

Study of the Augsburg Confession

Part 4: Justification (Article 4)

Article IV (4)

Our churches teach that our good works can't earn forgiveness or God's approval. God gives us forgiveness and makes us right. His grace does this, because of Jesus, through faith, when we believe Christ suffered for us. Because of His work, God forgives our sin, makes us right, and gives us eternal life. Romans 3:21-26 and Romans 4:5 say that God says faith is the same as righteousness.

Vocabulary

Faith – Trust in Jesus Christ, depending on Him, believing God's promises, confidence that Jesus' work saves us.

Grace – Free gift from God.

Justification – God doesn't judge us guilty sinners. Instead, He announces or makes us clean and right with Him.

Merits – If you do a good work, you get a reward. The Roman Catholic church teaches that you need to get enough merit (rewards) to get into heaven.

Regard and reckon – God thinks of us and names us righteous.

Righteousness – God's holiness and perfection. He gives us His holiness and perfection through faith in Jesus.

Satisfactions – Works that people do to pay for sin. The Roman Catholic church says that we deserve to get punished in hell and on earth for our sin. The Catholic church says our good works, prayers, and making things right can pay God. Then we don't need to suffer the earthly punishment.

Explanation

How do you have a right relationship with God? Article 4 answers that question. God gives you a right relationship with Him. It is His gift (grace), because of Jesus, through faith in Jesus.

Sin broke our relationship with God. This is not a small break. It is not a weakness. The Bible says that we are completely lost because of sin. Sin made us dead (Ephesians 2:1, Romans 5:12) and separated from God (Isaiah 59:2). Article 2 explained how everyone is born with original sin. This describes all of us. No one is born with a right relationship with God.

Then how do we get a right relationship with God? There are only three possible ways.

1. We fix our relationship.
2. God and we work together to fix our relationship.
3. God fixes our relationship.

We fix our relationship – False Teaching!

First, can we fix our relationship with God? Many people think we can, but the Bible gives a clear answer – NO. There are many Bible verses that show this. Romans 3:10-20 shows that all people are sinners. We can't obey the law enough to make ourselves right with God (verse 20). Isaiah 64:6 says that our best works are as good as dirty rags.

If we can't do enough good works, can we pay or sacrifice enough to make God happy? No. Psalm 50:7-12 says God will not accept our sacrifices as a payment. He already owns the whole world. We can't give Him or pay Him anything. He owns everything and we have nothing to give Him.

God and we work together to fix our relationship – False Teaching!

Second, we can work together with God to fix our relationship? No. But this is what the Roman Catholic Church teaches. They teach that Jesus died for us, God baptizes us and names us His children. Now we must do enough good works to pay for our sins and continue as His children.

Luther and the other Reformers argued against that false teaching. Article 4 says “our good works can't earn forgiveness or God's approval.” Should Christians live a good and right life? Yes! But our works don't earn forgiveness.

Romans 3:24 says God announces us righteous (“justified us”) as a free gift. If we try to do good works to make ourselves good enough to have His gift, that insults God and His gift. Romans 4:5 also says that our works don't make us right with God. God counts us as righteous because of faith.

God fixes our relationship – True Teaching

Third, the only right answer is that God fixes our relationship. Ephesians 2:8-10 says salvation is God's free gift for us. He gives it to us through faith. Our works don't help in any way. We still do good works, but not to help save ourselves.

For more, see this page online.

<http://atlanta.clclutheran.org/bibleclass/bookofconcord/article4.html>

Questions

1. How do you get salvation? What does the Catholic Church say?
2. How do you get salvation? What does the Bible say?
3. Sin ruined our relationship with God. How much – a little, a lot, completely?
4. God saves us by grace through faith. What does that mean?
5. You ask church members how they know they will go to heaven. One member says he goes to church; that means he will go to heaven.
 - What is wrong with what he said?
 - How do you tell him the true teaching about how we go to heaven?
6. You know a Christian (not Lutheran) who says a person becomes a Christian when they ask Jesus into their heart. Or they might say they decided to accept Jesus as their Savior. What is wrong with their belief? (Think about who does the work to save us. Do we talk about what we do, or do we talk about what God does?)