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## Full Forgiveness.

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

And did not Peter say in the Apostles' Council that he believed that he should be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? Acts 15, 11. This statement strikes the Socinians so hard that in their catechism<sup>1)</sup> they deem it necessary to use fully a page and a half endeavoring to refute it. The passage, says the catechism, reads thus: "Now, therefore, why tempt ye God to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." Acts 15, 10, 11. And then the catechism explains that the pronoun *they* refers to the Gentiles. To whom? To the Gentiles? Why, the apostle had just spoken of the "fathers." V. 10. Besides, in the original text the pronoun *they*<sup>2)</sup> is masculine, like "the fathers," but the noun *Gentiles*<sup>3)</sup> is neuter gender. Now, nobody refers a masculine pronoun to a neuter noun without urgent reason, especially if a masculine noun is much closer. Besides, the entire argument of St. Peter would be perverted in a most ridiculous manner if we would explain it according to the Racow Catechism. The manner of the justification of the Gentiles was under discussion in the Apostles' Council at Jerusalem. Acts 15. Some had asserted that faith alone was not sufficient, but that the Gentiles must also be placed under the Law. Acts 15, 5. And now imagine, Peter arises and proves — what? Not the justification of the Gentiles by the justification of the apostles, but the justification of the apostles

1) *Catechismus Racoviensis*. [*Catechesis Ecclesiarum Polonicarum*, published in Polish 1605, in Latin 1609. Racow (or Rakow), a small town in Russian Poland, was the center of the Polish Socinians at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century. See *Concordia Cyclopaedia* sub "Socinianism" and "Socinians." — *The Translator*.]

2) Ἐκεῖνοι . . . πατέρες, vv. 11, 10.

3) τὰ ἔθνη, v. 7.

by the justification of the Gentiles? <sup>4</sup>) Wonderful logic, indeed! But is it not rather this way, that Peter wishes to establish that the Gentiles can be saved without the Law? He uses two arguments to prove this. First, he shows that the Gentiles have already received the Holy Ghost, Acts 15, 8. 9; secondly, that even the fathers, who were under the Law, were not saved by the Law. Acts 15, 10. 11. For it would certainly be the height of folly arbitrarily to impose a law upon the Gentiles which did not even save those to whom God had given it. "Then all the multitude kept silence," we read Acts 15, 12; and that was proper, for this argument was irrefutable, and therefore a resolution based on it was passed. Acts 15, 22—29. This very plainly is what Acts 15, 11 teaches. Also the Apology of the Augsburg Confession found this to be the meaning of this passage (*Triglotta*, p. 137); and since the days of Augustine it has often been stated and demonstrated with strong proofs. In addition, Acts 10, 43 Peter declares the same thing, by saying that "*all the prophets* give witness to Him [Christ], that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." And Rom. 3, 21 Paul says that the imputed righteousness of Christ is "witnessed by the Law and the prophets." <sup>5</sup>) This testimony gave to Old Testament believers the assurance of forgiveness of sins. Therefore the Lord said to the Jews: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life." John 5, 39. And they verily would have had it if they had only been willing to see that the Scriptures testify of Christ. Therefore Paul writes of the Scriptures of the Old Testament to Timothy that they are able to make him "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." 2 Tim. 3, 15.

But putting all this aside, what will those people who incline towards Socinianism do with 1 Cor. 10, 4 and Heb. 11, 26? 1 Cor. 10, 1-4 we read: "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant how that all our fathers were under the cloud . . . and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ." What did they drink? Of the rock? But no rock followed them. And what is more, the apostle is not at all speaking of a material, but of a spiritual rock. "And that Rock was

<sup>4</sup>) The formula καθ' ὃν τρόπον reasons from a known (κακείνοι) fact to one which is still in controversy. 2 Tim. 3, 9; Acts 10, 47; 11, 17; 15, 8.

<sup>5</sup>) What sense would there otherwise be in the statement Heb. 11, 7, where Noah is called an "heir of the righteousness which is by faith"?

Christ." So, according to the clear words of the text, the Israelites in the desert drank Christ.<sup>6)</sup> John 4, 14, compared with chap. 6, 35, shows what this means, namely, that they apprehended the merit of Christ by faith. Therefore the saints in the Old Covenant had the same fountain of grace and the same way of drawing from it as we have. Heb. 11, 24—26 is still stronger: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; *esteeming the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures in Egypt.*" Pray, what will people who banish Christ the Lord from the Old Testament do with this passage?<sup>7)</sup> Either the apostle speaks nonsense, — which God forbid! — or his meaning is this: The reproach of Christ is that reproach which Christ suffers. But Christ suffers in His members. Christ calls from heaven: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *Me*?" Acts 9, 4. And yet Saul had persecuted the Christians. So it is as clear as day that also in the days of Moses, Christ was being persecuted in His members. If it had been his own reproach or only the reproach of his people which Moses chose, God would not have rewarded him for it. But because all reproach which Israel suffered in Egypt was meant for Christ and therefore was really and literally the reproach of Christ, it is said: "Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."<sup>8)</sup> Heb. 11, 26. And this recompense of reward he received abundantly; for he was with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9, 30) and (v. 31) spoke with Him "of His decease which He [Christ] should accomplish at Jerusalem." Thus he suffered

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6) Christ is compared to a rock for several reasons. *Est metaphora in subjecto (petra). Non enim loquitur de petra naturali, sed spirituali et de hac praedicat, quod sit Christus. Patet hoc etiam ex altero, quod de illa petra praedicatur, quod nimirum Israelitas secuta fuerit in deserto. Non enim petra illa materialis secuta fuit. (Balduin.)*

7) The apostle does not say: "Moses esteemed such a reproach as later on Christ among others suffered greater riches than the treasures in Egypt," but τὸν ὀνειδισμόν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, "the reproach of Christ." He knows but one reproach.

8) [Ὁ ὀνειδισμὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ] "est afflictio, quae infligitur intuitu et odio fidei in Christum. Fideles itaque sub veteri testamento etiam in Christum crediderunt. Vocatur istud opprobrium Christi, non tantum ideo, quia ecclesia patitur propter Christum, set etiam, quia Christus suum facit, sicut, e. g., Act. IX, 4: 'Saul, Saul, quid me persequeris?'" (Seb. Schmidt, *Com. in Ep. ad Hebraeos*, p. 1244.)



with Christ and was glorified with Him. Rom. 8, 17. Or in what other way was he made so blessed and so glorious, blessed and glorious long before the death of Christ on the cross? Was it for the sake of his works? Moses? That Moses who was punished for his unbelief, not being permitted, on account of it, to enter Canaan? Num. 20, 12; 27, 12—14; Deut. 34, 4, 5. No, Moses was blessed and glorified for no other reason than for Christ's sake. Who will dare deny this of a man who according to the express testimony of Scriptures suffered the reproach of Christ and tasted the glory of Christ? God says Rom. 8, 30: "Whom He justified, them He also glorified." Now He did glorify Moses, glorified him already before the death of Christ. Hence it follows that He truly justified him, justified him already before the death of Christ. Will you *still* say that the doctrine that the blood of Christ was efficacious before He shed it is an invention of the theologians?

And what sort of logic is it to assert that there indeed was forgiveness in the Old Testament, but not for Christ's sake? If God forgave Abraham and David without the intervention of the sacrifice of Christ, then He can forgive everybody without the intervention of Christ's sacrifice. There we have the dear old "Father of All" [*Allvater*] of the Rationalists, who connives at sin. Our God does not forgive without the shedding of blood. Heb. 9, 22. But since the blood of bulls and of goats does not take away sins, Heb. 10, 4, therefore, whenever God in the Old Testament forgave but one single sin, He forgave for the sake of the blood of Christ. Our opponents say: If God regarded Abraham as perfectly righteous for Christ's sake, then the death of Christ was superfluous. Exactly the reverse is true: If the justice of God permitted the granting of the very least forgiveness without regard to the death of Christ, then God could have dispensed with the death of Christ altogether. The only reason why Christ died was that the justice of God did *not* permit such forgiveness. The retroactive power of the blood of Christ is most clearly seen in those instances where He forgave sins before He died upon the cross. Did He not say to the man sick of the palsy: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee," Matt. 9, 2, and to the woman who was a sinner, Luke 7, 48, 50: "Thy sins are forgiven. . . . Go in peace"? We know very well by whose power this was done, but the question is for whose sake it was done. Did not Christ here publicly anticipate the fruit of His bitter death? Or if it was sufficient for forgiveness that He merely came and forgave, why, then, did He die? Now, just as He, in view of the shedding of His blood on the cross,

absolved the man sick of the palsy and the great sinner, just so and just as fully did He, in view of the shedding of His blood, regard Abraham and David righteous. Not this is an invention of the theologians, that the blood of Christ had retroactive power, but this, that forgiveness was ever granted without the blood of Christ. Let us, therefore, avoid such Socinian doctrine and abide in singleness of heart by the Word of God, and let us do this the more cheerfully because we know that Melancthon and Luther and the dear Fathers constantly confessed this doctrine. The Apology says: "The promise of Christ who was to come was transmitted from one patriarch to the other, and they knew and believed that God through the blessed Seed, through Christ, wished to give blessing, grace, salvation, and consolation. Therefore, since they understood that Christ would be the treasure by which our sins should be paid, they knew that our works could not pay such a great debt. Therefore they received forgiveness of sin, grace, and salvation without any merit and were saved through faith in the divine promise, the Gospel of Christ, just as the saints in the New Testament." (*Trigl.*, 136 [German text]; comp. also p. 265.) And in another place: "Of this the idle Sophists know little; and the blessed Gospel, which proclaims the forgiveness of sins through the blessed Seed, that is, Christ, has from the beginning of the world been the greatest consolation and treasure to all the pious kings, all prophets, all believers. For they believed in the same Christ in whom we believe; for from the beginning of the world no saint has been saved in any other way than through faith in the same Gospel. For Peter clearly cites the consensus of the prophets, and the writings of the apostles testify that they believe the same thing." (*Trigl.*, 273.) And again: "For also the patriarchs and saints in the Old Testament became righteous and were reconciled to God through faith in Christ who was to come, through whom salvation and grace was promised, just as we in the New Testament receive grace through faith in Christ who has been made manifest. For from the beginning all believers believed that an offering and payment for sin would be made, namely, Christ, who was promised, as Isaiah (53, 10) says: 'When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin.'" (*Trigl.* 402, German text.) Luther teaches exactly the same. He declares: "The forgiveness of sins has been *the same* at all times. Christ is *the same* yesterday and to-day and forever. Therefore they [David and the patriarchs] were saved through faith in Christ, who was to come; but we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life through faith

in the Lord Christ who has already been given unto us, who died for us, and is now sitting in His glory." (St. Louis Ed., V, 553.) And in another place: "[Forgiveness] was purchased once on the cross, but the distribution takes place often, before and afterwards, from the beginning of the world to the end. For since He [Christ] resolved to procure it, it was indifferent to Him whether He, through His Word, distribute it before or afterwards." (St. Louis Ed., XX, 275.) In his sermon on Gen. 3, 14. 15 Luther uses still stronger language: "Here it is written that Adam was a Christian long before the birth of Christ. For he had the same faith in Christ that we have. For in matters of faith, time makes no difference. Faith is of the same nature from the beginning to the end of the world. Therefore he [Adam], through his faith, received the same that I receive. He did not see Christ with his eyes, neither did we, but he had Him in the Word; so we also have Him in the Word. The only difference is this: at that time it *was to come* to pass, now it *has come* to pass. Accordingly all the Fathers were justified in the same manner as we through the Word and through faith, and in this faith they also died." (St. Louis Ed., III, 85.)

Must we cite still more testimonies, for instance, the testimony of Clement of Rome, the pupil of Paul, or of Augustine or of Chemnitz and Gerhard? We could present a long array of witnesses to the reader, and Spener would not even be the last one of them. At the same time we by no means deny the difference between the two Testaments, but we confess on the basis of Col. 2, 16. 17:<sup>9)</sup> We have the body of Christ; this the Old Testament believers did not have, not to speak of other very considerable advantages of the New Covenant.<sup>10)</sup>

Many passages, moreover, testify that the forgiveness which for Christ's sake was dispensed in the Old Covenant was perfect. Or does it sound like fractional forgiveness when Isaiah rejoices: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the robe of righteousness"? Is. 61, 10. And why does David pray: "Forgive *all* my sins"? Ps. 25, 18. And again: "Deliver me from *all* my transgressions"? Ps. 39, 8. And how can the Korahites pray: "Thou hast forgiven

9) Not *Χριστός*, but *τοῦ Χριστοῦ*, that means: *τὸ δὲ σῶμα σκιᾶς σώμα Χριστοῦ*.

10) Catholicity of salvation, much more abundant and more extended outpouring of the Spirit, miracle-working gifts, clearer knowledge of many heavenly things, freedom from the Ceremonial Law.



the iniquity of Thy people, Thou hast covered *all* their sin. Thou hast taken away *all* Thy wrath: Thou hast turned Thyself from the fierceness of Thine anger"? Ps. 85, 2. 3. And David: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, . . . who forgiveth *all* thine iniquities"? Ps. 103, 3. And King Hezekiah, speaking of the past: "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness; but Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; *for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back*"? Is. 38, 17. And does not Ezekiel say: "If the wicked turn from his sin, . . . *none of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him*"? Ezek. 33, 16. And Hosea: "Take with you words and turn to the Lord; say unto Him, Take away *all* iniquity and receive us graciously"? Hos. 14, 2.<sup>11)</sup> Is it possible to designate full forgiveness with clearer words? Or if the ever-recurring "all, all, all," according to laws of speech unknown to us, designates an incomplete justification, what terms should the Holy Spirit have used to designate to us a complete justification? Furthermore, these texts are not sufficiently explained by saying that one may possess forgiveness and still be very much in need of it. For if that means that one may in the same moment have and not have forgiveness of sins, then this is clearly false. Here is Hezekiah, who says that absolutely all his sins are forgiven. Now, if some one comes with the assertion that *all* in this place means as much as *not all*, then this is not merely a twisting of words, but is doing open violence to the words of Scripture. If, however, one wishes to say that one may be in possession of full forgiveness and yet, after two hours, be very much in need of it, then this is not only correct, but a necessary complement to the doctrine of full forgiveness. For God's forgiveness does not belong to any one like a house or a gold coin, but like a cloak — you must hold it fast. However, he who is in possession of it at this or any other moment has it entirely — Luther, and St. Paul, and Hezekiah, and Abraham, but no one in a higher degree than the other one.

It is, indeed, peculiar that the very people who assert that affliction is in proportion to sin deny the full forgiveness in the Old Covenant. They say that we have no full forgiveness because we must die, for death is a sign of incomplete forgiveness. And what about Enoch and Elijah? According to these people they possessed much less forgiveness than we. And yet they did not taste of death! Only one of the two propositions can be correct:

11) Not to mention Jer. 33, 8; Micah 7, 18—20; Ps. 130, 8.

either affliction is in proportion to wrath, and then Elijah obtained not only full, but superabundant forgiveness, or Elijah possessed a fractional forgiveness, and then the alleged connection between wrath and affliction is broken. I confess that I cannot understand how a person who is imperfectly justified can bodily be taken up in heaven. On a chariot of fire he is carried into the bosom of God, in a glorified form he appears on the Mount of Transfiguration in communion with the Lord, long before the crucifixion of Christ, — and yet he is said not to have had full forgiveness!

Finally, as regards the alleged connection between affliction and chastisement, such connection is present in one sense — through sin death came into the world. Rom. 5, 12. God threatened the first man: "In the day that thou eatest thereof [of the forbidden tree], thou shalt surely die." Gen. 2, 17. He ate, and the wrath of God burst upon him — "thorns and thistles," Gen. 3, 18, "in the sweat of thy face," Gen. 3, 19, "thou shalt return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken," Gen. 3, 19. This wrath, however, has been perfectly appeased through the blood of Christ, Rom. 3, 25; John 2, 2; Heb. 2, 17, at least for those who lay hold of this blood by faith, John 3, 36. Therefore all the affliction that God sends upon the believers flows from love. "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons." Heb. 12, 3—8. And Titus 2, 11, 12 the apostle says that not the wrath, but the grace of God teacheth [Luther: *zuechtigt*] us. Therefore Scripture carefully distinguishes between punishment<sup>12)</sup> and chastening.<sup>13)</sup> "Therefore it should be diligently impressed upon the minds of the afflicted who are thus chastened that God is *not angry with them* and that they should consider their present visitation a sure sign that God has received them into His grace." (Luther, St. Louis Ed., II, 1466.) However, the purpose of such chastening is not to procure a higher degree of forgiveness for the afflicted, but to keep them in humility. 2 Cor. 12, 7. 9. (Luther. St. Louis Ed., XVI, 7849; II, 1748.)

12) Τιμωρία, Heb. 10, 29; νόλασις, Matt. 25, 46.

13) Παιδεία, 2 Tim. 3, 16 (instruction); Heb. 12, 5. 7. 8. 11 (chastening).



The only text which seems to conflict with this is 1 Pet. 4, 17: "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" The Greek word which Luther [and the Authorized Version] translates with "judgment" simply means "judgment which has separation for its purpose."<sup>14</sup> Now, what does God separate? Of course, sin, from which He himself is far removed. That this judgment operates in different ways is the fault of men. Whoever lets go of his sin when God plucks it out of his hands will be saved; whoever fervently clings to it will be cast into the fire along with it. If you consider sin, then the affliction of the justified is the same as that of the enemies of God — judgment; if, however, you consider the persons who are visited by affliction, then you will find wrath in the case of one and grace in the case of the other. That this is so is shown by death. Death, viewed *per se*, is the wages of sin, but for the person who is visited by death it is neither a sign of justification nor of condemnation. To him who dies in Christ, death is grace, for it removes him out of thousand troubles and brings him into the heavenly fatherland. If, on the other hand, one dies in enmity with God, to him death is an earnest of damnation and a gate to hell. Hence the secure must be told that their affliction is a prelude to the torments of hell; for if they will not let go of sin, God casts them into the lake of fire. On the other hand, the penitent must be told that God indeed hates *sin*, but that He loves *them* and that, therefore, they should patiently submit to the treatment of their faithful Physician, and they will surely be made whole. (Luther. St. Louis Ed., II, 1467 f.) Whoever studies the divine message to the Seven Churches in Asia Minor in the Revelation of John in the light of this doctrine, will not be put to shame. True, God says: "I have somewhat against thee; repent." Rev. 2, 4. 5. 14. 16. This He must say, for also in those who are justified there still is sin. If God does not remove *that*, it will grow and become dominant. Now, when God says: "I have somewhat against thee," He does not mean: You are not yet fully blessed, — for we *are* blessed in Christ, Eph. 1, 6, — but He means: Under the garment of the righteousness of Christ which you are

14) *Κοῖμα*, from *κοίω*. This meaning fits in all the 28 texts in which it occurs in Scripture. Of course, the meaning is qualified according to the context. In Matt. 7, 2 and Rev. 20, 4 it is a judicial sentence of separation spoken by men; Rom. 2, 3 and Gal. 5, 10 it is God's own sentence of separation on Judgment Day.

wearing there still is sin. Free yourself from it, else I must free you from it; for sin easily gains the upper hand, and then it will tear your garment. So the words "I have somewhat against thee" prove the imperfection of the righteousness of life and not that of the righteousness of faith.

In no respect whatever is there an immediate relation between affliction and our justification in the sight of God. If by all means you would like to have a connecting medium, let it be this, that God through affliction leads man to repentance, and repentance is the soil of faith. And *in this way* God endeavors to keep us from falling from justification. (Apology. *Trigl.*, 299 f.) So, then, if God sends us affliction, we will penitently submit ourselves to Him; we will let go of all things which are not wholly pleasing to Him. From our afflictions we at all times should be willing to learn to know the imperfection of our righteousness of life; for if no sin adhered to us, God would not chasten us. But we will not permit any one to perforate the garment of the righteousness of Christ which God has given unto us. For among the thousands of imperfect possessions on this earth it is the only perfect one. And on the perfection of this possession all our comfort is based. It was only because Paul could begin his hymn of victory with the words: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," Rom. 8, 1, that he could close with the words: "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord." Rom. 8, 38. 39.

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