

THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

VOL. VIII.

AUGUST, 1928.

No. 8.

The Means of Grace.

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

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

(Concluded.)

But can it be said also of children that Baptism justifies them? They are certainly, it is argued, not yet able to partake of the merits of Christ. That was the reason why the disciples turned them away. Matt. 19, 13; Luke 18, 15. But what did Jesus say? "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 19, 14; Luke 18, 15; Mark 10, 14. These "little children" cannot possibly have been fully grown up, for they were carried in the arms. Matt. 19, 13; Mark 10, 13; Luke 18, 15. And the disciples did not chide the children, but those that bore them. Furthermore, the term which Luke employs to designate the children (*βρέφη*) is used in his writings only of the new-born or of the fruit in the womb. Luke 18, 15. [Note. — *Βρέφη*: of the new-born, Luke 2, 12; Acts 7, 19; of the fruit in the womb, Luke 1, 41. 44.] But the meaning of the "kingdom of heaven" which belongs to the children is shown Rom. 14, 17: "The kingdom of God is not meat or drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." So, then, these three things belong to them: the righteousness of Christ, the peace of God, and the joy in the Holy Ghost. But does not Christ say, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven"? Matt. 19, 14. Happy are we that He did say so; otherwise no adult would get into heaven. But did He, with the words "of such," wish to exclude the little children? Surely not; He rather made them the leaders of the procession to Salem. He says: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me"; they will be saved before all others; indeed, only such as they. [Note. — The *Hirschberg Bible* gives a very good explanation of the word "such" in Matt. 19, 18: "The children and those who, by committing themselves without malicious resistance to My arms of grace, become like them." . . . Christ

makes every misinterpretation of His words impossible by adding: "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." Mark 10, 15.] Heaven, however, does not belong to them for the same reason that it belongs to the angels, who are without sin, but in like manner as it belongs to sinful men; for they were conceived in sins. Ps. 51, 7; Job 25, 4; Ps. 58, 4; Gen. 8, 21. But sinners are saved in no other way than by water and the Spirit. John 3, 3. 5. Therefore children may not only, nay, they must be, baptized; "for," says the Lord, "it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." Matt. 18, 14. In obedience to this will the Christian Church has always baptized her little ones, so much so that St. John writes not only to the fathers and to the young men, but also to the children that their sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus' name, 1 John 2, 12. 13; so much so that St. Irenaeus teaches that regeneration [in Baptism] is given to the sucklings, and little children, and youths, and young men, and old men; yes, so much so that already Origen meditated on the question which sins are forgiven little children in Holy Baptism. [Note. — The originator of the evil custom of postponing Baptism to the adult years was Tertullian: "*Fiant Christiani, dum Christum nosse potuerint. Quid festinat INNOCENS aetas ad remissionem peccatorum?*" (*De Baptismo*, II, 18.) He endeavored to abolish infant baptism because he did not understand the Scriptural doctrine of original sin. But if he tried to abolish it, it certainly must have been in common use at that time. Origen simply says: "*Ecclesia ab apostolis traditionem suscepit etiam parvulis baptismum dare.*"] And, God be praised, the Church of Jesus Christ to this day baptizes her children. For to this day it is the will of our heavenly Father that none of these little ones should perish. And to this day no other way has been discovered to bring them into heaven than by water and the Spirit.

But does this not deny justification by faith? Do we with this doctrine not enter upon papistical ground? For if the sucklings are justified in their baptism, then it is certain that the Sacraments can at least be effective without faith, by simple application. True. But who says that the little children do not believe? Our observation alone can hardly decide in this matter. For we also observe no reason in them, and yet we do not conclude that they are brutes. What, then, does God's Word say? Already the fact that the Lord awards salvation to them is well worthy of our notice; for one might reason this way: "He who does not believe will not be saved;

therefore they believe." But we do not reason that way. For else we might be censured for building incomprehensible doctrines upon artificial conclusions. If, however, God should anywhere in the Scriptures clearly declare that the children believe, then we would ask permission to abide by that statement of our God in singleness of heart. Now, Matt. 18, 6 teaches this very thing. In the first part of that chapter we learn that the disciples quarreled about which of them should occupy the first place in the kingdom of heaven. Then Jesus took a child and set him in the midst of them and said: "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 18, 4. Then He proceeded to depict the glory of the children before their eyes: Whoso shall receive one such little child (*ἐν παιδίον τοιοῦτο*) in My name receiveth Me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me (*ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων εἰς ἐμέ*), it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." Matt. 18, 6. The connection shows clearly that children are being spoken of in this passage, so that the evasion that "little ones" in this place means as much as "large ones" is out of place here. Just as little does the subterfuge that "to believe" means "the mere possibility of believing," therefore really, "not to believe," satisfy our conscience. And even with such an interpretation the opponents of infant faith would have gained but little. For the Lord would still teach that infant faith, which they declare to be impossible, is possible. But one might say that the child in question was not a very little child. Maybe, although Christ calls it "little." But what will we do with Ps. 71, 6? There the psalmist prays: "By Thee have I been holden up *from the womb.*" (Luther's version: "*Auf dich habe ich mich verlassen* VON MUTTERLEIBE AN.") [Note. — Ps. 71, 6: *אָמַץ*, Niphal of *אָמַץ*, occurs six times in the Bible and always means "to lean upon." Judg. 16, 29; 2 Kings 18, 21; Is. 36, 6; 2 Chron. 32, 8; Is. 42, 2; Ps. 71, 6.] And Ps. 8, 2 the singer explains: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength because of Thine enemies." According to the express testimony of Christ this was fulfilled when the children saluted Him in the Temple with their hosanna. Matt. 21, 15. 16. Finally, David * rejoices, Ps. 22, 9: "Thou [Lord] art He that took me out of the womb; Thou didst make me hope

* It must not be overlooked that the Messiah is speaking here, and hence this text is not pertinent. — Ed.

[believe] when I was upon my mother's breasts." [Note.—**בָּטַח** means "to trust." The Hiphil, . . . in all the five passages where it occurs in the Bible, means "to make one trust," "to cause to believe." Is. 36, 15; Jer. 28, 15; 19, 31; 2 Kings 18, 30; 22, 9.]

What shall we say to this? Shall we put new coats on all these texts to make them look different from the way God made them? That would be a tedious and very unpleasant task. I think we will come out honestly and say: "The Bible contains numberless errors, and this is one of them." Or we will bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ and believe that He is able to do what He says. Not as though we took bud and blossom to be the same or imagined that a child perceives and discerns just as we can. But this is what we confess, basing it upon the Word of God: The soul of the child grasps the hand which God offers to it in the Sacrament just as well as we, yea, even better. For does a child not cling to the neck of its mother with both its little arms when it sees an animal coming? And is the maxim, "I see it not, therefore it does not exist," really unassailable? Does it not, when seriously applied, lead to the denial of the existence of God and the soul? Is it not, after all, better to abide by the Word of God? Verily, I am afraid to judge it, for it will judge me. John 12, 48. Therefore we simply teach with Luther that the little children who are baptized believe through the power of the Word which is prayed over them. (St. Louis Ed., XIX, 589.) Or, as John Gerhard says: "The Holy Spirit, through Baptism, presents to the children both faith and forgiveness of sins. For the Scriptures link these two things, faith and forgiveness, together with an unbreakable chain" (*Spiritus Sanctus per baptismum et fidem et peccatorum remissionem infantibus donat, quum remissionem peccatorum et fidem adamantino quodam vinculo Scriptura sacra ubique conjungat*).

Against this argumentation, however, the objection has been raised that genuine justifying faith is a moral struggle for liberty; that it is degraded when it is brought into connection with children; that the model way of salvation is a way through the penitential struggle; that, if children are saved at all, this is possible only if they experience something which is similar to it or at least related to it. But God's Word sweeps such thoughts away like spider-webs. Mark 10, 15 we read: "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." Thus God's Son turns your entire order of salvation upside down. You say: "If a little child does not

receive the kingdom of God as an adult, it will never enter therein." But Christ says: "All ye old, learned, pious people, even ye My dear disciples yourselves, ye will not be saved if ye do not wish to be saved in the same way as the children." Mark also the verb "receives." "To receive" means "to believe." When it is said, Acts 11, 1, that the Gentiles also received the Word of God, then this means that they believed it. When it is said of the Bereans, Acts 17, 11: "They received the Word with all readiness of mind," then this indicates their joyous faith. When, therefore, Christ testifies: "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein," then this means: "Whoever does not believe as a little child believes, he shall surely not be saved." [Note. — For also Mark 10, 15 has *δέχεσθαι*. And Rom. 14, 17 says what the *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* is, namely, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. I confess that I am unable to comprehend how these three gifts, in fact, all invisible things, can be received in any other way than by faith.] This is Christ's order of salvation. It is hard to understand — and yet easy. Hard, because the Old Adam is so very anxious to drag a little package of merit, and were it only the merit of a penitential struggle, across God's boundary-lines. Easy, for the children have one advantage over us adults — they have no will. And it is just this which hinders our salvation. [Note. — Or is something else in the way? Matt. 23, 37: "How often would I . . . and ye would not!"] For our will is free in the domain of sin and evil and has a strong tendency towards all that is evil; so free and so strong it is in this direction that we poor creatures, who are always burdened with this evilly inclined will cannot free ourselves from it in any other way than by fighting to the last drop of blood. But since God's order of salvation consists in this, that we commit ourselves entirely to His fatherly hands, therefore He has given us the children as patterns. To us, indeed, the saying applies: "Break thy will; endure afflictions!" But, verily, the fact that we resist God so much is no point in our favor. Happy are we if in *this* respect we become like unto the sucklings by committing ourselves to our faithful God without resisting Him. But woe unto us if we do not consider such return to the estate of children necessary; for Christ says: "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God." Matt. 18, 3.

This simple doctrine has always resounded in the Evangelical [Lutheran] Church. Martin Chemnitz developed it with special

clearness in his examination of the Decrees of Trent. Gerhard did it still more fully, especially with respect to the faith of children. And thus it has been faithfully handed down to us, so that Spener still confessed: "Concerning the children we believe that in one and the same Baptism all things happen at the same time: the bestowal of faith, the justification, or remission of sins, and the remaining regeneration, or creation of a new nature in us."

But the assertion that the honor bestowed upon the Sacraments encroaches upon the doctrine of "by faith *alone*" is at variance with the Scriptures and with history. With the Scriptures, for *they* designate the Word of God as the means of salvation just as often as they designate faith as such. With history, for all the confessions of our Evangelical [Lutheran] Church, from the Augsburg Confession down, emphasize both with equal force. The [Augsburg] Confession says: "Eternal righteousness, the Holy Ghost, eternal life, — these things cannot come but by the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, as Paul says, Rom. 1, 16: 'The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth'" [*Justitia aeterna, Spiritus Sanctus, vita aeterna. Haec non possunt contingere nisi per ministerium Verbi et sacramentorum, sicut Paulus dicit Rom. 1, 16: „Evangelium est potentia Dei ad salutem omni credenti“*]. (Triglotta, 85.) And the Apology: "When we say: 'Faith alone makes godly' [*fromm*], we with the word *sola* do not exclude the Word and the Sacraments, as though the Word and the Sacraments were in vain, if faith does it all, as the adversaries charge us, *but it is the opinion of our merit in the matter that we exclude.*" [German text.] (Triglotta, 140.) (*Excludimus autem opinionem meriti. Non excludimus Verbum et sacramenta, ut calumniantur adversarii.* Triglotta, 141.) And the Large Catechism: "But as our would-be wise and new spirits assert that faith alone saves and that works and external things avail nothing, we answer: It is true, indeed, that nothing in us is of any avail but faith. . . . But these blind guides are unwilling to see this, namely, that faith must have something which it believes, that is, of which it takes hold and upon which it stands and rests. Thus faith clings to the water and believes that it is Baptism, in which there is pure salvation and life; not through the water . . ., but through the fact that it is embodied in [*i. e.*, connected with] the Word and institution of God and the name of God inheres in it. Now, if I believe this, what else is it than believing in God as in Him who has given and planted His Word into this ordinance and proposes to us this external thing wherein

we may apprehend such a treasure? Now, they are so mad as to separate faith, and that to which faith clings and is bound, though it be something external. Yea, it shall and must be something external that it may be apprehended by the senses and understood and thereby be brought into the heart, as indeed the entire Gospel is an external, verbal preaching." (*Triglotta*, 739.) The same doctrine is taught by the Formula of Concord (*Triglotta*, 919. 929. 1087), the Book of Confessions of Duke Julius of Brunswick, and also by the theologians (Luther, St. Louis Ed., XII, 2437—2439; XVI, 1151; XIX, 587. 588. 590. 591).

We do not understand what is meant by the objection that we posit a non-living relationship to Christ. We posit nothing, but cling to the life-line which Christ throws out to us in the Word. He who refuses to take hold of the life-line, but requests the pilot rather to let him grasp his hands, will hardly be saved. If the king grants an audience in his castle, it certainly is better to approach him there with one's petition than to wait and see whether one may chance to meet him in the forest.

Finally, when it is said that it were ill-becoming in God to bind Himself to earthly matter: word, water, bread and wine, this vividly reminds us of Peter: "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet? Thou, the living God? With lowly water?" But what does the Lord reply? "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." John 13, 8. This He also says to the fanatics: "If ye despise My lowly baptismal water and My lowly Word, ye have no part with Me."
