* had declared this to be the amount of his debt, but the lord had found that to be the amount in his reckoning — not a penny less, not a penny more. How is it possible, in the face of this parable, to speak of fractional forgiveness? Verily, if partial forgiveness were heard of in the kingdom of our God, here would have been the place for it. For, after all, what great crime had the poor servant committed? Naked as he was, he, perhaps, was sorely in need of the twelve dollars which he demanded of his fellow-servant. Could his lord then not say: "Half of my gift shall be taken from thee as punishment, the other half you may keep, for the present"? God does not act that way, for a manifest token that before His tribunal the sentence is either "damned" or "free." And the entire Holy Scripture, from Genesis to the Revelation of John, confirms this. Everything in it revolves around these great antitheses: friend of God or enemy of God; believer or unbeliever; child of light or child of darkness; God's own or the devil's own. And God's conduct conforms to this separation which, as a mighty chasm, extends through humanity —

blessed or damned; death or life; judgment or salvation. "He that believeth hath everlasting life, shall not come into condemnation, is passed from death unto life." John 5, 24; 6, 40. 47. "He that believeth not is condemned already," John 3, 18. 36. And the same rift extends into the next world — above the city with streets of gold, Rev. 21, 21; below the lake of fire, Rev. 20, 15. Blessed are they that have washed their robes "that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter in through the gates into the city," Rev. 22, 14. "Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie," Rev. 22, 15. Whoever introduces a third factor between justification and condemnation in this life must also invent one for the next. [Note. Purgatory. See Conc. Trid., Sessio XXV, Decret. De Purgatorio. Also Sessio VI, Canon XXX: "*Si quis post acceptam justificationis gratiam cuilibet peccatori poenitenti ita culpam remitti, et reatum aeternae poenae deleri dixerit, ut nullus remaneat reatus poenae temporalis exsolvendae, vel in hoc saeculo, vel in futuro in purgatorio, antequam ad regna caelorum aditus patere possit: anathema sit.*"] It is well and good to say that in the hour of death the grace of Christ intervenes in a helping way and that he who hitherto was but imperfectly justified now covers himself wholly with the righteousness of Christ and in this adornment confidently goes to meet his Judge; but a true Christian does not postpone this till the hour of his death, but wholly covers himself every moment of his life with the garment of Christ's righteousness. Besides, God finds no condemnation, not only in them that *die* in Christ Jesus, but also in them that *are* in Christ Jesus. And as long as no manuscript of Rom. 8, 1 is discovered which has "die" for "are" we shall oppose those who limit full justification to the hour of death. The blood of Christ is always our garment and always covers us completely. For the sake of this garment the Bible calls us saints. And as long as we believe, the faith of all of us is "like precious" (*ἰσούμωρον*). 2 Pet. 1, 1. [Note. *Petrus omnes fideles fidem ἰσούμωρον, aequae pretiosam, habere pronunciat, nimirum ratione generis et objecti. Infirma enim fides itidem apprehendit Christum ut fortis.* John Gerhard.]

The untenableness of the opinion of gradual forgiveness becomes still more apparent when it is applied to little children. If the measure of forgiveness depends on the measure of repentance, then either nothing or at least very little of the kingdom of God, of that kingdom of God which "is not meat and drink, but

righteousness and peace and joy," Rom. 14, 7, belongs to the little children. But Christ declares expressly that it belongs to the little children, yes, to them before others. Mark. 10, 14, 15. In fact, there is no greater contrast than that between gradual forgiveness and Christ's order of salvation. The doctrine of gradual forgiveness says: There is only so much forgiveness, or at least only so much enjoyment of forgiveness, as there is penitential struggle. Full possession, or at least full enjoyment of forgiveness, is not for young girls of fourteen years, not to speak of younger ones, but only for persons of mature age, after restlessly pressing forward. Christ, on the other hand, says: "Full forgiveness for infants [*ganz kleine Kinder*] only; for persons of mature age, not at all, unless they be converted and become as little children." Matt. 18, 3; Mark. 10, 13. But, since the decision concerning salvation and damnation rests with Christ and not with some learned man, it will be well to abide by the order of Christ.

Also the Confessions of our Evangelical [Lutheran] Church teach the clear and explicit opposite of gradual forgiveness. The Apology says: "Justification is . . . the approval . . . of the *entire* person." *Justificatio non est certi operis approbatio, sed totius personae.* (*Trigl.*, 181.) And the Small Catechism: "In which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly *all* sins to me and all believers. (*Trigl.*, 545.) Mark well the words "daily and richly"! I should think that that is full forgiveness. And the Large Catechism says that "we have received forgiveness and a good conscience and *are entirely acquitted*, yet is our life of such a nature that one stands to-day and to-morrow falls." (*Trigl.*, 725.) The Smalcald Articles teach with the same clearness: "That by faith . . . we acquire a new and clean heart, and God will and does account us *entirely righteous* and holy for the sake of Christ. . . . And although sin in the flesh has not yet been altogether removed or become dead, yet He will not punish or remember it. And such faith . . . is followed by good works. And what there still is sinful or imperfect also in them shall not be accounted as sin or defect, for Christ's sake, but the *entire* man, both as to his person and his works, is to be called and to be righteous and holy from pure grace and mercy, shed upon us and spread over us in Christ." (*Trigl.*, 499.) And the Formula of Concord says: "Christ covers *all* our [their] sins . . . with his complete obedience. (*Trigl.*, 923.) Is it possible to declare oneself more clearly against gradual justification and for the old order of salvation of Jesus Christ? And this doctrine is taught by all [our theologians]. The *Book of Con-*

fessions of Duke Ulrich of Mecklenburg asks, XI, 5: "How does God forgive sins?" and answers: "Fully and perfectly." And Luther says: "Now we well know what forgiveness of sin means. If He forgives, He forgives *everything altogether and leaves nothing unforgiven*. Now, if I am rid of, and free from, sin, then I am also rid of death, devil, and hell and am a son of God and a lord of heaven and earth." (St. Louis Ed., XX, 751.) In another place he says: "For this reason it is called forgiveness of sin, because we are, before God, real sinners, and nothing but sin is to be found in us, although we may have *all* human righteousness. For where He speaks of sins, there must be real and great sins, just as also the forgiveness is no jest, but a real and serious matter. Therefore, if you look at this article, you have both facts: sin takes away *all* your holiness, no matter how pious you may be on earth, and, *vice versa*, forgiveness removes *all sin and wrath*, so that your sin cannot hurl you into hell, and your piety cannot lift you into heaven." (St. Louis Ed., XI, 1721.) Luther teaches the same doctrine wherever he touches on this subject. (St. Louis Ed., XIX, 995; II, 1457; XI, 1703 ff. 1933.)

(To be continued.)
