

Luther on” Simul Iustus et Peccator” – Simultaneously Saint & Sinner

Thus a Christian person is righteous and a sinner at the same time, holy and profane, an enemy of God and a child of God. None of the sophists will admit this paradox, because they do not understand the true meaning of justification. This was why they forced men to go on doing good works until they would not feel any sin at all. By this means they drove to the point of insanity many people who tried with all their might to become completely righteous in a formal sense but could not accomplish it. And innumerable persons even among the authors of this wicked dogma were driven into despair at the hour of death, which is what would have happened to me if Christ had not looked at me in mercy and liberated me from this error.

We, on the other hand, teach and comfort an afflicted sinner this way: “Brother, it is impossible for you to become so righteous in this life that your body is as clear and spotless as the sun. You still have spots and wrinkles (Eph. 5:27), and yet you are holy.” But you say: “How can I be holy when I have sin and am aware of it?” “That you feel and acknowledge sin—this is good. Thank God, and do not despair. It is one step toward health when a sick man admits and confesses his disease.” “But how will I be liberated from sin?” “Run to Christ, the Physician, who heals the contrite of heart and saves sinners. Believe in Him. If you believe, you are righteous, because you attribute to God the glory of being almighty, merciful, truthful, etc. You justify and praise God. In short, you attribute divinity and everything to Him. And the sin that still remains in you is not imputed but is forgiven for the sake of Christ, in whom you believe and who is perfectly righteous in a formal sense. His righteousness is yours; your sin is His.”

As I have said, therefore, any Christian is a supreme pontiff, because, first, he offers and slaughters his reason and the mind of the flesh, and, secondly, *he attributes to God the glory of being righteous*, truthful, patient, kind, and merciful. This is the continuous evening and morning sacrifice in the New Testament. The evening sacrifice is to kill the reason, and the morning sacrifice is to glorify God. Thus a Christian is involved, daily and perpetually, in this double sacrifice and in its practice. No one can adequately proclaim the value and the dignity of Christian sacrifice.

Therefore this is a marvelous definition of Christian righteousness: it is a divine imputation or reckoning as righteousness or to righteousness, for the sake of our faith in Christ or for the sake of Christ. When the sophists hear this definition, they laugh; for they suppose that righteousness is a certain quality that is first infused into the soul and then distributed through all the members. They cannot strip off the thoughts of reason, which declares that righteousness is a right judgment and a right will. Therefore this inestimable gift excels all reason, that without any works God reckons and acknowledges as righteous the man who takes hold by faith of His Son, who was sent into the world, who was born, who suffered, and who was crucified for us.

So far as the words are concerned, this fact is easy, namely, that righteousness is not in us in a formal sense, as Aristotle maintains, but is outside us, solely in the grace of God and in His imputation, In us there is nothing of the form or of the righteousness except that weak faith or the first fruits of faith by which we have begun to take hold of Christ. Meanwhile sin truly remains within us. But the fact itself is not easy or trivial; it is serious and important, because the Christ who is given to us has not done something meager for us and has not been playing. But, as Paul said earlier (Gal. 2:20), He “loved us and gave Himself for us”; and (Gal. 3:13) “He became a curse for us.” It is not an idle speculation that Christ was given for my sins and was made accursed for me in order that I might be rescued from eternal death. To take hold of the Son and to believe

in Him with the heart as the gift of God causes God to reckon that faith, however imperfect it may be, as perfect righteousness. **Here we are in an altogether different world—a world that is outside reason. Here the issue is not what we ought to do or by what sort of works we may merit grace and the forgiveness of sins. No, here we are in a divine theology, where we hear the Gospel that Christ died for us and that when we believe this we are reckoned as righteous, even though sins, and great ones at that, still remain in us.**

This is also how Christ defines the righteousness of faith in the Gospel of John. He says (John 16:27): “The Father Himself loves you. Why does He love you? Not because you were Pharisees, irreproachable in the righteousness of the Law, circumcised, doing good works, fasting, etc. But it is because ‘I chose you out of the world’ (John 15:19). And you have not done anything except that ‘you have loved Me and have believed that I came from the Father.’ This object, this ‘I’ sent from the Father into the world, this pleased you. And because you have taken hold of this object, the Father loves you, and you please Him.” Nevertheless, in another passage He calls them evil and tells them to ask for the forgiveness of sins. These two things are diametrically opposed: that a Christian is righteous and beloved by God, and yet that he is a sinner at the same time. For God cannot deny His own nature. That is, He cannot avoid hating sin and sinners; and He does so by necessity, for otherwise He would be unjust and would love sin. Then how can these two contradictory things both be true at the same time, that I am a sinner and deserve divine wrath and hate, and that the Father loves me? Here nothing can intervene except Christ the Mediator. “The Father,” He says, “loves you, not because you are deserving of love, but because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from the Father” (John 16:27).

Thus a Christian remains in pure humility. He really and truly feels that there is sin in him and that on this account he is worthy of wrath, the judgment of God, and eternal death. Thus he is humbled in this life. Yet at the same time he remains in a pure and holy pride, by which he turns to Christ. Through Him he strengthens himself against this feeling of divine wrath and judgment; and he believes that he is loved by the Father, not for his own sake but for the sake of Christ, the Beloved.

From this it is clear how faith justifies without works and how the imputation of righteousness is necessary nevertheless. Sins remain in us, and God hates them very much. Because of them it is necessary for us to have the imputation of righteousness, which comes to us on account of Christ, who is given to us and grasped by our faith. Meanwhile, as long as we are alive, we are supported and nourished at the bosom of divine mercy and forbearance, until the body of sin (Rom. 6:6) is abolished and we are raised up as new beings on that Day. Then there will be new heavens and a new earth (Rev. 21:1), in which righteousness will dwell. *Under the present heaven meanwhile sin and wicked men dwell, and the godly have sin. Therefore Paul complains in Rom. 7:23 about the sin that still remains in the saints, and yet he says later on (Rom. 8:1) that “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Who will reconcile those utterly conflicting statements, that the sin in us is not sin, that he who is damnable will not be damned, that he who is rejected will not be rejected, that he who is worthy of wrath and eternal death will not receive these punishments? Only the Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5). As Paul says, “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*¹

¹ Luther, M. (1999). [Luther's works, vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4](#). (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 26, pp. 232–236). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.