

Martin Chemnitz on the Doctrine of Justification

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1. In 1537 at Wittenberg Luther presided over a *Disputatio* held in connection with the academic promotion of two candidates, Palladius and Tilemann, in which he discussed the passage in Rom. 3:28, “We believe that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.” Luther, in his prefatory remarks, said, “The article of justification is the master and prince, the lord and ruler and judge of all areas of doctrine. It preserves and governs the entire teaching of the church and directs our conscience before God. Without this article the world is in total death and darkness, for there is no error so small, so insignificant and isolated that it does not completely please the mind of man and mislead us, if we are cut off from thinking and meditating on this article. Therefore, because the world is so obtuse and insensitive, it is necessary to deal with this doctrine constantly and have the greatest understanding of it. Especially if we wish to advise the churches, we will fear no evil, if we give the greatest labor and diligence in teaching particularly this article. For when the mind has been strengthened and confirmed in this sure knowledge, then it can stand firm in all things. Therefore, this is not some small or unimportant matter, particularly for those who wish to stand on the battle line and contend against the devil, sin, and death and teach the churches.”

2. Countless statements of this kind can be found in the writings of Luther, but this one passage, cited by the “second Martin,” Martin Chemnitz, in his *Loci Theologici*, suffices to illustrate the fact that Luther made the doctrine of justification the center of his theology, and so it has remained among true Lutherans to this day. The centrality of justification is the basic theme of Melancthon’s *Loci Communes*, begun (actually at a considerably earlier date than this *Disputatio*) in 1522. Chemnitz, in basing his *Loci Theologici* of 1554-1582 on the work of Melancthon, gave the same central position and emphasis to the doctrine of justification. Thus a person is certainly correct in asserting that from Luther’s rediscovery of the Gospel—as set forth in his early commentary on Romans in about 1510 and later stressed in his 95 Theses in 1517 and throughout his career—down to the present day, at least among Lutherans who indicate some theological depth and concern, the doctrine of justification has occupied the center of our theology.

3. This is strikingly evident in both Melancthon’s *Loci Communes* and Chemnitz’ *Loci Theologici* as well as the latter’s *Examination of the Council of Trent (Examen)*. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ the Mediator is the greatest contribution, and in some ways the unique contribution, of Martin Luther, and the same is true of Martin Chemnitz. This is not because the *locus* on justification in Chemnitz’ works is necessarily the longest or the most innovative and significant theologically. His writings on Christology and the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper are masterpieces in their area. But if one is even only a casual reader of Luther, the Lutheran Confessions or, in greater detail, of Melancthon’s *Loci Communes* or Chemnitz’ *Examination of Trent* or his *Loci Theologici*, it becomes abundantly clear that the Reformation was basically concerned about the relationship between a righteous God, who hates sin, and sinful man, who is alienated from God, and about how these two are brought together. Every article in the Confessions and the *Loci* of Melancthon and Chemnitz, as well as large sections of Luther’s writings, deal with this subject.

4. Chemnitz follows Melancthon’s order in dealing with the various topics of *loci* of theology. These topics in their order are: God; the Trinity; the Son; the Holy Spirit; creation and providence, with the main emphasis, of course, on the creation of man and God’s care for him; the angels, who are His ministering spirits; the cause of sin, emphasizing that, the devil and man, not God, caused sin; human powers and free choice, especially as over against God; original sin and actual sin, including a long discourse on what sin actually is; namely, the violation of God’s law. And at this point, in this context, comes the doctrine of justification, dealing with the question of how man in his sinful condition can be brought back into a peaceful relationship with the God who has been described in the foregoing. Justification and the forgiveness of sin are synonymous. Following the long treatment of man’s justification and forgiveness there is a discussion of good works and the relation between these works and man’s justification before God, and whether his good works are necessary for

his salvation. Since man lives in fellowship with both God and his fellow men, especially other believers, the next *locus* deals with the church in which man maintains his relationship with God through his use of the sacraments.

5. Thus the entire work of Melanchthon and Chemnitz deals with the relationship between this righteous God and sinful man, centering on the question as to how sinful man finds forgiveness and justification before God. This is the heart and functioning center of Lutheran theology and of the Lutheran Reformation.

6. A better understanding of Chemnitz' position on justification can be gained from a brief overview of the ecclesiastical and political conditions of his era. Luther began his great reform movement in 1517, but by the time of his death in 1546 conditions and situations had greatly changed. First, the political situation had changed. During most of Luther's public career there had been conflict between the two great Catholic powers of the age, France and the Hapsburgs who ruled Spain, Austria and the lowlands. This conflict had made it impossible for Charles V, a Hapsburg and emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, to which Germany belonged, to give his full attention to what was going on in northern Germany under Luther and with the active support of several of the secular German rulers. But by the time of Luther's death all of this had changed and peace had been established between the Catholic powers.

7. At the same time great inroads had been made by the Turks into the lands of the Empire in the east, and Charles V, previous to the time of Luther's death, had needed the help of the protesting German rulers in warding off the Turkish scourge led by no less than the great Suleiman the Magnificent. But this situation had also changed momentarily. Thus for the first time Charles was able to bring military power to bear on the religious problems of his empire. This he did in the Smalcald War of 1546-48, when he stood at the grave of Luther in Wittenberg and was urged to dig up his bones. Secondly, the period from Luther's death to that of Melanchthon in 1560 was the bleakest period that Lutheranism had known ecclesiastically and theologically up to that time. Melanchthon, upon whom Luther's mantle fell, was a great scholar and linguist, but a poor leader and fighter. He tended to compromise, and after Luther's influence was gone he fell into a rationalistic spirit which was evidenced especially in his compromise of Luther's position regarding the Lord's Supper as over against the Reformed and of his position regarding salvation by grace alone as over against the papists. The result was chaos among the Lutherans, with the earlier and more orthodox of Melanchthon's students arrayed against the later and often more permissive students. It was the period of the Interims and the beginning of the Catholic Counter-Reformation.

9. The Counter-Reformation was exactly what its name implies, an attempt to undo the entire Reformation; it was supported by the pope himself, the Catholic hierarchy of most countries, the Emperor Charles V, and some other secular rulers, who used military, academic, political, and theological means to accomplish its purpose. Even the so-called Interims granted to the Lutherans after their military defeats were only interims, concessions granted for limited periods. Among the most important instruments used by the Romanists was the infamous Council of Trent of 1545-63, which publicly passed itself off as giving a true ear to the Protestants, and which often deleted some of the crassest arguments and language of the earlier generation. But nevertheless it held firmly to the earlier doctrinal position of Rome and, by conciliar decree, outlawed certain evangelical teaching which had previously been permitted within the Roman church. In other words, it tightened the control of those who wanted to reject categorically Luther's rediscovery of the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ the Mediator.

10. To add to the problems for the Lutherans there appeared on the scene at this time the most formidable, well-trained, single-minded group yet to arise within Catholicism, namely, the Jesuits, who were bent on regaining all that had been lost to the Reformation.

11. Furthermore, the Reformed were on the march—often into Lutheran territory. England under her powerful king, Henry VIII, had turned Protestant, to be sure, but was violently anti-Lutheran and even had produced several Lutheran martyrs. The influence of Zwingli and Calvin was predominant in Switzerland, Holland, Scotland, and even parts of previously Lutheran Germany.

12. And while all this was going on, the Lutherans were falling apart theologically and ecclesiastically, due in part to the above-mentioned external circumstances, but also in part to the compromising and vacillating

position of Melanchthon and to various understandings and misunderstandings of Luther himself by his followers. By 1570 this situation had become so critical that several theologians with the help and encouragement of some of the secular princes decided that something had to be done to save Lutheranism as a theological as well as an ecclesiastical entity.

13. Called into the service of his church at this time was a man by the name of Martin Chemnitz, named Martin because, like Luther, he was born on the day of St. Martin. He was a Saxon, of poor and undistinguished family, yet a theological genius of the first rank, a man modest and unassuming, devoted to his Lord and His church, and one of the few men on record who turned down a professorship at Wittenberg in order to take a subordinate position in the church of Brunswick, itself not of great importance. Born in 1522, Chemnitz got a slow start. His education was sporadic and spotty. He spent a period of time at the new university of Koenigsberg as a librarian. Here he began to study Luther and the church fathers and became an excellent scholar of both. At the urging of Melanchthon he was called in 1554 (probably as a result of a very rigorous attack on Andrew Osiander by Chemnitz, whom Melanchthon also opposed) to a position on the faculty at Wittenberg.

14. But the following year he left to spend the rest of his life at Brunswick, first as assistant to the general superintendent and later as general superintendent (bishop) himself. While at Wittenberg he had begun lecturing on Melanchthon's *Loci Communes*, and he continued this practice before the pastors of his diocese almost till the time of his death in 1584 (without, however, completing the work). These lectures, carried on for a period of nearly thirty years, were published by Chemnitz' sons and his successor, Polycarp Leyser, in 1592 and bear the title *Loci Theologici*, a title that came to be applied to the works of many dogmatists who followed him.

15. Chemnitz was uniquely qualified for the task of reuniting the divided Lutherans with the documents known as the Formula of Concord (1577) and the Book of Concord (1580). As early as about 1550 he was asked by his friend and co-worker, Joachim Moerlin, to prepare material relative to the Osiandrian controversy. Andrew Osiander was a Lutheran in Prussia who had come to deny the concept of objective reconciliation and justification and taught that the sinner is justified by his own essential and inherent righteousness, that is, he is *made* righteous rather than *declared* righteous by the imputed righteousness of Christ. This controversy, although ultimately settled entirely in Chemnitz' favor, stayed in his thinking for a long time, and he refers to it later in his *Loci*. He does this especially when he is dealing with the very Scriptural and Lutheran doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ by which we are justified rather than by our own essential and very imperfect righteousness.

16. The Council of Trent was in session at the time Chemnitz began his duties at Brunswick in 1554. He undertook a study of the Jesuit order, which was new at the time, and he produced a monograph on the subject in order to inform the Evangelical churches exactly what this group stood for. This led him into a study of the proceedings of the Council which were in the process of being published and officially commented on by a Portuguese theologian names Andrada, who was attending the Council. Andrada made it painfully evident that the Council was closing all loopholes to an evangelical interpretation of the Scriptures and of the fathers. He was thus greatly strengthening the position which Luther from the very beginning had so vigorously opposed, by giving the authority of an ecumenical council to these errors. Chemnitz therefore undertook a thorough critique of the decrees of Trent. In 1565, only two years after the close of the council, his *Examen* (*Examination of the Council of Trent*) began to appear. This monumental work is to this day the classic Protestant answer to Trent.

17. During these Brunswick years, as stated earlier, Chemnitz also continued his lectures on Melanchthon's *Loci*, which had dealt at length with the doctrine of justification. Chemnitz' *locus* on this subject is filled with references to the Council of Trent, so, although the *Examen* and the *Loci* are somewhat different in thrust and overall content, there is a close relationship and considerable overlap. Because the general English-speaking public has had the *Examen* in English for over a decade, whereas the English translation of the *Loci* is still undergoing the editorial process, we shall in this paper present Chemnitz' position of justification on the basis of his *Loci Theologici*.

18. To give a few more details about the historical situation existing at the time of Chemnitz' *Loci*, we have mentioned Andrew Osiander, who fell into error on justification. We might also say a word about Joachim Moerlin, Chemnitz' mentor first at Koenigsberg and later at Brunswick.. Moerlin was a few years older than Chemnitz, a graduate of Wittenberg, and a thoroughly orthodox Gnesio-Lutheran. He was not a particularly noteworthy scholar, although he could spot error and he knew where to find the budding theologian who could handle it, namely, Martin Chemnitz. He induced Chemnitz not only to tackle the popular and well-connected Osiander, but also to leave Wittenberg and Melanchthon to take a position as his own assistant. He also undoubtedly encouraged him to continue his lectures on Melanchthon's *Loci*, which Luther himself had described as worthy of inclusion in the canon of Scripture.

19. Also in the background and, like the Osiandrian controversy, not appearing, at least by name, in the *Examen*, was the Antinomian controversy, led by another former devotee of Luther, John Agricola of Eisleben (Islebius). Agricola had fallen off the other side of the horse from Osiander by asserting that the law had no role at all to play in the life of the Christian.

20. The Osiandrian and Antinomian controversies were among the reasons for the development of the Formula of Concord. Both are dealt with at length in Chemnitz' *Loci*. Agricola's error had given much grief to Luther in his late years, partly because Agricola in stating his position had misquoted Luther or quoted him out of context. Furthermore, Agricola would appear to have recanted his errors only to revive them later. Both he and Osiander were signers of the Smalcald Articles. Related to this was also the error of another old Lutheran veteran, Nicolas Amsdorf, Luther's close associate over many years. Amsdorf had fallen into the trap of Agricola and had gone so far as to assert not only that good works were not necessary for salvation but also that they were positively detrimental. This had taken place on the one side, while on the other the ever-changing Melanchthon had revised his "canonical" *Loci Communes* to make room for the will of man to play a determinative role in his conversion and salvation.

21. Chemnitz in his tactful way also deals with this "Lutheran" aberration in his *Loci*. Thus there is a difference in thrust and content between the *Examen* and the *Loci* of Chemnitz, just as there is a difference between the theological bent of his *Loci* and the theological bent of the late Melanchthon, just as there is a difference in thrust, but not in basic theology, between Chemnitz and Luther, and between Chemnitz' *Loci* and his Formula of Concord. The circumstances determine the direction and the content, even though in some cases Chemnitz was involved with both works at the same time.

22. Unfortunately we must mention one more Lutheran errorist, Matthias Flacius, who was so vigorous in his assertion of the total depravity of man that he even insisted on saying that man's very essence is sin. He thus got himself into trouble with Chemnitz and the other authors of the Formula, who saw here the possibility of a basic denial of the doctrine of Christology by saying that Christ Himself as true man would thus be sinful.

23. All of these matters, plus the situation in Rome and the long history of problems associated with the doctrine of justification from the first century of the church down to the very year in which Chemnitz was lecturing, are reflected in his *Loci Theologici*. One significant section of the *locus* on justification is devoted to the distinction between law and Gospel., a beautiful and pastoral discussion of this doctrine which is so crucial for a correct understanding and proclamation of the doctrine of justification. Melanchthon in personal conversation with Chemnitz had stressed the importance of maintaining this distinction as essential to a correct understanding of the Gospel itself.

24. Chemnitz may well be called the father of normative Lutheran theology, a point which becomes increasingly obvious to anyone who studies such works as his *Loci* and his *Enchiridion*, in which in a very positive way he is covering most aspects of Lutheran doctrine over a wide range of topics.

25. Now let us turn to the *Loci Theologici* itself to see what he has to say about this crucial article of the Christian faith. Chemnitz begins his discussion of justification in his typical way by placing the matter in its proper context with other articles of faith, namely, man before God, man created by God, man fallen into sin and bereft of all his spiritual powers while the voice of the law accuses and condemns him. Then comes the blessed and joyous doctrine of justification, which deals with "our redemption, restitution and reconciliation." He says, "We must devote our utmost efforts to retain the genuine meaning and apostolic purity of the doctrine

of justification, to hand it on to our posterity and to prevent its being torn away from us or adulterated by sophistic trickery or fraud... For it was a labor far greater than the labors of Hercules to rescue the true light from the unspeakably dense darkness and the putrid filth and cesspool of the Antichrist and to restore the apostolic purity to the fountains of Israel... Nor must we think that in this great light there is no need for concern on our part. For we have this treasure not in iron or brass vessels but in 'earthen ones,' 2 Cor. 4:7, and the road on which we walk has many stumbling blocks on which in our weakness we may easily fall. I am often horrified that Luther with some kind of foreboding often repeated in his commentaries on Galatians and Genesis this statement: 'After my death this doctrine will again be brought into obscurity.'" On this serious note Chemnitz begins his *locus* on justification.

26. In the case of each *locus* Chemnitz always begins by stating the point at issue, the *status controversiae*. The Scripture verse which sets forth the entire subject is Rom. 3:21-28, "The righteousness of God, without the law, has been revealed" in the Gospel, namely, that we "are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation through faith, in His blood ...without the works of the law." In a very real sense this entire *locus* is nothing but an exegetical study of this passage in Romans. Chemnitz goes on to show that we must define such terms as "Gospel," "to justify" (*justificare*), "righteous" (*justus*), "righteousness" (*justitia*), "freely" (*gratis*) and "grace." He also wants to distinguish between justifying faith and the other uses for the term "faith." Involved here is also the distinction between law and Gospel.

27. In discussing definitions Chemnitz makes a statement which well summarizes his view both on the doctrine and on the terminology with which the doctrine is expressed: "We must not believe that this is mere childish zeal for the definition of terms. For just as the substantive matters in this *locus* are far above and beyond our reason, so also the Holy Spirit has certain terms in the teaching on justification which are not found in common usage. The church must be concerned about language, that is, it ought not devise new ideas or produce new dogmas, but those things which have been given to us by the Holy Spirit we must learn from the correct meaning of the words which the Scripture uses in teaching the heavenly doctrine. Later on we shall show that the neglect of correct language was the source and spring of all the errors under this article."

28. Chemnitz defines the Gospel as "the doctrine of free reconciliation or the benefits of the Mediator." He shows that the term "gospel" (*euangelium*) or "good news" was used in secular Greek, with parallels in other languages. In Scripture the Greek word *euaggelion* (good news) was used in the Septuagint (LXX) in such passages as Is. 41:27, "I give to Jerusalem a herald of good tidings," and Is. 52:7, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good tidings." And he shows that Paul, in Rom. 10:15 interprets the latter passage as referring to the era of the new covenant; just as Christ in Luke 4:18 applies Is. 61:1, "He has sent Me to preach good tidings to the afflicted," to His own ministry. These points are abundantly supported by many other Scripture passages and by quotations from the fathers and from secular Greek, all supporting the same meaning and the various shades of meanings.

29. Later, still discussing the term "Gospel," Chemnitz points out that some passages of Scripture use the term with reference to its origin in God, others with reference to its subject matter. Still other passages stress its effects, others the object of the promise, namely, Christ, and still others present metaphorical allusions which do not actually use the word "Gospel," yet refer to it. He affirms that "justification before God must not be taught, learned, or sought in the law but in the Gospel... The object of justifying faith is not the doctrine of the law but the voice of the Gospel..." Moreover, this has always been the case. It is an error to teach that the Old Testament saints before Moses are saved by obedience to the natural law, those after Moses by the Mosaic law, and those of today by the evangelical law. Some were saying such things, both in antiquity and in Chemnitz' own era; for, says Chemnitz, the doctrine of the law is known and knowable to human reason but the Gospel is hidden and must be revealed by the Holy Spirit.

30. Chemnitz proceeds in a masterful way to delimit eight ways in which the law must be distinguished from the Gospel. Much of this material is unique to his *Loci*. Later on he adds still further categories, such as the fact that the Gospel must be preached to the repentant, must deal with the concept of reconciliation and must include the person and work of Christ. The latter point is meaningful in our own age, which has so watered

down the Gospel as to mean almost anything which relieves a tough situation, with or without reference to Christ and His work or the purpose of His coming.

31. Note that Chemnitz equates justification with reconciliation between man and God. Justification is the legal concept describing man's relationship to the law, and reconciliation refers to his relationship with God. In describing reconciliation he points out the benefits: 1) Christ has taken away our sins and made satisfaction for them; 2) Christ is the fulfillment of the law, thus stressing both His active and passive obedience; 3) The Gospel teaches that these benefits are received through faith; 4) It also teaches that these benefits are offered in the Word and the Sacraments, through which the Holy Spirit works; 5) After giving the benefit of justification the Holy Spirit then works renewal; and 6) The promise of the Gospel is universal, applying to all, gentiles as well as Jews, as long as they repent and receive the promise in faith."

32. The common definition of Gospel, as used in the Augsburg Confession and the Apology, has been "the preaching of repentance and the remission of sins," a definition of "Gospel" in the broad sense of the word. This definition had become inadequate for dealing with certain errors which arose after the time of the Augsburg Confession. For example, both Luther and Chemnitz had attacked Agricola and the Antinomians, who had used this definition in support of their errors. Chemnitz says, "Here indeed Luther would have had cause to reject and condemn the common definition completely... if he had believed that it was a corruption of the true and correct teaching." But Chemnitz points out that this common definition can be misused on the one hand by the papists who try thereby to find a place for good works in their definition of justification, and on the other hand by the Antinomians who reject the need for good works entirely among the regenerate. For, as he points out, Christ Himself after the resurrection had committed to His disciples the ministry of "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," and in Luke 24:47 He speaks of "preaching repentance and remission of sins in His name."

33. Yet Chemnitz goes on to condemn the notion of the papists that "the Gospel properly speaking contains not only the promise of grace but also the teaching of good works," for, he says, they do not understand what they are saying. Such a notion would overthrow the distinction between law and Gospel as seen in Rom. 3:27, where "the law of faith" is used in opposition to "the law of works," and would thus change the Gospel into law.

34. This Gospel in the broad sense is indeed correctly defined as "the summary of the entire teaching which has been delivered and proclaimed through the ministration of Christ and the apostles." This is shown, for example, in Acts 20:21, "testifying repentance towards God and faith in Christ." Yet in the narrow or proper sense of the term the Gospel remains separate and distinct from the law. It is also correct to say that the Gospel is the preaching of repentance in that the Gospel announces grace not to the secure and the hypocrites but to the repentant. This is what the Augsburg Confession is talking about when it uses the term "Gospel" in the broad sense. Again, the Gospel, in teaching that "there is no name given to man whereby they can be saved" except the name of Christ, Acts 4:12, is antithetically demonstrating that "all have been imprisoned under sin," Gal. 3:22. The term "justification" is a judicial term which presupposes a conscience terrified by the fear of God's judgment. In this sense the Gospel can be called "the preaching of repentance and the remission of sins."

35. Chemnitz also shows that unbelief is sin, but that true belief, or true faith, is not merely something historical but it carries with it the sense of confidence or trust (*fiducia*), a faith which centers in the grace of God. In his endeavors to give a correct definition of "Gospel," he cites at length Luther's disputations against the Antinomians, led by Agricola. Strangely, these *Disputations* have not been translated for the American Edition of Luther's works, although they are extremely relevant to many of the aberrations of modern theology. It is Chemnitz' contention in this section of his *Loci* that problems with the doctrine of justification arise out of subtle changes or new interpretations of the classic definition of the term, and that the only way to counteract this is to set forth in a thorough manner the doctrine of the distinction between law and Gospel as an antidote against both the papists, who insisted on including the law in the doctrine of justification, and the Antinomians, who insisted on removing it entirely from the life of the Christian. Both erred, both had to be corrected, and the doctrine of justification had to be preserved by observing carefully the distinction between law and Gospel.

36. Chemnitz cites Luther's first disputation against the Antinomians to show "in what sense and for what reasons it is correct to say that the Gospel is the preaching of repentance," namely, 1) "because repentance by the testimony of all men is sorrow over sin together with the intention to live a better life"; 2) because "the first part of repentance, the sorrow, comes only from the law, but the second part, namely, the intention to do good, cannot come from the law, because this repentance only from the law is a half repentance or the beginning of repentance, or it is called repentance by the use of synecdoche, but it is without the good intention"; and "if a person continues in this 'half repentance,' it is the repentance of Cain, Saul, Judas, and other hopeless people. Therefore against these useless teachers of despair the Gospel teaches that repentance must not only be the loss of hope... but those who are repentant must take hope and out of love for God they must hate sin. This hatred of sin is the truly good intention."

37. And finally, 3) "The convergence of law and Gospel consists in this that the benefits of Christ of which the Gospel speaks are nothing else than the satisfaction for our guilt and punishment and that completely perfect obedience which we owe to the law. These two things which the law requires and demands are given to believers in Christ and imputed in Him for righteousness... and there is no way in which we can understand the greatness of the benefits of Christ unless they are compared with the rigor and severity of the law. This righteousness of which the law speaks, which is impossible for us because of the weakness of the flesh, the Gospel shows and points out in Christ, who was made under the law, in order that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us by imputation through faith, both in the initial state when the law through the Spirit was written in our hearts, and in eternal life when our obedience to the law of God will be brought to completion." In one sense the righteousness of the law and of the Gospel is one and the same thing, but with respect to us the righteousness is different. With respect to Christ it is the same righteousness, for what the law demands and requires, this Christ supplies and gives. So also in regard to reconciliation, with respect to Christ it is called redemption because the compensation has been paid, but with respect to us it is called the gracious remission of sins.

38. "And," says Chemnitz, "all the saints in all ages from the foundation of the world, have been saved by one and the same Gospel." He draws his material from Luther to demonstrate that from the fall to the flood, from the flood to Moses, from Moses to the prophets, and from the prophets to Christ there is one Gospel and one Savior. There have been controversies over this point in all ages, in the Old Testament, in the New, after the time of the apostles, in Chemnitz' day and, we may add, in our own also. Certain unfortunate statements of Luther had been used by the opposition on all sides to justify error. Chemnitz deals with these aberrations and gives the proper interpretation to Luther's statements.

39. All this brings him back to the true and correct definition of justification. He begins this subject with a long and very interesting historical review of how the rise of the Pelagian controversy caused men such as Augustine and even Jerome to revise some of their earlier unfortunate statements which had attributed too much to man's natural powers and free choice, for a false teaching on these subjects will of itself produce a false doctrine of justification. He also points out that the insistence of the papists in clinging to their synergistic errors on justification arose out of their desire to preserve their spiritual and financial hold over the people who through their purchase of indulgences (which they understood to be the forgiveness of all their sins) were actually financing the entire structure of the papacy. The sophistry of Rome at the time of Trent was not quite so crass as it had been at the time of Tetzl, but the result was the same. Trent urged that "justification does not consist only in the remission of sins and free reconciliation, but it also includes the renewal of the mind and the will through the Holy Spirit." This, of course, is a perversion of the distinction between law and Gospel and makes our justification before God contingent in part on our obedience to the law. It was this very error, creeping back into Lutheranism, which caused Walther, Pieper, H. A. Preus, and others to stress the objective aspect of reconciliation and justification. Man is forever work righteous.

40. Another perversion of this doctrine was the notion that "the obedience of Christ is indeed the only satisfaction for our sins and alone merits remission of sins and life eternal," but "these merits of Christ do not apply to those who live without contrition, repentance or good intention... therefore faith alone does not justify." Another variation of this error includes such ideas as that Christ made satisfaction only for original sin (the

early error of the scholastics), but more recently this had been refined to say that He had made satisfaction only for mortal sin, or only for those sins which preceded our conversion, but a satisfaction on our part is required for those sins we commit afterwards. Others argued that Christ has merited for us only first grace, so that through it we ourselves might merit remission and life. The argument was being increasingly refined and complicated. But Chemnitz asserts that in defining justification we must answer these questions: When the mind is terrified by the knowledge of sin and by the sense of the wrath of God, 1) what is that entity on account of which the sinner, in the face of God's judgment and condemned to eternal punishment, seeks the remission of sins, is absolved from the sentence of condemnation, and is received into eternal life? and 2) what is the means or instrument by which the promise of the Gospel, that is, the promise of grace, mercy, reconciliation, salvation, and eternal life, is received, laid hold upon and applied, that is, [what is] the merit or satisfaction and application of it to oneself?

41. In defining and describing justification he also defines the terms involved and points out the shortcomings of Augustine, Lombard, and others in dealing with the doctrine by stressing that the term "justification" is a forensic or legal term, never meaning "to make righteous" or "to infuse righteousness." The word was used in the same sense by the Hebrews. Thus in defining it he asserts that "the word 'to justify' includes three aspects: to absolve the person who has been accused and brought to judgment of the crime with which he has been charged, so that he is not condemned by the legal processes, and that he be restored to his state of innocence; it means to account or pronounce a person as righteous or innocent and to receive him as such. The term is used in this sense without distinction whether the cause is a just or an unjust one... The term also includes the fact that the Scripture attributes to those who have been justified the praise, the testimony, and the rewards which are owed to the righteous and the innocent, and it treats them not as condemned guilty or even as suspects, but as righteous and innocent; and because he has been absolved in the judgment, he is freed from the law, the power, the force and the oppression of his enemy."

42. He summarizes by saying, "In the entire Scripture it is impossible to prove by a single example that the word 'to justify,' when it speaks of God's justifying, is ever to be understood as referring to renewal by the infusion of new qualities." This in opposition both to the papists and to Osiander. He continues, "We do not deny the renewal which takes place through the Spirit, but now the question is what the word 'justification' means in the Scripture."

43. Ancillary to his definition of the term "justification" are certain subordinate questions. For example, why does Paul in explaining this article of faith prefer the forensic concept of justification while the other New Testament writers seem to use synonyms, such as, "to save" and "to remit sins"? He says, "The reason doubtlessly lies in the fact that the profane, self-sufficient and Epicurean men of that time believed that the justification of the sinner... was a very unimportant matter, and thus they did not take seriously or desire reconciliation with God." He suggests that the picture of the court room is the strongest that can be used in stressing the importance of this matter for worldly men. "Before God's judgment man can put up nothing in his own defense in order that he might be justified, since God does not justify out of frivolousness or unconcern, error or venality, and since He finds nothing in man whereby he might be justified before God (yet justification demands that the law be fulfilled, Rom. 8:4), therefore a foreign righteousness must intervene, the kind of righteousness which along with the remission of punishments must include also a total obedience to the divine law by way of satisfaction, so that there can be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. And to this the terrified sinner who is condemned by the voice of the law flees in true faith. He desires this, he begs for it, he lays hold on it, he submits himself to it, and he uses it as his defense before the judgment seat of God and the accusation of the law and is justified by this and by imputation, that is, he is absolved from the sentence of condemnation which lay over him and receives the promise of eternal life."

44. In connection with the human contribution to our salvation Chemnitz also points out the interesting fact that many of the fathers were far more Scriptural in their devotional writings than in their dogmatic treatises. He cites such men as Bernard, Gerson, and Augustine. For example, Augustine in his *De Civitate Dei* says that "our righteousness consists in the remission of sins rather than the perfection of our virtues." He cites many such excellent statements.

45. He also shows that what has been said about the objective nature of God's work as opposed to man's efforts under the term "justification" also applies to the other terms used to describe man's relationship to a saving God, terms such as "covering iniquity" and "not imputing sins." He cites Titus 3:5-7 to show that "justification," "salvation," and "inheritance" are synonyms; also that "reconciliation," "blessing and not cursing," and "remission of sins" are synonymous. And then he says that when the New Testament writers speak of the relationship between a righteous God and the salvation of sinful man, while they do not use the term "justification," they mean the same thing. There is one Scriptural doctrine taught by many different people at many different times, using many different terms and concepts.

46. Then Chemnitz turns to the subject of "the righteousness of God," as used in Rom. 1:17, 3:22, 2 Cor. 5:21, 2 Pet. 1:1, and Matt. 6:33. This term has been incorrectly understood in the church in the past, and even Luther confesses that although "he held to the article of justification, yet he was troubled by the word and did not gladly hear the statement 'In the Gospel is revealed the righteousness of God,' Rom. 1:17, because he understood it as referring to God's judicial and stern righteousness by which He enters into judgment with us." But after discussing the matter at length Chemnitz brings us to the conclusion held both by Luther and himself that the righteousness which avails before God is not the righteousness of the law, but of the Gospel, the grace, mercy, and goodness of God by which He imputes or accounts to believers for their own righteousness the obedience of His Son and Mediator. This is what the term "the righteousness of God" means in the article of justification and stated in Rom. 1:17, "In the Gospel is revealed the righteousness of God... because He Himself is righteous and the justifier of him who is of the faith in Christ."

47. Chemnitz throughout this entire *locus* is really giving us a word study of the Scriptural terms used in the article of justification. Thus he turns next to the word "faith," which receives over 100 pages of discussion. This is the Greek word *pistis*, which is translated into Latin with two different words, *fides* or *fiducia*, depending on the stress of the user. In order to get the matter into focus he begins by saying, "Thus far we have discussed the word 'justification.' But because Paul's statement refers not only to 'justification' but also to 'justification by faith,' he also calls the righteousness of which the Gospel speaks 'the righteousness of faith.' Therefore, it is necessary to have a correct and proper explanation of the term 'faith' (*fides*). For faith is the unique means and instrument through which we lay hold on the righteousness of Christ and apply it to ourselves... For this reason the devil is so hostile to the doctrine of faith, for since he cannot hinder the decree of God regarding the redemption of the human race, although he tried to do so with cunning trickery against the house and family from which he knew the Seed was going to come, therefore he puts all his artfulness to work to destroy or upset or corrupt the instrument and means whereby God's work is to be applied. For he knows that without faith there is no benefit for us, either from the decree of redemption or the preaching of the Gospel."

48. He then proceeds to describe at length some of the many errors with which this doctrine has been obfuscated, beginning with the time of the apostles. He says, "Some understand faith only as an assent to the historical account which in a general way asserts that the things which are revealed in the Scripture are true. Some look only to the quality of the faith and how strong it is, and because they think that it is imperfect and weak, something must be added to this faith which is done when a person weighs merits and worthiness on the scale, which can thereby justify him. From this then comes the idea of the... *fides formata* (faith formed by love). Others err in regard to the object of faith, because they make as the object of justifying faith the whole Scripture including the precepts of the promise and the threats of the law. Some rave that the effects which follow or the activities by which faith is shown are the true and living causes and thus they confuse the formal cause with the object of faith, on account of which faith justifies... Others understand justifying faith to be an idea in the mind, an opinion, a figment of one's own brain concerning the imputation of our sins, even without repentance... Among those who understand the word 'to justify' in a different way from what the Scripture teaches... there is also a perversion of the word 'faith,' because they understand faith in the same way they understand justification, namely, that because by faith the Holy Spirit is received who renews the mind and begins the new obedience, therefore... we are justified initially by faith but in a formal and complete way by love."

49. The point at issue must be stated correctly. And this he does under three categories: “The word ‘faith’ is better understood by an explanation of the word ‘to justify,’ for the question is not what virtues follow faith so that faith may be efficacious through love; but the question is this: how and in what respect does faith justify, that is, when in the real struggle our minds are terrified by the feeling of the wrath of God and seek firm consolation so that they may be freed from the sentence of condemnation and be received into eternal life, to what must faith, in the midst of this agony, look and what must it grasp? In sum, in the argument about faith, the question concerns the application of the merits and obedience of Christ for the righteousness and salvation of everyone who believes.” In this way the meaning of “faith” becomes clear. Antithetically, to say that we are justified means that we are “absolved from our sins and accepted as righteous, not by our works but by faith.”

50. The best way to interpret these terms is to do so on the basis of the object of justifying faith. The law is not the object of faith but Christ is. The grace and mercy of God in Christ are the objects of justifying faith. Chemnitz stresses that “‘faith’ in the article of justification must be understood not only as knowledge and general assent which affirm in a general way that the promise of the Gospel is true, but it includes at the same time the activities of the will and the heart, that is, it is a desire and trust (*fiducia*) which, in the struggle with sin and the wrath of God, applies the promise of grace to each individual, so that each person includes himself in the general promise given to believers, and thus governs his life so that he may understand that the promise of the Gospel is for him.”

51. Putting the matter another way, Chemnitz speaks of the effects of justifying faith, namely, the remission of sins, adoption, absolution from the accusation of the law, access to God, peace of conscience and purification of heart, victory over the world, salvation, and eternal life. Obviously these effects cannot be attributed simply to knowledge or general assent, for this kind of knowledge the devils have, but these are the merits and blessings of the Mediator “which are bestowed upon those who by faith lay hold and apply the promise to themselves.” Thus the correlative to justifying faith is the promise of grace.

52. With regard to the object of saving faith he makes the very interesting and significant statement which clears up many questions Lutherans of today (with our backgrounds in pietism) often have with respect to what exactly justifying faith is in contradistinction to other forms of faith, or with respect to the distinction between *fides* and *fiducia*. He says, “We do not deny that in many cases there are various external objects upon which our faith lays hold, but the question is: what is the object with respect to which faith justifies? In the account of the nine lepers the external object of their faith did not attribute to their faith the power to justify, as Christ Himself argues with reference to faith in the miracle. Thus we must make a distinction”

53. There is also the question of the exercises of faith under the cross, in obedience, in prayer, and the expectation of bodily and physical blessings, when the person is reconciled by faith. In sum, he says, “Even when faith is concerned with external objects... in order that the promise may be sure and the confidence of our hope firm, this must always illumine that faith which relies on the promise of mercy for the sake of Christ. For unless faith first establishes that God is favorable toward us and has been reconciled, there can be no peace of conscience sought or aid requested.”

54. Chemnitz then in his ongoing study of the Scriptural terms involved in this doctrine devotes considerable time to the matter of “trust, confidence in the face of fear, rejoicing, keeping the Word, eating and drinking and being filled.” He discusses weak faith and shows that our forgiveness is not proportionate to the strength of our faith, but that the strength of a person’s faith comes from Christ, its object. He also deals with the converse of these terms in a long discourse on doubt and its related concepts.

55. Chemnitz comes back again to the commonly accepted definition of faith as “assent to the entire Word of God as it has been given to us.” The papists had stressed this as being a completely sufficient definition of faith, but Chemnitz says, “Many have debated as to whether this aspect really ought to be included in the definition of justifying faith. But there are good and serious reasons for doing so... for justifying faith presupposes and includes general faith which establishes with a sure conviction and without any doubt that those things which are revealed in the Word of God are absolutely true because God Himself is the author who is to be praised for His truthfulness because He is above all error. For when this general foundation begins to shake or waver, then the firm confidence in the promise of the Gospel cannot take root or be retained in time of

spiritual struggle. For justifying faith has many properties in common with general faith, in that it involves things which are not seen, it does not rely on the judgment of our senses or a rational demonstration or proof... yet it is not a mere opinion but a sure conviction which has only the divine revelation in the Word as the cause for its certainty against the judgment of our senses and our reason and even our experience.”

56. This is a most interesting statement, written about 1580, yet it throws light not only on the thinking of men such as Kant but also on our recent controversies within Lutheranism and, indeed, all of modern Christianity, wherein theologians are trying to argue that we somehow can retain the Gospel or some kernel of the Christian faith, and even the concept of law and Gospel, while at the same time permitting a doctrine that the Scripture contains errors of every kind and description and is thus unreliable. Much has been said and more can be said on this subject. Yet Chemnitz says, “The sum, the end, the focus and boundary of all Scripture is Christ in his work of Mediator.” Chemnitz was neither a liberal nor a fundamentalist. Nor are we today who follow in his footsteps. He continues, “As Augustine says the Christian faith differs from the faith of the devils in the last articles of the Creed: ‘I believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.’ And in vain does faith concern itself with the other objects of Scripture if it does not hold firmly to the head of the Scripture which is Christ... The article of redemption cannot be truly understood unless there is the preceding knowledge of the rest of the articles of the Word of God. And yet we must firmly cling to this that faith justifies only with respect to that one object which is Christ.” He has in mind here also the papistic concept that by extension we must for salvation also believe all the traditions and extra Scriptural teaching of the church.

57. In defining and discussing saving faith Chemnitz also insists that we must include the work of the Holy Spirit in kindling faith and preserving us in this faith. The Spirit is the efficient or working cause of our faith and salvation.

58. He also brings in and expands upon the concept of the formal and material principles of faith, namely, the true faith or confidence (*fiducia*) which is directed alone to Christ as the object of faith, which is the material principle in distinction to general faith in the Scripture, the formal principle. This is a distinction which is often neglected today, and its neglect creates incredible confusion.

59. Chemnitz also discusses the final cause or goal of justifying faith, using 1 Pet. 1:9 as his text, “...the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”

60. Throughout his writings Chemnitz shows deep pastoral concern that Christians must possess the assurance of their salvation. This was in opposition to the papists who throughout proclaimed a theology of doubt and despair because the entire structure of their ecclesiastical organization was built upon doubt. In many places Chemnitz expands on this point.

61. Finally, having discussed the terms “justification” and “faith,” he now takes up the other terms from the passage in Romans 3 and carefully examines them. Time does not permit here a close scrutiny of his treatment of such words as “freely,” “grace,” “imputation,” or his long excursus on the word “only” or “alone” (*sola*) in which he studiously supports Luther. In a sense the word *sola* covers the whole subject.

62. His examination of the theology and the place in history of Pelagius, Julian of Eclanum, Cassian, Prosper of Aquitaine, the scholastics, and most recently the Jesuits and the Council of Trent in connection with these points is a theological classic in itself.

63. Finally, we can summarize Chemnitz on justification by citing one of his statements which occurs near the end of his *locus*, “Human reason, even though Scripture does attribute to it some importance, in the article of justification is completely eliminated by the thunder of divine judgment, because apart from faith and outside of Christ, even those things which seem to be virtues in the unregenerate, before the tribunal of God in the article of justification are only sins and weaknesses, John 16:8-9, Rom. 14:23, Heb. 11:6, Phil. 3:7. But in regard to the works of the divine law... neither before nor after the reception of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the fulfillment of the law, in this life, do these works establish our righteousness before God unto eternal life. And the reason is not that the divine law is not a divine teaching or that it is imperfect as is the case with our natural knowledge; but it is ‘weak through the flesh,’ even in the saints insofar as it pertains to perfect obedience...”

64. The statements cited through this paper, while only a minute fraction of the totality of his material, should convince the normally well-educated Lutheran that Chemnitz is very accurately reproducing the theology of Luther, of Melancthon in his best period, and of the Lutheran Confessions. The somewhat better informed will see also that this theology was duplicated by the great orthodox theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries, down even into the age of Pietism. And in the 19th century revival of Lutheran orthodoxy among both Europeans and Americans the theology of Chemnitz shines through. In fact, while Chemnitz is prolix and sometimes overly thorough, yet in even the age of rationalism he was honored for his objective scholarship, his irenic and fair-minded approach, his enormous knowledge and his pious concern not for his own glory but for the church. It is no overstatement to say that Martin Chemnitz, the second Martin of Lutheranism, is really the father of normative Lutheran theology. Luther ploughed the original rough ground but in a rather unsystematic way. Melancthon did much to systematize the work of Luther, but it remained for Chemnitz in his great confrontation with the Roman Counter-reformation and the Reformed and the weak Lutheran theology of the era, in his *Examination of the Council of Trent* and in his *Loci Theologici*, to bequeath to Lutheranism, which was no longer merely a movement or some temporary aberration which would eventually return to the welcoming and unchanging arms of Rome or be swallowed up in the pan-Protestantism already being planned in Geneva and Canterbury, the theological system which we to this day enjoy and for which we give thanks to God. The basic elements of Luther's teaching are all here: the centrality of the Gospel of Christ, the forgiveness of sin, the Scriptural basis, the respect for the thinking of the ancient church, the unity of all doctrine around the need of sinful man for a gracious and merciful God, all given to man in the church through the Word and the Sacraments.