

The Formula of Concord

Lesson Three

On Free Will or Human Powers

Introduction

Could you give me a hand? While out hiking in the mountains, you slip off the trail and go skidding over the edge of a cliff. Just before plunging to your death, your backpack catches on a small branch. That branch buys you a few more seconds of time on this earth, but with no hand hold and no rope – no hope! It's time to face the facts: you're dead. Just then a guide passes by, sees you, and lowers a rope. While you hold on to the rope with trembling hands, he pulls you to safety.

- What factors worked together to save your life?
- Is this a good comparison to how you were saved? Is there anything false or misleading in it?

“Of all the controversies after Luther’s death the synergistic controversy was most momentous and consequential. For the doctrine of grace with which it dealt is the vital breath of every Christian. Without it neither faith nor the Christian religion can live and remain. ‘If we believe,’ says Luther, ‘that Christ has redeemed men by his blood, then we must confess that the entire man was lost; otherwise we make Christ superfluous...which is blasphemous and sacrilegious.’” (Historical Introduction)

Historical Background

WHAT’S AT STAKE IN THIS CONTROVERSY IS NOTHING LESS THAN SALVATION BY GRACE ALONE

What was the situation?

- *Pelagianism*: Man is born essentially good and capable of doing what is necessary for salvation
- *Semi-Pelagianism*: The grace of God and the will of man work together in salvation; man must take the initiative
- *Synergism*: means “_____”

It refers to the belief that...

- *Monergism of Grace*:

Phrase used to teach that...

Synergism or Monergism of Grace?

- God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.
- Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.
- In fact, it is God who is working in you, both to will and to work, for the sake of his good pleasure.

Catholic Scholar name Erasmus

- Free will is “the ability of the human will according to which man is able either to turn himself to what leads to eternal salvation or to turn away from it.”

Viktorin Strigel

- “The human will must not be eliminated as one of the causes of conversion; for without man’s will and intellect no conversion is possible.”

Philip Melanchthon

- In answer to the question, “why some are saved and not others,” he answered by saying that there were “Three Causes” of a man’s conversion
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

What does God Say?

According to Romans 8:6-8, what are our sinful natures like?

They are _____ to God

By nature we _____ against God like an _____

What is our natural state in spiritual matters? (1 Corinthians 2:14)

We _____ accept them

They are _____ to us

What picture does Ephesians 2:4,5 give us of what we are by nature?

_____ in sins

Completely _____ and _____ to help fix our own situation

According to the God's Word and the Formula of Concord, which of these can't an unbeliever do?

- a) Read a Bible or come to church
- b) Make an informed decision for Jesus
- c) Do good, moral acts
- d) Learn the doctrines of Scripture
- e) Perform God-pleasing acts
- f) Want to do what God desires

In spiritual and divine matters, the mind, heart, and will of the unreborn human being can in absolutely no way, on the basis of its own natural powers, understand, believe, accept, consider, will, begin, accomplish, do, effect, or cooperate. Instead, it is completely dead to the good – completely corrupted. This means that in this human nature, after the fall and before rebirth, there is not a spark of spiritual power left or present with which human beings can prepare themselves for the grace of God or accept grace as it is offered. Nor are they capable of acting in their own behalf or of applying this grace to themselves or to prepare themselves for it. Nor do they have the ability, on the basis of their own powers, to help, act, effect, or cooperate – completely, halfway, or in the slightest, most insignificant way – in their own conversion. (SD II:7)

Application

We don't want to believe this to be true (what we just talked about in previous question). Why?

What does God Say?

How does saving faith come? (Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 10:17; Titus 3:4-7)

It is a _____ of God

Through the _____ message

Man's Will in Spiritual Matters

“posse non peccare”

- Means: _____
 - this was man's will _____ the fall

“non posse non peccare”

- Means: _____
 - this was man's will _____ the fall and before conversion

“New Man able to cooperate with God, although weakly, imperfectly and with limitations”

- this takes place after _____

“non posse peccare”

- Means: _____
 - this will be what it will be like in _____

Application

How does this article preserve and protect the gospel and the teaching of God's grace?

Evangelicals have preached the gospel to millions of people. But when they preach, they often say that there is one final step to establishing a relationship with God. They say, “Pray to Jesus and invite him to come into your heart.” Evaluate.

React to this line from the refrain of a Christian contemporary song: “I will choose to listen and believe the Voice of truth.”

The Catholic Church says that faith is produced by “the influence of the will which moves the intellect to assent.” Can we agree to this statement? Why or why not?

Agree or Disagree? God finds those who look for him.

If someone hears the Word of God and doesn't come to faith, whose fault is it? (Matthew 23:37)

Why some and not others?

Article II Rejects...

Determinism

Determinism falsely holds that a person does what he does because he can do nothing else. Circumstances have so shaped his life that whether he does right or wrong, he is not really responsible. He "must" act that way. This is a "no fault" morality.

This would make _____ responsible for evil

Fatalism

The false concept that all events are determined by fate, instead of by natural causes. According to this view, nothing that man can do will affect the course of events. In fatalism there is no room for a freedom of the will nor any personal relationship between God and man. The fatalist eliminates natural causes entirely.

Perfectionism

The false idea that a regenerated person may achieve freedom from sin in the present life

Enthusiasm

The "Enthusiasts" held that the Holy Spirit works "immediately," that is, "without means" – that the Holy Spirit will convert a man more or less spontaneously apart from Word and Sacrament.

Where do we see this today?

All who want to be saved should listen to this proclamation. For the proclamation and the hearing of God's Word are the Holy Spirit's tools, in, with, and through which he wills to work effectively and convert people to God and within whom he wants to effect both the desire for and the completion of their conversion. (SD II:52)

Summary

Article II...

Distinguishes between the will before and after conversion

Denies all power for good to the will before conversion

Speaks to ability of the will after conversion

Article II...

By nature human beings are dead in sin, hostile to God, in spiritual darkness and incapable of contributing to their salvation. Conversion in its entirety is the work of God the Holy Spirit.

All of these passages are used in this Article: Ephesians 2:1,5; Colossians 2:13; Romans 8:7,8; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 3:11,12; John 6:44; Ephesians 2:8,9

The Holy Spirit works through the means of grace to bring people to faith. No one comes to faith apart from the means of grace. (Romans 10:11-17; 1 Corinthians 1:21)

Sinful humans can resist the work of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 23:37; Acts 7:51)

After a person is converted he wants to make use of the means of grace because he recognizes that the Holy Spirit strengthens faith through them. (Philippians 2:12-13)

During the Week

Read Article III of the Formula of Concord, Epitome.

III. OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH BEFORE GOD.

STATUS CONTROVERSIAE.

The Principal Question In This Controversy.

1] Since it is unanimously confessed in our churches, in accordance with God's Word and the sense of the Augsburg Confession, that we poor sinners are justified before God and saved alone by faith in Christ, and thus Christ alone is our Righteousness, who is true God and man, because in Him the divine and human natures are personally united with one another, Jer. 23, 6; 1 Cor. 1, 30; 2 Cor. 5, 21, the question has arisen: *According to which nature is Christ our Righteousness?* and thus two contrary errors have arisen in some churches.

2] For the one side has held that Christ according to His divinity alone is our Righteousness, if He dwell in us by faith; contrasted with this divinity, dwelling in us by faith, the sins of all men must be regarded as a drop of water compared to the great ocean. Others, on the contrary, have held that Christ is our Righteousness before God according to the human nature alone.

AFFIRMATIVA. Pure Doctrine of the Christian Churches against Both Errors Just Mentioned.

3] 1. Against both the errors just recounted, we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that Christ is our Righteousness neither according to the divine nature alone nor according to the human nature alone, but that it is the entire Christ according to both natures, in His obedience alone, which as God and man He

rendered to the Father even unto death, and thereby merited for us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, as it is written: *As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous*, Rom. 5, 19.

4] 2. Accordingly, we believe, teach, and confess that our righteousness before God is [this very thing], that God forgives us our sins out of pure grace, without any work, merit, or worthiness of ours preceding, present, or following, that He presents and imputes to us the righteousness of Christ's obedience, on account of which righteousness we are received into grace by God, and regarded as righteous.

5] 3. We believe, teach, and confess that faith alone is the means and instrument whereby we lay hold of Christ, and thus in Christ of that righteousness which avails before God, for whose sake this faith is imputed to us for righteousness, Rom. 4, 5.

6] 4. We believe, teach, and confess that this faith is not a bare knowledge of the history of Christ, but such a gift of God by which we come to the right knowledge of Christ as our Redeemer in the Word of the Gospel, and trust in Him that for the sake of His obedience alone we have, by grace, the forgiveness of sins, are regarded as holy and righteous before God the Father, and eternally saved.

7] 5. We believe, teach, and confess that according to the usage of Holy Scripture the word *justify* means in this article, to absolve, that is, to declare free from sins. Prov. 17, 15: *He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the righteous, even they both are abomination to the Lord*. Also Rom. 8, 33: *Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth*.

8] And when, in place of this, the words *regeneratio* and *vivificatio*, that is, regeneration and vivification, are employed, as in the Apology, this is done in the same sense. By these terms, in other places, the renewal of man is understood, and distinguished from justification by faith.

9] 6. We believe, teach, and confess also that notwithstanding the fact that many weaknesses and defects cling to the true believers and truly regenerate, even to the grave, still they must not on that account doubt either their righteousness which has been imputed to them by faith, or the salvation of their souls, but must regard it as certain that for Christ's sake, according to the promise and [immovable] Word of the holy Gospel, they have a gracious God.

10] 7. We believe, teach, and confess that for the preservation of the pure doctrine concerning the righteousness of faith before God it is necessary to urge with special diligence the *particulae exclusivae*, that is, the exclusive particles, *i.e.*, the following words of the holy Apostle Paul, by which the merit of Christ is entirely separated from our works, and the honor given to Christ alone, when the holy Apostle Paul writes: *Of grace, without merit, without Law, without works, not of works*. All these words together mean as much as that we are justified and saved alone by faith in Christ. Eph. 2, 8; Rom. 1, 17; 3, 24; 4, 3ff.; Gal. 3, 11; Heb. 11.

11] 8. We believe, teach, and confess that, although the contrition that precedes, and the good works that follow, do not belong to the article of justification before God, yet one is not to imagine a faith of such a kind as can exist and abide with, and alongside of, a wicked intention to sin and to act against the conscience. But after man has been justified by faith, then a true living faith worketh by love, Gal. 5, 6, so that thus good works always follow justifying faith, and are surely found with it, if it be true and living; for it never is alone, but always has with it love and hope.

ANTITHESIS or NEGATIVA.

Contrary Doctrine Rejected.

12] Therefore we reject and condemn all the following errors:

13] 1. That Christ is our Righteousness according to His divine nature alone.

14] 2. That Christ is our Righteousness according to His human nature alone.

15] 3. That in the sayings of the prophets and apostles where the righteousness of faith is spoken of the words *justify* and *to be justified* are not to signify declaring or being declared free from sins, and obtaining the forgiveness of sins, but actually being made righteous before God, because of love infused by the Holy Ghost, virtues, and the works following them.

16] 4. That faith looks not only to the obedience of Christ, but to His divine nature, as it dwells and works in us, and that by this indwelling our sins are covered.

17] 5. That faith is such a trust in the obedience of Christ as can exist and remain in a man even when he has no genuine repentance, in whom also no love follows, but who persists in sins against his conscience.

18] 6. That not God Himself, but only the gifts of God, dwell in believers.

19] 7. That faith saves on this account, because by faith the renewal, which consists in love to God and one's neighbor, is begun in us.

20] 8. That faith has the first place in justification, nevertheless also renewal and love belong to our righteousness before God in such a manner that they [renewal and love] are indeed not the chief cause of our righteousness, but that nevertheless our righteousness before God is not entire or perfect without this love and renewal.

21] 9. That believers are justified before God and saved jointly by the imputed righteousness of Christ and by the new obedience begun in them, or in part by the imputation of Christ's righteousness, but in part also by the new obedience begun in them.

22] 10. That the promise of grace is made our own by faith in the heart, and by the confession which is made with the mouth, and by other virtues.

23] 11. That faith does not justify without good works; so that good works are necessarily required for righteousness, and without their presence man cannot be justified.