

# Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics

By Dr. Christian Löber, General Superintendent in Altenburg

[Originally printed in 1711. Reprinted in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1872;  
Translated By Brent Brutlag and Jonathan Schroeder, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1999]

## Part Three, Section One

### *The Fifth Chapter: Regarding the Divine Call to Grace*<sup>1</sup>

In his grace, God had mercy on the entire human race, and the Son of God undertook to save each and every man. This resulted in the gracious offer of God made in a testamental way to all poor, sinful men. Accordingly, God called each and every man to that Testament. He has also called, without exception, each and every man to participate in his mercy, and still continues to do so. This chapter shows that which is evident: God, after the fall, set up his covenant or testament of grace for all mankind. We will consider 1) in what this call to grace consists and 2) its universal nature. A brief, but thorough, definition of the call to grace is appended.

#### **The First Chief Point: In what does this call to grace consist?**<sup>2</sup>

The divine call to grace consists in the following: First, out of pure love and mercy, God has revealed his holy Word and through it not only calls men to himself but also offers them his testament and his grace. Though in it he gives sufficient information concerning his counsel and will, he has also closely bound divine power with his Word, so that it might enlighten men, kindle faith, and strengthen that faith in them. Therefore it has the power to lead men to God, and it will do so to all those who do not maliciously oppose it.

Earlier, it was proven in great detail, that the Word of God does have such power. “For you have been born again out of imperishable seed, namely from the living Word of God. This is the Word that is proclaimed among you,” 1 Pt 1:23-25. “The enduring prophetic Word is a light that shines in a dark place until the day breaks and the morning star rises in our hearts,” 2 Pt 1:19. “It is like the rain and snow, which falls from heaven and covers the earth and makes it fertile and lush,” Is 55:10-11.

However, it is also true that the Word of God reveals to everyone the necessary knowledge about God’s counsel and will concerning the salvation of all men. Indeed, since Scripture is the Word of God, and we have now described the same in the Holy Scriptures, therefore we know, that the Holy Scriptures, given by God, can lead us to salvation, and “that the man of God is thoroughly equipped for all good works,” 2 Tim 3:16 (*sic*). This perfect sufficiency of the Scriptures for salvation was handled in more detail earlier in this book.

Before the Scriptures were written, those who wanted to remain faithful to God still had divine revelation of his will among them, because in those days the Lord God often revealed himself directly. In this way he revealed himself to Adam after the Fall, Gen 3; to Enoch, Gen 5:22; Jude 14-15; to Noah before and after the Flood, Gen 6:9; to Abraham, Gen 12:1ff; to Isaac, Gen 26:1ff; to Jacob, Gen 28:1ff.; and to many others.

All these patriarchs, to whom the Lord God revealed himself, were the preachers of his covenant at that time. Concerning Enoch see Jude 14-15. “Noah was a preacher of righteousness,” 2 Pt 2:5. Concerning Abraham, God says: “I know he will command his children and his house after him, so that they will keep the way of the Lord,” Gen 18:19. Thus, even before the writing of Scripture, God sufficiently revealed his covenant and testament.

---

<sup>1</sup> *De vocatione.*

<sup>2</sup> *Eius quidditas.*

### **The Second Chief Point: The universal nature of the divine call to grace.<sup>3</sup>**

Most importantly, we have to show that God's call to grace through the Word is universal, that is, that it applies without exception to each and every sinful man, and we maintain this point in opposition to the Reformed false teachers. Just as the Reformed do not understand that the mercy of God applies to all mankind, and just as they fail to understand that Christ truly shed his blood intending salvation for all mankind, in the same way they also want to falsely deny that God's call to grace is truly meant for all.

We defend our teaching with the following rationale: The first point has been amply proven already, namely, that since the mercy of God is universal (Chapter 1), and since the atonement and merit of Christ is universal, then it logically follows that this call to grace also applies to each and every man.

It is written: "God wants all men to come to the knowledge of the truth," 1 Tim 2:4. And Christ speaks: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened," Mt 11:28. In Chapter 3 both passages proved the doctrine of the universal merit of Christ, and they certainly include all mankind without exception. Christ also speaks in the same way: "Go in all the world and teach all people," Mt 28:19. "Preach the Gospel to all creatures" (namely to all those with reason), Mk 16:15. "The Christ has repentance and forgiveness of sins preached in his name to all people," Lk 24:47. "God commands all people everywhere to repent and holds the proof before them," Ac 17:30-31. In summary: "As surely as God lives, he takes no delight in the death of the godless, but he wants them to turn from their ways and live," Ezek 33:2. "He doesn't want anyone to be lost but everyone to come to repentance," 2 Pt 3:9.

How then can his call to grace not apply to all mankind? The universal nature of the call is also clearly apparent from the three times that the divine Word was preached universally. The first universal preaching was to Adam; as the common ancestor of the entire human race, the promise was for him and his offspring without exception, Gen 3:15. The second universal preaching was to Noah. He was another common ancestor of the entire human race, and the Word of God was given to him and his offspring without exception, Gen 9. The third universal preaching began in the New Testament when the Gospel was proclaimed in all places and to the ends of the earth. That Gospel was the wonderful message of Christ and the eternal salvation which he established.

David had proclaimed this concerning the kingdom of Christ beforehand: "All the ends of the world will remember and turn to the Lord," Ps 22:28. Likewise: "Their [the apostles or messengers of Christ] voice goes out into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world," Ps 19:5. Paul upholds that and says: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world," Rom 10:18. In the same way it previously had been thought that the Gospel should be preached to all creatures, Mk 16:15. The threefold universal preaching of the divine Word has sufficiently attested that no man is excluded from the divine call to grace.

Thus we have proven, that such a call to grace applies to all mankind. Therefore, each and every man has the right to follow that call because they are included in the word "all," and God wants to help all men.

However, by no means can we say that the outward preaching of the divine Word still directly reaches each and every man in the entire world. It is enough for us to say that the Word of God is administered and promoted in the world to all mankind like an open door. All men may come to the knowledge of the truth unless they turn themselves from it.

With small children and with those who do not have the use of reason or of the outward senses, such as sight or hearing, Holy Baptism meets their need. Through baptism the Holy Spirit is poured out on them, does his work in them, and extends to them the universal call to grace, which the malice of the heart does not resist. The working of God through the Sacrament also belongs here, if they are adults and are able to participate in the Holy Supper. However, there are those who are born outside of the Church, completely separated from Christianity and are far from its locality, and there are children who are born outside of the church and die in their childhood. These we place in the hands of him who judges justly, who himself has said: "Whoever does not believe, is already judged," Jn 3:18.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Huius vocationis universalitas.*

This judgment especially concerns all those among them, who have the use of their reason. Paul assures us that they have no excuse, because they knew that there is a God yet they did not praise him as God in line with the true religion, that says that man should be reconciled with God and serve him. They have not sought him and consequently they have not praised him as God, Rom 1:20,21. They have no excuse, because, not only from the works of creation, but also from the Law written in their hearts they are able to observe the invisible nature of God, that is, his eternal power and divinity, cf. 1:20 and 2:25. They can even be convinced of the falsehood of their own religions when they want something different. In general, if God gives fewer opportunities to those outside the Church to hear his Word and his call to grace than to others, and if they are eternally lost, is it then to be thought that God foresaw their unbelief and impenitence? Is it to be thought that they would not have been converted even if the Word of God would have been preached to them through the apostles themselves? Meanwhile, however, the universal call to grace still applies to them.

So much may be said concerning the universal divine call to grace. The remaining facts, which can be discussed here, such as the author, intention, and cause of this divine call, fall under the discussion in the previous chapter concerning the divine Testaments.

Thus the divine call to grace<sup>4</sup> is a work of the triune God where, in his Word and for his honor, he demonstrates for all mankind the gracious revelation of his promise made public in Christ to all men. He unites his divine power with that Word intending that through it each and every man might come to the knowledge of salvation and become a participant in the divine testament of grace as an heir of grace and eternal blessedness.

### **Part Three, Section Three** ***The First Chapter: Regarding Rebirth***<sup>5</sup>

The first change that has to happen in the soul is rebirth. Concerning this rebirth, we will consider 1) the term, 2) the subject, 3) in what it consists, and 4) the remaining facts. A brief, but thorough, definition of rebirth is appended.

#### **The First Chief Point: The Term.**

The word “rebirth” (*παλιγγενασία* Titus 3:5) is used to describe<sup>6</sup> another birth in which someone is born anew, Jn 3:3. This is not speaking about a physical or natural birth—as if someone could go back into his mother’s body and be born again, Jn 3:4. Rather, this is a spiritual rebirth in which natural man is now born of the Spirit, Jn 3:5, that is, born of God, 1 Jn 3:9; 5:4.

Understand rebirth in this way: Natural man was born in and with original sin; natural man is by nature a child of wrath, Eph 2:5; natural man is dead in sin, Eph 2:3. Because of this, first and foremost he must undergo so great a change in his soul so that it could be said that he had been born again, or recreated.

However, different changes subsequently occur in and with the soul. Because these changes follow one right after the other, and because all the changes result in the soul being saved from the aforementioned spiritual death, consequently, the word “rebirth” has customarily had various meanings.<sup>7</sup> It can mean as much as justification, or the forgiveness of sins; but it can also mean the renewal of the soul after the forgiveness of sins. However, primarily it has two meanings: first, it may mean collectively all the spiritual changes that must happen in and with the soul (namely, the conferring of the divine powers of conversion, justification, and renewal). On the other hand, however, it means the conferring of the divine powers as the first spiritual change in the soul, upon which the rest follow.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> *Definitio.*

<sup>5</sup> *De regeneratione.*

<sup>6</sup> *Significatio etymologica.*

<sup>7</sup> *Homonymia.*

<sup>8</sup> *Vid. solid. declarat. Formul. Concord. artic. III.*

These two final meanings are certainly very different. According to the last meaning, everyone who is baptized is reborn. However, according to the first understanding, there are many who were baptized, but no longer consider themselves or promote themselves to others as Christian. Thus they are not reborn. Many among them do not stand in a state of repentance, of faith, of justification, and renewal.

We are accustomed to call that first meaning the “state of rebirth.”<sup>9</sup> This state includes all the mentioned spiritual changes in the soul, and is synonymous with the restoration of the lost divine image in the soul. But now we deal with the subject of rebirth in that other sense, in which it is the beginning of all spiritual changes in us. It is the granting or conferral of spiritual powers to the soul. In this meaning it is differentiated from the others as the spiritual change in the soul of renewal, that is “the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,” Titus 3:5.

### **The Second Chief Point: The subject of rebirth.**<sup>10</sup>

The subject of rebirth is natural man: Christ calls them flesh, Jn 3:6 (which is a figure of speech that I have explained at length). So he says: “Unless someone is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. What is born of flesh is flesh,” Jn 3:5-6. In the fifth and seventh chapters of the second part of this book, I sufficiently described and proved man’s miserable condition, namely, that the thoughts and acts of man are only evil. He does not have the least power or ability to turn himself back to God or to draw near him, as I previously explained. Oh, how truly miserable is the situation in which such a poor soul lies captive and from which it must be freed through rebirth!<sup>11</sup>

The poor soul cannot possibly be comforted or truly happy in its desires, wants, wills, longings, thoughts, acts, passions, or wishes, when it does not rest in the enjoyment of God, its highest good. Consider this: By nature the soul is outside of all the grace of God, as a child of wrath, Eph 2:3; it hears nothing from the Spirit of God, 1 Cor 2:14; on the contrary, it clings to its own wants and desires, to that which is false and transitory. It condemns itself through deceitful desires, Eph 4:22; it is so deeply entangled in sin and sin’s guilt that it is dead in sin, Eph 2:1,5; Col 2:13. Thus it is eternally lost and must fall into eternal death where it will not be helped by God through grace. From all this we see: “Unless someone is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” Jn 3:3. “The sinful mind is hostile to God,” Rm 8:7, and its end is death, Rm 8:6.

At the same time it is self-evident that the rational soul in man is the very part in which this rebirth happens.<sup>12</sup> This is apparent, not only from the aforementioned condition of the soul prior to rebirth, but also from the following chief point. That point states that this change (described as a change in the soul) is nothing other than receiving power from God to govern the bodily desires and to rule the whole body in a holy fashion. However, the soul also must not strive against the grace of the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit never makes this rebirth happen by compulsion, as was shown above.

### **The Third Chief Point: In what does this rebirth consist?**<sup>13</sup>

It consists in this: that the divine power to believe in Christ and to be united with him in faith is given to the poor soul, which of itself is dead in sin. This is also the way that the washing of rebirth is described, which the Holy Spirit is poured out richly on us, Titus 3:5. Though the soul is dead in sin, it is awakened and made alive, Eph 2:5-6. For it is written: “What is born of flesh is flesh, but what is born of spirit is spirit” (i.e., spiritually minded, with spiritual power, called forth to good and to believe in Christ), Jn 3:6. The spiritual are those who are spiritually minded, and to be spiritually minded is life and peace, Rom 8:6. Everything that is born of God overcomes the world, and our faith is the victory which has conquered the world, as John says in 1

<sup>9</sup> *Status renascentiae.*

<sup>10</sup> *Subiectum quod regenerationis.*

<sup>11</sup> *Terminus a quo regenerationis, i.e., status, in quo homo ant regenerationem est.*

<sup>12</sup> *Subiectum quo.*

<sup>13</sup> *Quidditas regenerationis.*

Jn 5:4. There he points out that this birth of God consists in this: the power to believe and the overcome the world through faith is placed into the soul.

The condition into which the soul is placed by God through rebirth is this: it has God's power in itself to know Christ and to make itself a participant in salvation through faith. 1) In regard to its understanding, the soul doesn't perceive beforehand what the Spirit of God is, 1 Cor 2:14. Thus it now receives the power of the Holy Spirit to recognize God and Jesus, the God-man, as its Savior, and then the divine enlightening begins in it. It is now called from the darkness to the wonderful light of God, 1 Pt 2:9. To those who sat in darkness and the shadows of death, Christ has now appeared, Lk 1:79. 2) In regard to its will, beforehand the soul was dead in sin, Eph 2:1,5. But now it is enabled by God to think about good things, 2 Cor 3:5. God now begins to work in you to will and act, Php 2:13. It is now awakened and made alive, Eph 2:4-5. The result is that it can grasp Christ in true faith, and it can make itself a participant [of its salvation]. "Whoever believes on the name of Christ, is born of God," Jn 1:12-13. This is the power from on high through which the soul, by the atonement in Christ's blood, is made able to recognize God, to receive him as the highest good, as its only true delight, and in him to find the sweetest enjoyment and rest.

### **The Fourth Chief Point: The remaining facts.**

It is self-evident that: 1) The agent<sup>14</sup> of this rebirth which bestows the divine powers on the soul is the Triune God. Who else could so equip the soul with such power? Therefore the reborn are called born of God or from God, Jn 1:13; 1 Jn 2:9; 5:4. Just as was shown in the fifth chapter of the previous section, this working is chiefly ascribed to the Holy Spirit, so that the reborn are especially called born of the Spirit, Jn 3:5,6,8. Paul writes: "The rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit," 1 Cor 12:3. 2) The cause in God<sup>15</sup> is that mercy we talked about in first chapter of the first section of the third part. "According to his great mercy, God has given us new birth into a living hope," 1 Pt 1:3. "God, who is rich in mercy, has made us alive through his great love with which he has loved us, when we were dead in sin," Eph 2:4-5.

The outward cause<sup>16</sup> is the costly merit of Christ. God, for his own sake, offers to us the power, through which we are made participants in our eternal salvation through faith. Paul says: "He has made us alive with Christ," Eph 2:5; further: "The Holy Spirit is poured out generously on us through the washing of rebirth through Jesus Christ our Savior," Titus 3:5,6. Peter says: "He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," 1 Pt 1:3.

The instruments or tools<sup>17</sup> and the outward means of grace, through which the Holy Spirit carries out rebirth in us, that is, through which he places his power in the soul, are the Word of God and Holy Baptism. They were discussed in the second section of this third part in the sixth and eight chapters. Concerning the Word of God it says: "The words, which I speak are Spirit and Life," Jn 6:65 (*sic*). "For you have been born again out of imperishable seed, namely out of the living Word of God, which has been proclaimed among you," 1 Pt 1:23,25. "He has begotten us according to his will through the Word of Truth," James 1:18. Concerning Holy Baptism it says: "For it may be, that anyone might be born out of water and Spirit, etc.," Jn 3:5. "The washing of rebirth," Titus 3:5. See also the earlier chapter on baptism!

Paul also counts the teacher of the Word among the instruments, through which rebirth happens, as he says: "I have begotten you in Christ Jesus through the Gospel," 1 Cor 4:15. "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth," (that is the pains of rebirth) Gal 4:19. "I have begotten Onesimus in my chains," Philemon 10.

In respect to us, God's ultimate purpose<sup>18</sup> in giving us rebirth is that we participate in Christ through faith, and consequently are righteous before God, made holy in renewal, and, finally, that we be eternally

<sup>14</sup> *Causa efficiens regenerationis.*

<sup>15</sup> *Causa impulsiva interna.*

<sup>16</sup> *Causa impulsiva externa.*

<sup>17</sup> *Causa minus principalis seu instrumentalis.*

<sup>18</sup> *Causa finalis intuitu nostrae salutis.*

blessed. The Holy Spirit is poured out through the washing of rebirth, so that we, having been made righteous through the same grace, might become heirs of eternal life, Titus 3:5-7. God has given us new life as an imperishable, unblemished, and unfading inheritance kept in heaven, 1 Pt 1:3,4. “He has created us in Christ Jesus [that is, given us rebirth] to do good works,” Eph 2:10.

In respect to God, his ultimate purpose or intention<sup>19</sup> is the eternal glorification of his name, or his eternal honor. This is his ultimate purpose for everything that he created, but especially for those who were drawn to him in faith. This was explained in the fifth chapter of the first part. “He has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ, to the praise of his glorious grace,” Eph 1:3,6.

Rebirth has the following attributes:<sup>20</sup> First, the necessity for reception of salvation.<sup>21</sup> Who would doubt that the soul could not receive salvation, unless it were equipped with powers from on high for faith? “Whoever does not believe will be damned,” Mk 16:16. By his own powers, however, the natural, purely passive man is not able to believe because he is dead in sin, Eph 2:1,5. “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit,” 1 Cor 12:3. Accordingly, Christ says: “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again,” Jn 3:3.

The second attribute is its eternity on the part of God.<sup>22</sup> The Holy Spirit wants the soul to always have the powers given to it in rebirth. He wants those powers to increase in the soul, and with those powers he wants to carry out all the spiritual changes in the soul and restore in the soul the image of God. Then the soul could become an heir of God, its highest good. It is the one of whom Paul speaks in good confidence, that “the one who has begun in you the good work, will also carry it out until the day of Jesus Christ,” Ps 6. See what has been said above concerning baptism!

The third attribute is that rebirth can easily be stopped on the part of man.<sup>23</sup> When the soul maliciously and petulantly resists the Holy Spirit, it forfeits his gracious working and restoration. “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit,” Gal 5:17. “For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die,” Rom 8:13.

The fourth attribute is that rebirth is renewed again in true repentance.<sup>24</sup> For in conversion, the Spirit of the Lord gives the soul the power of rebirth again. For this bestowal of power is eternal on the part of God, as has been said above. See this also in the following chapter!

The brief, but thorough, definition<sup>25</sup> of rebirth, as it is here understood, is this: It is a work of God through Holy Baptism and his divine Word, in which, according to his mercy for the sake of Christ, he gives divine power to the soul that by nature is powerless and averted from God. This power enables the soul to grab hold of Christ in true faith, unless it maliciously resists. Through this faith in Christ, the soul is able to receive righteousness, life and true enjoyment in God, and consequently the eternal and perfect nourishment of this highest good. All this he does to the eternal honor, glory, and praise of his eternal name.

### **Part Three, Section Three** ***The Third Chapter: Regarding Faith in Christ***<sup>26</sup>

The previous chapter showed that the second component of true repentance is true faith. We will define that faith in this chapter, although most of these facts were already discussed in the section dealing with faith as a component of conversion: 1) The necessity of faith. I covered this in various places, but in short: “Whoever does not believe in the Son of God is already judged,” Jn 3:18; he is condemned, Mk 16:16; “Without faith it is

---

<sup>19</sup> *Finis ex parte Dei.*

<sup>20</sup> *Affectiones regenerationis.*

<sup>21</sup> *Necessitas ad salutem.*

<sup>22</sup> *Perennitas ex parte Dei.*

<sup>23</sup> *Defectibilitas ex parte hominum.*

<sup>24</sup> *Iterabilitas in conversione.*

<sup>25</sup> *Definitio.*

<sup>26</sup> *De fide in Christum.*

impossible to please God,” He 11:6. 2) God the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of faith in us, and he kindles that faith through his holy Gospel and also through Baptism as the outward means and instruments of grace. All of that was covered under the first chief point of the previous chapter and also in the chapter *Regarding the Office of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and Holy Baptism*, and in the chapter *Regarding Rebirth*. In the same place I explained the cause and reason why God holds this faith before us, Ac 17:31. Beyond these points, there still remains to be explained: 1) What is the object of faith? 2) In what does it consist, or what is its nature? 3) Its necessary effect and work. 4) Its characteristics.

### **The First Chief Point: What is the object of faith?**<sup>27</sup>

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, who accomplished the most perfect merit and atonement for us, is the object of our faith (and therefore, he is also the basis for our faith). Scripture says: “Whoever believes in the Son of God is not condemned,” Jn 3:18. “Whoever sees the Son and believes in him has eternal life,” Jn 6:40. “All the prophets testify concerning this Jesus, that in his name all who believe in him will receive forgiveness of sins,” Ac 10:43. “God presented Christ Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood,” Rom 3:25.

However, since the knowledge of Christ’s blood and merit is reported in the Gospel, faith clings to the Gospel as the comforting Word of God that tells of the grace which happened through Christ. So in this word of comfort faith finds and grasps Christ: “You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jn 6:68-69. “Believe the Gospel!” Mk 1:15 (In this meaning the teaching of Christ is also the basis for faith).

If true faith has grasped Christ, then at the same time in Christ it applies to the Triune God. So true faith grasps the triune God with a strong trust as a reconciled God through Christ the Mediator. This trust and faith in the triune God originates from the true, justifying, and saving faith in Christ. “You believe in God through Christ,” 1 Pt 1:21. “You believe in God; you also believe in me,” Jn 14:1. “Whoever wants to come to God must believe that he exists and he will reward those who seek him,” He 11:6. “Through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we also have access in faith to this grace in which we stand,” Rm 5:1-2.

### **The Second Chief Point: The nature of faith.**<sup>28</sup>

The word πίστις, faith, at different times can mean faithfulness, honesty, and obedience. From that come several meanings; the chief among those offered by the Enthusiasts, is the meaning that the nature of faith in Christ either is to be obedient and faithful to Christ, or to comprehend obedience and faithfulness besides trust. Now the Apology of the Augsburg Confession<sup>29</sup> does speak in that way. It says that faith is actually obedience to the Gospel, as it is written: “Not all of them were obedient to the Gospel;” for Isaiah says: “Lord, who has believed our message?” Rom 10:16; etc. As in the cited confession of faith, here “faith” is only to be understood as the obedient grasp of grace which God tenders in Christ—and such obedience is nothing other than the certain trust of faith.

However, the idea that obedience in good works belongs with the nature of faith is certainly wrong, and does nothing but stir up an unnecessary misunderstanding. This much is true: Faith at all times necessarily leads to obedience as its result or work (cf. the following chief point!). Whoever is not faithful and obedient to Jesus does not truly have faith within him. However, the nature of faith, that in which it consists, is merely a grasping of the proffered grace and the certain trust and confidence in that grace. For we are justified and saved not from the result of faith (*i.e.*, not for the sake of works), but on account of the nature of faith (because we grasp the proffered grace).

<sup>27</sup> *Obiectum fidei.*

<sup>28</sup> *Forma fidei.*

<sup>29</sup> *De dilectione et impletione legis.*

Now I want to prove these points: 1) The phrase πιστεύειν (*sic*) εἰς Χριστόν means to believe in Christ, cf. Jn 3:6,18; Jn 11:25; Jn 14:12; Ac 10:43; and many other passages as well. Although the word πίστις, faith, can also mean faithfulness and obedience, πιστεύειν εἰς τινα, to believe in something, still means absolutely nothing other than to cling to something with certain trust. So the word πίστιν, faith and faithfulness, and πιστός, believing and faithful, when they are used in the context of faith in Christ, mean nothing other than assent and trust. Thus faith and unbelief are contrasted with one another, as Thomas said: “I don’t want to believe it.” Then Jesus said: “Stop doubting (μὴ ἄπιστος) and believe (πιστός), Jn 20:25,27.

2) Paul describes the nature of justifying faith (insofar as faith can justify) as nothing other than assent and trust when he says: “Abraham did not doubt the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith and knew most certainly that what God promises, he also is able to accomplish. Therefore it was credited to him as righteousness,” Rom 4:20-22. 3) Faith is described in the same way in Jn 11:40, Jn 20:29, and in many other places. 4) In the Epistle to the Hebrews the nature of faith (insofar as it can justify and save) is described in this way: “So we hold fast to the trust and glory of the hope until the end,” He 3:6. “Faith is the certain confidence in that which one hopes for, and not doubting that which one does not see,” He 11:1.

5) Finally, the Holy Scriptures testify in many places that we are justified and saved through faith alone, Jn 3:6; Jn 20:31; Rom 4:3ff. Rm 3:28; Eph 2:8; etc. They also testify that we are justified and saved out of grace alone for the sake of Christ—and absolutely not for the sake of works, Rom 3:21-25; Rom 4:6-7; Eph 2:8-9; Php 3:9; etc. Thus it must necessarily follow that faith (insofar as it can justify and save) is nothing other than the confident grasping of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Now we want to actually consider the nature of faith. Faith must be in the entire soul, that is, in the intellect as well as the will. I have already explained myself regarding the faith of small children and all those who don’t have the use of their reason. Here, I will speak about people who have the use of their reason and show that the nature of faith consists in three parts:

1) In the intellect, there must be a knowledge and recognition<sup>30</sup> of Jesus our Savior and of those teachings, which are inextricably bound to the teaching of Jesus, without which we could not know why need Christ. “How can they believe in the one whom they have not heard?” Rom 10:14. “We have believed and acknowledged that you are Christ, the living Son of God,” Jn 6:69. “In faith I will betroth you, and you will acknowledge the Lord,” Hos 2:20. “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the Father, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent,” Jn 17:3. Thus also the Scriptures describe unbelief as ignorance, Ac 17:30-31.

2) In the intellect and will, there must be approval or assent<sup>31</sup>—namely, that the soul considers what it has learned to be absolutely true. The word “faith” carries that connotation: for if faith chiefly means confidence or trust, then at the same time its meaning must include assent, without which trust cannot exist. “Blessed are those who have not seen and still believe,” Jn 20:29. “He did not doubt in the promise through unbelief but was strong in faith,” Rom 4:20. “Faith is the certain confidence in that which one hopes for, and not doubting that which one does not see,” He 11:1. “Whoever wants to come to God must believe that he exists and he will reward those who seek him,” He 11:6.

Along with assent belongs the individual soul’s apprehension of the universal grace of God and the merit of Christ. The result is that the soul considers following things to be certainly true: that Christ has made atonement for that individual soul in particular, and that God wants to be merciful to that individual soul. For since Christ’s atonement and God’s mercy apply to all, they also applies to that individual soul—just as it was shown in the first section of this third part that the grace of God, the merit of Christ and that the gracious call to the covenant of grace are all universal.

We see this in Job, where he says: “I know that my Redeemer lives,” Job 19:25, and in Paul, who says: “the Son of God has loved me and has given himself for me,” Gal 2:20. That word “my” is the true word of faith when the soul believes and says, “Mine, my Jesus, my Savior” and so forth.

---

<sup>30</sup> *Notitia.*

<sup>31</sup> *Assensus.*



3) In the will, there must also be a firm trust and confidence in the merit of Christ.<sup>32</sup> See the above preceding proofs! After the soul, in heartfelt repentance over sin, has removed from its heart the longing, will and desire for such things as sin and vanity, it feels disgust, sorrow, fear, and has the intention not to get its heart tangled up in them again. But rather it goes to God through this true, living confidence; it receives Jesus, Jn 1:12; it takes him, Col 2:6, that is, it grasps him with its heart, longing, will and desire. The soul seeks and finds in Jesus all true comfort, rest and peace with God. Therefore the soul receives with its entire heart the grace God offers in Christ. The soul then holds itself to His promise with firm and immovable confidence, and won't be driven from it. This is true, living faith. However, consider faith's necessary result and effect as well, so that no one might deceive himself and consider false security of the heart to be true faith!

### **The Third Chief Point: The result and effect of faith.**<sup>33</sup>

When faith is true and right, as it was described above, then it has the necessary result and effect that: 1) On the one hand it justifies, and if it remains steadfast to the end, it also saves (cf. the next chapter). 2) But on the other hand it also brings forth renewal as its fruit. As a result, one can and must see in himself evidence of his justification (James 1:3; 1 Pt 1:7). For faith doesn't seize an absent Jesus but the present Jesus and in him the present, triune God. As soon as the soul parts with sin and vanity and seizes Jesus, Christ begins to work renewal in the soul by means of his Spirit so that the old man is put off and the new man is put on. "Christ dwells in your hearts through faith," Eph 3:17. "I no longer live but Christ lives in me, for how I now live in the body, I live in faith," Gal 2:20. "Everyone born of God has overcome the world and our faith is the victory by which the world has been overcome," 1 Jn 5:4. "Faith without works is dead," James 2:26. "Whoever has such hope purifies himself, just as God is pure," 1 Jn 3:3. Thus true faith necessarily leads to obedience and faithfulness to Jesus, whom the soul allows to reign in its heart after grasping him by faith. However, this is not the nature and character of faith but its result, its fruit and effect.

### **The Fourth Chief Point: The characteristics of faith.**<sup>34</sup>

True faith has the following characteristics: 1) Certainty.<sup>35</sup> Not only is faith certain in its consideration of God as the one who cannot lie, Rom 4:20-21, but it is also certain in its consideration of believers as those who know what and in whom they believe, and as those who are sure of their faith. Exclude here the spiritual temptation, which God subsequently replaces with all the greater comfort: other than that, believers have the faith-born feeling of sweet comfort, which Jesus works in them. "I know on whom I believe," 2 Tim 1:12. "Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith, test yourself, or don't you realize that Jesus Christ is in you?" 2 Cor 13:5. See also Rom 8:16!

2) Faith's second characteristic is that it can grow stronger or weaker.<sup>36</sup> The growth of faith is taught in 2 Cor 10:15 and 2 Thess 1:3. This growth consists in this: the soul increases in confidence, in strength, in comfort, and in its love for God and is strengthened in its conquest of the world and its desires. For it is written: "You are rooted in him and are firm in your faith," Col 2:7; Eph 3:17. Through those increases, that faith becomes a more steadfast faith,<sup>37</sup> because not only once does it depend on Jesus, and in him, on the triune God, but it depends on him always and exercises itself constantly in that dependence.

However, faith can also decrease in the same manner and become weaker. The follow points belong here: 3) Faith can completely come to an end and vanish.<sup>38</sup> It is written: "They believe for a while but in the

---

<sup>32</sup> *Fiducia.*

<sup>33</sup> *Necessarius effectus fidei.*

<sup>34</sup> *Affectiones fidei.*

<sup>35</sup> *Certitudo.*

<sup>36</sup> *Quod recipit magis et minus.*

<sup>37</sup> *Fides habitualis.*

<sup>38</sup> *Defectibilitas.*

time of testing they fall away,” Lk 8:13. “Some have rejected faith and a good conscience and have shipwrecked their faith,” 1 Tim 1:19. This is the necessary result when the soul does not let Jesus rule its heart, but separates itself from him and from his Spirit which gives the soul the ability to renounce the world. This soul maliciously opposes Jesus as was mentioned in the earlier chief point.

In conclusion, faith is defined<sup>39</sup> as an attitude of the soul, whereby it recognizes Jesus as its Savior through the work and power conferred to it by God out of grace for Christ’s sake and for his honor. Such faith firmly believes and from the bottom of its heart grasps Jesus as its only Savior with certain confidence and trust, and remains firm and immovable in this comfort. Through this faith, the soul is reconciled with the triune God; it becomes a participant in all of God’s grace offered to it in Christ; and it is justified before God and given eternal salvation.

---

<sup>39</sup> *Definitio.*