

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

Topical Bulletin, November 2022

This month's topic for consideration is a continuation of: **The Apostles' Creed; the third Article.**

To review, Luther's Small Catechism puts it thus:

THE THIRD ARTICLE

SANCTIFICATION

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean?

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith;

even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith;

in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers,

and will at the Last Day raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life.

This is most certainly true.

Comment: Having considered in last month's bulletin the broad depth of what it means when we confess, "I believe in... the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints"; we will presently continue, to its conclusion, our contemplation of the Apostles' Creed; the third Article.

We will now consider the closing phrase: **I believe in... the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.**

The Holy Bible will furnish us with positive proof concerning the truth of the confession we make regarding the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.

"For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great." (Psalm 25:11)

"Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." (Psalm 103:1-5)

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." (Psalm 130:1-4)

"I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." (Isaiah 43:11 & 25)

Comment: Observe that each and every Christian can, in truth, say: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." The reason why such confession can honestly be made, is because the Holy Bible assures each and every Christian that God daily and richly forgives all sins, to me and all believers!

"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)

"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." (Romans 4:5-8)

"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." (Romans 8:33)

Comment: Notice that God forgives sins by no longer charging, or imputing, sins to the sinner. God declares the sinner righteous – reconciled to Himself, justified – for Jesus' sake. (Objectively speaking, God, in Christ, no longer imputes sins to the entire world, but declares the world forgiven – reconciled unto Himself – for Jesus' sake, since Jesus has paid for ALL the sins of ALL people.) However, that objective declaration of forgiveness and reconciliation does not benefit the individual sinner, subjectively, unless the individual sinner sincerely repents and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior!

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 3:19-26)

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephesians 1:3-7)

"And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” (Luke 18:9-14)

Comment: Note well that God forgives us our sins, not because of any merit or worthiness in us, but purely by His grace and mercy, for Jesus Christ’s sake! It is necessary for each and every sinner to sincerely repent of his (or her) sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, so that he (or she) may thereby personally receive the forgiveness of sins!

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:1-2)

“And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.” (1 John 4:14)

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)

Comment: The Holy Bible repeatedly informs us that the forgiveness of sins has truly been obtained for ALL, because JESUS CHRIST HAS FULLY ATONED FOR ALL THE SINS OF ALL PEOPLE!

“Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:46-47)

“Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” (Mark 1:14-15)

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:16-17)

“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16)

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matthew 26:26-28)

Comment: Observe that God offers folks the forgiveness of sins in the Gospel of Christ, the Word of reconciliation, when preached or attached to visible elements in the Sacraments!

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” (Romans 3:28)

**“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”
(Mark 16:16)**

“And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6)

*Comment: Notice that the individual sinner accepts the forgiveness of sins offered to him (or her) in the Gospel of Christ, by believing the Gospel— believing the good news that Jesus Christ has kept God’s Law perfectly for all people and has paid for our lack of keeping God’s Law; Jesus having shed His holy and precious blood in full payment for all the sins of all people. It’s as we saw in Holy Scripture earlier: “...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”
(Romans 3:23-26)*

God is He, **“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” (2 Timothy 1:9-12)**

“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:34-39)

Comment: Each and every believer in Jesus Christ can, and should, be fully persuaded; certain, of the forgiveness of sins and of his (or her) salvation, because GOD’S PROMISES ARE SURE! “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19)

**“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”
(John 14:6)**

In reference to Jesus Christ, Holy Writ states: **“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)** And: **“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” (Acts 10:43)**

Comment: It is evident, from the above Scripture passages, that we must ever firmly maintain the doctrine of justification by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, because it is the chief doctrine of the Christian religion!

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” (Galatians 2:16)

“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.” (Galatians 5:4-5)

“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” (Micah 7:18-19)

Comment: Note that we must ever firmly maintain the doctrine of justification by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, because it distinguishes the Christian religion from false religions (ALL of which teach salvation by one’s own works)!

“Then he [the keeper of the prison] called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.” (Acts 16:29-34)

“And he [Jesus] entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.” (Matthew 9:1-2)

Comment: Observe that we must ever firmly maintain the doctrine of justification by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, because this doctrine gives enduring comfort to penitent sinners!

“John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” (Revelation 1:4-6)

“Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth.” (Psalm 57:5)

Comment: It is evident, from the above Scripture passages, that we must ever firmly maintain the doctrine of justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, because this doctrine gives ALL GLORY TO GOD, AND NONE TO SINFUL MAN!

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” (John 5:28-29)

“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” (Job 19:25-27)

Comment: The above Bible passages make it quite clear that, at the great Last Day, God will raise up ALL the dead, so that our bodies – the same bodies that have died – shall be made alive. The resurrection of the body will occur when Jesus Christ visibly returns to earth in glory, to judge the living and the dead. Note well that the believers in Jesus Christ will be raised to everlasting life, while the unbelievers will be raised to suffer damnation: never-ending death, everlasting shame and contempt, in the torments of hell.

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We [that is, we Christians] shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-54)

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” (Philippians 3:20-21)

Comment: Observe that the believers in Jesus Christ will rise, with glorified bodies, to everlasting life, in heaven!

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.” (Matthew 7:13)

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28)

Comment: Notice that the unbelievers will rise to eternal death, the torment of their soul and body in hell, which is the place: “Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:44) Another interesting fact is that there are degrees of punishment in hell, for the Lord is just. Yes, Holy Writ reports, “that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be

beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." (Luke 12:47-48)

"And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:42-43)

"For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." (Philippians 1:23)

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." (Revelation 14:13)

"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." (Luke 16:22-23)

Comment: The above quoted verses of Holy Scripture teach that at the time of temporal death, the soul of the believer is at once received into the presence of Jesus Christ in paradise! On the other hand, at the time of temporal death, the soul of the unbeliever is at once in hell, in torments!

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm 16:11)

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:1-2)

Jesus says: **"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24)**

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:14-18)

Comment: Note that at the Last Day the believers in Jesus Christ will live with Him, according to soul and body, in eternal joy and glory! Another interesting fact is that, in accord with the Lord's perfect justice and grace, there are degrees of eternal glory. Yes, Holy Scripture relates, "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Daniel 12:3) "Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten

cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities." (Luke 19:16-19)

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:16-18)

"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." (Matthew 24:13)

Comment: NOTE WELL THAT GOD WILL GIVE ETERNAL LIFE TO ALL TRUE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST, AND ONLY TO TRUE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST!

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one." (John 10:27-30)

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." (Romans 8:28-33)

Comment: ALL true Christians should be sure they will enter eternal life. Each Christian can and should confess: I firmly believe that, as God has in time called me by the Gospel of Christ, enlightened, sanctified, and kept me in the true faith; even so He has, from eternity, chosen me unto the adoption of children and unto life everlasting; and, no man shall pluck me out of His hand. Indeed, the Lord, "hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:8-14)

ACCORDINGLY, FELLOW CHRISTIANS, WE CAN BE CERTAIN OF OUR SALVATION!

Therefore, we can definitely close the third Article of the Apostles' Creed by confessing, "This is most certainly true"; for all that we confess in the Apostles' Creed is plainly taught in the Holy Bible. m.e.l.