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Luther and the Doctrine of Justification

Robert D. Preus

In this article I will address myself to the centrality of the doctrine of justification in Luther's theology and how it worked its way out in Luther's hermeneutics and theological enterprise as a whole.

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Stress has always been placed by Lutheran theologians and historians on the importance of the doctrine of justification for Luther in his search for a gracious God and in his theological writings. May I merely cite a small representative number of statements from Luther on the *centrality, importance, and usefulness* of the article of justification.

If we lose the doctrine of justification, we lose simply everything. Hence the most necessary and important thing is that we teach and repeat this doctrine daily, as Moses says about his Law (Deut. 6:7). For it cannot be grasped or held enough or too much. In fact, though we may urge and inculcate it vigorously, no one grasps it perfectly or believes it with all his heart. So frail is our flesh and so disobedient to our spirit!¹

Again Luther says,

This is the true meaning [*vera ratio*] of Christianity, that we are justified by faith in Christ, not by the works of the Law.²

This is the highest article of our faith, and if one should abandon it as the Jews do or pervert it like the papists, the church cannot stand nor can God maintain His glory, which consists in this, that He might be merciful and that He desires to pardon sins for His Son's sake and to save.³

If this doctrine of justification is lost, the whole Christian doctrine is lost.⁴

This doctrine can never be urged and taught enough. If this doctrine is overthrown or disappears, then all knowledge of the truth is lost at the same time. If this doctrine flourishes, then all good things flourish, religion, true worship, the glory of God, and the right knowledge of all conditions of life and of all things.⁵

For Luther we see that the article of justification is indeed the

article upon which the church stands and falls, so far as its doctrine is concerned. Luther puts the matter even more emphatically when he says,

There is one article and one basic principle in theology, and he who does not hold to this article and this basic truth, to wit, true faith and trust in Christ, is not a theologian. All other articles flow into and out of this one, and without it the other articles are nothing. The devil has tried from the beginning to nullify this article and to establish his own wisdom in its place. The disturbed, the afflicted, the troubled, and the tempted relish this article; they are the ones who understand the Gospel.⁶

The article of justification, or, as Luther often puts it, faith in Christ, is at the center of all Christian doctrine and is the heart of the Gospel itself. But the article of justification, or the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ, is for Luther not merely the center of theology; it is the very heart of the content of Christian faith:

In my heart one article alone rules supreme, that of faith in Christ, by whom, through whom, and in whom all my theological thinking flows back and forth day and night. And still I find that I have grasped this so high and broad and deep a wisdom only in a weak and poor and fragmentary manner.⁷

Luther maintains, "It is above all for this doctrine, on which we insist so diligently, that we bear the hate and persecution of Satan and of the world. For Satan feels the power and results of this doctrine."⁸ Luther is not only insistent but at times downright arrogant as he maintains the centrality and rectitude of his doctrine of justification, or Christian righteousness:

Thus I do not listen to anything at all that is contrary to my doctrine; for I am certain and persuaded through the Spirit of Christ that my doctrine of Christian righteousness is the true and certain one.⁹

And he had better be certain of his position at this point, for whoever loses this article of justification loses Christ, no matter how great his sanctity may be.¹⁰

It is in his *Lectures on Galatians* that Luther's views on the centrality and supreme importance of the article of justification are most prominent and articulate. Significantly, even in the early pages of this great commentary and even before he gets to Paul's discussion on justification, he speaks at length about the article and its significance, and positions it, as it were, vis-a-vis the Law and legalism (including Judaism, papism, fanaticism, etc.), the

Gospel (which is the revelation of God's love in Christ and Christ's redemptive work), false doctrine (which always stems from a misunderstanding or rejection or ignoring of justification), the interpretation of the Bible, Christian instruction, confession of the faith, *Seelsorge*, and any other concerns. Luther sees the book of Galatians as a Pauline commentary on the doctrine of justification. And he emphasizes repeatedly that justification is based upon God's grace in Christ and upon Christ's redemption. This is a matter of crucial importance for Luther.¹¹

II.

What precisely does Luther mean and include when he speaks about the article of justification?¹² When he extols the article and speaks of its supreme value for the Christian and its usefulness for the Christian theologian, he does not have in mind a narrow formulation requiring the term "justify" and embracing exclusively its sense in Romans 3:28 or Galatians 2:16, apart from their broader context. We must bear in mind that Luther in his Small Catechism never even uses the word "justify." Nor may we conclude that Luther has in mind merely a kind of theological shorthand resume of the Holy Spirit's work in bringing the individual to faith in Christ and forgiving him, as is expressed in the Third Article. No, for Luther the article of justification is grounded not in what the Spirit does as He brings a person to faith, but in the redemption and righteousness of Christ. Christ and His work are for Luther the substructure of the sinner's justification.¹³ We have justification and the forgiveness of sins only through Christ's death and resurrection.¹⁴ Almost as often as Luther says that the sinner's justification is through faith in Christ he says simply that it takes place *sola Christi iustitia*,¹⁵ or "by grace through Christ."¹⁶ Any discussion of justification by faith in Christ will automatically introduce us to the work of Christ's atonement, or rather Christ's work of perfect obedience as a prerequisite to the preaching of justification.¹⁷ And so, if one would speak of justification before God, one must approach the matter from the vantage point of the Gospel which deals with the person of Christ and His work as the mediator who brings righteousness and reconciliation and salvation to lost sinners.¹⁸

To Luther the article of justification enhances the work of Christ,¹⁹ points to it, and emphasizes it as the basis of our justification. How often does Luther in a hundred different ways say that if justification is not by grace through faith in Christ, then

Christ died in vain!²⁰ For Luther the work of Christ is not only the basis for God's justifying us and the meritorious cause of our justification, but actually constitutes our righteousness before God, as Luther emphatically puts it in his "Disputation on Justification" of 1536.²¹

Actually, Luther says precisely the same things about the "article concerning Christ" (*Artikel von Christo*), or the article concerning our knowledge of Christ (*Artikel von Erkenntnis Christi*), and extols this article in his *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John* as he does the article of justification in his *Lectures on Galatians* and elsewhere. One can only conclude that for Luther the two articles involve each other and are really one article, or that the article concerning a person's justification through faith is based upon the article of Christ's redemption. This fact is made emphatically clear in the Smalcald Articles (II, II, I) where Luther makes the office and work of Jesus Christ, or our redemption, the "first and chief article" of the Christian faith. After quoting four pertinent Bible passages dealing with Christ's redemption and atonement, he then proceeds to say, "Inasmuch as this must be believed and cannot be obtained or apprehended by any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that such faith alone justifies us, as St. Paul says in Romans 3, 'For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law' (Romans 3:28), and again, 'That [God] Himself is righteous and that He justifies him who has faith in Jesus' (Romans 3:26)." When Luther continues by saying that "Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised," and cites Acts 4:12 and Isaiah 53:5, I assume that he is speaking of the article of redemption, but redemption as it is to be appropriated through faith.

III.

What specifically is the value and use of the article of Christ, or the article of justification? From the statements cited above and many others in which Luther extols the doctrine, I think we can come to four very definite conclusions.

1. First and foremost, the doctrine gives abundant comfort to the penitent sinner, the comfort of the very Gospel itself. For the doctrine of Christ and of justification *is* the Gospel. In the article of justification, Luther says, is assurance and peace.²² If one loses justification, he loses the Gospel itself.²³ Faith in Christ alone gives comfort. "We must turn our eyes completely to that bronze serpent, Christ nailed to the cross (John 3:14). With our gaze fastened firmly to Him we must declare with assurance that He is

our righteousness and life and care nothing about the threats and terrors of the Law, sin, death, wrath, and the judgment of God. For Christ on whom our gaze is fixed, in whom we exist, and who also lives in us, is the Victor and Lord over the Law, sin, death, and every evil. In Him a sure comfort has been set forth for us, and victory has been granted.”²⁴ At this point Luther is often wont to contrast the works of the Law which thunders against our sin and the Gospel of Christ which gives joy and peace to the believer.²⁵ For the Gospel, the doctrine of Christ, tells us of the “price,” or “cost,” that God would pay to deliver us from our sins.

It is chiefly in Luther’s comments on the death and redemption of Christ, which constitute the sinner’s righteousness before God, that he emphasizes the consolation to be found in this doctrine. Commenting on John 16:10, where Christ tells His disciples that the Holy Spirit will convince the world of righteousness because He goes to the Father, that is, carries out His work of redemption, Luther says, “There is no other consolation than Christ’s going to the Father. This is our chief possession and inheritance, our ultimate trust and eternal righteousness.”²⁶ This knowledge of Christ, “that He became a curse for us and set us free from the curse of the Law,” offers the believer the most “delightful comfort.”²⁷ And so it “is our highest comfort, to clothe and wrap Christ this way in my sins, your sins, and the sins of the entire world, and in this way to behold Him bearing all our sins.”²⁸ The doctrine of Christ and His redemption “is the most joyous of all doctrines and the one that contains the most comfort. It teaches that we have the indescribable and inestimable mercy and love of God.”²⁹ Of course, the inestimable comfort to be derived from the doctrine of Christ is possessed only by one who believes in Him, by the Christian. And so Luther defines the Christian as follows: “A Christian is not someone who has no sin or feels no sin; he is someone to whom, because of his faith in Christ (*propter fidem*), God does not impute his sins. This doctrine brings firm consolation to troubled consciences amid genuine terrors. It is not in vain, therefore, that so often and so diligently we inculcate the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins and of the imputation of righteousness for Christ’s sake, as well as the doctrine that a Christian does not have anything to do with the Law and sin, especially in a time of temptation Therefore when the Law accuses and sins troubles, he looks to Christ; and when he has taken hold of Him by faith, he has present with him the Victor over the Law, sin, death, and the devil — the Victor whose rule over all these prevents them from harming him.”³⁰

2. Only the doctrine of justification according to Luther could give certainty to the believer. "Whoever does not know the doctrine of justification takes away Christ the Propitiator [*propitiatorem*]." ³¹ One who attempts to make atonement for himself apart from Christ the Mediator can only fall into utter despair. ³² Luther gives this advice:

Therefore if sin makes you anxious, and if death terrifies you, just think that this is an empty spectre and an illusion of the devil — which is what it surely is. For in fact there is no sin any longer, no curse, no death, and no devil, because Christ has conquered and abolished these things. Accordingly, *the victory of Christ is utterly certain*; the defects lie not in the fact itself, *which is completely true*, but in our incredulity. It is difficult for reason to believe such inestimable blessings. In addition, the devil and the sectarians — the former with his flaming darts (Eph. 6:16), the latter with their perverse and wicked doctrine — are bent on this one thing: to obscure this doctrine and take it away from us. It is above all for this doctrine, on which we insist so diligently, that we bear the hate and persecution of Satan and of the world. For Satan feels the power and results of this doctrine. ³³

In this significant statement Luther makes it clear that it is the doctrine of Christ's victory that gives certainty, and that faith clings to this doctrine, or to the content of it; namely, Christ's redemption. Of course, no one "has" certainty who does not hold with "a firm faith" to this doctrine. But it is clear that for Luther the believer's certainty is based on the objective righteousness of Christ and His work of redemption, not on his own faith in Christ. For it is the righteousness of Christ which the Christian receives through faith. For Luther certainty is an element of faith which clings to Christ and His redemption. And in this sense the Christian's certainty is a certainty of faith. ³⁴

3. The article of justification is a bulwark against heresy and the sects. This is a strong emphasis of Luther's which crops up in many of his writings but again most often in his Galatians commentary:

Therefore I say (as I have often said) that there is no power and remedy against the sects except this one article of Christian righteousness. If you lose this it is impossible to avoid other errors or the sects. We see this today in the fanatics, the Anabaptists, the Sacramentarians, who having set aside this doctrine never stop doing away with other doctrines, erring and seducing others. And there is no doubt

that they will raise up more sects and invent new works. But what are all these things, even though they seem fine and very holy, compared with the death and the blood of the Son of God who gave Himself for me?³⁵

Luther is very emphatic in this matter. He points out “that throughout history we find that all heresy and error have arisen where this doctrine has disappeared,”³⁶ or where people become smug about the way of salvation and think they know everything. On the other hand, he points out that history teaches us that when the article concerning Christ has been set forth as the chief article and has been understood correctly, as in the case of certain of the fathers, the other articles of faith were retained as well. Among the papists and the sects of his day he sees clear examples of other articles of the faith being attacked when the chief article concerning Christ is ignored or distorted.

On the other hand, the Christian cannot smugly assume that he can remain perfectly orthodox in all the articles of faith simply by giving formal adherence to the doctrine of justification. For the matter of justification is a “slippery thing” — not because of itself, for in itself the doctrine is “absolutely sure and certain.” But it is slippery in respect to us. How often, in tribulations, will even the best theologian slip away from the “firm footing” afforded by this doctrine into doubt, false doctrine, and, very commonly, misapplication of Law and Gospel. And thus everything is ruined and one forgets justification, grace, Christ, and the Gospel. The Christian and the Christian theologian must be very aware of how easily this doctrine can slip away and how, as a result, the other articles of faith are lost as well as Christ and the Gospel.³⁷

4. The doctrine of justification is a fundamental principle for the Christian in applying and integrating Law and Gospel and the entire Christian doctrine. When Luther says that justification by faith, or the doctrine of Christ, is the chief doctrine, he means very definitely that no teaching drawn from reason or even from the Bible itself (such as the accusations of the Law) can be used against it. He says, “Therefore any doctrine at all that does not teach as mine does, that all men are sinners and are justified solely by faith in Christ, must be false, uncertain, evil, blasphemous, accursed, and demonic, and so are those who either teach or accept such a doctrine.”³⁸ In his *Smalcald Articles* (II, II, 1-4) Luther scrupulously applies this principle against the various legalistic aberrations and false practices of the papacy. In no way is he hereby placing the article of justification in opposition to other clear articles of faith, but only to false papistic interpretations of

Scripture and practices which undermine the Gospel. And so the theology and practice of the papacy are in this sense subjected to the scrutiny of the Gospel of justification. Luther does not shrink from affirming that an understanding of and adherence to the article concerning Christ will enable the theologian to keep all the articles pure, as we have mentioned above.³⁹

Why is this so? I am not sure that one can answer this question completely, but certainly one reason is that the doctrine of justification is for Luther the “principal doctrine of Christianity” (*praecipuus articulus christianae doctrinae*).⁴⁰ “And what is all creation in comparison with the doctrine of justification?” But the doctrine of justification is not only the *articulus praecipuus*, but is at the very center of all Christian theology to Luther. “The other articles are rather far from us and do not enter into our experience; nor do they touch us . . . but the article on the forgiveness of sins comes into continual experience with us, and in daily exercise, and it touches you and me without ceasing. Of the other articles we speak as of something strange to us (e.g., creation, Jesus as the Son of God). What is it to me that God created heaven and earth if I do not believe in the forgiveness of sins? . . . It is because of this article that all others touch us.”⁴¹ What good does it do a Jew to believe that there is one God who is Creator, even to believe all the articles and accept all of Scripture, but deny Christ?

To Luther all doctrine—with the doctrine of Christ at its center—is like a golden ring,⁴² like a ring without the tiniest crack, or it would not be perfect. There is an organic relationship that all the articles of faith have with each other. Obviously, then, the very heart of Christian theology will have a bearing on all the articles of faith. Thus, the chief article of justification helps the theologian to coordinate and understand and, most important of all, apply the other articles of faith. It affords the theologian a kind of posture, orientation, vantage point for applying the articles of faith, and particularly for dividing Law and Gospel. For, as we have seen, it is primarily the misapplication of the Law which distorts the doctrine of justification and the Gospel and thus the whole Christian faith.

Is the article of justification a hermeneutical principle which transcends or opposes sound grammatical and historical exegesis? I am sure that no Luther scholar would venture to accuse Luther of exalting the doctrine of justification to such a sovereign role. But may the doctrine be used as a hermeneutical principle alongside of Scripture, not only to clarify texts which are obscure,

but even to mitigate the *sensus literalis* of texts which seem to conflict with the chief article?

Only in a restricted or indirect sense can the article of justification be called a hermeneutical rule for Luther. The many statements of Luther's that we have cited would rather indicate that it is a very important *theological tool* for *applying* and *relating* the articles of faith, not primarily a *norm* for *interpreting* the Scriptures. In no case does Luther use the article of justification or of Christ to mitigate what he finds to be the intended sense of a Scripture passage. What we find him doing again and again in his lectures on *Galatians* and throughout his writings is to set passages of Scripture dealing with the chief article of redemption or justification against passages teaching the Law, or to distinguish between Law and Gospel. He seems always to do so on the basis of sound exegesis of the passages under consideration. In every case the text itself determines its own meaning, not another text affirming the Gospel of justification or redemption. And so Law and Gospel (as the Gospel is expressed in the article of justification) stand against each other as two contrary teachings. But just as the Romanists ought not use Law passages to mitigate the *sensus literalis* of passages affirming justification by grace, so passages affirming justification and the redemptive work of Christ may not be employed to change or negate the meaning of passages affirming the Law. The chief article of the Gospel indeed transcends and negates the claims and accusations of the Law, but it does not and cannot alter the *meaning* of Scripture passages teaching the Law. Thus, the chief article exercises a mighty *theological* function, but not a direct hermeneutical one.

Even the proper distinction between Law and Gospel (justification) is, strictly speaking, not a hermeneutical principle, but a theological one. That is to say, the distinction does not ordinarily determine what passages *mean* in given cases, but rather it aids us in appropriating and applying the Scriptures:

Such a proper distinction between the function of the Law and that of the Gospel keeps all genuine theology in its correct use. It establishes us believers in a position as judges over all styles of life and over all the laws and dogmas of men. Finally it provides us with a faculty for testing all the spirits (I John 4:1). By contrast, the papists have completely intermingled and confused the doctrine of the Law and that of the Gospel, they have been unable to teach anything certain either about faith or about works or about styles of life or

about judging the spirits. The same thing is happening to the sectarians today.⁴³

Notice that in this passage Luther says the same of the function of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel that he said so often concerning the function of the article of Christ and of justification. We might conclude that the theological function of the article of justification is an aspect of properly dividing Law and Gospel in the total activity of the theologian.

If what I have said is a correct understanding of Luther, then we can conclude two things. *First*, there is no conflict for Luther between the article of justification and its authoritative role in the theological enterprise and the authority of Scripture and its role as the *principium cognoscendi*, which also is the basis for the pure doctrine of justification.

There are two passages in Luther which have been used by Luther scholars to indicate that he indeed made the article of justification a hermeneutical norm over Scripture itself. The first is in his *Preface to the Epistle to James* of 1545,⁴⁴ in which Luther makes the true test for the apostolicity and so canonicity of the New Testament antilegomena whether they "deal with Christ" or not. The second is a passage from his *Lectures on Galatians*⁴⁵ where, speaking metaphorically, Luther opposes Christ the "Lord" and "Author" and "King" of Scripture, that is, the Gospel of justification, against the "Servant," that is, "Scripture," or "passages in Scripture about works." In neither case does Luther intimate that he is opposing the article of Christ to the Scriptures as such or that he is making the article of Christ an authority above the Scripture or any of its verses, or that he is affirming a "norm within the norm of Scripture."⁴⁶ In the passage dealing with the canonicity of James Luther is simply applying the necessary principle of Christocentricity which he affirms in the very context of his statement to argue that the Book of James does not qualify for canonicity according to this criterion. He is not attempting to use the article of justification either to interpret James against himself or to mitigate the intention of James' discussion of the doctrine of justification. In the second passage (in his *Lectures on Galatians*) Luther is not only speaking metaphorically in the sense mentioned above, but he also takes occasion to stress the authority of Scripture as such (against the papists who stress only Law passages) to establish doctrine and to insist in the strongest terms that Scripture does not contradict itself, as the papists intimated when they pitted Law passages of Scripture against the chief article of the Christian faith.⁴⁷

Secondly, there is no real conflict between God's Law and the Gospel of justification *as such*, although the two chief themes (*praecipui loci*) found throughout Scripture *appear* as contraries; and the differences between the two teachings must always be held in strict tension, even though the Scriptures thereby may appear to teach contrary doctrines. For instance, Luther often makes statements like the following, "A Christian is righteous and beloved by God [according to the teaching of the Gospel of justification], and yet he is a sinner at the same time [according to the teaching of the Law in Scripture]."48 It is for Luther basic to the believing exegete, as he reads the Scriptures and listens to God speak to him there, that he hold to the Word of God no matter how inconsistent and absurd it may seem. Commenting on Galatians 3:6, Luther says, "For faith speaks as follows: 'I believe Thee, God, when Thou dost speak.' But what does God say? Things that are impossible, untrue, foolish, weak, absurd, abominable, heretical, and diabolical, if you consult reason."49 To Luther, quite obviously, not only do the Law and the Gospel seem to contradict each other, but the articles of faith in general (such as the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, baptismal regeneration, the virgin birth, the resurrection, and the ascension) all go against the grain and seem to be foolish and wrong. The faith which Luther speaks of as believing in the Gospel promise (*fides specialis*) involves also a *fides generalis* which believes all the articles of faith subsumed under the general categories of Law and Gospel, no matter how absurd they may seem or how contradictory to each other they may seem at times.

Thus, the Christian and the believing exegete must simply hold to all the articles of faith in all their apparent inconsistency. But the Christian who understands the article of justification is enabled to transcend paradoxes in the articles of faith, including the apparent opposition between Law and Gospel. "Who will reconcile those utterly conflicting statements (*illa summe pugnancia*), that the sin in us is not sin, that he who was 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 through the Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ (I Tim. 2:5)."50 In fact, when one understands the doctrine of justification, one finds that there is no real contradiction between Law and Gospel at all, but that the two teachings are in complete agreement (*consentientes*). But "to a man who is ignorant of the doctrine of faith, these statements seem to be utterly contradictory."51

For Luther, therefore, there is no opposition whatsoever between the doctrine of justification as an integrating principle of theology and the *sola Scriptura* principle, that is, that all our theology is drawn from Scripture and that Scripture alone is the judge of teachers and teachings in the church. The more I read Luther, the more clear it becomes to me that as he extols the doctrine of justification, he extols also the formal principle of our theology, and vice versa.⁵² In that very passage where he says that Christ is the Lord and King of Scripture, he strongly warns against concluding that Scripture contains any contradictions whatsoever.⁵³ To believe in Christ and the forgiveness of sins is to believe in His Word. If one has Christ, one has His Word. If one loves Him, one loves His Word. The Word of Scripture was so precious to Luther because Christ and the forgiveness of sins, which are central to Scripture, were so precious to him.⁵⁴

FOOTNOTES

1. *Luther's Works* (American Edition), 26, 26; cf. *LW* 26, 116, 126.
2. *LW* 26, 136.
3. Erlangen Ausgabe, *Opera Latina*, 10, 137.
4. Erl. Lat. 21, 20.
5. Erl. Lat. 21, 12; cf. *WA* 30², 651.
6. Weimar Ausgabe, *Tischreden*, No. 1583.
7. Erl. Lat. 21, 3.
8. *LW* 26, 285; cf. *LW* 24, 319.
9. *LW* 26, 198.
10. *LW* 26, 395. "Whoever falls from the doctrine of justification is ignorant of God and is an idolater. Therefore it is all the same whether he then returns to the Law or to the worship of idols; it is all the same whether he is called a monk or a Turk or a Jew or an Anabaptist. For once this doctrine is undermined, nothing more remains but sheer error, hypocrisy, wickedness, and idolatry, regardless of how great the sanctity that appears on the outside."
11. *LW* 26, 54. "It seems to be a trivial matter to teach the Law and affirm works, but this does more damage than human reason can imagine. Not only does it mar and obscure the knowledge of grace, but it also removes Christ and all His blessings, and it completely overthrows the Gospel, as Paul says in this passage."
12. Terms which Luther uses in this respect are *articulus*, *doctrina*, and occasionally *locus* (theme).
13. *LW* 26, 396.
14. *LW* 26, 224.
15. *LW* 26, 40; cf. 247.
16. *LW* 26, 99.
17. *LW* 26, 33, 35, 38.
18. *LW* 26, 30.
19. *LW* 26, 179.
20. *LW* 26, 17, 19, 26, 27, 28, 32, 182, 440.
21. *WA* 39, 97-98.

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22. *LW* 26, 27.
 23. *LW* 26, 26.
 24. *LW* 26, 166.
 25. *LW* 26, 175; cf. *WA* 28, 271; *Tischreden* 1, 2457b.
 26. *LW* 24, 349. The entire discussion (pp. 345-349) stresses the comfort to be found in the "doctrine of Christ."
 27. *LW* 26, 278.
 28. *LW* 26, 279.
 29. *LW* 26, 280.
 30. *LW* 26, 133. I have no explanation for the use of *propter fidem* here except that Luther is not speaking of justification here, which is always *per fidem*. Luther uses the phrase *per fidem* in the immediate context.
 31. *LW* 26, 28.
 32. *LW* 26, 29.
 33. *LW* 26, 284-285.
 34. *LW* 26, 172. In such a sense Luther speaks of a "certain faith": "Here you have the true meaning of justification described, together with an example of the certainty of faith (*exemplum certitudinis fidei*). 'I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me' — anyone who could say these words with Paul in a certain and constant faith (*certa et constanti fide*) would be truly blessed."
 35. *WA* 41¹, 296.
 36. *LW* 24, 320.
 37. *WA* 40¹, 128-129; cf. *LW* 26, 10; 63, 232.
 38. *LW* 26, 59.
 39. See Footnote 36.
 40. *LW* 26, 106.
 41. *WA* 28, 271ff.
 42. *LW* 27, 38.
 43. *LW* 26, 331.
 44. *LW* 35, 395-396.
 45. For a thorough discussion of this interpretation of Luther's words see Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, translated by Edwin W. Leverenz and Rudolph F. Norden (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977).
 46. *LW* 26, 295: "Therefore one should simply reply to them as follows: 'Here is Christ, and over there are the statements of Scripture about works. But Christ is Lord over Scripture and over all works. He is the Lord of heaven, earth, the Sabbath, the temple, righteousness, life, sin, death, and absolutely everything. Paul, His apostle, proclaims that He became sin and a curse for me. Therefore I hear that I could not be liberated from my sin, death, and curse through any other means than through His death and His blood. Therefore I conclude with all certainty and assurance that not my works but Christ had to conquer my sin, death, and curse. Even on natural grounds reason is obliged to agree and to say that Christ is not my work, that His blood and His death are not a cowl or a tonsure or a fast or a vow, and that in granting me His victory He was not a Carthusian. Therefore if he Himself is the price of my redemption, if He Himself became sin and a curse in order to justify and bless me, I am not put off at all by passages of Scripture, even if you were to produce six hundred in support of the righteousness of works and against the righteousness of faith, and if you were to scream that Scripture contradicts itself. I have the Author and the Lord of Scripture,

and I want to stand on His side rather than believe you. Nevertheless, it is impossible for Scripture to contradict itself except at the hands of senseless and stubborn hypocrites; at the hands of those who are godly and understanding it gives testimony to its Lord. Therefore see to it how you can reconcile Scripture, which, as you say, contradicts itself. I for my part shall stay with the Author of Scripture.' " (Compare *LW* 37, 50, where Luther accuses Oecolampadius of opposing Scripture against Scripture as he argued from a number of Bible passages against the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper.) Theologians of various persuasions have interpreted this comment of Luther as making justification a category of hermeneutics, a kind of "norm within the norm." See Gerhard Goelge, "Die Rechtfertigungslehre als hermeneutische Kategorie," *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 89:3 (March 1963), pp. 162-175; Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, tr. by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 12 *infra*; Hermann Sasse, *Sacra Scriptura* (Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, 1981), p. 310, *passim*. Sasse clearly makes the doctrine of justification the analogy of faith for Luther and represents Luther as making this article a *norma* "over the *norma normans* of Scripture," and only with this idea in mind can the Lutheran accept the Formula of Concord statement that the Holy Scripture "remains the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrine should be and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong" (FC, Ep., Rule and Norm, 2). Ironically, Sasse, Goelge, Emil Brunner, and the many others who have misinterpreted Luther on the basis of the aforementioned passage to be saying that the authority of Christ, or the doctrine of justification, can set aside the force of Scripture passages or at least is a category of hermeneutics or is a "norm within the norm" have missed a Luther statement in which he, carried away as he often is by the inestimable value of the article of Christ and the crucial function it exercises in the activity of the theologian and in the life of the church, actually praises the fathers for basing all their teachings on the central article of redemption. Commenting on John 16:3, Luther says, "If one abides by this article [of Christ] diligently and earnestly, it has the grace to keep one from falling into heresy and from working against Christ or His Christendom. For the Holy Spirit is surely inherent in it, and through it illumines the heart and keeps it in the right and certain understanding, with the result that it can differentiate and judge all other doctrines clearly and definitely, and can resolutely preserve and defend them. This we see in the old Fathers. When they retained this article of faith and based their doctrines on it, or derived them from it, they preserved purity of doctrine in every detail; but when they departed from it and no longer centered their arguments in it, they went astray and stumbled with a vengeance as happened at times to the oldest Tertullian and Cyprian. And this is basically the failing not only of the papists but of our schismatic spirits, who rant against baptism and other doctrines. They have already surrendered this article of faith and have paid no attention to it. Instead they have put forth other matters. In this way they have lost a proper comprehension of all doctrines, with the result that they cannot teach anything about them that is right and can no longer preserve any doctrine as unquestionable" (*LW* 24, 320). One can only conclude that Luther is obviously overstating himself here. Shortly before he had said, "Although other doctrines are also based on Scripture [just as is the chief doctrine of Christ] — for example, Christ's birth from a pure virgin — it does not stress

them so much as it does this one" (p. 319).

47. *LW* 26, 235; cf. *LW* 26, 282; *WA* 56, 269-71, 347; 40¹, 368; 4, 320; 46, 342; *Erl. Lat.* 19, 43.
48. *LW* 26, 235; cf. 232.
49. *LW* 26, 227.
50. *LW* 26, 235.
51. *LW* 26, 252.
52. *LW* 26, 98, 104. "I am making such a point of all this to keep anyone from supposing that the doctrine of faith is an easy matter. It is indeed easy to talk about, but it is hard to grasp; and it is easily obscured and lost. Therefore let us with all diligence and humility devote ourselves to the study of Sacred Scripture and to serious prayer, lest we lose the truth of the Gospel" (*LW* 26, 114).
53. *WA* 40¹, 458-459.
54. *LW* 24, 317.