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Full Forgiveness.

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(Continued.)

The Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer has been used as an argument against our doctrine. In this petition, it is said, we ask for forgiveness not only of the sins of the last twenty-four hours, but of all our sins, of all the evil we have done each and every day of our lives. Let this, for the moment, be granted. We merely ask, Is such a prayer heard? I think it is; for "if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him." 1 John 5, 14. 15. Now, the Fifth Petition certainly is according to the will of God, "for He Himself has commanded us so to pray and has promised to hear us. Amen, Amen, that is, yea, yea, it shall be so." If we, therefore, in the Fifth Petition ask for the forgiveness of all our sins and if God hears us, as He must, then we have full forgiveness. And that is all we want, absolutely all. For we cheerfully grant that this full forgiveness is no license to sin, on the contrary, that it must be held fast by daily repentance and faith if it is not to slip away from us.

The baptism of John the Baptist has also been mentioned to show the possibility of incomplete forgiveness. It has even been asserted that the baptism of John did not offer as much salvation as the baptism of Christ. That is Romish doctrine.¹⁾ Up to the coming of Rationalism the Evangelical [Lutheran] Church constantly preached the opposite. All her teachers, from Luther to Spener, have confessed that the baptism of John worked regeneration just as well as the baptism of Christ. If the [so-called]

1) Si quis dixerit, baptismum Joannis habuisse eandem vim cum baptismo Christi, anathema sit. (*Concilium Tridentinum*, Sessio VII, *De Baptismo*, Canon I.)

Christian consciousness of to-day does not believe that, it must square itself with the Word of God; but under no circumstances is it at liberty to set aside the old Evangelical [Lutheran] doctrine as an invention of only yesterday. It makes a peculiar impression, indeed, on one who is familiar with the writings of the Fathers to see the doctrine of Bellarmine designated as self-evident truth while the unwavering confession of the Evangelical [Lutheran] Church is treated as a strange error, which really should not be entertained by any one. Will the reader nevertheless listen to a few humble remarks? Is it really a fact that Christian Baptism did not begin earlier than Matt. 28? Did not the apostles of the Lord, in His name and by His express command, baptize long before that time? Do we not read John 3, 22: "After these things came Jesus and His disciples into the land of Judea; and there He tarried with them and baptized"? What was the nature of that Baptism? Was it efficacious or non-efficacious? If it was efficacious, what, then, hinders us from saying the same thing of the baptism of John, which was administered contemporaneously? John 3, 22, 23. Did not God expressly call John to baptize? Luke 3, 2, 3; John 1, 33. And did not Christ Himself give testimony in behalf of the baptism of John? Matt. 21, 24—27; Mark 11, 28—33. Was it not administered for the remission of sins? Luke 3, 3; Mark 1, 4. No one maintains that the baptism of the apostles did more. And was it not a means of "fleeing from the wrath to come"? Luke 3, 7. Does our baptism do more? Indeed not. But the baptism of the apostles did more inasmuch as it was accompanied by a miraculous outpouring of the Spirit, the like of which was not heard of before or nor has been afterward. But such extraordinary gifts of grace in no wise rest upon a more abundant measure of forgiveness, so little, in fact, that the Lord declares: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I *never* knew you; depart from Me." Matt. 7, 22, 23. "I *never* knew you," says the Lord, not even at the time when you wrought miracles in My name. This shows that one's position in the kingdom of God in no wise depends upon the measure of the gifts of grace. But if the conclusion, "More Spirit, more forgiveness," is wrong and if the baptism of John brought remission of sins and saved from the wrath to come, then it cannot have been different from the baptism of the apostles in respect to the *chief thing*. The fact that John the Baptist testifies concern-

ing himself that he must decrease and Christ increase, John 3, 30, has not the least to do with the question concerning [the efficacy of] his baptism. The apostles, too, were as nothing compared with their Lord, 1 Cor. 3, 7. 8, and yet their baptism was efficacious. This, however, is the chief difference between the baptism before Easter and the baptism after Easter: before Christ's going to the Father, God forgave for the sake of the sacrifice which was to take place; afterwards He forgave for the sake of the sacrifice which had taken place.²⁾ It was that way in the Old Covenant, too. In the Old Covenant also the saints were saved through the grace of Jesus Christ; for the blood of Christ was efficacious before He shed it. True, it has been said that this is an invention of the theologians, for which not one single proof-text can be quoted from Scripture. But it has also been said that the use of "for" as denoting the basis of discernment [*Erkenntnisgrund*]³⁾ cannot be shown from a single really adequate example from the Holy Scripture, and yet one was found later on. Now, since no one is infallible, neither the Fathers nor their contemporaries, it is perhaps advisable to consult the Bible itself. There certainly was forgiveness of sins in the times of the Old Testament. Scripture testifies to this in about a hundred texts.⁴⁾ And our opponents do not deny this. Now Heb. 9, 15 plainly states that the death of Christ took place "for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament."⁵⁾ "For then," so he proceeds v. 26, "must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world." But perhaps the objection will be raised that we are severing v. 26 from its connection and arbitrarily combining it with v. 15. Very well. We will show the connection, and the reader may decide for himself. In v. 25 the apostle had declared that Christ did not enter into heaven "that

2) Of course, there are still other differences, especially the abundant and miraculous outpouring of the Holy Ghost, which since Acts 2 was wont to accompany the baptism administered by the apostles.

3) "For" used as a conjunction introducing an elliptical clause of reason. — *The translator.*

4) Ex. 34, 7; Num. 14, 1. 18—20; Ps. 32, 1. 5; 78, 38; 85, 3; 99, 8; 103, 3; Micah 7, 18; Ps. 31, 6; Is. 29, 22; 43, 1; 44, 23. With the help of a concordance these thirteen texts could easily be increased to eight times this number.

5) Ideo earum, quae sub vetere, h. e., durante Veteris Testamenti statu, commissae fuerunt, transgressionum in specie meminit, quia de illis dubitari poterat, an per Christi mortem fuerint expiatae, quum ante Christi adventum fuerint commissae. (John Gerhard, *Com. in Epist. ad Hebraeos*, 229.)

He should offer Himself often." He proves this in the following manner: If it were necessary that after His ascension the sacrifice of Christ must be repeated from time to time in order to atone for our sins, then this would have been necessary also several thousand times before the advent of Christ, yes, from the foundation of the world; for before the advent of Christ, too, there was sin and forgiveness of sin. But just as the sins of the Fathers were all blotted out through the one and all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ, just so the sins of the saints are forgiven now and in all eternity for the sake of this sacrifice, which need not be repeated.⁶⁾ Verily, if one wishes to call the doctrine that the blood of Christ was efficacious before He shed it an invention of theologians, then the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews must be numbered among them. And he is not the only one. St. John believed the same thing. At least he used the peculiar expression, Rev. 13, 8 that "the Lamb," namely, Christ, "was slain from the foundation of the world." What does this mean? Christ was not literally slain from the foundation of the world, but only once, under Pontius Pilate. Neither can the text be understood as speaking of a slaying in the counsel of God, for it does not say "before," but "from the foundation of the world." Consequently the text is speaking of the fruit of the sufferings of Christ. In this sense, and in this sense only, can it be said that Christ died from the foundation of the world, that is to say, from the foundation of the world the death of Christ was so present in the mind of God that He forgave sins for the sake of this death. Therefore Isaiah does not say, "He *will* bear our sins," "He *will* carry our infirmities," "the Lord *will* lay on Him our sins," but "Surely He *hath borne* our griefs," "He *carried* our sorrows," and "The Lord *hath laid* on Him the iniquity of us all."⁷⁾ Yes, he says: "Through His [Christ's] stripes healing comes to us [hath come to us]." Is. 53, 5. In this sense Christ

6) Probat, quod dixerat, Christum non ideo introiisse in coelum, ut saepius seipsum offerat. Vis argumenti in eo consistit: Si fuisset necessarium, saepius repeti sacrificium Christi, postquam ipse in mundum venit ac pro nobis passus est, utique etiam illud fieri debuisset ante Christi adventum, imo jam inde a prima mundi origine, quia etiam illo tempore homines fuere peccatis obnoxii ac proinde purificationis indigni. Sed quemadmodum peccata piorum, qui ante Christi adventum vixerunt, unico illo sacrificio Christi in ara crucis oblato fuerunt mundata, ita quoque absque ulla sacrificii illius repetitione futuris temporibus omnes credentes per ipsum mundantur. (John Gerhard, *l. c.*, p. 242 sq.)

7) Is. 53: נִשָּׂא, כָּבַל, הִשְׁבַּנּוּ, נִרְפָּא, הִפְּנִיעַ. All these verbs are in the perfect tense.

was slain from the foundation of the world.⁸⁾ True, the Socinians have endeavored to break the force of this argument by translating Rev. 13, 8 as follows: "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [the dragon], every one whose name is not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the slain Lamb." We do not wish to appeal to the position of the words in the original text in order to show that this translation is wrong; although it clearly speaks for us,⁹⁾ we will rather grant for a moment that the Socinians understood the text correctly. Even in that case we have the proposition that the names of the righteous in the days of imperial Rome are from the foundation of the world written in the book of the slain Lamb. But how can names be written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the slain Lamb if the Lamb was not slain from the foundation of the world?¹⁰⁾ So the Socinians have, after all, been caught in a trap.

(To be continued.)
