

THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

VOL. VIII.

OCTOBER, 1928.

No. 10.

Full Forgiveness.

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

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

(Continued.)

Are we to produce still more testimonies? Are we to show — and this would be an easy task — that our Evangelical Lutheran Church has confessed the doctrine of full forgiveness at all times? Are we to summon Martin Chemnitz to the arena? or Aegidius Hunnius? Hunnius says: There are no degrees in justification. For it is impossible that a man should have partly obtained forgiveness of sins and partly not. It is also impossible for a man to be partly in grace and partly without it, or to be an heir of eternal life and at the same time a child of the devil. But he that is justified *has obtained full forgiveness of all his sins* and is fully in grace and an heir of eternal life. For in justification our greater or lesser worthiness does not come into consideration, consequently our justification cannot be increased or decreased by our worthiness. Not even our faith conditions our justification in so far as it has this or that quality, being strong or weak, but only in so far as it apprehends its object, the merits of Christ. But the merits of Christ are indivisible.¹⁾ John Gerhard says: The Word of God “carefully distinguishes between justification and

1) *Justificatio nec magis recipit nec minus, quandoquidem fieri non potest, ut quis ex parte remissionem suorum peccatorum obtineat, ex parte vero non; nec quisquam partim in gratia est, partim extra gratiam; nec quis potest esse ex parte haeres vitae aeternae, ex parte vero filius gehennae et damnationis. Sed homo justificatus plenariam omnium peccatorum adeptus est veniam, et totus est in gratia Dei atque vitae sempiternae haeres. Neque spectantur in justificatione illae virtutes, quibus auctis vel diminutis ipsa quoque justificatio tale subeat vel incrementum vel decrementum. Quin ne quidem fides ingreditur justificationem, quatenus ex sua conditione aestimata nunc firma, nunc languida est, sed quod subjectum suum aspicit, quod aequabile semper est. Considerat quippe gratiam justificantis Dei, quae infinitate sua omnem inaequalitatem respuit. Considerat meritum Christi, quod, quia infinitum est et in justificationis actu totum apprehenditur, itidem hujusmodi graduum inaequalitatem in justificationis arcano non constituit. (A. Hunnius, *Articulus de Justificatione*, p. 102.)*

renovation. *Of justification, which consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, it teaches that it is perfect, but that renovation grows from day to day.*"²⁾ And Henry Hoepfner, whose treatise on justification is perhaps the best we have, says: "Forgiveness of sins has no plus and no minus; God freely forgives all, exhibiting to all the same fulness of mercy. Therefore Scripture testifies that all who are justified, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, those of little faith and those of strong faith, are just as righteous as Abraham, the father of all them that believe."³⁾ And at another place he says: "Whoever is justified, that is, regarded as righteous, is not justified because of his righteousness, but by the all-sufficient righteousness of Christ. Therefore his righteousness cannot become greater or more abundant or more perfect before the tribunal of God."⁴⁾ And in that vein he continues throughout the whole book.⁵⁾ Calov declares with the same emphasis: "It is pure fiction to say that besides the perfect forgiveness there is also an imperfect forgiveness. For God forgives fully when He forgives, Ps. 32, 1; 103, 3 ff.; He cleanseth from all sin, 1 John 1, 7; He casts all our sins into the depth of the sea, Micah 7, 19, so that there is no more condemnation to us, Rom. 8, 1."⁶⁾ And Scherzer teaches: "The forgive-

2) Scriptura justificationem a renovatione accurate distinguit ac justificationem in peccatorum remissione et justitiae Christi imputatione consistentem perfectam esse, sed renovationem de die in diem crescere docet. (J. Gerhard, *Disputationes Theologicae*.)

3) Deus gratis ignoscit peccata non secundum magis et minus, sed aequali misericordia ac totaliter omnibus, sive majora sive minora peccata patrarint. . . . Qua de causa sacrae literae testantur, omnes, quotquot justificantur, Judaeos et gentes, mares et feminas, tam imbecillos in fide quam fortes, absque ullo discrimine justificari per unam eandemque fidem in Christum . . . et justos esse aequae ac Abrahamum, patrem credentium. (H. Hoepfner, *De Justificatione*.)

4) Qui justificatur, id est, justus censetur, universali justitia Christi, quae in facto est, ille non sua justitia justificatur: tantum abest, ut justitia ejus fiat major, auctior et perfectior coram Dei tribunali. (H. Hoepfner, *l. c.*)

5) Justificatio est *plena remissio peccatorum* et imputatio justitiae Christi. . . . Justificatio est actio judicialis, qua *Deus nos aestimat* non qualitercunque, sed *absolute justos*. (H. Hoepfner, *l. c.*)

6) Remissionem peccatorum aliam perfectam, aliam imperfectam esse, merum est commentum, quandoquidem peccata, dum remittuntur, plene remittantur, Ps. XXXII; Ps. CIII, 3 cet., . . . mundamur ab omnibus peccatis, I Joh. I, 7, . . . projicitur omnis iniquitas in abyssum maris, Micha VII, 19, . . . ut nulla in nobis sit condemnatio, Rom. VIII, 1. Qui ergo dubium esse potest peccata plene hic remitti? (Calovius, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum*.)

ness of sins in this life is perfect, so that no condemnation remains. Consequently also justification is perfect, it being nothing else than the forgiveness of sins." 7) Spener, going still more into detail, says: "Concerning the question whether a man grows more righteous and holier, we, too, concede this in respect to the inherent righteousness, which, of course, grows and must grow, so that we become more and more perfect. . . . But this does not pertain to justification, but to sanctification. It is not this which makes us pleasing to God or through which we become His children. Justification, however, is that beneficent act of God by virtue of which He receives us into grace and keeps us in His grace, in consequence of which we may stand in His Judgment. And here we cannot say that a greater or more augmented righteousness is to be found; but he who has forgiveness for his sins has complete forgiveness, and therefore no one has a more complete forgiveness than another. So it is obvious that they cannot say that the forgiveness of sins bestowed for the first time in Baptism is less perfect than that which one enjoys after one has exercised himself in good works for thirty or forty years. *Hence he who by imputation has received the righteousness of Christ by faith has it wholly*; for it is indivisible, and he cannot have a more perfect righteousness of Christ after twenty or thirty years than he received in the first moment. Hence all believers must have an equal righteousness in which they may stand before God." And the pious Fresenius writes: "Just as the merit of Christ is conveyed to the believers in its entirety and at the same time, so *also all sins are forgiven at the same time.*" And in another place he says: "Now, Christ and His righteousness are indivisible. Whoever has Him has Him wholly. . . . Hence it follows without contradiction that he must also be wholly righteous because his Savior brings him His entire righteousness." Nicolaus Hunnius, Caspar Loescher, D. Hollaz, Burk, Thomasius, and Frank teach the same doctrine. Lastly, Philippi writes with great clearness: "After all, the fact remains that justification, as the imputation of the perfect righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, is incapable of growth, grades, or degrees, but from beginning to end is perfect in itself. There are indeed degrees of faith, but no degree of justification, because also the infirm faith, if it be but upright, apprehends the righteousness of Christ, which,

7) In hac vita contingit perfecta peccatorum remissio, ita ut nulla remaneat condemnatio. Ergo etiam perfecta justificatio, quae nihil est aliud quam peccatorum remissio. (J. Ad. Scherzer, *Systema Theologiae.*)

verily, needs no perfecting through our faith or our works." Will these testimonies suffice? Or must we proceed and let "the singing Church" testify in behalf of full justification? She sings:—

Sins are truly here forgiven. . .
All flesh shall rise again.⁸⁾

And again:—

He canceled my offenses,
And saved my soul from death;
'Tis He who ever cleanses
Me from my sins through faith.
In Him I can be cheerful,
Bold, and undaunted aye;
In Him I am not fearful
Of God's great Judgment Day.

Naught, naught can e'er condemn me
Nor set my hopes aside;
Now hell no more can claim me,
Its fury I deride.
No sentence e'er reproves me,
No ill destroys my peace,
For Christ, my Savior, loves me
And screens me with His grace.⁹⁾

And again:—

There His Word is preached to me;
*From all my sins He makes me free.*¹⁰⁾

Our hymn-books abound in such testimonies. Whoever accepts them seriously actually renounces the doctrine of gradual forgiveness. Pray do not deceive yourself by making a distinction between possession and enjoyment. The whole earth has been in possession

8) Hie *all' Suend' vergeben werden,*
Das Fleisch soll auch wieder leben.

9) Mein Jesus hat geloeschet,
Was mit sich fuehrt den Tod;
Der ist's, der mich rein waeschet,
Macht *schneeweiss*, was ist rot.
In ihm kann ich mich freuen,
Hab' einen Heldenmut,
Darf kein Gerichte scheuen,
Wie sonst ein Suender tut.

Nichts, nichts kann mich verdammen,
Nichts nimmet mir mein Herz!
Die Hoell' und ihre Flammen,
Die sind mir nur ein Scherz.
Kein Urteil mich erschreckt,
Kein Unheil mich betruetzt,
Weil mich mit Fluegeln decket,
Mein Heiland, der mich liebt.

10) Da laesst er uns sein Wort verkuenden,
Machet uns ledig von allen Suenden.

of forgiveness since the death of Christ on the cross. In the justification of the individual person the point is always the enjoyment, the fact that the righteousness of Christ saves *me*, is for *my* benefit, is enjoyed by *me*. And this is done through faith. Through faith we enter into the enjoyment of the good things which Christ has purchased for us. According to the doctrine of the Evangelical [Lutheran] Church we thereby enter into their full enjoyment; according to the opinion which teaches a gradual forgiveness we enter only into their partial enjoyment. Now, when Paul Gerhardt sings: "Naught, naught can e'er condemn *me*," he does not only magnify that which Christ has merited upon the cross, but this is what he magnifies: that he, Paul Gerhardt, through faith has entered into the full enjoyment of these merits; that to him, the said Pastor Gerhardt, there is absolutely no condemnation, and this on account of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Whoever with his whole heart and mind joins in singing this thereby confesses the full enjoyment of forgiveness, that is to say, the very opposite of the doctrine of gradual forgiveness.

In order to prove this doctrine, which formerly was not heard of in the Evangelical [Lutheran] Church, Luke 18 has been pointed to. A Pharisee and a publican "went up into the Temple to pray. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus within himself, God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." Luke 18, 10—14. It is claimed that the Lord here expressly speaks of degrees in justification. And this is held to be the case even if one assumes with Luther that the publican went home fully justified. So, then, the Pharisee was also justified even though it was in a somewhat less degree than the publican. Now, please, consider just for a moment: A man of the class of those who made clean the outside of their cups and platters, but within they were full of extortion and excess, Matt. 23, 26, such a man dares to praise himself in the presence of God as compared with notorious robbers. A man of the class of those who appeared beautiful outward, but were within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness, Matt. 23, 27, such a man dares to boast of his righteousness in the presence of God, Luke 18, 11. A man of the class of those who paid tithes of mint and anise and cumin and omitted mercy and

faith, Matt. 23, 23, such a man dares to brag of his tithes in the presence of God, Luke 18, 12. And in such shameful hypocrisy he struts about; not in any way does he desire justification or ask God for anything whatsoever. And this man also is believed to have received divine forgiveness!¹¹⁾ I think the analogy of faith, after all, is not entirely useless in exegesis. *(To be continued.)*
