

# Luther and Justification by Faith

--Presented by  
Darren Fung



Luther with open Bible, along with his reforming colleagues, over against Pope Leo X, the monks and the papal theologians



- Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg (1490-1545), Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg and Administrator of Halberstadt, by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1520/25)





# The sale of indulgences



The sale of indulgences. On a pole, in the form of a cross, hangs the papal authorization for the sale; on the ground lie scales; two sacks of coins show the profit. (*Woodcut by Jorg Breu the Elder, Geisberg, 353*)

# Printed letter of indulgence of 1488

**Uniuerſis** pātes lrāo infpectorio. Raymūdo panti. ſacre pagine pfelloꝝ Archidiacono in eccleſia ſanctonē  
ſancte ſedis aplice pthōdū. ad Almania vniuerſaq; ſingla. puinas. ciuitates. traſ. ⁊ loca  
Germanie ⁊ Galliaz puinceo Dacie Swecie ac Norwegie regno. ⁊ alijs vrbibꝫ ſciet. Szaro: Munioꝝ ⁊ Cōmiſſarioꝝ  
apliceo Elm. Moniaam. qſo ſciſm. dñs nr̄ Innocētiꝫ ppa. viij. et modern. cūctio vſq; lrao pphocibꝫ p ruitōne  
catholice fieri ⁊ Turcoꝝ inf̄ ordiatōꝝ nr̄az man. ſciētes porrigē vſq; iudicē ⁊ alijs indulgē. gr̄ao. facultates qo ſupōicti  
rpiſcōles obtinē pñe vilitate eccleſio p nouiam p amuſſarioꝝ nr̄os rparioꝝ. ſc̄i vilitate eccleſio vſq; tpe iudicē. pur i bull  
apliceo rſuano toties qñes op. fuerit abſolue poſſit. Et illoꝝ toties qñes ad talē ſtātū rreuerit vt verūſit̄ te eoꝝ mon  
te dubiet etiā ſi tūc eoꝝ ab hac luce rretere nō rign. arꝫ in vero mortis articulo plēnā oim ſuoꝝ peccōꝝ rmiſſioꝝ rto vale  
et igni de ſue pſeudie pñato facultate rceſſit. Volūtiꝫ idē ſc̄iſ. dñs nr̄ motu ppo oca ⁊ ſingloꝝ dñoi bñſcōles arꝫ eoꝝ  
parētes rſuatoꝝ ⁊ eoꝝ bñſcōles q cū caritate rceſſerit i oibꝫ pab. ſuffragio. mſi. clemēſia. rēnato. oꝝoibꝫ diſciplia ⁊  
ceteris oibꝫ ſpūalibꝫ boiſ q ſiūt fieri pōerit i rō vniuerſali ſacrolcā rpi eccleſia militate ⁊ oibꝫ mēdia ruiſcōe impettoꝝ pñā  
pca fieri. Cū itaq; deuot In xpo ad ipi. ſiūt pñ ſuatoꝝ ⁊ rſc̄ioꝝ iur. ſūm  
pōntificis intētoꝝ et nr̄az ordiatōꝝ pur p pātes lrāo ſibi in dñoi rſtiōniū a nob rōrao approbā de ſuis beimo rulerū ruiſcō  
eucte pōntificis ſibi vt indulgētia p pōra ruitōe ſc̄iſ. rceſſa quo ad in ſupioꝝibꝫ rita vni ⁊ gaudere valeat merito pſtat e. ſe  
rēſū. Datū ſub ſigillo nr̄o ad hoc ordiatō. Die *die* Anno dñi. M. ccc. lxxxviii

## Forma abſolutōis i vita totiēs quotiēs.

Aſcreeſ tm rē. Dñs nr̄ iſo rpo p meritū ſue paſſioꝝ te abſoluat. auēte cur. ⁊ aplica mibi in hac pte pmiſſa et tibi cōceſſa  
ego te abſoluo ab omnibꝫ peccōis rāto. In nomine p̄ris ⁊ filij ⁊ ſpūſſancti. Amen.

## Forma abſolutōis ⁊ plenarie rmiſſioꝝ i vero mortis articulo aut verſili.

Aſcreeſ tm rē. Dñs nr̄ iſo rpo p meritū ſue paſſioꝝ te abſoluat ⁊ ego auēte ipiꝫ ⁊ aplica mibi in hac parte pmiſſa ⁊ tibi  
rceſſa te abſoluo. P̄rio ab oibꝫ ſc̄iſ. et cōicatioꝝ maioris vſq; mēdia ſiquā incurriſti. Den̄ ab oibꝫ peccōis rāto rita rceſſi et obli  
tis. Conferēto tibi plēnā oim peccōꝝ tuoꝝ rmiſſioꝝ rmitēto tibi p̄rao purgatoꝝ In noie p̄ris ⁊ filij ⁊ ſpūſſancti. Amē.)

Printed letter of indulgence of 1488. The empty spaces in the middle allow the name of the recipient as well as the date to be entered. The final two paragraphs quote the formula of absolution specified.

(Staatsarchiv, Berlin)

# Indulgence

- Pope Paul VI defines an indulgence as ‘the remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has been forgiven’
  - (apostolic constitution *Indulgentiarum doctrina* (1967))

# The context of the sacrament of penance

- Sin: double consequence—
  - (1) mortal sins break our communion with God
  - (2) deprive us of eternal life.

# Forgiveness of sin

- remission of this eternal punishment
  - effected by the forgiveness of guilt
  - and by the restoration of our communion with God



# Temporal punishment:

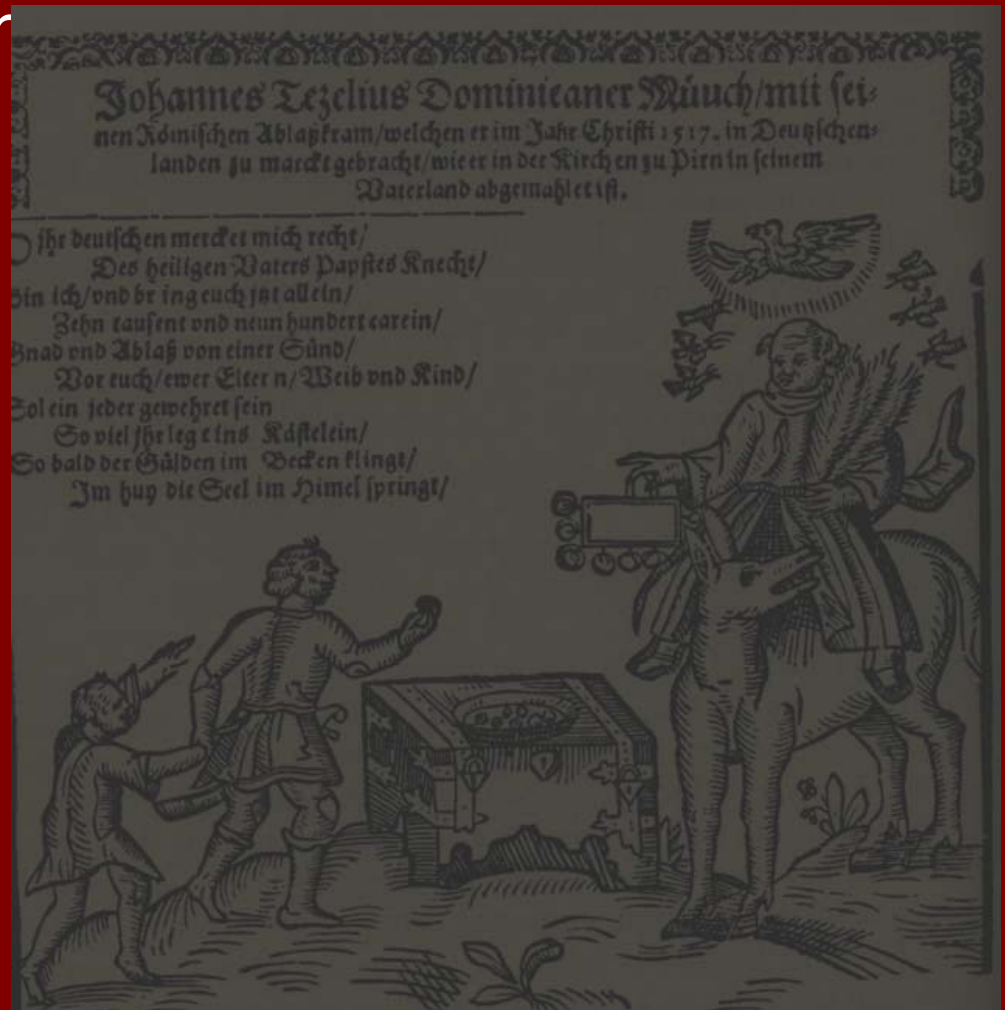
- brought about by both mortal and venial sins
- consists in the disorderly and often painful attachment to creatures which hampers our full communion with God

# Temporal punishment

- So it must be purified on this earth through works of mercy and of love as well as through prayer and penance or after death through a process called purgatory.

# Caricature of Tetzels sale of indulgences

- “As soon as the coin falls in the coffer rings, the soul into heaven springs.”



***A contemporary chronicler  
reported on the activities of  
Johann Tetzel:***

- At that time a Dominican monk named Johann Tetzel was the great mouthpiece, commissioner, and preacher of indulgences in Germany. His preaching raised enormous amounts of money which were sent to Rome. ..

# Johann Tetzel's claim:

- The claims of this uneducated and shameful monk were unbelievable. Thus he said that even if someone had slept with Christ's dear Mother, the Pope had power in heaven and on earth to forgive as long as money was put into the indulgence coffer. And if the Pope would forgive, God also had to forgive...



# The 95 Theses

- Posted on the door of the Wittenberg Church on 31 October 1517
- Luther called these a *Disputation of the Power of and efficacy of Indulgences*



# Luther's protest against indulgences



## From the 95 Theses

*Out of love and zeal for truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following theses will be publicly discussed at Wittenberg under the chairmanship of the reverend father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and Sacred Theology and regularly appointed Lecturer on these subjects at that place. He requests that those who cannot be present to debate orally with us will do so by letter.*

*1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance...*

*20. Therefore the pope, when he uses the words 'plenary remission of all penalties', does not actually mean 'all penalties', but only those imposed by himself.*

*21. Thus those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgence...*

*24. For this reason most people are necessarily deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty...*

*42. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a needy man and passes him by, yet gives his money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgence, but God's wrath...*

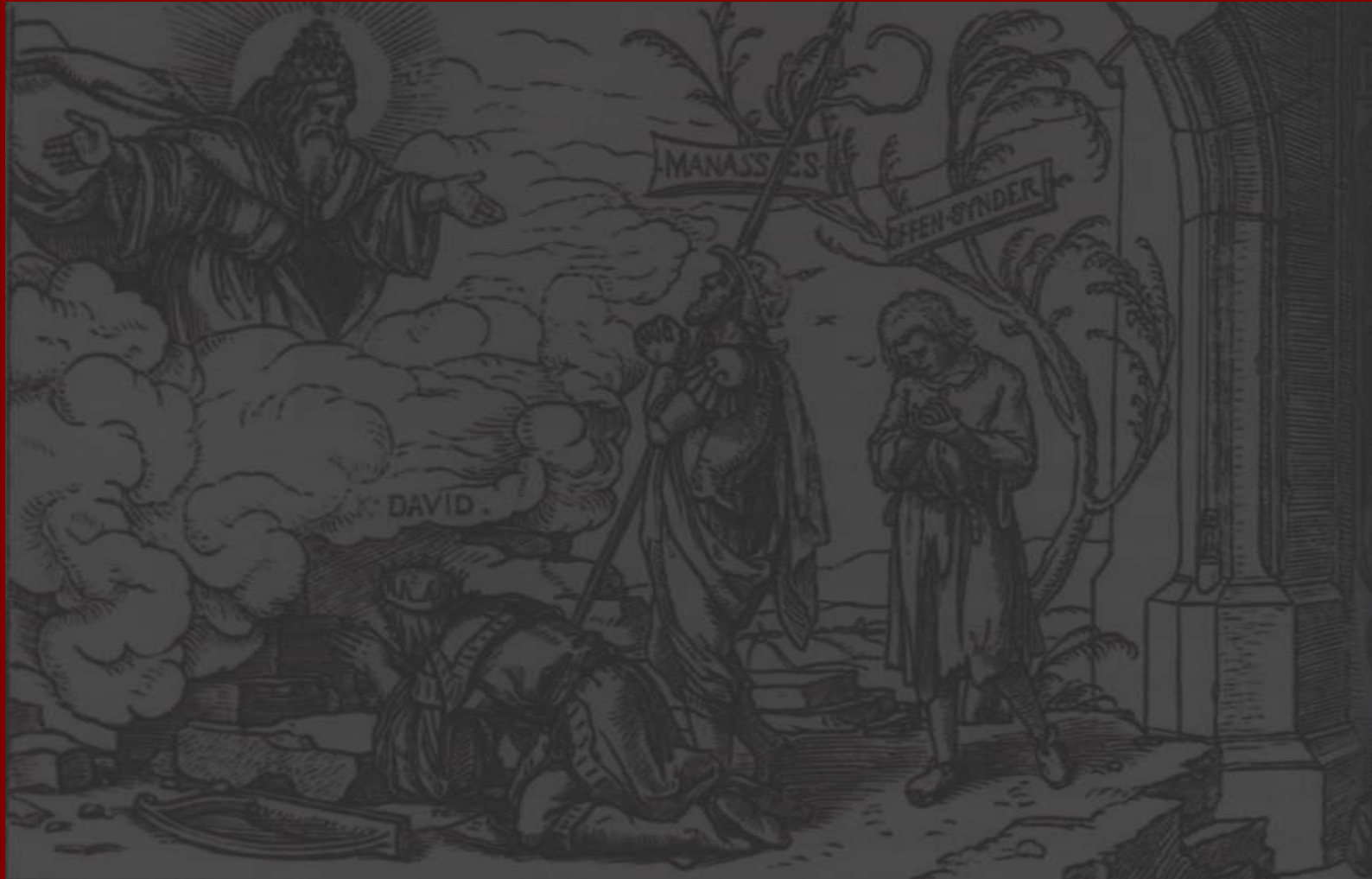
*50. Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that the basilica of St Peter were burnt to ashes than built up with the skin, flesh and bones of his sheep.*



# Woodcut contrasting simple repentance with the sale of indulgences by the pope



# Simple repentance





## ***Luther lectures on Psalm and Romans: 1513-16.***

- Luther's previous understanding of the Righteousness of God: an impartial divine attribute.
  - → God judges individuals with complete impartiality.
- If the individual has met the basic precondition for justification, he or she is justified; if he has not, he or she is condemned.

# Years of change

- The difficulty of this approach appears to have become increasingly clear to Luther in late 1514 or early 1515

# Pelagius and Gabriel Biel

- They assumed that humans were capable of meeting this precondition without any undue difficulty.

# Augustine's influence

- But Luther seems to have begun to appreciate the insights of Augustine at this point, arguing that humanity was so trapped in its sinfulness that it could not extricate itself except through special divine intervention.

# Luther's struggle

- 'I was a good monk, and kept my rule so strictly that I could say that if ever a monk could get to heaven through monastic discipline, I was that monk. All my companions in the monastery would confirm this ...





- And yet my conscience would not give me certainty, but I always doubted and said, 'you didn't do that right. You weren't contrite enough. You left that out of your confession.' The more I tried to remedy an uncertain, weak and troubled conscience with human traditions the more I daily found it more uncertain, weaker and more trouble.'



# *Luther's 'autobiographical fragment'*

- In his preface to the first volume of the complete edition of his Latin writings in which he described how he came to break with the church of his day.

# 'The tower experience'

- Scholars called this 'the tower experience', taking place in a tower of the Augustinian monastery.



‘The tower experience’, taking place  
in a tower of the Augustinian monastery



# Luther's discovery

- 'I had certainly wanted to understand Paul in his letter to the Romans. But what prevented me from doing so was not so much cold feet as that one phrase in the first chapter: 'the righteousness of God is revealed in it' (Romans 1: 17). For I hated that phrase, 'the righteousness of God', which I had been taught to understand as the righteousness by which God is righteous, and punishes unrighteous sinner.

# Luther's discovery

- Although I lived a blameless life as a monk, I felt that I was a sinner with an uneasy conscience before God. I also could not believe that I had pleased him with my works. Far from loving that righteous God who punished sinners, I actually hated him ... I was in desperation to know what Paul meant in this passage.



# Luther's discovery

- At last, as I meditated day and night on the relation of the words 'the righteousness of God is revealed in it, as it is written, the righteous person shall live by faith', I began to understand that 'righteousness of God' as that by which the righteous person lives by the gift of God (faith); and this sentence, 'the righteousness of God is revealed', to refer to a passive righteousness, by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'the righteous person lives by faith.'

# Luther's discovery

- This immediately made me feel as though I had been born again, and as though I had entered through open gates into paradise itself. From that moment, I saw the whole face of scripture in a new light ... And now, where I had once hated the phrases, so that this passage in Paul became the very gate of paradise to me.' (*Luther's Works*, vol. 34, pp. 336-8.)

# Righteousness given by God

- The righteousness on the basis of which the sinner is justified is not his own righteousness, but a righteousness which is given to by him God
- Augustine had made this point earlier.

# ‘Forensic justification’

- Luther, however, gives it a subtle new twist, which leads to the concept of ‘forensic justification.’
- The point at issue centres on the question of the location of justifying righteousness.

- Both Augustine and Luther are agreed that god graciously gives sinful humans a righteousness which justifies them.
- But where is that righteousness located

# Luther and Augustine compared

- Augustine argued that it was to be found within believers
- Luther insisted that it remained outside believers.
- That is, for Augustine, the righteousness in question is internal; for Luther, it is external.



# Augustine

- In Augustine's view, God bestows justifying righteousness upon the sinner in such a way that it becomes part of his or her person.
- As a result, this righteousness, although originating outside the sinner, becomes part of him or her.

# Luther

- In Luther's view, by contrast, the righteousness in question remains outside the sinner: it is an 'alien righteousness' (*iustitia aliena*).
- God treats, or 'reckons', this righteousness *as if* it is part of the sinner's person.

# Luther's lectures on Romans of 1515-16

- 'The saints are always sinners in their own sight, and therefore always justified outwardly. But the hypocrites are always righteous in their own sight, and thus always sinners outwardly. I use the term 'inwardly' to show how we are in ourselves, in our own sight, in our own estimation; and the term 'outwardly' to indicate how we are before God and in God's reckoning. Therefore we are righteousness outwardly when we are righteous solely by the imputation of God not of ourselves or of our won works.'

- Through faith, the believer is clothed with the righteousness of Christ in much the same way as Ezekiel 16: 8 speaks of God covering our nakedness with his garment. For Luther, faith is the right (or righteous) relationship to God. Sin and righteousness thus co-exist; we remain sinners inwardly, but are righteous extrinsically, in the sight of God.

- By confessing our sins in faith, we stand in a right and righteous relationship with God. From our own perspective we are sinners; but in the perspective of God, we are righteous.

## Luther commenting on Romans 4: 7

- ‘the saints are always aware of their sin and seek righteousness from God in accordance with God’s mercy. And for this very reason, they are regarded as righteous by God. Thus in their own eyes (and in reality!) they are sinners; but in the eyes of god they are righteous, because God reckons them as such on account of their confession of their sin. In reality they are sinners; but they are righteous by the imputation of a merciful God. They are unknowingly righteous, and knowingly sinners. They are sinners in fact, but righteous in hope.’



# Faith and justification

- how a righteous, free, and pious Christian, that is, a spiritual, new, and inner man, becomes what he is.

- It is evident that no external thing has any influence in producing Christian righteousness or freedom, or in producing unrighteousness or servitude.

- A simple argument will furnish the proof of this statement. What can it profit the soul if the body is well, free, and active, and eats, drinks, and does as it pleases? For in these respects even the most godless slaves of vice may prosper.

- On the other hand, how will poor health or imprisonment or hunger or thirst or any other external misfortune harm the soul? Even the most godly men, and those who are free because of clear consciences, are afflicted with these things. None of these things touch either the freedom or the servitude of the soul.

- It does not help the soul if the body is adorned with the sacred robes of priests or dwells in sacred places or is occupied with sacred duties or prays, fasts, abstains from certain kinds of food, or does any work that can be done by the body and in the body.

- The righteousness and the freedom of the soul require something far different since the things which have been mentioned could be done by any wicked person.

# The Word of God

- One thing, and only one thing, is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ, as Christ says, John 11[:25], “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live”; and John 8[:36], “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed”; and Matt. 4[:4], “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”



- Let us then consider it certain and firmly established that the soul can do without anything except the Word of God and that where the Word of God is missing there is no help at all for the soul. If it has the Word of God it is rich and lacks nothing since it is the Word of life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory, and of every incalculable blessing.

# What then is the Word of God?

- You may ask, “What then is the Word of God, and how shall it be used, since there are so many words of God?” I answer: The Apostle explains this in Romans 1. The Word is the gospel of God concerning his Son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who sanctifies. To preach Christ means to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it, provided it believes the preaching.

# Faith and the Word of God

- Faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the Word of God, according to Rom. 10[:9]: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Furthermore, “Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified” [Rom. 10:4]. Again, in Rom. 1[:17], “He who through faith is righteous shall live.”

# Justified by faith

- The Word of God cannot be received and cherished by any works whatever but only by faith. Therefore it is clear that, as the soul needs only the Word of God for its life and righteousness, so it is justified by faith alone and not any works

# Faith and works antithetical to each other

- This faith cannot exist in connection with works—that is to say, if you at the same time claim to be justified by works, whatever their character—for that would be the same as “limping with two different opinions” [1 Kings 18:21], as worshiping Baal and kissing one’s own hand [Job 31:27–28], which, as Job says, is a very great iniquity.

- Wherefore it ought to be the first concern of every Christian to lay aside all confidence in works and increasingly to strengthen faith alone and through faith to grow in the knowledge, not of works, but of Christ Jesus, who suffered and rose for him, as Peter teaches in the last chapter of his first Epistle (I Pet. 5:10). No other work makes a Christian.

- Thus when the Jews asked Christ, as related in John 6[:28], what they must do “to be doing the work of God,” he brushed aside the multitude of works which he saw they did in great profusion and suggested one work, saying, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” [John 6:29]; “for on him has God the Father set his seal” [John 6:27].

# How is it that faith alone justifies?

- Should you ask how it happens that faith alone justifies and offers us such a treasure of great benefits without works in view of the fact that so many works, ceremonies, and laws are prescribed in the Scriptures



# The Scripture

- the entire Scripture of God is divided into two parts: commandments and promises

# Commandments

- The commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it.
- They are intended to teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his own ability.

# Commandments → despair

- Now when a man has learned through the commandments to recognize his helplessness and is distressed about how he might satisfy the law, then, being truly humbled and reduced to nothing in his own eyes, he finds in himself nothing whereby he may be justified and saved.

# The promises of God

- Here the second part of Scripture comes to our aid, namely, the promises of God which declare the glory of God, saying,
  - “If you wish to fulfill the law and not covet, as the law demands, come, believe in Christ in whom grace, righteousness, peace, liberty, and all things are promised you.
  - If you believe, you shall have all things; if you do not believe, you shall lack all things.”

- God our Father has made all things depend on faith so that whoever has faith will have everything, and whoever does not have faith will have nothing.

# The first power of faith: freedom from the law

- A Christian has all that he needs in faith and needs no works to justify him; and if he has no need of works, he has no need of the law; and if he has no need of the law, surely he is free from the law.

# The second power of faith

- It is a further function of faith that it honors him whom it trusts with the most reverent and highest regard since it considers him truthful and trustworthy.

- There is no other honor equal to the estimate of truthfulness and righteousness with which we honor him whom we trust. Could we ascribe to a man anything greater than truthfulness and righteousness and perfect goodness?



- On the other hand, there is no way in which we can show greater contempt for a man than to regard him as false and wicked and to be suspicious of him, as we do when we do not trust him.

- So when the soul firmly trusts God's promises, it regards him as truthful and righteous. Nothing more excellent than this can be ascribed to God. The very highest worship of God is this that we ascribe to him truthfulness, righteousness, and whatever else should be ascribed to one who is trusted.

- Is not such a soul most obedient to God in all things by this faith? What commandment is there that such obedience has not completely fulfilled?

- What more complete fulfilment is there than obedience in all things? This obedience, however, is not rendered by works, but by faith alone.

- On the other hand, what greater rebellion against God, what greater wickedness, what greater contempt of God is there than not believing his promise? For what is this but to make God a liar or to doubt that he is truthful?—that is, to ascribe truthfulness to one's self but lying and vanity to God? Does not a man who does this deny God and set himself up as an idol in his heart?

# The result

- When, however, God sees that we consider him truth and by the faith of our heart pay him the great honor which is due him, he does us that great honor of considering us truthful and righteous for the sake of our faith.

# The third power of faith

- The third incomparable benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom.
- By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh [Eph. 5:31–32]. And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage—indeed the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but poor examples of this one true marriage—it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil.

- Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own.



- Let us compare these and we shall see inestimable benefits. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's;

- for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his.
- If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers?

- By the wedding ring of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's. As a matter of fact, he makes them his own and acts as if they were his own and as if he himself had sinned; he suffered, died, and descended into hell that he might overcome them all.

- Now since it was such a one who did all this, and death and hell could not swallow him up, these were necessarily swallowed up by him in a mighty duel; for his righteousness is greater than the sins of all men, his life stronger than death, his salvation more invincible than hell.

- Thus the believing soul by means of the pledge of its faith is free in Christ, its bridegroom, free from all sins, secure against death and hell, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of Christ its bridegroom. So he takes to himself a glorious bride, “without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her by the washing of water with the word” [Cf. Eph. 5:26–27] of life, that is, by faith in the Word of life, righteousness, and salvation.

- In this way he marries her in faith,  
steadfast love, and in mercies,  
righteousness, and justice, as Hos. 2[:19–  
20] says.

# *The Freedom of a Christian*

- A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.
- A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

