

The
Salvation

By
Promise

A Book of Theology for Laymen

by
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*"Righteousness is by faith, in order to be according to grace,
for the promise to be certain" (Romans 4:16).*

Introduction.	- 4 -
The Difference between divine Salvation and man-made Religions.	- 5 -
Background.	- 6 -
The Circumstances which brought on Salvation.	- 7 -
The Want for Salvation.....	- 7 -
Christ's Death was no moral Necessity.	- 8 -
The Matter of Salvation.....	- 9 -
The Presentation of Salvation is found in the Bible.....	- 9 -
The Creation of Salvation.	- 10 -
The Task which God faced in order for him to assemble and to complete a Salvation for lost Mankind.	- 12 -
The inner Workings in the Mind of God in the Creation of a Promise.	- 15 -
What moved God to save us?	- 16 -
What would constitute a Promise?	- 18 -
How would a Person go about believing a Promise?	- 19 -
What would constitute a Promise of God?	- 20 -
How did God create his Promise?	- 20 -
So how would a Promise work in the Matter of Salvation?-	22 -
How has this Salvation by Promise worked in your Case?-	24 -
The saving Promise as a Contract.	- 24 -
Of what would this Contract consist?	- 29 -

Scripture uses the Term "Seal" to reassure you of your Salvation.	- 31 -
Paul teaches a few things about God's gospel Contract. .	- 34 -
Proffer.....	- 35 -
The Parable of the Salesman	- 39 -
A Summary of the Plan of Salvation.....	- 44 -
Scripture will use accounting Terms in explaining its Salvation by Promise.	- 48 -
Redemption	- 52 -
How would this Redemption work in our Case?.....	- 55 -
Scripture uses a judicial Procedure in its Salvation by Promise.	- 60 -
Hence Scripture speaks to us in judicial Terms about its Salvation by Promise.	- 63 -
The pardon Method in God's Plan of Salvation comes only at a Price.	- 68 -
To pardon and to forgive.	- 69 -
The Synonyms of Forgiveness.	- 71 -
Scripture speaks to us in judicial Terms regarding our State of Guilt.	- 74 -
Scripture also speaks to us in judicial Terms of Christ's Punishment on the Altar of his Cross.	- 77 -
Justification.....	- 78 -
Righteousness in the Book of Romans.	- 84 -

The Salvation by Promise and the Apostle Paul's Practice. - 86 -	
-	
Faith..... - 87 -	
The Use of the Words "Faith" and "Belief" in the Book of Romans. - 92 -	
The Violent take it by Force. - 92 -	
The Difference between Saving Faith and having a Trust in God's Protection. - 93 -	
Reconciliation..... - 94 -	
Imputation. - 96 -	
Justification in the Old Testament. - 100 -	
Mediation. - 103 -	
Propitiation. - 106 -	
God's Blood..... - 107 -	
The shedding of Blood. - 108 -	
A Summary of Salvation. - 111 -	
The Resurrection of Christ. - 112 -	
The Saving Acts of God. - 114 -	
God hands his Salvation over to us. - 115 -	
A Preservation from succumbing to false Teachings. - 119 -	
Conversion. - 121 -	
Absolution..... - 128 -	
Repentance. - 131 -	

Our daily Troubles..... - 133 -	
The Just shall live by Faith. - 136 -	
Believing in Christ, and believing in his gospel Promises. - 137 -	
-	
Believing the Truth and believing the Promise..... - 138 -	
A brief Commentary on Salvation by Luther. - 139 -	
Home to Heaven. - 140 -	
A brief Statement of Salvation..... - 142 -	
A Prayer of Luther that expresses my Sentiments..... - 143 -	
THE SERMONS..... - 143 -	
 SEE THE GLORY OF THE GREAT PROMISE OF GOD!..... - 143 -	
 GOD DOUBLY ASSURES THAT HIS PROMISE IS TRUE.....- 148 -	
OF WHAT DOES THE CONTRACT OF GOD CONSIST? - 153 -	
EMBRACE THE PROMISE OF GOD BY FAITH!..... - 159 -	
CONSIDER THE COMFORTING QUALITY OF THE GOSPEL PROMISE!..... - 165 -	
BE CONFIDENT, NOT DOUBTFUL!..... - 170 -	
RECOGNIZE THE SAVING ACTS OF CHRIST!..... - 175 -	
PUT OFF THE OLD MAN! PUT ON THE NEW!..... - 182 -	
A FUNERAL SERMON. - 186 -	

Introduction.

There is a little word in the Bible. It is a quiet word, that is, it is one that easily could be overlooked. In fact, it hardly is used at all in our English translations of the Old Testament.

Just the same, in the New Testament between all of the thrilling, thundering announcements of the terrific acts of God on earth – in suffering hell for you, in leading a holy life for you, which is meant to be presented to you as a gift, and in smashing down all your spiritual foes in one spectacular victory – there it is. The Holy Spirit inserts it again and again. Thus, as the foundation of a magnificent house lays there quietly in plain sight doing its crucial task of keeping the whole structure from falling down, yet without much notice, while all of the fanfare seems to go to the pomp of the soaring turrets, or to the sweep of the grand arches, so also this important and crucial word, sitting right there in plain sight, would seem to be passed by without much notice.

What would it be? Why would the God of the glorious gospel bring it up in such crucial places in the New Testament? because it is so important.

That word is “promise.”

In fact, the apostle could not state it any simpler when he said about our salvation: “God gave it by promise” (Galatians 3:18).

So what would be “the salvation by promise?”

It will mean that you are saved by believing a promise of God. It will be as simple as that.

Since this salvation by promise would be based on such a simple plan, it actually will be easy to describe. Thus the purpose of this book is to highlight Scripture’s active use of its vital promises as the basis for its many calls for faith from the sinner who is in dire need of obtaining salvation from God his Savior.

Therefore, see from the following why your loving Lord has given it so much prominence! See how great and glorious it truly is! Indeed, look at the pledge of God, and see the glory of basing his plan of salvation on a divine pledge: a salvation by promise!

Nevertheless, would God ever make his salvation so difficult to understand that only a handful of theologians ever could comprehend it? Of course not.

Rather, in his Bible, God speaks to you in plain language. He presents you with explanations that are clear. He offers you pledges that are simple enough for a child to understand.

Thus this whole matter of salvation is quite simple. In fact, let us go through it this way: step by step, one description at a time.

The Difference between divine Salvation and man-made Religions.

Realize, first of all, that throughout history there have been many different, man-made religions! For example, in antiquity there were national religions in which the various nations had their own deities which they would worship, usually paired with various sacrifices designed to appease these gods in regards to the guilt which all men commonly feel by the accusations of their consciences.

More recently, in the last two centuries, Western Civilization has suffered the obnoxious, random invention of ethical religions, with or without a deity. Indeed, what is preached today in the overwhelming majority of houses of worship in America is likewise an ethical creed; that is to say, one in which men would have to act a certain way, to think a certain way, and to do specific things, depending upon this creed, in order to appease a deity that otherwise would be mad at them. Yet this idea of an appeasement is proposed simply because these worshipers have been indicted by their consciences that they “are worthy of death” (Romans 1:32) since they have committed sinful acts and thoughts.

Just the same, realize that all of these proposals of religion are simply the product of the unregenerated,

natural, sinful mind of man, the thinking of which “is bitter hatred against God” (Romans 8:7)!

To be sure, all of the different systems of religious belief that have been concocted by men have numbered in the thousands. Many of these have died out; others have not. Nevertheless, all of them have this in common: they are all the religion “of the Law” (Galatians 3:2) and “by the flesh” (Galatians 3:3).

Why are they “of the Law” and not according to some other standard? It is because the Law which God wrote into their souls (Romans 2:14-15) had made such an impression on them.

Yet God’s way of salvation is different than all of these sorry substitutes. Though some of man’s invented religions, indeed, have imitated, adapted, accommodated, and abused parts of the Almighty’s commandments, still the Lord’s way of salvation is and always will remain unique, for it is different than all of these. It is high above them, for it is a salvation “outside of the Law” (Romans 3:21). In fact, it presents a way of salvation that has “not entered into the heart of man” (1st Corinthians 2:9).

Indeed, after the blessed Lord would reveal his gospel plan to you, and you first could see it with your regenerated eyes, you only could marvel at just how ingenious the whole plan was: how it has been designed flawlessly and has foreseen every contingency; how it has unfolded perfectly and has succeeded decisively through the ages, though the entire, evil world and the army of

devils have done their worst to stop it; how the immense task of reconciling the two extremes: the holy Divine with the sinful human race, nevertheless was accomplished with such a remarkable thoroughness that it has an assuring, decisive finality to it. In view of this you should be utterly humiliated and just plain speechless at just how much the Godhead condescended, personally sacrificed, and humbled itself in order to spare unworthy, rebellious sinners from the ravages of eternal torment in hell. What grace! Think of it!

In fact, God's wonderful salvation is in a category all by itself, not solely because it is divine and, therefore, assured, but because it has taken a completely different approach to the matter of salvation than what man ever could have devised.

It is a salvation by *promise*.

Background.

We learn from the Bible that before Creation only God existed: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

What is more, God was content in his existence. That is to say, he lacked nothing.

Just the same, in time he created angels and men as his creatures. These were beings, as he is a being. These were spirits, as he is a spirit, with the difference that man was given a body to be joined to his soul, or spirit.

To be sure, we have not been told why God created us. What is more, even if we would attempt to guess as to his reason, we never will be able to obtain from our guess any divine assurance that our assumption would be correct.

Nevertheless, we have an expression in our language which runs, "I have enjoyed your company." Thus after the Creation there would be this difference from that period which went before: now there would exist souls that would derive great enjoyment from the company of God. To be sure, as we ourselves have seen, and as Scripture itself has stated: everything which God has done after Creation has been a sacrifice on his part solely for our benefit. God is gracious to his created beings.

At the beginning of creation God had created man and woman pure and holy for the purpose of having them live with him in heaven. To this end, God created this world for man to live in temporarily, for him to bear children, and then, after a period of time, which God would determine, to take the parents home to heaven one by one without dying, as Enoch and Elijah were taken into heaven without dying. There, along with the angels, mankind would live forever in God's presence. It was as simple as that.

This was God's intended plan. This is how the events could and should have occurred.

The Circumstances which brought on Salvation.

However, this plan was upset terribly by the devil. Adam and Eve were tempted to sin. After which they did not resist temptation, but proceeded to sin, burning their bridges, so to speak, so that they never could regain their holiness.

This ruined everything. The holy and righteous Almighty could not have sinners in his presence in heaven murdering each other, for instance, as Cain later murdered his own brother (Genesis 4:8). Therefore, the sinful human race was not only locked out of heaven, but also doomed to be punished. Indeed, according to the Almighty's earlier warning (Genesis 2:17), sinful man would now face an upcoming punishment to which the devils also had been sentenced: God's full anger would be poured out on them for eternity. Man would be shut out from heaven, and would suffer the most excruciating torment ever without end. Thus God also set a day of reckoning called "Judgment Day." Sinners would have to die an earthly death, be brought before the almighty Judge, and then be punished with an "eternal death"; also referred to as "hell" (Matthew 10:28), "fire" (Revelation 20:10), "torment in flame" (Luke 16:24), and "outer darkness" (Matthew 8:12).

Indeed, an earthly death is God's arrest. Earthly death is simply his judgment on that evil which has

infected the soul, through which process God brings the sinner face to face with him in his court on Judgment Day.

Hence your sins are no slight matter. They are a slap in the face to the holy and righteous Almighty. They are a revolt and a defiance so outrageous and damnable, that nothing less than a never-ending punishment of the sinner would do.

See the truth in all of this! Admit that it is true! It is useless for you to deny it for "your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23); for "God will bring every work into judgment" (Ecclesiastes 12:4), since the Lord searches the heart... even to give every man according to his ways (Jeremiah 17:10).

So admit your sinfulness! You have grieved and offended the Almighty. If anyone should be sorry, you will be the one, and you ought to do it here and now!

The Want for Salvation.

Realize, then, that there was, indeed a place for salvation, but not a demand. There was a want for salvation, but not an obligation; an opportunity for salvation, but not a necessity; sinful man was eligible for salvation, but he was not entitled to it! Remember that the angels that fell into sin rightly received no consideration by God for a salvation!

God's holy law thunders out that since all men have sinned, they are no longer holy and perfect, but continually fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Therefore, not only do such rebels and lawbreakers deserve to be shut out of heaven, they deserve to be punished with eternal torment at the hands of a furious God as well.

This is what you had faced. This is what you had deserved. Indeed, the Almighty still would be a perfect God of love if he had punished the whole wicked race. The mighty Maker, who has sentenced all of the devils to eternal torment, is not one bit less a God of mercy because of it. Understand, therefore, that the Almighty does not owe it to you to rescue you! All that ever would be owed to you will be to punish you.

Christ's Death was no moral Necessity.

Thus "It would not be right to say unconditionally that Christ had to die, for nothing forced God to save the world by the death of His Son. He did it purely by grace. He was not compelled by a sense of justice to redeem man, whom He had made. It was through no fault of His that sin had come into the world and that man was in danger of perishing because of sin. He had created Adam in holiness, had given him a will of his own, had warned him against disobedience, and had given him the power to resist evil. The commands which He gave to Adam and

the demands which He made of him were entirely just and fair. But in spite of it all, Adam fell into sin and thus brought sin upon all men, inasmuch as all men have inherited their evil nature from him.

"God therefore owes man nothing but to punish him. We have no right to say that because God made us He is in duty bound to save us. He is not guilty of man's death. The fault rests upon Adam and upon us who continue in sin....

"It is because we are sinners and because the holy Father cannot have sinful children. A righteous God cannot leave wickedness unpunished" (M. J. Steege, "A Call to Bear Witness," *The Concordia Pulpit for 1947*, XVIII [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1946], page 472f.).

Thus God had recognized that there was an opportunity for a rescue of the sinful human race, though mankind, like the devils, did not deserve to be rescued in the least.

So what would God decide? Should he save the damnable, human race, or not?

What would move him to decide one way or the other?

He assures us that his mercy and his grace moved him to rescue the ruined race of sinful men.

The Matter of Salvation.

Just the same, would there even be such a thing as salvation? Yes, there will be, for the Almighty himself has assured you of it. He has assured you of it in his written communication to you called “the Bible.” When God speaks to you in his Bible, assuring you that the words which he speaks are the truth, your intellect, after reading his words, will respond, “What I just have read is the truth. These words must be what they say they are: the words of God. Indeed, these words are different from whatever man could write.”

Moreover, because they are God’s truthful, divine words, your intellect could and should admit not only that “These words are the truth,” but, “I have been divinely assured of this fact.”

This is why you could and should be divinely convinced that there is salvation for you. God’s words themselves divinely will assure you of it. It is as simple as that.

Men’s words, describing their own, man-made ways of salvation, will contain no divine authority, divine truth, or divine assurance. While men, indeed, have an incentive to be attracted to man’s ways of salvation for fleshly reasons, these men will not be given any divine assurance from man’s words for the simple reason that

man’s ways of salvation lack divine truth and assurance. To be sure, men’s souls will not be fed by man’s way of salvation, but will be left hungry and parched.

In fact, should you ever be asked: “How could you be sure that you will get to heaven according to what you believe?” a good reply will be: “Because I have been divinely assured of it by God’s own promises.”

*“My salvation is to me
Well assured eternally.”*

Hymn 317:4

The Presentation of Salvation is found in the Bible.

While God communicated essential parts of his plan of salvation to men before the time of Moses, it was his will that the norm for knowing about and also for being assured of his salvation would be by way of hearing and of searching the Scriptures: the Bible. Therefore, God had his Bible written and has blessed its distribution in order to inform all of mankind of his plan of salvation so that all could be saved by it.

Furthermore, while today we have books on biblical theology, that is to say, on biblical teachings, in which the saving acts of God are thoughtfully arranged so as to present this matter to the reader with as few, man-made obstructions as possible, God has not arranged his saving acts in this manner in the Bible. That is, God has

not laid out his saving acts in an outline form, for instance. Rather he presents his salvation to the biblical reader in clear, plain, and easily understood passages throughout his Bible in a natural setting in a fitting context, which the theologians have called “the seats (places) of doctrine,” introducing them commonly in a conversational manner.

*The mystery hidden from the eyes
Of learned men and sages
God hath revealed us from the skies
In Scripture's holy pages.*

Hymn 264:1

The Creation of Salvation.

First of all, in order to organize your thinking: ask yourself some natural questions! For instance, how would God go about planning a salvation, along with constructing it? What has he revealed to us about this?

Know that before he could plan salvation, he would have to have an intent to do so! Happily he assures us that he did have an intent. Moreover, he cheerfully informs us that he had grace in his heart to do so. This is to what those many passages about grace in the Bible point.

After he had mercy on our sinful race, the next step, according to his biblical revelation, is that the Lord

was moved by this same grace to address this problem, and then to resolve to do something for the whole ruined race, which he did.

*O how great is Thy compassion,
Faithful Father, God of grace,
That upon man's wretchedness,
That upon man's sinful station
Thou took'st pity, so that we
Might be saved eternally!*

Hymn 317:1

Consequently, the gracious God of heaven would decide to plan his salvation this way: he would base it entirely on a substitutional arrangement. That is to say, he would select only one person to do it. To be sure, he would chose someone who could shoulder the responsibility of doing it; who alone could be entrusted to do it; who completely and cheerfully would submit to the will of God in doing it; and would have the infinite capability of accomplishing such a gigantic task with a successful, happy, and decisive conclusion. Who would be capable of such an immensely-demanding task?

Since such a task would be impossible for a Heaven-hating, righteousness-rejecting sinner; since it would be infinitely beyond what even a mortal man would be capable of, such as innocent and sinless Adam was, if there were such – which there no longer is – or even an

angel, the Father of the triune Godhead selected and sent the all-powerful Son to do it. Indeed, since the Son was almighty God, he could accomplish anything. Thus the Son was chosen to carry out these certain, saving acts of submission and service, while the Father, for his part, would pass judicial approval on his Son's saving acts (see Matthew 3:17: "In whom I am well pleased"), among his other judicial acts; for instance, the punishment of the Son (Matthew 27:46), and the acceptance of the Son's payment of punishment by way of resurrecting him (Romans 4:25).

*Then God beheld my wretched state
With deep commiseration;
He thought upon his mercy great,
And willed my soul's salvation;
He turned to me a Father's heart –
Not small the cost! – to heal my smart,
He gave His best and dearest.*

Hymn 310:4

Since we could not see into God's mind, nor see the inner workings and the decision-makings going on, such as his spirit of mercy, his intent to rescue, his motive to hand over to us a gift of salvation, or the invisible, saving acts which the Trinity would be performing, the Lord communicated with the doomed world of lost sinners

about these matters by way of his personal pledges to assure us.

To be sure, the Lord could have revealed these different components of his salvation, and simply exclaimed: "These are the truth. Believe this truth!" which he has done at times for a reason (for instance, "Your Word is truth," John 17:17). However, he intentionally stresses that his salvation is a promise (Galatians 3:18). Indeed, any truthful announcement that someone has performed an act, or any oath to this effect, and a pledge that someone has done it, will be merely two sides of the same coin.

Thus the Lord gave to mankind these promises, at first verbally before the time of Moses, but afterward, he had them written down purposely in his Bible. In other words, first of all, the Almighty would contact and inform lost and damned sinners that because of the grace in his heart, he will come down to earth in the future, and, as their substitute, will do the works that would be necessary to pull them out of damnation, and to bring them into the mansions of heaven. Then, since these acts had not yet occurred; since even the people who saw Jesus walk this earth, including his crucifixion, could not see that all of his acts were substitutionary, and were credited to us by Heaven; and since sinners could not see into his heart, God will promise the sinful world that there is grace in his heart, and that he would perform these saving acts.

This will become known by the endearing name of “the gospel.”

Furthermore, when the Lord would take this step to inform you about his salvation, how would he go about doing it? How would he explain it? as thoroughly as human speech could be used. For example, he would use, first of all, legal terms: justification, righteousness, lawlessness, guilt, punishment, and absolution; then accounting terms: debt, payment, credit, account, and redemption/manumission; medical descriptions: to be sick, in need of a physician, to comfort, that is, to strengthen from a condition of weakness, and to make whole; a military portrayal: defeating your enemies: sin, death, and the devil; illustrating his salvation as a protecting/saving/guarding measure: the Good Shepherd, seeking the lost sheep (“no one will pluck you out of my hand”), “will guard your hearts and minds” (Philippians 4:7); defining it as a nourishment obtained by a spiritual form of eating and drinking.

To that end, the Lord at times will use different manners of speaking to you, such as you yourself commonly would use to communicate validly for effect, or for brevity. For example, the Lord will use parables, which the Old Testament prophesied he would do (Matthew 13:35). Moreover, the Bible rightfully and properly will use what linguists have called “metaphors” (1st Peter 2:5), “metonymy” (Luke 2:30; Acts 2:11; Luke 22:20), and “synecdoche” (John 19:42; 1:14; Romans

11:7), for example. Therefore, do not be puzzled or offended whenever the Lord would use such common and valid expressions of speech.

In fact, God, who is the inventor of thought, and of our language, which is marshaled by thought, thoroughly exhausts our vocabulary in his efforts to make you knowledgeable. Look at the Hebrew of the Old Testament, and the Greek of the New Testament! See how God enlists nouns, verbs, and adjectives in order to cover this whole matter of salvation most thoroughly, for the purpose of removing all doubt, and for assuring you completely!

The Task which God faced in order for him to assemble and to complete a Salvation for lost Mankind.

In order for God to get sinful mankind on earth to live with him in heaven, there were immense problems, humanly speaking, to be addressed and to be overcome. That is to say, there would be a number of saving acts which he would need to accomplish.

For instance, there would be, first of all, the matter of a sin debt, consisting of what theologians have termed “actual sin,” that is, active violations of God’s holy law for which sinners were responsible to him and for which they had to pay. Though this “sin debt” would fall under the category of a “moral debt,” it still is a real debt.

The solution for this would be that God would have to transfer the responsibility for this debt onto himself. Otherwise, if it were left to man, the debt never would get paid.

*But only may He of His grace
The record of my guilt efface,
And wipe out all my debt.*

Hymn 372:5

Secondly, the justice of God would have to be satisfied fully that the terrible punishment, which the entire world of sinners had incurred on account of its enormous sin debt, had been carried out completely. Therefore, God would have to be the one to endure this punishment. Otherwise man would spend eternity in hell paying for this debt, with no time left over to be in heaven.

*O Jesus, who my debt didst pay,
And for my sin wast smitten,
Within the book of life, O may
My name be also written!
I will not doubt; I trust in Thee,
From Satan Thou hast made me free,
And from all condemnation.*

Hymn 552:5

Thirdly, sinful man lacked a holiness with which he could enter heaven, since, after he fell into sin, he burned his bridges, so to speak; that is, sinful man was incapable of returning himself to a condition of holiness. The solution for this would be that God would have to provide sinful man with a human holiness.

*Thy righteousness, O Christ,
Alone can cover me;
No righteousness avails
Save that which is of Thee.*

Hymn 329:4

Fourthly, sinful man would need a transformation of his sinful mind out of a condition which theologians have termed “original sin” into a condition in which his mind would want to do God’s will. This intent of the mind Scripture has called, “the mind of Christ” (1st Corinthians 2:16). The solution to this would be that God would have to use his power to accomplish this, for man, in his sinful mind, would lack utterly the incentive, the power, and the ability.

*O turn us, turn us, mighty Lord!
Convert us by Thy grace;
Then shall our hearts obey Thy Word,
And see again Thy face.*

Hymn 303:4

Fifthly, there also would be the problem of how to keep man from falling back into a state of damnableness once God would have provided him with a salvation. For instance, after Adam and Eve had fallen into sin God simply could have passed his hand over them to remove their sinful state miraculously, and then returned them to a state of complete holiness. Yet this alone could not have kept them holy; for Adam and Eve could have fallen back into sin and damnableness once again, even perhaps multiple times. Furthermore, they even could have reasoned, "We do not care how many times we may fall into a state of sin and damnableness. We simply hope that God will return us to a state of holiness once again."

The solution to this would be for God to provide a source of divine power for man to use for the purpose of keeping his mind from falling back into a state of spiritual damnableness: a source of divine power that could be called, for example, the "gospel."

*[The gospel] It is the power of God to save
From sin and Satan and the grave;
It works the faith which firmly clings
To all the treasures which it brings.
Hymn 116:4*

In the sixth place, there would be the matter of fighting the battle, which the devil had won in the Garden

of Eden, all over again, ensuring that man would win this time. The solution for this would be that God would have to do it himself. Though this would mean that he would have to become a man.

*Forth today the Conqu'ror goeth
Who the foe, sin and woe
Death and hell o'erthroweth
God is man, man to deliver,
His dear Son Now is one
With our blood forever.
Hymn 145:2*

It also should be admitted in this regard that sinful man never was looking for, much less approaching God on his own, to request from him an act of clemency, that is, a way of salvation. Neither the wisdom to think such a thought (1st Corinthians 2:9), nor the will to produce such a concept (John 1:13) went out of the intellect of sinful man. Rather, we are told, Adam and Eve "hid themselves" (Genesis 3:8) from fear of punishment. Aside from this, man, in his state of damnableness, was only capable of and in a state of seething resentment and hatred toward his God. Consult 1st Corinthians 2!

*The Lord looked from His heavenly throne
On all mankind below Him,
To see if there were any one*

*Who truly sought to know Him,
And all his understanding bent
To search His holy Word, intent
To do His will in earnest.*

*But none there was who walked with God
For all aside had slidden,
Delusive paths of folly trod,
And followed lusts forbidden;
Not one there was who practiced good,
Though many deemed, in haughty mood,
Their deeds to God were pleasing.
Hymn 277:2-3*

In spite of this, the Lord took the initiative, as is characteristic of him, as his New Testament parables (Luke 14:16-17; 15:4-10, for instance) and gospel promises bear out (Luke 19:10). The Lord Jesus had compassion on you when you only had hatred for him. He saw you in your iniquities while your eyes were blind to see him in forgiving grace. He found you as you were: lost in your trespasses. Then, driven by his limitless love, he left his holy throne in heaven for this world of woe in order to remove your sins' guilt off you, and to place it on himself; in order to die in hell's fires the death which your guilt had brought upon him, so that in the end Heaven happily could pronounce you innocent and free to enter paradise. Thus not only was he well aware of all of these

tasks, but also he devotionally addressed and lovingly completed them completely, and, for your sake assuredly. Thus the Lord deserves your highest admiration, praise, and thanks for his unsurpassed resourcefulness, ambition, dedication, and love for your soul which he demonstrated in crafting for you what became known as his salvation by promise.

*He saw me ruined in the fall,
Yet loved me notwithstanding all,
He saved me from my lost estate –
His lovingkindness, O how great!
Hymn 92:2*

The inner Workings in the Mind of God in the Creation of a Promise.

In other words, what was God thinking after Adam and Eve fell into sin? God reveals it in his Bible: His spirit was mercy. His intent was to rescue you. His motive was to hand over to you a gift of his grace.

In fact, your salvation is all of your Lord's doing, none of yours. A fuller presentation of this matter would be the following. For instance,

God's spirit - mercy

His intent - to rescue

His motive - to hand over a gift of his grace

His purpose - to sacrifice

His cost - his life

His object - you

His benefit - none

Your benefit - all of the best

His resolve - to get you to heaven

His responsibility - it is all his doing, none of yours

His acts - the saving acts of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit¹

His proof - the sacrifice of himself on the cross

His guaranty - his resurrection

His means - his gospel pledge

His mark - your baptism

His result - your life in heaven

What moved God to save us?

*O Prince of might! Thy mercy show,
Thou God of earth and heaven;
To every sinner here below
Thy saving grace be given!
Hymn 264:7*

To be sure, God's all-knowing mind was not caught off guard by our first parents' fall into sin. How this would be possible is something that we could not comprehend by our limited, human minds. Nevertheless, for our benefit, to convince and to comfort us, the Lord speaks in and teaches in his Bible in terms of cause and effect. That is, God informs us that he took note of the Fall into sin, and mulled it over in his mind.

Furthermore, he was not at a loss as to what to do. He did not punish us in his righteous anger immediately, as he would have been justified in doing. Rather his

¹ The Father saw his plan through; the Son lived a holy life for the sinner, and died the sinner's death in hell; and the Spirit puts this salvation into the sinner's possession.

merciful will brought his intellect to a decision to intervene on our behalf. Out of his grace he immediately went to the soul-cure for our dire situation. In other words, he decided to save us with a way of salvation.

While this Heaven-designed salvation has never “entered into the heart of man” (1st Corinthians 2:9), it now has been revealed to us; that is, the gospel promise “according to the revelation of the hidden knowledge which was kept secret since the world began, but now has been made public, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations” (Romans 16:25-26).

Furthermore, while those who would follow man’s substitutes instead of God’s way of salvation will never advance but simply remain where they are in wretched, spiritual darkness and damnableness, the true salvation of God will be able “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 26:18).

*Before Thee none can boasting stand,
But all must fear Thy strict demand,
And live alone by mercy.*

Hymn 415:2

Yet to our rebellious and self-ruined race “through the tender mercy of God the sunrise [Christ] from on high has visited us, to give light to those who sit in darkness

and in the shadow of death” (Luke 1:78-79), because “God so loved the world” (John 3:16). Indeed, “the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:4-5). Likewise, “the grace of God, that brings salvation to all men, has appeared” (Titus 2:11) in his gospel pledges, “freely by his grace” (Romans 3:24). Thus the way in which the grace in God’s mind chose to rescue us for heaven was with a salvation which would be by a promise.

*From Thee alone comes such high grace,
No works of ours obtain it
Or can gain it;
Our pride hath here no place –
This Thy free promise we embrace.
Hymn 365:4*

What should we say about this grace of God? not enough. Where would we be without it? Just think of how critical it was that God willed to have grace on us, instead of to punish us forever! The devils never received such consideration. They simply received damnation which both they and we rightly deserved. Yet the Lord had compassion on us in our self-inflicted misery, and has shown us rebels goodness even though we have not deserved it. What a shame it is that we could not speak

of his grace endlessly and sing praises about it constantly this side of heaven!

*O that I had a thousand voices!
A mouth to speak with thousand tongues!
My heart which in the Lord rejoices,
Then would proclaim in grateful songs,
To all, wherever I might be,
What great things God hath done for me.
Hymn 62:1*

What would constitute a Promise?

Simply stated, it will be this: a promise will be an offer made to another soul to inform him of acts that will be performed for his benefit. If a rock would pose a problem to you, you just could push it aside. If a tree would need to be dealt with, you simply will cut it down. With people, however, your action would have to be different. People are animate. They are not lifeless objects. They have rational souls, for instance. They think and they will. In fact, their souls have the following mental faculties: intellect, judgment, will, desire, and memory. Thus you must deal with souls in a different manner than mere inanimate objects. You must deal with

them within the framework, structure, and, indeed, the confines of a promise. How?

Understand that since the human race is made up of rational souls, agreements will be needed, whether these would be express or merely implied! For example, pledges are necessary and required in order to communicate, to carry on business, and to have a relationship, such as a marriage. For instance, banks could not operate without promises. In fact, our entire business structure in this country: employers, employees, and customers, would cease to exist without the important bridge to establish relationships, that is, agreements known as “promises.”

You will need to use promises whenever you would come into contact with others.

In other words, though you may not realize it, though you simply may go about your daily routine without ever stopping to think about it, you would need to promise to do or not to do something for others. For example, you would pledge to acknowledge or not to acknowledge their presence. You would promise to listen, or not to listen to them. You would agree to accept or not to accept their offer.

Furthermore, promises merely may be implied or explicit; subtle or formal; verbal or unspoken; a wink and

a nod, or a written and endorsed, ironclad contract; made in good faith or in bad faith.

Thus agreements are needed in those situations in which we come into contact with other rational souls. The framework of the social sphere, which permits relationships to exist at all, will be one of promise.

Moreover, love will be the spirit which would govern you all the while that you would be in contact with others. Your intent in these situations will be either to promote mercy, justice, or saving faith (Matthew 23:23), depending upon the facts confronting you.

Realize, then, that a promise is not simply an isolated word! Be conscious of just how much intense activity would be involved in the making of a simple agreement! For instance, if a homebuyer would make a promise to purchase a new home from a builder, plans will have to be drawn up, financing approved by a lender and its staff, a title of ownership created, and subcontractors lined up to complete all of the various projects: framing, plumbing, masonry, and electrical work. Then the house itself would have to be built, according to plan, and under supervision. Months of labor would be consumed in bringing the house to a completion: to the point where the buyer could begin to enjoy the benefits. Such activity is not uncommon with our contracts. So God's pledge, also, has been accompanied with a great amount of energetic,

monumental, supreme, unsurpassed, and unfathomable saving activity on the part of the Trinity.

How would a Person go about believing a Promise?

Think about this! Better still: Under what circumstances would you not believe a promise? If it would be a stranger who would be doing the promising, that is, if you would not know whether or not this person would be credible; if what anyone would say to you would seem too far-fetched, that is to say, you would not be confident that what is promised will be reliable; especially if it would be a pledge that your sinful flesh would hate to believe.

Thus a person will believe a promise only after certain conditions would be met first, for instance: if the person doing the promising would be credible, that is, truthful, reliable, and competent to keep his pledge; if the promise itself would be credible and believable; and if your sinful flesh would not reject it purely for selfish reasons.

In fact, in this regard, there is not only the problem that your sinful flesh would want to reject what is true, but it will want to believe what is false. This also will be called wishful thinking.

What would constitute a Promise of God?

It will be this: It will be an offer made by God to sinners to inform them of acts that have been performed for their spiritual benefit to get them to heaven.

Furthermore, as we continue to examine God's gospel salvation, understand that because it is a pledge, it will have wonderful multi-purposes to it that will work toward your spiritual benefit! For example, the gospel promise will inform sinners of the disposition of God's heart, namely, that he has grace toward us sinners, who by no means, have deserved it.

In addition, as a pledge, the gospel will bring out the intent of its Maker, which is to rescue us.

Moreover, the gospel will bear out that God, its author, has made an oath in good faith toward us which will testify to his truthfulness in the whole matter.

What is more, God's pledge, by nature, will include a guaranty of God's faithfulness in the performance of his pledge, as the legal authorities would put it, that is, it will assure you that God will carry out those saving acts of his completely as he has agreed to do.

Furthermore, realize that the living Lord acknowledges that you are a rational soul, just as the angels are, and just as he is! Hence he will deal with you as with a soul. That is, he will communicate his pledges to you with words, presenting knowledge to your intellect while addressing your will with benefits in order to move

you both to think and to respond in the godly way in which he wants.

In fact, the promises or the agreements which God will make with men, who would be either in a holy state, such as Adam and Eve, or in a sinful state, will be no different than the pledges which men would make among themselves, except for the weaknesses and the corruptions of man's contracts.

For instance, think of it: If you would like to give someone a gift, what would be the process through which you would go? First of all, you will resolve to give the gift. Then you will follow through and act. On the other hand, if there would happen to be a problem, first you will determine what would need to be done, and then, you will pledge to a person, "This is what I intend to do for you." After this, you would keep your vow by fulfilling its obligations. This is how promises work.

How did God create his Promise?

After he had mercy on our sinful race, the next step, according to his biblical revelation, is that the Lord was moved by this same grace to address this problem, and then to resolve to do something for the whole ruined race, which he did. Since we could not see into God's mind, nor see the inner workings and the decision-making process going on, such as his spirit of mercy, his intent to rescue, his motive to hand over to us a gift of salvation, or

the invisible, saving acts which the Trinity would be performing, the Lord communicated with the doomed world of sinners about these matters by way of his personal pledges.

Then God gave mankind these promises, at first verbally before the time of Moses, but afterward, he had them written down purposely in his Bible.

In other words, first of all, the Almighty would contact and inform lost and damned sinners that because of the grace in his heart, he will come down to earth in the future, and, as their substitute, will do the works that are necessary to pull them out of damnation and to bring them into the mansions of heaven. Then, since these acts had not yet happened (and since few sinners would actually witness the acts of Christ), and since sinners could not see into his heart, God will promise the sinful world that there is grace in his heart, and that he will perform these saving acts. This will become known by the endearing name "the gospel."

Indeed, the gospel report of God's salvation in the Bible will become better understood by your mind the more that you would become familiar with it.

For example, know that though God's way of salvation has never "entered into the heart of man" (1st Corinthians 2:9), yet now this gospel way has been revealed to us; that is, "the revelation of the hidden knowledge which was kept secret since the world began, but now has been made public, and by the prophetic

Scriptures has been made known to all nations" (Romans 16:25-26)! In other words, "the grace of God, that brings salvation to all men, has appeared" (Titus 2:11), since through Adam "sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). As a result, "these will go into everlasting punishment.... into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:46, 41). "At that time you were... strangers from the contracts of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12).

Just the same, "God is the God of salvation; and to God the Lord belong the escapes from death" (Psalm 68:20). "This is the promise which he has promised us: eternal life" (1st John 2:25). "He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

"The Word of this salvation has been sent to you" (Acts 13:26). "Believe to the saving of the soul!" (Hebrews 10:39.)

"God... now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). "Repent and believe in the gospel!" (Mark 1:15.) "If we would confess our sins, [God] will be faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1st John 1:9).

Realize that God has "given to us the greatest and precious promises" (2nd Peter 1:4)! "How will we escape if we would neglect so great a salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3.) Therefore, strive "for the faith of the gospel!" (Philippians 1:27.)

*Implicitly I trust Thee, Lord,
For Thou has promised in Thy word:
“In truth I tell you, who receives
My word, and keeps it, and believes,
Shall never fall God’s wrath beneath,
Shall never taste eternal death.”
Hymn 527:8-9a*

So how would a Promise work in the Matter of Salvation?

How could God give mankind the gift of salvation? It would work in this way: First of all, the Lord would look down on what he could not help but see: the wretched condition of wicked mankind who had saddled themselves with a hopeless condition by being rebels and lawbreakers, who, out of intense hatred for their Creator, burned their bridges between them and the friendship of the all-holy and pure God.

Next, solely because of the grace in his heart, the Lord would be moved by this same grace to address this problem, and would resolve to do something for the whole ruined race. He then would communicate with the doomed mass of sinners that because of the grace in his heart, he would perform certain saving acts that would make it possible for them to enter heaven. Then he would

fulfill his promise by caring out his saving acts, and would personally see to it that we would end up in heaven.

Just the same, the highest and the best conclusion, indeed, the only conclusion to which a sinner on his own ever could and should come, would be the same admission that was wrung out of Peter’s heart when faced with the grim reality that the all-holy Almighty stood before him, as witnessed by an act of his divine power: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8.) Therefore, realize that there is no hope for the sinner that God ever would tolerate him, much less be gracious to him, for the sinner, by himself, has no divine promise of this which would exist naturally in his heart! As a result, he has no notion, no hope, no foundation on which to form any valid conclusion other than that God is obliged by his holiness and anger to depart from the sinner, and to stay departed from him. Indeed, according to Scripture, being forsaken by God will not be something insignificant; it will involve the most unbearable suffering of body and soul (Matthew 27:46).

Again, the confession of Peter: “Depart from me,” was not due to humbleness on Peter’s part, but due only and solely to guilt. Thus how could God ever approach the sinner, such as Peter, with his help when the sinner would put up the obstacle of guilt every time, and rightly so?

If the sinner would be saved at all, God would have to do all of it. For instance, he would have to formulate a

plan of salvation on his own, and keep guilty sinners from participating in the planning and the execution of it. Moreover, he would have to construct it in such a way that it could stand before his justice with integrity, and with lasting endurance. After this, he would have to bring it to man's attention, and then not only overcome man's natural objections, protests, and guilt ("depart from me"), but also convince him with heavenly assurance that "this man receives sinners" (Luke 15:2). In other words, the Lord would have to use his divine power to permeate and to suppress man's natural heart of stone (Ezekiel 36:26), and to overcome his persistent guilt, in order that man might have a sure basis on which definitely to depend, not having some shaky trust that would arise from the wavering weakness of his own feeble will, based on some speculation from his unsound, intellectual process of deduction, which ever would doubt and even reject the very idea that the Almighty ever could receive sinners. But that man would have a solid foundation on which to trust, one of Heaven's own making; the unbreakable, gospel pledge that "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

In fact, see how wonderful and wise your true and triune God is by putting your salvation into the form of a promise! Arguably and theoretically, the divine Godhead could have put his salvation into something else. For example, he could have put it into a string of beads. Yet think of how in this manner your salvation easily could

have been stolen or lost! Indeed, see the disastrous unbelief which is connected with good luck charms which people wear around their necks, that is, with the use of objects to drive away evil: people look to the charm and not to God! To avoid this idolatry, and to remove any other thing that would be uncertain and unassuring, doubtful and unconvincing, the Lord put your salvation into the form of a promise – the opposite of superstition – because he loves you too much and considers your life to be too precious. What a caring Creator he is! Out of safety concerns for your soul, and so that you yourself could and should be certain of it, the Lord did not put his salvation into this or that physical object which could become broken, lost, or otherwise untrustworthy. He put it into a promise: his promise. So trust it!

To be sure, there already had been some promises which God had made to holy mankind before the Fall into sin. For example, the Lord had pledged that in the future he would bring holy mankind into heaven one by one, after mankind had spent some time on earth raising children. He also promised that when a man and a woman would agree to be husband and wife, at that moment he would agree to unite them as man and wife (Genesis 2:22). Furthermore, the Creator likewise pledged that he would provide for man's bodily needs by means of his created earth (Genesis 1:29-30). We distinguish between these and those later, saving pledges of God given to sinful

mankind by referring to the latter as the “gospel promises.”

How has this Salvation by Promise worked in your Case?

It has been done in this manner: The Lord would give you a promise, such as one of his many gospel pledges which he has caused to be written down in his Bible. Not leaving anything to chance, he also would send ministers and missionaries to baptize and to instruct you. Before giving you his gospel pledge, however, he would first prepare you for it by preaching to you his law, in which you will be told that the “anger of God is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18) because of their hardness and their unrepentant heart (Romans 2:5); that the Almighty one day will judge and punish them with his fury. Upon hearing this awful threat, God will use his power to make your intellect convinced of it, and for your heart to be sorry for your sins.

After this, the Lord would hold up to your saddened, sin-filled soul the thrilling pledge that he, your angry Judge, has stepped in for you and intervened out of his grace, and has rescued you out of your punishment. Then the Lord would convert you, that is, he would not let you fumble or lose his promise. He would use his power to move you to grab onto his pledge, and to possess it by an

act of faith, so that you would find in it alone your sure salvation. This is what Luke 1:72 means when the Holy Spirit points out that God “performed the mercy promised to our fathers,” “because he looked on his people and worked out redemption for them” (Luke 1:68). This is also what the apostle declares when he sums up in words of one syllable, that cannot get any simpler, saying, “God gave it through a pledge” (Galatians 3:18).

So where, then, would salvation be found? in the promises of God. How, then, could you get to heaven? by the pledges of God. Of what, then, would you need to do more? to trust in the promises of God. Do so!

*All depends on our possessing
God's free love and grace and blessing,
Though all earthly wealth depart;
He who God for his hath taken,
'Mid the changing world unshaken
Keeps a free, heroic heart.*

Hymn 363:1

The saving Promise as a Contract.

Definition. First of all, a contract is an agreement between two parties in which each would promise to do or to refrain from doing certain acts. Thus it is a pledge which would bind a party to perform what he has

promised to do. As a result, the one party would acquire a claim or right on what the other party had pledged to him. Literally, the English verb “contract” means “to draw together.” This would be the purpose of such an agreement.

A contract also will refer to that document or writing which would contain the agreement of these two parties, listing the terms and conditions, and serving as a proof of their pledges and obligations.

A “covenant,” which the English translators of the Bible have preferred to use instead of the more familiar term “contract,” will mean practically the same thing as a “contract.” Literally, it will mean “a meeting, or agreement, of the minds.”

A “testament” also will mean practically the same thing as a “contract.” This is another term which the English translators of the Bible have favored above “contract.” “Testament” refers not merely to that division of the books of the Bible into two parts which the Church has done, but also to God’s contract of the law (the Old Testament) and of the gospel (the New Testament). Moreover, to call the Lord’s Table a “testament,” as in “last will and testament,” as the English translators of the Bible have done (Matthew 26:28), actually is quite fitting considering that the Lord Jesus was bequeathing the

sacrament to his followers as their possession prior to his imminent death (Hebrews 9:17).

In brief, a contract is a plain promise, for its most essential part is a promise.

Hence not only does Holy Writ call God’s gospel salvation a promise, but it also terms it a contract, since in this agreement self-imposed, rescuing acts are promised, and the saving benefits to the sinner are pledged, for the purpose of drawing the sinner and God back together again.

This is why God made it a salvation by promise. Give him thanks for this!

Furthermore, realize that all contracts are not alike! “Contracts may be classified on several different methods according to the element in them, which is brought to prominence.”² Indeed, the gospel promise, or the salvation contract, which Heaven has made with the human race is unique. To be sure, it is in its own category.

Moreover, it is not a “joint contract,” the kind of which we are most familiar; the one in which there are “two or more promisors, who are jointly bound to fulfill its obligations”;³ for in God’s unique, gospel contract men are not called upon to fulfill any obligation in order to receive Heaven’s soul-rescuing benefits; since the obligations which are stipulated in this gospel contract to

² Henry Campbell Black, *Black’s Law Dictionary*, 5th Edition (Saint Paul: West Publishing Company, 1979), page 292A.

³ *Black’s*, page 293A.

perform, are all his, none of ours. These obligations may be called “God’s saving acts.” They comprise what the Father did; what the Son did; and what the Holy Spirit did.

Hence, for sinners, this gospel contract is all grace, without consideration given toward “any merit or worthiness in” us, since, frankly, we have none. Indeed, if we sinners could have added our sinful contributions to God’s saving acts, we only would have ruined his holy work. As a consequence, we never could be assured (have faith) that it could save us.

So what kind of contract would this be? To describe God’s gospel contract in Western, legal language, it would be defined in this way. First of all, it will be a “unilateral contract.”⁴ This is one in which a person would make a promise to do something for someone else without receiving from him anything in return. In addition, it will be a “gratuitous contract,”⁵ in which the object of the contract is solely the benefit of the person with whom it is made. Likewise, it also will be, as it is called in Latin, a “*nudum pactum*,”⁶ or “bare agreement,” in which this contract is a voluntary promise to the person to whom the pledge is made, without any consideration other than his goodwill toward this person. These features describe exactly what the gospel contract is.

Hence the gospel contract is pure grace; for it has been created solely for your benefit.

Who else would do such a thing for you? The loving Lord has done it so that you could be together with him.

* * *

In the Garden of Eden, when the triune God created the first human pair, a contract was created between the Creator and his subordinate, created beings. It was not a mere acquaintance, but a real contract understood by all and agreed to willingly by all. It was a simple, common, mutual, binding agreement in which all of the parties agreed to fulfill their respective responsibilities. This is demonstrated by their activities as described in the first, few chapters of Genesis.

For example, in this contract God pledged to provide for the physical needs of the pair, giving them food and water, and to provide for their spiritual needs by speaking with them in the evening.

The human pair honored this contract by acknowledging and by serving their Creator as their God, for instance, by physically taking care of their provided home, the Garden, and by leading a holy life as one of their religious duties.

⁴ Black’s, page 294A.

⁵ Black’s, page 293A.

⁶ Black’s, page 961A.

However, this contract soon was broken tragically by the human couple when they sinned. For example, by sinning ever after, Adam and Eve rebelled against their Creator, instead of obeying him. Instead of keeping their agreement to love, they were selfish, they hated, and they maliciously broke all of the commandments which God had given them to keep, to the contempt and the neglect of God.

They broke their promise.

The consequences for breaking this contract had been spelled out by the Creator right from the beginning, namely, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you must not eat; for in the day that you would eat of it, you surely will die” (Genesis 2:17). Indeed, the “soul who would sin must die” (Ezekiel 18:4).

Just the same, out of his grace the Lord wished to reestablish a contract with mankind in which once again they could be on loving terms. The Lord could not reinstate the old contract, for man now had become a sinner. Yet he could draw up a new one, which is what he did. In this new contract, he promised to do certain things for them, which is what a contract is: a promise.

“If there were a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the Law” (Galatians 3:21b).

Yet what was impossible for the Law of God to do, God did out of grace (Romans 8:3-4).

By this new contract God determined to reestablish his kingdom. Realize that when the Ruler of the universe created the first couple, they were the first human members of the kingdom of God! After they rebelled, they left the kingdom of God for the kingdom of the devil. For instance, by sinning, Adam and Eve threw off the yoke of God (Psalm 2:8), though it was easy and light, and by that yoke they had rest for their souls (Matthew 11:29-30). They dishonored God (Romans 2:23) by lying, for example. They resisted and rejected the will of God, that is, “the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2), and followed instead the will of the devil, of the world, and of their newly created sinful flesh.

Nevertheless, the Lord wanted them back in his kingdom. Therefore, to accomplish this, he created a new contract. In other words, through his promises in this contract, the Almighty would reestablish his kingdom, and populate it with men once again. Think of it! As he previously used his powerful words to create the physical universe, so now he would use these same powerful words (2nd Corinthians 4:6) to endow sinners with his image once again (Colossians 3:10) by transforming their minds (Romans 12:2). Yet how could he do this when men still had sinful natures? God would create gospel pledges to do this.

To that end, the Lord would illumine, convert, make righteous, impel to good works, guide, govern,

strengthen, and preserve men to be and to remain in his kingdom.

On the other hand, God would bind the devil, dash his plans, scatter his forces, and destroy his traps; in short, he would pledge to bruise Satan under man's feet (Romans 16:20). Thus the battle that man lost in the Garden to the devil, God would require to be fought all over again. This time, however, God would take man's place. He would be his substitute, his proxy, in taking on a human nature, thus assuring mankind's victory. He would reset the whole matter of the fall into sin, so that as far as Divine Justice was concerned, it would be as if mankind never had fallen into sin; for their lack of righteousness would be compensated for completely by the God-man. In addition, their sentence of punishment also would be served totally by him. What a job the God-man accomplished! What a rescue! This is why it is rightly called a "salvation," a rescue accomplished by the God-man, Jesus Christ, by his saving acts, which are by his grace. To us bystanders, so to speak; that is, to us sinners who stand to receive not merely the most, but actually all of the benefits from these events, it is a salvation by promise; for though we were tasked with none of these saving acts, yet all of our benefits from these acts are pledged to us.

Interestingly, the Hebrew language in the Old Testament will not use the word "to promise." Instead

the Hebrew merely will use either of two words: "to speak" or "to say" in reference to something which God had stated. Consult, for example, *Young's Analytical Concordance*! Yet the New Testament will point back to these same passages in the Old Testament in which either of these two words were used, and declare: "These were promises made by God."

For instance, the apostle Paul will state: "The gospel of God which he promised before through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 1:1-2), and: "We declare to you glad tidings – the promise that was made to the fathers." Stephen the martyr will talk about "when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham" (Acts 7:17).

Therefore, in the Old Testament, anytime that God would say or would speak something, in which he would think a certain way toward sinners in regards to their salvation, or that he would do a certain thing in this regard, this would be referred to by the New Testament as a "promise" of God. In fact, a person validly could translate these passages in Hebrew with "God promised" instead of simply writing "God said," or "God spoke."

Hence though the Old Testament did not include the word "to promise" in its vocabulary, this does not mean that the idea of a promise was unknown to or not used by the minds of the Old Testament people. For example, the Hebrew word for "contract," which

obviously is a promise, and which has been translated in our English Bibles with the old word “covenant,” is used many times by the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament Scriptures. Likewise, oaths, another type of promise, commonly occur in the Old Testament. Moreover, it could be implied plainly from the speech of the Old Testament people whenever they would be making a pledge.

Thus those Old Testament gospel declarations of God that either clearly are called “contracts” in the Old Testament (Genesis 17:7), or are merely statements which God “said” or “spoke” in the Old Testament (Genesis 3:14-15), have been specifically and intentionally called in the New Testament either “promises” (Acts 13:23), or “contracts” (Acts 4:25) by the Holy Spirit. This is something significant.

Therefore, Scripture calls your attention to this matter so that you could and should take notice of it; for after God’s blessed enlightenment of your mind; after you would realize that the simple basis of God’s salvation is a promise, you will see better how all of the other subjects of the Bible naturally will fit in and make sense, for instance, that the function of faith is to believe a promise; that the matters of personal hope, reassurance, and confidence are now possible because of a divine pledge.

Of what would this Contract consist?

This contract of salvation which God, our Savior, made with us, in which he spelled out what he would oblige himself to do to rescue us, would, first of all, have to be substitutionary. That is to say, evil man, being dead in his trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), was in no state of mind ever to accomplish a salvation. Someone else would have to do it for him. Someone who would not be evil. Someone who could do it perfectly. Moreover, someone who would be powerful enough to do it for all men, not just for one, or for a few, but for all sinners.

Thus an angel could not do it, since a created being would have neither the capability to die in hell, nor to live a holy life for the whole world. Only the Almighty could do this, since only he is capable of doing anything (Luke 1:37).

Secondly, according to the laws of Divine Justice, the Lord would have to set up a legitimate transfer of the legal responsibilities from mankind to his appointed substitute. Next, solely for the sinner’s assurance, this transfer would need to be acknowledged publically by Heaven, along with a list of all what was being transferred. Indeed, Scripture notes this, and describes this transfer along with its proceedings thoroughly. See Romans 5:12-21, for example!

In this regard, Divine Justice, which “is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29), first would need to

declare the whole world to be guilty (Romans 5:19; Galatians 3:22), again, not for God's own knowledge, but for ours (John 12:30), which declaration will be an official decree that simply would recognize an existing fact.

After this, God then could declare the whole world to be righteous (Romans 5:18-19). This would amount to a pardon.

Nevertheless, in order for this pardon to realize its goal, all of its requirements would have to be met. For instance, in the first place, God would have to have the gracious will to extend a pardon to sinners. Without this gracious will, there would be no pardon. Think about this! Note how important God's grace is!

Next he would have to declare his pardon publicly and in writing in his Bible so that it would be divinely official as far as men would be concerned. Then he would need to bring this to the attention of mankind, which is bound in the devil's prison of sin and death, urging sinners to read it; assuring them that it is divinely legal and, indeed, the will of the divine Signatory. Upon this the Lord would invite them to believe this pardon, and to enjoy the release and the freedom which it would bring; for the very nature of this gracious announcement will imply that the prisoner could and should believe it to enjoy its stated benefit: his freedom.

Again, since by nature sinners would be unaware of "the thoughts that I think toward you", says the Lord, 'thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and

a hope'" (Jeremiah 29:11), there would be a need to inform them of their pardon. Just the same, since sinners in their malicious state of mind absolutely would reject the things of God (1st Corinthians 2:14), being terrified of his judgments, even of his gracious presence (Luke 5:8; Matthew 17:5-6), and having contempt for his goodness (Matthew 12:22-24), the Lord would need to extend to them his pardoning pledge in the form of a gracious invitation (Luke 14:16-24; Matthew 22:3-4), at times urging them in the strongest possible terms to accept it in order to overcome their misgivings (Luke 14:23). In addition, in order to transform their minds so that they would welcome the invitation with joy, believe the pardoning pledge, and not reject it, so that their "faith should be in the power of God" (1st Corinthians 2:5), the Lord would need to use his divine persuasion included within this invitation, not his divine force which he used when he commanded the devils to come out from the people which they possessed, and they had to comply against their wills (Luke 4:34-36).

Likewise, whenever you would hear of these gospel passages which would promise to you God's love, these pledges will pour into your mind God's powerful, warming love, overcoming your loneliness; or when reading those biblical passages regarding his pledged peace, these passages will dispense the powerful, divine peace of God which will subdue your fears. This is why

repentant criminals, for instance, above all else, wish to hear the story of the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43).

Thus see that at the heart of this whole matter there is: (1) a divine promise of pardon; and (2) a glad response to believe it. Indeed, the function of faith is to believe a promise. Hence this is a salvation by promise.

*Sin's debt, that fearful burden,
Let not your souls distress;
Your guilt the Lord will pardon
And cover with his grace.*
Hymn 136:8

Scripture uses the Term “Seal” to reassure you of your Salvation.

What would the Bible mean by this word?

In our everyday conversation we would use this word in connection with the cover of a jar, can, or bottle. Having just purchased one of these objects, we would describe the container as something which is “sealed” for the express purpose of keeping the contents inside the container pure by preventing foreign matter from entering the container, and ruining the contents.

However, the word “seal” as used by the New Testament of the Bible is associated instead with that old custom of pouring molten wax on a document or a letter, for the purpose of impressing it with a signet ring or some

other hand-held, signet-inscribed object. After the wax would cool, the impression will remain. The reason for this impression was to give the recipient of the sealed paper an assurance that the message which he received from the sender was authentic, since it included a signet impression which was exclusive to the sender. This is the imagery which the Lord will use in a figurative sense to describe something which is genuinely divine.

Why did the Lord choose to use this imagery instead of simply using the word “assure”? This was done in order to grab your attention; to make you think about Heaven’s spiritual process of reassuring your saving faith to make it more strong. Thus this is an additional process which Heaven will use to convince your mind of, and to chase away doubts from his saving gospel pledges.

For example, consider the passage, “He who has received his [Christ’s] testimony, has set to his seal that God is true” (John 3:33)! “Seal” in the original Greek language is used here as a verb, meaning that an impression is being made on the soft wax by an engraved ring or other such object.

Who would be performing this “sealing” in a figurative sense? the gospel believer will. What would it be that he will “seal”? That is to say, of what would he be assured? that God is being truthful in Christ’s testimony about our salvation. What would assure him of this? The testimony of Christ itself. In other words, whoever would believe the gospel testimony made by

Christ will attest to the fact that God is being truthful in this testimony.

Indeed, the confession that “God is true” never could be a mere personal judgment, but a biblically-based admission which Heaven by its power would bring out of anyone who ever would hear Christ’s mighty gospel testimony.

In addition, in 2nd Timothy 2:19 we read, “The foundation of God stands sure, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those that are his’.” The word “seal” here means “that which confirms, ratifies or makes stable” (Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828). This means that the holy Christian church is built upon a firm, divine foundation. In other words, the impression which the Almighty has inscribed upon this foundation for us to read is a gospel promise. Moreover, the pledge which the Holy Spirit chose to use on this occasion, considering the context, is this: “The Lord knows those that are his.” Consequently, such a divine foundation as this comforting, powerful promise accomplishes the purpose of making stable the saving faith of those believers who make up the communion of saints on earth.

What is more, consider Ephesians 1:13-14: In Christ “you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance, to the redemption of the acquired possession.”

The Holy Spirit converts (John 3:5-7; Romans 8:9). Upon conversion, the Spirit of God enters the believer’s soul and dwells there (Romans 8:11; likewise the Son, Ephesians 3:27, and the Father, John 14:23). Heaven considers this indwelling to be a reassurance to you that you are a believer who is headed for heaven.

In Ephesians 1:13 Scripture further considers this indwelling of the Spirit to be a sealing. Thus when the Spirit of God brought you to faith, you were sealed. That is to say, Heaven made an authoritative imprint on you to authenticate you as a believer who is headed for eternal life. This imprint was not a mark or a gospel motto, but the living presence of an important being: The Holy Spirit himself. The Bible now reports this to you. This is done for your reassurance. Moreover, he is called “the Spirit of promise.” which promise? the divine promise of the Father (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4) to convert sinners by sending to them the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, it is the very nature of this work of sealing to authenticate that both the Spirit and the holy gospel will impress upon a man’s faith with divine certainty that he is saved. That is their job. God does not task the fallible, fluctuating, human mind with the determination of what is divinely certain, and what is not.

To be sure, whenever doubting church members would wonder whether they should believe what the Bible has taught or not; whenever unbelievers hold the Bible to be no different than any other religious book, realize that

this clear sealing action of the Word (both the law and the gospel), and of the Spirit of God during the reporting of this Word will impress in a subtle yet sure manner that the biblical words being read are true and divine; that they come from Heaven! Neither man-made religion, nor human philosophy, nor science book, nor volume of human history, nor math book, nor political constitution, nor dictionary has this power. As the apostle teaches: “My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not be based on the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1st Corinthians 3:4-5).

Holy Writ reports divine truth. It is true; and it is divine. At times the Bible even will state the case that it is true and divine (2nd Peter 1:20-21). However, just as you will know heat when you would come across it, and cold, so every time Scripture would speak, the words will emit divine power to convince you that they are true and divine.

Practical application: Thus if an unbeliever ever would ask you how you could be sure that God has saved you, go all the way down to biblical bedrock! Respond: “Because he has promised it.” When this is followed up with: “How could you be so sure it was God who has promised it?” reply: “The biblical promises are divine, not human.”

In fact, the Holy Spirit is not only a living seal dwelling inside us for the purpose of testifying to us with divine certainty though Christ’s gospel that we are saved, but he is also an “earnest” (Ephesians 1:14). This is a legal term. It denotes something which people did already thousands of years ago. In English the complete term would be “earnest money.” It gets its name from the fact that a buyer is in earnest in his attempt to purchase something. Though the buyer could not give the total price at this time, he will hand over to the seller a sizeable amount initially as a good faith gesture to demonstrate that he is sincere in his desire to pay the total price in time. In other words, this would be a down payment. About the only time the average citizen ever would come across the use of this term will be in a real estate transaction involving the purchase of a home.

Hence the Holy Spirit is our divine “earnest money,” namely, he is Heaven’s reassurance to us that our eternal home is waiting for us. Though God’s home is out of sight to us, legally it is our inheritance according to Heaven’s court. Until the time that we could realize our “acquired possession” and “enter into that rest” (Hebrews 4:11), the Lord will confirm it to us by giving us a guaranty that he is being sincere in his salvation contract with us in order to calm our frequent doubting and troubled minds, by giving us something of infinite value to possess until we would take subsequent possession of our eternal home. He will give us the Spirit

himself to reassure us that our name is “written in heaven” (Luke 10:20) “in the book of life.” (Philippians 4:3). What a reassurance!

Incidentally, the German Lutherans early on called baptism a “seal” (the wax impression), being taught by the passages of Romans 4:11 and Colossians 2:11-12 in which, respectively, circumcision is called a “seal,” and in which baptism is compared to Old Testament circumcision as its New Testament counterpart. Subsequently, one of our *Lutheran Confessions* called both of the sacraments “seals.” S

ee Philip Melanchthon, “The Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” *Triglott Concordia*, editors W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1921), pages 261 paragraph 42; 310 ¶14 (in the German Frakturschrift text only with the German word “Siegel”); and 313 ¶20!

*Make us see our great salvation,
Seal us with Thy promise sure;
And present us, in Thy glory,
To Thy Father, cleansed and pure.*
Hymn 186:3

Paul teaches a few Things about God’s gospel Contract.

In the Book of Galatians, the apostle remarks: “Though it only would be a man’s contract, yet if it would

be confirmed, no could annul or add to it” (3:15). “Now to Abraham and to his Seed were the promises made” (3:16). “The Law, which was 430 years later, could not annul the contract that was confirmed before by God to Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect” (3:17).

First of all, note that the apostle uses the words “contract” and “promise” interchangeably! Secondly, he teaches that God’s gospel contract is sure and unalterable; that is, it could not be made null and void, as we would put it. Nor could it ever be changed by making an addition (or a subtraction) to it.

Furthermore, he speaks of a confirmation not only of God’s contract, but also of a contract between ordinary men. How would a man’s contract be confirmed? How would God’s gospel contract be confirmed?

In our Western legal terminology, “to ratify a contract” will mean as much as “to confirm.” “To ratify a contract” will mean that a person will agree to and approve of the terms of a contract that was drawn up on his behalf by another person. For example, businessmen usually will have their attorneys draw up a business agreement which they will then ratify by signing it. Likewise, buyers of homes or of cars will ratify a purchase agreement prepared for them by the sellers of these objects, when they would look it over and then sign it.

Now when God ratified his gospel contract, he did not have someone draw it up for him. Nor did he look

over the gospel contract first before he would agree to it. So what would the Holy Spirit through the apostle mean when he said that the Godhead ratified the gospel contract to Christ, the Seed? For instance, would Christ need assurance that the Deity truly backed the wording of his contract of salvation? No. God ratified his contract to Christ solely to assure you that he divinely agreed with the wording of the gospel contract. It is as simple as that.

Practical application: Thus understand that every gospel promise is an assurance made to you! Indeed, the function of a promise is to assure.

Summary: “You were... strangers from the contracts of promise” (Ephesians 2:12).

“The world by wisdom did not know God; it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe” (1st Corinthians 1:21).

“We preach, warning every man” (Colossians 1:28) “to open their eyes... that they may receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 26:17-18) “to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins” (Luke 1:77).

“You are able... to be... participants of his promise in Christ through the gospel” (Ephesians 3:4).

“To you it has been granted... to believe” (Philippians 1:29).

“Believe to the saving of the soul!” (Hebrews 10:39.)

“A promise remains for entering his rest” (Hebrews 4:1).

“We who have believed do enter that rest (Hebrews 4:3).

Proffer

After the Lord would assure you of the truthfulness and also of the unchangeableness of his gospel contract with you, he will want you to address it and to respond to it. In other words, after he intentionally would put his forgiveness of you into the form of a pledge, he will desire you to believe it. To be sure, the plain reason that a pledge would be given in the first place is so that you will believe it.

Thus God your Savior will send you a message through his Bible on earth and through his ambassadors on earth (2nd Corinthians 5:20) who will point you to this message. They will be “workers together with him” (2nd Corinthians 6:1), that is, missionaries and pastors. Their message will be simple: “You have been saved.” Their accompanying invitation will be: “Believe it! Possess it!”

Would you not agree that an invitation would be natural? However, the existence of sin in the mind of the recipient would frustrate and defeat this purpose. Once again God’s power would have to be included in this gospel invitation in order that it could be brought to bear on your sinful mind to overcome this natural rejection, the doubt, the preference for worldly goods, and the distaste for divine gifts and blessings. “I have loved you

with an everlasting love. Therefore, with lovingkindness have I drawn you” (Jeremiah 31:3).

Moreover, included within any invitation, there will be a proposal. Thus through his ambassadors the Lord will bring his salvation promise to you in the form of a proposal; namely, “that which is offered or propounded for consideration or acceptance” (Noah Webster, *Dictionary*, 1828).

That is, the Lord will present his gospel to you as an offer, that is, “a proposal to be accepted or rejected” (Noah Webster, *Dictionary*, 1828).

To be more precise, it will be a “proffer.” A “proffer” is “an offer proposed for acceptance by another” (Noah Webster, *Dictionary*, 1929).). However, we are more accustomed to use the word “offer.” Hence this is a proposal brought before you, or brought to your attention, for the purpose of presenting it to you so that you could accept it for your benefit. It is an offer exhibited so that it may be taken. Therefore, after the Lord would offer his forgiveness to you as an invitation, he would intend for you to accept it. Do so!

*Deep His love and most enduring,
His desire is ever great
He is calling and alluring
Us to enter heaven's gate.*

Hymn 506:7

Indeed, never will this offer be presented in such a way that a choice to reject it would be offered. To be sure, any rejection would be vile, anti-God, and damnably destructive to the soul.

The parable of the Wedding Reception in Matthew 22:1-14, the Gospel reading which you will hear in church on the 20th Sunday after Trinity Sunday, along with the parable of the Great Supper in Luke 14:16-24, the Gospel reading for the 2nd Sunday after Trinity, are the Bible's descriptions of the spirit, intent, and motive of the Lord's offer of salvation in his gospel pledges. These passages also include the dire and irreversible consequences of rejecting in unbelief God's offer of salvation. “Consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver!” (Psalm 50:22.)

In the first parable, the king, namely, the triune God, “sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding” (Matthew 22:3), and to its accompanying reception dinner. These guests had been invited prior to this, being informed of the date and time (see also Luke 14:16-17). In other words, these people were aware of the Holy Bible which God had provided, with his gospel invitation written on its pages.

To be sure, the Almighty was aware that sinners on earth could not read his mind, and, therefore, could not know about his salvation for them.

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,

Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those
Who love him” (1st Corinthians 2:9).

In addition, since he does not speak audibly as he did to Abraham or to Moses, for instance, the Lord would have to write down in his Bible for their knowledge where his salvation could be found, namely, in his gospel pledges, at the same time offering to them his salvation through these same promises.

Now the loving Lord goes even further than this. In his high concern and zeal for lost souls, he sent out servants: pastors, missionaries, even conversant laymen, to remind the unconverted of his prior gospel pledges. Notice that these servants are sent out twice, meaning: If those who were invited would not be convinced the first time: repeat the effort to convince them!

With the sending out of these servants of God, this offer could and should be highlighted, demonstrated, and personally impressed upon these people face to face, grabbing their attention in order to get them to answer this urgent matter on the spot.

In doing so, the God of all mercies “requests their presence,” that is, he “invites” (Matthew 22:3) them to his wedding dinner, that is, to his salvation. This is simply a metaphor, an expression, and another way of saying that God is offering his gospel promise to these unbelievers to

the intent that they should believe the salvation which he is gifting them.

An important practice for the servants of God who would stress Heaven’s appeal to believe the gospel while the opportunity exists, would be to point out the benefits of doing so. For example, the gospel removes from us the guilt of our sins forever. It assures that Christ underwent our eternal punishment, and completed it for us; that heaven is open; and that Divine Justice has declared us to be righteous. Though the mention of the benefits is subtly implied in the passage (Matthew 22:4), it still is there. In fact, it was brought up deliberately so that it could be stressed to the invited guests as another convincing argument.

Knowing the treacherous mind of the unbelieving sinner, which is obsessed with not merely doubting the pledges of God, but of aggressively hating and spitefully rejecting the “things of the Spirit of God” (1st Corinthians 2:14), the Lord will overcome this deep-seated, outrageous temperament, not only by stressing to his ministers the urgency of the matter of salvation-acceptance (“Go out quickly,” Luke 14:23) which they could and should pass on to the invited ones by their demeanor, but also by urging the invited ones in the strongest terms humanly possible to accept God’s offer: “Compel them to come!” (Luke 14:23.) In other words, the “ambassadors for Christ” (2nd Corinthians 5:20) are to invite not merely in an urgent manner, not simply in a

strong manner, but even more than this, if this would be what it would take: to urge the invited as strongly as they could be impressed without forcing them to do something against their will, exclaiming, for instance, “Do not miss out! You only could gain.”

An additional feature that is brought out by both these parables is that “all is ready” (Luke 14:17). In other words, there would be nothing that the invited guests did or could do to effect the prepared dinner. The host did it all. It was his house, his idea, only his wide resources to be able to set such a fine and extensive table, his decision to have guests, his permission for them to enter his home, and his graciousness to sacrifice so much for them, even though they were far below his exalted station.

Thus sinners have done nothing to bring salvation to themselves. God has done it all by himself out of his mercy, in spite of the world’s unworthiness and malice toward him. For example, he saw to the preparation of salvation. He saw to its public presentation. He even worked to convince his proposed guests to come and to enjoy his pledged salvation, overcoming their innate objections, placing his gospel pledge into their minds in a wonderful way which does no violence to their will, but persuades it in a mild manner.

In summary, then, the salvation of God that affects you does not occur in this manner: God does not treat you as a rock which he would lift up and toss into heaven in order to save you. Rather you are a living, thinking soul

whose intellect and will the Lord will engage by means of kindly announcements, warm proposals, and delightful invitations.

So after the Lord would assure you of the truthfulness of his gospel contract with you, he will want you to address it and to respond to it by trusting it. After he would offer his forgiveness to you in a warm invitation, he will intend for you to accept it. Do so! Do not miss out on it!

*Come, ye sinners, one and all,
Come, ye all have invitation;
Come, obey His gracious call,
Come, accept His free salvation!
Firmly in these words believe:
“Jesus sinners doth receive!”
Hymn 414:4*

Since the Lord is “not willing that any should perish” (2nd Peter 3:9), but “will have all men to be saved” (1st Timothy 2:4), he has brought about “the day of salvation” (2nd Corinthians 6:2). This “day of salvation” is not one certain day, but comprises the whole time of the New Testament. This day is now at hand for you. Thus whenever the gospel invitation to believe God’s salvation pledge is offered to you, this will be the day of your salvation.

Moreover, Scripture speaks of this occasion with great urgency, because it is a serious matter not to let such a life-saving transaction as the transfer of forgiveness to you, to be neglected and lost.

In fact, be aware that God's invitation to believe may be withdrawn at any time, and will be withdrawn sometime (Luke 14:16-20, 24). Compare also Hebrews 3:7-14! In other words, understand that Jesus never promised that he would plead endlessly with sinners to believe. The Lord never has pledged that he will come with limitless invitations after continually being rejected. Rather sinners easily could drive the Son of God away by their doubt and excuses (Luke 14:18-20).

To be sure, we must observe a distinction here between God's offer of his gospel pledge of salvation, and the pledge itself, distinguished as it must be in accurate thought. The gospel pledge itself will not be revoked. However, God's offer of the gospel pledge to the sinner may stop at any time.

Furthermore, be aware that when exhortations are made to believe, such as "Believe the gospel!" (Mark 1:15), these would not be commands, that is, they would not be laws of God that must be obeyed. They will be purely gospel invitations, indeed, urgent offers, expressed in the strongest terms possible in order to overcome any reluctance to accept them.

The Parable of the Salesman

If ever a salesman would want a stranger to buy something from him, what would he need to do? Those people who either have had years of sales' experience, are sales trainers, or those who would have educational degrees in marketing, will give this as a reply, for instance.

First of all, a salesman would have to get you, the potential buyer, who also will be a stranger, to like and to trust him, so that you will have confidence in him, that is, so that you will have trust in what he would have to say, and also in what he would be offering you. To that end, the salesman will smile, act friendly, and be respectful, for example.

Secondly, the salesman would need to point out a need, in fact, a dire need, which you will have without either his product or his services.

Thirdly, this salesman would need to point out the great benefits to you personally which you will receive with either his product or his services.

Fourthly, the salesman should ask you in a nice way to acknowledge this need which you have and those benefits which you would receive by buying his products or his services. Then he would assist you by way of his assurances to reach the conclusion which you could and should have reached already on your own, namely, that it would be to your benefit and to your advantage to buy; and, finally, to coax you to acknowledge that you, indeed,

have reached this conclusion in your mind, and that you now are comfortable with the decision to make the purchase.

Yet notice that the ethical salesman in all of this has neither tricked you, nor tried to manipulate you in any way! He simply has addressed your intellect openly and in good faith by telling you of facts of which you may not have been aware, or of which you may not have been concerned at the time. In a fair manner he also would have addressed your faculty of judgment in order for it to come to a conclusion. After which he would have addressed your desire, and then appealed to your will to act in the form of making a purchase.

In fact, there is nothing unusual in any of this. Rather, this is the way in which your own mind commonly will deal with problems, or with any new information which is brought to your attention which you either must acknowledge, or concerning which you must make a decision. A salesman simply will walk you through this normal, mental process in an orderly, timely, and efficient manner. In fact, a good salesman will be a good teacher.

Likewise, in a much higher and holier manner, when it comes to God's gospel promises, the Lord will do the same.

First of all, he will address you as a thinking, rational soul, and will lay out before your mind news of which you were unaware. In doing so he will address the pertinent faculties of your mind: for example, your

intellect, in order for you to understand his words and promises; next, your judgment: in order that you may reach a conclusion about your spiritual needs, namely, a release from sin's guilt, power, and punishment; then an appeal to your desires by way of his gospel pledge, with an invitation to your will to believe it all.

Thus realize that the Lord will not circumvent the faculties of your mind! Rather he will make use of them. First of all, since "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him," God will reveal these saving things to the sinner (1st Corinthians 2:9-10) by the gospel report which is by the Word of God (Romans 10:17) "through his Spirit" (1st Corinthians 2:10).

Nevertheless, since by nature all of man's faculties are controlled by sin, and, as a result, man could "not receive the things of the Spirit of God" (1st Corinthians 2:14), but automatically will reject them; nor could his faculties by nature ever rightly understand the teachings of the Spirit which would be brought to his attention, since these teachings need to be understood spiritually, the Lord will have to use his divine power in a wonderful way that is designed to permeate the sinner's "stony heart" (Ezekiel 11:19) in a persuasive, impelling, and powerful way which is capable of informing him of God's gospel promises, to convince him of the need to trust them, and to overcome his natural rejection of them. See

that “this was the Lord’s doing; and it is marvelous in our eyes” (Matthew 21:42)!

Indeed, what a wonderful persuader the Lord of salvation is! He takes the initiative and actively and energetically seeks out sinners (for example, Luke 14:16-17; 15:4-7, 20) all of whom are “strangers from the contracts of promise” (Ephesians 2:12), and, by nature, are children under divine anger (Ephesians 2:3). He pities them (Mark 6:34) and, as a result, befriends them (Luke 19:5).

Subsequently, as the Lord of heaven goes about doing “all things well” (Mark 7:37), sending his “sun to rise on the evil and on the good” (Matthew 5:45), speaking words “of grace and of truth” (John 1:17), sinners will become confident to approach him in order to hear him (Luke 5:15; 15:1). At other times, since the hardened state of the sinner’s mind may require a shaking, the Almighty will put the sinner through a crisis to humble his heart.

At which time the Lord will point out to sinners their dire need: “You will die in your sins” (John 8:24), unless they would repent of their trespasses and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15), trusting that Jesus Christ is “the author of eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:9). Moreover, they would need to undergo a rebirth (John 3:3-8), being transformed by the divinely worked renewing of their minds (Romans 12:2), as Scripture describes it. They would have to be made free of (John 8:36) and cleansed

of their sins by the gospel words of Christ (John 15:3) in which he would announce Heaven’s happy decision to transfer the guilt of every sinner to Christ, on the one hand, while transferring the accomplishment of the holy life of Christ, which he lived down here, to every sinner’s moral account (Romans 5:19), on the other hand. Thus the hungry and parched souls of sinners are in dire need of the “Bread of life” (John 6:48-50) and of the fountain (Jeremiah 2:13) of “living water” (John 4:10 & 14) to sustain them from dying an eternal death.

Furthermore, solely in the interest of your salvation, the loving Lord will point out to you the great benefits which you personally could receive because of the Lord’s own acts to rescue your soul. Think of it! The Almighty simply could have ordered you to believe his gospel as you could and should. Yet, once again, he kindly will approach you as a rational being, communicating with you through the faculties of your mind which he, your Creator, has placed within you, reasoning with you regarding his gospel: “Come, let us reason together: though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

To this end, he commonly will make sharp contrasts by comparing law and gospel passages side by side to the intent that you should appreciate all the more the benefits of his gospel pledges. For instance, the Holy Spirit will write:

“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord: (Romans 6:23).”

“When we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

“All have sinned and continue to fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23-24).

“Though you were angry with me, your anger is turned away.... Behold, God is my salvation!” (Isaiah 12:1-2.)

“God is the God of salvation; and to God the Lord belong the escapes from death” (Psalm 68:20).

What would be the benefits of God’s salvation by promise? Actually, there will be so many benefits that it would be difficult, humanly speaking, to make an exhaustive list at one time and in one place. For instance, the Bible uses almost four dozen, different expressions alone in describing the one benefit: the forgiveness of sins.

Furthermore, another benefit of the gospel promise is that it is intended to motivate you to undertake any one of an uncountable number of godly actions, and to avoid the same number of sinful acts, as the apostle does briefly in Ephesians 5:2-27, for example.

Nevertheless, a brief list of the benefits of the salvation by promise, which Scripture itself presents to the sinner, is the following. To have –

The release from the guilt of your sins (Romans 3:19; Hebrews 10:22; 1st Peter 3:21);

The release from the power of the earthly grave (Psalm 49:15);

The escape from a death in hell (Psalm 68:20);

The gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23);

The acquirement of a perfect, human righteousness, gained by Christ (Romans 5:19; 2nd Corinthians 8:9), that will let you into heaven (Matthew 25:46), and will cause God to smile upon you (2nd Thessalonians 2:13);

The admittance into God’s family (Galatians 3:26);

The obtaining of God’s salvation (1st Thessalonians 5:9);

The deliverance from every evil work (2nd Timothy 4:18);

The loving kindness and tender mercies with which God will crown you (Psalm 103:4);

The possession of the mind of Christ (1st Corinthians 2:16);

The ability to do all spiritual things through Christ who strengthens you (Philippians 4:13);

The peace of God (Philippians 4:7), through which you are assured that he is for you, not against you (Romans 8:31);

Access to God’s heavenly throne through prayer night or day (1st John 5:14); and

God’s unfailing companionship (Hebrews 13:5).

Look at all of these advantages!

Indeed, Scripture will make much use of these promised benefits in its efforts not only to invite and to urge sinners to believe the gospel, but also afterwards to keep them believing the gospel through a process of reassuring them continually of its benefits.

Furthermore, the Lord will use these same gospel benefits in order to supply you with the will and the desire to perform your daily good works. Therefore, use these gospel benefits to strengthen, to encourage, and to build up (to edify) yourself and others in the saving faith!

After the Bible, through any of its numerous passages of God's law, will bring its almighty power (Hebrews 4:12; Romans 10:17) to bear upon the sinner, in order to indict and to convict him of his wretched and damnable condition as a lawbreaker against Heaven, in which he hates God and the holy things of God, yet is in a hopeless situation under the anger of almighty God, consigned to await Judgment Day and everlasting death, Scripture not merely will wish or suggest that the sinner should acknowledge all of this, but will demand it of him (Acts 17:30; Mark 1:15; Matthew 3:2), and will insist that the sinner cease and desist from his sinning, and repent immediately and unconditionally; that is to say, the sinner must have a sincere remorse over his sinful state of mind and over his acts, and that he must regret that he ever has

thought and acted this way in willful defiance of God almighty. He must have a change of heart.

Next the Word of God happily will inform the sinner that the Lord Jesus, the world's Savior, actively and energetically will seek out sinners (Luke 19:10) in order to receive them so that he could "heal them," as Scripture puts it (John 12:40), of their sins, having not merely a wish or a desire, but a devoted intent to draw all sinners to himself through the report of his salvation-gaining, cross suffering (John 12:32). What devotion! To that end, the Lord will invite the sinner (Luke 14:16) to believe God's gospel promise of his magnificent, heaven-opening salvation using mild (Luke 14:17: "Come!"), or more urgent and strong exhortations, as the case may call for it (Luke 14:23: "Compel them!").

Since Scripture assures us that our faith in the gospel pledge exists through "the working of God" (Colossians 2:12); that we believe "according to the working of his mighty power" (Ephesians 1:19), and that the intent to believe did not originate with us, but rather with God who continues to grant us faith in Christ (Philippians 1:29), the Lord again will use his divine power in a wonderful way that is designed to permeate the sinner's "stony heart" (Ezekiel 11:19) in a persuasive, impelling, and powerful way to inform him of God's gospel promises, to overcome his natural rejection of them, and then, finally, to convince him and to move him to possess them by an act of faith.

That is, the Holy Spirit, first of all, will approach the intellect of the unregenerated sinner by informing it of gospel facts of which it had not been aware, and of which it formerly had not been concerned. This could be done, for example, through preached, public sermons or by way of private instruction by a minister, by the biblical remarks of a layman, by the reading of the Bible or of a book which repeats biblical doctrine, or by a recollection from memory. Then the Lord also will prompt the faculty of judgment in the soul of sinner to come to a conclusion. After which God will move man's desire, and then urge his will to act by believing his gospel pledges.

Thus a saving faith in the gospel promises will consist of (1) the knowledge of salvation, which would be the role of the intellect; (2) the ongoing decision to believe it, which would be the role of the judgment; (3) the intent to believe it, which would be the role of the will; and (4) an intense longing to believe it, which would be the role of the desire.

This, briefly, would be how God will bring a sinner to believe in his gospel promises. "To you the Word of this salvation has been sent" (Acts 13:26). "See the salvation of God!" (Luke 3:6.) "How will we escape if we would neglect so great a salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3.) "Strive for the faith of the gospel!" (Philippians 1:27.)

Exhortation

"Enter in at the narrow gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction; and there are many who go in by it!" (Matthew 7:14): thus our Lord's gospel urging and his warning. Realize that God's salvation by promise is the only way to heaven! How important, then, it is for you to cling to it! Yet your sinful flesh will urge you to take a much easier way through life, that is, one without repentance; a life that would let you enjoy your lusts instead of denying them to your flesh. Nevertheless, such a life will bring on a tormenting, guilty conscience with no relief. Moreover, without doing the hard work of putting on your table the Bread of Life everyday, your soul will be famished and parched continually. Finally, such a life of spiritual neglect will bring on a life in hell forever. What an irony: a lifetime of fleshly ease will bring on an eternity of unbearable suffering! Do not make this same mistake as so many others! Avoid it! Work hard to "watch and pray," for the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41), and thus wisely "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12)!

A Summary of the Plan of Salvation.

Thus examine God's gracious plan of salvation!
It is a salvation by promise.

The salvation by promise means that you are saved by believing a promise of God. It is as simple as that.

Since this salvation by promise would be based on such a simple plan, it actually will be easy to describe.

For example, to give you knowledge of this plan, the various gospel passages in the Bible at times will reveal either one or more of its parts, such as reporting a saving benefit to you ("Be of good cheer: your sins are forgiven!" Matthew 9:2), or describing one of the saving actions which God performed to produce this benefit ("Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures," 1st Corinthians 15:3).

In addition, a gospel passage will give either a fuller description of this salvation (Romans 5:6, 8-10); or simply a brief summary of it ("He has promised us eternal life," 1st John 2:25).

Furthermore, if these various parts would be assembled in sequence, you will have a thorough presentation of the salvation by promise.

Nevertheless, before this could be demonstrated, first recall the background to this plan of salvation by promise, that is to say, that in the beginning Adam and Eve were created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), that is, they were created righteous! As a result, they were not guilty of anything; neither were they in need of punishment, nor were they in any captivity. They were free and righteous.

Moreover, they were in God's kingdom, namely, in his family. They were on friendly terms with him. They kept their agreement to obey and to serve him.

After being on earth for a while so as to have children, it was God's plan that they would be translated to heaven, as Enoch and Elijah were, to have eternal life.

Instead of pursuing this course, however, Adam and Eve listened to temptation, and fell into sin, and with it, caused all of their descendants to suffer the same consequences, that is to say, they were all out of God's kingdom and into the devil's. They were held captive by sin. They had run up a moral debt, the payment of which to God was a death sentence to be served in hell. In addition, they broke their spiritual contract with God, and hated him; and he them (Psalm 5:5). Consequently, the Almighty owed them nothing but to punish them.

Instead he had grace.

In order to bring the whole ruined race back into his kingdom (Mark 1:15), and to give them eternal life, the triune God formulated a plan of salvation, and then tackled the tasks which would attain this. When these different tasks would be put into sequence, we will get the following summary.

First of all, by inheriting a sinful mind from Adam and Eve called "original sin," and by committing sins in our lives termed "actual sin," we ran up a moral debt, the payment for which, in Heaven's court, is a death sentence: eternal torment.

God the Son then left his throne in heaven, and assumed a human body on earth. Theologians refer to this as the “Incarnation.” The Son did this so that he could become mankind’s human substitute in Heaven’s eyes.

The Son obeyed the Ten Commandments for all of mankind. This task is regarded by the Bible as a payment to God which theologians have termed his “Active Obedience.” He then paid the debt which we owed Divine Justice for sinning. He paid it by serving a punishment, namely, he suffered the eternal torments of hell for everyone beginning at Gethsemane, and finally finishing on the sacrificial altar of his cross. This second payment has been called his “Passive Obedience” by the church’s teachers. Both of these together have been termed “the (two) merits of Christ,” which description often has been used by Christian hymnists, authors, and composers of prayers. Indeed, this two saving acts of Christ were designed to accomplish two things.

First of all, both of these tasks together are considered by the Bible to be the total amount which Jesus Christ needed to pay to liberate us from a captivity; namely, from the captivity not only of our sin-debt, but also from the curse of God’s Law (eternal punishment), and from our bondage under our sinful nature and under the devil. Hence, when considered strictly according to its purpose to liberate us, this total purchase price has been called by the English translators of the Bible our

“ransom” or “redemption,” and the one who liberated us: our “Redeemer.”

On the other hand, whenever this total amount would be viewed as that price which was paid to God as a compensation, then the Bible will refer to this payment as the “atonement,” or the “propitiation.”

The next step: After receiving this total amount on Good Friday afternoon, God the judge retired to his chambers, so to speak, in order to examine this price which Christ just had paid him, and to make a judicial decision about it. The various parts of this decision have been put into the following sequence in order to help you to follow it.

In accord with the prearranged plan of the Trinity, God the judge, first of all, accepted this amount; that is, he credited the human race with the righteousness which Christ had earned for them on earth (the first payment), and then he credited to the human race that second payment which Christ paid to Divine Justice when he was punished in hell. Theologians will express this double crediting as the “Imputation.”

As a result of these wonderful payments which God credited to the sinners’ account, a satisfied Lord considered the whole world to be righteous, and free from punishment. This part of his judicial decision has been referred to as his “Justification.”

Since our righteousness was now an actuality, as far as Divine Justice was concerned, since it was brought

into existence by a legal determination, God pardoned the whole world. Yet, instead of using the word “pardon,” the Bible rather will announce that the world’s sins have been “sent away.” In the original languages of the Bible, Holy Writ uses this expression (2nd Samuel 12:13; Acts 13:38) or its imagery (Psalm 103:12; Micah 7:19) often. Nevertheless, the English translators of the Bible have preferred instead to translate the literal words “to send away” with the word “to forgive.” As Noah Webster in his 1828 *Dictionary* has noted: “the original and proper phrase is to *forgive the offense*, to send it away.”

In addition, the triune God is now at “peace” with the human race because of the saving acts of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1), which peace the angels announced to the shepherds (Luke 2:13), and which peace the Lord handed over to his disciples on Easter evening (John 20:19, 21).

Thus, in our new position as ones considered to be righteous according to God’s judicial decision, the Almighty, who formerly was angry and threatening, now no longer has anything against us. He has become conciliatory toward us. This part of his saving acts has been labeled the “Reconciliation.”

Moreover, not intending to keep these judicial verdicts to himself, God chose to make a pronouncement of them on Easter Sunday in an impressive way. That is, he would create a special event for this. He would raise his Son from the dead. This is called the “Resurrection.”

Furthermore, to the end that this salvation actually could do us some good by reaching us, God used the pardon method. That is to say, he promised us a pardon because of what Christ had done as our substitute. This pardon is clearly pledged or implied in any of the gospel passages in the Bible which God caused to be published and circulated by his missionaries and pastors. To be sure, all by itself this pardon is a pledge.

What is more, since this pardon is a gospel pledge, it will have divine power to reach us and do us some good as our own personal salvation.

In other words, the gospel pardon has the divine power to exhibit to sinners that it is a pardon of their sin, and that they could enjoy this pardon in the obvious, natural way: simply by believing it.

Secondly, this pardon will confer upon the person whom it is addressing the very thing which it is announcing: his pardon from God. This conferring has been given the name “absolution” by the theologians.

Thirdly, the power of this divine pardon will operate on the heart of the listener, and move him to obtain this pardon by an act of faith. Thus faith will believe in a promise: the divinely promised pardon.

These, then, are the three, divine powers which the gospel words of Christ have.

Furthermore, as soon as the sinner happily would accept this pardon, he will become “converted.” Prior to this, he was an unbeliever, and headed for hell. Upon his

conversion, he, for the first time, will take possession of his pardon by a simple act of gospel-powered faith. This part is called the “personal,” or “subjective justification” by the theologians.

Praise and thank the Almighty for his wonderful and gracious salvation! Treasure it! Hold to it!

Scripture will use accounting Terms in explaining its Salvation by Promise.

You may have heard of the expression “to settle accounts.” In order to clear us of our guilt, to deliver us from everlasting punishment, and to allow us into heaven, there, indeed, had to be an “opening up of the books” and a “settling of accounts.”

Usually we do not think of accounting terms when it would come to a description of God’s salvation, but there they are. He himself uses them. For instance, in Matthew 18:23-35, which is the Gospel reading for the Twenty-second Sunday after Trinity, we hear the terms “settle accounts,” “owe,” “pay,” “payment,” “forgive debt,” and “due.”

Likewise, in Romans 6:23 there is “the wages of sin”; “precious,” that is, “costly” (Psalm 49:8); the accounting “books were opened” (Revelation 20:12); “ransom” (Jeremiah 31:11); and “buy back” or “redeem” (Psalm 130:8), and in its form as a noun: “redemption,”

that is, “the price of his release” (Leviticus 25:50), or its technical term: “manumission.”

Why would Scripture use these terms? It will be for the same reason that it has used all the other vocabulary to explain its salvation: to make you more knowledgeable of your salvation (“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly,” Colossians 3:16); in order to increase your saving faith (1st Timothy 1:4) so that you could stand firmly (1st Thessalonians 3:8) against the devil, the world, and your flesh, and having done all: to stand (Ephesians 6:13) in the saving faith in full assurance (Colossians 2:2).

Thus after these accounting passages would be brought to your attention regarding the moral debt which you owe to God, this simply will be part of God’s process to hold you, the sinner, accountable for your debt to Heaven’s ledger: not only in regards to your lack of innocence, which is a theft of yours for which you are liable to make good by a repayment to compensate him, but also in regards to the debt of punishment which you have prompted as a result.

Definition. “Debt” is a word that is commonly understood since it is used often enough in our daily conversation. Debt refers to something which is owed by one party known as “the Debtor,” to another party known as “the creditor.” While most of the time a debt will refer to a sum of money which is owed, our Lord Jesus in his Bible will refer to a moral debt which sinners owe to their

God; something which is not based on any monetary value.

Indeed, in those biblical passages which refer to, describe, or imply our moral obligation to God (that is, God's law, God's will, the Ten Commandments), along with our failure to meet this obligation which the holy and righteous Creator expects of his created beings, as a result of which sinners have run up a moral debt which liability consists of a lack of innocence on the one hand, and a long list of actively performed sins on the other, further accounting terms will come into use to describe this sordid and deplorable predicament; such as:

“Arrears” – the state of being late in the fulfilling of our moral obligation (Matthew 18:25).

“Default” – the failure to fulfill our moral obligation (Matthew 18:25; Romans 5:6a).

“Deficit” – our payment which falls short of the amount required by law (Matthew 18:25; Romans 3:23).

“To owe” – to be bound to pay a debt (Matthew 18:24).

“Accountability” - the state of being responsible to pay; liable (Matthew 18:23).

“Heaven's ledger” – “I saw the dead... standing before God, and books were opened.... The dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:12; see also Matthew 18:24; Hebrews 4:13).

“Canceling a debt” – to terminate our debt lawfully so that it might be made of no effect (Matthew 18:27).

“Penalty” – that which God's law demands payment of by way of our punishment for (1) doing that which God has prohibited, or (2) for not doing what which he has required (Matthew 18:25; Romans 2:5; 2nd Peter 2:9).

Furthermore, this penalty is intended to be not a measure by which some possible compensation could be extracted from the sinner for violating God's holy law. It is solely intended to be a punishment imposed upon the transgressor by Heaven's unbreakable law as a consequence of the commission of a sin.

What would this biblical penalty be? “The soul that sins, it must die” (Ezekiel 18:4); not merely an earthly death (Romans 5:12), but a second death which will follow (Matthew 25:46, 41; Revelation 21:8).

To be sure, when Scripture would make use of these accounting terms, it will not be in reference to money matters, but to moral ones; for there is, indeed, such a thing as a moral accounting for the created soul to his Creator: “Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy!” (Leviticus 19:2.) For example, there are moral debts amassed by the sinner, which the apostle elsewhere terms as “wages” (Romans 6:23), for which the Almighty calls for payment in the form of eternal suffering according to his anger.

Indeed, realize that any proper law will impose a punishment, usually in the form of a fine or in the form of imprisonment!

In addition, before the violator of a law could be set free, a payment must be made, either in the form of money to pay the fine, or in spending time behind bars. In some cases, it will be by execution.

Moreover, each payment must be made according to the law's requirements. For instance, an \$100 fine could not be paid with a box of butter. The law simply would not accept that. Nor could the one who was fined be set free if he would only offer to pay \$90. The law would not accept that either. Only when the violator would meet the law's full demands, will the law be satisfied, release him from his guilt, and no longer impose any punishment on him.

So it is with God.

For example, our sins were violations against his divine law. Therefore, Divine Justice demanded that this violation be paid. What was Heaven's price? Would money do, for example? No. When Simon the sorcerer offered money to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter replied, "May your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!" (Acts 8:20.) Money has no worth in heaven.

The release of our souls from punishment requires a payment more costly than mere money. Indeed, the punishment for violating Heaven's holy laws was neither

a fine nor an imprisonment. The punishment was death. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Adam was warned that "in the day you eat of it you surely will die" (Genesis 2:17).

In brief, then: because man had sinned and had violated God's Ten Commandments, he had amassed a moral debt. This moral debt called for a moral payment. This moral payment is the punishment of eternal death. In other words, sin is so evil, man's punishment would last forever. Neither could man offer some other kind of moral payment as a substitute to release himself from punishment, because he had nothing with which to pay. Remember: the sinner is bankrupt, morally!

This is why the gospel wants to notify you of the "riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus; for by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:7-8). What happy news! God's gospel riches have made the payment which has released you from eternal punishment.

What would be these gospel "riches of his grace?" Examine the books! Look in the Bible at the narrative of your gospel rescue, and see what part these accounting terms play!

Furthermore, be aware that these "riches of his grace" would be decisive, since two tasks that faced God in order for him to assemble and to complete a salvation for the whole ruined race, would be these: First he would

need to assume the responsibility for what could be called mankind's "sin debt." Then he would need to pay it.

Thus, through the use of these accounting terms, Scripture would open your eyes to the reality that not only is your sinful debt so immensely large, but also that the All-holy One's penalty on account of this debt is so infinitely massive, that only God himself ever could pay such a massive amount to himself to settle your account.

Happily for you he does so in his accounting pledge (Matthew 18:27); so gloriously, in fact, considering the consequences, that the psalmist rejoices: "God will buy back my soul from the power of the grave" (Psalm 49:15).

Continuing on with the use of accounting terms, the Bible now offers the solution to the sinner's enormous debt and its resultant, infinite punishment; which solution would dismiss his dark depressions, lift his drooping spirits, and thrill his despondent heart by the cheering and fear-conquering power of the mighty gospel, when it presents the exciting promise of being delivered from this desperate situation, by a rescue means in the only successful way it could be done: by using an accounting device to settle accounts with Divine Justice; by using what is known as a "ransom." "You are bought with a price" (1st Corinthians 6:20).

There are a few words in Hebrew in the Old Testament and two words in Greek in the New Testament which the Bible uses for its meaning of "to ransom," that is, "to buy back." These words will describe either the

ransom amount (a noun), the ransom act itself (a noun), or the action of freeing by a ransom payment (a verb).

Of the two, different Greek words which the New Testament will use, the one will mean literally, "to buy something from the public market place." The implication of this act is that the purchaser will buy some commodity currently under the ownership of the seller, and with that purchase, place this commodity under his own control, that is, under his own ownership.

Our modern mind well could understand this act in regards to groceries and to other personal possessions, but it would be different and foreign to our ordinary way of thinking when it would come to the purchase of a human being. Such a thing today would be unheard of, unless it would be in regards to a kidnapping, or to an historical reference to slavery.

Nevertheless, in the Old and New Testament times it was not uncommon to hear about the ransoming of prisoners of war, of slaves purchasing their freedom with their own wages, or of some friend paying for the release of a criminal sentenced to die, for example.

Our modern mind, accustomed as it is to the current behavior of society under our modern, political laws, easily could understand a ransom payment which is made to release a kidnap victim, or a ransom payment paid for the release of prisoners of war. Yet it might be hard to picture someone that would release a slave willingly. Nevertheless, it did occur.

The technical term which legal authorities use to describe this act is one of which you never may have heard. It is called “manumission.” It is “the act of liberating a slave from bondage and giving him freedom. In a wider sense, releasing or delivering one person from the power of control of another” (“Manumission,” *Black’s Law Dictionary*, 5th edition [Saint Paul: West Publishing, 1979], page 870A). Thus the English translators of the Bible could have used the word “manumission” instead of “ransom,” and would have been quite accurate. However, translators would be wise to avoid the use of words with which the common layman is not familiar, unless it would be necessary (for instance, see Revelation 21:19-20).

In slavery times, manumission would occur when an owner, for benevolent reasons, would free one of his slaves after many years of devoted, faithful, and valuable service, for example, or as an incentive for the younger slaves to be equally as hardworking and faithful. Such actions would be understandable.

Nevertheless, it would hard for us to imagine a case in which someone, as a random act of kindness, would pay an expensive sum of money simply to liberate some slave picked at random.

Just the same, this is what God did for the whole human race of sinners.

*Father of heav’n whose love profound
A ransom for our souls hath found,*

*Before Thy throne we sinners bend;
To us Thy pard’ning love extend.*

Hymn 269:1

Redemption

Furthermore, those biblical Hebrew and Greek words which mean “ransom” or “manumission,” have been translated at times with the word “redeem.” Why the English translators have chosen to translate them with “ransom” at some times, and with “redeem” at others is unknown.

In fact, think about it! How often have you not heard this word? Regularly you have heard it in sermons and read it yourself in the Bible. You even have said it in prayers and sung it in hymns. To be sure, the word “redeem” has become so familiar, that a Christian may hear it without even thinking about what it means, and then move on to the next thought.

From the connection in which “redeem” is used, it would indicate that it must have something to do with salvation. But exactly of what nature this might be, the average Christian might be unsure.

So what exactly would the word “redeem” mean?

First of all, you would have to admit that since you do not use this term at all in your everyday conversation. Since there is no occasion for you to use it, you may not know or, at least, may not be sure of its meaning.

Back in the 1950's, many merchants offered, among others, S & H green stamps. Depending on the amount purchased at a store, the buyer would receive these stamps which, like postage stamps, had a sticky backing when moistened, and were meant to be placed into small booklets. Then a person would take these filled booklets to what was called a "redemption center" and would "redeem" them, that is, trade them in for some merchandise there. To be sure, someone could buy the same merchandise elsewhere for money, but for reasons of appeal these merchants wished to refer to this special practice as a redemption.

This has been the only recent, common, non-religious use of these terms.

Definition. "Redemption" means: The "repurchase of captured goods or prisoners; the act of procuring the deliverance of person or things from the possession and power of captors by the payment of an equivalent; ransom; release.... *In theology*, the purchase of God's favor by the death and sufferings of Christ; the ransom or deliverance of sinners from the bondage of sin and the penalties of God's violated law by the atonement of Christ" ("Redemption," *Noah Webster's First Edition of an American Dictionary*, 1828).

A simple, biblical definition of what "redeem" would mean, in fact, one that could and should be familiar to Lutherans, is the one Luther used in his explanation in his *Small Catechism* to the second part of the *Apostles'*

Creed: "I believe that Jesus Christ... bought and freed me." In other words, we sinners were bound up in a tragic captivity, confined by our sins to a sentence of an unending death by fire, from which we only could be released by being bought and freed by the high price of God's own blood; for "the Scriptures declare that fallen man is a captive, a willing slave to sin, and entirely unable to deliver himself from its bondage and corruption" (L. Boettner).

Indeed, no fewer than three dozen Old and New Testament passages proclaim that God has redeemed us.

This would mean that there was a merciful desire on God's part to get sinners out of one condition into another; that is to say, out of a state of damnableness into a position of becoming heirs of eternal life.

This also would indicate that there was a divinely-lawful and effective way to do this. To be sure, if nothing had been done, sinners would have to remain in their state of damnableness.

"You were not redeemed with corruptible things" (1st Peter 1:18)

The salvation plan of God required a sin-offering. This would consist of the holy body and soul of the God-man, which were meant to suffer in hell in the place of the whole world of sinners. This self-offering the Son of God

willingly undertook. Another name for this sin-offering is the “ransom payment” (see Mark 10:45).

This payment was to be made to the Triune God.

Moreover, Divine Justice had determined when and where this payment should be made. This payment of suffering was made while the Savior was hanging on his cross, a brutal, physical suffering, which was to indicate to us the much more severe suffering of his body and soul in hell.

Upon receiving this payment; that is, after Christ had suffered an eternal death in hell, the death which the whole world had to die for eternity; namely, after “all things were now accomplished” (John 19:28); after this ransom had been paid in full, Divine Justice received this payment, acknowledged it, was satisfied with it, and, on Easter morning, gave to the world a receipt for it. This receipt was the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is how the God’s redemption worked.

The amount of money raised by the first performance of Handel’s *Messiah* secured the release of 142 impoverished people from debtors’ prison. Christ’s suffering in hell released the entire world from the debt it could not pay the Almighty.

Thus proceeding through this plan of salvation, it would look like this:

God “would have all men to be saved” (1st Timothy 2:4) in order for them to live with him for eternity in righteousness and true holiness. Yet how could this be

done if all sinners would have to spend their eternity in hell?

They could be in heaven if they could be released from this predicament lawfully, that is, in accordance with Heaven’s laws.

However, the hindrance to this release is that, according to the Almighty’s holiness and righteousness, the guilty party still must be punished; unless the guilt could be transferred to someone else, and that party could be punished for eternity instead.

Yet who could be found to do this? Who would qualify?

Only God himself could take on such a task.

However, this divine punishment was specifically designed for men. Therefore, the Lord would have to take on a human nature. Then God could substitute for all men, and God would be satisfied with the result. In simple terms, the God-man, Jesus Christ, was handed our bill to pay for it. This is what God determined to do.

Thus when Scripture teaches about its salvation by promise, it will refer at times to that process in which the Savior will free the sinner from the damnable consequences of his slavery to sinfulness, by making a payment to purchase him out of these consequences. This process will go by the familiar name of “redemption,” or “to redeem,” referring to the Savior who is performing it as the “Redeemer.”

For instance, Henry Clay once owed his bank a large sum. Friends, knowing how this troubled him, quietly raised the required amount and paid the full obligation, without informing him. One day, when the worry bothered him more than usually, he went to the bank president to speak with him about his financial problems. "Why," this official told him, "you don't owe us anything." Clay, thinking he had been misunderstood, repeated, "I should like to see you about the money I owe the bank." Again he was assured, "You don't owe us anything." "How can that be?" he demanded. Slowly the banker explained, "Some of your friends paid your notes in full, and you do not owe us a penny." Clay's eyes filled with tears. He tried to speak but could not. With overwhelming relief he turned away and left the bank. In a much higher and holier way, the Lord Jesus voluntarily stepped in and paid your horrible debt, which your lawless thoughts and acts against Heaven had stacked up, saving you from their fiery consequences in eternal damnation.

*Thank God! My Jesus cleanseth me
From all sins I committed,
He paid my debt and set me free,
I, therefore, am acquitted.*

Hymn 189:1

How would this Redemption work in our Case?

While Henry Clay's story was a much-abbreviated version, to give you an example of just how far into detail Scripture will go to describe God's payment of your sin debt, in which he left nothing undone, look at this thorough parable of the same predicament involving you.

That is to say, you would (1) run up a bill which (2) you could not pay; (3) the creditor would demand payment; (4) he would threaten you with the consequences if you would not pay; (5) someone would hear of your debt; (6) he would ponder the evidence and weigh the consequences; (7) his intellect would be moved by his will to help you; (8) he would propose to pay; (9) he would go ahead and pay; (10) he would ask the creditor to accredit this payment to your account; (11) the creditor would comply; (12) the creditor would send you a statement legally and authoritatively declaring that your bill has been paid in full; (13) you would receive possession of this statement, open it, read it, and accept it; and (14) you would announce the glad news to your family and friends.

To win your salvation, God followed and addressed these same steps fully and perfectly. Moreover, in his Bible your loving Lord took special pains to assure you both emphatically and in detail of his full attention to complete each step for a salvation that was certain.

(1) First of all, by falling into sin and then, by passing on that sinful state of mind to every descendant, our first parents and all of their descendants since then have run up a debt, a moral debt to God by their sinful lives. In what way?

God the Maker made man. Hence we are God's children. As such we have the moral duty to behave as his children ought to behave. How should we behave? "Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy!" (Leviticus 19:2.) Whenever we would sin and not act holy, we would not have done our duty. Thus whenever we would sin we would have substituted sinful behavior for holy behavior. As a result, we would owe God for that missing holy behavior. To use some accounting terms: we would have fallen behind, into arrears, and into the red.

Furthermore, even if it were only one sin, it still would be a lack of holy behavior in the past which we never could make up. Hence, we always would owe to God that missing holy behavior.

Just the same, Scripture clearly refers, not to our missing holy behavior, but to our sins as the debts which we owe to God (Matthew 6:12; 18:23-34; Luke 7:41-43). How could the sins which we have committed be called a debt owed to God in any way?

While it certainly is biblically true that we are lacking in righteous behavior, and that this is a real debt, Scripture, nonetheless, clearly and plainly in Matthew

6:12, in 18:23-34, and in Luke 7:41-43 does not refer to this lack of holy behavior as a debt, but in these passages it calls the substituted sinful behavior, which we have committed, the debt which we owe to God. To be sure, properly speaking, it will be the eternal punishment which would be pending on these sins which is owed to God. That is, this punishment could not be dropped. It must be inflicted on the sinner, or "paid," as Scripture prefers to put it briefly. That is, God is waiting for that punishment to be paid to him.

Yet instead of saying, "sin's punishment is the debt owed to God," the Bible purposely chooses to state it simply as, "sin is the debt owed to God." Why? By stating it in this way Holy Writ wants to substitute the use of one word (sin) for another (punishment) which it suggests; substituting the cause (sin) for the effect (punishment). The grammarians would call this figure of speech a "metonymy." For what purpose? By stating the matter in this way the damnableness of our sins would be emphasized to our minds, as well it ought to be.

Thus, first of all, because we sinners lack a righteousness which our holy Maker has every right to expect from us, we are liable and subject for punishment.

In the second place, instead of a holy life which we could and should be living as God's creatures, we have committed sins which also make us liable and subject to the punishment.

* * *

(2) “The Scriptures declare that fallen man is a captive, a willing slave to sin, and entirely unable to deliver himself from its bondage and corruption” (L. Boettner). Hence sinners could not pay God for this bill. In fact, the debt which we owe him is so gigantic, the bill which we have to pay is so enormous that it is unfathomable. It never could be paid off by us, because our punishment must be ongoing into eternity, never ending.

* * *

(3) & (4) Since all men have sinned (Romans 3:23), the whole world is guilty before God (Romans 3:19). As a result, the Triune God is not pleased with, but is angry with sinners (Romans 1:18). As a result, God set a day of reckoning called “Judgment Day.” After which the Creator has threatened to punish all those who have failed to obey his law perfectly (Galatians 3:10).

What would this punishment be? It would be an earthly death (Genesis 2:17; Ezekiel 18:4): the separation of the soul from the body, followed by the second death (Revelation 21:8), that is, by the Almighty’s full, unrestrained anger on man for all eternity, in which man would be confined to “the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Sinful man would

now face an upcoming punishment to which the devils also had been sentenced: God’s full anger poured out on them for eternity. Thus man not only would be shut out from heaven, but he would suffer the most excruciating torment ever without end.

* * *

(5) & (6) God knew about the sinner’s punishment-debt and of also of their debt in the form of a lack of holiness. Since he knows all things he is well aware of the full extent of what sinners owed him, and that they were completely guilty. He also knew that sinners would have to spend eternity paying him back, which would leave no time left for them to enjoy heaven with him. Hence he pondered the evidence and weighed the consequences.

* * *

(7) After doing so the Lord came to a decision. In the high counsels of the holy Trinity, the Deity was moved by his merciful will to design and then, generously to carry to completion a course of salvation so that sinners would be able to live with him in heaven, and not to spend their eternity in hell.

To be sure, as the Deity, the triune God will not have to mull things over first, nor proceed through the

steps of a decision-making process to arrive at a judgment, as his created human beings have to do.

Just the same, the Lord graciously will accommodate himself to our way of thinking in order to help us better understand his reasoning and his acting, by describing his process of thinking in ways in which we are familiar, as when he assures us in Isaiah, "My purpose will rise, and I will do all my desire.... Yes, I have spoken it; yes, I will bring it; I have formed it; yes, I will do it" (Isaiah 46:10, 11; the author's translation).

* * *

(8) & (9) God would propose to pay, and then, would go ahead and pay our debt. Remember, again, that since God was the creditor to whom we owed something, he did not have to make an offer to himself to pay. Nevertheless, as we see from his subsequent, self-sacrificing actions that he was willing to pay the high price for our release from eternal punishment. In order to keep it out of our sin-stained hands so that it would not be ruined, God completed our salvation himself. Indeed, he was the only one mighty enough to do it, for it took the resources of God almighty to do it.

Once again: our salvation came at a terrific price. The Deity had to hand over God the Son to endure the torments of hell for all the billions of sinners. Who could measure the degree of such suffering? Moreover, this

generously was done, not for the sake of God's dearest friends, but for his bitterest enemies. Yet this personal sacrifice on God's part would run so strongly against a sinner's own experience, and would contradict his sinful way of thinking, that a sinner emphatically will reject the very idea as unthinkable, as foolishness (1st Corinthians 2:14), or even damnable if God's divinely powered gospel did not impel our minds to believe it. To be sure, if this dramatic, divinely tragic work of the Son of God on earth were left to be considered merely by the deductive process of our intellect, we would reject it with a vehemence.

What was this payment? Of what did it consist? It would consist of two payments, actually. The first payment would be that the Son of God, after taking on a human body, would live a life of holiness on this earth, doing so out of the right motive: love for God, to make up for all the lives which all the billions of the inhabitants of our world failed to live totally in a holy manner out of love for God. In other words, Christ made a payment to get you into heaven.

Secondly, since all of mankind lived sinful, wicked, and godless lives instead, the Son of God had to make an additional payment. He had to suffer the punishment outlined on God's Law book which all of this lawlessness against the holy, majestic God of purity deserved. He had to endure each sinner's torment in hell for eternity. As a result, he "delivered us from the anger to come" (1st Thessalonians 1:20).

*Thou hast redeemed me, Son of God,
Hast shed for me Thy precious blood,
The Law for my sake hast fulfilled,
And thus Thy Father's wrath hast stilled.*
Hymn 35:5

* * *

(10) & (11) Next God credited these two payments of his Son to your soul-saving account, so to speak. He has done this in his official, gospel declarations in the Bible. In that the Lord no longer charges to the world's account its trespasses, since he "was in Christ," working through him those two, saving acts of his (2nd Corinthians 2:19), you no longer have your sins charged against you, on the one hand, because you are definitely part of the world. On the other hand, "through one Man's righteous act" you will receive "the gift of righteousness" "to eternal life" (Romans 5:18, 17, & 21).

* * *

(12) & (13) After this the Almighty did not keep his gracious decision quietly to himself, but for your benefit made a public pronouncement of it in Scripture known as the "gospel" proclamation. Not content with you finding him (Acts 17:27), he sought you out (Matthew 18:12; Revelation 3:20) by commissioning

missionaries and ministers to bring this saving news to you.

By doing so, see that God your Savior took the initiative once again in this matter, and brought his completed salvation to you for the purpose of handing it over to you, and of putting it into your possession!

How could this be done? How could God manage a transfer of his salvation to you? In what way should he do it?

For example, should God have placed his salvation into some physical object, such as a string of beads, to be worn around your neck? No, for such an object easily could be lost, broken, or stolen (Matthew 6:20). Besides, easily superstitious men would be tempted to put their trust in the beads, as good luck charms, not in God.

Actually, after you would think about it, the safest way would be through words; for words and memory could not be taken physically from your mind. They are there to stay, especially since they would be God's powerful words; the same mighty words which he used to create the universe (2nd Corinthians 4:6). This is what God did.

In effect, he has declared, "I will put my salvation into words – into a statement – assuring you that by my saving acts the whole ungodly, ruined race is now freed from punishment, considered to be righteous (Romans 4:5), and thus now welcomed to enter an open heaven. I will call this 'my gospel promise'. He who would believe

it will be saved. He who would not believe it will be damned” (Mark 16:16).

Furthermore, notice that in regard to your belief: you would not believe in something in order that it will become true! You would believe in something because it already is true. We are told that long after the publishing of Lincoln’s *Emancipation Proclamation* many slaves were kept in servitude because they had not heard of the document which granted them their freedom. Do not make the same mistake! God has proclaimed your release from hell’s punishment, and your freedom to enter heaven. Do not deny yourself this freedom, and remain in hell’s chains! Believe God’s gospel freedom now!

Nevertheless, how could you believe it adequately when you must admit that your poor, weak, sin-saturated mind is slow to believe anything, including the Word of God (Luke 24:25; John 6:60)?

In this the Lord helps you. In effect, he pledges, “I will not leave it up to you and your poor power to believe. I have placed within and inherent to my gospel proclamation this superlative feature: it will have power, so that every time someone would hear my gospel words, those words will power him to believe them. Thus, in doing so, that person will then possess the salvation in the manner that I want him to, assuredly.”

* * *

(14) Having now passed from death to life (John 5:24), you could and should want to confess your Savior before men gladly, being encouraged by the Lord’s pledge, “Whoever would confess me before men, him also will I confess before my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32).

Scripture uses a judicial Procedure in its Salvation by Promise.

The saving acts of God also include legal proceedings. In fact, they resemble an earthly courtroom scene. They are actual legal proceedings, though a spiritual one, over which Divine Justice presides, in which definite moral violations against the Lord of heaven are prosecuted and judged, and on which sentence is passed on the guilty one, while the innocent are acquitted (2nd Corinthians 5:21).

Indeed, after man had sinned, God planned to hold a Judgment Day at the end of this earth’s period of grace, which plan was revealed later on in time in the Bible in numerous prophecies. As the name implies there would be a judging, to be sure, a final one. As in a courtroom scene, evidence would be presented, guilt and innocence would be obvious, and judgment and sentence would be pronounced on the guilty for fitting punishment.

Nevertheless, before this final Judgment would occur, the Almighty planned to hold another court session, a prior one, that would intervene on the behalf of mankind so that no one should have to face the final one. He called this court session "The day of salvation" (Isaiah 49:8; 2nd Corinthians 6:2). This court proceeding would last from Maundy Thursday evening until Easter morning.

What would the case be that would be considered before this court? It would be in regards to a large, technical term which you have heard before which is used by the Bible. This term will describe how you could be let into heaven. This word is "justification." Indeed, realize that this word is a legal term which has to do with legal proceedings, specifically, it describes a judgment made by one with the authority to do so, who would look at the facts of the case, that is, at the evidence, and would officially pronounce a person to be innocent, namely, just or righteous!

For instance, picture to yourself a courtroom scene! In a court session there would three kinds of persons necessary: a judge, whose duty it is to examine the witnesses and their evidence with or without the help of a jury, and to pronounce sentence according to the law on the accused one found guilty. Secondly, there is the accused one himself, who must appear before the judge to hear his sentence. Thirdly, there are witnesses that testify to the guilt or the innocence of the accused.

Just so the matters that would pertain to the acquittal or to the justification of sinners would constitute a spiritual court. For example, in this court God will be the judge. He will conduct the examination of the accused, which will be all of us, and will find that all have sinned. The witnesses, so to speak, in this court are the Law of God, though this is not necessary since the judge knows all things.

Furthermore, what would be the procedure in this court? How would sinners be justified?

In a worldly court the defendant will be acquitted, declared innocent, or justified after he would be found not guilty. However, in Heaven's court all have been found guilty of the crimes which they have committed. All have sinned.

Moreover, according to divine law the sentence for sinning is eternal death, for the soul that sins, it must die (Ezekiel 18:20). While some judges may simply acquit the accused and let him go free, setting aside both crime and law, the Almighty is too holy simply to overlook or to forget our vast violations of his law. Our punishment has to be paid for and our sentences served before those charges could be canceled and their guilt removed. God simply could not set aside his law and still remain just. What his law demands must be done; the punishment which it imposes must be inflicted. Therefore, while a human judge may be moved to liberate a convicted criminal for various reasons, God could not. For instance,

an earthly judge may look at a lawbreaker, acknowledge that he would be guilty, yet would have to admit that in other respects he had been making generous, positive contributions to society, and, accordingly, set him free. However, such things are not permissible in God's court. Having virtue in some matters could not make up for viciousness in others. Reforming, trying to make up for past wrongs, repairing, and patching will carry no weight in the matter of divine justification. "The souls that sins, it must die" is the verdict set in stone by God's unbreakable Law. Heaven's Law must be kept rigidly intact: the sinner must be punished.

Just the same, God loved the world with an infinite love. He wanted every sinner on earth to spend eternity with him in heaven. Yet how could this be possible if they would have to suffer their punishment forever?

Therefore, the loving Lord devised a perfect plan and a wonderful way to meet the exacting demands of his holy law, and yet have sinners spend eternity with him. He turned to his only-begotten Son, his dearest treasure, the one whom he loved greater than any parent has ever loved his child, and sent him to his death in the sinner's place. In other words, the punishment in hell which the entire world deserved, God the Son served for them. It was a hard, crushing death, but Christ did it for you.

Furthermore, since the entire world had failed to obey any of God's commandments, the world also had no righteousness with which to get into heaven, for God

could not have unholy people in paradise. So prior to his punishment, the Son of Man again stepped in and lived a righteous life on earth that was planned to be counted as our holy life; indeed, as if the entire world its whole lifetime long had kept the commandments perfectly.

Thus, in both of these cases, the Son of God stepped in and became our high and holy substitute. To be sure, in earthly courts this sort of substitution may not be permissible, that is, in which a volunteer steps forward, and offers, "Punish me instead, and let this guilty fellow go free!" Yet in God's court it is. Praise his soul-saving mercy! Thus the eternal Son stood up, and declared to God the judge, "I will take on the sinner's guilt and punishment. In addition, I will live a holy life for him. Now let him go free!" Then Christ suffered his full sentence on the cross, and Divine Justice went into its chambers to weigh the matter and to reach a judicial decision.

On the third day, Divine Justice reached a verdict, and instead of banging down his gavel, he chose a most attention-getting way of reassuring the public of it. Divine Justice raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. Subsequently, the mighty Judge turned to the sinful world, and announced, in effect, "What are you doing here? You may go free. I have pronounced you 'just'."

Hence God the Judge made two pronouncements during this court session. First of all, he found God the Son to be guilty of our sins, and sentenced him to the

punishment of them in hell, where the fury of the Almighty for eternity was converged and concentrated solely on Jesus Christ.

Secondly, after Christ finished serving this frightful sentence, Divine Justice pronounced it done, that Christ could now go free, and, subsequently, he declared all sinners to be freed of their sins' guilt and its punishment.

Hence Scripture speaks to us in judicial Terms about its Salvation by Promise.

Why would Scripture do this? Obviously, first of all, it will be to give you knowledge of his salvation for you, which he wants you to have according to his will. Secondly, it will be to reassure your ever-doubting mind that your salvation is certain, since Divine Justice has taken care of all of the judicial matters which, according to his laws governing man, and to his own righteousness, have been satisfied completely.

Thus when Scripture speaks about its salvation by promise, it will describe this matter at times in judicial terms, since, according to Heaven's high, unbreakable laws governing his created, moral beings, there are various procedures that are required for settling lawfully matters of lawbreaking.

To understand this whole procedure of biblical salvation by promise, it would be good then, first of all, to look at a similar and familiar situation from everyday life.

That is, look at a typical case of a lawbreaker, and then follow along as the normal steps are taken against him in a common, legal procedure!

After this would be done, then consider those measures which could be used to accomplish his legal release from his punishment!

Therefore, picture a law-abiding citizen who would break a law, not just any law, but the most serious law which would carry with it the death penalty!

In doing so this citizen would have had a prior intent and a subsequent motive in his mind to break this law, which things, in time, would drive him to commit the illegal act. He also would have had prior, legal knowledge that what he was contemplating was illegal and punishable by death.

This lawless act would come to the attention of the authorities who then would arrest him, and hold him legally responsible for his crime which he had committed as it could be concluded from the facts, that is, from the evidence which is available and obvious that he willfully committed the unlawful deed.

Next he would be brought before a court. Then formal (legal) charges would be brought against him. After this the evidence of his illegal action would be given in order to convince the average, reasonable mind that this man had committed a crime. This convincing evidence will go by the legal name of "proof."

Subsequently, the accused will be found guilty of the act, not innocent of committing it, by those who are competent (authorized) to make such a pronouncement. This conclusion is what is known in legal circles as a “guilty verdict.”

After this the guilty person will be sentenced by the court to an adequate punishment, that is, to one that is fitting to the seriousness of the crime. Thus a “capital offense” will require “capital punishment,” namely, the death sentence.

Now after Adam and Eve fell into sin, all of the above happened in a twinkling of an eye; for in God’s court it is the Almighty who is at once the arresting officer, prosecutor, judge, jury, and warden, and immediately knows all things. Hence any sinning that would be done by any of his created, rational beings will be dealt with by God immediately, for he had warned Adam, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you must not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17). Indeed, “the soul that sins: it must die” (Ezekiel 18:4). Thus as the Almighty dealt immediately with the sinning angels, so God immediately condemned man to die after his sinning.

Incidentally, we learn from Scripture that man would be sentenced to two deaths: an earthly death and an eternal death. However, neither of these deaths would occur immediately, but only after a length of time which God would determine for each man.

Not only did Adam and Eve go through this judicial process with their Creator, but every sinner since then has. In fact, ever since the Fall of Adam and Eve, every time when God’s law passages would be brought to the attention of a sinner, he will go through this whole judicial process in a twinkling of an eye.

Indeed, since by nature the sinner habitually and willfully would refuse to recognize, much less to admit, his criminal lawbreaking against Heaven, those passages of God’s law which have a judicial color to them, could and should be used to remind the sinner that his case has been brought before God’s court; that he has been accused, tried, convicted, sentenced, and awaiting the death sentence; for the sinner, according to his fleshly mind, also will delude himself that his behavior would be above the law, and not liable for punishment.

So how could and should the judicial use of God’s law concern you, the believer? Realize that since Scripture ever warns you to “put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to deceitful lusts” (Ephesians 4:22), to “put to death” (Colossians 3:5), and to crucify “the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24), you must use these judicial passages to suppress severely and without sympathy your sinful nature, which would drag you down into hell!

For example, scold your sinful mind to the effect that presently, in God’s court, “the Lord comes... to

execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds” (Jude 14-15); for “would you think this... that you will escape the judgment of God?” (Romans 2:3.) Indeed, “your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23). Likewise, there exists presently “the handwriting in the decrees that was against us” (Colossians 2:14), in which those who have pleasure in unrighteousness” will “be condemned” (2nd Thessalonians 2:12). To be sure, “those who practice such things are worthy of death (Romans 1:32). “These will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power” (2nd Thessalonians 1:9).

This is how you could and should use these judicial passages of the law of God. This is God’s convicting process for you, the sinner. This is perfectly biblical. Nothing about this would be unreasonable or unjust. In fact, it will be terribly important at any moment of your life; even more serious that if you would be arrested and tried for the worst crime under human law.

So now what would happen to the wretched and ruinous human race? By sinning the rebellious race had been sentenced to a never-ending punishment in hell. Would the Almighty leave it at that, as he had with the fallen angels?

We have been assured that instead of treating the sinful race as he, the holy, just, fair, loving, and gracious

God, treated the angels that fell, or as sinners ought to be treated, he instead decided upon a course of rescuing man.

What would this course be? What divinely legal means would there be that could accomplish sinful man’s release from his eternal death?

First of all, look again at the case of a common criminal! Consider those measures which could be used to accomplish his legal release from punishment!

For instance, in our own human, judicial systems there is a practice known as “Executive clemency.” “Executive” means that it will be done by the head of government, such as a president, or state governor. “Clemency” will refer to the kindness, mercy, or leniency of this act by the executive.

In the case before us, that form of Executive clemency which could be used to accomplish a criminal’s legal release from his punishment will be known as a “pardon.” A pardon will release the individual from the punishment fixed by law for his specific offense. It will be an act of grace which will exempt the individual on whom it is bestowed from the punishment which the law inflicts for a crime which he has committed. A pardon will be a

permanent cancellation of a sentence. Under human laws, a pardon is perfectly legal and acceptable.⁷

This is the course which God took: to pardon all sinners.

* * *

Furthermore, the divine power to move the sinner to believe God's pardon will come only from the true Word of God itself, which will speak the truth of the full capacity of God's pardon without any eclipse of it. Any teaching that would advocate less than a full pardon from Heaven not only will lack this divine convincing-power to its report, but also will introduce sufficient doubt in the sinner's mind that he would not be pardoned at all.

* * *

Moreover, a pardon which is applied to a group of people, such as the whole world, rather than to an individual, is called an "amnesty." Therefore, since "Jesus Christ the righteous... is the satisfaction for our sins... also for the whole world" (1st John 2:1-2), God's gospel promise then, to be accurate, could be called an "amnesty"; of which act Scripture now could assure all sinners highly, pledging that through Jesus Christ's

"righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life," since "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not charging them with their trespasses (2nd Corinthians 5:19). As a result, the sinful world no longer is condemned by God for its sinfulness. It has been given amnesty. How so?

First of all, since the world's sentence has been taken off it legally, and placed on the Son of God legally, that is, in accord with Heaven's will, this death sentence no longer could revert back to the world.

Secondly, by serving the world's punishment satisfactorily and entirely, Christ no longer has to suffer the torments of hell. He has done it completely. He has served his sentence fully to the satisfaction of Divine Justice. Therefore, because Christ has served his sentence fully, there is no reason for this sentence ever to revert back to Christ, much less to the world.

In addition to this, the holy life which he led on earth as a man, he led for all in his capacity as their substitute, with the intent that righteousness, namely, innocence from sin, would be credited to the entire sinful race, which Heaven had pledged to do. On the basis of

⁷ "To pardon" - "to forgive; to remit; as an offense or crime. *Guilt* implies a being bound or subjected to censure, penalty or punishment. To *pardon*, is to *give up* this obligation, and release the offender. We apply the word to the crime or to the person.

We *pardon* an offense, when we remove it from the offender and consider him as not guilty; we *pardon* the offender, when we release or absolve him from his liability to suffer punishment" (Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828).

these two, saving acts of Christ rests God's announced amnesty of the whole world.

*Thou hast redeemed me, Son of God,
Hast shed for me Thy precious blood,
The Law for my sake hast fulfilled,
And thus Thy Father's wrath hast stilled.*

Hymn 35:5

Hence whenever you would hear in hymns, in prayers, and in sermons the familiar term "merit(s) of Christ," realize that it will be referring to these two, saving acts of Christ.

*Though I have grieved Thy Spirit, Lord,
His help and comfort still afford;
And let me now come near Thy throne,
To plead the merits of Thy Son.*

Hymn 419:4

* * *

Hence God's gospel salvation is not a commutation, or even a conditional commutation of sentence, in which the sinner's punishment is made less severe either with or without a condition which the sinner must first meet.

* * *

Nor is the Lord's salvation by promise a "parole" in which a sinner would be released from eternal

punishment after actually serving part of his sentence in hell, for the sinner is excused from serving all of his sentence.

* * *

Furthermore, God's pardon by promise is not a "reprieve" or a "respite," namely, a temporary postponement of inevitable punishment. It is a full pardon. It makes no demands on the sinner to meet certain conditions beforehand in order to receive clemency.

This is important to maintain, for the divine power to move the sinner to believe God's pardon will come only from the true Word of God, speaking the truth of the full capacity of God's pardon without any eclipse of it. Any teaching that would advocate less than a full pardon from Heaven (such as one that would demand the sinner to meet certain conditions beforehand) not only will lack this divine convincing-power to its report, but also will introduce sufficient doubt in the sinner's mind that he has not been pardoned at all.

* * *

Note: To believe the pardon is not a condition of the pardon! A pardon has no conditions. To be sure, in order to be effective, to do one some good, a pardon must be accepted, and not rejected. The U. S. Supreme Court has handed down this decision: If a person would refuse to accept a pardon, he will stay condemned. Just the

same, a pardon must be given without any conditions. This is its nature.

After the emperor Hadrian began to rule Rome, he learned that some of its foremost citizens practiced wholesale fraud. To spare them, he brought the books containing the record of their thefts into the Forum, and with his own hand Hadrian burned every evidence of their crime. This is called “an expungement,” namely, a process or act by which the record of criminal conviction is destroyed, thus removing any record of his public conviction or public guilt. Yet Hadrian could not remove the personal guilt and shame which still resided in these people’s hearts. On the other hand, the divine convincing-power of God’s gospel pledge could remove the guilt and fear of punishment which any sinner will have through the gladdening knowledge that since his sins’ punishment has been transferred to the divine Savior, then his guilt also must have been transferred to Christ as well. Thus gospel power will drive the sense of guilt out of a believer’s conscience.

Nevertheless, under God’s holy law we are not expunged; for there is still a clear record of our guilt, of our sins, and of God’s public condemnation of our sinfulness in many law passages which will surely kill us and drag us down into hell. This is why we need to flee to the gospel pledges; for they contain a clear and reassuring record of what God himself did as our Savior to satisfy, or to fulfill, in accord with Heaven’s laws, the

demands of Divine Justice concerning our sins’ guilt and their punishment.

The pardon Method in God’s Plan of Salvation comes only at a Price.

Furthermore, realize that the pardon method in God’s plan of salvation comes only at a great price! Heaven’s biblical pardon of sinners is different than the civil pardon which state governors and U.S. presidents give. God’s pardon comes at a price. That is, a price has to be paid to satisfy the law of God which was broken.

In other words, divine law will obligate the lawbreaker to pay a moral debt, which he has incurred by breaking the law, in the form of a punishment. Thus whoever would be guilty of lawbreaking will be liable to punishment.

Hence while civil governors could and do bypass their laws when they give out pardons, divine law never could be circumvented.

For example, “When a mob breaks into jail and sets a criminal free, that prisoner is not a legally free man, because the law still retains its claim on him. Violence is not law, but rather an overthrowing of the law. To make a transgressor legally free, the demands of the law must be complied with. Behold here the reason why God would not use His almighty power to set us captives free, because He would not set aside His own Law. He wanted

our liberty, but legally, lawfully, and the Law requires a ransom.... Man had to be redeemed according to law, with judgment and righteousness, and could not be restored by violence or connivance' (Kuegele)" (F. W. Herzberger, *The Family Altar* [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1922], page 63).

Thus the pardon of the whole sinful world came at a great cost. The God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ had to endure the punishment of all sinners in eternal torment before God ever would pardon them. He did this and satisfied divine law, because he paid the debt which sinners owed God's law for breaking it. Thank him for doing so!

Likewise the love of God which saves sinners comes only at a great price. "At the Religious Parliament of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904 a speaker held that the genius of Jesus Christ was shown in that He pointed souls in distress over their sins straight to the love of God; that He preached the Fatherhood of God as an inalienable right even of fallen man, who still was God's image.

"This view seemed to magnify the love of God to sinners but ignored the fact that this love is represented throughout the Scriptures as a redeeming love. It cost God something; He paid a great price for it. Jesus did not merely say, 'God loved the world', but this is what He declared: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only

begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life'.

"The love God extends to sinners as sinners is indeed one manifestation of His general goodness, and benevolence, but it operates in a particular way. As the Creator and Sustainer of all that He has made, he is 'good to all, and his tender mercy is over all his works'....

"It is true, then, that God loves even fallen man as his creature, and employs him for His purposes in the government of this world, as long as He chooses to preserve the present world order. This love of God fallen man shares with every other creature of God. But this is not the love by which God forgives sinful man his sin. That love of God requires an atoning sacrifice and a reconciliation; for man had been created an intelligent and responsible moral being, and his sinning consisted in his rebellion against God and putting the law of God away from himself. Sinning man turned enemy to God, and his natural mind henceforth was 'enmity to God'" (W. H. T. Dau, *Utterances of Jesus* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1938], pages 59-60).

To pardon and to forgive.

Have our English versions of the Bible used the word "to pardon"? Yes, they have. The English translators of the *King James Version*, for example, have used the word "to pardon," in its various forms, at least

sixteen times, but only in the Old Testament, not in the New, in their translation of two, different, Hebrew words. One word means “to lift up and away,” and the other “to send away,” the idea being that sins are to be sent up and away from the sight and the person of the sinner and his Judge.

One of the words in the New Testament Greek that is translated with “forgiveness” in our English Bibles repeats this thought, having the meaning: “the sending away of,” the image being the same as the vivid, attention-getting, hard-to-forget sacrament of the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:21-22), on whose head the priest, by God’s command and promise, laid all the people’s sins, lead the same goat out into the wilderness, and then released him, never to be seen again. Those sins were “sent away,” never to be seen again, neither by God, nor by the people themselves.

Where would the forgiveness of sins fit into this plan of salvation? In our common dictionaries the term “to forgive” is treated as being identical to the word “to pardon,” though in our legal literature only the term “to pardon” is used while “to forgive” is not. In addition, in our common practice of forgiveness we simply would forgive an offending person without demanding a price, or a ransom from him beforehand.

This saving act of God could be referred to also as the “forgiveness of guilt.” Indeed, for all practical purposes, both of these terms would mean the same. Just

the same, the phrase “of sins” will bring to mind the evil which we have committed.

What is more, the *King James Version* translators will use the term “to forgive” in the Old Testament in at least fifty places, curiously using it to translate those very same, Hebrew words which in other places they had translated with the word “to pardon” instead. Examples of this are the following: “Pardon mine iniquity for it is great!” (Psalm 25:11.) “You forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5). It is unknown to me why they would switch their choice of words like this. To be sure, I am aware that there were forty-seven translators of the *King James Version* assigned only certain sections of Scripture to translate. Yet they also met in committee to discuss their translations.

A recent check of a concordance to a Lutheran hymnal showed that the frequency of use of the words “to forgive” and “to pardon” by the hymnists was just about the same.

As for the New Testament, the *King James Version* translators, for instance, will use the word “to forgive,” in its various forms, to translate two, different, Greek words: one word which means “to be gracious to”; and the other “to send away.” Consult *Young’s Analytical Concordance*, for example! Again, “to send away” will not be the imagery that ordinarily will come to mind when the common American would hear the words “to forgive” or “to pardon,” yet this will be the vivid, colorful imagery of

Scripture in such passages as: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12), and the imagery of the scapegoat, upon which the sins of the people were placed; which animal then was led off into the wilderness, never to be seen again. Consult Leviticus 16:20-21!

In our common, secular use of the word “to forgive,” we ordinarily use it to mean “to cease to blame or to feel resentment about an offense or an offender.”

In his translation of the Bible Luther used the German word for “to forgive” also.

Likewise, in the *Apostles’ Creed*, which originally was written in the Greek language, the Greek word which has been translated “forgiveness” means “a sending away.”

Consult also Noah Webster who, in the footnote, has defined “to forgive” as “to send it away”!⁸

⁸ Forgiveness – “to pardon; to remit, as an offense... [to] treat the offender as not guilty. The original and proper phrase is to *forgive the offense*, to send it away, to reject it, that is, not to *impute it*, [put it to] the offender. But by an easy transition, we also use the phrase, to *forgive the person* offending” (Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828).

⁹ The old Latin version of the *Creed* has translated this Greek word with its own term for “a sending away,” namely, with the Latin word *remissio*, from which we have gotten our term “remission.” The physicians in our day will speak of a remission of a disease after a medical treatment has sent back the spread of a disease. Likewise, with good reason, the translators of the *King*

The Synonyms of Forgiveness.

It is due to the influence of the English translation of the *Apostles’ Creed* and to that distinctive phrase in it which its authors chose to sum up the salvation of God that most church writers for centuries now commonly have used the expression “the forgiveness of sins,” literally, as the original version of the *Apostles’ Creed* has it in the Greek “the sending away of sins” (Acts 13:38).⁹ Just the same, the Lord recognizes that his remarkable report of salvation is too wonderful an announcement to be limited to one term only. Therefore, the Lord, who is the creator of all human thought and expression, exhausts the limits of our language in order to paint for you such colorful portrayals of his salvation, which are rich in

James Version and the *New King James Version*, for example, in a few instances, but not commonly, have used the word “remission” to translate that Greek word which means “a sending away” of sins. Indeed, the English version of the *Nicene Creed* which we use reads “the remission of sins.”

What word have the Germans used in the *Lutheran Book of Concord* in the two creeds to translate the original Greek word for “a sending away”? They have used the word which corresponds to our word “forgiveness.”

revelation, by employing vivid metaphors, striking scenes, and blazon images.

Listen to the almost four dozen different descriptions which the Lord uses to portray his salvation for you!

The assuring Almighty describes his salvation at length as -

1. Being gracious to you (Colossians 2:13);
2. Being merciful to you (Luke 1:78) to as great an extent as heaven is high above the earth (Psalm 103:11);
3. Sighing deeply in pity over your misery, and being moved to act ("to comfort" you, Isaiah 40:1);
4. Casting your sin behind his back (Isaiah 38:17);
5. Drowning your sin in the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19);
6. Separating your sin from you (2nd Samuel 12:13) by sending it away (as with a scapegoat, Leviticus 16:10);
7. Putting sin far off (Psalm 103:12), as far as the east is from the west;
8. Setting you free by the payment of a ransom, which ransom is the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7);

9. Freeing you from all your iniquities by paying a price (Psalm 130:8);
10. Freeing you from the power of the grave by paying a price (Hosea 13:14a);
11. Lifting sin up and away from you (Psalm 25:18) multiple times (Isaiah 55:7);
12. Loosening sin away (Luke 6:37);
13. Having your heart sprinkled with the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:22 & 19; 4:14; Leviticus 16:14-16);
14. Washing you thoroughly of iniquity (Psalm 51:2) in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 5:9), who is Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:5);
15. Cleansing you with hyssop (Psalm 51:7), a plant dipped in water used for sprinkling in a cleansing ceremony (Numbers 19:18);
16. Having your body washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:22; Numbers 19:19);
17. Blotting out sin, that is, wiping it up, absorbing it, or erasing it (Psalm 51:1) as greatly as a cloud could (Isaiah 44:22);
18. Covering your sin (Psalm 32:1);
19. No longer remembering your sin (Psalm 25:7);
20. Hiding his face from your sins (Psalm 51:9);
21. Making his face to shine upon you (Psalm 31:16);
22. Lifting up his face to you (Numbers 6:26);
23. Passing over your sin (Romans 3:25);

- 24. Changing sin's color from guilty red to innocent white (Isaiah 1:18);
- 25. Rescuing you from your sins (Matthew 1:21);
- 26. Delivering you from all your transgressions (Psalm 39:8);
- 27. Not retaining his anger against you (Micah 7:18);
- 28. Turning away from the fierceness of his anger (Psalm 85:3b);
- 29. Drawing his unrestrained wrath back to himself (Psalm 85:3a);
- 30. Having his anger turned away from you (Hosea 14:4);
- 31. Not causing his anger to fall on you (Jeremiah 3:12);
- 32. Causing his anger toward you to cease (Psalm 85:4);
- 33. Turning to you according to the multitude of his tender mercies (Psalm 69:16);
- 34. Being reconciled to you (2nd Corinthians 5:19);
- 35. Making peace through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:20);
- 36. Having broken down the middle wall of partition [Matthew 27:51] between us (Ephesians 2:14);
- 37. Paying off your iniquity ("to pardon," Isaiah 40:2);
- 38. Not charging iniquity to your account (Psalm 32:2);

- 39. Erasing the handwriting in the decrees against you (Colossians 2:14) which indicted you with guilt;
- 40. Having nailed this erased handwriting to his cross (Colossians 2:14) as a public testimony that your sin debt has been paid in full;
- 41. Giving to you the Lord's righteousness (Jeremiah 33:16);
- 42. Declaring you to be righteous (Romans 4:5);
- 43. Bringing forth the declaration of righteousness (Isaiah 42:1);
- 44. Clothing you with the garments of salvation (Isaiah 63:10);
- 45. Being a light to the peoples (Isaiah 51:4); and
- 46. Making you clean (John 15:3).

Realize that your loving Lord has expressed these synonyms of forgiveness, not for his sake, but for yours! He has designed them to rivet your attention to them in order to bring you into contact with their power. After that is accomplished, God's chief purpose is to use their great gospel might to convince you with absolute assurance that his salvation already has been accomplished for you decisively.

Believe it!

"Blessed are those who hear the Word of God, and keep it!" (Luke 11:28.)

Scripture speaks to us in judicial Terms regarding our State of Guilt.

Though its sense is found throughout the Bible in many of the law passages, the actual word “guilt” seldom appears in the Old Testament Hebrew or in the New Testament Greek words of Scripture whenever there would be a discussion of our offences against the law of the Almighty. This is remarkable.

For example, though in a court trial the words “guilty” or “not guilty” will be used freely, it will not be so in the Bible. Rather, when it would wish to condemn us, Scripture will bring up the subject of our sins.

What would be the benefit of having Scripture so often condemn us pointedly for our sins, rather than for our guilt? For instance, commonly Scripture has announced, “Your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23); “They are all under sin” (Romans 3:9); and “You will die in your sins” (John 8:24), but rarely has it stated, By “whatever the law says... all the world may become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19).

It will be this. If a prosecutor in court, for example, simply were to say to the accused repeatedly, “You are guilty,” the accused typically will think, “Of what? What have I done wrong?” Yet if that same prosecutor would bring up and repeatedly refer to all the

various crimes which the accused had committed, the accused himself will be convinced of his guilt, without any need of the prosecutor’s conclusion to that effect.

Thus the Word of God has chosen to use the word “sin” or its brothers “iniquity,” “transgression,” and “trespass” to impress upon sinners all the more forcefully their guilt and shame by reminding them impressively of what they ought to be ashamed. Hence the Spirit of God has used this arresting method commonly in his law passages to convict the sinner decisively.

Indeed, this same method of substituting “sin” for “guilt” has been used, for instance, in the Confession of Sins found in the hymnal which the congregation confesses every Sunday.

Therefore, though Scripture seldom has used the term “guilt” in condemning us, it has expressed the thought behind these words clearly, often, and sufficiently.

This is brought out in the case when Scripture has used the word “guilt,” that is to say, in Ezra 9:6, which is an example of Hebrew parallel poetry, in which the second line will restate the meaning of the first line by using different words. Thus the first line: “Our iniquities have risen higher than our heads” is echoed by the thought of the second line: “Our guilt has grown up to the heavens.” Thus Scripture points out that our iniquities consist of our guilt.

Furthermore, a good instruction in the meaning of the word “guilt” will be this explanation given by Noah Webster in his 1828 *Dictionary*:

“That state of a moral agent which results from his actual commission of a crime or offense, knowing it to be a crime, or violation of law. To constitute guilt there must be a moral agent enjoying freedom of will, and capable of distinguishing between right and wrong, and a willful or intentional violation of a known law, or rule of duty. The guilt of a person exists, as soon as the crime is committed; but to evince [to show clearly] it to others, it must be proved by confession, or conviction in due course of law. Guilt renders a person a debtor to the law, as it binds him to pay a penalty in money or suffering. Guilt therefore implies both criminality and liableness to punishment. Guilt may proceed either from a positive act or breach of law, or from voluntary neglect of known duty.”

What could we learn from this subject of guilt? How would it concern us biblically?

First of all, realize that sin, for example, drunkenness, could not occur by itself. It would take a person to bring it about! Thus the axiom taught by some Protestants in the mid 1900’s: “God hates sin, but not the sinner,” is both senseless and unbiblical.

In addition, when a rational soul would sin, it will place him into a state of criminality, or guilt, whether he would wish to recognize it and to admit it or not; whether it would be an evil thought which the public could not see,

or an evil public act, the fact of which other human beings could and should recognize.

Moreover, understand that before a rational soul would have a sinful thought, or would commit a sinful act, he would be innocent of these things! However, after he would do them, he no longer will be innocent of them, but will have transported himself into a state of criminality, in which state anyone could find fault with him, blame him, consider him to be culpable, charge him with wrongdoing, and censure him, in addition to the shame which is produced by his own conscience when it acts like a judge: comparing his evil deed to “the law [of God] written in” his heart, and pronouncing judgment (Romans 2:15). Thus, for instance, we have civil courts which exist to “bear the sword not in vain” (Romans 13:4); that is, to establish the case of one’s criminality, or of his innocence, employing the familiar expressions “guilty” or “not guilty.”

The all holy Judge who created us, against whom we rebel, whose laws we break, is our arrestor, arraigner, prosecutor, judge, and jury. He is also the executioner. Against him only have we sinned (Psalm 51:4). His all-seeing eye notes our evil thoughts, and witnesses every evil act which we commit against his Ten Commandments.

Moreover, these sins display our criminality. Hence we are not in a state of innocence, but in one of guilt. As a result, we lack a righteousness which is

necessary to be on friendly terms with God, and to be allowed into heaven. To change this, someone mighty enough would have to supply us with a righteousness, that is, with a state of innocence, for we could not. What is more, it would have to be an innocence flawless enough for Heaven to accept.

Furthermore, there will be another consequence to anyone found in a state of guilt. He will be a debtor to the law. That is to say, the law will obligate the lawbreaker to pay a moral debt which he has incurred by breaking the law, a bill, a penalty, either in the form of a fine of money, or in the form of a punishment. Thus whoever would be guilty of lawbreaking will be liable to punishment.

Just so we sinners, in our perpetual state of criminality ever since our conception, were debtors to the Ten Commandments since we had broken them. As a result, we were bound to pay the penalty for violating these laws of the Almighty, namely, the Almighty's punishment: to suffer under the full anger of God for eternity in flames which will never end.

How could this guilt ever be lifted from us?

How could we ever be freed from guilt and its consequence: eternal punishment, so that instead we could spend our everlasting days in the mansions above?

Some powerful person would have to suffer our eternal torment for us in an act of substitution which God would accept to free us for a life in heaven.

What is more, someone also would have to live a guilt-free life for us; a life that was completely innocent which we could obtain and possess for our own; and one which Heaven would allow. Then with this flawless righteousness we could be let into eternal life instead of suffering forever in hell.

This is the plan which Heaven devised. Our compassionate Lord Jesus Christ carried it out for us. He accomplished these two things for us to the saving of our souls.

“You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich” (2nd Corinthians 8:9) – rich with righteousness. Out of his great love the Son of God gave up his well-being. He sacrificed it for an intense period of grief and suffering down here on this earth beginning at Gethsemane, in which he endured in flames the total anger of Divine Justice for eternity not for just one man, or for a handful of men, but for all the uncountable billions of sinners ever born into this world; a sum and degree of pain and torment which no human mind could calculate. Thus Divine Justice transferred our state of guilt unto the Lord Jesus Christ so that he could bear its punishment for us. As a result of this transfer, he became poor, morally speaking.

This is why the sin and the guilt which Christ confesses in Scripture (Psalm 69:5) and feels in his

conscience (Matthew 27:46; 26:37-38) are not his own, but the transferred sin and guilt of the world, as Scripture states, Isaiah 53:6: “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all,” and 2nd Corinthians 5:21: “[God] has made him [Christ], who knew no sin, to be sin for us.”

Believe these words! To be sure, Christ your Savior pledges: “If you would abide in my word, you will be my disciples indeed. And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32); free from guilt, and free from its penalty: eternal death. “Therefore, since the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36); free to enter heaven.

Scripture also speaks to us in judicial terms of Christ’s punishment on the altar of his cross.

Scripture also speaks to us in judicial terms of Christ’s punishment on the altar of his cross. Christ “was delivered for our offenses” (Romans 4:25). He “bore our sins in his own body on the tree” (1st Peter 2:24).

Starting in the Garden of Gethsemane, our Lord began his sentence of being punished (Luke 22:44). However, this was interrupted for a time until it began once again on his cross on Calvary. The form of his punishment consisted of suffering under the full force of the anger of Divine Justice against, not just one sinner for one sin, but against all of the sins committed by all of the

billions of sinners for which their punishment would last for an eternity. Who could fathom the amount of punishment this would consist?

Christ then completed his enormous sentence of eternal death at three in the afternoon on Good Friday. After this there was nothing left for which he must be punished. He had completed his sentence fully.

Now it would be up to Divine Justice to recognize this fact judicially, since this whole matter of Christ’s saving work proceeded in a proper, divine, judicial manner, following Heaven’s prescribed laws regarding the arrest, prosecution, sentencing, and punishment of the guilty, sinning party.

However, this was not done immediately, for God had a good, gospel reason to wait until Easter to make his official announcement regarding Christ’s completion of his sentence, and of its blessing for the race of sinners.

Instead, immediately after Christ died on Good Friday, God left his courtroom of divine justice, and went into his private chambers to ponder. He considered the evidence. He recounted in his mind the saving acts which Christ just had completed, and noted how he had obeyed the law perfectly in our place. Next he considered how Jesus also had undergone the punishment for the sinful race as its substitute. Then he came to a decision. After this he came out of his judicial chambers on Easter morning with the decision that he would absolve the

human race of its sins. He would declare it to be righteous.

Yet he would do this not merely by releasing a statement to this effect. Rather he would do it in an impressive manner to get your full attention. In fact, he would do it by an astounding act. He would raise the dead body of his Son back to life; and this is what he did. God raised up his Son on Easter morning as a declaration of our righteousness, “for our justification,” as the more familiar statement in Romans 4:25 has it.

*My manifold transgression
Henceforth can harm me none,
Since Jesus' bloody passion
For me God's grace hath won.
Hymn 197:3*

Justification.

What kind of salvation would God create?

This matter is described as “salvation” because there would be a saving action involved, that is, a rescue from a very bad and disastrous ending awaiting men’s sin-stained souls: the burning anger of the Almighty himself for eternity, raging in intensity so much that its horror is beyond calculation and description. Scripture has pictured it as a burning lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).

Burn victims in hospitals have testified that there would be no greater pain than to be burned. To be sure, people have been seen jumping from burning buildings to their certain deaths, preferring that rather than to face the horror of being consumed by flames.

Again, what kind of salvation would God create? Remember: after our parents had sinned in the Garden of Eden, the Almighty did not punish them immediately as they had deserved. The Lord had grace in his heart. He still wanted the human race which he had created to be with him in heaven.

Just the same, he could not have sinners in his holy realm such as Cain, who had thoughts of hatred in his heart, and carried them over into overt acts (Genesis 4:6 & 8).

So how could the Lord accomplish such a salvation that could change the hearts of sinners so that they would want to live a holy life? Think about it!

If he were consulted, man would propose, for example, that as Christ touched the leper with his hand to dispel his leprosy (Luke 5:13), so the Lord should make sinners holy by eradicating sin entirely out of their minds, and return them to that state in which he had created them: innocent and holy.

The problem with this plan is that newly-cleansed minds still could fall back into sin at some point in time, and then be lost for eternal punishment all over again. Even if such men with newly-cleansed minds did not fall

back into sin for the rest of their time on earth, they still would be liable for eternal punishment for those sins which they previously had committed.

Indeed, of all of the foolish plans which sin-based minds have concocted to pacify the offended Deity, this single, biblical idea of grace on the part of the Supreme Deity by which sinners would be released, since their guilt and punishment would be transferred to another, and his righteousness to them, ever has been unthinkable to man.

Furthermore, all of the salvation plans of men have lacked one vital component: divine, convincing power. Without this, men, never could be certain of it; doubtful, but never convinced. Indeed, only a promise from God will have this divine, convincing power.

To be sure, by this same gospel promise the Lord pledged that he would declare us to be righteous, or just. In other words, as the theologians would like to call it, Heaven would “justify” us.

Justification! This is the foundation of Heaven’s salvation for us poor sinners.

This is a technical term that has come down to us from the Western Church’s old, Latin-using days.

Indeed, this has become the preferred word which the translators and the theologians have used instead of the lengthy description, for instance: “the process to get sinners to become righteous, and to be released legitimately from the guilt of their crimes, and to be freed from the punishment due them.”

What would be meant by “justification”? “Justification” is one of those words which we never use in our everyday conversation. Commonly, only in church, or in church literature, would we ever find it. As a result, church members could be uncertain about its scriptural meaning, especially if they would be asked at random to define it, for instance.

“Justification” means “the act of making sinners righteous.” God has performed this act. Moreover, he clearly pledges that he has made us righteous prior to the time when we believed it, while we were still unbelievers, in fact (Romans 4:5; 5:8), by declaring us to be righteous. Christ “will justify many, for he will bear their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:11). “Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1st Peter 3:18).

Our Lutheran Confessions define it thusly: “The word justify here means to declare righteous and free from sins, and to absolve one from eternal punishment for the sake of Christ’s righteousness, which is imputed by God to faith” (“Formula of Concord,” Thorough Declaration, III, *Triglot Concordia*, editors W. H.T. Dau and F. Bente [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1921], page 921, paragraph 17).

“‘To be justified’ means that out of unjust men just men are made, or born again” (Philip Melancthon, “The Apology [Defense] of the Augsburg Confession,” Article IV [II], *Triglot Concordia*, editors W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1921], page 141, ¶72).

“Justification is only a matter freely promised for Christ’s sake and therefore is always received before God by faith alone (Philip Melanchthon, “The Apology [Defense] of the Augsburg Confession,” Article III, *Triglot Concordia*, editors W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1921], page 179, ¶96). “To attain the remission of sins is to be justified, according to Ps. 32:1: ‘Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven’” (Philip Melanchthon, “The Apology [Defense] of the Augsburg Confession,” Article IV [II], *Triglot Concordia*, editors W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1921], page 143, ¶76).

“To be justified does not mean that a righteous man is made out of a wicked man, but to be pronounced righteous” (Philip Melanchthon, “The Apology [Defense] of the Augsburg Confession,” Article III, *Triglot Concordia*, editors W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1921], page 191, ¶131)

Would you need a righteousness? Realize that you are in desperate need of one! For instance, recall how many times in your life your own conscience later on has accused you of wrongdoing, though at the time you thought that you were pursuing a smart course of action! In fact, every day you will be found doing such things as promise-breaking, lying, slandering, gossiping, fault finding, mocking, being selfish, and other such lawless behavior before the all-seeing Almighty who watches your every move, and constantly peers into the depths of your soul, and accuses you with his condemning verdict: “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Genesis 8:21); and: “Out of the heart of men proceed

evil thoughts, adulteries... murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit... pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man” (Mark 7:21-23). Indeed, “those who practice such things are worthy of death” (Romans 1:32), Holy Writ threatens.

Subsequently, the unbreakable Bible will place your conduct on the truly accurate scales of Divine Justice, and report: “all of” your “righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6)!

Hence, to create this righteousness for you, the Son of God came down to earth, assumed a human body, and lived a just life: so that, on the one hand, he could accomplish what you had failed miserably to do, namely, to lead a righteous life; and so that, on the other hand, he could present you “with white garments” (Revelation 3:18); “with the garments of salvation... with the robe of righteousness,” as Scripture calls it (Isaiah 61:10). As a result, as the Bible puts it, you “have been made the righteousness of God” (2nd Corinthians 5:21) because of the work which Christ did for you. To be sure, think of the devotion which he had for your soul which made him, “the Lord, our righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6), leave his heavenly throne for this sin-cursed world solely to help you!

In addition, so that you could enjoy your gift of righteousness, and not spend the rest of your eternity in hell suffering the punishment which you deserved for your sin-stained life, the Lord Jesus also has served out

your sentence in hell's horrors for you, also according to his unbreakable pledge. Thus, according to the Almighty's all-knowing mind, nothing has been overlooked, everything have been accomplished to bring you into eternal life. Think of it! Now believe it!

Admit it, then, and face the fact that, in the first place, you have no righteousness which to offer God, and that, in the second place, your sinful existence is, therefore, just one, lifelong march toward death; then judgment; then the second death of eternal punishment!

Would there be anything which you could do about this? No; nothing. Let this fact sink in!

Nevertheless, the God of heaven stepped in and did something. First of all, why? Why would he do such a thing? What would be his intent? It was solely his grace. He wanted to spare you from the punishment of your sins in hell's horrors, so that you could live with him above in happiness.

What have you done to deserve this? Nothing. In fact, you have done everything not to deserve this.

So how has God helped? First of all, since you were utterly without a righteousness with which to live with him in heaven, God resolved to make one for you. As a matter of fact, he would have to do all of the work himself to insure that it would be done flawlessly, and completely satisfactory. After this he would give you his promise that he has created a righteousness for you, assigned it to you as your own, officially recognized it in Heaven's court, and

now would urge you happily to "seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33) by believing his pledge. It will be as simple as that. This is what he did.

In summary, then, because of the grace in his heart, and then because "your Lord Jesus Christ has had mercy on you, and has taken on your nature so that he might fulfill for you the whole will and law of God, and for you and for your delivery suffer death and all that you by your sins have deserved," God has pledged that you are now righteous as far as he is concerned, and ready for life with him in heaven.

Since the Lord has promised to you with divine certainty that he has created righteousness for you, obtain it from him now by believing his pledge! It will be as simple as that. The benefits to you will be these: (1) you will not be punished for eternity under God's anger for rejecting his pledged salvation; (2) you will have peace of mind knowing that God is on friendly terms with you; (3) your soul will no longer be aching and feel empty, but will be filled with the assurance of divine salvation. As a result, your existence will be one, lifelong march toward eternal life in heaven.

To summarize all of this in as few words as possible, while highlighting the function of faith, we could call this: "righteousness by faith," or by the more familiar expression: "justification by faith."

Nevertheless, the Bible also speaks of being "justified by Christ" (Galatians 2:17); "justified by his

blood” (Romans 5:9); and “justified by his grace” (Romans 3:24). Why is it that Lutherans all along have emphasized that we are “justified by faith”? Recall the background to this! After the first Lutherans left the Catholic church because it had been teaching a new version of salvation by works, the Catholic writers called them false teachers who taught a false gospel. To confess what Scripture clearly teaches about salvation, and to reject what the Catholic church teaches, the Lutherans emphasized the maxim “justification by faith” to highlight the vital fact that righteousness is not accomplished by doing good works, rather, as it is pledged by God, it has been accomplished “by Christ” (Galatians 2:17), “by his blood” (Romans 5:9), and “by his grace” (Romans 3:24), and obtained by us by an act of faith in God’s gospel pledge that he did it.

Indeed, realize that nowhere does Scripture teach that “justification by faith” means that justification is created or accomplished by faith! Rather, Scripture clearly teaches that justification is obtained by faith. Note the difference!

Walther remarks: “If I am to be saved through believing that I am redeemed, that I am reconciled with God, that my sins are forgiven me, then all that must already be there beforehand. Surely no man will be so foolish as to think that through his believing that something happens, he causes it actually to happen” (*Justification – Objective and Subjective: A Translation*,

translator Kurt Marquart [Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 198-], page 13). That Walther is the one who wrote this translated essay, see Engelder quote him as the author in Th. Engelder, “Walther, a Christian Theologian,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Volume VII, Number 11 (November, 1936), pages 807 & 812)!

Thus this familiar phrase could and should point out that in order for sinners to possess that state of righteousness, or justness, which God has pledged that he, indeed, has obtained for them, it is his will that they should believe it, just as it is the will of a governor that an imprisoned man should believe the governor’s pledge that he has been pardoned and set free.

Be that as it may, why has this last sentence been phrased to say: “to believe the pledge of a pardon,” instead of simply: “to believe the pardon,” since the result would be the same?

This has been done in order to make what is called “a distinction in accurate thought,” since to pardon someone is also to make a contract with him, a unilateral, gratuitous contract, to be sure, in which the recipient is promised a benefit by the giver, without any consideration in return.

In other words, the pardoner pledges that the pardon which he is giving is true, and has accomplished officially what it was intended to accomplish: a full pardon. Accordingly, an essential part of any pardon

contract is the promise that is made; in this case the promise of the pardoner.

Furthermore, so that the pardon may achieve its desired end, there is included in the pardon an important assumption. That is to say, the imprisoned recipient should accept the gift. He should acknowledge it for what its stated purpose is, and want to possess it. Moreover, the only way in which a pardon could be accepted by the human mind will be by an act of faith. Yet this is nothing unusual. This is how all contracts, all promises work.

To be sure, the United States Supreme Court has handed down this ruling: If an imprisoned man would refuse a pardon, he will stay condemned and imprisoned. Therefore, if he would not believe the pledged pardon, he will have blocked maliciously and effectively the pardoner's contract with him, and, consequently, will not have obtained the pledged gift. The same tragedy will occur in regards to God's promised salvation: "He who would not believe will be damned" (Mark 16:16). Luther: "A king gives you a castle; if you do not accept it, your refusal does not make the king a liar nor his gift void. You have cheated yourself; it is entirely your own fault: the king has certainly given you the castle" (Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, translators Theodore Engelder and J. T. Mueller [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1960], Volume II, page 400 footnote).

Therefore, since it is his will that this pledged righteousness could only be obtained from him by an act

of faith in his promise, the Lord invites us to believe it. It is as simple as that.

This is the faith that saves. This is the faith that takes possession of the righteousness which is handed over to it in God's promise.

This is what is meant by "justification by faith."

"Through our faith, then, we for our person step within this justifying judgment of God which God has already declared over all sinners in general" (George Stoeckhardt, *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, April, 1978, page 143). Thus writers of theological books, and professors who teach Christian doctrine, commonly will divide this subject into two parts. That is, first of all, they will teach how God has declared the whole world to be righteous; and secondly, how it is God's will that every sinner could and should come to believe this, and in so doing, may obtain possession of this righteousness, and thusly lay hold of God's salvation.

As a result, these two parts variously have been called "universal justification" and "personal justification" (consult Edward W. A. Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 2nd edition [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1971], page 149); "objective justification" and "subjective justification" (see Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, translators Theodore Engelder and J. T. Mueller [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1960], Volume II, page 347); or "general justification" and "individual justification" (confer A. L. Graebner, *Outlines of Doctrinal Theology* [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1908], page 189f.), for example.

Righteousness in the Book of Romans.

In the early chapters of his book to the Romans, the apostle teaches at length about the righteousness which the gospel pledges to cover us and bring us to heaven. Using the Greek language, Paul uses the Greek word for righteousness in its various forms, for example, as an adjective: “righteous” (Romans 2:13); as a noun: “righteousness” (Romans 1:17); and as a verb (Romans 5:19). Think of the English word “love” in its various forms: as an adjective: “Whatever things are lovely” (Philippians 4:8); as a noun: “Love is kind” (1st Corinthians 13:4); and as a verb: “We love God” (1st John 5:2)!

Nevertheless, when it would come to a verb, the English language has no verbal form for its word “righteousness” just as the Germans do not. The Germans would have to write, as we would have to in English, “to make righteous,” or “to become righteous.” This is simply the way certain words exist in various languages. Thus realize that not all English words are like the term “love” which could be used in a nounal, verbal, and adjectival form by itself! Some words simply do not exist in all these forms.

With this in mind, what have the English translators of the *King James Version*, the *New King James*

Version, and of other English translations, done in order to supply a verb for “righteousness” in the book of Romans?

First of all, in Romans 5:19 they have created the verb “made righteous.” This is a good solution.

However, in all the other places in Romans that would call for this same verb, they have not done this. That is to say, they have not used the verbal form “made righteous,” but curiously have switched to a different word entirely for their verb, namely, to the word “justify.” See Romans 4:5, for example! In other words, they will use the adjective “righteous,” and the noun “righteousness,” but when they would need a verb, they will resort to the verbal form of a different word: “justify.”

Not only that but in Romans 3:26, where the translators naturally would have used the word “righteous” in its form as a noun and as an adjective, they have substituted a word instead, and have used it in its form as a noun (“justifier”) and as an adjective (“just”).

Why have they switched words in these cases? What were their rules? I have not come across an explanation for this. Indeed, switching words was entirely unnecessarily. For instance, the translators simply could have used the word “justify” throughout the chapters of Romans, for it does exist in all the forms, and thereby, all by itself, sufficiently could have translated that one, Greek word.

This matter becomes confusing and misleading, because the average reader, not knowing the Greek,

naturally would conclude that with a switch in the English words, there must be two different Greek words that are being translated: one for “righteous,” and a different one for “just”; indeed, that the Holy Spirit must be talking about two different things with two different meanings. Otherwise, if there would be only one Greek word, why would the translators not just stick with the same English word throughout to translate the same Greek word? Though “righteous” and “just” mean practically the same thing, this unnecessary switch in words by the translators becomes puzzling and not reassuring.

Note: The word “justify” has come down to our English language from the Latin. This term, in its various forms, is what the Latin translators used long ago to translate the Greek word for “righteous” for their Latin Bible. Incidentally, the *King James Version* translators would have been well aware of this.

An additional *note:* According to Scripture, the ungodly “is made righteous” or “is justified” only by being “declared righteous” by God on account of the saving acts of Jesus Christ. “Accordingly, the word *justify* here means to declare righteous and free from sins, and to absolve one from eternal punishment for the sake of Christ’s righteousness” (“Thorough Declaration of the Formula of Concord,” *Triglott Concordia*, editors W.H.T. Dau and F. Bente [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921], page 921, paragraph 17).

A further note: In his statements in Romans the apostle frequently and pointedly will speak of the

believers who have been made righteous because it is in them that salvation is finally realized. Compare 2nd Peter 2:1: “There will be false teachers among you... denying the Lord who bought them”; and Hebrews 2:3: “How will we escape if we would neglect so great a salvation?” Consult Mark 4:20: “These are the ones seeded on good ground, those who hear the Word, accept it, and bear fruit”!

* * *

Moreover, the following is a retranslation of those passages in Romans in which the English translators have switched to the word “justify.” In these passages the English word “righteous” will be retained instead. Hence a verbal form of this word will need to be created.

Romans 1:17b: “The righteous man will live by faith.”

Romans 3:4b: “That you may be declared righteous in your words.”

Romans 3:24a: “Becoming righteous freely by his grace.”

Romans 3:26b: “That he alone is righteous, and makes him righteous who is of the faith in Jesus.”

Romans 3:28b: “A man becomes righteous by faith apart from the works of the law.”

Romans 4:2a: “If Abraham would have been righteous by works.”

Romans 4:5a: “But to him who does not work, but believes on him who makes the ungodly man righteous.”

Romans 4:25: “Who was delivered on account of our transgressions, and was raised on account of our having been made righteous.”

Romans 5:1a: “Therefore, having become righteous by faith.”

Romans 5:9a: “Much more, then: having become righteous now by his blood.”

Romans 5:16: “As it was with the one who sinned, should it not be with the gift? For while the judgment on the one [Adam] was for the condemnation of many, so the one gift for many transgressions is for the making of many righteous.”

Romans 5:18: “So then as by one transgression, judgment came upon all men for their condemnation, so also on account of the one who accomplished righteousness, the gift comes to all men for the righteousness of life.”

The Salvation by Promise and the Apostle Paul’s Practice.

After his conversion in Damascus, we hear that Paul “preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.... Proving that this Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 9:20 &22). Indeed, later on when he was a missionary and faced a heathen who had asked, “What must I do to

be saved?” the apostle replied “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!” (Acts 16:31.)

Furthermore, in his epistles to the average local congregations, Paul again teaches a “salvation by Christ,” writing, for example, “In whom [Christ] you also trusted, after that you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (Ephesians 1:13).

However, if you would read the first five chapters of his book to the Romans, or his letter to the Galatians, Paul will argue at length that God’s salvation is one “by promise.” Why would he do this?

In these two places he is facing errorists whose creed held a number of errors about the way to heaven. On such occasions, Paul wanted to “be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince those who contradict” (Titus 1:9).

Thus realize that if the apostle would have argued: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!” they would have replied: “We do”! Likewise if he would have urged: “Jesus is the Christ. Salvation is by him,” the errorists would have answered: “We believe this.”

Therefore, in such situations, Paul knew that he would have to go all the way down to bedrock, that is, all the way back to the very basics of God’s salvation, namely, “What kind of salvation has God actually arranged?”

The answer, of course, is: A salvation by promise.

This is why in Romans and Galatians, more than in any other place, Paul brings up the subject of “promise”

to contradict the errorists' creed of salvation by works. Indeed, it will be the only response that would work. Hand in hand with this the apostle also would mention faith in this gospel promise contrasted with a mental obedience to a law.

Practical application. Likewise, whenever you would be in a situation in which you would have to defend, to teach, or to know for your own self more exactly the Bible's way of salvation, you will need to return to the basics, and understand that it is a salvation by promise; and that the function of the faith that would save you will be to believe this promise.

Thus, indeed, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, for he is the promised Savior! He is the promised one "that should come" (Matthew 11:3).

Faith.

Faith is an act of your mental faculties used by the grace of God to put you into possession of God's salvation. According to his established order (Mark 16:16), you will need to be in possession of this salvation in order to escape damnation and to enter heaven. While in theory, at least by way of contrast, God could have arranged some other, wonderful way in which to provide you with salvation, nevertheless, he wanted your salvation to be by way of promise. Furthermore, since the only way in which a promise ever could be possessed or secured by an

individual will be by an act of faith, God intentionally chose this way. Why?

First of all, Scripture reminds us sinners that: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways," says the Lord; 'for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8-9). "How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33.)

Just the same, the Bible does supply a negative reason to this question when it puts its salvation on display next to man's wisdom for the purpose of a comparison and of a commentary (Romans 1:21-22; 1st Corinthians 18-29; 3:19-20), to make the point that the Almighty deliberately has chosen the weak things of this world, humanly speaking, in order to stump the wise; in order to put to shame both publicly and privately the unregenerated wisdom of men who arrogantly would dictate to God what moral acts he himself should follow; and, pointedly, so "that no flesh should glory in his presence" (1st Corinthians 1:29).

Likewise, Scripture supplies us with two positive reasons why the Lord chose his salvation for men to be a salvation by promise, when the Holy Spirit writes: Righteousness "is by faith that it should be according to grace, so that the promise could be sure" (Romans 4:16).

The first explanation given for having a salvation by promise is so that man's newly given righteousness

“should be according to grace.” In other words, God’s moral law, written in man’s heart (Romans 2:15), had been around since the Garden of Eden. However, after man sinned, this same law of God, pure and holy thought it be, as Luther points out, now only would kill and drag us down into hell. This law could not supply us with a salvation (Galatians 2:21). So God had to create something which would counteract his law; something that would be in the opposite category as his law. This will be his grace. Indeed, in this grace Heaven would sacrifice for us in order to rescue us.

Secondly, our saving Lord would have to deal with the sinner’s propensity, through doubt and unbelief, to reject the things which he would bring to the sinner’s urgent attention (1st Corinthians 2:14). Therefore, he would have to give them something “sure,” that is, something convincing; something which they could believe in with certainty. So he gave them one of his unbreakable promises as his gracious way of salvation.

Furthermore, the Lord wills that we should be in contact with him. Yet how could this be possible in this wicked world considering the fact that we are sinners, and that no man could see God and live (Exodus 33:20)? It is God’s will that we should be in contact with him by our use of his Word, as if he would have written a letter to us – a living letter – that breathed divine power into our nostrils, so to speak, to give us spiritual life for the high

and holy purpose for which God was giving us his writing, namely, for our salvation.

Indeed, Holy Writ informs us of God’s will and of his intentions toward us, and of pledges for us. It commands us to do his will. It assures us that though he will remain invisible to us, yet he will be active all around us keeping his pledges to support our body and life, to keep us fed with the Bread of life, to protect us from evil, and yet, at times, to use other evils in a miraculous manner toward our spiritual health by employing them to move us to exercise our trust in his promises, an act which must require our constant activity, never our relaxation or neglect. This busy, promised activity on the part of God, we could admit, noticeably is fulfilled all around us every day.

Hence the Lord chose to communicate with us through his pledges, and through his commands (his law) as well.

Nevertheless, while man enthusiastically would have chosen to put salvation into some form of a law, notice that the Lord deliberately, yet astonishingly, humanly speaking, put his salvation into the form of a simple promise, not merely so that your intellect could be informed about it, and that your judgment could be convinced of the truthfulness of it, but once again, for wise purposes of his own, namely, for your highest assurance! He wanted you to have it in your own personal possession; to retain it on your own person at all times;

to receive from him a precious gift; and to have and to hold it for your very own.

Actually, this purpose should not be surprising. Think about it! This is the same intent which God displays in regards to his sacraments which he has provided for you. These sacraments purposely are designed for, and are the way in which the Lord wants to be able to assure you personally.

Thus realize that the Lord put his salvation into the form of a promise not for his own benefit, but solely for yours! Remember this as a biblical maxim!

For instance, on Judgment Day, when the whole human race will be gathered at that final checkpoint before eternity, it will not be necessary for you to provide God himself with some sort of proof of salvation. He already will know this. Hence the personal possession of your salvation by an act of faith is designed and intended by the Lord solely for your benefit.

Therefore, God, arguably by way of contrast, could have devised through his unlimited power some other way to cover you with or to shelter you under a salvation of his own making. In fact, he could have arranged a salvation in such a way in which you would have been completely in the dark, and would not know what was happening. However, this would be out of character for God. Rather he deals with his created, intelligent beings as he once commented about one of them: "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?" (Genesis 18:17.)

Thus the personal possession of your salvation by an act of faith has been designed and intended by the Lord solely for your benefit. That is to say, God your Savior purposely chose this form of salvation: the salvation by promise, so that you could obtain actual possession of his promised salvation by an act of faith, to the end that you could and should be assured of it greatly since you are being assured of it so closely.

This is what is meant by the biblical expression: justified by faith.

See this! Then say: "Glory be to God on high!"

In other words, God wants you to be just, or to be righteous, and to be ready to enter heaven in the only way in which he wants you to do so: by obtaining his promised salvation in the only way his promise could be obtained: by an act of faith. Indeed, notice that an act of faith has no other function at all, nor any use at all except for the sole purpose of believing a promise!

By grace! may sin and Satan hearken!

I bear my flag of faith in hand

And pass – for doubts my joy can't darken –

The Red Sea to the Promised Land.

I cling to what my Savior taught,

And trust it, whether felt or not.

Hymn 311:10

* * *

So what, again, is faith? Or, to be more clear, just what goes on in the act of believing the saving gospel?

Realize, first of all, that the function of faith is to believe a promise! Certainly faith has no other function at all, nor any purpose to exist at all except to believe a promise. Indeed, think carefully on just how many times throughout the day you rely on promises, that is, that you have faith in them! To be sure, the vast majority of these pledges will be very subtle, what the logicians would call “implied” promises rather than explicit or formal promises. For example, these implied promises would be better known to you as things on which you will “depend,” such as, you have faith that the chair on which you are sitting will not collapse. You are depending upon that. You have faith in that fact, or in that implied promise, and certainly with good reason.

Notice also that the Lord has arranged matters so that we would grab ahold of his salvation neither through the senses, for example, the sense of touch: hot, cold, soft, hard; nor through smell: pleasant, unpleasant; nor taste: sweet, sour; nor sight: brightness, darkness; nor through physical actions, such as holding, carrying, or grasping, but solely through the mind. As moral beings, God addresses our mental faculties, for instance, our intellect, will, judgment, desire, and memory, with Heaven’s truth, convincing these faculties through a wonderful, divine persuasion to believe his gospel

pledges, and, in this way, to take ownership of our salvation.

Which of the faculties of your mind would do the believing? All of them will. Know that all of your faculties: your intellect, judgment, will, desire, and memory lie in your soul, not in that physical organ known as your brain, for while the believer’s brain will lie motionless in the grave, his soul will live on, all the while thinking and willing! What is described as the faculties of the mind are merely the mental instruments which our Creator has equipped the rational soul of man so that he is able to understand, to evaluate, to have emotion, and to respond to that information which comes to his attention, such as events or the speech of others, as well as to his own ideas. We simply speak of the different faculties of the soul in order to have a way to describe the soul’s different activities, and thereby, better to follow and to understand our process of thinking.

Thus while saving faith will consist of the knowledge of salvation, which would be the role of the intellect, saving faith also will consist of the ongoing decision to believe it, which would be the role of the judgment. The will would provide the intent to believe. The desire would have an intense longing to believe.

Furthermore, upon conversion, these faculties will undergo a regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Realize, that formerly these faculties had been occupied exclusively by sinful thoughts and feelings! Previously, these faculties

had objected to and rejected the things of God, such as his salvation by promise. Now these faculties delight in, rejoice over, and treasure it, since these faculties now are occupied with spiritual thoughts of gospel belief and of doing God's will. In the process of regeneration new spiritual life has been put into them where formerly there had been none before. Our soul now is "alive to God" (Romans 6:11) for the Holy Spirit, through the speaking of the gospel, has created new spiritual life in the soul where there was none before. In fact, the apostle likens this wonderful process to a rising from the dead (Ephesians 2:5-6), a feat equally as astounding.

If this would be true, then why will we continue to have sinful thoughts? Be aware that while a lethal attack was made on your sinful flesh at your conversion, Romans 6:6 calls it a "crucifixion," and broke the complete, deadly control which sin held over your mind, remnants of sin remained, like pieces of a burst balloon! This state of mind in your soul is variously called "the old man," "the body of sin" (Romans 6:6), "the flesh with its affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:24), and "our members which are on earth" (Colossians 3:5). In his new state of conversion called "the new man," the gospel believer will be urged to control this "old man" (Ephesians 4:22-24) as it could and should be controlled, namely, by using the fitting passages from God's powerful law on his mind for the purpose of shaking from his mind the love of such sinful thoughts. Then he could and should use gospel promises

on his mind, by simply reading them, hearing them, or reminding himself of them, in order to tap the divine power which also is provided by God's gospel to want to do God's will. As a result, the sinful thoughts and desires simply will dissolve from the mind. Do so next time!

*All our knowledge, sense, and sight
Lie in deepest darkness shrouded,
Till Thy Spirit breaks our night
With the beams of truth unclouded;
Thou alone to God canst win us,
Thou must work all good within us.
Hymn 3:2*

* * *

Realize that the Lord has put his salvation in the form of a promise!

Moreover, this gospel pledge calls for your acceptance. Therefore, you must address it. That is, in and through his gospel promise, the Lord does two things: he pronounces, and he proposes to you.

First of all, he pronounces. That is, he solemnly and officially announces to you his gospel declaration. Next he proposes it to you. In other words, he offers it to you for your acceptance with reference to the saving work which he has done for you on the cross, at the Easter tomb, and in the judicial decisions in his heart.

In fact, so important is your acceptance of his gospel pledge, that if you would refuse to depend on his words, you would tear up Heaven's pardon for your sins, reject the whole divine plan for your salvation, stand before Divine Justice guilty as charged without any recourse, and reintroduce the punishment of damnation on your head.

As a result, you must believe it. That is to say, you must acknowledge it, agree that it is true, and, consequently, trust it.

*And in Thy mercy now bestow
True Christian faith on me, O Lord!
Hymn 413:3*

The Use of the Words “Faith” and “Belief” in the Book of Romans.

Why have the translators of the *King James Version* and the *New King James Version*, for example, switched between the use of “faith,” and the use of “to believe” in the first five chapters of Romans? Would it be because there would be two different Greek words involved here which would have two different meanings? No.

As the English word “love” could be used in its various forms as a noun: “Love is kind” (1st Corinthians 13:4); as an adjective: “Whatever things are lovely” (Philippians 4:8); and as a verb: “We love him because he

first loved us” (1st John 4:19), so the Holy Spirit used the Greek word for “faith” in its various forms: verb, noun, and adjective.

However, the English translators are faced with a predicament, for, unlike the Greek, our English word “faith” has no verb form. They have solved this problem by resorting to the word “to believe” whenever a verb form would be needed. Moreover, since the English language does not have the noun “unfaith,” the translators once again have turned for help to the word “belief,” and will use the noun “unbelief.” See this usage in the following passages: “To him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.” “He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith” (Romans 4:5 & 20).

Since the word “belief” exists in the form of a noun, a verb, and an adjective, the English translators could have used that term consistently instead of resorting to the word “faith” for the noun form. Why did they not just use the word “belief,” then, in all its forms? I have not discovered a reason.

The Violent take it by Force.

In regards to faith, there is a remarkable passage in Scripture, which few Christians, perhaps, could recall from memory; in which our Lord Jesus Christ gives faith

high praise for it gospel-clinging activity through the power of the Holy Spirit. To be sure, God does not do the believing for men. Rather he prompts us with his power in a hidden, unsearchable way, in which “the power of the Highest will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35), through our daily reading of the gospel report. We “believe according to the working of his mighty power” (Ephesians 1:19).

Moreover, every time the believer would do so, “the kingdom of God suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12). That is, after the Lord Jesus along with John the Baptist began to preach repentance and gospel forgiveness (Mark 1:15) in order to bring the kingdom of God to the gospel-ignorant Jews, there were results (“will not return to me empty,” Isaiah 55:11). In Matthew 11:12 Jesus reports on these results of their gospel ministry which the humble believer could not see, as Elisha’s servant could not (2nd Kings 6:17). In other words, though faith may fluctuate between weakness and strength, it is still saving faith. As saving faith it never is half-hearted, but unshakeable and determined. Saving faith storms the gates of God’s kingdom, so to speak, in order to seize the salvation promises which are contained there.

To be sure, we commonly associate the word “violence” with harmful, criminal activity. But here the Lord is depicting the intent of faith, which he describes as being a strong-willed, insistent effort to claim ownership of the forgiveness which God pledges.

Why would Christ bring up this matter? It is meant to be a strong encouragement for us to believe, and not to become discouraged.

The Difference between Saving Faith and having a Trust in God’s Protection.

Be aware, first of all, that the Bible teaches that there is a faith which trusts in God’s promises of earthly blessings, such as the pledge of divine protection against danger, and the promise of being given food and clothing; in short, the pledge to be given regarding “all that I would need to support my body and life.”

Nevertheless, this trust is different from saving faith. Saving faith depends on the promise of salvation which Christ has gotten for the world. To be sure, both are connected. That is to say, you could not have the one faith without the other. Indeed, if the one would be weak, so will the other.

While in the New Testament Epistles the faith that is most discussed by Paul and the others is saving faith in God’s pledge of salvation, in the Gospel books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the faith that is most often spoken of is the other kind, namely, the trust which believers have in God’s promise of earthly help. For example, this trust is spoken of in connection with miraculous healings, the feeding of five thousand people,

and the stopping of storms. In these cases, we most often hear the Lord complain of a lack of trust in his protective promises, referring to it as a “weak” or as a “little faith.”

In fact, as long as a person would not have a saving faith in the forgiveness of sins, he will not trust God to help him in earthly matters, either.

Reconciliation.

*Once far off, but now invited,
We approach Thy sacred throne;
In Thy covenant united,
Reconciled, redeemed, made one.
Hymn 182:2*

As a result of justification, that is, the act of being declared righteous by Heaven, the Almighty has become reconciled with us. He has become conciliatory toward us.

The Bible speaks assuringly of a reconciliation which God has effected with the entire sinful race.

First of all, this word implies a few things. That is, this term describes a situation that is brought about by some previous activity. For example, to arrive at a reconciliation, two parties (to use legal language) originally would have been on friendly terms. To put it positively: they were amicable with each other. To state it negatively: there was no discord between them. Thus

they were in harmony, associating together in agreement. There was nothing separating them from their common relationship with each other. They were kept together by their will, intent, and motive.

Then something happened. One of them sinned in his will, intent, and motive. This caused him to commit a malicious act. Moreover, the offending party did not apologize, but was adamant, hardened, and entrenched in his malice. For instance, if he would have been asked by the other party to give a justification for this change, he only would have given excuses, lied, or denied.

For example, if someone today would have been insulted by another over such a minor matter that the courts would not recognize it, the offended party, out of grace, commonly will dismiss it and forget it. The reason why the courts will not recognize such a minor matter, is because the law would not.

However, if this offender merely would not insult but would engage in much more serious, unlawful activity against another, the latter rightfully could be angry, and justifiably could take legal action, the remedy for which could result in some form of punishment, such as a fine, imprisonment, or a monetary award.

Nevertheless, if, at some point, one or the other of these two parties would have a change of heart, would want to return to the former relationship, would take the necessary steps to accomplish this, and finally, would

succeed in this attempt, this accomplishment would be given the endearing name: a “reconciliation.”

Just so, upon being created “in righteousness and true holiness,” Adam and Eve were in full harmony with their Creator. They were created into a loving relationship with him. They were agreeable and amiable with him. There was no discord among them.

Then there was an unjust change of heart by the human race, in fact, one so extreme that it was as far away from harmony as two parties ever could get. The human race chose evil, and rejected holiness. They no longer loved the Lord their God with all of their heart and mind, but despised and hated him, so much so that they would have killed God if they would have had the chance, just as when God walked this earth as Jesus of Nazareth, sinful men, beginning with Herod, wanted to kill him but were divinely frustrated from doing so until they were allowed to do so on Good Friday.

Thus there was indeed enmity, that is, bitter hatred: by sinners for God, and by God for sinners. Scripture describes this severe falling out and its consequences in the following:

“Your iniquities have separated you from your God” (Isaiah 59:2).

“You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness.... You hate all workers of iniquity” (Psalm 5:4, 5).

The Lord tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence his soul hates” (Psalm 11:5).

“I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity... to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me” (Deuteronomy 5:9).

Indeed, God in his hatred curses the sinner for what he has done. Sinners and sinful angels are called “the cursed” (Matthew 25:41). Elsewhere sinners are called the “children of the curse” (2nd Peter 2:14).

Furthermore, they are called the “children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3), since “the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 5:6); “for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18). Thus “because the carnal mind is enmity against God....those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:7 & 8).

Hence it could be said that Adam and Eve were at war with Heaven, and Heaven with them.

Though God had commanded them to be holy as he is (Leviticus 19:2), yet after they fell into sin, the imagination of their heart was only evil (Genesis 8:21), bringing forth evil desires, evil words, and evil actions; and bringing down God’s anger and curse as a result.

Thus this breakup was caused solely by the human race. There occurred a change of mind on the part of the human race for the worse.

Nevertheless, due to the love in his heart, the Lord had a desire to be in harmony with the ruined race once again. Yet how could this be done? God knew the way. God would send his Son on a monumental mission to break “down the middle wall of division” (Ephesians 2:14) between Heaven and sinners, by suffering their deserved punishment on “the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity,” that is to say, bringing to an end the bitter hatred which existed (Ephesians 2:16), as the apostle colorfully describes it. In plainer language, Paul reports, “When we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10); and “by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:5).

Thus there are two, vital components that were needed to move Heaven to be reconciled to cursed sinners. For your peace of mind, and for your divine assurance, know them and remember them! (1) the grace in God’s heart; (2) the two saving acts of Christ: (a) his substitutionary, holy life; and (b) his substitutionary punishment in hell. Without these two conditions the God of love never would have laid aside his just anger against his bitter enemy: the sinful race.

This is why the saving work of Christ was so important. He had to remove the cause for this bitter hatred between Heaven and man: sin. How could Christ remove it? He would do it the way that God had planned. He would fulfill the necessary requirements that would bring about God’s pardon. He would make the necessary

payment to Divine Justice. As a result, Heaven has become reconciled to the entire ruined race of sinners, even to those ultimately who would deny this conciliation (2nd Peter 2:1), and urges all: “Be reconciled to God!” (2nd Corinthians 5:20.)

*Immortal honor to the Son,
Who makes Thine anger cease;
Our lives He ransomed with His own,
And died to make our peace.
Hymn 267:2*

Imputation.

Romans 4:20-22

“Imputation.” What would this mean? This will be one of those words which we never use, because it just is not in our everyday vocabulary. Instead we will use some other word.

Then why would it still be around? It is because the English translators of the Bible (the *King James Version* and the *New King James Version*, for instance) still wished to use it. Just the same, the Greek word in Romans chapter 4 which is found eleven times in that chapter, has been translated not always with “impute,” but sometimes with other words; such as with “reckon” and “count” (*KJV*), or with “account” and “count” (*NKJV*). It will be unknown to me why this would be. To be sure, upon

viewing these different words, the average reader of Romans 4 may think that there must be three different Greek words being translated, all having different meanings. Yet this is not so. Be aware of this!

“Imputation” is an accounting term. “To impute” means “to acknowledge something as belonging to someone” (Genesis 15:6); “to reckon,” “to account,” “to credit,” or “to charge to one’s account.” For instance, Scripture talks of the imputation of Adam’s sin (and its guilt) to the entire, sinful, human race (Romans 5:19); the imputation of our sins (along with their guilt) to Christ (2nd Corinthians 5:21); and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us that is highlighted in Romans chapter 4. To be sure, though imputation may be an accounting term, the Bible will not use it to refer to a person’s money, but rather to his moral standing (guilty or innocent) before the Almighty (John 5:29; Jeremiah 32:19).

Again, Scripture speaks of three imputations in regards to our salvation. For example, in 2nd Corinthians 5:21, though the word is not used there, the meaning certainly is. In this passage there are, in effect, two imputations promised for the assurance of the reader. The first one is that the Godhead imputed, or, since the effect is negative, we accurately could say that the Godhead “billed” all of our sins to the God-man, Jesus Christ. This was an official, judicial ruling in Heaven’s court. The second, official ruling which Heaven made was to impute, or to state it positively, “to credit” us with “the

righteousness of God in” Jesus Christ, since it was he, the God-man, who earned, created, and accomplished this high and holy moral life while he lived here on earth.

Indeed, in 2nd Corinthians 5:19 we are assured that God purposely did not impute, or “bill” the trespasses of the world to it, but to Christ, as we just learned in verse twenty-one.

Then, in Romans chapter 4, the apostle makes use of a gospel promise from Genesis 15:6 in his argument that we are saved not by the righteousness from works which are done, but by a righteousness from God’s grace; a gospel assurance that was meant “also for us. It will be imputed to us who believe” (Romans 4:24).

What would be imputed to us? It will be righteousness: the righteousness which the God-man earned for us.

For what reason would this be accounted? It will be for having faith in God “who justifies the ungodly,” that is to say, in the one who declares the whole sinful world to be righteous for two reasons: because the Son of God in the flesh has lived a righteous life for them; and, secondly, he has suffered their terrifying punishment for them, and has been acquitted for it, causing them to be acquitted also.

But back to the passage, Romans 4:20-22: Abraham “did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what he [God] had

promised he also was able to perform. And therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness’.”

Who did this crediting? God did. What did he credit? Christ’s righteousness. To whom did God credit it? He credited righteousness to Abraham, and to anyone else who would believe.

On what did God base his action? It was that the person believed him as his God and Savior. Stated another way: First of all, God would bring someone to believe in his gospel pledge. That is, the Lord would move and prompt him to believe this promise through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, who would use the mighty gospel pledge to accomplish this. Then, according to Romans 4:20-22, God will declare righteous whomever he would see performing this act of faith in his gospel promises. That is to say, the act of believing the gospel pledges will prompt the Lord to credit that person with righteousness – Christ’s righteousness – for that is the only righteousness which Scripture teaches in regards to its salvation. Hence God looks down. Whomever he would see that would believe in his pledged righteousness, God will account him as being righteous.

This will be done not for God’s benefit. He would have no need for it. The Lord publicly reveals to us his imputation for our benefit: to reassure us, and thus to strengthen our trust in his gospel.

To be sure, in Romans 4:20-22, 3, & 5, the Holy Spirit writes about belief in God, and does not bring up

the term “gospel pledges.” Nevertheless, saving faith in God our Savior is always faith in the saving gospel pledges, such as in the promise that God “justifies the ungodly” (Romans 4:5), namely, God “declares the ungodly to be righteous” on account of the saving acts of Christ; and in the promise of the forgiveness of sins (Romans 4:7-8).

Noteworthy also is the use of the present tense of the verb “impute” in Romans 4:6. This will mean that God’s crediting of righteousness to us is an ongoing act. It occurs every day.

Moreover, this crediting is a judicial decision. That is, it assures our standing in the holy ledger of Heaven’s court, namely, that Divine justice considers us to be innocent and ready to enter heaven; neither to be guilty nor punishable.

While we know (are reassured) from the gospel promise itself that by believing it we will gain possession of Christ’s righteousness and not be condemned for our sins and punished (since this is what it pledges), we would not have known about this subsequent matter of imputation unless Romans chapter 4 and Genesis 15:6 would have told us about it. As a result, you might observe: “This imputation would seem to be an additional, special act of God apart from my initial possession of Christ’s righteousness when I first believed.” However, this imputation will not be something that will occur later in time at some point, but

will be simultaneous with the startup of faith, and will continue on ever after.

So why has God brought his imputation to your attention? It has been to reassure you that your faith is working as he pledged to you that it would: that is, your faith is grasping Christ's righteousness. God sees this, and assures you of it.

Indeed, if someone ever would ask you: "How would you understand this gospel passage? What would be its point? What case would it be trying to make?" reply: "It is designed to reassure me." To be sure, this will be the purpose of any gospel passage. For example, a Lutheran lady once asked, "Since our sins have been forgiven, why would we have to go to Holy Communion repeatedly?" The answer will be: "for reassurance." In fact, realize that reassurance and forgiveness are simply two sides of the same saving coin!

Again, why has the Lord purposely informed you of his act of crediting you with Christ's righteousness, over and above his act of handing over to you Christ's righteousness when you believe? Why would the almighty God and Savior go to such great lengths to reassure you, going above and beyond what you yourself would estimate was needed, to make sure that you will get to heaven?

It will be for two reasons: First of all, it will be because he loves you so much, and is so devoted to you that as your Good Shepherd he knows you better than you

do, and knows what is best for your soul-safety, so that you will not slip and fall, and miss out on heaven.

Secondly, the loving and all-seeing Lord knows just how deceitful and devious your sinful heart is, though you would greatly underestimate it, and in the pride of your strength, would be complacent. However, your sinful mind despises and hates the precious promises of God, and will stop at nothing to get you to doubt them, constantly seizing every opportunity ruthlessly to distract you and to entice you away from the gospel, so that you no longer would want to have anything to do with it. Therefore, to counter this insidious, treacherous assault on your faith, your divine Physician knows best how to fortify you. So he gives you a gospel passage about imputation, that is, about crediting you with Christ's righteousness, to reassure you yet once again that it is yours. Acknowledge this, and thank him for doing so!

*Blest is the man to whom the Lord
Imputes not his iniquities;
He pleads no merit of reward,
And not on works, but grace relies.
Hymn 309:2*

Justification in the Old Testament.

Psalm 119.

In the Greek language of the New Testament the apostle Paul often will bring up the subject of justification. This will be done in order (1) to give his readers more knowledge with which to increase the strength of their faith (to edify them); (2) to motivate them to do good works; (3) and for other reasons (2nd Timothy 3:16). That is, the apostle will mention the gospel pledge that God our Savior has declared us sinners to be righteous (Romans 3:24).

In the Old Testament the holy Scriptures likewise will touch upon the topic of justification, and will use a word from the Hebrew language which means “to declare righteous” (Isaiah 53:11).

In addition, on occasion the Old Testament Scriptures also will use another Hebrew word to describe this justification. It will refer to this same, gracious, gospel, judicial decision to declare us righteous as a “judgment.”

Now whenever we would hear the word “judgment” our minds will not think about justification, but rather about something different. Having been raised in our country, and having listened to our countrymen use only certain words under certain circumstances, and giving these words only certain meanings, we have been accustomed to understand the word “judgment” to have

only one meaning, namely, that of a punitive justice, such as a condemnation, a guilty verdict in the courtroom, or a sentence of punishment handed down by a judge. We would not understand the word “judgment” to mean the opposite: a judicial decision in which a person is declared to be innocent. Yet that is how the Old Testament also will use it: Sometimes it will mean: a judicial declaration of innocence, and at other times it will mean a judicial declaration of guilt.

For example, the entirety of Psalm 119 consists of Hebraic, parallel poetry, in which the inspired poet will express a thought either about God’s law or his gospel on one line, then he will state the same thought on the next line in a different way.

This would be how we could tell whether a passage in Psalm 119 would be entirely gospel: If the gospel would be on one line of the verse, the next line will reflect it. For example, verse 76: “I pray: Let your merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to your Word”: “Merciful kindness for my comfort” will be gospel. Thus the term “Word” in the next line also will be gospel, namely, a “gospel Word.”

The same thing will hold true also for the word “judgment,” which is used twenty times in this psalm. Sometimes it will mean a judicial declaration of guilt; sometimes a judicial declaration of innocence, namely, a gospel pronouncement of justification. For instance, in Psalm 143:2, “judgment” will mean a judicial declaration

of guilt: “Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for in your sight no one living is righteous.” However, in Isaiah 1:27, “judgment” will mean the gospel promise of justification: “Zion will be redeemed with judgment.”

Thus to know if “judgment” would mean “justification,” that is, a declaration of righteousness of the sinner by God, it will need to be determined by the context: by a gospel reference on the next or the previous line.

Would there be instance of this in Psalm 119? Yes, there will.

What would the psalmist have to say about justification?

He will have this to say, for example. In verse 43: “And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I have hoped in your judgments!” The character of this whole passage hinges on the term “hope.” To be sure, we obey and show respect for God’s law, but we do not hope in it. We only could hope, believe, and trust in the gospel. “Judgments” is plural. Thus the psalmist is referring to multiple promises of justification.

In verse 20 we hear: “My soul breaks with longing for your judgments at all times.” The determinative term here will be “longing,” which is akin to the idea of “hope,” something quite distant to the idea of obeying or respecting God’s law. Indeed, the evidence for this could be found in verse 40: “I long for your precepts, revive me!” This is a gospel expression. In addition, consult

verse 174 which also is gospel: “I long for your salvation, O Lord.”

In verse 52 we read: “I remembered your judgments of old, O Lord, and have comforted myself.” Again a single term: “comforted” defines the verse. God’s law never could comfort; only the gospel could.

Verse 149 reads: “Hear my voice according to your lovingkindness; O Lord, revive me according to your judgment.” The word “lovingkindness” describes a gospel intent of God. Moreover “Revive me!” only could be done by the gospel. The law has no power to convert. The law never could kindle in the heart a saving faith in Christ. To be sure, the gospel will give increased spiritual life to the faith of the believer whenever his mind would consider the gospel pledges.

In verse 156 the inspired writer praises and prays: “Great are your tender mercies, O Lord; revive me according to your judgments!” The words “tender mercies” and “revive” both refer to the gospel.

In addition to these verses, the idea of justification is also presented in verse 40, though this verse does not use the word “judgment” when the psalmist requests: “Revive me in your righteousness!” In other words, the writer is asking for more spiritual life, that is, more spiritual strength to his saving faith. This could only be obtained by the divine work of the gospel report of salvation.

Again, in the above passages: which part of this gospel report would the inspired writer desire to hear? It will be the part concerning his justification. It will be the account regarding the righteousness which the Son of God earned for all of us, by which God declared us to be righteous, which he distributes to us through his gospel report, and urges us to obtain it from him for our own by believing it. This righteousness is our justification.

So what would the inspired poet think of God's declaration of righteousness, that is, of his justification?

In general, he is exuberant about it.

However, in a somber moment he confesses his hope in his justification (verse 43), even to the extent of a continuing "breaking in longing for it" (verse 20), as he puts it. Nevertheless, he takes the initiative, and comforts himself with his ownership of Heaven's justification of him. His expression "to comfort myself" is a personal act of faith-strengthening (verse 52).

Indeed, the divine poet is convinced that attentive consideration of the gospel report (Romans 10:17) regarding his justification will increase the strength of his saving faith. In fact, it is his desire that this should occur perpetually (Colossians 3:16). Therefore, he acknowledges that he wants to make use of the pledge of justification in this way. Of course, he asks God to help him do this since "it is God who works in [us] both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13), reminding the Lord of his pledge of "lovingkindness"

toward those who believe in him; aware that "we believe according to the working of his mighty power" (Ephesians 1:19), so that the Lord would "revive" him with ever stronger faith through the word of the gospel (verse 149).

Once more he repeats his request (verse 156) for an increase in the strength of his faith through the soul-thrilling news of being declared righteous. This time he encourages the Lord to do so because of his "great tender mercies," that is, because of his compassions upon man whose sin has brought him so much misery. Notice that the abundance of mercy which is ascribed to God is not his usual mercy, but is his "tender" mercy! In addition, it is not just his regular tender mercy, but his "great" tender mercy. What is more, this mercy is not just singular, but plural: "mercies." In other words, it is a multiplication of God's great, tender mercy. What a kind and generous Father he is!

This is how highly the Old Testament psalmist regards his justification by Heaven. Imitate him!

Note: Be aware in regards to the use in Psalm 119 not only of the word "judgment" to mean either law or gospel, but of other terms as well, that "the term 'Law' is used in Holy Writ also in a wider, or general, sense to designate all the divine revelation and, moreover, the divine revelation...the Gospel, as in Is. 2:3: "For out of Zion shall go forth the Law".... The term 'Gospel', too, is used in Holy Writ to designate the whole body of Christian doctrine. In this case it is a synecdoche, denominating by its principal part all that is to be taught in and by the Church.... Thus Mark 1:1 says of the

whole Gospel according to St. Mark, in which also the preaching of repentance by John the Baptist is recorded (v. 4ff.): 'The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ'. But the term 'Gospel' is never used to designate the Law in the proper sense" (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, translator Walter W. F. Albrecht, volume III [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1970], page 222f.).

Mediation.

In any reconciliation there is a mediator. That is to say, there is someone who would work to get back together again the two parties in conflict. It could be either one of the two parties in conflict, or else it could be a neutral, third party.

For your faith's strengthening through the knowledge and the assurance of the gospel, the Holy Spirit writes about a mediator in his plan of salvation by promise.

Who was the appointed mediator? The Bible replies, "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1st Timothy 2:5). "It pleased the Father that... by Christ to reconcile all things to himself" (Colossians 1:19, 20).

With what did the God-man, Jesus Christ, mediate this reconciliation between sinners and Heaven?

Again Holy Writ answers: "Having made peace through the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20). As a result of this, the Bible holds the Savior up to our gaze,

and says, "He is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14). "The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

But what would this peace with Heaven have to be "made through the blood of his cross"? To understanding this teaching of Scripture, realize that without Christ, you would be at war with Heaven, and Heaven with you. Indeed, countless times every day you violate the Almighty's high and holy laws, for Holy Writ testifies: "All have sinned and continue to come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "There is not a just man on earth that does good and does not sin" (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

First of all, you think thoughts of evil, such as jealousy, hatred, and revenge. You wish that people more fortunate than you would meet up with ruin and not success. Then you even vocalize your thoughts with your mouth. You lie, exaggerate, and deceive to get your way. Then you deny or make excuses if you would be called to account. Even worse is when your sinful thoughts spill over into mean-spirited act which gratify your selfishness, but hurt and harm your neighbor.

To be sure, you even become angry with God when he would not bless you on time, but even would send you reverses instead. You will blame him for misfortune, decline to thank him, fail to trust him, neglect to listen to him, love other thing more than him, and get made at him when would interfere in your life.

Moreover, with Christ's mediating work, Divine Justice would be at war with you. For example, you reject

and violate every day the Ten Commandments which were designed by him to show you how to do good. This malicious and rebellious attitude is a slap in the face to your kind Creator and Father in heaven. In your iniquities you daily splash mud on his holy name. Your transgressions defy God and resist his will. As “a sow having washed” returns “to her wallowing in the mire” (2nd Peter 2:22), so you regularly have returned to your sins and have exasperated the Almighty.

To be sure, as evil crowds on Good Friday could not wait to get their hands on their God and put him to death, so it always has been that “the heathen rage, and the people plot a vain thing. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed One, saying, ‘Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us’” (Psalm 2:1-3).

Yet “cursed will be everyone who would not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Galatians 3:10) God’s unbreakable Word threatens. Indeed, so incensed is the Almighty by the human race’s obsession for sinning and for rejecting anything which is holy, that he has threatened: “The soul that would sin, it must die” (Ezekiel 18:4), and has prepared not only a day of dread on which all transgressors will be judged and sentenced to death, but he has prepared a terrible place of punishment for them: a lake of fire (Revelation 20:15) in which his burning

anger will be the excruciating torment that will run forever.

Hence this antagonism and animosity between Heaven and the rebellious race of human beings goes far beyond the simple conflict between enemy combatants. It is far more intense and bitter.

So how could two opponents as this ever overcome such hatred?

Moreover, who could mediate and reconcile these two?

What would it take to reconcile them? It will take God’s own blood. That is, God himself would have to come down to earth and assume a man’s body so that he could undergo the punishment which was meant for man. This would require suffering under the anger of Divine Justice. To be sure, on his cross the God-man testified that this was happening when he cried out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34.) “To be forsaken by God” biblically means the same thing as “to suffer under his anger.”

Thus on Good Friday, “the sudden, terrifying gloom that overcast the earth at full midday when the very sun seemed blotted out from the heavens was a reflection of the fearsome and impenetrable darkness that now filled our dying Savior’s soul. His heavenly Father, the central Sun of His life now hid His gracious face from Him. He now beheld nothing but the forbidding countenance of the angry, avenging, holy Judge. God had now become cruel to Him (Job 30,21), and made Him to be sin for us, and suffered Him to expiate the very last and

extremest penalty of sin – separation from God, the divine source of all life and happiness. He now dwells in that outer darkness where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, where the terrors of the damned consist in this very thing, that they are forsaken forever by God!” (F. W. Herzberger, *The Family Altar* [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1922], page 93).

As Luther once remarked: “God forsaken by God: who could understand it?” Yet we have the Almighty’s confirmation that it did happen.

The technical term for this action is that Christ “atoned” or our crimes. That is, he paid back God for them by completing the full sentence of punishment which Divine Justice had required. Indeed, by doing so he is “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1st John 2:2). That is to say, the sacrifice of Christ, in which he gave himself up to be “delivered for our offenses” (Romans 4:25) in hell, is the only satisfaction to God by which he would drop his anger against sinners and become reconciled to them.

In other words, not a simple “forgive and forget” would suffice. Christ had to spill his blood in a horrible death to satisfy the exacting demands of Divine Justice. A ransom price, a redemption, had to be paid. The only payment costly enough to effect the release of billions of sinners from damnation; the only amount great enough to equal the punishment of the world in hell forever, was the spilling of Christ’s blood on Calvary.

We often hear the words “Redeemer” and “redemption,” but do not fully realize what they mean. They mean that in order to rescue the whole rebellious race from eternal torment, a price had to be paid to Heaven. Yet the only price great enough for Divine Justice to recognize; the only payment powerful enough to do the job, was if God himself would be punished with damnation. Think of it! “You are bought with a price” (1st Corinthians 6:20).

Thus on dark, lonely Golgotha, nailed to a wooden cross, suffering the execution given only to the worst criminals, Divine Justice used this crucifixion as a visual aid to grab your attention as to what really was going on: namely, that Jesus Christ was weighted down with all of the world’s guilt for all of its crimes, and was suffering its punishment of eternal divine anger to spare you from it. Think of his devotion!

“For this reason he is the Mediator of the new contract [the gospel], by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first contract [the law]” (Hebrews 9:15).

In addition, to supply their lack, transgressors have been provided with a righteousness which Christ had gained for them by his holy life on earth.

*Therefore my Intercessor be,
And for Thy bloody merit
Declare my name from judgment free,*

*With all who life inherit;
That I may see Thee face to face,
With all Thy saints in that blest place,
Which Thou for us hast purchased.
Hymn 552:6*

Propitiation.

This is a technical term. Technical terms are used for precision and exactness. Indeed, in biblical terms and teachings, we want to be precise and exact in order to speak God's Word faithfully (Jeremiah 23:28).

However, in our secular conversations "propitiation" is never used. As a result, its meaning is probably unfamiliar to many of us.

Just the same, under those circumstances which would call for the use of this word, people instead will use such words as "satisfy," "settle him down," "pacify," or "placate." The technical term "expiate" also would mean about the same thing: "to make reparations for damage; to remove the reason for anger." Though the English translators of the *King James Version* and the *New King James Version* have not used "expiate," a few hymn writers and various authors of church literature have used this term.

"Propitiation" is that English word which the translators have used to interpret a specific Greek word which is used several times in the New Testament. For example, it is found in 1st John 2:2 & 1st John 4:10, and

refers to Jesus Christ. Likewise, it is found in Romans 3:25 where it also refers to Christ. It means "he who propitiates" to God; that is, "he who makes a satisfaction to God to pacify his anger."

When and where on earth did the God-man, Jesus Christ, accomplish his work of propitiation? Colossians 1:20 answers: He "made peace through the blood of his cross."

What is more, in Hebrews 9:5 the Greek word used means "the place of propitiation," namely, the lid of the Old Testament ark of the covenant, which lid also has been termed "the mercy seat" which was sprinkled with the blood of a slain lamb by the High Priest, which blood, in turn, was the sin offering on the annual Day of Atonement. As a result of this sprinkling, Divine Justice was satisfied with this payment, and became pacified.

This "blood of sprinkling" foreshadowed and described the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1st Peter 1:2), that is, what the all-sufficient Savior would accomplish in New Testament times. As Hebrews 9:11-12, 16 & 22-24 describes it: "Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood he entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.... Where there is a testament, there also of necessity must be the death of the testator... According to the law almost all

things are purged with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no remission. Therefore, it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”

In other words, “This [new] Covenant, too, like the one of old, has its ratification by the blood of sprinkling. The blood shed by Christ on earth for atonement is conceived as carried by Him with Himself into the holy place on high to be forever the blood of sprinkling” (W. H. T. Dau, *Doctrinal Theology*, volume 1 [Saint Louis: mimeographed, 191-], page 303).

Hence this “blood of sprinkling” was intended to occur in heaven, after the Lord’s death in hell, his other work of propitiation, had been completed on earth.

What would be its purpose? This “blood of sprinkling” in heaven forever motivates the Trinity to forgive us our sins.

In fact, Christopher Wordsworth, the 1800’s hymn writer, sings about this, and describes it as well as the ascended Lord this way:

*Now our heav’nly Aaron enters,
With His blood, within the veil.
Hymn 231:4*

So why has this gracious matter been revealed to you? It is to reassure you of the forgiveness of your sins.

Hence this is the ongoing work of propitiation. This is the ongoing work of Christ your Mediator.

*Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
Which at the mercy-seat of God
Forever doth for sinners plead,
For me – e’en for my soul – was shed.
Hymn 326:4*

* * *

With what, again, did Christ pay Divine Justice? Christ “made peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20).

God’s Blood.

This remarkable phrase is used repeatedly by Scripture to bring this gospel fact to your attention for your faith’s strengthening through gospel knowledge and assurance. For instance, God “has purchased the church with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). “We have redemption through [Christ’s] blood” (Ephesians 1:7). “The blood of Jesus Christ, [God’s] Son, cleanses us from all sin” (1st John 1:7). “Jesus Christ... loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood.”

Thus when John the Baptist pointed to the Lord Jesus and announced, “Behold: the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), his audience could and should have understood his meaning. Namely, that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of those familiar, Old Testament sacrifices involving the Passover lamb; “for indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” the Holy Spirit teaches in the Epistle reading to be read for Easter Sunday in church (1st Corinthians 5:6-8).

To be sure, in order to prepare the lamb for the Passover meal, as with all of the Old Testament, livestock sacrifices, the lamb’s neck was cut with a piece of flint rock, later on with metal knives, so that the animal would bleed to death, and die quietly in this manner. This is the idea behind the biblical term “the shedding of blood,” that is, “the pouring out of blood,” meaning that a life had been taken. The Hebrews were taught that their state of guilt was transferred to this lamb, and as their substitute, it consequently would take on their divine punishment. This punishment was death – death by being bled to death – in other words, death by having its blood poured out. Hence the scriptural teaching: “It is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11). “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22).

Thus the other Old Testament sacrifices, such as the morning and evening lamb sacrifices in the temple (Exodus 29:38-39), and of the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:8-

26), were for the same purpose: to remove the people’s guilt and punishment until the time when Christ would accomplish it by his blood. Hence we were redeemed “with the costly blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1st Peter 1:19; consult Numbers 28:3; 29:7).

Indeed, these sacrifices were sacraments which dispensed the forgiveness of sins to the people for the time being by virtue of the coming Savior from sin.

*He blotted out with His own blood
The judgment that against us stood;
He full atonement for us made,
And all our debt He fully paid.
Hymn 434:2*

The shedding of Blood.

Luther refers to “this inestimable, infinite treasure, even the death and blood of His Son, one drop whereof is more precious than the whole world” (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, translators Theodore Engelder and John T. Mueller, volume 2 [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1960], page 64). This would raise the question: “Would it be necessary to be saved by all of the blood of Christ?”

“Lutherans say that the blood of Christ, the blood of the Son of God, has infinite value in even its smallest amount – not the quantity, but the quality of the blood shed by the Son of God endows it with infinite redemptive worth – but that, on

the other hand, since Christ poured out His blood according to the will and counsel of God, we may not say that He shed one drop of His blood superfluously. God regulated this matter. Quenstedt: 'God alone knows best how much is required for a plenary and perfect satisfaction, and why He wanted His only-begotten Son to suffer just so many strokes, not more, no less, and to shed just so much of His blood as was shed... Just how much it behooved the divine justice to accept, the Word of God, not our imagination, must tell us'. In short, we regard the whole obedience and the whole suffering of Christ, as it is presented in Scripture, as the ransom which satisfied the divine justice. – When we ascribe redemption to a portion of the work of redemption, as Scripture also does (Rom. 5:10: 'Reconciled to God by the *death* of His Son'), that is to be understood not as excluding, but as including, the rest of His work" (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, translators Theodore Engelder and John T. Mueller, volume 2 [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1960], page 381f.).

Thus when Scripture credits salvation to a portion of the work of salvation as it does in Acts 20:28: God "has purchased the church with his own blood," this is to be understood not as excluding, but as including the rest of his saving work.

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12.) Was it necessary, then, for all of Christ's blood to be poured out literally during his crucifixion on Good Friday as the Passover lamb's blood was? No.

To be sure, a full loss of blood at that time would have caused a premature earthly death for him, that is, a separation of his soul from the body. Such a loss of blood, however, did not occur. When Christ did expire at 3 p.m. on Good Friday, it was because he had willed his soul to separate from his body. Using his almighty power, this occurred (John 10:15-18).

Realize that in Christ's crucifixion, unlike the Passover lamb, his Roman executioners did not try to cut his neck, and have him bleed to death! Moreover, neither the nails and the spike that affixed him to the cross, nor the prior scourging (Mark 15:15) were intended to cause a fatal loss of blood. Crucifixion was designed to make a person experience the most possible pain, for the longest period of time (a few days) without losing consciousness.

What is more, the blood that later did pour out miraculously after the soldier pierced his side (since once the heart would stop pumping, blood no longer will flow, even from a gaping wound) came after the Lord Jesus already had completed his guilt-removing, punishment-serving work (John 19:28, 30 & 34), not during it. Hence it was for a different reason that this blood (and the water) later poured out from his side. The apostle John, an eye witness of this miracle, reports it (John 19:34-35). However, he offers no explanation for it. Just the same, later on in his Epistle, he once again addresses the subjects of water and blood. This time he implies that they refer to the two sacraments (1st John 5:6 & 8).

Literal or figurative? The “shedding of blood” or the “pouring out of blood” means that life has been taken away either (1) by bleeding to death; (2) by being slain by a piercing of the body by a sharp instrument (note that Deuteronomy 21:1 “slain” means the same as verse 7: “shed this blood”); or (3) by being bludgeoned to death by rocks (Acts 22:20). Thus the examples of (2) and (3) would be a figurative use of the expression “pouring out of blood” since the victims in those cases did not bleed to death, but rather died from other causes.

Indeed, the human mind might rationalize and deduce that it is not actually the physical blood of Jesus Christ, the God-man, which saves, but it was his suffering in hell on the cross and the judicial decision of Divine Justice that after Christ’s completion of punishment, the sinful world was free to enter heaven. For example, unlike the Passover lamb, all of Christ’s blood did not pour out during the time he suffered on the cross. Hence “God’s blood” simply could be an allegory for the actual agent (Christ) and the agencies (his dying in hell; God’s judicial decision) which did save us. An allegory is a figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another.

With this in mind, then, should it be concluded that the expression “shedding of blood” only should be taken in a figurative sense when the Lord Jesus, on the altar of his cross, died the second death in hell, since in

doing so he did not bleed to death in the process, unlike the Passover lambs which did? No.

Scripture is so clear and insistent when it teaches of God’s saving blood, that we must take it as no allegory, but literally, even though our reason may not comprehend it.

To be sure, realize that, first of all, Scripture must be taken literally when it states something! Scripture only could be taken figuratively after Scripture itself, not the rationalizing human mind, would present us with a reason to do so (1st Peter 2:5 “stones,” for instance). In this case, Holy Writ has not provided us with any reason to take this figuratively.

In addition, the Passover lambs to which Christ specifically is compared literally had their blood shed.

What is more, the Lord himself plainly states, while instituting the sacrament and utilizing the liquid of wine for a physical element of it, that “This is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

Furthermore, the Lord’s suffering in Gethsemane under the fury of Divine Justice was so great that he perspired “great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44). This would qualify as a “shedding of blood” unto death for the forgiveness of sins, since already in Gethsemane he was undergoing the second death in hell.

Jesus, the Lord, the mighty God,

*An all-sufficient ransom paid:
O matchless price! His precious blood
For vile, rebellious traitors shed.
Hymn 202:3*

Note: Christ announced before he expired at 3 p.m. that he already had completed his work of salvation (“Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished,” John 19:28, “said, It is finished,” John 19:30). In other words, he already had suffered the punishment of the whole world. Thus the scriptural expression “died on the cross for our sins” will refer to that period of suffering from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. while he was still alive on the cross, dying the second death in hell (Revelation 20:6 & 14; 21:8). Hence the expiring which Christ did on the cross at 3 p.m. was not a part of his dying in hell; that is to say, it was not a part of his “dying on the cross for our sins,” for this already had been completed.

Consequently, unlike other men, Christ experienced first the second death, then the first death (the separation of body and soul). In the divine plan of salvation that is the way the sequence had to be.

A Summary of Salvation.

When the Bible would talk about salvation, sin, and saving, there are all sorts of words and descriptions that are used. Yet stated simply, what would it all mean?

It will mean this:

Shortly after he was created holy, man rebelled against the laws of his holy Creator, and broke every last one of them.

For this act, he had to pay.

As citizens, who would break serious civil laws, will be held to account, so much more will men, who would commit crimes against the righteous Almighty, be arrested at their death, found guilty, and punished forever by God’s fiery anger.

Just the same, the Creator had mercy on those whom he had created. He wanted them to live with him in harmony in heaven. Yet he could not overthrow his own holy laws. Therefore, in order to satisfy both his desire for their pardon and his demand for their punishment, he thought of a way to satisfy both.

Since this satisfaction could be accomplished only by the unlimited capability of God himself, the Son of God was chosen to do it.

What would be the list of things which he would have to accomplish?

Simply put, it will be this:

So that sinners would be free to spend eternity in heaven, not in hell, the Lord Jesus Christ would have to take on a human nature, and suffer their eternal punishment in flames for them.

Secondly, so that sinners could be considered by God as righteous people, and thereby allowed into heaven, the Lord Jesus lived a righteous life in everyone's place.

When both of these acts were placed before Heaven's judgment throne, they both were approved.

However, men's hearts still would need to be changed so that they could and should follow after righteousness, and not after sin.

Therefore, Heaven decided that the Holy Spirit would use the gospel story of the saving acts of God as the sole means to change the hearts of its readers to serve God, and to reject temptation.

Furthermore, by his inviting power, the Spirit of God also would move sinners' minds to believe God's pledge that his saving acts were meant for them, so that they would not push God's salvation away from them, and thus lose out on being admitted to heaven.

The Resurrection of Christ.

On Good Friday afternoon, just before 3 p.m., "Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished.... said: 'It is finished'" (John 19:28 & 30). Thus the Lord assured us that his saving work on earth had been completed. In addition, the reason why he vocalized it is so that we could be aware of it.

The two words "accomplished" and "finished" are actually translations of one and the same Greek word.

The word "finished" conveys the idea in our common, America usage of something that has required hardship, but that finally has come to an end. "Accomplished," on the other hand, has a positive, constructive sense to it, for example, that a lack now has been filled. Hence "finished" has a sigh of relief to it. "Accomplished," on the other hand, has a cry of victory to it.

At this point on Good Friday, what would God do next according to his plan of salvation?

For instance, would Christ merely come down from his cross, and ascend into heaven? Would he lay down his life, and have his body put into a grave where it would remain until the Last Day to be raised up in the general resurrection of the dead (John 11:24)? His disciples thought so despite their Master's clear prophecies to them to the contrary (Matthew 26:2 & 32).

Nevertheless, Heaven planned all along to hold a resurrection. What would be the Trinity's purpose in doing this: in having the human nature of Christ die an earthly death, and then bring it back to life? Realize that it was all for your benefit, to strengthen your faith!

First of all, the resurrection of his Son from the dead on Easter was God's intended way of announcing to his whole creation Christ's astounding accomplishment on Good Friday, especially that Christ's action consequently moved Heaven to declare the whole world righteous ("He was raised again for our justification," Romans 4:25).

Secondly, as our high and holy leader, Christ would show us the way to heaven, the route we would take by demonstrating what would happen to us at life's end, namely, that our bodies would die, as a judgment on the sin that lived in us and caused us to sin. Yet our souls would ascend to be with Christ (Philippians 1:23). Then on the last Day our bodies would be returned to life and reunited with our souls.

Thirdly, as a carrier of the entire state of guilt for the whole world, Christ's body likewise had to die as a judgment on the sin which his body had carried. This was the will of Divine Justice.

Fourthly, the Almighty wanted to use the resurrection of Christ also to announce the defeat of our dreaded and powerful spiritual foes, namely, the complete rout of them as far as God is concerned. In his gospel promise to Adam and to Eve in the Garden (Genesis 3:15) the Lord pledged to refight in the future this battle which the devil just had won, and to defeat him. "For this purpose the Son of God appeared: that he should destroy the works of the devil" (1st John 3:8; see Luke 11:20-22). This occurred on Good Friday, and was announced at that time ("It is finished," John 19:30), as well as on Maundy Thursday ("Now the prince of this world will be cast out," John 12:31), and in a big way on Easter.

Fifthly, Christ has defeated sin, that is, he has cancelled sin's condemnation. In other words, by laying on Christ, the heavenly lamb, "the iniquity of us all"

(Isaiah 53:6), sin and its state of guilt, have been removed from us. Then by suffering the punishment come due for being guilty of sin, Christ has cancelled sin's condemnation of him. With this Divine Justice is now satisfied, and has declared Christ to be innocent of any further punishment.

This declaration was announced, not audibly, but by an act, when the Father raised his Son from the dead on Easter. Now Christ is all through with sin. He is "dead to sin," as the apostle strongly puts it (Romans 6:7-11). Since then this astounding announcement has been published in the pages of the Bible under the gospel pledges.

This Easter announcement, which took the form of Christ's resurrection, also would include the victory over earthly death: that Heaven had removed its sting (1st Corinthians 15:55), that is, its potency to strike terror into the believer's heart since it is the door opening to hell. The Almighty pledges that according to his mighty power he has transformed death into a mere sleep for the Christian, as when he would lay his head down at night (John 11:11; Matthew 27:52).

Moreover, this grand display of Christ's resurrection would mark the end of hell – another spiritual enemy. Believers in the gospel no longer will have to enter there (Mark 16:16; John 3:15). After its fall into sin, the human race would have to be punished in hell for its inexcusable, malicious state of guilt. But after

the Lord declared the whole ungodly race to be righteous (Romans 4:5), it is now free to enter heaven. Just the same, only those who actually would believe this declaration of God will enter heaven. Those who would reject it “will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2nd Thessalonians 1:9).

In this context understand that the pure and holy Law of God which, nevertheless, threatens us with the punishment of an earthly and eternal death (Romans 7:10-12; Genesis 2:17; 3:19) since we have violated its commands, and which also cursed our substitute, Christ, to suffer in hell, is never depicted in the Bible as a spiritual enemy!

Likewise take note that the anger of God (Colossians 3:6; Revelation 6:16-17), which Christ had to placate by his cross-suffering, under which unbelievers will suffer fire and torment (Revelation 20:15; Luke 16:24), is never depicted by Scripture to be a spiritual foe!

To be sure, throughout his epistles the apostle Paul pointedly refers to the importance of Christ's resurrection, linking it up with saving faith: “If the dead were not to rise, then Christ would not be risen. If Christ were not risen, your faith would be futile; you still would be in your sins” (1st Corinthians 15:16-17). “If you would confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). The apostle Peter echoes this importance: “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ... has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1st Peter 1:3).

Understand, then, that the resurrection of Christ on Easter was undertaken to fill out God's plan of salvation for your benefit: to bring you to heaven!

*But Jesus Christ, God's only Son,
To our low state descended,
The cause of Death he has undone,
His power forever ended,
Ruined all his right and claim,
And left him nothing but the name, -
His sting is lost forever. Hallelujah!*
Hymn 224:3

The saving Acts of God.

In order to settle accounts; to straighten things out; to set matters right with his divine, unbreakable laws, the triune God would have to perform certain, saving acts.

Generally speaking, the saving acts of the Trinity for the salvation of sinners could be divided up according to the way in which the Nicene Creed, which we confess on Communion Sundays, has them listed; namely, that the Father would send his Son down to earth to take on a human body in order to carry out the substitutionary part

of Heaven's salvation; and then, the Holy Spirit would do his work also.

Just the same, how would we know that all of this actually occurred? For instance, even if we would have been alive at this previous time, how could we ever peer into heaven, or know God's thoughts to find out what he was planning? Thus even if we would have been present to see Jesus of Nazareth on the cross, how could we know that at the same time, invisible to our eyes, the anger of the Almighty was poured out on him?

We could be divinely assured of these saving acts by God's promise. Therefore, that is what he did. He gave us his pledge. Hence this gospel promise could not only inform us of this hidden knowledge, but it also could give us divine assurance of it. Thus the Lord's way of salvation could accomplish these things for us because, once again, it is a salvation by *promise*.

To be sure, when it comes to fixing things, many of us are not minded mechanically. That is to say, many of us are not good at taking things apart, and putting them back together again. Just the same, if we ever would watch a demonstration on how an engine would work, that is, of how all of its various components would contribute to the whole operation; how they would work in unison or in sequence, we better could understand how these parts will work according to their design. Thus God wants us to be knowledgeable about his design of salvation and of its parts, and not to be ignorant of his

saving acts. In fact, sinners urgently are encouraged to acquire soul-saving knowledge (Colossians 3:16).

In addition, every time that you would learn of, or be reminded of one of God's saving acts, the divine power of that gospel truth will make your saving faith grow stronger. This is what the Lord wants. Hence this will be another reason why the Lord would want you to be well informed of his saving acts (1st Peter 2:2-3).

God hands his Salvation over to us.

It has been pointed out a number of times already that God hands his salvation over to us in his gospel promises like a governor does when he hands over a promise of pardon to a prisoner. Thus Scripture directs us to find God's salvation in the gospel pledges. It is to the gospel where we must look, and whose promises which we must believe in order to be let out of our prison of sin, unbelief, and the devil's prison. Hence it will be a natural and obvious conclusion to say that God uses his gospel to save us, as the apostle assures us, for instance in Romans 10:17: "Faith comes by the gospel report, and the gospel report by the Word of God" (my translation). "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).

Nevertheless, various errorists throughout the New Testament centuries adamantly have rejected this teaching. In effect, they have taught that God

communicates with man in a different way; that he gives men thoughts about what he wants them to believe; and that the Bible is, in essence, a mere supplement to the more important divine communications to the mind. They have written frankly that the Bible is “a dead letter”; that it has no life or power to work faith in anyone, contradicting the Lord’s clear teaching: “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63), also the plain words of Hebrew 4:12: “The Word of God is living and powerful,” and Romans 10:17: “Faith comes by the gospel report.”

To counter this faith-wrecking contradiction, and also to organize their thinking about the Bible’s teachings in an orderly manner, true teachers in the church have taught that in God’s plan of salvation, he will “apply his grace” toward sinners, that is, he will set up a way through which he will work to hand his pardon over to them so that, like a prisoner receiving a pardon, they will receive it and accept it, and no longer be without it. A governor’s channel to a prisoner, for example, will be a phone call, a letter, or even a personal visit. God’s channel will be his gospel.

Indeed, biblical teachers have noticed that Holy Writ speaks of itself as having both a purpose and a power which Heaven uses to bring salvation to sinners. Hence authors of books on Christian doctrine will teach that God uses the Word of God as his instrument to put “into effect his gracious counsels and purposes concerning the

sinner”; that is to say, to bring salvation to sinners. Furthermore, the Almighty has clearly taught and assured us that he will do this only through his gospel, and through nothing else. One of our Lutheran Confessions professes: “The declaration, John 6,44, that *no one can come to Christ except the Father draw him*, is right and true. However, the Father will not do this without means, but has ordained for this purpose His Word and Sacraments as ordinary means and instruments; and it is the will neither of the Father nor of the Son that a man should not hear or should despise the preaching of His Word, and wait for the drawing of the Father without the Word and Sacraments. For the Father draws indeed by the power of His Holy Ghost, however, according to His usual order [the order decreed and instituted by Himself], by the hearing of His holy, divine Word, as with a net, by which the elect are plucked from the jaws of the devil. Every poor sinner should therefore repair thereto [to holy preaching], hear it attentively, and not doubt the drawing of the Father. For the Holy Ghost will be with His Word in His power, and work by it; and that is the drawing of the Father” (Johannes Olearius, Thorough Declaration, XI, “Formula of Concord,” *Triglott Concordia*, editors W. H.T. Dau and F. Bente [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1921], page 1087f., paragraphs 76-77).

These “means” and “instruments” also have been referred to variously as an “intermediary agency,” “way,” “method,” “means of salvation,” or more recently “the means of grace.” The gospel promises and the two sacraments are these means.

Indeed, consider this: “It is a wise and merciful arrangement, that God has restricted His gracious operations

to certain means, and that he does not approach us by immediate contact and wants us to understand His gracious intentions concerning us, not from what we experience in our heart, but from the intelligence he conveys to us in His Word. The operations of the Holy Ghost would be in danger of being grievously misjudged by men, if men were left to determine their presence, character, process and force from the state of their hearts.... If we heed this warning, we will be kept from the error of those who confound the natural emotions of the heart with the operations of divine grace, and grieve over the absence of divine grace from their hearts, when they notice no natural sensations of grace in themselves" (W. H. T. Dau, *Doctrinal Theology*, 2 [Saint Louis: mimeographed, 191-], page 20f.).

"Accordingly, we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil" (Martin Luther, "The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article VIII, *The Book of Concord*, edited and translated by Theodore G. Tappert [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959], page 313).

To be sure, what is unique about the gospel is that it is an instrument with divine power, far beyond and above the pardon which any governor could give; for it has divine might to produce in the sinner not only the capability to believe Heaven's offered pardon, not only to make someone divinely certain of it, but it also has the divine strength to create this belief in the sinner himself. To be sure, while Holy Writ teaches that the gospel has the inherent divine might to bring about faith in a sinner,

it teaches that the power of the Holy Spirit also will bring about faith: "My speech and my preaching were... in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1st Corinthians 2:4-5).

"The message of the cross... is the power of God" (1st Corinthians 1:18).

Thus searchers of the Scriptures have found that the saving faith which the Bible teaches, is not solely a deductive process of the human intellect, in which sinners would attempt their best to convince themselves that what Holy Writ writes is true, and hence ought to be believed. Rather, they have observed that the gospel has three, divine powers to it.

First of all, the gospel has the divine power to alert sinners as to what it actually is, namely, forgiveness, and to move them to listen to it, and to desire it; "to give knowledge of salvation... by the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 1:77). "The holy Scriptures... are able to make you wise for salvation" (2nd Timothy 3:15). "God... has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" with the same power by which at Creation he "commanded light to shine out of darkness" (2nd Corinthians 4:6).

Secondly, at the very same time, the gospel pledge will hand over to the sinner of what it consists: forgiveness of sins. In other words, the gospel is a divine power to bring to sinners the very thing which, at the

same time, it is announcing to them. For instance, John 15:3 demonstrates this: “Now you are clean through the Word which I have spoken to you.”

Thirdly, the gospel is a divine power that will move sinners to believe it, and in so doing, to possess it by an act of believing. “The Word of God... effectually works also in you who believe” (1st Thessalonians 2:13). “Faith comes by the gospel report, and the gospel report by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17, my translation).

Note: In Romans 10:16 the term “the gospel” means the same thing as “our report.” Moreover, the original word in the New Testament Greek for “report” in verse 16 is a noun. This same Greek word is found in verse 17 also as a noun. However, in verse 17 this Greek word has been translated into a different English word, not as a noun but as a participle: “hearing” by the *King James Version* translator. Consult also Galatians 3:2 & 5 where this same Greek noun “report” once again has been used, and once again has been translated into English with the participle “hearing.”

Why would there be such a bending over backwards to mistranslate this word, especially in these vital passages? Remember that these *King James Version* translators were Calvinists! As such they denied in their creed that Scripture has any power to convert sinners, believing that it is simply “a dead letter.” To this end they have felt the need to correct Scripture to conform to what

they believed the Bible should say on this subject. This is why they have done this.

In fact, this has been not the only instance in which they have felt the need to correct Scripture. For example, see Acts 3:21: “Who must occupy heaven” is what the Greek says! The Calvinist, *King James Version* translator has rendered it: “Whom the heavens must receive.” The *Formula of Concord* has something to say about this: “As some Sacramentarians have willfully and wickedly falsified the text Acts 3:21: *Oportet Christum coelom accipere*, that is, ‘Christ must be received, or be circumscribed and enclosed by heaven or in heaven’, in such a manner that in His human nature he can or will in no way be with us upon earth” (Thorough Declaration, VII, “Formula of Concord,” *Triglot Concordia*, editors W. H.T. Dau and F. Bente [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1921], page 1013, paragraph 119).

An additional note: “Scripture teaches that the gracious and omnipotent operation remains solely God’s, though the entire divine activity proceeds through the means of grace. It is not detached from God, nor divided between God and the means of grace. God works all of it, and the means of grace work all of it. Scripture says this by declaring: God saves (2 Tim. 1:9), and the Word and Baptism save (Acts 11:14; James 1:21; 1 Pet. 3:21); faith is wrought by God’s omnipotent operation (Eph. 1:19) and through the preached Word (Rom. 10:17); the Spirit quickens (John 6:63), and the words that Christ speaks are spirit and life (John 6:63); the Christians are born of God (John 1:13), and Paul has begotten Onesimus and the Corinthians through the Gospel (Philem. 10; 1 Cor. 4:15)”

(Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, translator Walter W. F. Abrecht, volume 3 [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1970], page 153).

Thus with a gospel promise of God in hand, you are given a help to understand it far above the mere deductive process of your intellect. You are given the almighty power of the promise itself to enlighten your mind with clear understanding and, what is more, to obtain divine assurance as to its meaning, if only you would ponder it in your heart (compare Acts 17:11). No word of man has such an unsurpassed ability. Indeed, no writing of man could give divine certainty: no encyclopedia, no book on poetry, nor any book on philosophy.

In addition to the gospel report, the sacraments are also means or instruments instituted by God. In their case, they utilize physical elements: water, wine, and bread in addition to a gospel pledge in order to impress upon our minds with the help of our senses what Heaven pledges to accomplish by them, that is, to cleanse us from our sins by washing them away, and to assure us of our forgiveness of sins by giving us the very things which got us our forgiveness on Calvary: The body and blood of Christ.

A Preservation from succumbing to false Teachings.

This truth that “with a gospel promise of God in hand, you are given a help to understand it far above the

mere deductive process of your intellect,” concerns itself also with the serious matter today of recognizing the false teachings of false teachers. C. F. W. Walther reminds us: “In Matthew 24 Christ says of the time shortly before the Last Day: ‘Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or, there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect’. vv.23, 24....

“Nowadays Christians are split up into almost countless factions and sects, who oppose each other like hostile armies and fight; and even within these individual factions which have the Christian name there is now almost no more unity of faith and confession. There are almost as many confessions as there are chancels and preachers, almost as many faiths as so-called Christians; and there is almost no article of faith about which even Christians are not at variance in their teaching. However, the most tragic thing is that nowadays they know how to present and whitewash false doctrines with such cunning that they have the most wonderful Christian semblance....

“Is it, therefore, really possible in these times, to know who is right and be preserved from being misled? Should an unlearned man who has no time to study books every day be in a position to separate truth from error, examine everything and keep what is good? Certainly one would think that everyone would accept the truth rather

than error. However, do not even the wisest and most learned men now disagree, so that the one considers and calls that the truth which another deems and attacks as error? If even the wisest and most learned people cannot find their way, is one not to think that, therefore, an unlearned could discover the truth even less?

“True, so it seems; and sad to say, there are only too many who suppose that it is absolutely impossible to say with certainty who is right and who is not. But eternal praise and thanks be to God! It only seems so. True, the prevailing errors nowadays are many; true, they are presented and defended as the truth with great vigor; true, the whole Christian Church today seems to be a huge maze; true, the danger of being entangled in error and being lost is great as Christ has so clearly predicted of the last times; but with this tragic prophecy Christ has at the same time given comfort. He says: ‘Insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect’. Mt 24:24. ‘If it were possible’, says the Lord. It, therefore, is not possible. God has taken care that every person can find the truth; no seduction can be so cunning and no error so plausible but that even the simplest Christian can be preserved against it.... Christ himself says: ‘I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life’, Jn 8:12” (C. F. W. Walther, *Standard Epistles*, translator Donald E. Heck [Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press,

1986], page 359f.). Thus you have God’s promise. See this!

Furthermore, from his readings of Luther, C. F. W. Walther likewise reports on his remarkable find regarding error and the central teaching of Christianity, namely, that God has declared the whole sinful world to be righteous (Romans 4:5): “As long as this doctrine is quite pure among us, no error in other points can cling to us. It is as Luther says repeatedly: ‘This doctrine tolerates no error’. It is the sun in the sky of the church, and where it rises, all shadows must vanish” (*Justification – Objective and Subjective: A Translation*, translator Kurt Marquart [Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 198-], page 2).

Hence the errors prevailing in the church today are so strong, so appealing to the flesh that, if it were possible, even the very elect might be misled. Thus, do not perish during these dangerous times! Follow these three apostolic rules (1st Corinthians 15:1-7): First of all, cling firmly to the basic teachings of the gospel which you have learned; secondly, at all times stay with the clear passages of Scripture; and thirdly, know that the gospel facts are Heaven’s divine, unbreakable truth. Then even though it will grow darker in those churches calling themselves biblical, you still could walk in Scripture’s light, alert yourself to error, and gain the crown of victory. Do so for your faith’s sake!

Conversion.

Holy Writ describes man's natural state of mind as a sinful one; in which all of man's thoughts are lawless; in which he never could make his thoughts free from sin. Likewise, by nature sin would govern all of the faculties of his soul, that is, his intellect (knowledge and assent), will, desires, judgment, and memory.

To describe this sinful state of man, the Bible depicts it, for example, as a mental "darkness" (Ephesians 5:8; Luke 1:79: "those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death") to which only the gospel pledge could bring mental light to produce "the mind of Christ" (1st Corinthians 2:16), that is, to produce the true knowledge of, and hence the correct assessment and proper perspective of spiritual matters revealed in the Bible.

This sinful state of mind, with which all are born by nature, is further described as a mental bondage, or slavery, which has captivated man's will and his other faculties, in which condition he only could prefer lawlessness and unrighteousness.

Scripture goes into even further, picturesque detail of the sinful state of mind when, for instance, in describing the soul-rescuing work of John the Baptist, it pictures the fleshly mind as being perverse, like a crooked road that needs to be straightened out (Luke 3:4-6), in order to be of any use in believing God's salvation

promises; whose roadway is strewn with heavy rocks, that is, with stubborn mental obstacles, such as objections and doubts which need to be cleared away. In this spiritual demolition project there are also hills which need to be leveled, namely, sinful pride needs to be humbled, or eradicated, before the gospel pledge of salvation could enter the heart.

Thus be aware that any plan of salvation would have to conquer this resistance! Moreover, it would require a lot of power, outside power, indeed, divine power, brought to bear on man's mind to make these changes.

Furthermore, the human race would need to have its thinking transformed back to the way Adam and Eve thought before their fall into sin; to the holy way in which the angels are thinking. Sinful mankind has no idea how to accomplish this, much less the desire or ability to achieve such a thing. In fact, evil men are content to remain the way they are.

Nevertheless, God "would have all men to be saved" (1st Timothy 2:4). This is his will. Therefore, "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and saying... 'The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel!'" (Mark 1:14-15.) Then, neither leaving it to their minds to decide foolishly against it, nor foolishly to ignore his invitation, he urges, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness!" (Matthew 6:33.)

Indeed, God “would have all men to be saved” (1st Timothy 2:4). So God “commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations!” (Matthew 18:19.)

Thus it is God’s will that there should be pastors and missionaries who always would bring sinners out of the kingdom of the devil, and back into the kingdom of God on earth, so that they could enter his kingdom in heaven. This only could be accomplished by preaching repentance before announcing the gospel promises.

*Thus Jesus His disciples sent
Go, teach ye ev’ry nation,
That, lost in sin, they must repent,
And flee from condemnation;
He that believes and is baptized
Shall thereby have salvation,
A new-born man he is in Christ,
From death free and damnation,
He shall inherit heaven.*

Hymn 401:5

Hence it is God’s gracious will that he should have his kingdom among his created beings on earth. Adam and Eve were the first citizens of it. Then the devil pulled them out of it. Now the merciful Lord would pull them back in with a power stronger than sin’s hold over them.

How would he do this? What would be the Lord’s plan of rescue to bring man out of the devil’s kingdom (John 12:31; 1st John 3:8) back into his own, and to restore his original design?

First of all, to settle the enormous criminal case against the lawless, guilty race, the Son of God would have to satisfy the demands of Divine Justice by paying a ransom for them at a terrific cost to himself under his Father’s anger. Nevertheless, the entire ruined race really would not care at all if Christ had appeased the Almighty for man’s rebellion against Heaven (1st Corinthians 2:14).

In addition, apart from the Lord’s efforts to put his saving pardon into the hands of sinners, how could he get man to want to be reunited with him in his kingdom? For instance, how could he get man to have the will and the desire to stop serving sin, and to want instead to serve Heaven with a holy love? To do this, the Almighty would have to overcome man’s furious and malicious despising by using his mighty power. However, he would need to use it in such a way that would not force anyone or coerce anyone against his own will to believe. To be sure, the Lord would move the will of man in a warm, persuasive way. Hence the Spirit of God knew what to do, and how to do it.

Sinful man would need a transformation of his sinful mind from an inherited, transmitted, corrupt moral condition which theologians have consented to call

“original sin” into a condition in which his mind would desire to do God’s will. This intent of the mind Scripture has called, “the mind of Christ” (1st Corinthians 2:16). The solution to this would be that God would have to use his power to accomplish this, for man, in his sinful mind, would lack utterly the power, the incentive, and the ability.

What is more, there also would be the problem of how to keep man from falling back into a state of damnableness once he would be transformed. For example, after Adam and Eve had fallen into sin, the Almighty could have returned them to a state of complete holiness by passing his hand over them to remove their sinful state miraculously. Yet this alone could not have kept them holy; for Adam and Eve could have fallen back into sin and damnableness once again, even multiple times. Furthermore, they or their descendants even could have reasoned, “We do not care how many times we may fall into a state of sin and damnableness. We simply hope that God would return us to a state of holiness once again.”

Of course, the holy “God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses” (Ephesians 2:4-5), knew best what to do. His solution would be to introduce a new, preserving power to keep sinners from falling back into unbelief. Consequently, though Eve in all of her

holiness fell into temptation, you, in all of your sinfulness, now could resist temptation. How?

Indeed, it would have to be through a new “tree of life,” which by purpose and design, would be a spiritual life-giving model of that formerly spent tree of life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9), and supply man with true life, indeed, being itself a model of the coming tree of life in heaven (Revelation 22:2).

It will be that new, powerful instrument with which the Lord has supplied us; the same one that has brought us to faith: his gospel promise. It is by this gospel pledge that the Lord’s salvation is indeed one of promise. Would you see how important this promise is? When Heaven’s powerful gospel pardon reaches man’s ears, it transforms him into “a new creation; old things have passed away... all things have become new” (2nd Corinthians 5:17). Putting it briefly, the divine might of the gospel gives man a new heart, that is, it converts his will so that he serves God and no longer wants to serve sin. The Lord pledges: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh” (Ezekiel 11:19).

Hence after the almighty Lord would power up faith in us so that we could obtain and possess his salvation, we no longer would remain sinners who would hate God and love sin; for along with working in us a saving faith, Heaven will work a remarkable change in our

mind which would become “dead to sin” but “alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:11).

This divine change, that would come over us by God’s working, would be so different from a sinful state of mind, that Scripture helpfully has described it to us in detail by giving it some rather strong and remarkable names, for example, by calling it a “rebirth” or “regeneration” (John 1:12-13; 3:3-8; “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever,” 1st Peter 1:23; 1st John 5:1), and a “transformation” (Romans 12:2). In addition, the Bible also has called it a “renewing” (Romans 12:2), a “conversion” (Isaiah 60:5; Acts 15:3), a “rising from spiritual death” (namely, a resurrection, Colossians 2:12), an “illumination” or “enlightenment” (Ephesians 5:8), and a being “called” (Matthew 22:14; Romans 8:30).

Furthermore, in the process of the initial conversion of a sinner, and then in his ongoing, daily, moral restoration, the Bible will speak about “the old man” and “the new man” (Ephesians 4:22 & 24). This means that it is the Holy Spirit’s will to bring us out of the sinful state which he refers to as “the old man,” and to bring us into that new godly state which he calls “the new man.”

To that end, the Almighty will use the power of his mighty law passages in the Bible to terrify us of our damnable state as law violators. Next he will use his

gospel passages to move us to want to possess his saving pardon by believing it. In the process of doing this, the Spirit of God then will set upon our “old man” to put it to death (Romans 6:4 & 6: “Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”

Indeed, “Upon this element in man a severe attack was made by divine grace in a person’s regeneration, which broke the deadly spell of sin on man, and in justification which cancelled the guilt of sin. But remnants of sin remained in the form of defects in the understanding, feebleness of the will and perverseness of the desires. Regenerate Paul recognizes these remnants of evil in him in Rom.7.... [Note: “Remnants of sin” was used by Philip Melanchthon, “The Apology [Defense] of the Augsburg Confession,” *Triglot Concordia*, editors W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1921], page 171B, paragraph 58).

“Together with the process of putting off the old man there goes the process of putting on the new one. The ‘new man’, Col. 3,10 also is a term which denotes not the substance, but the quality of the regenerate. It is the form which that new life assumes which was implanted in man in regeneration. The spiritual ignorance of the natural man gives way to knowledge, Col. 3,10; the will becomes firm in the determination to live righteously, and the desires become sanctified in the true holiness, Eph. 4,24. The regenerate receives, so to speak, spiritual character and personality by this process” (W. H. T.

Dau, *Doctrinal Theology*, volume 2 [Saint Louis: mimeographed, 191-], page 119).

Thus at your conversion the mental faculties of your soul, namely, the intellect, judgment, will, desire (and memory) were so changed and sanctified that you became a “servant to God” (Romans 6:22) in which you loved the Lord with all your heart.

Nevertheless, the sinful mind in its own mental activity will continue to utilize the same intellect, judgment, will, and desire as it did before your conversion.

Scripture describes this sinful flesh by assigning to it various names; for example: “the old man” (Ephesians 4:22), the “flesh” (Galatians 5:17), the “outward man” (2nd Corinthians 4:16), “the carnal mind” (Romans 8:7), and “the body of sin” (Romans 6:6). On the other hand, the Christian nature has been termed: “the new man” (Ephesians 4:24), “the inward man” (2nd Corinthians 4:16), “the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16), “the spirit” (Galatians 5:1), “the mind” (Romans 7:25), and “the mind of Christ” (1st Corinthians 2:16).

How would the Christian mind and saving faith be related? They will be the same thing.

*So, too, by our repentance, must
The old man, with his sins and lust,
Be daily drowned, and then arise
A new man, righteous, pure, and wise.*

Hymn 403:5

Continued conversion. Just the same, as it was mentioned above, after the Holy Spirit’s severe attack on your sinful flesh (Galatians 2:19-20), remnants remained, like pieces of a burst balloon. As a result, it is God’s will that you should deal with these remnants as they were dealt with at your initial conversion, namely, by a daily ongoing use of the law and gospel passages on your mind; that is, by reminding your sinful nature, first of all, of those law passages which deal with the temptation at hand, either specifically, for instance: “Judge not, that you be not judged; for with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (Matthew 7:1-2); or in general: “Do not let sin rule in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.... For the end of those things is death” (Romans 6:13 & 21). Then remind yourself of gospel passages to motivate and to power your Christian mind to do the loving, godly act instead, utilizing, for example, the following: “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Romans 6:2.) “God proves his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “We love him, because he first loved us” (1st John 4:19).

If such a response would not be forthcoming, your faith over time will die; for if you would not feed your Christian faith with gospel passages on a regular basis,

especially right after you would have sinned, every transgression which you would commit will erode and chip away at your faith until there would be nothing left. So “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul!” (1st Peter 2:11.) “Walk in the spirit!” (Galatians 5:1.) Indeed, Holy Writ teaches that these two minds in your soul will struggle hard to gain the supremacy over the other: “The flesh wars against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh” (Galatians 5:17). This is why you have experienced conflicts in your mind which tug and pull at you in different directions regarding moral questions of right and wrong, especially regarding those answers that are not clear to your mind. Just the same, consulting the law of God will make these answers clear, for the law passages have divine power to them; which power could enlighten your mind as to their meaning.

In this difficult suppression of the sinful nature, Scripture comes to your aid by encouraging you to continue the fight onward to success. For example, the apostle makes a list of typical problems which face the average Christian, which would include the accompanying temptations of the flesh, enumerating: “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2nd Corinthians 4:8-9); likewise, “as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well-known, as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as

poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2nd Corinthians 6:8-10). In spite of all these discouragements, the inspired writer assures: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels [our bodies], that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2nd Corinthians 4:7). In other words, the gospel assures us that God will work his power through us to be successful in our struggles against our flesh.

In fact, even if we would feel too weak to “take off the old man” and to “put on the new man” (Ephesians 4:22 & 24), the gospel of Christ assures us that still “the power of Christ” will rest upon us and carry us through regardless of our weaknesses, for his “strength” will be “made complete” in our weakness (2nd Corinthians 12:9) whenever we would depend upon his gospel passages; for they will preach to us “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,” since our “faith should be... in the power of God” (1st Corinthians 2:4 & 5).

*Create my nature pure within,
And form my soul averse to sin;
Let Thy good Spirit ne'er depart,
Nor hide Thy presence from my heart.
Hymn 419:2*

Note: Some people may get the impression that the letters of the apostle Paul in the New Testament, that are written to common laymen of average intelligence, are

books on difficult theology. However, if you actually would look closely, the apostle merely will be engaged in what seminary professors would like to call “practical theology,” namely, the apostle simply is motivating congregational members, on a case by case basis, to curb their particular, sinful behavior on the one hand, and to practice good behavior on the other. The only effective motivator that could work will be one that is filled with divine power, intended also for this purpose: namely, the gospel. Indeed, this is just what the apostle uses.

Yet instead of repeating the same gospel passage over and over, the apostle Paul will use a variety of gospel facts. For instance, in one place he may bring up a saving act of Christ; in another, an act of the Father; and in yet another, of the Holy Spirit to motivate you in that holy manner which God wants you to be moved. In fact, the same gospel, motivational theme which you will hear in Romans 12:1, the Epistle reading appointed in church for the First Sunday after the Epiphany, “I implore you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God [that is, by the gospel], that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God” (my translation), you will find repeated by Paul throughout his letters, using different gospel words and phrases, to be sure, but still with the same, practical theme: “Refrain from sinning, and do good works because God has saved you!” So look for this gospel, motivational theme whenever you would read the epistles of Paul! It will be easy to find; for example: 2nd

Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 5:2; Philippians 2:1; and Colossians 3:1.

Furthermore, at times the apostle also will use these same gospel facts for the additional purpose of “edifying” (2nd Corinthians 12:19) the reader, that is, for “building up” his saving faith in the gospel even stronger. Why? The reason for this ongoing need is that on his own, a Christian could do little. He needs spiritual strengthening from a source of strength to make himself more capable of resisting sin, of doing good works, and of retaining a saving faith. Paul is aware of this. He knows that the gospel promises supply this strength, indeed, a divine strength, as God has intended them to do. So Paul has used them for this helpful purpose as well.

In addition, by presenting to them such a variety of the saving acts of God, the apostle wanted the congregations to be “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10).

Thus, as Paul would go about reminding his readers of the various, saving acts of God in order to educate them, to motivate them, to strengthen them in desisting from certain sins, and to keep the Ten Commandments, he will have quite a collection of gospel passages by the time he is through, and, consequently, a great deal of theology as well, as the other apostles also will do in their epistles.

Note: “How does God work faith in us?” “How does Heaven convert us?” The Bible characteristically does not present a mechanical explanation of how the triune God could accomplish these things, nor require us to believe it based on our understanding of the mechanics. Instead the Lord wisely teaches, in effect: “Believe my promise that I could do it,” and leaves it at that. Remember: His is a salvation by promise, not one by an assurance gained from an understanding of the mechanics involved. Consult John 3:3, 4, 9, 10 & 12: “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’. Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ Nicodemus answered and said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered and said to him....’If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” Romans 11:33: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!”

Absolution.

What would be “absolution”?

“Absolution” will be the handing over of personal forgiveness to one or more persons upon their confession of sins, either publicly by the public servant of the church,

that is, by a called minister of a local congregation, or by a lay Christian in a private setting.

Why would it be called “absolution”? Centuries ago writers of church Latin wondered what word they could use to refer to this process described above. They came up with the Latin word “*absolvo*” which means “to loosen,” namely, “to loosen one from his sins.” This term has stuck ever since.

Thus at his ascension, after our suffering Lord had paid the price to acquire our salvation, he did not take this forgiveness which he had earned back to heaven with him. He left it behind here on earth where it would do us some good. The apostle points this out in Romans 10:6-9. There Paul mentions “the righteousness by faith,” instead of the subject of “forgiveness.” Nevertheless, he teaches something which is true of both: “The righteousness by faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ that is, to bring Christ down from above, or, “Who will descend into the abyss?”’ that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. But what would it say? ‘The Word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart’, that is the Word of faith which we preach: That if you would confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (consult Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

Moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ has provided for all of the ways and means necessary to distribute on earth

his righteousness and forgiveness by faith. For example, on Easter evening he offered both to his disciples and to his followers (Luke 24:33): “Peace to you! As my Father has sent me, even so I send you’. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you would forgive the sins of any, they will be forgiven them’” (John 20:21-23). This they were to do as they would “go into all the world and preach the gospel” (Mark 16:15).

Hence as Christ during his earthly ministry not only announced forgiveness for the entire world (Luke 20:1), but at times, gave forgiveness out only to a single person, saying, for instance, “Your sins are forgiven you” (Matthew 9:2), so the Lord sent his followers out to do the same.

For example, on Easter evening, when his eleven disciples were gathered together along with other followers of the Lord (Luke 24:33), the risen Redeemer announced to them: “As my Father has sent me, even so I send you’. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit! If you would forgive the sins of any, they will be forgiven them; if you would retain the sins of any, they will be retained’” (John 20:21-23). In other words, the disciples would be faithful servants tasked with bringing the “good tidings of great joy which will be for all people” (Luke 2:10). Moreover, they should be encouraged to do so, since the Lord assured them that the Holy Spirit would be with

them, bringing his power to bear through the gospel words so that forgiveness would be handed over to those people hearing them. Thus their announcement of absolution would not be “with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that... faith should not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1st Corinthians 2:4-5).

Why would the power of the Spirit of God be needed? Every day the sinner faces the same drudgery in life. Commonly he goes through the same, monotonous routine, facing daily discouragements, dogged by persistent problems, burdened with heaviness, chained to unrelenting grief, wearied by fear, struck down by disappointment, deprived of love, and drained of his patience, as he tries to make it through to the end of the day. On top of this is the crushing weight of the nagging guilt with which he is burdened by the memory of his past sins. Since the sinner has no ability to escape his own conscience; since he has no mental capability to stop its accusations, something more powerful and enduring than the feeble and fickle will of the sinner would be needed; likewise something with divine intelligence to guide aid to the right spot, and to feed, to nourish, and to uplift the soul. Only the power of the divine Holy Spirit could do this. This is why saving faith needs to be not in the dilapidated “wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

Indeed, absolution is the actual giving to a repentant sinner his own personal portion of forgiveness

meant and intended for him alone. It is not merely an announcement of the availability of forgiveness. Nor is it a general announcement that the world's sins have been forgiven. But as a warden hands a pardon to a prisoner with his name on it, so Christians are to do the same to overcome the terrified sinner's doubt that he ever could be forgiven for committing such a terrible sin.

In addition, as Christian pastors and laypeople absolve others, they should be assured that theirs will be an actual, effective pardon, for the Lord's promise to them is clear and certain: "If you would forgive the sins of any, they will be forgiven" (John 20:23). Heaven is certain of this; you should be also.

In fact, one of our Lutheran Confessions notes that absolution "is also an aid and consolation against sin and a bad conscience, ordained by Christ himself in the Gospel" (Martin Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," *Triglot Concordia*, W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente editors [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1921], page 493, paragraph 1).

To whom is absolution to be applied? Some sinners are to be absolved; to other sinners, their transgression is to be retained, that is, not to be forgiven.

What would decide this? The facts.

Thus if sinners would be repentant, if they would be sorry for their sins and worried about them, absolution should be brought to them. They should be told: "Be of good cheer: your sins are forgiven!" (Matthew (9:2.)

However, if there would be open sinners who would show no remorse for what they have done wrong, and even would repeat it, showing no repentance or "fruits of repentance" (Matthew 3:8), without their solicitation they should be approached and warned: "Your sins remain on your head. You are not free and clear of them. They condemn you before Heaven's throne of judgment." As Luther has pointed out: "Every apostle, and every minister of the Gospel is authorized to proclaim unto the sinners who will not repent and are obstinately wicked, that they are in the clutches of the devil and surely will be thrust into the jaws of hell; on the other hand, it is equally a part of their office to assure the penitent and believers that, because of the sufferings and resurrection of Christ, heaven and eternal life will be theirs."

Hence from time to time there also will be a need for you to be assured personally that Heaven has forgiven you. So look forward to absolution from the pastor at the beginning of the Communion liturgy, and in the sacrament itself when you would receive the Lord's body and blood, since it is intended to assure you personally of your forgiveness of sins!

*All praise, Eternal Son, to Thee
For absolution full and free,
In which Thou showest forth Thy grace.
From false indulgence guard our race.
Hymn 426:11*

Repentance.

*My sin is very sore and great,
I mourn beneath its dreadful load;
O free me from this heavy weight,
My Savior, through Thy precious blood;
And with Thy Father for me plead
That Thou hast suffered in my stead;
From me the burden then is rolled,
Lord, I lay hold
On Thy dear promises of old.*

Hymn 413:2

“How could you ever get someone to change his mind?” Psychological researchers, and even recruiters of sales people, have done a lot of thinking about this matter. They have come up with some general ideas as to how. Yet even these do not always explain every change of mind. For example, researchers will say that when knowledge would come to people’s attention, that is, when men would hear about some advantage, then they will change their mind in order to obtain this benefit. Recruiters of sales people, for instance, simply will appeal to men’s greed for money to attract applicants, and to motivate their sales force.

However, this theory of changing one’s mind to get a benefit would not explain why people often will throw

away a good thing just to embark on destructive behavior. This will be because these researchers and sales recruiters never have figured sin into their equations, namely, the evil nature of men’s thinking. To be sure, Scripture points out, “What man is there among you who, if his son would ask for bread, will give him a stone. Or if he would ask for a fish, will he give him a serpent?” (Matthew 7-9-10). Just the same, the Bible also teaches that man sins daily, and could be selfish and negligent even toward his own family (1st Timothy 5:8).

For example, in regards to the greatest benefit which any sinner ever could be handed: Escape from eternal punishment and being ushered into heaven, man by nature will loathe and reject this in an ongoing manner (1st Corinthians 2:14), and will refuse to take a neutral or objective stance toward it. Thus the Holy Spirit with his mighty power would have to overcome this bitter hatred of the human mind. To be sure, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit’, says the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6) could sinful man ever change his mind and become converted. This “changing of the mind” is what repentance is.

How could this occur? Understand that by nature the attitude of sinful man toward his evil actions is one of indifference, even one of approval! However, if this attitude would change, and would become an attitude of self-condemnation of his sins, then that person will have changed his mind. He will have repented.

Indeed, it is God's will that everyone should change his mind from leading a sinful life, into leading a holy life. The Bible teaches that God "commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Why?

"God does not have pleasure in wickedness" (Psalm 5:4). To be sure, "God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it would be good, or whether it would be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). So "be sure, your sin will find you out!" (Numbers 32:23) "for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body... whether it would be good or bad" (2nd Corinthians 5:10). "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2nd Thessalonians 1:7-9), threatening them: "Depart from me all you workers of iniquity!" (Luke 13:27.)

Nevertheless, "the Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2nd Peter 3:9). Therefore, "Repent, and turn to God!" (Acts 26:20), for "godly sorrow works repentance to salvation" (2nd Corinthians 7:10). To be sure, "The Lord is near to those who are of a broken heart, and saves such as are of a contrite spirit" (Psalm 34:18). So "seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is

near! Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord!" (Isaiah 55:6-7) since "he who would cover his sins shall not prosper, but whoever would confess and forsake them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). Thus "If we would confess our sins, he will be faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1st John 1:9), because "the Lord is merciful and gracious.... He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities; for as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:8 & 10-12).

"Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is!" (Ephesians 5:17.) "Repent, and believe the gospel!" (Mark 1:15.) "Repent... and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out!" (Acts 3:19.) Confess: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13.) "I acknowledge my sin to you, and mine iniquity I have not hid. I said: 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'; and you forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:5.)

Hence when Holy Writ commands you, the sinner, to have a change of mind, this would mean "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Do so!

In addition, realize this: Your memory occasionally will recall with shame specific sins from your past which brought down hurt to others! Also your foolishness will accuse you of wrongdoing from which thoughts you could not escape. Likewise, you will become depressed after realizing that you had just fallen low once again through sin, and mentally could not shake the nagging guilt which persistently would ruin your happiness. When this would happen, recall with happy assurance the Savior's command to the armed enemies of his disciples in Gethsemane when he ordered them, "Let these go!" and they did (John 18:8); for with a similar intent today the risen Lord will exert his same divine power in a sublime way through his gospel passages on your mind, and command the guilt which is besieging you, "Let this man go!" and will free your mind from guilt, doubt, and depression as a refreshed person would be freed from his thirst, and will restore to you a calm, innocent mind which will be at peace with God and with your own conscience! Only the salvation promises of God could do this.

*He shows to man His treasure
Of judgment, truth, and righteousness,
His love beyond all measure,
His yearning pity o'er distress;
Nor treats us as we merit,
But lays His anger by,
The humble, contrite spirit*

*Finds His compassion nigh;
Far as the heavens above us,
As break from close of day,
So far, since he doth love us,
He casts our sins away.*

Hymn 59:2

Our daily Troubles.

The Savior has cautioned: "In the world you will have tribulation. "But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Just what could the Redeemer do with the fear, grief, and doubt which would rob you of cheer?

In other words, how could the Lord quiet your fears, replace your griefs with happiness, and displace your doubts with confidence?

To accomplish these things Christ went to the root of all these problems, namely, to sin, the violation of Heaven's holy laws. After this he would remove sin's curse on you, the guilty sinner. Next he would break sin's hold on you. Finally, he would restore you to your heavenly Father.

Realize, first of all, therefore, that to bring peace to your troubled conscience, and to quiet all of your fears, Christ has removed sin's curse on you by taking upon himself your guilt, and then by suffering its penalty in hell. By doing so Christ has removed God's anger at you

because justice now has been served. As your Mediator, he has moved Heaven to quit its anger, and to come to peaceful terms with you. With this in mind, then, there no longer would be any reason for you to fear, since God's anger on account of your sins has been stilled; for Christ has "made peace through the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20). Indeed, now "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

Moreover, to help you, Christ will use his divine power through his gladdening gospel news to overcome your anxieties with his divine assurances. Thus with his might he actively will put your troubled conscience to rest, and will quiet all your fears. Hence his powerful promises of peace will bring you what they say they would; likewise his pledges of comfort, joy, and so forth.

Secondly, to remove your griefs, and to bring happiness to your soul, your sinful heart also must be changed. Accordingly, what was impossible for you to do, the loving Lord accomplished for you. He broke sin's hold on your heart by implanting in you a new one, thus keeping his pledge: "I will give you a new heart, and will put a new spirit within you" (Ezekiel 36:26). "Therefore, if anyone would" have faith "in Christ, he will be a new creation; old things will have passed away," such as sin grief; "behold all things have become new" (2nd Corinthians 5:17). As a result, your new heart will desire to serve God "in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24), and to bring forth "joy and peace"

(Galatians 5:22), "in believing" (Romans 15:13), and to have as its "end: everlasting life" (Romans 6:22).

Consequently, this new heart will view any difficulty which your heavenly Father has pledged to send you "for our good" (Romans 8:28) as a spiritual blessing in disguise, and not as a source of grief.

Thus in order for you to "serve the Lord with gladness" (Psalm 100:2), and not to serve grief, the Father (John 6:44), the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-6), and also the Son (John 6:63) will break sin's hold on you by giving you a new heart.

Furthermore, to instill confidence in our minds that he has restored us assuredly to our heavenly Father, and to displace all the doubts which sin would produce, Christ, in the third place, will bring us into God's family by working in us a saving belief so that we could become "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26) "according to the working of his mighty power" (Ephesians 1:19), when we would listen to his gospel (John 6:63). Hence by believing we become "the children of the promise" (Romans 9:8), and are called "the sons of the Highest" (Luke 6:35). Moreover, as we believe in the gospel Savior, the Holy Spirit "testifies with our spirit that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16). As a result of such powerful persuasive testimony, doubt would be displaced in our minds so that nothing will be left but a confident belief. Accordingly, doubt will not defeat us. Rather, "we are more than conquerors through him who

loved us” (Romans 8:37) since we are “followers of God as dear children” (Ephesians 5:1).

Hence only the Highest could instill divinely-assured confidence in your soul, and displace the nagging doubts caused by sin when he moves you to believe in his gospel promises by converting your heart so that you may become a child of God.

Notice in this matter that all along the rebellious race of men has been incapable to do anything about sin! Even the brightest and the best never could make any headway. Yet the all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-compassionate, saving Son of God has conquered sin and its consequences solely for your benefit.

Indeed, since the Lord Jesus Christ has delivered you from eternal grief, he could deliver you as well from lesser daily troubles. “He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32. “He was in all points tempted like as we are yet without sin... and in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to relieve them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). What a happy assurance!

As a consequence of this and of other reassurances in Scripture, the apostle gladly announces: “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2nd Peter 2:9). How?

With a complete acknowledgment of your own inability, you will be compelled diligently to seek the

gospel promises for their divine power. The gospel passages are the only way through which the Lord will continue and “complete” the “good work” of faith which he “has begun in you... until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). It will be into this faith, that is, into your believing “mind” (Romans 7:25) through which God will work “in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13), that the Lord will pour his strength, so that in your daily discouragements, worries, and stress, you could and should remain calm and patient, and even lift your Christian spirit above this storm to view these troubles simply as divinely-pledged helps designed to purge out sin, to give you a deeper repentance, and a fuller faith. Indeed, in Romans 8:35 the apostle lists some examples of daily troubles by asking: “Could tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword” “separate us from the love of Christ?” He then replies: “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

To be sure, any follower of Christ merely could wait out these troubles. Nevertheless, all the while he would be tempted to worry, to be impatient, to be fearful, and to lose trust in Heaven’s protection promises. Therefore, you will conquer when by faith you would brush aside these troubling temptations through the power supplied to your faith by your conquering, resurrected Savior through his gospel. Pray for it! Ask him: “Let your power be upon me!”

In summary, then, Christ will use his divine power to give your faith his mighty divine assurance through his gladdening gospel news, to put your troubled conscience at peace, and to quiet your fears. Scripture assures you of this: that both God and his mighty gospel have the divine power to do this.

Furthermore, since the triune God has pledged to preserve you spiritually until you would reach heaven, commonly he will strengthen you for, or spare you from, various daily temptations. 1st Peter 1:5 assures that “you are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation” in heaven. “Faithful is he who calls you... who also will do it” (1st Thessalonians 5:24). Thus the Lord pledges to preserve you during your daily griefs by removing them from you, or by giving you the strength to bear them. This surpassing strength is obtained solely from his gospel assurances. You have his pledge for this: “The gospel of Christ... is the power of God for salvation” (Romans 1:16).

*Why should I grieve? He who fulfilled
The Law, thus to release us
He who His Father's wrath has stilled
By His own death, this Jesus
Still liveth, and all that He hath
He giveth unto me through faith;
Is there a greater treasure?
Hymn 189:2*

The Just shall live by Faith.

Galatians 3:11

What would this mean?

Simply put, it will be this: That person whom God will consider to be fully righteous, that is, who could enter heaven to live with him there, will obtain this divine gift simply by believing the righteousness-dispensing, gospel pledges of God.

To be sure, in such a condensed statement as this, a lot is left unsaid. A number of things are implied.

For instance, by yourself you would have no righteousness with which you could be let into heaven; for “Who could say: ‘I have made my heart clean; I am pure from sin?’” (Proverbs 20:9) since the entrance to eternal life demands complete righteousness, without any sin stain. Therefore, it will need to be your gracious God who would provide you with one; for it would have to be one which he himself has prepared, with which he would be fully satisfied, and by which he could announce assuredly: “This will get you into heaven.” Indeed, this is what he has done according to his unbreakable pledge.

From where could such righteousness originate? from Jesus Christ. According to God's gospel promise, the Son of God was sent down to earth to assume a human nature in order to live out a righteous life in the place of

all sinners. As a result, Divine Justice now regards this as the sinner's own righteousness.

In short, Scripture has given you the extraordinary pledge that this righteousness has been accomplished willingly by Jesus Christ, and that it was meant to be put into your hands so that you could live eternally with him in heaven.

Yet how would you be able to obtain this?

"By faith." Indeed, realize that every time the Bible would speak of this term "faith," it immediately will have transported you to the bright abode of divine pledges; where everything is governed by God's gospel guarantees; where God wants you to believe his pledges that Christ has created a righteousness for you, and that furthermore, Heaven has decreed that this righteousness is yours.

Thus faith never stands alone. It needs a promise to which to cling. To be sure, the sole function of saving faith is to believe a gospel promise. Hence, without a gospel promise, "the faith that saves" would not and could not exist.

Thus the word "faith" is simply Scriptural shorthand to refer to that remarkable trust which God himself has produced in the human mind to believe his happy gospel promise, for the purpose of obtaining and possessing that Christ-earned, Heaven-pledged righteousness with divine certainty which you, the sinner, now could claim as your own, and, consequently, pass through death into life eternal.

What soul-thrilling assurance the Almighty gives you! Think of it!

Just the same, the pressing question of the moment is: "Would you believe it?"

God wants you to. So do it! Declare: "Yes!"

Say it! Mean it!

*Savior, all my sins confessing,
Gracious hear me when I cry;
Give through faith the promised blessing,
Freely, fully justify.*

Hymn 14:1

Believing in Christ, and believing in his gospel Promises.

The title of this book is "The Salvation by *Promise*."

So how would we be saved then? Would it be by believing in Christ's gospel promises, or would it be by believing in Christ himself? It will be by both.

First of all, Scripture teaches that we are saved by believing in Christ: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!" (Acts 16:31.) "You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26).

In addition, Holy Writ also teaches that we are saved by believing the gospel, when it quotes the words of Christ: "Believe my words" (John 5:38 & 47). "Believe the gospel!" (Mark 1:15.) Indeed, "The gospel of Christ...

is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Thus both the belief in Christ and the belief in the gospel pledges save. How?

For the purpose of giving you more biblical knowledge to the end that you might grasp the salvation of God more firmly, the Bible will teach you about the various parts of the salvation which save you. For instance, it will inform you that you are “justified by Christ” (Galatians 2:17); “justified by his blood” (Romans 5:9); “justified by grace” (Romans 3:24); and “justified by faith” (Romans 3:28). Likewise if you would “believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15), and would “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:31), you will be saved, for the discussion of one part of salvation will include by implication all of the other parts of salvation; or, to phrase it negatively, the discussion of one part of salvation will not exclude the other parts of salvation which are not mentioned.

The purpose of this book has been to highlight Scripture’s active use of its vital promises as the basis for its many calls for faith from the sinner who is in dire need of obtaining salvation from God his Savior.

Believing the Truth and believing the Promise.

The theme of this book has been “The Salvation by *Promise*.”

Nevertheless, Scripture speaks in a number of passages in regards to its salvation by “truth.” For

example, it says: “Sanctify them through your truth, your Word is truth” (John 17:17). “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). The Father “begat us with the word of truth” (James 1:18). “God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2nd Thessalonians 2:13). You are “able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2nd Timothy 3:7). “The truth of Christ is in me” (2nd Corinthians 11:10). You “knew the grace of God in truth” (Colossians 1:6).

Therefore, could it not be confessed: “I simply believe the biblical truth of what Holy Writ has told me about salvation,” instead of professing: “I believe the gospel pledges of a salvation by promise”?

Indeed, would there even need to be a distinction made between the two, that is, between believing a promise and believing the truth, since, in effect, the outcome for both would be the same?

Scripture itself introduces the word “promise,” and urges its place and acceptance, declaring, for example: “That the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (Galatians 3:22). “This is the promise that he has promised us” (1st John 2:25). “This is the word of promise” (Romans 9:9). “The children of God” are “the children of the promise” (Romans (9:8) “according to the promise of life” (2nd Timothy 1:1). There is “a promise being left us of entering into his rest” (Hebrews 4:1).

Thus while for the purposes of dispelling doubt, and for refuting those false teachers “who would pervert the gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1:7), the Bible assures that “we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2nd Peter 1:10) but only brought out the truth about the “hope of eternal life which God, who could not lie,” gave us (Titus 1:2), Holy Writ also emphasizes that its salvation is one by promise (“which God, who could not lie, promised before the world began,” Titus 1:2), in which this unique form of salvation calls forth faith on the part of man in order to obtain its pardon, and was created partially for the purpose of putting to shame (1st Corinthians 1:19-21) sinful man’s prideful insistence on an opposite salvation by works; that is, by his pathetic attempt to obtain forgiveness through an obedience to the law.

Therefore, be “partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6)!

A brief Commentary on Salvation by Luther.

“The dearest and most comforting doctrine of the Gospel says nothing of works, which are commanded in God’s Law or by men; but it preaches and teaches only of the incomprehensible, inexpressible mercy and love of God, which He has shown towards us unworthy and

condemned sinners; namely that He, the most kindly, most merciful Father saw that we were so pitifully oppressed powerfully held down by the curse of the Law, so that by our own powers we could not have worked out way out in all eternity, nor redeemed or liberated ourselves from it. And therefore He sent His only-begotten Son into the world, threw all sins of all men on Him, and said to Him thus: You are Peter, who denied, Paul, who persecuted, blasphemed, and practiced all violence, David, who committed adultery, etc., also the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise, the murderer who hung on the cross, in sum, You shall be what all men are, as if You alone had committed all men’s sins; therefore consider now how You will pay and make satisfaction for them. There comes at once the Law, accuses Him and says: Here I find this One among the sinners, yes, Him Who has taken all men’s sins upon Himself and carries them, and besides this I see no sin in the whole world, anymore, except on Him alone; therefore He shall yield Himself and die the death of the Cross. Thus the Law with its accusation and terror presses upon Him with full force and slays Him. Through this innocent death of Christ the whole world is purified and released from sin and thereby redeemed from death and from all evil. Since now through this one Mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ, sin and death have been taken away, the whole world would indeed be so pure that our Lord God could see nothing in it except pure righteousness and

holiness- if only we could believe it. And even if something of sin should still remain, God still would not be able to see such sins for this clear, bright sun, which is Christ. There is no lack on that side; for Christ has carried the sin of the whole world, made satisfaction for it; but the lack is in us, who believe it weakly. If we believed it completely, we should indeed already be saved and in Paradise. But the old sack that still hangs about our neck does not let us come to such certain faith. Therefore it is highly necessary that we press unceasingly the article of the righteousness which we have in Christ, and make it great and glorious against the righteousness which comes out of the Law and works; although there is likely no language and rhetoric in the whole world, which can adequately grasp its greatness and glory, much less exhaust it. And just this argument which St. Paul treats here is very fitting and powerful against all sorts of righteousness of the law, not to mention the straw righteousness of human ordinances. For of these two things one must certainly and indisputably be true: Namely, if all the world's sins lie on the single man Jesus Christ, as the Holy Spirit testifies through Isaiah 53:6, then of course they do not lie on the world; but if they do not lie on Him, then, without fail, they must certainly still lie on the world. Again, if Christ Himself has become guilty of all our sins, which we have ever committed, then we are indeed absolved, free, and acquitted of all sins; but this has not happened through ourselves, our works or

merit, but through Him; but if He is innocent and does not bear our sins, then we must bear them ourselves, and die and eternally perish under them, as under a heavy and unbearable burden. To God be praise and thanks, Who has given us victory and conquest through Jesus Christ, our dear Lord, Amen" (C.F.W. Walther, *Justification – Objective and Subjective: A translation*, translated by Kurt Marquart [Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 198-], pages 11-12). [From Luther's Galatians commentary.]

Home to Heaven.

"Home" – what a comforting word! Just the sound of it brings feelings of warmth and happiness! Throughout these pages you have been reading about the gospel promise, ransom, righteousness, and so forth. What would be the final purpose for all these things? It will be to bring you home to heaven. "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20). "Now having been set free from sin," you have "the end: everlasting life" (Romans 6:22). Indeed, heaven is where you truly belong. It is where the Lord wants you to be.

Thus believers ought to bear a great resemblance to a group of emigrants on their way to a new land. Look at how anxious they are to arrive at their destination! Listen to how they talk excitedly about their new homeland! This subject is uppermost in their minds.

They never tire of discussing with each other what they have read and heard about it.

This is the way we ought to be. We should say to each another, for example, "Have you heard? In heaven we all will be gathered before the gracious and merciful God our Savior: the holy Trinity, dressed up in fine, white linen, in which we will celebrate the grand wedding reception which Christ will give for his church, and sing delightful songs of praise to him (Revelation 19:1, 4b-9). Moreover, we will worship him wearing our white robes (Revelation 7:10-13). In addition, we will offer up our prayers to him which will be mixed with heavenly incense (Revelation 8:3-4). Think of it! How glorious all of this will be! Could you not just imagine it!"

Therefore, Scripture enthusiastically describes this place in rich, comforting terms, such as "life," "eternal well-being" (Matthew 7:14; 19:16), "glory," "glory of God" (Romans 2:7; 5:2), and "peace" (Romans 2:10); also "an eternal weight of glory" (2nd Corinthians 4:17), and "eternal salvation" (Hebrews 5:9).

There believers will live in the highest well-being. Accordingly, Holy Writ takes the name "paradise," which was the name of the home of our first parents in their state of innocence, and transfers it to the abode of the blessed above (Revelation 22:2).

In addition, the Bible calls this wonderful home "the Jerusalem which is above" (Galatians 4:26), because the earthly Jerusalem was the capital of the Old Testament

people of God, the royal residence and the place of divine worship. Likewise, it is termed the "heavenly kingdom" (2nd Timothy 4:18) and "the everlasting kingdom" (2nd Peter 1:11). It is also referred to as an eternal "inheritance... that does not fade away" (1st Peter 1:4), meaning the ownership of lifelong happiness, just as the Old Testament Hebrews inherited the wonderful Promised Land. The blessed in heaven are said "to sit down at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Matthew 8:11), that is, they share with the saints of old in the joys of salvation.

In heaven they also "rule with" Christ (2nd Timothy 2:12), namely, they are given the high honor of participation with Christ in whatever he does. Moreover, they enjoy a "rest" or a Sabbath (Hebrews 4:9-11), indicating the peace and total deliverance from evil which the weary righteous will experience.

Furthermore, in heaven the Almighty reveals himself to his saints in his uncovered majesty "face to face" (1st Corinthians 13:12) so that "we shall see him as he is" (1st John 3:2). The saints are "they which came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14) because they had saving faith and kept it.

Hence the way to heaven is by believing the Savior from sin. Everyone who would believe that Christ is his personal Savior will enter the glory of heaven. Jesus Christ himself has promised this (John 3:16).

Moreover, in eternal life believers in Christ will live in perfect happiness. The Word of God pledges, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Revelation 7:17), and pictures the immense joy in heaven by describing it as a wedding reception (Matthew 25:10; Revelation 19:9) and as a banquet (Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:29). In addition, the saints are shown great honor by being sat upon thrones (Luke 22:30). What is more, there will be no needs in heaven, for “they shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore, neither shall the sun strike them, nor any heat” (Revelation 7:16). There will be no more suffering, for “there shall be no more pain” (Revelation 21:4).

Into this place the God-man, our brother, has ascended, and waits for us. Indeed, he is preparing a place for us (John 14:2), promising: “Since I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3).

In response to this wonderful pledge, let us sing the words which we do at Christmastime: “Take us to heaven to live with you there!”

A brief Statement of Salvation.

“William Walther, the excellent Luther scholar, records in his reminiscences an incident which came to my mind when I penned these lines. He attended the

lectures of the well-known Marburg Professor A. F. C. Vilmar, an independent thinker and prominent defender of the Biblical truth in the nineteenth century, and heard how Vilmar quoted the seventh stanza of Luther’s great Reformation hymn ‘Nun freut euch, liebe Christen g’mein’, Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice. And reciting the words of Christ... [*Now I am yours, and you are mine, And where I live, there you must be*’. See – Song of Solomon 2:16; John 12:26; Romans 8:39; & Hebrews 2:14-15!] Vilmar declared this to be the heart of Luther’s theology, and tears streamed down the cheeks of that tall, strong, ‘iron’ man. Some of my readers will at once recall how beautifully Paul Gerhardt expresses the same thought in the two closing stanzas of his well-known hymn ‘Warum sollt’ ich mich denn graemen?’” (L. Fuerbringer, *Persons and Events* [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1947], page 203).

*Since Christ has gone to heaven, His home,
I, too, that home one day must share;
And in this hope I overcome
All doubt, all anguish, and despair;
For where the Head is, well we know,
The members He has left below
In time He surely gathers.*

Hymn 236:1

A Prayer of Luther that expresses my Sentiments.

“My hearty wish and prayer, my diligent teaching and writing, aim at nothing else than to see the poor masses of your people, who have been so miserably torn by sects and confused by dreams of men, scattered and straying like a flock of sheep, converted to you again, that by your Spirit they may know you in the true faith as their only Shepherd and Master and Bishop of their souls (Ezekiel 34:23; 1st Peter 2:25). For their sake I still pray that you would exalt and preserve yourself and your Word through my ministry, in order that they may abide with you in the one faith; for I have not sought to have them cling to me, or that I should rise to honor or high station, but I have directed them to you, and made them cling to you, in order that you might be exalted greatly, and glorious and praiseworthy among them.”

This is a prayer of Martin Luther translated by W. H. T. Dau, altered, from a brief exposition of Psalm 7:7 appended to his writing “Concerning Secret and Stolen Letters,” *Dr. Martin Luthers__Saemmtliche Schriften herausgegeben von Dr. Johann Georg Walch*, Herausgeber Albert Frederick Hoppe, Band XIX (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1882-1910), seite 542.

*Lord, how shall I thank Thee rightly!
I acknowledge that by Thee
I am saved eternally,*

*Let me not forget it lightly,
But to Thee through all things cleave,
And my heart true peace receive.
Hymn 152:3*

* * *

THE SERMONS

SEE THE GLORY OF THE GREAT PROMISE OF GOD!

Luke 1:68, 70, & 72: “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people... as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets, who have been since the world began... to perform the mercy promised to our fathers.”

There is a little word in the Bible. It is a quiet word. That is, it easily could be passed by; it often may go unnoticed. In fact, it is hardly used at all in the Old Testament in the English translations.

Just the same, in the New Testament between all of the thrilling thundering announcements of the terrific acts of God on earth – in suffering hell for you, and in leading your holy life, smashing down all your spiritual foes in one spectacular victory – there it is. The Holy Spirit inserts it again and again. As the foundation of a magnificent house lays there quietly in plain sight doing its crucial task of keeping the whole structure from

crashing down, yet without much notice, while all of the fanfare seems to go to the pomp of the soaring turrets, or to the sweep of the grand arches, so also this important and crucial word, sitting right there in plain sight, would seem to be passed by without much notice.

What is this word? Why does the God of the glorious gospel bring it up in such crucial places in the New Testament? because it is so important.

That word is this: “promise.”

See from the following why your loving Lord has given it so much importance! See how great and glorious it truly is! Look at the pledge of God, and –

*SEE THE GLORY OF THE GREAT PROMISE
OF GOD!*

As you would study the first sermons of the apostles in the book of Acts; as you would wade through the river of reassurances in the Epistles of Paul, you could and should be struck by one word that has been brought up repeatedly in the New Testament. That word is this: “promise.”

The promise of God: what a blessing! How imperative it is for you to stop and to focus intently on it!

So lift it up high! Raise it up to the light of the Bible! Behold all of its glories like a diamond, for they will shine down upon you, and lighten your face with the brilliancy

of your gracious God and Savior, who will pour down his loving mercy upon you!

Realize that it was the high purpose of the Lord to shower benefit upon benefit on you through the means of his pledge! This is why in the New Testament age the apostles are directed by the Spirit to lift up the promises of God for your concerted gaze. Behold what wonderful things God has in store for you through his pledge!

To be sure, “the true treasure of the church is the holy gospel of the glory and grace of God,” declares Luther in thesis 62 of his 95 *Theses*. Understand that this is at what you need to look! Do so!

Do so now; for the Bible gives you the shocking news that you are in a wretched and hopeless condition as a lawbreaker; that though you may fool yourself into believing that you have complied with the Ten Commandments, you are really a child of his anger (Ephesians 2:3), ready to be struck down and punished by the furious Almighty for the evil in your heart; for “there is none who has done good; no, not one” (Psalm 53:3)! “The soul that sins must die” (Ezekiel 18:3). Face this terrifying truth! Do not deny it!

Then be sorry for your sins! Admit your guilt! Confess your many wrongs!

After that, realize that you need to be rescued!

How?

Stop and think about that for a moment!

First of all, understand that a rescue from your sins could not be something physical, such as some kind of a protective shield that you could place between you and the anger of God, or a fortress to which you could flee to protect yourself from God's eternal punishment! These will never work. Neither could you ever run away physically from God's presence like an escaped convict from prison, or hide from him in some lone spot. God is everywhere. You could not escape him. In fact, "death is God's arrest."

A rescue from your sins would have to be of an entirely different nature. It would have to be the same as when the governor of a state would pardon a guilty convicted prisoner. By his rightful authority the governor, indeed, could issue a full pardon to the guilty, condemned, and sentenced prisoner. That is to say, he could issue an authoritative and binding pledge that the person serving a sentence may now go free.

To be sure, this is the manner in which God has rescued you from your sins, namely, from their guilt, condemnation, and sentence of punishment. He has pardoned you. At the heart of his pardon is a promise that it is so. Nevertheless, certain conditions had to be met before the Almighty could pardon the whole human race. But these conditions were met fully and decisively by Christ's saving acts.

So how could you possess this pardon by God so that it would concern you, cover you, and benefit you? Ask

yourself: How would a pardoned convict realize the benefit of his pardon? Think about it! The answer is: he will realize it simply by believing it. That would be the only way. On the other hand, how would he miss out on it? by dismissing it, by rejecting it, and by not believing it.

In fact, the United States Supreme Court itself has handed down this decision: If a prisoner would refuse to accept a pardon, he will remain in prison! Consider the serious implication of this! Understand that though a governor may issue a real pardon to a prisoner, that pardon will do him no good if he would refuse to acknowledge it! He will stay in prison – just as if he never had been pardoned; or just as if he had torn up his pardon. Do not be so foolish toward God's pardon of your sins!

Thus, in order for your salvation to do you any good, you will have to acknowledge the gospel pledge of God that you have been rescued, saved, freed, and pardoned from the guilt and punishment of your sins. Believe it! In fact, say: "God's pledge has pardoned me, a sinner!" Do not be afraid! Say it! Mean it! God wants you to! Do it!

Nevertheless, if you ever would be tempted to think that a promise just would not be enough; that it simply would be too meager - even precarious - to save your soul from an eternity of overwhelming torment, realize that God deliberately, intentionally, on purpose set up your salvation in the form of a promise. By doing this he would want you to understand that it is all of his doing – none

of yours; that his almighty power could work through anything, even the most fragile, meager, and despised object in mankind's petty estimate, and still get the job done.

Just the same, see how wonderful and wise your true and triune God is by putting your salvation into the form of a promise! Arguably and theoretically, the divine Godhead could have put his salvation into something else. For example, he could have put it into a string of beads. Yet think of how in this manner your salvation easily could be lost or stolen! Indeed, see the disastrous unbelief which is connected with good luck charms which people wear around their necks, that is, with the use of objects to drive away evil: people look to the charm and not to God! To avoid this idolatry, and to remove any other thing that would be uncertain and unassuring, doubtful and unconvincing, the Lord put your salvation into the form of a promise – the opposite of superstition – because he loves you too much and considers your life to be too precious. What a caring God he is! Out of safety concerns for your soul, and so that you yourself could and should be certain of it, the Lord did not put his salvation into this or that which could become broken, lost, or otherwise untrustworthy. He put it into a promise: his promise. Trust it!

How could this be done? When a rock would give you trouble, you simply will push it out of the way. If a tree would present a problem, you will cut it down. With

people, however, it will be different. They are not lifeless objects. They are moral beings. They have souls that think and will. Therefore, you must deal with them in that fashion.

For instance, if you would like to give someone a gift, first of all, you will resolve to do it. Then you will follow through and act. Or, on the other hand, if there would be a problem, you will determine what needs to be done, and then, you will tell a person, "This is what I intend to do for you." After this, you would keep your vow by fulfilling its obligations. This is how promises work.

To be sure, realize that every day you yourself make promises! Because the human race is made up of rational souls, we need to make promises in order to communicate, and to do business with each other. For instance, banks could not operate without promises. Indeed, our entire business structure in this country: employers, employees, and customers, would cease to exist without the important bridge to establish relationships and agreements known as a "promise."

Just so, God knows, too, that you are a living soul, just as the angels and he is. He will deal with you as with a moral being. In other words, he will communicate with you through words, presenting knowledge to your intellect, and addressing your will with benefits in order to move you to act.

How would this work in the matter of salvation? It will work in this way: First of all, the Almighty would

contact and inform lost and damned sinners that because of the grace in his heart, he will come down to earth in the future, and, as their substitute, will do the works that are necessary to pull them out of damnation and to bring them into the mansions of heaven. Then, since these acts had not yet happened (and since few sinners would actually witness the acts of Christ), and since sinners could not see into his heart, God will promise the sinful world that there is grace in his heart, and that he will perform these saving acts. This will become known by the endearing name “the gospel.”

How did this work in your case? It has been done in this manner: The Lord would give you a promise, such as one of his many gospel pledges which he has caused to be written down in his Bible. Not leaving anything to chance, he also would send ministers and missionaries to baptize and to instruct you. Before giving you his gospel pledge, however, he would first prepare you for it by preaching to you his law, in which you will be told that the “anger of God is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18) because of their hardness and their unrepentant heart (Romans 2:5); that the Almighty one day will judge and punish them with his fury. Upon hearing this awful threat, God will use his power to make your intellect convinced of it, and for your heart to be sorry for your sins.

After this, the Lord would hold up to your saddened, sin-filled soul the thrilling pledge that he, your angry Judge, has stepped in for you and intervened out of his grace, and has rescued you out of your punishment. Then the Lord would convert you, that is, he would not let you fumble or lose his promise. He would use his power to move you to grab onto his pledge, and to possess it by an act of faith, so that you would find in it alone your sure salvation. This is what our text means when the Holy Spirit points out that God “performed the mercy promised to our fathers,” “because he looked on his people and worked out redemption for them.” This is also what the apostle declares when he sums up in words of one syllable, that cannot get any simpler, saying, “God gave it through a pledge” (Galatians 3:18).

So where, then, would salvation be found? in the promises of God. How, then, could you get to heaven? by the pledges of God. Of what, then, would you need to do more? to trust in the promises of God. Do so!

Understand, then, that the entire Godhead desired to save you; that God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son into death as the Savior from the guilt of sin and death; that in the fullness of time, the eternal Son took on a human body and by his substitution and through his saving acts of satisfaction took away the anger of God against you; and that the Holy Spirit works in your heart a faith in his gospel pledge and thus makes you possess the salvation which was gained for you by Christ!

What could and should be your response to all of this? See it as a promise! Then believe it! It is meant for you.

Indeed, lift up the gospel pledge high! Raise it up to the light of the Bible! Look at the glory of the great promise of God! Consider what a blessing this simple direct, yet power-packed promise of God is! How imperative it is for you to stop, and to focus on it intently! Realize that it is the only thing that will save you from the anger to come on Judgment Day! So believe it! Then look forward to heaven!

* * *

**GOD DOUBLY ASSURES THAT HIS PROMISE IS
TRUE**

Hebrews 6:11-18: *“Show the same diligence toward the full assurance of hope until the end, in order that you may not be sluggish but would be imitators of those who through faith and long patience will inherit the promises! After having promised Abraham, God swore by himself, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, saying, ‘Surely, by blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply you’, and thus, having had long patience he obtained the promise; for men, indeed, will swear by the greater; and for them an oath for confirmation will put an end to a dispute. Therefore, God, desiring more abundantly to show to the inheritors of promise the unchangeableness of his resolve, guaranteed by an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things,*

in which it would be impossible for God to lie, we, who have fled for refuge, might have strong encouragement to lay hold of that hope which is set before us.”

What if the new mayor and the new town council of your community were to announce some new changes that would affect your future? Would you pay attention? For instance, what if they were to promise new sweeping changes that would introduce grand new boulevards; and that to do this they would have to tear up most of the town, move most of the houses and businesses, or even demolish them. Would you be concerned? Yes, you would be.

First of all, you would demand more information about how this would affect you. Then you would want assurances, guaranties in writing that would safeguard your property.

Now stop and think about that for a moment! Would this be an unusual request: to want more information and assurance regarding something new in your life? of course not. This would be natural, that is, it could and should be expected from the mayor and the council if they truly were exercising due care.

So God also has seen the need to inform and to assure you. Do not think it strange, then, when he would take the necessary steps to do so! In fact, see the high wisdom and the great benefit to you when he would assure you through his gospel pledge! See why-

GOD DOUBLY ASSURES THAT HIS PROMISE IS TRUE

In the Garden of Eden, while Adam and Eve were in their state of perfection, there was no need to teach them theology. They already knew it. When he created them, the Lord placed into their intellect the knowledge of his will and of his truth, for example, that he would provide for them; that he was a triune God; and that after a time of bearing children on earth, he would bring them alive into heaven to live with him there.

Moreover, being in a state of holiness, Adam and Eve also had no need of being assured of these things. They already were fully confident beyond a shadow of a doubt, as the expression goes.

The same would hold true for the angels. They did not need to be taught anything about the will of God. They knew it. Neither did they need to be assured of it. They never doubted in their state of perfection.

However, after Adam and Eve fell into sin, doubt was born into this world. Doubt and its children: fear, worry, panic, and terror, now ruled the minds of sin-enslaved men. No longer would there be the peace, calm, and complete confidence like in the state of perfection.

Imagine what it was like for Adam and Eve! After they had sinned they panicked, and were filled with terror. They had no hope. They knew that they would be punished with death.

What is more, God would not have been one bit less gracious if he had done just that, just as he had judged the devils that had sinned and sentenced them to punishment.

Just the same, God went far out of his way for our ruined race. Out of the grace in his heart he intervened for us, and planned a way for us to escape, a plan of salvation.

Of course, by nature Adam and Eve could not have known about this plan. The same would hold true today for you. You were born without this knowledge. Realize, then, that God would have to tell you about his subsequent thoughts, giving this information to you!

In addition, since this plan of God would be something new and surprising, in your sinful state your flesh naturally would doubt it, even resist it. Indeed, since your sinful nature actually hates the things of God, you would need to be assured of this plan before you ever would accept it; assured that it was true, and that it would be completed.

For instance, do you remember facing your road test to get your driving license? Do you recall how nervous you felt before the test? There was the fear of the unknown along with the worry. Could you have used some assurance?

Because of the astounding new situation of full and free forgiveness and deliverance from damnation for all

sinners, none excluded; with all of the remarkable gospel facts which, due to his blind and evil condition, the sinner automatically would reject with a vengeance; which, even after he would become a God-powered believer, the sinner still will doubt or wonder about it at times due to his weakness, God, nevertheless, put his salvation plan purposely into the form of a promise. Why? solely for your benefit. He put his salvation plan into the form of a promise in order that he could be able to assure you of his words, with the intent that you could and should be certain and confident of them. Starting then with the first gospel promise in Genesis 3:15, the Lord gave Adam and Eve, and the rest of the race, his rescue plan which he pledged to perform.

Later, in the Old Testament, God would do even more in consideration of the weakness of the sinner. He would add assurances on top of his already existing promises, and declare, for example, “I will perform it,” or else he would even make an oath in regard to them, stating solemnly, “I swear,” or say the word “surely” (verse 14) to strengthen his promises, so to speak, not for his own benefit, for he had no need of it; but solely for your benefit. What do you think of that?

The Holy Spirit pointed this out in the text after he brought up the Old Testament case of Abraham, and stated, “After having promised Abraham, God swore by himself, because he could swear by no one greater, saying, ‘Surely by blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I

will multiply you’; and thus having had long patience he obtained the promise” (verses 13-15).

In other words, 4,000 years ago God promised Abraham three things: Abraham would have a son in his old age, his descendants would be many, and that the Christ would be born from his family. Abraham patiently lived to see the first blessing come true. Just the same, for the benefit of Abraham; to make him more confident beforehand of all three future blessings, God gave him not only these promises, but, to make them extra certain and doubly sure; to make Abraham not to doubt, but to have full confidence in them, the Lord added a second assurance on top of the first by taking an oath, swearing by the only one he could swear by, namely, himself, declaring, “Surely I will do this.”

What a gracious God he is! Who else would look out for you as much as he does?

What conclusion, then, would the Holy Spirit want you to draw from this? The text has drawn the conclusion for you, and, by calling you an “inheritor” of the same promise of salvation as Abraham had, states, “Therefore, God, desiring more abundantly to show to the inheritors of promise the unchangeableness of his resolve, guaranteed by an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it would be impossible for God to lie, we, who have fled for refuge, might have strong encouragement to lay hold of that hope which is set before us” (vv. 17-18).

In other words, not just for Abraham, but for your benefit also; to drive away all doubt; to make you firmly confident of your salvation, God did not just do one thing but two in order to give you the strongest assurance.

How generous he was to do that! How he must yearn for you to trust in his promise!

See that, first of all, he gave you a pledge! Then he took an oath.

Our text draws your attention to these two actions, and then, points out two features of them:

- 1) That it will be impossible for God to lie when he promises or takes an oath; and

- 2) That both acts of God are unchangeable; they are set, done; they could not be reversed or revoked.

After stating this, the text now points out two benefits that you will have as a result:

- 1) God did these two acts to show you “more abundantly” that his resolve to save you is unchangeable, irrevocable; that he will not change his mind tomorrow, and declare, “Forget what I said!”

- 2) God did these things also to give you “strong encouragement” since you, as the text puts it, “have” by

faith “fled for refuge to lay hold of that” salvation which God has “set before” you.

Do you need to flee to his promise for refuge? You certainly do. The unbreakable law of God will convict you of this truth that you are in a damnable condition as a lawbreaker and a rebel against Heaven, for you have violated the laws of God, and have had evil in your mind. To be sure, your sins will find you out. They certainly will sentence you, and drag you down into hell. See this! Admit it! Regret it, here and now!

Then recall the powerful promise of God which has been preached to you! It has been set before your eyes. It has wrestled with your mind, and has turned you from being a sinner to being a saint, from heading to hell to heaven. The Lord’s promise has assured you with an unbreakable guaranty from Heaven that the total guilt of your life has been cancelled, that your punishment by the Divine Judge has been removed, and that you have already been declared righteous by the holy life and the hell-suffering work of Christ, your God, almost 2,000 years ago.

Continuing on, the gospel pledge then hands over to you what it says it is: forgiveness of sins, and even powers your mind to take hold of it with confidence and to possess it by an act of faith. Thus by believing God’s pledge you possess salvation. You have it. That is, you are saved. You will enter heaven. Think of it! What a

mighty message it is! What other words could be as powerful as to release you from going to hell, and to give you a firm grasp on heaven? Hang onto this pledge!

God knows that sin is your greatest trouble, and that his pledge is your most needed blessing.

Therefore, the Lord hands over to you his pledge to bring you peace with Heaven and with your own conscience; to provide you with the comfort of his constant companionship and protection; to supply you with a full victory over sorrow, weakness, doubt, and fear. He puts his pledge into your lap to assure you of a new wonderful existence of your soul after your death, of a resurrection of your body into a radiant glory, and of an incredibly happy existence with him in his heavenly mansion.

What could be done for lost and condemned sinners? God knew precisely what to do: to promise and to assure them.

Initially, God gave you his double assurance when you first came to faith. Just the same, realize that for the rest of your life you will need to be reassured over and over again with this double assurance; indeed, at times daily, even hourly!

How?

How would this reassurance work in practice?

Listen to the following example! A seminary student in the 1800's in Saint Louis went to see his professor, C.F.W. Walther of the Missouri Synod, about his spiritual

distress. This student relates the following anecdote. "Serious doubts" that Christ is God "had arisen in my mind while I was his student. I was brought near the brink of despair. What should I do, remain and play the hypocrite, or give up the study for the ministry? After much hesitation I resolved to go to Walther and tell him about my miserable condition. With a trembling heart I ascended the stairway to his study. How would the great theologian, the staunch champion of Christ, receive me? Would he listen to me at all, or would he turn me out in disgust as an unbeliever? When I entered his study, he received me very cordially and asked me what my troubles were. After patiently listening to my tale of woe, he grasped my hand and said, 'My dear young friend, you seem to think that you alone are vexed with such doubts. You are mistaken. I have the very same experiences. Why, often when I am preaching in the pulpit, or lecturing before my classes, Satan whispers into my ears, "How do you know this to be true".' Then he showed me that I was still a Christian, a believing child of God, because no unbeliever would be troubled with anxiety and fear on account of his unbelief" (The Reverend Julius A. Friedrich, "Dr. C.F.W. Walther," *Ebenezer*, Editor W.H.T. Dau [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922], page 36).

This is biblical reassurance. Practice it!

Understand, then, that because of the weakness of your flesh; because of the hatred by your sinful nature for

the things of God, throughout your life your mind will be attacked by doubt of, dislike and distrust in the gospel promise – the only thing that could get you to heaven!

To combat these assaults, God has provided something for you: assurance, in fact, double assurance. So, look to the gospel promise itself and to the assurances within! These assurances have been designed by God to demonstrate to you his truthfulness and the fact that his decision cannot be changed (verse 17). These assurances have been designed to give you “strong encouragement” (verse 18), “full assurance” (verse 11); to persuade your heart (1st John 3:19) to believe with certainty (Acts 2:36); and to plant you firmly on the gospel promise (2nd Timothy 2:14) so that you could not be moved. So believe them! That is what they are for!

Hence what is the benefit to you of the gospel pledge? It is to give you assurance. Be confident, then! Run for refuge to the gospel shelter, as the text urges, to receive “strong encouragement” that you have been washed clean of the guilt and of the punishment of your sins by the blood of the Lamb of God, for God doubly assures you that this promise is true!

* * *

OF WHAT DOES THE CONTRACT OF GOD CONSIST?

Romans 11:27: *“This is the contract from me to them:
When I have taken away their sins.”*

According to the account of his son, a number of years ago his father, a man by the name of L. Ron Hubbard, sat down and determined to discover the quickest way to make a lot of money. He researched this way and that. Finally, he saw the answer. He sat down and wrote a book entitled *Dianetics* which, if you would recall some years ago, was displayed all over bookstore windows, and was advertised with powerful commercials on television. Mr. Hubbard sold a lot of these books, and made a lot of money.

What was the subject of his book? It was a new religion. Mr. Hubbard had found that the quickest way to make a lot of money was to invent a new religion.

Yet did it help anyone? Did it get him to heaven? The answers are: no. It only benefited L. Ron Hubbard. It made him a lot of cash.

Contrast this with the only true salvation: the gospel promise of God. Would it benefit anyone? Yes, it will. Would it get him to heaven? Yes, it will. Would it benefit God? no, not in the least. In fact, he received the worst of

it. He suffered every sinner's torment in hell, while every sinner got to go free to enter eternal life.

Think of it! God did all of the work. Yet he got the worst of it. Nevertheless, you received the benefit of it. What a wonder! How different is the shallow pretentious ramshackle offers which selfish small-minded men make to enrich themselves at your expense, compared to the commitment which God makes to save you from a catastrophe!

This commitment which God makes is so far superior not only because of him who makes it, but also because of what it consists. In fact, it is so superior that it is in a category all by itself.

Our text calls it a "contract." How interesting! Look at it closely, and see –

OF WHAT DOES THE CONTRACT OF GOD CONSIST?

1. It consists of salvation for you.
2. It consists of all of his doing, none of yours.
3. It consists of benefits solely for you, none for him.

1.

The text actually is a quote of God made in the Old Testament. It is from Isaiah 27:9. When the Holy Spirit translated the Old Testament Hebrew into the Greek of our text, he used the Greek word for "contract." That is,

in our text, translated literally, God announced, "This is the contract from me to them: when I have sent away their sins." While the *King James Version* and even the *New King James Version* here have used the old English word "covenant," a "covenant" is nothing more than what we today would state with the word "contract."

So of what would the gospel contract consist? Moreover, what would be its intent? What would be its purpose? It will have the very same purpose, intent, and content as that of the gospel pledge, namely, "the sending away of sins," as the Bible so often likes to express it in the original languages of Hebrew and of Greek, doing so, in fact, thirty times in the Old Testament and forty-two times in the New, though in every instance the translators of our English Bibles rather have preferred to use instead the more familiar expression "the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 6:2). As a matter of fact, all four of these terms used by Scripture are synonymous. The gospel pledge, the sending away of sins, and the contract of God all mean "the forgiveness of sins."

Why does the Bible bring up and stress the subject of sin so much? Because everyone needs to be rescued from sin so much. "All have sinned, and continue to come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "The soul that sins must die" (Ezekiel 18:3). To be healed and delivered from sin, from its guilt – condemnation, and from its consequence – eternal death, the sinner needs to be awaked to the awful truth of his evil condition.

The all-knowing Almighty reports that “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries... thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:19). As a result, your sinful flesh continually will break God’s commandments, despise his truth, ridicule his pledges, and reject his mercy. Nevertheless, according to Scripture this would be no minor matter, but will be an outrage so destructive that unless it would be removed it will damn souls to hell. In fact, if you could picture to yourself only for a moment the terrible punishment which Divine Justice would have to deal out to you for your sins; if you could realize the torture of body, mind, and soul which torments the damned; if you were able to feel what it would mean to suffer everlastingly in unrelieved pain, tears of anguish would fill your eyes, and in fright you would plead out right: “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30.)

Yet there would be nothing which you could do to save yourself. First of all, you would have no power to save yourself. Secondly, you would have no knowledge as to how to save yourself. Thirdly, whatever course you might take in an attempt to save yourself will give you no divine assurance that you would have accomplished it. You only would have doubts.

Just the same, the Son of God has “come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He receives sinners (Luke 15:2). That would include you. Out of his

mercy, therefore, the Lord determined to save the whole ruined race of doomed rebels. As a result, God the Father sent his Son to remove the curse of your transgressions forever. On Calvary’s cross beneath the full fury of divine anger that had been channeled and concentrated against all sinners, Christ suffered it all alone when he assumed your guilt, took on your punishment, and underwent your eternal torment. What a sacrifice he made for you! Think of it!

Yet, as a result of his loving act of substitution, Jesus Christ has canceled, removed, and destroyed your sins of the past, present, and future. With his blood he has paid off the debt of your sins so that no longer could they be charged against you. One of the rarest gems in the world is the blood red diamond. Since there are only five known to exist in the world, the 2.33-carat diamond is worth 42 million dollars. However, Christ’s blood is even more valuable than that, for the only substance in the entire universe that would be costly enough to pay Divine Justice for your soul’s release from eternal punishment; the only payment which would be recognized and be accepted by Heaven’s court, will be the blood of the Son of God spilled out on his cross while acting as your substitute. Recognize this! Then be assured of it!

This is the gospel. This is the commitment which God has made to you, and, subsequently, has carried out in his saving acts. This is the contract which God has

made with you. This gospel contract consists of the forgiveness of your sins.

2.

Why does God refer to his gospel in the text as a contract? It is because the Lord wants you to realize, in the second place, that it is all of his doing, none of yours.

To be sure, the gospel contract is not an express agreement between two parties, that is to say, God did not sit down with the human race and offer, "If I would promise to do something for you, will you agree to do something for me?" This is not how the Lord laid out his contract of salvation. Rather, like a last will and testament, he did all of the awful work to secure for you the wonderful gift of pardon and freedom. Then he simply handed it over to you as a gift without any obligation on your part. As an inheritance which suddenly would be announced to your amazement and delight, so the gospel contract is announced and its contents are handed over to you. It is all of God's doing, none of yours. He simply hands it over to you for your possession as a gift. Indeed, Scripture purposely uses the language and the imagery of an inheritance, referring directly to you as an "inheritor" of the blessings and benefits of the gospel contract of the Lord.

Why did God not call on you to iron out a contract of salvation with him? It was so that it could be done perfectly. If sinners were to have had any say in the plan of salvation, it would have been misdirected by evil intentions, sullied by sinful hands, and hopelessly stalled by selfish cross purposes. As a result, it would have been completely untrustworthy. This is why God kept it out of your hands, and did it himself entirely. Consequently, you could and should be confident of it, for it is trustworthy.

Realize that God resolved, indeed, to make a commitment to you, and has put it into the form of something solid, sure, and certain! He has placed his salvation for you into the form of a promise, and has given it the added features of a binding contract, namely, he has obligated himself to perform its terms and conditions.

Think about it! God himself worked out your salvation. He was committed to do what it took to get you to heaven. As a result, nothing has been omitted. Nothing further needs to be done. The results are in. Heaven is yours. Of this he is certain. Should you not be certain of it, too?

3.

From your study of the gospel in the last two sermons, you have learned the following:

1. That the only salvation by which God has reunited you to him is the salvation by promise. There is no other way.
2. That he not only assures you that his salvation is by promise, but he doubly assures you that it is the truth and no trick, and that it cannot be changed.

Knowing that the Lord has assured you of these things, what are you to do? Understand that he presents you with his promise of salvation with a view toward making a contract with you! This contract is called the “New Testament,” or the “new contract” to distinguish it from the old one, that is, from the Ten Commandments. The “new contract” is distinguished by its purpose. Its purpose is nothing else than the forgiveness of your sins (Jeremiah 31:31). Almost 2,000 years ago the saving works of Christ on the altar of his cross and at the Easter tomb moved God to declare you righteous, that is to say, to be free from guilt and punishment, and to be ready to enter his heavenly home.

Just the same, does not the word “contract” signify an agreement between two parties under certain terms and conditions, with give and take, and with mutual obligations, duties, and benefits? not in this case. Remember: God’s salvation is “not by works”! While the will of God, indeed, wants your will to address his promise for the express purpose of believing it, your

salvation is still all for your benefit, and none for his. For instance, when it comes to translating the Greek word used in the Bible for “contract,” the authors of the biblical Greek-English dictionaries scratch their heads in wonderment, for the Holy Spirit uses this term in a special sense. For example, on the one hand, the gospel contract of God is like a last will and testament in which you receive a benefit as a gift, without doing anything to acquire it. On the other hand, it is not like a last will and testament. That is, the gospel contract does not require that the testator first would have to depart this life before his last will and testament ever could be activated, and the benefit of forgiveness enjoyed. Again, on the one hand, the gospel contract is a declaration of intent on the part of God, in which he holds himself responsible for carrying out the terms and the conditions of this contract. On the other hand, according to the terms and the conditions of this contract, there are no duties or obligations for you to perform at all. Rather, you simply would receive all of the benefits.

What kind of a contract is this? To be sure, this is not your normal contract. Nevertheless, it is a valid one. In fact, our own western legal system recognizes this species of contract, and refers to its different parts with the names of a “unilateral contract,” a “gratuitous

contract,” and a “*nudum pactum*.” A “unilateral contract”¹⁰ is one in which a person makes a promise to do something for someone else without receiving from him anything in return. A “gratuitous contract”¹¹ is that of which the object is solely the benefit of the person with whom it is made. A “*nudum pactum*”¹² or “bare agreement” is a voluntary promise without any consideration other than goodwill to the person to whom the pledge is made. These features describe exactly what the gospel is.

Here we go to the heart of the whole matter of the gospel contract of God, namely, that this contract is not a mere wish in the heart of God, but it is the grace in his heart by which he is driven, bound, and determined to have grace for you. Thoughts of you are continually on his mind. Therefore, he resolved to make a contract with you in his heart. Literally, the English verb “contract” means “to draw together.” This is exactly what the gospel contract of God does. It draws him to be together with you. What a blessing! Will you not see it?

Then, for your further benefit, to convince you of his seriousness and of his yearning love for you, the Lord has put his contract down in writing on the pages of the Bible

so that it could and should serve notice to you of the obligation which he has made to draw you closer to him. Take notice of it!

Thus the object of the gospel promise of God is solely for your benefit. That is, God receives no benefit from it. As a matter of fact, he loses. For example, Christ your God was declared guilty and sentenced to punishment while you were declared righteous and set free. He suffered damnation while you escaped it. All that God planned, worked at, and suffered was solely for your benefit, none for his. Think about that!

What, then, is the greater wonder: that God, the holy Creator of all things, lost all by making himself the worst sinner after he loaded the sins of the world and damnation on his back by his gospel contract, or that you, a lost and condemned sinner, have been declared holy by that same contract?

Of what, then, does the contract of God consist in the third place? It consists of benefits that are solely for you. Consider the following!

First of all, the gospel contract is *voluntary*. God has done it completely by design by a deliberate act of choice.

¹⁰ Henry Campbell Black, *Black's Law Dictionary*, 5th Edition (Saint Paul: West Publishing Company, 1979), page 294A.

¹¹ Henry C. Black, *Black's Law Dictionary*, 5th Edition (Saint Paul: West Publishing Company, 1979), page 293A.

¹² Henry C. Black, *Black's Law Dictionary*, 5th Edition (Saint Paul: West Publishing Company, 1979), page 961A.

In fact, this contract is a *voluntary act of kindness*, that is, it has been initiated without waiting around for a request from you, the object of his kindness.

Secondly, the gospel contract *acquits*, that is, it releases, absolves, and purges you of the accusation of sinfulness, and releases you from its debt: punishment in eternal torments.

Thirdly, the contract of God is an *amnesty*, namely, the forgetfulness of, or the judicial abolition of your transgressions.

Additionally, this contract is a *settlement* in which the disputed matter regarding your iniquities and Heaven's call for your complete holiness has been adjusted, determined, and decisively put to rest.

It is a *declaration of substitution*, in which the demand of Divine Justice for your eternal punishment has been met and paid for by a substitution: the payment both of Christ's holy life and of his punishment in hell.

It is also a *clemency*, an act of kindness.

It is a *release*, a discharge of your debt by a gracious act of God.

It is not a reprieve, but a *permanent cancellation* of your sentence of eternal death.

What great things, then, the gospel contract serves! Think about them!

Look at all of the benefits which you have as a result! Think about them! Then confess confidently, "Praise God! They are mine"!

* * *

EMBRACE THE PROMISE OF GOD BY FAITH!

Ephesians 2:8-9: *By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Consider this for a moment: which human promises have never been broken? For instance, think of the names that some people have chosen for their businesses that imply a promise, such as, "Precious Love Day Care," or "On Time" delivery service! Have these implied promises ever been broken? of course they have, daily. Though the reason people have picked such names is, frankly, to attract customers, such names by themselves cannot guaranty that the exceptional care which they promise will always be provided. This is because business people are not perfect. They are sinners. No matter how hard they may try, they will fall short in everything, including living up to their companies' names.

Which brings us back to the question: "Which human promises have never been broken?" none. All have been broken. None have been fulfilled perfectly,

because all are sinners, and therefore cannot fulfill their pledges perfectly; only the Lord can. Is this not assuring to know? Does this not inspire confidence in him? So –

EMBRACE THE PROMISE OF GOD BY FAITH!

See –

1. How the salvation of God is handed over to you.
2. What saving faith is.
3. What saving faith is not.

In the text Paul is reminding some congregational members of the manner in which God has set up his salvation, and of how it works. Hear the words of the text again, “By grace are you saved”! In other words, briefly, this is what happened:

After the fall into sin, Adam and Eve were cowering in hiding, and shaking with terror over the anger and the eternal torment which they had stirred up because of their sins. As well they might; for the unbreakable Bible threatens that man’s sin causes God’s anger which, in turn, causes man’s death both now and for all eternity. Indeed, hell is where the roaring fire of God’s anger rages endlessly against the guilty soul. Do not deny this, for your own conscience condemns you of the wrong done in your life! See what damage this has done; what a breach it has caused with God! Face the facts! How will you ever

stand before the holy God? Regret your sins! Show remorse for them!

Then rejoice that God had grace in his heart toward Adam and Eve! His intent was to save them. His motive was to give them a gift of grace. What was this gift? It was to deliver them and all sinners from their punishment in order that they could be spared for heaven.

However, to settle accounts; to straighten things out; to set matters right with Divine Justice, your triune God would have to perform certain saving acts: that is, the Father would need to craft the plan of salvation; the Son would need to take on a human body to carry out the human part of it; then, the Holy Spirit would need to do his work also.

Thus, after Christ suffered the world’s punishment in hell, lived a holy life for everyone, and broke death’s grip for all on Easter, God Almighty banged down his judicial gavel, and decreed, “Go free! Your guilt and punishment have been taken care of by another. You are dismissed. Go, enter heaven!”

That is, according to Scripture, at that time God declared the whole world to be righteous, and ready to enter heaven. While we were still sinners, while every one of us was still ungodly (Romans 5:6-11), God decreed that he had forgiven man his sins on account of the holy life and the eternal suffering which he did on earth in a human body for man.

What excellent news! What undeserved kindness you have been shown! By grace you have been saved. Realize that this is the great, glorious gospel!

1.

Now what? After the Lord did all of this, how was his salvation going to do you any good? Think about that! Remember, sinful mankind could not see into the mind of God; nor could it know what was going on in those acts of that most hated man on earth named “Jesus”. So, again, how was this going to do you any good? How would salvation reach you?

For instance, would the Lord without speaking, suddenly transform you inside by a process of “infused grace,” that is, in which he would pump holiness into you making you holy? Of course not!

Recall what you have heard so far in the past sermons, namely, (1) that the salvation of God is by promise; (2) that it is God-assured; and (3) that it is a contract! Yet there is an additional feature involving all three of these. That is to say, all three of these features call for you to address them. How?

First of all, the Lord framed his words into the form of a promise for the purpose that you would address yourself to it by believing it.

Next the Lord God gave you assurance in order that, stated negatively, you would not doubt his promise, and,

stated positively, so that you would face it with trust as you could and should trust it: fully, confidently, and firmly.

Thirdly, through his promise of forgiveness the Lord made a contract with you so that you would be able to receive its benefits. A contract will do you no good if you would not address it and ignore its benefits.

Yet this is not all. Understand that the gospel is, moreover, an offer, or, to be more precise, a “proffer.” A “proffer” is “an offer proposed for acceptance by another” (Noah Webster). It is a proposal brought before you, or brought to your attention, for the purpose of presenting it to you with the intent that you should accept it. It is an offer exhibited so that it may be taken.

In other words, the salvation of God which affects you does not occur in this manner: God does not treat you as a rock which he would lift up and toss into heaven by means of his salvation. Rather, you are a living thinking soul whose intellect and will the Lord will engage by means of kindly announcements and by heartening assurances; by means of his warm proposals and delightful invitations.

So, after the Lord assures you of the truthfulness and of the unchangeableness of his gospel contract, he wants you to address it. After he puts his forgiveness of you intentionally into the form of a promise, he expects you to respond by trusting it. After he proffers his

forgiveness to you as an invitation, he intends for you to accept it. Do so!

Thus the pledge of the Lord is not like that of a neighbor, for example, who would come up to you and promise to sweep your sidewalk for you, and then, later, would do it – a promise to which you really paid no attention, about which you really did not care, and for which you held out no real hope, but were benefited from it anyway.

The gospel pledge of God calls for your acceptance. Therefore address it and accept it! To be sure, “the Lord of promise,” as he calls himself (2nd Peter 3:9), wants you to be one of his “children of the promise” (Romans 9:8).

Observe, then, that God has arranged his salvation into the form of a simple pledge for the high purpose that his promise might be trusted by you, and thus in this manner, transfer his forgiveness over to you! Simply put: God wants you to trust his pledge of your forgiveness, in order for you to have it. How safe! How certain!

In other words, this is how the Lord connects you up with your salvation: not by intravenous tubes, not by wearing a string of holy beads, not by feeling a sense of holiness come over you, but by the nod of your head at his gospel pledge.

Realize that the function of faith is to believe a promise! Thus the function of saving faith is to believe the promise of forgiveness. Be assured that this is how God wants you to possess his salvation! He distributes

forgiveness to you in his pledge of pardon. You then take it and possess it by faith. This is what it means: “You are saved through faith.” This is the way that the Lord has intended, arranged, and established for you to be saved. Moreover, it is the only way which he will recognize. See it!

2.

In short, then, what is “saving faith”? “Saving faith” is the manner for receiving the forgiveness of God. It is the instrument, the hand, or the mode for taking it. Faith holds out its hand, it opens its mouth, and it opens up its pocket to receive the forgiveness of God. It is all taking. Saving trust is a longing for, a looking for, a desire for, and an embracing of the gospel promise.

Furthermore, faith in the promise of your forgiveness puts you at once in possession of your salvation. Refusing to believe in the gospel at once excludes you from salvation. “He who does not believe will be damned” (Mark 16:16). The salvation of God is transferred over to you when you believe that you are received into his favor and that your sins are forgiven because of the saving acts of Christ.

3.

What is not saving faith?

Our text replies, saving faith is brought about not by man's "works, lest anyone should boast" and contend, "I have gotten salvation on mine own."

The holy Scriptures teach two things: (1) your faith is the result of God's power and effectiveness; and also (2) your faith is the result of the power and effectiveness of the gospel promise. In the first place, Ephesians 1:19 teaches that you "believe according to the working of God's mighty power." In the second place, Romans 10:17 instructs that "faith comes by the gospel report," and that this "gospel of Christ is the power of God for salvation" (Romans 1:16). Look at this second item!

Know that the gospel works faith! Man does not have the ability to produce saving faith. The creation of saving faith in the mind of man is all the gospel's doing, none of his. The creation of faith by man is impossible because natural, sinful man cannot apprehend the truth of the gospel, as 1st Corinthians 2:14 testifies. Man by nature does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he understand them for they are spiritually understood.

Therefore, saving faith would not be a conviction gotten from the use of your natural powers, but will be a knowledge and conviction accomplished by the gospel promise itself. Thus the creation of this faith will not lie within your power. Indeed, whenever the gospel promise would come to the ears of sinful man, he will want to reject it. So be aware that faith lies above and beyond

human strength and deduction! Faith is created by the preaching of the gospel. Faith is the product of almighty power and is a gift of divine grace.

Thus saving faith is not a product of human deliberation or self-decision. It is not a matter in which man carefully weighs pros and cons and decides accordingly. The Lord Jesus declares, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). "It is given to you... to believe on" Christ, the apostle echoes (Philippians 1:29). Neither is faith a mere intellectual knowledge which also the wicked, murderers, adulterers, and criminals may have.

Faith is a creation of the gospel promise. The gospel is called "the Word of faith" in the Bible (Romans 10:8) because it is that Word itself which creates faith. This pledge of the gospel is that "Word of God which effectual works in you who believe," Holy Writ testifies (1st Thessalonians 2:13). Thus the gospel pledge does not merely enable man to believe, but it produces the very act of faith in him (see Philippians 1:29). In this process of creating faith, the gospel changes man's aversion and repugnance to the gospel into a willingness and a desire to possess the promise of God. Saving faith in the gospel does not mean merely to know the story of the saving acts of God, but to trust that it includes you. Saving faith is a longing for, a seeking for, a desiring for, and an embracing of the gospel. Do you embrace the gospel promise of forgiveness? Say: "Yes"! "This is a faithful saying, and

worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1st Timothy 1:15).

To be sure, in the Bible, saving faith is placed in opposition to all human achievements. The text doubly emphasizes that saving faith is not a work on your part; that is to say, it is not a contribution on your part toward the salvation of your soul. The apostle has to warn about this point because the sinful flesh in your mind naturally wants to “boast,” that is, it wants to delude itself about its lack of accomplishments in the area of salvation, and think that it actually has contributed something. Yet no value must be given to your saving faith in and of itself. You are saved solely by the grace of God. It is all God’s doing, none of yours. Faith saves not on the ground that it is a work which in itself is worthy, but only because it has in its possession the promise of God’s mercy. Faith saves not by itself as an act, but because of the object which it grasps. Faith saves not as a good quality, virtue, or as a compliance with the law of God, but because it believes God’s forgiveness announced and offered in his promise.

Keep in mind that, first of all, the Lord decided to forgive you. Then he put that decision into a promise. Next he handed that promise over to you with the intent that you should receive it. He did this as you either read about his pledge, remembered it, or heard about it. Then his powerful words of promise moved you to believe the

pledge that you are forgiven. At that moment you were put into possession of your forgiveness: that salvation that will get you into heaven. This is how he gives you his gracious gift of forgiveness: He moves you to believe his pledge that you are forgiven. Then, ever after, to reassure you that you have his forgiveness, he repeats his gospel pledge. So listen to it!

Indeed, acquire and keep God’s gift of forgiveness by believing it! Say: “I know and am assured that I am forgiven”!

Therefore, we have seen the following today:

The gift of God’s grace, his gospel promise, is proffered by God to everyone so that they may have it. This is his intention.

Moreover the Lord wants everyone to accept his proffer. To do this, his pledged gift of forgiveness must be believed by them, whereupon, they will take possession of that forgiveness which he is extending to them. Yet how could they believe when natural unregenerate man hates all of the things of God? So how, then, is saving faith produced in sinners?

“Faith comes by the gospel report” (Romans 10:17), the Bible replies. What power and importance, then, does the gospel have!

Thus, when you nod your head in agreement to the words of the text, and profess, “I am saved through faith,” you mean that you are in possession of God’s pledge of forgiveness because you believe it. You confess that it is

all of God's doing, none of yours. You admit that there is nothing which you could do to gain heaven; that only the gift of God could do it. Do so!

This is what "by faith" means. This is what the Lutheran reformers in the Reformation meant when they used the phrase "justification by faith."

So, how, then, is saving faith created? by looking at the gospel promise. How is saving faith kept alive? by looking at the gospel pledge. Of what, then, do you need to do more? to look at the gospel promise. Do so!

* * *

CONSIDER THE COMFORTING QUALITY OF THE GOSPEL PROMISE!

Isaiah 40:1-2: *"Comfort, comfort my people!" says your God. "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is finished; that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all of her sins!"*

Around Christmas time it is common to sing in public concerts the great musical work *Messiah*. The *Messiah* is a sacred oratorio, the music of which was written over 250 years ago by George Frederick Händel. God, not man, has seen to it that this piece has remained popular. In fact, when the moment arrives for the Hallelujah chorus to be sung, when such magnificent praise of the Lord is about to be given, kings and queens

in the audience have been moved to rise from their seats to stand out of sheer respect for such reminders of the glory of the Lord.

However, Charles Jennens, the English coal businessman who wrote the words to Händel's *Messiah*, was displeased with Händel's musical accompaniment to his words by calling it an "entertainment." Just the same, see in this instance the truth that God uses the men and the events of this world as scaffolding with which to build his church, for when Mr. Jennens arranged his work, he deliberately put at the very beginning of his work for emphasis, in the most prominent place, the great benefit of the gospel pledge, namely, that of comfort! Thus the oratorio *Messiah* begins its vocal section with the great gospel words from the mouth of God, the words of our text, in which he exclaims with a sense of urgency, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people!" Thus the very first words of the *Messiah* highlight what Scripture itself highlights, that is to say, that the purpose of the gospel pledge is to comfort.

Learn this lesson! Look at these words of the text, and –

CONSIDER THE COMFORTING QUALITY OF THE GOSPEL PROMISE!

This quality –

1. Comforts you from the guilt of your sins;
2. Comforts you from the terrors of death; and
3. Comforts you in your sufferings.

1.

Many years ago a retired Lutheran pastor was asked what he would do differently if he were to be in the ministry all over again. He replied, “I would comfort more.” Indeed, this is right.

Hear again the text, this time translated literally from the Hebrew! “‘Comfort, comfort my people’! says your God. ‘Console¹³ Jerusalem, and call to her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is paid off¹⁴, because she has received from the hand of the Lord double for all her sins’!”

In other words the Lord is urging all of his gospel messengers that he wants it doubly emphasized to Jerusalem, that is, to his church, that he wants to comfort her. How would this be accomplished? through his gospel pledge.

Realize, then, that one of the key features of the gospel is to bring comfort! How could and should you be certain of this? The text says so.

Look at the meaning of the Hebrew word which is translated with our word “comfort”! The Hebrew word **נחם** means “to breathe out deeply in pity over the misery of others”; “to sigh, or to groan over the misery of others, and to be moved.”¹⁵ There is an example of this in the case of Joseph and his brothers in Egypt. Even though Joseph had freely forgiven his ten brothers of their murderous attempt on his life years before, after their father’s death the brothers’ fear returned. They dreaded that now without their father’s presence, Joseph would no longer feel restrained, but would take out his revenge on them.

When word of their fear came to the ears of Joseph in the form of a plea in which they begged, “Pardon, we ask, the transgression of your brothers and their sin for the evil they did to you” (Genesis 50:17), how did Joseph respond? We are told that he cried, and then, he “comforted them, and consoled them” – the very same Hebrew phrase used by God in our text¹⁶ when he stated, “Comfort... console Jerusalem!”

Understand that Joseph had pity over the misery of his brothers’ fear, and was moved to action. He would console them with assurances that he would not take out revenge on them and punish them as he had a right and

¹³ Heinrich Friedrich Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebrew and Chaldean Lexicon*, editor Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1974), page 186B bottom.

¹⁴ Gesenius, page 778B top.

¹⁵ See Gesenius, page 544A f.

¹⁶ **נחם** על־לֵב פִּי Gesenius, page 186B bottom.

the authority to do so, but instead he would pardon their trespass, send their sin away from his memory, and be gracious to them.

In a much higher sense, this is what the great God of the gospel has done.

In fact, the brothers of Joseph were just as you are. Hanging over your head was the threat of dire judgment, for you have never loved perfectly. Despite the many gospel assurances in the past, your current sins, along with the memory of former wrongs, rise up randomly to condemn you. They send you discomfort and distress. They subject you to a fiery ordeal and to oppression. They irritate and torment, harass and hurt. Is this not so? Admit it! In fact, confess: “I have brought on all of this”!

Yet would there ever be any relief? Could your conscience ever find comfort?

It could and should find comfort, for the Lord will comfort you. That is to say, out of his grace he “has pity over your misery, and is moved to action.” He “consoles” you with his glorious, gospel pledge that the terrible debt of eternal punishment which your “iniquities” had run up has been “paid.” This is because of the wonderful good news that you “have received from the hand of the Lord twice” the amount of pardon needed for all your sins. Your guilt and punishment have been replaced with a “double” portion of pardon, the Lord assures you, for he will, indeed, “multiply pardon” (Isaiah 55:7).

Take comfort, then, in the fact that as the Lord in the text had brought to a close the Babylonian warfare against the Jews, so your spiritual “warfare” has been ended “for you”! In other words, be aware that you had been involved in a spiritual battle! At first it was a one-sided battle – one-sided because you found yourself desperately losing it – because you were totally routed, defeated, and captured by your enemies: the devil, the world, and your flesh. As a result, you were helplessly headed for hell.

However, this spiritual battle has had a sudden turn of events, producing a glorious new outcome. A new ally joined your side, and counter-attacked. That ally is your Good Shepherd, God who came down from heaven in the flesh, Christ the Lord. By his saving acts which, Scripture says, he has accomplished on the cross and at the deserted Easter tomb (John 19:28, 30), the Lord has “accomplished” your warfare for you. That is, he has fought your battle and has won. Your God in the flesh has accomplished a victory far greater than a David standing over a fallen Goliath. In other words, by his glorious intervention, the Lord has remarkably reversed the outcome of your spiritual battle: your punishment has been served for you, as a result, your guilt has been lifted off you; the control which the devil, the world, and your flesh had over you has been broken, and now there is nothing left but for God to declare you innocent and ready to enter heaven. Your warfare has been accomplished.

So, “be of good cheer! Your sins are forgiven you” (Matthew 9:2).

What, then, does God, want for you? your comfort.

How will he give it to you? through his gospel promise.

What should you do, then, to get comfort? Look at his gospel pledge! Do so! In fact, plead, “Comfort me, Lord! Pardon mine iniquities through your gospel promise!”

2.

Yet the comfort of the gospel does not stop there. It is not limited to the removal of your guilt for past and present sins. Of what further comfort does the gospel give? It provides soul-penetrating consolation even from the terrors of death.

The holy Scriptures teach that the Lord sighs for your comfort in regard to the matter of death. For instance, at the death of Lazarus (John 11:11-45), the Bible instructs that Christ the Lord “groaned in his soul, and was troubled¹⁷” (v. 33). Later he came to the gravesite “groaning within him” (v. 38).

Where have you heard that expression before? It is that biblical expression for “comfort” in our text. It

means “to sigh, or to groan in pity over the misery of others, in which the soul has become troubled and is moved to action.” To be sure, in the case of Lazarus, the sympathetic Savior did act. He raised Lazarus from the dead, and proclaimed to the overjoyed onlookers, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who would believe in me, though he may die, yet will he live” (v. 25).

Thanks to Christ, then, that not only has he had compassion on you, but that he also will quiet your fears of death through his powerful promise to push death aside and bring back to life your deceased body! Consequently, he has made your earthly death a restful sleep for your body, for he keeps your soul alive and safe with him until he brings both soul and body together again in a radiant wonderful existence on the Last Day. Christ raised Lazarus from the dead in order to comfort. This is comforting proof that he will raise you, also.

So, for your high consolation, the Bible assures that Christ can, indeed, be “touched with the feeling of” your “weaknesses” (Hebrews 4:15) since “he himself has suffered,” he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:18) by the terrors of death.

Exult, then, with confidence, confessing, “My soul will never die. My body will be raised in glory”!

¹⁷ Ἐτάραξε— aorist indicative active form of the Greek word ταραάσσω “troubled.” Though this is an indicative verb, it

could not be translated properly into the English idiom without using its passive form “be troubled.”

3.

Yet, wait! There is still more. Realize that another purpose of the gospel is to comfort you throughout all of your hardships and sufferings as you wait for heaven! In this, also, the Lord sighs for your comfort, and will provide it. What care and foresight he has!

An example of his will to comfort you in your suffering is given for your concrete consolation in Mark 7:34. In this instance a deaf and mute man was brought to the Lord for healing.

Having compassion on this request the Lord took the man aside, and “sighed” in front of him. Note again the biblical concept of comfort in which the comforter “breathes out deeply in spirit over the misery of others, and is moved to action”! Christ then comforted this man promptly by healing him.

So also the Lord assures you, “I will not leave you without comfort” (John 14:18). So “do not let your heart be troubled!” (John 14:1.) In fact, “do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to test you, as though some strange thing had happened to you, but rejoice in that you partake in Christ’s sufferings!” (1st Peter 4:12-13.) Yes, the Bible frankly states that God sends you your sufferings. Furthermore, they are fiery, namely, very unpleasant. Just the same, they are sent to you for a variety of good reasons.

First of all, marvel of marvels, God sends you afflictions not to defeat you, but in order to test you, that is, to exercise your trust in his gospel pledges, just as your muscles are exercised to become stronger; so that, as the apostle explains, the Lord “would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16). May God accomplish this in you! “May the God of all grace, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you!” (1st Peter 5:10.)

Secondly, Holy Writ teaches that your hardships have been sent so that as you endure them, you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God (2nd Thessalonians 1:5). The apostle again points out, “If we would endure, we will also rule with” Christ (2nd Timothy 2:12). We are fellow heirs of heaven with Christ since we suffer together with him (Romans 8:17). To be sure, as an encouragement Scripture points to those souls already in heaven, and declares that they are those who “came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14). So, rather than complain, rejoice when you partake of Christ’s sufferings!

Thirdly, because you are a believer, loved by the Lord, your sufferings are hallowed. That is to say, every sorrow or sickness is simply evidence of his compassion, for whom the Lord “loves, he chastens” (Hebrews 12:6).

Fourthly, your Heaven-sent hardships and tribulations are really disguised blessings. "All things," Scripture emphasizes, omitting nothing, "work together for good for those who love God" (Romans 8:28). Through his almighty energy through which the loving Lord pledges, "I make all things new" (Revelation 21:5), he miraculously turns your troubles into helps, your reverses into rewards, and your sorrows into soul-strength. What seems to be a crushing blow proves, in reality, to be an uplifting purifying power. In all of these ways learn the secret of suffering: It is to bring you closer to God!

See, then, the consolation which the Lord has moved himself to give you in his priceless pledge, "I will not leave you without comfort" (John 14:18), for all the promises of God in Christ are "Yes!" and "Amen!" (2nd Corinthians 1:20); for he pledges to comfort you from the nagging guilt of your sins, to console you from the terrors of death, and to comfort you when you suffer!

Therefore, what, then, should be your response? Do not doubt the Word of the Lord! Trust his pledge! "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord which he will accomplish for you today!" (Exodus 14:13.)

* * *

BE CONFIDENT, NOT DOUBTFUL!

1st Thessalonians 1:5: "*Our gospel did not come to you only in word, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance.*"

What would be a gospel passage? It will be a passage in the Bible that will teach the divine doctrine that God has gotten salvation for you by his saving acts. "It is any Word of God in which the sinner is assured of present righteousness and peace of conscience and of future rest and glory, because of the reconciliation effected by Christ"¹⁸ between God and the rebellious sinful human race.

Compare the gospel to the law of God! The law teaches what you are to do and not to do. The gospel teaches what God has done, and still does for your salvation. The law shows you your sin and the anger of God. The gospel shows you your Savior and the grace of God. The law must be preached to all people, but especially to unrepentant sinners. The gospel must be preached to sinners who are troubled in their minds because of their sins. Why? in order to make them confident that the Lord has taken away their sins, and removed them as far as the east is from the west. It is this

¹⁸ W. H. T. Dau, *Doctrinal Theology*, volume II (no place: mimeographed, after 1910), page 22 middle.

latter matter that will prove what a blessing your salvation is when God brings it to you in the form of a promise: it will make you confident. That is to say, not only are all of the parts of his promise validated (Galatians 3:17) and guaranteed (Hebrews 6:17) by which you could and should become convinced and confident of its truthfulness, but the gospel promise itself contains divine power for the purpose of working confidence in your mind (1st Thessalonians 1:5). This is what we will look at today.

BE CONFIDENT, NOT DOUBTFUL!

1. Be warned that your flesh will doubt the gospel!
2. Be confident toward the pledge of God as you could and should be!

The psalmist cries out, “Do not let those who look for you become confounded!” (Psalm 69:6). The Lord, in turn, responds, “My promise will not let them become confounded,” that is, “it will not disappoint, nor leave them looking foolish. It will work every time. It will not fail. So be confident!”

The last time we heard how the gospel promise comforts your soul. This time we will see how you could and should be confident of the gospel. What would be the connection between these two sermons? The logical link will be this: First of all, God will comfort you. How? through his gospel pledge. While you will be waiting for

heaven, God will continue to recomfort you all the while from the guilt of your sins, from the terrors of death, and throughout your sufferings. He will do this in order “to heal” you, as he calls it, that is, in order “to give your faith new strength.” To accomplish this he will work to make you more confident in his gospel pledge.

In our text the apostle reminded the local congregation at Thessalonica of how they came to faith. He recounted how that the gospel preaching by him and by his assistant was not just with words, but with power – a power which no other words contain, namely, divine power. This is how the Thessalonians were turned around and came to believe in the salvation of God: through the power contained in the gospel pledge. Moreover, where the gospel would come, the Holy Spirit will come along with it. Furthermore, where the gospel would be preached, assurance to the believer will be preached along with it, the text guarantees. In fact, the original Greek of our text is even more emphatic. It reads that “full assurance or full conviction” will come with the gospel. That is to say, the power of the gospel will work in you full confidence of itself.

Think about this for a minute! If this would be what the gospel pledge does, will this, then, not be the way that God wants you to be? So be fully convinced! Be confident of his gospel! This is the way he wants you to be.

Realize that the entire Trinity desires you to keep alive your God-given faith, that all-important, vital

component in your salvation! Therefore, the Lord will use his all-purpose tool – his gospel pledge – to keep your faith alive.

In order to accomplish this, Scripture assures you, by the use of some vivid imagery, that the Lord will heal your faith (Ezekiel 34:16) by his Word (Psalm 107:20), that is, he will bring new strength from his gospel to your weak faith.

Faith, or to be more exact, the power of faith, may increase (2nd Corinthians 10:15) or decrease (Luke 22:32). It may be strong and bold (Ephesians 3:12) or weak. You are at your best when your faith is at its strongest. The Lord knows this. This is the condition for which he is constantly working.

1.

The Trinity recognizes the fact that due to your sinful flesh, there will be at times an unfortunate decrease in the degree of trust which you have in his gospel promise; that while your faith could and should always strongly be confident, it will not always be so. Therefore, whenever your sinful flesh would tempt you to doubt, and you would weaken and follow your flesh, you foolishly will undermine, damage, and even sabotage the confidence which the gospel had worked in you.

Remember that the function of faith is to cling to a promise! Faith will live and exist to do one thing and one thing only: to grab onto a pledge. Whenever you would doubt, you will be helping your flesh to defy your faith, to defy the purpose of the promise, and to defy God in saving you. This is why doubt is so dangerous and deadly, and why confidence is so vital and necessary.

Realize that doubt is the opposite of faith! Doubt belongs in the category of unbelief. Doubt is sin. It originates in your flesh. While doubt is not outright denial it is very close to it. In fact, if it would not be fought, doubt eventually and absolutely will destroy your trust in the gospel pledge.

Scripture describes doubt in various ways. For instance, “to doubt” is “to be greatly perplexed about something”; “to be at a loss as to what to make of it” in the original Greek of Acts 2:12.¹⁹ It is a state of uncertainty (Luke 24:4).²⁰ It is a fluctuation of the mind respecting the truthfulness of a matter (James 1:8).²¹ “He who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind” (James 1:6). “He is a double-minded²² man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8), who is in need of “purifying his heart” (James 4:8).

¹⁹ διαπορέω

²⁰ ἀπορέω

²¹ δίψυχος

²² δίψυχος

Doubt is the seed of unbelief. Unbelief is like handing God's salvation back to him, and declaring, "I do not want it." It is like saying, "I am too busy with other things. Do not bother me. I will take my chances on Judgment Day without your pardon."

How would God react to this? Would his pardon still cover that person anyway? The U.S. Supreme Court has handed down this verdict: If a prisoner would refuse to accept a pardon, he will stay condemned. The same judgment has been declared by God. If a sinner would refuse to accept his pardon, he will stay condemned. His unbelief will damn him. "He who does not believe will be damned" (Mark 16:16). In fact, where there is unbelief, there "all [his] other sins [will] again assume their condemnatory character."²³

What would cause you to doubt? It certainly will not be due to a lack of evidence regarding your salvation. God has spoken to you abundantly about it, and has assured you of its truthfulness by many promises and oaths. Doubts arise in your mind because your flesh always rejects the things of God due to its natural contempt for them (1st Corinthians 2:14).

In addition, an indifferent attitude toward the gospel will cause you to lose confidence in it. That is, whenever you would catch yourself yawning at the gospel, thinking,

"I have heard all this before," this will be a symptom of doubt – doubt that there would be much importance at all attached to the gospel.

Furthermore, you will belittle the promise of God whenever you would allow your mind to be distracted and become occupied more with the things of this world than with the holy things of God. Your Lord warns against this – against imitating the thinking of the people in the days of Noah and of Lot, who 'ate, drank, bought, sold, planted, and built' until punishment came along and they were all destroyed (Luke 17:26-28) because they had not done what it took to keep faith in the gospel.

What is more, you will bring on uncertainty whenever you would serve sin, and would not quit it; whenever you would not purge sin out of your mind by working hard to put it down. Sin will tear down your faith bit by bit with every transgression until there is little, and then, finally, no faith left.

In addition, during periods of sufferings you will tend to doubt. While God-sent sufferings are designed to do the very opposite: to make you more confident, you will be tempted to think: "Why is God doing this to me? Where is his pledge to help? Has he forgotten me?"

So watch out for these messengers of doubt! He who would doubt the promises of God will distrust God. He

²³ Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, translator Walter W. F. Albrecht (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1970), volume III, page 548.

who would distrust God will imply that the Lord is a liar (1st John 5:20). In fact, he who would have a hostile attitude toward the gospel will bring down God's judgment of blindness on him, in which he will not be able to see the truth.

Moreover, doubting will bring on the destruction of faith; then, eternal death and damnation. Do not be foolish! Do not doubt! Be confident!

2.

Saving faith trusts in the forgiveness purchased by Christ and guaranteed in the gospel pledge. Confidence is the heart of this saving faith. It is the believer's "Amen" or "This is most certainly true" to the salvation which God has pledged. To be confident, then, the believer, first of all, has to be assured by the gospel promise.

To stay confident, the believer has to be reassured continually by the gospel. Thus these reassurances of God will be what would make you confident. Hence the only way to stay confident is to continue in the gospel words of Christ. So "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly!" Colossians 3:16.)

²⁴ πείθω

²⁵ πεποίθησις

²⁶ παρρησία

²⁷ θαρρέω

Scripture describes the state of confidence as having the knowledge of salvation of which the believer is persuaded and assured: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded²⁴ that he is able to keep that [faith] which I have entrusted to him," (2nd Timothy 1:12). Christian confidence is variously described as confident persuasion²⁵ (Ephesians 3:12); as boldness²⁶ to which the believer holds firmly (Hebrews 3:6) and does not "cast away" (Hebrews 10:35). Confidence is the state of having good courage²⁷ (2nd Corinthians 5:6). It is a confidence of the heart subsisting firmly and immovably²⁸ (Hebrews 3:14). It is trust (2nd Corinthians 3:4); confident boasting (2nd Corinthians 9:4); being fully persuaded (Romans 4:20); full assurance (Colossians 2:2); in full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:22).²⁹

To be sure, a believer must be certain of the gospel before he could be confident of it. The Bible, therefore, describes the Christian as "knowing the certainty" of the gospel³⁰ (Luke 1:4).

However, to be certain, the ground of certainty must be found outside of your unsound mind. To be divinely certain, you will need to have an outside divine witness. Only the divine gospel could create in you full assurance that your sins are forgiven (1st Thessalonians 2:13). Thus

²⁸ ὑπόστασις

²⁹ See W. H. T. Dau, *Doctrinal Theology*, volume II (no place: mimeographed, after 1910), page 107 top.

³⁰ ἀσφάλεια

your confidence will be mightily strengthened whenever you would rehear the gospel passages in Scripture. Indeed, when you could apply the gospel promise to yourself, and testify, "That forgiveness includes me," it will mean that you are confident. This is why God chose the singular method of salvation by promise, so that you could be completely confident of it. Do you see this?

In fact, to strengthen your confidence, and to prevent doubt, the Lord also purposely will send you crosses that will prod you into firming your trust as you reach for his gospel pledge once again with an eager anxious will that is confident in his promise to save and to help; a will that is bold and firm; that is persuaded that what all the Lord has pledged is true and unbreakable; a will that is fully assured that the salvation which the Lord has promised has taken place; a mind that is safely, surely, certainly, and firmly planted in the words from the mouth of God; a soul that is made steady with full faith in all what God had done to rescue you from the damnation to come, and to make ready for you your home in heaven.

So have full assurance of faith! Why? for "the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (Joel 2:13). He has cast all of your sins behind his back (Isaiah 38:17). He will clean up the spill of your transgressions, and will remember them no more (Isaiah 43:25). If you would confess your iniquities with the intent to make a good faith effort to stop doing them,

God will have mercy on you (Proverbs 28:13), for he will multiply pardon (Isaiah 55:7) toward you.

What more could you ask? Be confident, then! Trust his gospel promise!

* * *

RECOGNIZE THE SAVING ACTS OF CHRIST!

Hebrews 2:9: *"We see, Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor on account of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."*

There is a difference between the promise which God gave to the Old Testament believers and then, subsequently, to the New Testament believers. To the New Testament Christians he gave additional knowledge in regard to the saving acts of Christ. That is, he gave a detailed, even minute testimony of the saving events in Christ's life, including a listing of people, days, and hours, besides a detailed account of plot, action, and speech.

Why did the Lord do all this? He did it for one reason: for you, to assure you.

Realize that the saving acts of Christ could have been done quickly and quietly in seclusion, capped off with God's pledge to you that it was so! However, the Lord chose the opposite! In other words, he went far out of his way and to great lengths in regard to his saving work. He did them publicly, purposely in plain view of all including trained observers and high governmental officials.

Think of it! God did not send his Son down to earth to a deserted frozen wasteland that was uninhabited, such as Siberia, where Christ, would rest down on a rock, and momentarily suffer quickly, quietly, and unseen, after which God would announce that his Son had just accomplished a salvation for the entire world! God did not want to do it in this way. Rather, it was done in this manner: the birth, holy life, death, and all the other acts of Christ were done openly in front of witnesses. For instance, shepherds and Wise men are pulled in deliberately to witness the inauguration of Christ. His birth is publicly recorded on the official rolls of the Roman Empire. Crowds are at his trial.

Multiple governmental and church officials are made to view his execution as eyewitnesses. Hundreds see him after his resurrection. Why? Why did God parade these saving acts of Christ in front of so many thousands of eyewitnesses? simply and solely for this reason: for your benefit, so that you could and should be all the more certain of the saving acts which Christ did.

Think about that! What a caring Christ he is! Therefore-

RECOGNIZE THE SAVING ACTS OF CHRIST!

From time to time in the sermons, and from your own readings in the Bible, you have heard such technical terms as reconciliation and redemption, propitiation and imputation, expiation and incarnation, atonement and testament. To what do these refer? They refer to the saving acts of God.

Look at what went on in the merciful mind of God! See the wonderful works of Christ on earth! Realize what an important part they played in

your salvation! They released you from Judgment Day, and spared you from an eternity in hell.

Consider the saving acts of God! First of all, look at them in their natural order!

Before this is done, however, remember the background to the story of salvation! God had created man in his own image. This means that Adam and Eve had been created holy and righteous as God is. Just the same, in spite of these advantages, Adam and Eve chose to sin and brought upon themselves, and passed onto their children, a sinful nature, that is, an evil mind which, on the one hand, hated God and the things of God, and, on the other hand, served evil with a passion. The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. There is none that does good; no, not one. As a consequence, this brought upon the human race guilt, slavery to sin, the anger of the Almighty (Romans 5:10; Ephesians 2:3), and the sentence of eternal punishment.

Acknowledge these facts! Come clean! Confess to the sin in your heart! Admit your guilt! Sorrow over the fact that your sin-stained life has separated you from God! Then "return to

the Lord" (Lamentations 3:20)! The only way in which this could be done; the only way that you could become reconciled to God is that you must look to and depend upon God's wonderful pledge that he has laid all of your sins of Jesus' back, and has punished him on Calvary's cross instead of you. Depend on this salvation! It has removed your sins from you.

Indeed, instead of imposing immediately the well-deserved punishment with which he had threatened the sinner, God resorted to the *grace* in his heart. That is, God had mercy or compassion on man who had in every way given up his right to God's love. The Almighty stopped himself in his tracks, so to speak, and instead of punishing the sinner as he fully intended, the Lord planned a way for all mankind to escape its damnation. This plan of God would be an intervention so that the entire world could be rescued from the destruction towards which it was headed.

Nevertheless, this would not be a gratuitous deliverance. That is to say, the Almighty simply could not announce that all of the charges against

mankind had been dropped; that the crimes they had committed no longer mattered. Payments had to be made, and debts paid. Punishment had to be meted out and God's righteous anger satisfied. Rather, the plan of salvation would be accomplished in this way: the grace of God would work together with his justice. The grace of God would set up a way to meet the demands of his justice without sending the whole ruined race into eternal torment. How could this be done?

Briefly put, the plan of God was this: The Father would send the Son to earth to take on the body of a man. This mission of the Son would be twofold: (1) to fulfill the law of God for the sinful world so that the Father could decree to the rebellious race, "You have done it. You have done all that I had commanded you. You are righteous. Go free! You may enter my heaven"; and also (2) to endure as man's substitute the everlasting punishment in hell which fallen man had deserved. We call these "the saving acts of Christ." In brief, this was the gracious plan of God.

In spirit we Christians could and should see Jesus in his saving acts, the text declares. He was made a man, a little lower than the angels, for the purpose of suffering eternal death, so that he might taste it for everyone. Recognize in this the important biblical teaching of *substitution*! That is to say, in all of his saving acts Christ did not do these things for himself – he had no need for them. He did them for you. You lacked the holiness with which to enter heaven. Christ earned it for everyone. You deserved to die in everlasting torment. Christ tasted this death for all people. Thus you are now freed from them. So be assured of this! Build your confidence on it! God wants you to do so. Recognize the saving acts of Christ, for they are your salvation!

To put it briefly, the saving acts of Christ would be these: They began with his *incarnation*, by which he accomplished your *redemption*, and made *atonement* or *expiation*, that is, *reconciliation*, or *propitiation* for your crimes by his *active* and *passive obedience*. As a result of which Christ gave you an *imputation* of his righteousness, that is, a *justification*, or, in other words, the *forgiveness of*

sins. Then, he promised in a pledge to you called the “*New Testament*” that this is what he had planned, had seen it through, and carried out to completion to save you fully, freely, and finally.

Take a closer look at these terms! It was the job of God the Son to accomplish the saving acts in which he would obey voluntarily the divine law on behalf of mankind, and then that he would suffer their torment in hell. To accomplish these things, he had to come down to earth and become *incarnate*, that is, he had to take on a man’s body. Thus “God appeared in the flesh,” Holy Writ remarks (1st Timothy 3:16). Why? Since the law of God and the punishment in hell were intended for men, and not for a spirit, he had to become a man in order to submit himself to both. These two acts of Christ have been called by theologians the *active* and *passive obedience*. In other words, Christ behaved as you should be behaving, and he made up for what you had done wrong in the past. He actively obeyed the law of God so fully and perfectly that it is now considered by Heaven to have been obeyed flawlessly by the entire human race. “By the obedience of one many will be made

righteous” (Romans 5:19). Secondly, the punishment which Christ endured in hell for all sinners has been served so fully it is as if all men had suffered it for eternity themselves, so much so that God has spent his anger, and no longer has anything against the human race. In short, as the text assures you, “Jesus, by the grace of God, should taste death for everyone.”

By these two major crowning achievements on earth as a man, God has accomplished your *redemption*. In other words, Christ has released you from all your guilt and from all the punishment in hell which you deserved by the debt of your sins.

Literally, “to redeem” means “to buy back.” In the original Greek it meant to pay a ransom in order to set free a prisoner. In fact, realize that you were that prisoner: the worst kind! Scripture teaches that your thoughts, speech, and actions were completely captive to the cruel slavery of sin. Because of the evil which you had done, you were sealed in guilt. As a result, your sins ran up a debt, a huge debt of punishment, namely, death and everlasting punishment because they were

rebellion committed against the pure, holy, and perfect God. It was real debt. It was a horrible terrifying debt. You were locked into it. It had come due. What is more, there was nothing in your power which you could do to release yourself from this debt.

Yet when you were without strength; while you were still ungodly (Romans 5), the mighty God, in the body of a man, paid off your threefold debt and released you from the control of sin, from all of your guilt, and from every part of your punishment.

How did he accomplish this? not with gold or silver – that would be a pitifully poor sum – but with the costliest price ever: God’s own suffering and death in hell, and God’s own holy life on earth. Understand that you had been held captive! A sum was needed to pay for your release. God paid that sum with his blood and life. He *redeemed* you. He bought you. He bought you with a price: a very dear price.

What happened after Christ paid this redemption payment? He settled God’s anger

against you and gave you the holiness with which to enter heaven.

First of all, Christ settled, or appeased the righteous wrath of God which was furious over the rebellious lawbreaking of evil-loving mankind. Christ made *atonement*. That is to say, he did what was necessary to bring God back to friendly terms with the rebellious race through his gracious voluntary punishment in hell upon the altar of his cross on behalf of the sinful world, making satisfaction for your sins. Christ’s atonement was the loving act of a mediator between God and man that effected a change in the heart of God toward the sinner from being hateful to that of being peaceable.

In fact, in its common meaning in the Old Testament, “*atonement*,” as well as the terms “*propitiation*” and “*expiation*,” along with the word “*reconciliation*” in the meaning of Hebrews 2:17, are all translations of the same Hebrew and Greek words meaning “to appease,” and also “to clear from guilt.”

Remember: God was angry at the world over its enormous iniquity! As a holy, just, and

righteous God he must punish all evil. Yet Christ “delivered us from the anger to come” (1st Thessalonians 1:20). He came down and cleared the world of its guilt by appeasing God. He did this by *substituting* his punishment in hell for that of the world. As a result, Divine Justice was satisfied. God became *reconciled* with the whole world. He changed his attitude from hatred to love; from being a foe, to being a friend. He no longer had any reason to punish the world because Christ had already suffered its punishment. “Having made peace through the blood of his cross,” God reconciled all to himself (Colossians 1:20).

Therefore, Christ has paid off your debt. Whereupon God now gave credit to your account. He banged down his judicial gavel, so to speak, and made this pronouncement: “The whole world is now freed from its debt of punishment. Moreover, mankind is now declared to be righteous, holy in my judgment, since the Son has lived a holy life for it.” This is what is known as “*justification*.” God made Christ “who knew no sin, to be sin for us so that we might be made the

righteousness of God in him” (2nd Corinthians 5:21).

As a result of Christ’s work, God, in his courts and decrees, in his legal ledger and register, has declared the whole world to be just and righteous, freed from all punishment, and of having a holiness capable of entering heaven.

Observe that the Lord did not give you holiness in the form of a crown, for instance, and lay it on top of your head! He did not pass a wand over you and transform you into a completely holy person. Rather, he did it differently.

He did it in a juridical manner. That is to say, he *imputed* holiness to the whole world; namely, he accredited holiness to the world’s account. He gave it to the world’s credit, *absolving* it, clearing it officially before the court of Divine Justice of any wrongdoing, of debt, and of punishment. This is called a “*pardon*.” This also is known as “*forgiveness*.” Indeed, this is the grand glorious *gospel* promise.

But wait! The Lord was not done yet. There still was more. Next he set up the *means of grace*, that is, his gospel promises in his Bible and at the

heart of his two sacraments, baptism and communion, to bring this pardon to the sinner with the intent of handing it over to him, and of making it his own by powering him to obtain it and to possess it by taking it through an act of faith.

All of these saving works of Christ, and all of the juridical responses of God to them are what are known as your *salvation*.

In fact, realize that all of this activity of God was done not for his benefit! He had no need for it. It was done all for your benefit. So the next time that you would recite the *Apostles' Creed*, and profess its list of the saving acts of God, realize that there are two words that are missing. These words are "for me." The Lord did all these things for you.

Be assured of this! Build your confidence on it! See the saving acts of God, for this is your salvation!

* * *

"PUT OFF THE OLD MAN! PUT ON THE NEW!"

Ephesians 4:22-24: *Put off concerning your former conduct the old man which is rotting according to the lusts of deceit, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new man which was created according to God in righteousness and true holiness.*

Being a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ requires something different than merely joining a local congregation, meeting nice people at the services, admiring the fine interior of the building, and enjoying the music and the singing in the services. Some of this may have its place in the beauty of worship, yet if someone would be attracted by nothing more, he will be lacking a saving faith, and despite his Sunday surroundings, will end up in eternal torment.

Being a true follower of Christ means that after Scripture assures us that we have total pardon for the damnable guilt in our lives, we naturally could and should respond: "Lord, what would you have me to do?"

In his Bible he responds:

"PUT OFF THE OLD MAN! PUT ON THE NEW!"

Examine:

1. The importance of putting off the old man.
2. The necessity of putting on the new.

- 1.

First of all, what would be the “old man”? Scripture calls it “the flesh with its affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24), “the body of sin” (Romans 6:6), and “our members which are upon earth” (Colossians 3:5). The “old man” is a phrase which describes a moral quality of a man. It is called “old” because it draws its origin from the fall of our ancestors, Adam and Eve, into sin long ago, the effects of which have been passed on to each human being through his parents. Hence this “old man” will be sin in all of its forms, and thus is characterized in our text as “the old man which is corrupt according to the lusts of deceit” (verse 22).

Upon this old man “a severe attack was made by divine grace in a person’s regeneration, which broke the deadly spell of sin on man” (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:6). “But remnants of sin remained in the form of defects in the understanding, feebleness of the will and perverseness of the desires. Regenerate Paul recognizes these remnants of evil in him” (W. H. T. Dau, *Doctrinal Theology*, volume 2 [Saint Louis: mimeographed, 191-], page 119), and cries out: I see a “law in my members... bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members”

(Romans 7:23). In other words, at our baptism (Romans 6:4), when the triune God “crucified” and “destroyed” (Romans 6:6) our sinful flesh, “remnants” of it remained (Philip Melanchthon, “Apology to the Augsburg Confession,” *Triglot Concordia*, editors W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1921, page 171), like pieces of a burst balloon.

What has the text told us to do with our old man? It tells us to put him off. What would this mean? It will mean to get rid of him as you would take off any garment. Such an action will be very decided and complete. It will not be a mere change of opinion, but a decisive change of one’s life. It will be a suppression of those outcroppings of the sinful flesh. It will be a ridding of the craving and behavior of the old man.

Why should you put off the old man? Because the text teaches that he “is rotting according to the lusts of deceit.” Indeed, sin is a state of decay or corruption, and in all cases, when left unchecked, it will corrupt. Furthermore, sin is against God’s will.

Moreover, “deceit is personified; it is an agent of evil, sending out lusts which seem harmless but are really ruinous – their real character is concealed. They come as ministers of pleasure, they end as destructive tyrants. Lust of power, lust of money, lust of pleasure, have all this character; they are the offspring of deceit, and are always to be shunned” (Blaikie in *Pulpit Commentary* quoted by W.

H. T. Dau, *Notes for Lectures on Catechism* [Saint Louis: mimeographed, 1920], page 154), that is, to be put off.

Thus the old man must be put off because it would defeat the good intentions of the believer (Romans 7:18; Galatians 5:17). The old man is like a watchful enemy, surrounding the believer and trying to find a weak point (Hebrews 12:1). The old man strives to gain the mastery over the Christian in order to bring him into the captivity of the law of sin (Romans 7:24), to make him obey its lusts, in order that it may dominate his body (Romans 6:12). Therefore, we are to put him off so that we no longer will serve sin. As Romans 6:12 and Titus 2:11-12 command: “Do not let sin rule in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. For the grace of God that brings salvation to all men has appeared, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.”

How could we put off the old man? To be sure, we could not grab it physically and choke it to death, for “we wrestle not against flesh and blood” (Ephesians 6:12), but against our sinful mind. Therefore, “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual” (2nd Corinthians 10:4). Hence it is a mental battle. It is a battle of the wills. We aim at the old man’s desires and thoughts, and make the effort to rid our minds of them. God’s divine law aids us by revealing to us the sinful character of our doings (Romans 3:20; 7:7). “In sanctification the conscience of the regenerate is quickened [made alive],

and he is made to be keenly sensitive of his wickedness, with the aim that he shall separate from the same. But the impulse to quit evil is not furnished him by the Law, but by the Gospel, which sets forth to him its daily appropriation by virtue of his baptism, Rom. 6,4, which has included the old man in him in the death and burial of Christ. In the power of the Gospel grace, by means of his faith in the same, the regenerate lays aside which he has recognized through the law as being sinful. He becomes ‘dead to’ this or that sin, i.e., he does not knowingly and willingly commit it, and thus he has put off the old man ‘concerning the former conversation’” (W. H. T. Dau, *Doctrinal Theology*. volume 2 [Saint Louis: mimeographed, 191-], page 119).

This would imply a need to be well-versed in God’s law through a study of the Bible. Likewise, there is a need to “be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might” (Ephesians 6:10); for if we would not feed our faith daily with the gospel, we will not be able to put off the old man. Indeed, we soon would be overcome by it, and would become unbelievers once more.

2.

This act of putting off the old man by “suppressing old desires, resisting old weaknesses” will not “leave the regenerate a moral blank, no longer bad, but yet not good.

Together with the process of putting off the old man there goes the process of putting on the new one" (*Dau*, page 119).

What would be the "new man"? The new man will be another scriptural term which will indicate another moral quality in the believer. The text personifies this quality and calls it the "new man" (verse 24). The "new man" is that life which was implanted in us in conversion. It is the opposite quality of the old man, for 2nd Corinthians 5:17 points out: "If any man would be in Christ, he will be a new creation; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." "The spiritual ignorance of the natural man gives way to knowledge, Col. 3,10; the will becomes firm in the determination to live righteously, and the desires become sanctified in the true holiness, Eph. 4,24" (*Dau*, page 119).

The Christian should put the new man on as one would put on a new clean garment. Similarly, the text encourages the Christian to do the same thing by being "renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Verse 23). "To be renewed" is to begin a new life. Hence Christians are taught to put off their sinful conduct and to become new persons. By saying "be renewed in the spirit of your mind" the text forcefully emphasizes that it is not encouraging a mere outward change, but a change in one's innermost mind. A person's spirit in connection with his mind is the place where one comes up with the thoughts and will that will determine his conduct. Thus the text

encourages you: "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind! Put on the new man!"

Why should you be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new man? "For you were bought with a price," 1st Corinthians 6:20 reminds us. "Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." The price which bought you was the payment which Christ paid by his suffering. He paid the penalty for every sinful thought, word, and act which the entire world has produced. By serving the world's sentence in hell for all of its guilt, he has removed its condemnation. He won the world's release with his own blood. In light of this remarkable, soul-rescuing mission, put off the old man, and put on the new!

How could you put on the new man? Since it is God who works in the Christian "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12), "God supports him and grafts him the power to determine his mortal body against the law of sin in his members and for the law of righteousness" (*Dau*, page 120).

God's divine law aids us in this process in that it will teach what conduct the Almighty requires to live righteously. However, the motivation to put on the new man and to live before God "in righteousness and true holiness" (verse 24) will come only from the gospel. Indeed, only that person will serve the Lord out of love who knows that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Only that person who is assured

that “when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10) will “deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow” Christ (Matthew 16:24). Thus the gospel will urge upon the believer the appropriation of the power of the resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:4) through which he puts on the new man, and walks in newness of life. The risen Christ is the sanctifying power in his followers through the energy which he constantly exerts towards them by his gracious word, and causes them to put on the new man, be renewed in the spirit of their mind, and hence, to show spiritual life in their thoughts, desires, and actions (see *Dau*, page 119f.). Therefore, delve into the gospel pledges, and draw out the power of the resurrected Christ to put away the old sins, to put on the new man, and to walk in newness of life!

So that you would not fail to do this, the text places these matters before you in the form of earnest appeals, and urges you: “Put off the old man, and put on the new!” Be renewed in the spirit of your mind; so that “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself his own special people, zealous of good works” (Titus2:12-14)!

To be sure, get the strength to put on the new man to do good works by receiving the will and the motivation through the gospel passages!

* * *

A FUNERAL SERMON.

Romans 5:12, 8-9: *As through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and thus death passed to all men, for all sinned. But God proves his own love to us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. How much more, therefore, having been justified now in his blood will we be saved through him from anger!*

Why is this body lying here dead?

It is because of sin. The almighty God of heaven and earth has threatened, “The soul that would sin, it must die” (Ezekiel 18:4).

Think about it! Should this be so strange? In July of 2011 twenty-one motorists in Minnesota were ticketed for driving more than 100 miles per hour. Another seventy-two were fined for doing more than ninety mph. If those who have broken human laws have been pulled over and punished, will not those who have broken Heaven’s laws be apprehended and punished?

Who has broken Heaven’s laws? Everyone has. “All have sinned,” the Bible reports (Romans 3:23).

Therefore, “death passed on to all men, for all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). Thus the entire human race marches on to its grave on account of sin, because “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Romans 1:18).

Why should the punishment for sin be death? The pure and holy Almighty had warned his pure and holy creatures, Adam and Eve, whom he had created, that if they would ever sin, they will be punished with death. After this, the Bible related the tragic story, “By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed on to all men, for all have sinned” (Romans 5:12).

At the beginning of creation God had created man and woman pure and holy for the purpose of having them live with him in heaven. To this end God created this world for man to live in temporarily, in order to bear children, and then, after a period of time, to take the parents home to heaven one by one without dying.

However, this plan was upset by the devil. Adam and Eve were tempted to sin. After which they did not resist temptation, but proceeded to sin, burning their bridges, so to speak, so that they could never regain their holiness.

This ruined everything. The holy and righteous Almighty could not have sinners in his presence in heaven murdering each other, for instance, as Cain later murdered his own brother. Therefore, the sinful human race was not only locked out of heaven, but doomed to be

punished. As a result, God set a day of reckoning called “Judgment Day.” Sinners would have to die an earthly death, be brought before the almighty Judge, and then be punished with never-ending suffering called “eternal death.”

Indeed, an earthly death is God’s arrest. Earthly death is his judgment on that evil which had infected the soul. This is why this body is now lying here dead.

Thus your sins are no slight matter. They are a slap in the face to the holy and righteous Almighty. They are a revolt and a defiance so outrageous and damnable, that nothing less than a never-ending punishment of the sinner would do.

See the truth in all of this! Admit that it is true! It is useless for you to deny it for “your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23); for “God will bring every work into judgment” (Ecclesiastes 12:4), since the Lord searches the heart... even to give every man according to his ways (Jeremiah 17:10).

So admit your sinfulness! You have grieved and offended the Almighty. If anyone should be sorry, you should be the one, and you ought to do it here and now!

What is more, realize that, out of his grace, the Lord determined to help you. He resolved to overturn the damage which the devil had done. God planned that the battle which the devil had won in the Garden of Eden should be fought all over again. This time not Adam but God himself, the second person of the Trinity, God the

Son, would assume a human body and fight the devil. Since he is almighty God, victory over the devil's temptation would be assured. Realize that this occurred decisively when the Lord Jesus Christ left his throne in heaven and came down to this earth for the purpose of resisting the devil's temptations in your place, and, then, as your holy and powerful substitute, of keeping every law of God which you had ever broken! What is more, the Lord Jesus removed the pending eternal punishment which your sinning had brought upon you by suffering it himself on Calvary's cross. Then, on Easter Sunday, he broke the chains that had confined you, the sinner, in an eternal death forever. See this! Declare: "I want to believe that Jesus has gotten forgiveness for me"!

So what would this action of Jesus mean? How would it benefit you?

It would mean this: Since the demands of Divine Justice have been fully met and satisfied by no less than God himself, the Lord Jesus Christ; since his announcement from his cross, "It is accomplished" (John 19:30) assures that everything required for your release from sin's ruin has been accomplished fully and flawlessly by no less than God himself, there are immense benefits to you, the sinner who is standing all alone, facing, in spirit, the judgment bench of the angry Almighty himself.

First of all, God himself has cast all of your sins behind his back, and has declared you sinless. As a result, your guilt has been removed. In addition, your sentence

of eternal death in hell's horrors has been cancelled. Because of this, heaven's doors now have been flung open wide to receive you after this life. Indeed, this had been God's intention all along.

Moreover, through this good news your thoughtful Lord exerts his gentle power so that his Words of peace will put you at peace with your heavenly Father and also with your conscience, in order that you may have divine assurance from Heaven's own pledge that God has pardoned you, become friendly and reconciled toward you, and so that you could be confident that your body also will rise to heaven, as Jesus rose on Easter Sunday, according to his promise, "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19).

To be sure, you will have to die on account of the sin which has caused the decay of death in your body, as this body lying in the casket before you demonstrates. Yet your soul, cleansed by Christ's saving blood, will be kept alive beyond the grave safely at the side of Christ, ready to be reunited with your resurrected body on the Last Day.

All of these promises – and they are just that, are they not? Think about it! - for you never have been able to see Jesus Christ when he lived on this earth, have you? You never have been able to look into God's mind in order to determine what thoughts he has toward you, the sinner, have you? Realize, then, that the only assurance which you ever could have that this salvation will be true, is if you would have God's own word for it: his pledges.

This is precisely what the Lord has given you. He left his pledges behind on this earth with you in order that you would depend on them and not on your own thoughts; in order that you would have faith in his pledges as your only rescue from ruin by the great God himself, since God will keep his promises. Do so!

The deceased did. In fact, all that he had was God's promises. Think about it! He had nothing else with which to get right with God. He departed this life holding onto God's pledges, looking forward to heaven as God had promised him. Do the same!

Hear those pledges once more!

"Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12); they "will go into everlasting punishment... into everlasting fire" (Matthew 25:46, 41) "which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

Nevertheless, "God is the God of salvation; and to God...belong the escapes from death" (Psalm 68:20);

For "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:23).

So "the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (1st John 4:14) "who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

"He who believes the Son has everlasting life" (John 3:36), he "will not be hurt by the second death" (Revelation 2:11).

"Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!" (2nd Corinthians 9:15.)

"Lay hold on eternal life!" (1st Timothy 6:12.)

"Believe in the gospel!" (Mark 1:15.)

* * *

*Thanks we give and adoration,
For Thy Gospel's joyful sound.
May the fruits of Thy salvation
In our hearts and lives abound:
May Thy presence
With us evermore be found.
Hymn 17:2*

