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THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS AND ST. PAUL'S
EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty
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THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS AND ST. PAUL'S

EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

INTRODUCTION

In the preface to the Augsburg Confession, the signers state that they

offer and present a confession of our pastors' and preachers' teaching and of our own faith, setting forth how and in what manner, on the basis of the Holy Scriptures (German: Aus Grund gottlicher heiligen Schrift; Latin: Ex scripturis sancto et puro verbo Dei) these things are preached, taught, communicated and embraced in our lands, principalities, dominions, cities, and territories.¹

With these words, the Augsburg Confession sets the basis for its teaching in the words of Holy Scripture. Much has been written on the subject of the relationship between the Lutheran Confessions and the Holy Scriptures. However, this relationship is much more than the Confessions affirming Scriptural authority as the "only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated."² The relationship of the Confessions to the Scriptures must also be seen in light of their use of the Scriptures. This is where an attitude is put into practical expression.

Edmund Schlink maintains that "Confessions in their proper sense will never be taken seriously until they are taken seriously as exposition of the Scriptures, to be specific, as the church's exposition of the Scriptures."³ If we are to understand

what the Lutheran Confessions teach we must investigate their use of Scripture. In fact, a proper attitude toward the Confessions can occur only after we have seen how they treat Christian doctrine in the light of the Scriptures.

Since the Confessions insist on being recognized as exposition of Scripture, only that response takes them seriously which affirms or rejects them on the basis of Scripture. This presupposes the discovering of the exegetical principles on which the confessional articles rest. In this connection special attention must be given to the Scripture quotations found in the Confessions themselves.⁴

A casual glance at the number of Scripture references found in the index to the Lutheran Confessions shows how many times the Word is quoted or referred to in them. As Schlink says again:

We observe, first, the frequency of quotations from Scripture and the importance of their position. Most of the quotations in the Augsburg Confession are from Scripture and they have the character of decisive and conclusive proof. Since they are frequently found at the end of an article they confirm the previously made statements as doctrine.⁵

Hence, the Scripture quotations in the Confessions serve a purpose. They affirm the teaching being presented by quoting Scriptural authority. The quotations are not simply stacked up to convince someone by the overwhelming weight of numbers. Rather each passage is selected for a specific reason. Fagerberg uses the example of Melanchthon in showing the care in which Scripture passages were used. "In the course of his presentation in the Apology, Melanchthon makes detailed references to the Bible, and he justifies his most important doctrinal assertions by careful exegetical analysis"⁶

Any real understanding of the Lutheran Confessions must begin with a look at their use of Holy Scripture for the "truth of a Confession is based expressly on the great number of Bible passages which proclaim this truth; a Confession is the comprehensive exposition of the total Scripture."⁷

This paper will investigate the use of Scripture by the Lutheran Confessions in their presentation of important Scriptural teachings. Such an undertaking, however, would be monumental in character if some way were not found to limit the scope of the presentation. For this reason, passages from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans which are quoted in the Confessions will be used as the basis for this study. Most of the passages referred to will be ones which are quoted directly rather than merely cited unless there is some point of interest in the cited passage.

The Epistle to the Romans plays a major role in the Lutheran Confessions. According to the index in Tappert's edition of the Book of Concord, Romans is quoted or cited approximately 280 times in the Lutheran Confessions.⁷ Such a relationship is a natural one when consideration is given to the great doctrinal exposition which Romans is. St. Paul's careful enunciation of the doctrine of justification by faith is the major teaching of the epistle. This emphasis, which is also central in the Lutheran Confessions, points out their natural affinity. During the time of the Reformation, Romans was an effective instrument in the proclamation of the Gospel. Lenski has summarized well the importance of this epistle in

the following words:

The great Lutheran Confessions, written in that magnificent era of the church were founded in large part on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, beside which was placed Galatians. . . . To this day the truth laid down in Romans forms the Gibraltar basis of doctrine, teaching, and confession in the true evangelical church.⁹

In the same connection, Martin Luther highly prized the Epistle to the Romans and wrote in his Prefaces to the New Testament:

This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest Gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. We can never read it or ponder over it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes.¹⁰

With these things in mind, we will proceed to explore how the Lutheran Confessions, as a faithful exposition of Holy Scripture, use the Epistle to the Romans in presenting the following doctrines: The Law and its relationship to sinful man; the Gospel and Christ (Justification through faith); the Means of Grace; the Christian Life; the doctrine of election; and a concluding section on how the use of the Epistle to the Romans exemplifies the confessional view of Scripture. In looking at these areas of doctrine, we will be finding in the Epistle to the Romans those very things which have made it a treasure house of comfort, instruction and encouragement since the Apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote it for the sake of the church at Rome and for our sake over 1900 years ago. "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction...." (Romans 15:4)

Notes to Introduction

¹Augsburg Confession, Preface, 8. All quotations cited from the Lutheran Confessions are quoted from The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959). References cited in German or Latin are from Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, 2. verbesserte Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1952). All references will be made to specific paragraphs in the Confessions and for the sake of simplicity the following abbreviations will be used:

AC = Augsburg Confession

Ap = Apology

SA = Smalcald Articles

SC = Small Catechism

LC = Large Catechism

Ep = Formula of Concord, Epitome

SD = Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration

²SD, Rule and Norm, 3.

³Edmund Schlink, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions, translated by Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. xvi.

⁴Ibid., p. xix.

⁵Ibid., p. 2.

⁶Holsten Fagerberg, A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions, (1529-1537), translated by Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), p. 15.

⁷Schlink, p. 15.

⁸cf. Tappert, p. 643-645.

⁹Richard Charles Henry Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945), p. 8.

¹⁰Martin Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 365.

CHAPTER I

THE LAW AND SIN

The Epistle to the Romans has much to say about the Law and its function in revealing sin and accusing the sinner. It also speaks of man's natural condition and his inability to save himself. As Luther says in his preface to Romans:

It is right for a preacher of the Gospel in the first place by revelation of the law and of sin to rebuke and to constitute as sin everything that is not the living fruit of the Spirit and of faith in Christ, in order that men should be led to know themselves and their own wretchedness, and to become humble and ask for help. This is therefore what St. Paul does. He begins in chapter 1 to rebuke the gross sins and unbelief that are plainly evident. ... In chapter 2 he extends his rebuke to include those who seem outwardly to be righteous and who commit their sins in secret. ... In chapter 3 he throws them all together in a heap, and says that one is like the other: they are all sinners before God.¹

The Lutheran Confessions also proclaim the Law and man's sin by references to the Epistle to the Romans. The fact that man is a sinner because of Adam's Fall is taught on the basis of Romans 5:12. "Here we must confess what St. Paul says in Rom. 5:12, namely, that sin had its origin in one man, Adam, through whose disobedience all men were made sinners."² "Through Satan's scheme, 'by one man sin (which is the work of the devil) entered into the world.'"³ Because of sin, man's condition is one in which he is unable to help himself or free himself from the power of sin. This condition is

universal.

The Confessions amply illustrate the universality of sin by quoting Romans 3:11, 12: "No one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one." Of this passage the Confessions say: "In this way Scripture calls the natural man simply 'darkness' in spiritual and divine things."⁴

Thus Scripture denies to the intellect, heart, and will of the natural man every capacity, aptitude, skill, and ability to think anything good or right in spiritual matters, to understand them, to begin them, to will them, to undertake them, to do them, to accomplish or to cooperate in them as of himself. ... "They are all incompetent." (Rom. 3:12--German: Sie sind allesampt untüchtig.)⁵

The Confessions also recognize the fact that man's will is set against God. St. Paul's words in Romans 8:7-8 are used several times in this connection.

... We believe, teach, and confess that man's unregenerated will is not only turned away from God, but has also become an enemy of God, so that he desires and wills only that which is evil and opposed to God, as it is written "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God...."⁶

Concerning this text, Melancthon says: "These words are so clear that they do not need an acute understanding but only attentive listening--to use the words that Augustine uses in discussing this matter."⁷

This enmity which man has against God as seen in Romans 8:7-8 is also explained in the Confessions in another way with reference to man's inability to contribute to his salvation:

Much less will he be able truly to believe the Gospel, give his assent to it, and accept it as

truth. For the mind that is set on the flesh (the natural man's understanding) "is hostile to God, it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot."⁸

So, in man's sinful nature there is nothing pleasing to God. As the Apology says, "And Rom. 3:23 says, 'All fall short of the glory of God,' that is, they lack the wisdom and righteousness of God which acknowledge and glorify him."⁹

The Confessions come face to face with this sad state of men and their failure to please God. The words of St. Paul again are used to describe this self-recognition of sin on the part of man, an action which is brought about by the law. "And Paul himself complains (Rom. 7:23) that in his flesh he was a captive to 'the law of sin.'"¹⁰ Luther says, "As long as we are in the flesh we shall not be untruthful if we say, 'I am a poor man, full of sin. I see in my members another law,' etc. (Rom. 7:23)."¹¹

It is by the law then, that men are brought face to face with their sin. In the final analysis the law shows men God's anger at sin. The law condemns and accuses.

However, the chief function or power of the law is to make original sin manifest and show man to what utter depths his nature has fallen and how corrupt it has become. ... Thus he is terror stricken and humbled, becomes despondent and despairing, anxiously desires help but does not know where to find it, and begins to be alienated from God, to murmur, etc. This is what is meant by Rom. 4:15, "The law brings wrath," and Rom. 5:20, "Law came in to increase the trespass."¹²

The words of St. Paul in Romans 4:15 are used several times in the Apology to emphasize the work of the law in its accusatory function. "Paul says (Rom. 4:15), 'The law brings

wrath.' He does not say that by the law men merit the forgiveness of sins."¹³ "It always accuses the conscience, which does not satisfy the law and therefore flees in terror before the judgment and punishment of the law, 'for the law brings wrath.'"¹⁴ "For the law will always accuse us because we never satisfy the law of God. As Paul says (Rom. 4:15)"¹⁵ To show that the accusatory function of the law continues in the New Testament Luther uses Romans 1:18: "This function of the law is retained and taught by the New Testament. So Paul says in Rom. 1:18, 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men.'"¹⁶ The Formula of Concord makes the following comment on this passage: "Then 'God's wrath is revealed from heaven' over all sinners, and men learn how fierce it is."¹⁷

The Confessions are very cognizant of the fact that this function of the law is of great importance. "For as Luther says against the nomoclasts, 'Everythings that rebukes sin is and belongs to the law, the proper function of which is to condemn sin and to lead to a knowledge of sin.' (Rom. 3:20; 7:7)."¹⁸

All the Scriptures and the church proclaim that the law cannot be satisfied. ... Without this faith in Christ, the law always accuses us. For who loves or fears God enough? ... Who lives up to the requirements of his calling? ... Therefore St. Paul says (Rom. 7:19), "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Again (Rom. 7:25), "I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." Here he openly says that he serves the law of sin."¹⁹

Because of sin and its terrible consequences in human lives, there is no salvation possible by depending upon the

law. In making this point, the Confessions once again use Romans extensively. "Without his grace our 'will and effort' ... are in vain unless he 'gives the growth.'"²⁰

If the forgiveness of sins depended upon our merits and if reconciliation were by the law, it would be useless. For since we do not keep the law, it would follow that we would never obtain the promise of reconciliation. So Paul reasons in Rom. 4:14, "If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void."²¹

Man cannot hope to succeed in keeping the law because "men really sin when they do virtuous things without the Holy Spirit; for they do them with a wicked heart, and (Rom. 14: 23) 'whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.'"²² Regarding a man who lives under the law the Formula of Concord says:

St. Paul calls the works of such a man "works of the law" in the strict sense, because his good works are extorted by the law, just as in the case of bond-servants. Such people are saints after the order of Cain. (Latin adds: hoc est, hypocritae)²³

We see the teaching of the Law amply delineated in the Lutheran Confessions by quotations and explanations from the Epistle to the Romans. The result of this teaching can only be despair for as the Formula of Concord says concerning sin's results: "The only cause of man's damnation is sin, for the 'wages of sin is death.' (Rom. 6:23)."²⁴ Thankfully, St. Paul in Romans 6:23 does not end with this thought but goes on to speak of the free gift of God. The Lutheran Confessions have a great deal to say about this free gift also on the basis of the Epistle to the Romans.

Notes to Chapter I

- ¹Luther, Works, v.35, p. 372-373.
- ²SA, III, I, 1.
- ³SD, I, 7.
- ⁴SD, II, 10.
- ⁵SD, II, 12.
- ⁶Ep, II, 3. Similarly used in SD, II, 17.
- ⁷Ap, IV, 32.
- ⁸SD, II, 17.
- ⁹Ap, IV, 32.
- ¹⁰SA, III, VII, 1.
- ¹¹SA, III, VIII, 2. Also quoted along with Romans 7:14 in SD, II, 7.
- ¹²SA, III, II, 4-5.
- ¹³Ap, IV, 38.
- ¹⁴Ap, IV, 270.
- ¹⁵Ap, XII, 88.
- ¹⁶SA, III, III, 1. Also quotes Romans 3:19-20.
- ¹⁷Ep, VI, 8.
- ¹⁸SD, V, 17.
- ¹⁹Ap, IV, 167-168. Romans 7:7 is quoted along with Romans 7:23 in a similar way in Ap, II, 38-39.
- ²⁰Ep, II, 6. An allusion to Romans 9:16 and 1 Cor. 3:7.
- ²¹Ap, IV, 42.
- ²²Ap, IV, 35. This passage is also used to show man's failure to do good without faith in Ap, XII, 85; XV, 17; XXVII, 23; SD, IV, 8.
- ²³SD, VI, 16. An allusion to Rom. 2:15 and 3:20.
- ²⁴SD, XI, 81.

CHAPTER II

THE GOSPEL (JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH)

"Paul calls eternal life a 'gift' (Rom. 6:23) because the righteousness bestowed on us for Christ's sake at the same time makes us sons of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17)."¹ This quotation makes a good introduction to the subject which we are about to consider. It also shows how much the Lutheran Confessions are dependent upon the Epistle to the Romans in their teaching of justification. On several occasions the Confessions actually outline large portions of Romans to get across their point. Such a dependence can be considered only natural when one recognizes justification by faith as the central theme in Romans. St. Paul himself sets the theme for this epistle when he writes in chapter 1:16-17: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel.... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" In looking at the topic of justification we shall discuss the person and work of Jesus Christ, justification itself, and faith without works.

As he sets forth the chief features in the doctrine of justification, Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles:

The first and chief article is this, that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, "was put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). ... Moreover, "all have sinned," and "they

are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, by his blood" (Rom. 3:23-25).²

From this quotation we can see that the proper understanding of the person and work of Christ is central to the doctrine of justification.

The Confessions speak of Jesus Christ, the true God and true man, without hesitation. The Formula of Concord quotes Luther's "Concerning the Last Words of David" to show that Christ is the Son of God:

From eternity I have this authority from the Father before I became man, but when I became man I received it in time according to the humanity and concealed it until my resurrection and ascension, when it was to have been revealed and demonstrated, as St. Paul says, "He is designated the Son of God in power" (Rom. 1:4)"³

The Formula of Concord, when speaking of Christ's two natures and their distinctiveness, says using Romans 1:3:

On the contrary, it is distinctly explained according to which nature the property in question is being ascribed to the person. Thus for example, "the Son was descended from David according to the flesh"....⁴

As Christ's human nature is affirmed using Romans, His divine nature is also confessed using the doxology of St. Paul in Romans 9:5:

Christ Jesus is henceforth in one person simultaneously true eternal God, born of the Father from eternity, and also a true man, born of the most blessed virgin Mary, as it is written, "Of their race, according to the flesh is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever"⁵

The use of this passage in this way is of great interest especially when it is contrasted with the reading adopted by the Revised Standard Version: "... is the Christ. God who is

over all be blessed forever. Amen." The Confessions have made an exegetical decision in the use of this text to show the divinity of Christ.⁶

The work of Christ is also presented by the Confessions. Jesus Christ's obedience to the will of the Father including his death upon the cross is part of the work of salvation. He is the second Adam.

This obedience is our righteousness which avails before God and is revealed in the Gospel, upon which faith depends before God and which God reckons to faith, as it is written, "For as by one man's disobedience many will be made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19)
....?

Using quotations from Romans Christ's work is also presented as our access to the Father. He is the Propitiator. "We know that the merits of Christ are our only propitiation. Because of them we are accounted righteous when we believe in him, as the text says (Rom. 9:33), 'He who believes in him will not be put to shame.'"⁸ "Thus Paul says in Rom. 5:2, 'Through him we have obtained access' to the Father and he adds 'through faith!'" In this way we are reconciled to the Father and receive the forgiveness of sins"⁹ Melancthon says of this passage speaking of Christ as the one who gives us access to the Father: "We stress this statement so often because it is so clear. It summarizes our case very well"¹⁰ Christ is also seen as the perfect sacrifice and sin offering. In a comment on Isaiah 53:10 the Apology appeals to the Apostle Paul:

Paul interprets the same word as "sin" in Rom. 8:3,

"As a sin offering he condemned sin," that is, through an offering for sin. ... Isaiah and Paul mean that Christ became a sacrificial victim or trespass offering to reconcile God by his merits instead of ours.¹¹

Christ's work must be applied however to sinners. By grace we who are sinners are accounted righteous for Christ's sake through faith. The doctrine of justification by faith is the major teaching in the Lutheran Confessions--it is the central teaching of all Scripture. In the extensive treatment given this subject, Romans is used time and again. We see first how it is used in the definition of the word "justify." "... According to the usage of Scripture the word 'justify' means in this article 'absolve,' that is, pronounce free from sin. ... 'Who shall bring any charges against God's elect. It is God who justifies' (Rom. 8:33)."¹² In speaking of Romans 5:1, "Since we are justified by faith we have peace with God," the word justify is explained in this way: "In this passage justify is used in a judicial way to mean 'to absolve a guilty man and pronounce him righteous,'"¹³

Justification is based upon the promises of God, not on our own efforts. It is given freely as a gift of God's grace.

Therefore we must always go back to the promise. This must sustain us in our weakness, and we must firmly believe that we are accounted righteous on account of Christ, "who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us." (Rom. 8:34)¹⁴

Or again, as the Apology says:

This promise is not conditional upon our merits but offers the forgiveness of sins and justification freely. As Paul says (Rom. 11:6), "If it is by works, it is no longer on the basis of grace." Elsewhere he says, "Now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law" (Rom. 3:21), that

is, the forgiveness of sins is offered freely.¹⁵

The gift of justification also includes the promise of eternal life.

We have shown above that justification is strictly a gift of God, it is a thing promised. To this gift the promise of eternal life has been added according to Rom. 8:30, "Those whom he justified he also glorified."¹⁶

This righteousness is available to the whole world and becomes ours through the gift of faith. As the Formula of Concord succinctly puts it, "Righteousness 'comes through faith in Christ to all and on all who believe.'"¹⁷ The Confessions make the Epistle to the Romans a primary source book on this subject.

In the Epistle to the Romans, especially, Paul deals with this subject and states that when we believe that God is reconciled to us for Christ's sake we are justified freely by faith. In chapter 3 he advances this conclusion, embodying the basic issue of the whole discussion: "We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom. 3:28).¹⁸

Faith justifies. This point is made clear by the following quotations based upon Romans (especially chapters 3 and 4).

Because the righteousness of Christ is given to us through faith therefore faith is righteousness in us by imputation. That is, by it we are made acceptable to God because of God's imputation and ordinances, as Paul says (Rom. 4:5), "Faith is reckoned as righteousness."¹⁹

And lest we suppose that Paul made the statement "Faith justifies" inadvertantly, he reinforces and confirms it with a long discussion in Rom. 4 and repeats it later in all his epistles. In Rom. 4:4,5 he says, "To one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due. And to one who does not work but trusts in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness." Here he clearly says that faith is accounted for righteousness. ... And afterwards (Rom 4:9) Paul

says, "We say that faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness." In Rom. 5:1 he says, "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God," that is, our consciences are tranquil and joyful before God, and in Rom. 10:10, "Man believes with his heart and so is justified," where he declares that faith is the righteousness of the heart.²⁰

A whole series of passages from Romans are quoted here to show how the doctrine of justification is based on numerous texts. The same methodology is used in the Formula of Concord.

Thus the following statements of St. Paul are to be considered and taken as synonymous: "We are justified by faith" (Rom. 3:28), or, "faith is reckoned to us as righteousness" (Rom. 4:5), or when he says that we are justified by the obedience of Christ, our only mediator, or that "one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men" (Rom. 5:18).²¹

This faith which justifies must not be mingled with works of any kind. The principle of sola fide was stressed very emphatically by the Lutheran Confessions. The Smalcald Articles say that

... it is clear and certain that such faith alone justifies us, as St. Paul says in Rom. 3, "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom. 3:28), and again, "that he [God] himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).²²

Not even sorrow over sin or contrition can be considered a part of faith.

But when St. Paul says, "We are justified by faith apart from works" (Rom. 3:28), he indicates thereby that neither the preceding contrition nor the subsequent works belong in the article or matter of justification by faith.²³

The fact that men are saved has nothing to do with good works.

Good works should be excluded from the article of man's salvation. The Apostle affirms in clear terms, "So also David declares that salvation pertains only to the man to whom God reckons righteousness

apart from works, saying, 'Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven'"²⁴

Just as David is used as an example of salvation by faith so also Abraham is shown to have been saved by faith.

... St. Paul raises this question (Rom. 4:1); On what did the righteousness of Abraham before God, whereby he had a gracious God and was pleasing and acceptable to him to eternal life, rest? To this he answers: "To one who does not work, but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Rom. 4: 5,6)²⁵

In emphasizing the fact that salvation is by faith alone, the Confessions found themselves opposed by those who disliked the word "alone". In answering these people, the Confessions appeal to the Apostle Paul.

The particle "alone" offends some people, even though Paul says (Rom 3:28), "We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law," ... and again (Rom. 3:24), "They are justified by his grace as a gift." If they dislike the exclusive particle "alone," let them remove the other exclusive terms from Paul, too, like "freely," "not of works," "it is a gift," etc., for these terms are also exclusive.²⁶

Or, as the Formula of Concord states: "Thus the holy apostle Paul uses such expressions as 'by grace,' 'without merit,' 'without the law,' 'without works,' 'not by works,' etc."²⁷ This is an example of how even individual words of Scripture are given tremendous authority in answering objections. These terms are the particulae exclusivae which Paul uses to describe faith without works.

The opponents of the Reformation were not willing to surrender Romans without a fight. They also used it to support their position. Here is an example of how the Confessions answer their objections:

Here our opponents urge against us the texts ... (Matt. 19:17) ..., "The doers of the law will be justified" (Romans 2:13), and many similar passages regarding the law and works.²⁸

Melanchthon replies:

"To be justified" here does not mean that a wicked man is made righteous but that he is pronounced righteous in a forensic way, just as in the passage (Rom. 2:13), "the doers of the law will be justified." ... As we have said, the good works of the saints are righteous and please God because of faith. ... In this sense it is said, "The doers of the law will be justified," that is, God pronounces righteous those who believe him from their heart and then have good fruits, which please him because of faith and therefore are a keeping of the law.²⁹

This is a good example of how the analogy of faith is used to explain a passage which could cause difficulties. Lenski interprets this passage in much the same way: "The 'doers of law' are those who by faith and a new heart actually do what God bids and by their doing demonstrate their faith"³⁰

Faith is also something which is discussed in the Confessions as to what it is. Once again, St. Paul is the teacher. "Paul clearly shows that faith does not mean mere historical knowledge but is a firm acceptance of the promise (Rom. 4:16): 'That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may be guaranteed.'"³¹ Faith also involves a confession:

Paul says (Rom. 10:10), "Man believes with his heart and so is justified and he confesses with his lips and so is saved." ... Paul says that confession saves in order to show what kind of faith obtains eternal life, a faith that is firm and active. No faith is firm that does not show itself in confession.³²

In the work of justification, the forgiveness of sins is offered to those who have faith, even the troubled in

conscience. "...It is certain that sins are forgiven because of Christ, the propitiator, according to Rom. 3:25, 'Whom God put forward as an expiation,' and Paul adds, 'to be received by faith.'"³³ This forgiveness which comes by faith is based upon the promises of God in Scripture:

But it is very sure, though all the gates of hell cry out against it, that the forgiveness of sins cannot be accepted by anything but faith alone, according to Rom. 3:25, "Whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith," and Rom. 5:2, "Through him we have obtained access by faith to this grace."³⁴

Or again as the Apology says:

Anyone who looks will find many passages in Scripture to set his mind at ease for Paul fairly screams as it were, that sins are freely forgiven for Christ's sake. He says, "We are justified by his grace as a gift" (Rom. 3:24) "in order that the promise may be guaranteed" (Rom. 4:16).³⁵

From the above, we have seen how the article of justification is presented in the Lutheran Confessions on the basis of the Epistle to the Romans. Many passages were used in this discussion. One passage, however, is used extensively in the Apology and can serve as the summary for this chapter. It is Romans 5:1: "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The Augsburg Confession sets the stage for the use of this passage in the Apology when it says: "The conscience cannot come to rest and peace through works, but only through faith, that is, when it is assured and knows that for Christ's sake it has a gracious God as Paul says in Rom. 5:1,"³⁶ As the Augustana points out man cannot find peace in himself or in

his works. "This is evident in terrors of conscience, for we cannot set any works of ours against the wrath of God as Paul clearly says (Rom. 5:1)"³⁷ Here the passage is used in the opposite way that one might expect. The argument appears to be: The only way one can obtain peace with God is by faith, works will not do. "But the conscience cannot find peace with God except by faith alone, by which it is sure that God is reconciled to us for Christ's sake, according to the saying (Rom. 5:1)"³⁸ "There can be no forgiveness of sins and no conquest of the terrors of death and sin through any work or anything else but faith in Christ as we read (Rom. 5:1)"³⁹

Faith is the only strength and confidence we need. "This faith strengthens, sustains, and quickens the contrite according to the passage (Rom. 5:1) This faith obtains the forgiveness of sins."⁴⁰ Even when doubts assail us we can have a sure hope.

Against these doubts Paul says (Rom. 5:1), "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God"; we ought to be utterly sure that righteousness and eternal life are given us freely for Christ's sake. And of Abraham he says (Rom. 4:18), "In hope he believed against hope."⁴¹

This is the promise of God to us which is "so firm and sure that it can prevail against all the gates of hell."⁴² With St. Paul we can confess, "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notes to Chapter II

¹Ap, IV, 356.

²SA, II, II, 1,3. Rom. 4:25 is also quoted in SD, VI, 22 in a similar way: "...every penitent sinner must believe-- that is, he must put his confidence solely on the Lord Jesus Christ, "who was put to death'"

³SD, VIII, 85.

⁴SD, VIII, 37.

⁵SD, VIII, 6.

⁶See the discussion of this text in Martin Franzmann, Romans, Concordia Commentary Series (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p. 169-170. He does a good job explaining the reluctance of critical scholars to adopt the reading used by the Confessions.

⁷SD, IV, 67.

⁸Ap, XXI, 31.

⁹Ap, IV, 81. Also Ap, IV, 269, 297.

¹⁰Ap, IV, 314.

¹¹Ap, XXIV, 23.

¹²Ep, III, 17. Also SD, III, 17.

¹³Ap, IV, 305.

¹⁴Ap, IV, 165.

¹⁵Ap, IV, 41.

¹⁶Ap, IV, 362. Also Ap, IV, 196.

¹⁷SD, XI, 28. A quotation of Rom. 3:22.

¹⁸Ap, IV, 87.

¹⁹Ap, IV, 307.

²⁰Ap, IV, 89-92.

²¹SD, III, 12.

²²SA, II, I, 4.

²³SD, III, 27.

²⁴Ep, IV, 7. Rom. 4:6-8. See also Ap, IV, 163.

²⁵SD, III, 34.

²⁶Ap, IV, 73.

²⁷Ep, IV, 10. Scripture references include Rom. 3:20, 21, 24, 28; 6:46; 11:6. Another passage which is used in connection with sola fide occurs in the following from SD, VI, 34: "In other words he [Paul] attributes to faith alone the beginning, the middle and the end of everything. Likewise he says, 'They were broken off because of their unbelief, and you stand fast only through faith' (Rom. 11:20)."

²⁸Ap, IV, 122.

²⁹Ap, IV, 252.

³⁰Lenski, Romans, p. 160.

³¹Ap, IV, 50. See also the usage of Rom. 4:16 in Ap, IV, 84; XII, 81.

³²Ap, IV, 383, 384.

³³Ap, IV, 82.

³⁴Ap, XII, 63.

³⁵Ap, XXI, 10.

³⁶AC, XX, 15-16.

³⁷Ap, IV, 195.

³⁸Ap, IV, 217.

³⁹Ap, XXIV, 60. Also XXIV, 89.

⁴⁰Ap, XII, 36.

⁴¹Ap, IV, 320.

⁴²Ap, XXIV, 12.

CHAPTER III

THE MEANS OF GRACE

The great and glorious message of salvation in Christ must be made known to men. For this reason God gave the means of grace--the Word and the Sacraments--as the instruments by which the Holy Spirit works faith. The Lutheran Confessions address themselves to the question of the means of grace. They again make use of quotations from the Epistle to the Romans. In particular, two passages receive special emphasis--Romans 1:16 and 10:17. In this chapter, we shall consider the means of grace in general, then look at the Word and the Sacraments as they are presented in the Confessions from the viewpoint of Romans.

How is it that man can learn about God's gift of salvation? In answer to this question the Formula of Concord states: "We must learn about Christ from the holy Gospel alone, which clearly testifies that 'God has consigned all men to disobedience that he may have mercy upon all' (Rom. 11:32)"¹ The gift of faith comes when we learn of Christ from the Gospel.

St. Paul calls the Gospel the "power of God" in Romans 1:16. This passage is used by the Confessions in describing the power and function of the Word and the means of grace in general.

These gifts of office of the keys--forgiveness of sins, cannot be obtained except through the office of preaching and administering the holy sacraments, for St. Paul says, "The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith."²

God's Word is not like some empty tale, such as the one about Dietrich of Bern, but as St. Paul says in Rom. 1:16, it is "the power of God," indeed the power of God which burns the devil and gives us immeasurable strength, comfort, and help.³

In the ministry, all who serve should find their strength in this "power of God," for "the ministry of the Word has God's command and glorious promises"⁴

The key passage in Romans which speaks of the effects of the means of grace is Romans 10:17. The Word has a definite effect upon people who hear it. It produces faith. "Therefore justification takes place through the Word, as Paul says (Rom. 1:16) ... and (Rom. 10:17), 'Faith comes from what is heard.'⁵ Several other quotations also illustrate the use of this passage.

And it is God's will to call men to eternal salvation, to draw them to himself, convert them, beget them anew, and sanctify them through this means and in no other way--namely, through his holy Word (when one hears it preached or reads it) and the sacraments (when they are used according to his Word). ... "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).⁶

In order that we may come to Christ, the Holy Spirit creates true faith through the hearing of God's Word, as the apostle testifies, ... (Rom. 10:17) when it is preached in sincerity and purity.⁷

This passage is also used in connection with absolution: "In speaking of faith, therefore, we also include absolution since 'faith comes from what is heard,' as Paul says (Rom. 10:17)."⁸

The Word is present not only when it is preached or read,

it is also present in the Sacraments and in this instance also it is effective. "Through the Word and the rite God simultaneously moves the heart to believe and take hold of faith, as Paul says (Rom. 10:17), "Faith comes from what is heard."⁹ In speaking of the sacraments as signs of grace the Apology uses the example of circumcision which St. Paul calls a "sign or seal" in Romans 4:11. "Therefore the Word offers forgiveness of sins, while the ceremony is a sort of picture or "seal," as Paul calls it (Rom. 4:11), showing forth the promise. ... For the Holy Spirit works through the Word and the sacraments."¹⁰ As circumcision was part of the covenant of grace in the Old Testament so the Sacraments form an essential part of the covenant of grace in the New Testament.

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism has only one major reference made to it based upon the Epistle to the Romans. This occurs in the Small Catechism.

What does such baptizing with water signify?

Answer: It signifies that the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God's presence.

Where is this written?

Answer: In Romans 6:4, St. Paul wrote, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."¹¹

The text from Romans is used as a sedes doctrinae for the regeneration which takes place in Holy Baptism.

The Epistle to the Romans is not known for its extensive

treatment of the Lord's Supper. The major Scriptural teaching on the Sacrament of the Altar comes from the Gospels and Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. There are, however, several incidental references concerning the Lord's Supper in the Confessions based upon Romans. In speaking of the presence of Christ in the Sacrament, the Apology says: "We are talking about the presence of the living Christ, knowing that "death no longer has dominion over him."¹² In discussing the idea of the scholastics that the sacraments work ex opere operato the Apology says in opposition: "In fact, Augustine says the opposite: that faith in the sacrament, and not the sacrament, justifies. And Paul's statement is familiar (Rom. 10:10), 'Man believes with his heart and so is justified."¹³ Finally, when the question is asked who should attend the Lord's Supper, the Formula of Concord, in showing that the Sacrament was intended for "timid, perturbed Christians ... who consider themselves unworthy of this noble treasure," quotes Romans 14:1,3 along with several other Scripture passages. "As for a man who is weak in faith, welcome him, for God has welcomed him."¹⁴

With the high regard that the Lutheran Confessions show the means of grace it is evident that nothing else, no matter how holy it looks, must interfere with the Gospel. "Therefore we must not believe that they [human traditions] are necessary for righteousness before God. He [Paul] says the same in Rom. 14:17, 'The kingdom of God does not mean food or drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."¹⁵ "Thus

bishops have no right to create traditions apart from the Gospel as though they merited the forgiveness of sins or were acts of worship that pleased God as righteousness."¹⁶ With these words of warning, the Lutheran Confessions show their high regard for the means of grace--nothing should be added to hinder them.

Notes to Chapter III

- ¹Ep, XI, 10. Also, SD, XI, 28.
- ²AC, XXVIII, 9.
- ³LC, Preface, 1.
- ⁴Ap, XIII, 11. Followed by the quotation of Rom. 1:16.
- ⁵Ap, IV, 67.
- ⁶SD, II, 50-51.
- ⁷SD, XI, 69. Rom. 1:16 and 10:17 are used similarly in Ep, II, 4: "... the Holy Spirit ... does not effect conversion without means."
- ⁸Ap, XII, 39.
- ⁹Ap, XIII, 5.
- ¹⁰Ap, XXIV, 70.
- ¹¹SC, Holy Baptism [IV], 14.
- ¹²Ap, X, 4. A reference to Romans 6:9.
- ¹³Ap, XIII, 23.
- ¹⁴SD, VII, 69, 70.
- ¹⁵Ap, VII-VIII, 36.
- ¹⁶Ap, XXVIII, 7.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (SANCTIFICATION)

When a person has been justified he is in a new relationship with God. His life has been changed by the working of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Not only does the Epistle to the Romans teach justification, it also speaks of sanctification, showing what the new life in Christ is and warning against remaining in the snares of the flesh. At the same time the Apostle presents a healthy corrective against perfectionism as he discusses the continuing struggle between the Old Adam and the new man. Besides these theological points the book of Romans also speaks of practical applications of the Christian life in such areas as civic righteousness. All of these points are found in the Lutheran Confessions' discussion of the Christian life as they turn to the Epistle to the Romans.

St. Paul presents the basic principles of Christian sanctification in the beginning of Romans 12:

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (v.1-2)

In these words, St. Paul summarizes the content of the Christian life. The Confessions also make much of his concept of

"spiritual worship."

Spiritual sacrifices are contrasted not only with the sacrifices of cattle but also with human works offered ex opere operato, for "spiritual" refers to the operation of the Holy Spirit within us. Paul teaches the same in Romans 12:1: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice ... which is your spiritual worship." Spiritual worship is a worship in which the spirit knows and takes hold of God, as it does when it fears and trusts him.¹

This new life is seen by the Apology as genuine mortification of the flesh. "When this comes, we must obey God's will, as Paul says (Rom. 12:1), "Present your bodies as a sacrifice."²

In a word, there is no penitence inwardly which does not produce outwardly the punishing of the flesh. This, we say, is what ... Paul means, when he says (Rom. 6:19), "Yield your members to righteousness," and elsewhere (Rom. 12:1)"³

Another term used for the new life is rebirth which makes the difference between death and life. "This rebirth is, so to speak, the beginning of eternal life, as Paul says (Rom. 8:10), 'If Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead to sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness.'"⁴

For when the Holy Spirit has brought a person to faith and has justified him, a regeneration has indeed taken place because he has transformed a child of wrath into a child of God and thus has translated him from death into life, as it is written ... "He who through faith is righteous shall live." (Rom. 1:17)⁵

The regenerated man, justified by God, can do good. "And immediately he does good, as much and as long as the Holy Spirit motivates him, as St. Paul says, 'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.'"⁶

While the Confessions speak of the new life and its

good works, they also warn of the dangers to be found in failing to be wary of the power of the flesh.

We should often, with all diligence and earnestness, repeat and impress upon Christians who have been justified by faith these true, immutable, and divine threats and earnest punishments and admonitions: ... "If you live according to the flesh you will die." (Rom. 8:13)⁷

The Apology makes a similar warning:

And so it [faith] cannot exist in those who live according to the flesh, who take pleasure in their lusts and obey them. Therefore Paul says (Rom. 8:1), "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." And in Rom. 8:12, 13 he says, "We are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh--for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."⁸

The Confessions take very seriously the teaching that we are simul justus et peccator. The Old Adam must still be reckoned with. No Christian will ever completely be free from sin in this life. In chapter 7 of Romans, Paul uses his own life as an example of the struggle within the flesh. These verses are used by the Confessions to show the difficulties that the Christian must still face.

But in this life Christians are not renewed perfectly and completely. For although their sins are covered up through the perfect obedience of Christ ... nevertheless the Old Adam still clings to their nature and to all its internal and external powers. Concerning this the apostle writes, "I know that nothing good dwells within me." And again, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Likewise, "I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin."⁹

Christians may even have a struggle at times when they are doing good works. When the Formula of Concord speaks of

good works being done freely it adds the following: "However in the elect children of God, this spontaneity is not perfect, but they are still encumbered with much weakness as St. Paul complains of himself in Rom. 7:14-25"¹⁰ Sin is still very much a part of our lives. "As Paul says (Rom. 8:10), 'Your body is dead because of sin'; that is, it is being killed because of the sin still present and remaining in the flesh."¹¹

When Christians face the fact that even they cannot fulfill the demands of the law of God they can be comforted by the promises of God. "We do not satisfy the law, but for Christ's sake this is forgiven us as Paul says (Rom. 8:1), 'There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.'¹² The Formula of Concord also finds comfort in the same passage. "Nevertheless for Christ's sake the Lord does not reckon this weakness against his elect, as it is written, 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:1)."¹³

In concluding this section on the Christian life, we must look at how the Confessions use the practical instruction of Romans chapter 13. Luther, in his Prefaces to the New Testament, says of this chapter that Paul

teaches honor and obedience to worldly government. Although worldly government does not make people righteous before God, nevertheless it is instituted in order to accomplish at least this much, that the good may have outward peace and protection and the bad may not be free to do evil in peace and quietness, and without fear. Therefore the good too are to honor it even though they themselves do not need it.¹⁴

In the Confessions, quotations from Romans 13 occur in the Table of Duties under the headings "Governing Authorities" (Vom weltlicher Oberkeit) and "Duties Subjects Owe to Governing Authorities" (Was die Untertan der Oberkeit zu tun schuldig sind) and the summation of the Second Table of the Law, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" as it is quoted in Romans 13:9 occurs under the heading "Christians in General" (Der Gemeine).¹⁵ The Apology also deals with the subject of the Christian and his government:

For the Gospel does not destroy the state or the family but rather approves them, and it commands us to obey them as divine ordinances not only as from fear of punishment but also "for the sake of conscience" (Rom. 13:5).¹⁶

With these words we see the very practical application that is made by the Lutheran Confessions in their discussion of the Christian life.

Notes to Chapter IV

¹Ap, XXIV, 26. Also similar is Ap, XXIV, 88 which speaks of "reasonable service": "... Paul meant the service of the mind, fear, faith, prayer, thanksgiving, and the like, in opposition to a theory of ex opere operato."

²Ap, XV, 45.

³Ap, IV, 370-371.

⁴Ap, IV, 352.

⁵SD, III, 20.

⁶SD, II, 63. A quotation of Rom. 8:14.

⁷SD, IV, 32.

⁸Ap, IV, 143.

⁹SD, VI, 708. References to Romans 7:18, 19, 23. A similar thought in SD, II, 64.

¹⁰Ep, IV, 13.

¹¹Ap, XII, 152.

¹²Ap, IV, 308.

¹³Ep, V, 14.

¹⁴Luther, Works, v.35, p.379.

¹⁵SC, Table of Duties [IX], 4, 5, 14.

¹⁶Ap, XVI, 5.

CHAPTER V

ELECTION

There is one other major doctrine the Lutheran Confessions, especially Article XI of the Formula of Concord, emphasize which has its basis in much that is said in the Epistle to the Romans. This is the doctrine of election by grace. St. Paul speaks of this doctrine in chapters 8-11 of Romans. A study of the doctrine of election is really a review of the other doctrines we have looked at in this paper: justification, the means of grace, and the Christian life. As Francis Pieper says in defining election:

Eternal election includes not only a part of the ordo salutis, such as the final award of eternal life--"receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls"--after perseverance in faith unto the end (electio intuitu fidei finalis), but it embraces the entire way on which God leads the Christians to salvation, from their calling to their induction into glory.¹

This is what St. Paul writes:

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.²

Here he includes the whole order of salvation in election.

This is also the view which is taken by the Lutheran

Confessions as they speak of election, in defining it, in showing its relationship to the means of grace, in showing that election is a comforting doctrine, and in dealing with problems which occur in the discussion of election.

Election is in the first place an action of God's grace from eternity. "Before the creation of time, ... before we even existed, before we were able to have done any good, God elected us to salvation 'according to his purpose' by grace in Christ (Rom. 9:11; II Tim. 1:9)."³ There is nothing in us that makes us worthy of God's grace.

For not only before we had done any good, but even before we were born ... God elected us in Christ-- "in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, she was told, 'The elder will serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'" (Rom. 9:11-13; Gen. 25:23; Mal. 1:2,3).⁴

The Confessions make it abundantly clear that election is by grace and so uphold the principle of sola gratia.

As God elects, He is also the one who calls. "This is revealed to us ... as Paul says, 'Those whom God has fore-known, elected, and decreed, he has also called' (Rom. 8: 29, 30)."⁵ This call comes by the means of grace and a Christian should look at his election only in this light.

The Christian is to concern himself with the doctrine of the eternal election of God only in so far as it is revealed in the Word of God, which shows us Christ as the "book of life." Through the proclamation of the holy Gospel, Christ opens and reveals this book for us as it is written, "Those he predestined, he also called."⁶

Predestination is to be seen as a comforting doctrine of Scripture. We are to see ourselves as God's own whom He has

chosen. "For the Spirit testifies to the elect that they are 'children of God' (Rom. 8:16)." ⁷ "Thus the Spirit of God gives 'witness' to the elect 'that they are the children of God,' and when they 'do not know how to pray as we ought,' he intercedes for them 'with inexpressible groanings' (Rom. 8:16-26)." ⁸ Our Lord Jesus Christ promised that no one will be able to pluck us out of his hand (John 10:28). This comfort is also witnessed to by the Confessions on the basis of the great concluding words to chapter 8 of Romans that nothing can "separate us from the love of God" (v.39). "For this reason, too, Paul asks, Since we are called according to the purpose of God, 'who will separate us from the love of God in Christ?' (Rom. 8:35)." ⁹ The following quotation from the Solid Declaration summarizes the teaching of this great chapter of St. Paul:

... Paul presents this in a most comforting manner when he points out that before the world began God ordained in his counsel through which specific cross and affliction he would conform each of his elect to "the image of his Son," and that in each case the afflictions should and must "work together for good" since they are called "according to his purpose." From this Paul draws the certain and indubitable conclusion that neither "tribulation nor anguish, neither death nor life, etc. can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:28, 29, 35, 38, 39). ¹⁰

The Christian has the assurance in God's Word of His love for him.

The Confessions are also aware of problems which arise in the doctrine of election. The Calvinistic doctrine of double predestination needed to be avoided. For this reason,

the question, "Why some, not others?" is addressed forthrightly by the Confessions. First of all, they reiterate the doctrine of universal grace:

Hence if we want to consider our eternal election to salvation profitably, we must by all means cling rigidly and firmly to the fact that as the proclamation of repentance extends over all men (Luke 24:47), so also does the promise of the Gospel. . . . "He is simultaneously Lord of all, rich toward all who call upon him" (Rom. 10:12).¹¹

When then are men lost? In answering this question, the Confessions look to examples from Scripture.

Hence Pharaoh (of whom we read, "For this purpose have I let you live to show you my power, so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth") did not perish because it was God's good pleasure that he should be damned and lost.¹²

In this discussion, much is made of the example of St. Paul of the potter and his pots (Rom. 9:19-24). The Confessions show the distinction that is made between the "vessels of wrath" and the "vessels of mercy."

Hence Paul very carefully distinguishes between the work of God, who alone prepares vessels of honor, and the work of the devil and of man, who through the instigation of the devil and not of God, has made himself a vessel of dishonor. It is written, "God endured with much patience the vessels of wrath fitted for damnation in order to make known the riches of his glory in the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for salvation" (Rom. 9:22, 23). The apostle says in unmistakable terms that God "endured the vessels of wrath with much patience." He does not say that God made them vessels of wrath.¹³

Concerning "the vessels of mercy" he [Paul] says specifically that the Lord himself "has prepared them unto glory." He does not say this of the damned, whom God has not prepared but who have prepared themselves to be vessels of damnation.¹⁴

From this the Confessions conclude that "the devil and man

himself, and not God, are the cause of their being fitted for damnation."¹⁵ Even in the fact that men are lost by their own works, however, the Lutheran Confessions find words of comfort and encouragement for

God permits us to behold his righteous and well deserved judgment over certain lands, nations and people, so that ... we may learn the more diligently to recognize and praise God's pure and unmerited grace toward the "vessels of mercy."¹⁶

So the Confessions in their discussion of election keep the grace of God primary in their emphasis and show how the children of God may have their assurance in Christ Jesus. They also admit that much of this doctrine is a mystery, something man cannot possibly understand completely. And rather than engage in endless debate on the subject, the Formula of Concord simply uses St. Paul as an excellent example of what our attitude should be:

But whenever something in the discussion of this subject soars too high and goes beyond these limits, we must with Paul place our finger on our lips and say, "Who are you a man to answer back to God?"¹⁷

And again:

After a lengthy discussion of this article on the basis of the revealed Word of God, as soon as he comes to the point where he shows how much of this mystery God has reserved for his own hidden wisdom, Paul immediately commands silence and cuts off further discussion with the following words: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! ... For who has known the mind of the Lord?" --that is outside and beyond what he has revealed to us in his Word.¹⁸

The Lutheran Confessions show that we dare not go beyond the revealed Word of God in our inquiry. This leads us to our final point.

Notes to Chapter V

¹Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3 vols.
(St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950-53), 3:475.

²Rom. 8:28-30.

³SD, XI, 43.

⁴SD, XI, 88.

⁵SD, XI, 30.

⁶Ep, XI, 13. A reference to Rom. 8:30.

⁷SD, XI, 73.

⁸SD, XI, 31.

⁹SD, XI, 47.

¹⁰SD, XI, 49.

¹¹SD, XI, 28.

¹²SD, XI, 84. A quotation from Ex. 9:16 which is referred
to in Rom. 9:17.

¹³SD, XI, 79.

¹⁴SD, XI, 82. A reference to Rom. 9:23.

¹⁵SD, XI, 80.

¹⁶SD, XI, 60.

¹⁷SD, XI, 63.

¹⁸SD, XI, 64.

CONCLUSION

THE CONFESSIONS AND THE SCRIPTURES

In this paper, we have looked at how the Lutheran Confessions deal with the subjects of the law and sin, justification, the means of grace, sanctification, and election. These doctrines were all considered in the light of how the Confessions used the Epistle to the Romans to bolster and support their position. One final question, however, needs to be asked: Can the use of Romans by the Confessions show us anything about their view of Scripture?

The many times that passages from Romans are simply quoted without comment shows us that they are meant to stand by themselves in the discussion of controverted issues and settle the matter. Often, quotations are introduced with the words "as Paul writes," or, "as the apostle says."¹ At other times a quotation is introduced by the formula "as it is written," or, "as the text says."² The words of Romans are also called "the Gospel," and "the holy Gospel."³ It is clear from these examples that the Confessions have no doubts about the ultimate origin or authority of the Epistle to the Romans. It is clearly to them the Word of God--the final and absolute authority. One more example shows this relationship very well. In speaking of those who say that monastic observances are services which makes men righteous

before God, the Apology says of such a view that it conflicts "with the Gospel of the righteousness of faith." It then quotes several Scripture passages including Romans 14:23: "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." Since such a view conflicts with the Scriptures the matter is settled. "For how can they maintain that these are services which God approves as righteousness before him when they have no proof from the Word of God?"⁴ Here the book of Romans along with other Scripture passages is clearly identified as the Word of God.

While the Confessions thus maintain clearly the normative authority of the Word they also never lose sight of the purpose and efficacy of the Scripture. "Furthermore, everything in the Word of God is written down for us, not for the purpose of thereby driving us to despair but in order that "by steadfastness, by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).⁵

This is the attitude with which the Lutheran Confessions approached the Epistle to the Romans. For it is in Romans as Luther said that we

find most abundantly the things that a Christian ought to know, namely, what is law, gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, and the cross; and also how we are to conduct ourselves toward everyone, be he righteous or sinner, strong or weak, friend or foe--and even toward our own selves. Moreover, this is all ably supported with Scripture and proved by St. Paul's own example and that of the prophets, so that one could not wish for anything more. Therefore it appears that he wanted in this one epistle to sum up briefly the whole Christian and evangelical doctrine, and to prepare

an introduction to the entire Old Testament. Therefore let every Christian be familiar with it and exercise himself in it continually. To this end may God give his grace. Amen.⁶

It is the teaching of this great epistle, which the Lutheran Confessions, in their faithfulness to the apostolic Word, proclaimed to their generation and also proclaim to ours.

Notes to Conclusion

¹See Ap, IV, 143; SD, VI, 8.

²See Ap, IV, 352; Ap, XXI, 31.

³See Ap, XVI, 5; Ep, XI, 10.

⁴Ap, XXVII, 23.

⁵SD, XI, 12.

⁶Luther, Works, v.35, p. 380.

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