

# Christian Faith versus Human Reason

## The Priority of Faith

It is a privilege for me to share with you some things that I have learned while on my Christian pilgrimage. What follows is partly testimony, partly instruction, and partly warning. As far as I am aware, the ELCR is one of the last remnants of the visible, orthodox, historical Church here on earth. Not that there are not other Christians elsewhere, but you have the high honor of still holding to the Word of God in all of its truth and purity. May God preserve this unique and valuable heritage in these last days of Satanic assault.

One of the things that led me to recognize Martin Luther as a true teacher of the orthodox Church was his constant and correct emphasis on the priority of faith over reason. Dr. Luther understood that faith was that God-given ability to confidently affirm the truth of God's Word wherever it might go. There is no such thing as faith without the external, objective Word of God. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). "Through faith, we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God" (Heb. 11:3). Abraham, the Father of Faith, was commended because he was "fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21).

Dr. Luther did not oppose reason in and of itself. Rather, he insisted that reason must operate within its own proper domain. Faith must lead reason, and not vice versa. Luther called reason, "Madame Reason". She must be subject to her husband, Faith. She must behave herself modestly, and call him "Lord". She must not usurp his God-given authority to lead. She must remain silent in the Church, and keep herself covered in worship for the sake of the angels. In the Assembly, we must hear only the oracles of God, with the voice of Faith ever saying, "Amen and Amen".

Last winter I experienced a good illustration of faith and reason while driving in the California Mountains with my mother and six-year old son, Stephen. We had just crossed the summit of a mountain and were beginning our descent when we entered into a very thick fog. In fact, it was so thick that we could only see the road's yellow center line a few feet in front of us. On either side of the narrow road were often unseen precipices of hundreds of feet. I slowly and carefully followed the yellow line around many treacherous twists and turns until we finally reached a place of safety.

That yellow center line illustrated the Word of God, and my eyesight God-given faith. My reason or sense sometimes told me that the road would naturally turn one way or another, but the objective yellow line testified differently. Had I listened to my reason and distrusted the yellow line, a terrifying death may have ensued. But so long as I kept my close attention on that yellow line and acted accordingly, I could make progress out of the danger.

In this world, this kingdom of darkness, we must ever remain attentive to our Yellow Line, the Word of God. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psa. 119:105). If we follow the Line, we will continue to abide in Christ and His atoning work. If we lose sight of the Line or follow a counterfeit Line, we will surely perish. Hearing and receiving the Word of God is truly "the one thing needful". Jesus said, "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed" (Joh. 8:31). Peter said that we do well to pay heed to the prophetic Word "as a light that shineth in a dark place" (2 Pet. 1:19).

There are times when the Word of God is quite agreeable to reason. Here faith and reason, believer and unbeliever, seem to be of one mind. But this unity cannot last. "What communion hath light with darkness, and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor. 6:14,15). God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and His Word will inevitably depart the way of natural reason. This is a great blessing, for here we see the manifestation and glory of faith. Faith will always stay with the Word of God. Faith says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou has the words of eternal life" (Joh. 6:68). Faith, like Jacob of old, wrestles with God and says, "I will not let you go until you bless me". Faith, like the Wise Men from the East, follows the bright star until it finds the newborn King.

Over the next few issues of Steadfast, I would like to share with you some important places in the Word of God where the genuine faith of Lutheran orthodoxy shines brightly in contrast to the dark reasonings of Reformed heterodoxy. If the Lord wills, in relation to faith and reason, we will look at the Lord's Supper, the Person of Christ, conversion, election, law and Gospel, and preservation. I pray that God will be pleased to use these studies for your edification and for His own glory.

### Faith vs. Reason - The Lord's Supper

God is a very wise God. "How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out." When God created the visible universe, He did so with wisdom. He created things not only with natural purpose, but often with spiritual purpose. For instance, He created a lamb with all of its attributes and qualities to teach us something about His Son, the true "Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." Christ is the spiritual reality of which the lamb is the natural metaphor. Knowing this truth about creation makes everything take on meaning and yes, even fascination. Many of the things which we see everyday, if understood through the Word of God, have lessons attached which the natural man cannot know.

I am always interested in the lessons of life which teach me about faith and reason. One such recent lesson concerns an older couple named Willard and Margaret. Willard is a faithful and loving husband who illustrates to me the Word of God. Margaret is his blind but trusting wife who illustrates faith. I have often seen the two walking harmoniously together with Willard leading and Margaret clutching his arm. Willard is usually talking with Margaret describing what he is seeing. Through his trustworthy word, Margaret is able to "see" the same things and walk accordingly.

Like Margaret, we too, according to our natural state, are blind. But our blindness is a spiritual blindness by which we of our own selves cannot know the things of the Spirit, the things of the Kingdom of God. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ... neither can he know them." Thus, if we are to know these things, we must do so through the word of One who does see, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. Via His Word, like Margaret, we are able to "see" -- not with the natural eye, but with the eye of faith. In no other way can we know about this invisible realm, this Kingdom of God, but by this Word. And we must trust this Word, regardless of how contrary it may seem to our own thoughts. A person who rejects the way of faith, and depends upon his own reasonings, is yet totally blind and knows nothing.

As you know, during the days of the Reformation, Martin Luther had a sharp conflict with Ulrich Zwingli and the Reformed Churches concerning the Lord's Supper. This conflict has continued to this very day and is one of the foundational issues still dividing the Lutheran and Reformed churches. But, as Luther wisely saw in his day, the real difference here is the difference between faith and reason.

Luther taught us that the chief issue of the Lord's Supper is the Word of God. He said that when I partake of the Lord's Supper, I do so as "with a bag over my head". When the Pastor speaks the Words of Institution in the stead of Christ, and places the bread in my mouth, I am to regard it as the true body of Christ "given for me". Though it looks like bread, feels like bread, smells like bread, and tastes like bread, I am to have a higher regard for the testimony of the Word of God than for my own senses. I am to "walk by faith, and not by sight". Likewise with the cup, I am to apprehend it in accordance with the Word of God as the blood of Christ "shed for the remission of my sins".

In this way, via the Word of God which cannot lie, we poor needful sinners come into personal contact with the real life-giving body and blood of Christ - that very same body that hung on the Cross for us, and that very same blood that was shed for the remission of our sins. The Word of God enables us to transcend time and space, and literally places us at the foot of the Cross - nay, even on the Cross with Christ. This is what Luther saw, and this is what was at stake in his controversy with Zwingli.

The Zwinglians regarded the Lord's Supper as symbolic of the body and blood of Christ. This, of course, is agreeable to reason, even though it violates Christ's own clear words, "This is My body... This is My blood". Two of the principles on which Zwingli operated at the Marburg Colloquy were, (1) "The finite is not able to contain the infinite", and (2) "Christ's body is at the right hand of God, and cannot be in more than one place at a time". John Calvin called the Lutheran doctrine of the real presence a "perverse and impious superstition". He said, "It is repugnant to all reason". How sad and wicked to argue with the clear words of our God. How many countless millions have been deceived by these Reformed reasonings, and robbed of the unspeakable blessing of partaking of God's great antidote against sin.

The Formula of Concord warns again and again of the dangers of human reason in regards to the Lord's Supper. It tells us never to be diverted from the true doctrine by any "objections or human contradictions spun from human reason, however charming they may appear to human reason". And so the Lutheran Church confesses in one of its great communion hymns,

An awe-full mystery is here  
 To challenge faith and waken fear:  
 The Savior comes as food divine  
 Concealed in earthly bread and wine.

But here we have no boon on earth,  
 And faith alone discerns its worth.  
 The Word, not sense, must be our guide,  
 And faith assure, since sight's denied.

### **Faith vs. Reason - The Person of Christ**

A story is told about a man who fell into an open well. Having pulled himself out of the dark water, he looked up to see a small circle of light far above him. Being thankful that he was not injured, he considered how he might climb out of the well. At first he tried to scale the walls of the well, but alas all was too damp and slippery. Then he felt something with his right hand. It was a rope. But when he tried to pull on it, the rope would not pull taut, and he was unable to make any use of it. Again he began groping in the dark, and to his surprise, he found another rope -- this time with his left hand. But for whatever reason, this rope also would not pull taut, and he again was unable to make any progress out of the well.

Soon the man discovered something very mysterious. He found that if he held the two ropes together, they both became taut, and he could lift himself up and make progress towards the light. This remained quite perplexing to the man until he reached the top of the well and found that the two ropes were really one rope looped over a pulley.

This man's experience illustrates something very important about the Word of God, faith, and reason. There are times when, like the two ropes, the Word of God seems to have two conflicting truths. A person led of reason will grab hold of one of the truths and deny the other. Or he will grab hold of the other truth and deny the one. In either case, he will not advance in the Word of God. However, a person led of faith will humbly acknowledge the limitations of his own reason and gladly hold to both truths. This person knows that "God cannot lie", and "Let God be true, and every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). Thus he alone will "grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

A good example of these two ropes concerns the doctrine of the Person of Christ. Here, as everywhere faith must lead, and reason must follow. In fact, it is impossible to correctly hold to the doctrine of Christ but by faith. God has wisely determined that no man can apprehend His Son but by faith in His Word. Any attempt to apprehend Christ by reason will leave one shipwrecked upon the rocks of heresy. Consider now this chart contained in a confessional Lutheran book called *The Foolishness of God*, by Siegbert Becker.

Jesus Christ is both God and Man in one indivisible person.

Since He is God, then He...

1. is spirit (Joh. 4:24).
2. is omnipotent (Matt. 28:18).
3. is omniscient (Joh. 21:17).
4. cannot be contained by the heavens (2 Chron. 6:18).
5. never slumbers nor sleeps (Psa. 121:4).
6. cannot die (1 Tim. 6:16).
7. dwells in the light which no man can approach (1 Tim. 6:16).

Since He is man, then He...

1. has flesh and blood (Luk. 24:39).
2. is overpowered by His enemies (Joh. 19:11).
3. grows in knowledge (Luk. 2:52).
4. fits into a manger (Luk. 2:12)
5. slept (Luk. 8:23).
6. gave up the ghost (Mar. 15:37).
7. appears to men (Joh. 1:14; 14:9).

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| 8. possesses the earth and its fullness (Psa. 24:1).               | 8. has no place to lay his head (Luk. 9:58)                     |
| 9. is the Creator of all things and made all that is (Joh. 1:1-3). | 9. is a creature (Col. 1:15) and is made of a woman (Gal. 4:5). |
| 10. is eternal (Isa. 9:6).   | 10. is born (Isa. 9:6).   |
| 11. is equal to the Father (Joh. 5:23).                            | 11. is inferior to the Father (Joh. 14:28).                     |
| 12. is King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16).               | 12. is subject to His parents (Luk. 2:51).                      |

The doctrine of the Person of Christ is, of course, vitally important to the Christian faith. It is one of the chief doctrines guarding the purity of the Gospel. Lose this doctrine, and the loss of the Gospel is soon to follow. For this reason, the early church occupied itself much with this truth, as evidenced by the great councils and creeds. Luther said that Christ was the ladder in Jacob's dream upon which the angels ascended and descended between heaven and earth. The angelic activity indicated their constant occupation with the Person of Christ. They were ever exploring but never exhausting the height and depth, the exaltation and humiliation of our great Savior. This is surely one of "the things written aforetime ... for our learning" (Rom. 15:4).

In Reformed circles, there are two noticeable stumblings concerning the Person of Christ. One concerns Christ's birth, and the other concerns His death. Because of reason, the Reformed have difficulty affirming that, in Christ, God was born and God died. These truths are offensive to the natural mind. Only faith can correctly confess Mary as the mother of God -- not to pay undue honor to Mary, but to preserve the unity of Christ's person in His birth. Likewise, only faith can confess that God died on the Cross for our sins. In fact, Luther said that if you take Christ's Deity out of the atonement, you are left in your sins. Only an infinite Person could pay an infinite debt required by an infinite offense. It was Christ's humanity that qualified Him as our substitute, and it was His Deity that gave infinite value to His death in our behalf.

The Formula of Concord, after discussing the Person of Christ in detail, closes with these words,

We admonish all Christians, since in the Holy Scriptures Christ is called a mystery upon which all heretics dash their heads, not to indulge in a presumptuous manner in subtle inquiries, concerning such mysteries, with their reason, but with the venerated apostles simply to believe, to close the eyes of their reason, and to bring into captivity their understanding to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

### **Faith vs. Reason - Conversion**

One day a Christian man of the early Church was walking on a beach by the Mediterranean Sea. Soon an unbelieving man came alongside and mockingly said, "If your Christian God is so real, why don't you just show Him to me?" To this, the Christian responded, "It is not that I do not have a God to show, but it is that you do not have eyes to see".

God's Sun of Righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ, shines upon the just and the unjust with the light of His Gospel of Grace. There are those who, by God's own doing, see the light with the eye of faith and return glory to God. There are many others who, of their own wicked selves, refuse the light and thus remain in their natural blindness. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (Joh. 3:19). If a man is saved, it is completely due to the grace of God. If a man is lost, it is completely that man's own wicked fault. To God be all the glory, and to man be all the shame.

The doctrine of conversion, as revealed by the Word of God, presents many difficulties for human reason which again evidence themselves in Reformed Christianity. First, there is the indisputable fact that God earnestly desires the salvation of all men -- and yet, not all are saved. Then there is the equally indisputable fact that all men are dead in their trespasses and sins and can work nothing towards their own salvation -- and yet, not all are lost. Reason, however, is quick to conclude that since some men are saved and others are lost, the determining factor must reside in either the will of God or the will of man. Both conclusions are wrong, and contrary to the Word of God and faith.

In one camp of the Reformed are the Calvinists, named after John Calvin (1509 - 1564). These people agree to the total depravity of man's will, but wrongly conclude that the issue of salvation must reside in the will of God. That is, God must not love all men equally, but He must favor some and not others. He must be a God of partiality, and could not in truth "will that all men be saved". Since the difference concerning the saved and lost cannot reside in man, who is equally and completely depraved, it must reside in God, who wills the salvation of some and not of others.

In the other camp of the Reformed are the Arminians, named after Jacob Arminius (1560 - 1609). These argue in the opposite direction. They say that since God loves the world and is not a God of partiality and does truly "will that all men be saved", then the determining cause for salvation must reside in man. These people deny the total depravity of all men, and wrongly conclude that man has the innate power to choose Christ. They assert the false doctrine of "free will". Some men, they say, exercise their free will unto Christ and thus are saved, while others make no use of it, and thus are lost. It was against such a teaching that Martin Luther wrote one of his greatest books, "The Bondage of the Will".

Confessional Lutheranism again correctly leads us on the path of the Word of God and faith concerning this important doctrine of conversion. With the Word of God, Lutherans affirm the total and equal depravity of all men. "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8). "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). With the Word of God, Lutherans also affirm the equal and gracious will of God toward all men. "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). The Lutheran Church rightly makes no attempt to reconcile these two truths to the natural mind, but rather exhorts us to receive them in childlike faith as spoken by a God "who cannot lie".

In the doctrine of conversion we again have truths which natural reason simply cannot handle. We must always remember that this is due to the fact that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8). As someone once said, "It is not Christianity that needs to be made reasonable. It is reason that needs to be made Christian." All men are totally depraved and when it comes to the issue of salvation, there is no difference in man. God is equally gracious to all, and there is no difference in God. Yet one man is saved and another is lost, and there is no conceivable reason why this should be so. Here is another opportunity for faith to shine.

### **Faith vs. Reason - Election**

We come now to consider the doctrine of election in regards to faith and reason. This doctrine has very special meaning to me because it was here that Satan sought to turn me aside to the broad road and wide gate that leads to destruction. And he found a ready accomplice in my natural reason. But it was here also that God graciously delivered me and led me to the uniquely pure doctrine of Martin Luther. With the doctrine of election I found, as it were, the tip of a great iceberg, with the depths of pure doctrine lying below. As I plummeted into the deep waters of Luther's Works I discovered doctrine after doctrine where I had been badly deceived by Reformed Christendom. I came to see the whole iceberg (so to speak) as historical, orthodox Christianity, and I saw that Martin Luther had wisely attached his humble name to every facet of its glorious form. What an unspeakable blessing to be a partaker of this purity of doctrine, which echoes the life-giving Word of God.

With the doctrine of election we again have truths which are clearly spoken by God and yet unreceived by the natural mind. God has declared in His Word that He has, from eternity, unconditionally chosen a particular people to be called by His name. This "peculiar people" is His glorious Church -- the holy, unblemished, spotless Bride of Christ. Each and every member of this Body of Christ, this Holy Temple of God, has been foreknown, elected, and predestined to faith and salvation. However, God has also declared in His Word that, though He has elected some, Christ died for all. The fact that God loves all men, and that Christ died for the sins of the whole world is attested to by over twenty clear verses (Luk. 2:10; 22:14-21; Joh 1:29; 3:16,17; 4:42; 12:46,47; Acts 13:38,39; Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:14,15; 5:19; Col. 1:20; 2 Thes. 2:10; 1 Tim. 1:15; 2:3-6; 4:10; Titus 3:4; Heb. 2:9; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Joh. 2:2; 4:13,14).

But because of carnal reason, most of Reformed Christendom denies one or the other of these two truths. The Arminians, for the most part, deny the doctrine of predestination. In fact, I was forced out of my Reformed pastorate over this very issue. Though the doctrine and even the word "predestinated" is clearly in the Scriptures (Eph 1:5; Rom. 8:28), I was told that such teaching was incompatible with the denomination. One lady, of long-

standing membership, told me in regards to this doctrine that "if God is as I say, she wouldn't want Him". On the other side of reason, we have the Calvinists. These people, for the most part, deny the doctrine of God's universal love and Christ's universal atonement. The limitation of Christ's atonement is one of the five cardinal points of Calvinism as defined by the Synod of Dort and reiterated by the Westminster Confession. What a disgrace!

Please permit me to share with you why these two doctrines, election and universal atonement, are so important. The doctrine of election is crucial for two reasons. First, it secures God's glory in the issue of salvation. God must be the "first-cause" of our salvation. Jesus said, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you... that ye should go and bring forth fruit" (Joh. 15:16). Paul said, "Who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:35,36). Secondly, the doctrine of election excludes human boasting. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7). "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Co. 1:30,31).

The universal atonement of Christ is also vitally important. It is by this great truth that we know with certainty our inclusion in the love of God and the work of Christ. In other words, I know that God loves me and that Christ died for me, because He died for all. And I am part of this "all". However, if there was even one person that Christ did not die for, I must suspect myself, and thus my faith could never rest completely and securely in Christ's work. I have learned that it is the nature of man to separate himself from other men. The Pharisees were like this -- "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men" (Luk. 18:11). Woe to such thoughts! The truth is that the spotlight of God's love shines specifically on this thing called "the world". So long as we stand in the circle of humanity, and declare ourselves as like sinners, we stand as objects of God's love. But if we want to separate ourselves, we are on our own.

In order to be saved, I must believe the Holy Gospel, how that "Christ died for my sins" (1 Cor. 15:1-4). And I must derive this faith from the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Without a universal atonement this cannot be done. A notable Christian leader, in his latter years, was once asked of the most profound truth that he had ever learned in his Christian studies. He paused in thought for a moment, and then leaned forward and said, "The most profound truth that I have ever come to know is this -- 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so'".

### **Faith vs. Reason - The Law and the Gospel**

We come today to the crown jewel of all Biblical doctrines in the doctrine of law and Gospel. Because of false teaching and carnal reasoning, Christians may err in many doctrines, but here they may not err. The Gospel is that doctrine alone by which we are saved. Paul said that it is "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (ROM 1:16). It is that Word which "effectually worketh also in you who believe" (1TH 2:13). It is that precious heavenly seed which is sown in the world by those with "beautiful feet", and which, if received, produces the whole life of God in the human soul.

And yet as basic and foundational as the Gospel is to our faith, it can never be learned too well. Because of the designs of our Adversary, we must be continually reaffirmed in its truths, lest at any time "we should let them slip" (HEB 2:1). Thus in the Lord's Supper, as often as we do it, we "do shew the Lord's death till He come" (1CO 11:26). All false doctrine has as its aim the attempt to steal the Gospel out of our hearts that we might be eternally lost. May we, through the Spirit, keep "that good thing which was committed unto us" (2TI 1:14).

In his great Commentary on Galatians of 1535, Martin Luther states that there is nothing more difficult than maintaining the proper distinction between the law and the Gospel. He said that he himself often had difficulty here, and one who can maintain this distinction should know that he is "a right divine". Here is the place where Paul would exhort Timothy "to rightly divide the Word" (2TI 2:15). Luther said that we must assign the law to that natural man in Adam who, like a laboring ass, should always feel the weight of his burden. But we must assign the Gospel to our spiritual man in Christ who, like Isaac, should leave the ass in the valley and ascend the holy mount with Father Abraham occupying himself with the sacrifice of promise.

Why is it so difficult to maintain the distinction between law and Gospel? First, our natural reason stumbles at this seeming contradiction. It is a paradox. God, in His Word which cannot lie, condemns us and yet justifies us; He punishes us and yet forgives us; He kills us and yet makes us alive; He hates us and yet loves us. Our natural mind simply cannot abide with these two thoughts, and thus the necessity of faith. But not only is there the opposition of

our natural minds, our experience and feelings also continually challenge the naked Word of the Gospel. Experience teaches us our sinfulness and loathsomeness, and our feelings are ever conscious of the wrath and enmity we so richly deserve. But set against all of these "voices" is the Word of the Gospel. Here we are told that God loves us, and is not mad at us - no, even fully justifies us in His own perfect sight - for Christ's sake. Oh, what is this Christ that He causes the all-knowing God to forget all of my sins? As Luther said, "If the Bible condemns us, we quote Jesus against the Bible" - that is, we quote the Gospel against the law.

Reformed Christendom often confuses the law and the Gospel. In fact, I would venture to say that most Reformed people could not give you a correct, Biblical definition of the Gospel - "how that Christ died for our sins" (1CO 15:3). Reformed pastors often say that you can't have Jesus as your Saviour unless you make Him the Lord of your life. And you make Him Lord by your obedience to the law. Thus, you can't have Jesus as your Saviour without your works. Thus Christ and faith have been rendered null, and all depends upon you and your works. It is no longer "by faith alone", but by faith and works, by God and man.

The key word that is missing in Reformed circles in regards to Christian works is the word "gratitude". Luther said that the whole Christian life can be summed up in that single word. We, as Christians, do not do the works of the law because we have to, but because we want to. "We love because He first loved us" (1JO 4:19). This is the correct order of things - sin, law, condemnation, Gospel, repentance, faith, love (gratitude), and works. This order is unalterable. Any change to it leads to false doctrine and ultimately to destruction.

Both the law and the Gospel have their vital roles in delivering us from sin and judgment. But each must operate in its own domain. The law belongs to our natural state and the Gospel to our spiritual state; the law to the kingdom of this world and the Gospel to the kingdom of God; the law to our fear of the Lord and the Gospel to our love of our Heavenly Father. We need both. In Adam we are sinners; in Christ we are righteous. In Adam we are haters of God; in Christ we are lovers of God. In Adam we need the law; in Christ we need the Gospel. The law and the Gospel - God's contradictory remedy for a contradictory people.

### **Faith vs. Reason - The Doctrine of Preservation**

For several years I have worked in the Training Department at a large insurance company in Los Angeles. We offer many courses to the employees with many different forms of presentation. One course in particular is presented in a very unique format. Students are given a workbook and a red piece of plastic. They are asked to read the contents of the workbook and answer certain questions. When they are ready to check their answers, they are to lay the red plastic over a certain portion of the book and the answers will "magically" appear. The answers are really always there, but it requires the red plastic to make them apparent.

This red plastic reminds me of the blood of Christ. If I look heavenward to God without the "red plastic", I see nothing but God's wrath and displeasure because of my many sins. Even if I try to reassure myself of God's good will, I know that I deceive myself, because in truth without Christ, God wears a menacing frown towards me and all other sinners. But when I take in hand Christ and His glorious Gospel, this "red plastic" so to speak, and place it between myself and God, His frown turns to a friendly smile. Now here is the point - Let me ever behold the smile of God through the atoning work of Christ. But if ever I should lose sight of Christ's work, let me not see that smile lest I deceive my own heart. Then let me see God's frown and wrath, let me feel the terrors of the law, that I might again haply flee to the cross of Christ and be saved.

I say all of this in reference to the issue of Christian preservation, that is, our security in Christ. God, in many verses, has shown us that He wants us to be secure and assured of our salvation in Christ (MAT 24:24; JOH 10:27-30; ROM 8:38,39, 11:29; EPH 1:13; PHI 1:6; 1TH 5:23,24; 1PE 1:5; 1JO 5:13; JUD 24). But this security does not stand by itself, but rather in relation to the Gospel (1CO 15:2; GAL 5:4; COL 1:23; HEB 3:6,14; 2PE 1:9). When we hold the Gospel, we hold security. When we let go of the Gospel, we let go of security. In other words, there is no such thing as security and assurance without the apprehension of the Gospel.

Now, let me show you how the Reformed look at the issue of security. The Calvinist Reformed would hold to what they call "once saved, always saved". That is, if you have received Christ as your Lord and Saviour at some point in time, then you can never be lost. If you have doubts about your salvation, you are to look back to this point in time as proof that you are genuinely saved. This teaching has you ever reviewing your conversion experience to have any certainty of your spiritual standing before God. On one hand, these Reformed argue for security, but on the other hand they direct you to the wrong fount from which to draw this security. They have you looking to the

past, rather than the present; looking back, rather than up; looking to self rather than to Christ; and looking to the shifting sands of experience, rather than the immovable rock of the objective Word of God.

The Arminian Reformed do not hold to "once saved, always saved". They correctly believe that God's warnings are real and that people can lose their salvation (ROM 11:21,22; 2TI 1:15; HEB 6:4-6, 10:26,27). But they seek to preserve themselves by their own works, and speak little of Christ and faith. I have heard Arminians describe God's grace as a shower. So long as you are obedient to God's law, you stand in the refreshing waters of Christ's atoning work. But as soon as you sin, you are outside of the shower and are no longer protected by Christ's work. Everything depends upon you and your obedience. And because one's obedience is always imperfect, one can never have real abiding assurance of one's salvation. This synergistic scheme echoes the false teachings of Papal Rome.

The Arminians under-value the extent of the Gospel provision. When we behold the Gospel, we see that all sins are forgiven - past, present, and future. We are not, as it were, walking on eggshells in our relationship with God, justifying and condemning ourselves by our own works. This would be the path of law. Rather, for us the issue is Christ and faith. Sin is a threat, not in that it can exceed the grace of God (ROM 5:20), but in that it can darken the eye of faith (HEB 3:13; 2PE 1:9). So long as Christ and His Gospel are in view, we must be assured of God's salvation. Only sin can separate a person from God, and the Scriptures state that Christ has taken the punishment for our sins. To have doubts about our salvation is evidence that our eye is not upon the Cross, but upon our own self (1JO 3:20).

Confessional Lutheranism again agrees with the Scriptures that God is sincere in His comforting promises of security and yet earnest in His severe warnings of loss. But whereas reason would hold to the security and dismiss the warnings (Calvinists) or hold to the warnings and dismiss the security (Arminians), faith will hold to both. Faith holds to both because both are clearly spoken to us by a God who cannot lie. In time, faith learns to assign each to its own proper domain. It assigns security to the Gospel, and warnings to anything outside the Gospel. So long as we abide in the house of the Gospel, let us feel safe from the raging storm outside. But if ever we depart the house, let us be warned of the very real dangers of loss. The elect child of God will heed this prescription, and will ever remain in the house of the Gospel by faith.