

“ON JUSTIFICATION”¹

by *Leonardus Rijssenius*

Translated by J. WESLEY WHITE

Introduction by *J. Mark Beach*

LEONARDUS RIJSSENIUS (or Leonard van Rijssen) was a Dutch Reformed theologian who labored throughout his career in his native Holland. He was born in 1636, and was educated at Utrecht, receiving his doctorate in theology from that university in 1655. He served pastorates, starting in 1655, at Tull en 't Waal, 1659 at Heusden, 1668 at Deventer, 1674 again at Heusden. He never occupied an academic post.

Rijssen was an aggressive proponent of Voetian orthodoxy and waged polemics against the inroads of Cartesian theology and against Cocceian theologians. His writings include *Synopsis impurae theologiae Remonstrantium* (1661); *De Oude Rechtsinnige waerheit verdonckert, en bedeckt door DesCartes, Coccejus, Wittich, Burman, Wolzogen, Perizon, Groenewegen, Allinga, &c.* (1664); *Dootstuypen der Cartesianen en Coccejanen, vertoont in twee boecken* (1667), *Summa theologiae elencticae completa* (1671); *Iusta detestatio sceleratissimi libelli Adr. Beverlandi de peccato originali* (1680); *F. Turretini compendium theologiae ex theologorum nostrorum institutionibus theologicis auctum et illustratum* (1695). He died in 1700.

¹ The material below, following the introduction, is taken from Leonardus Rijssenius, *Summa Theologia Elenctica Completa. Et didacticae quantum sufficit* (Edinburgh, 1692), Chapter XIV, pp. 221-239.

The text of the translation below is taken from the 1692 Edinburgh printing of the *Summa theologiae elencticae completa*. The chapter heading on justification is incorrectly numbered in that printing as chapter XIII (and all subsequent chapters are wrongly numbered as well). In fact, it is the fourteenth chapter that treats the doctrine of justification. This chapter follows upon separate chapters that expound the covenant of grace, Christ and his offices, and conversion and faith. After treating justification, Rijssen takes up the Ten Commandments and good works. Indeed, Rijssen's *Summa* follows a fairly typical arrangement of materials, with a first chapter devoted to the nature of theology, followed by chapters on Holy Scripture, God, the Trinity, the divine decrees, predestination, creation, and providence. Next he treats topics in theological anthropology. After his exposition of Christological themes and facets of what may be termed soteriology, wherein the chapter on justification is found, Rijssen closes out his work expounding the doctrine of the church and sacraments, with a final chapter on the end times.

Since Rijssen's *Summa* is written in a succinct and tightly compact form, it is important to read this material with reflective care. The reader will discover that there is a great deal of material to ponder and digest in these few pages. It is also appropriate to have a Bible nearby in order to consult Rijssen's numerous references to Scripture. It will become obvious that the author is not attempting to present exegesis in this work. Instead, he offers the reader doctrinal formulations, within the context of polemics, which are derived from key texts of Scripture. Inasmuch as Rijssen's *Summa* is a summary of theology, and a summary of *elenctic* theology at that, the primary interest of this work is to lay out the dominant themes and controversies current among the Reformed churches (of that time), and, in so doing, to consider the prominent objections against the Reformed view and to reply to them. As a summary of Reformed teaching, then, this work served as a helpful synopsis of doctrine, bringing a concise overview to the most important matters under contest in that day.

Since his *Summa* is written in Latin, Rijssen intended the work for an educated audience. No doubt it first had an academic purpose, serving as an effective tool for theological education. In fact, on the facing page of the Edinburgh printing, it is advertised as a volume to be used in for students at academies in Scotland. The work was likely also aimed at pastors as a source that could be

consulted with ease, serving as a book from which one could readily give instruction to others, and serving too as a book which offered a refresher on basic Reformed doctrine. It can still serve that purpose today for Reformed pastors and interested laypersons, and a portion of it is offered here in translation as a sample of one form of theological literature characteristic of seventeenth-century Reformed theology.

To my knowledge, no work of Rijssen, or even a part of his work, with the exception of short quotations from Heinrich Heppé's *Reformed Dogmatics*, has appeared before in English translation. A word of hearty thanks to J. Wesley White for his groundbreaking labors.

Regarding Rijssen's exposition of the doctrine of justification, and the polemics attached to it, a few observations are in order. First, readers should be alerted to Rijssen's procedure in expounding doctrine. His analysis is divided into fourteen theses. Under some theses Rijssen takes up one or more matters of controversy in connection with a given thesis. True to scholastic method, when treating a point under debate Rijssen first states the nature and substance of the controversy, followed by his affirmative or negative reply to it, usually with specific opponents identified. He then proceeds to set forth, in terse form, the key arguments in support of his opinion, followed by a consideration of the major objections or counter-arguments in opposition to his staked out position, with pithy responses to each objection. Some theses contain no matters of controversy, whereas other theses are followed by as many as nine questions of controversy.

Second, readers will discover that Rijssen is jealous to defend the Reformation doctrine of justification. After offering a fairly standard definition of this doctrine, he observes that the occasion in which the sentence of justification is spoken or assigned to the sinner can have different contexts. Justification, as a declaration of the sinner's acceptance before God, is never apart from Christ the surety. The verdict itself, however, is something that has an eschatological dimension, being spoken both to the believer in his or her conscience, and yet also declared at the last judgment. Justification means absolution from guilt rather than an infusion of holiness. If the latter were the case, justification would essentially be sanctification and would imply that condemnation means to make sinful and guilty. Meanwhile, God, not faith, is the cause of justification—in fact, faith is merely an instrument. God, according

to his grace, sends Christ as surety and mediator. Christ's righteousness meets the demands of God's law—that is, the demands of God's righteousness and holiness, both in its negative sanction and positive demands, and thus Christ's righteousness is the material cause, or the ground and reason, of the justification of believing sinners inasmuch as his righteousness is imputed to them. The entire aim of justification is, finally, God's glory, while the immediate fruits for believers are the blessings of adoption as God's children, assurance and peace of conscience in the face of the abiding struggle with sin, and the hope of eternal life. Justification, as a divine verdict, is not without sanctifying effects upon believers, however, though it remains altogether distinct from sanctification. The distinction between justification and sanctification is invincible since justification results in believers being invulnerable to accusation, something untrue about believers in their sanctification. Moreover, since justification fundamentally has to do with absolution and forgiveness, it must be distinguished from becoming holy. As for the faith that justifies (or justifying faith), it is not some bare assent of the mind but the consent of the soul in receiving Christ. Faith functions as the instrumental cause of justification not as a theological virtue, not as coming to Christ with its own good works in order to receive him, or as claiming faithfulness as the means to obtain his blessed benefits. Faith acts alone in receiving Christ for justification, without the virtues or good works of faith—just as eyes alone see although eyes are not alone.

Third, Rijssen's treatment of Christ's righteousness, distinguished between his active and passive obedience, seriously challenges, indeed, overthrows, modern day misrepresentations and caricatures of this distinction. Rijssen's analysis serves as an informative recipe of correction, and traces out this distinction with clarity and perception. In reply to Roman Catholic, Socinian, and Remonstrant opponents who maintain that Christ's passive obedience is alone imputed to believers, Rijssen argues that Christ fulfilled the whole law for believing sinners, for the law never promised blessing for passive obedience, that is, for suffering its penalty; rather, it promised blessing for active obedience, in the fulfillment of its positive stipulations. Moreover, the righteousness of Christ cannot be parsed to create a divide between his active and passive obedience, as though only one aspect of the Mediator's righteousness is imputed to believers for their justification. If the active obedience

of Christ is not imputed to believers, they remain “under law” and subject to its negative verdict and penalty.

Last, Rijssen’s explication of justification, despite its scholastic form, has a contemporary ring. Present-day criticisms of the Reformed doctrine of justification are not unlike the criticisms the doctrine received from seventeenth-century Roman Catholics, Socinians, and Remonstrants. The issues have changed very little. Rijssen’s formulations and replies to critics are studied and theologically apt—as such they still offer a sound response to opponents of the Reformation doctrine. While it is possible to evaluate Rijssen’s analysis of the doctrine of justification as an historical curiosity, a more constructive evaluation of this material is to view it as an instruction manual that still serves the church today.

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Summa Theologia Elencticae Completa, Chapter XIV: *de Justificatione*

A Complete Summary of Elenctic Theology

“On Justification”

- §I. Justification is the gracious sentence of God that absolves the believer from punishment and grants to him the right to eternal life.
- §II. This sentence is pronounced:
1. In the word of God (Acts 13:38).
 2. In Christ as surety (Isa. 50:8).
 3. In the conscience of believers (Rom. 5:1).
 4. At the last judgment (Rom. 3:26).

Controversy – *Whether the word to justify means to infuse holiness? Or rather to absolve from guilt? We deny the former and affirm the latter against the Papists.*

Arguments

1. It is unlawful to justify the ungodly (Exod. 23:7; Prov. 17:15). But it would be permitted if to justify meant to make holy.
2. Things are said to be justified, which are not capable of being made holy, such as God (Luke 7:29), his wisdom (Matt. 11:19).
3. It is contrasted with condemning someone to death (Rom. 8:11, 34).
4. The ungodly are reprov'd who justify themselves (Luke 16:15). That could not be if to justify meant to sanctify.
5. Justification is not by works (Rom. 3:28). But it would be entirely by works if to justify meant to sanctify.

Objections

1. "*Knowledge justifies*" (Isa. 53:11). Reply: No, but Christ, through his own knowledge and faith in him, leads believers to a state of justification (Luke 1:77).
2. "*Pastors justify many*" (Dan. 12:3). Reply: Ministers absolve in the name of God. The meaning of the text is that they lead others to a state of justification.
3. "*The dead are justified*" (Rom. 6:7). Reply: They clearly are justified, and they are clearly absolved.
4. "*He who is righteous let him be righteous still*" (Rev. 22:11). Reply: That is, let him remain in that state. All righteous (*justus*) men ought to be justified daily in the Word of God and their own conscience. "Forgive us our debts."
5. *To justify means to make just*. Reply: No more than to magnify (*magnificare*) is to make great (*magnu facere*).

§III. Justification means, therefore, to declare righteous:

1. Whether it is by a judge.
2. By a friend.
3. By a man himself.

And therefore to justify is sometimes to *absolve of guilt* (Exod. 23:7), sometimes to *praise as righteous* (Luke 7:29), and sometimes to *show* to be righteousness (Job. 32:2).

§IV. In order that justification might be properly understood, the following should be observed:

1. God is sitting on his throne as judge (Ps. 9:4).
2. Believers are cited and accused (Rev. 20:11-12).
3. The devil is the accuser (Zech. 3:1).
4. Jesus Christ is the intercessor, showing that he has satisfied for believers (1 John 2:1-2).
5. God absolves believers on account of that satisfaction (Rom. 8:33).

And this is rightly called justification.

§V. The *principal cause* of justification is the triune God (2 Cor. 5:19). The *internal moving cause* is the grace of God (Rom. 3:24). The *external cause* is the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). The *material cause*, or that which is imputed to us, is the same righteousness of Christ (Phil. 3:9). The *formal cause* is the judicial acquittal from punishment and the judicial granting of life (Rom. 8:33). The *instrumental cause* is faith (Rom. 5:1). The *final cause* is the glory of God and our salvation (Rom. 3:25).

§VI. The effects are:

1. Adoption (Tit. 3:7).
2. Peace of conscience (Rom. 5:1).
3. The hope of eternal life, and so on.

§VII. Justification is distinguished into active and passive. Active is the general sentence of God by which all believers on account of the righteousness of Christ are at one time absolved. This occurs in paradise and by promise (Gen. 3:15), in Christ the Head (2 Cor. 5:19), and in his Word (Rom. 8:1).²

§VIII. But passive is the particular justification of each believer:

1. In his *person* when Christ is given to him,

² Translator's note: For more on the distinction of active and passive justification, see Heppe, Heinrich, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: The Wakeman Trust), pp. 555-59.

2. In his *conscience* after the act of faith (Rom. 5:1), which also is often repeated.

§IX. *Active* justification precedes our faith and sanctification; *passive* justification follows.

§X. There is in God a *will not to punish sin* before a person believes,³ but the elect actually remains under guilt until they receive Christ by faith.

§XI. The effect of justification is a change, *not in the person substantively (realis)*, but *morally (moralis)* and in *status (statu)*. He acquires a right to life.

§XII. The believer has this right on account of the *righteousness* that Christ the *Mediator* acquired by his *active* and *passive* obedience, which God gives, and is received by faith.

§XIII. Faith means here *consent of the soul*, and not a bare *assent of the mind*, by which someone enters into a covenant and pact with Christ to receive him as Mediator and righteousness and commit himself to Christ for salvation.

§XIV. Thus a believer, being constituted in a state of grace, remains in it his whole life, and cannot perish.

Controversy 1 – *Whether God gives in addition to sanctification the grace of justification, by which he acquits those appointed to punishment and gives to them a right to eternal life?* We affirm against the Papists.

Arguments

1. They are listed as two distinct graces (1 Cor. 6:11).
2. Justification results in no one being able to bring a charge against believers; therefore, it is distinguished from sanctification (Rom. 8:33).
3. Christ's declaration, "Your sins are forgiven you," is altogether different from sanctification (Matt. 9:2).

³ Translator's note: The author here has a reference to the Greek version of Paul, but he provides no reference.

4. Justification is completed in this life at the same moment that someone believes, but sanctification is not (Rom. 5:1; Luke 18:14).
5. Justification is the sentence of God by which he absolves someone (Rom. 8:1), but sanctification is not.

Objections

1. *They are one and the same (1 Cor. 6:11)*. Reply: They are listed distinctly.
2. *Justification is the washing away of sins, therefore...* Reply: Not by the Holy Spirit but by the blood and merit of Christ, by which our debts are blotted out (1 John 1:7).
3. *By the grace of justification we are new creatures (Eph. 2:10)*. Reply: On the contrary, this is done substantively (*realiter*) in sanctification, but it can be said to be done morally (*moraliter*) and by reason of status in justification.
4. *The grace of justification is said to be an inherent (inbaerens) gift (Rom. 5:17)*. Reply: It is called a gift because it is given by grace. It is not called an "*inherent (inbaerens) gift*" or "*our holiness*."

Controversy 2 – *Whether a man is justified on account of his own inherent righteousness?* We deny against the Papists.

Arguments

1. A man is not justified by *his* righteousness (Rom. 10:3; Phil. 3:9).
2. He is not justified by the law (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:11).
3. Not by works (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16).
4. A man is justified by grace (Rom. 3:24).
5. Our righteousness is imperfect; therefore, we cannot truly be declared righteous on account of it (Isa. 64:6).
6. Justification takes away from a man all opportunity of glorying (Rom. 3:27).
7. We are justified by the blood and merit of Christ; therefore, we are not justified by our own righteousness (Eph. 1:7).

Objections

1. *"Your sins are forgiven you, for you loved much (Luke 7:47)."*
Reply: "For," not as an effecting cause, but it notes a connection, just as, "The sun is risen, for it is day."
2. *"We are justified by grace" (Rom. 3:24).* Reply: From God, not from what is inside us.
3. *"The doers of the law will be justified" (Rom. 2:13).* Reply: They would be justified by the law, if such they were, but because none are, all must be justified by grace.
4. *We are constituted righteous through Christ as through Adam we are constituted unrighteous, but this is done inherently (Rom. 5:17).*
Reply: All of this is conceded. The one sin of Adam is imputed to us, and as a result of it we are sinners. Thus, we are acquitted by the righteousness of Christ and regenerated by his Spirit.
5. *Repentance justifies (Acts 2:38).* Reply: By repentance our sins are forgiven, but not on account of our repentance.
6. *Abraham was justified as a result (ex) of works (James 2:21).*
Reply: That is, by that which was not without works, but was effective (*efficax*) through works.

Controversy 3 – *Whether the satisfaction and righteousness of Christ are imputed to us, and whether we are justified on account of their imputation to us?*
We affirm against the Socinians, Papists, and Remonstrants.

Arguments

1. Since Christ is said to be our righteousness before God (Jer. 23:6; Phil. 3:9; 1 Cor. 1:30).
2. We are constituted righteous through his obedience as we were constituted unrighteous through the disobedience of Adam (Rom. 5:18-19), but this has occurred by imputation.
3. As our sins were imputed to Christ, so his righteousness is imputed to us (2 Cor. 5:21).
4. Whatsoever Christ performs for us as our surety ought necessarily to be imputed to us. He performed righteousness for us (1 Tim. 2:6; Gal. 4:4); therefore . . .
5. On account of Christ and his blood our sins are remitted; therefore, his obedience ought to be imputed to us (Rom. 5:9; Gal. 3:13; 1 John 1:7).

Objections

1. *Then we are just as righteous as Christ.* Reply: Not at all. For the righteousness of Christ is given to us not as something that dwells (*inhaereat*) in our essence but because of the power and efficacy of his satisfaction.
2. *Then our sins are only covered, not taken away.* Reply: They are taken away as to dominion in sanctification, as to the power to condemn in justification.
3. *Therefore our sins were properly imputed to Christ.* Reply: More properly, that which had the power of meriting punishment. *Objection: Then Christ ought to be a son of the devil.* Reply: By no means, for that comes from the indwelling (*inhaerente*) dominion of sin.
4. *No one is able to be constituted righteous by the righteousness of another.* Reply: By payment of another one cannot be made inherently righteous, but by the payment of another one can be released from debt.
5. *The judgment of God is not according to truth if he judges to be righteous those who are not righteous.* Reply: God does not judge us to be righteous in justification, that is, perfectly sanctified, but we cannot be condemned since Christ has made satisfaction for us.
6. *We are justified freely (Rom. 3:24).* Reply: Inasmuch as we do not pay anything.

Controversy 4 – *Whether only Christ's passive obedience or death is imputed to us, or also his active obedience and observing the whole law?* We affirm against the same.

Arguments

1. What Christ has paid for us ought to be imputed to us; but he paid active righteousness for us (Gal. 4:4-5; John 17:19).
2. Christ fulfilled the whole law for the justification of everyone who believes (Rom. 8:3; 10:4).
3. The law never promised blessing to passive obedience but only to active: "Do this, and you will live" (Gal. 3:12); therefore, he had to do this in order that he might acquire for us a right to life.
4. Nor is there any other righteousness than that which can be said to be imputed to us (Rom. 4:6; Jer. 23:6).

5. We are justified by the obedience of the Mediator (Rom. 5:19). But obedience is not only passive but chiefly active.
6. Unless it is imputed to us, we would still be obligated to pay it to acquire a right to life, for the law cannot be broken (John 10:35).
7. It is a cloak of righteousness with which Christ clothes us (Zach. 3:4-5; Phil. 3:9; Isa. 61:10).

Objections

1. *It is constantly ascribed to his death and blood.* Reply: Because it is the ultimate end and fulfillment of all the obedience of Christ.
2. *By the death of Christ all of our sins are taken away, including those of omission.* Reply: By his death our sins are blotted out inasmuch as they are worthy of punishment, but it does not supply what was lacking for the fulfillment of the covenant of works: "Do this, and you will live."
3. *The active obedience of Christ was owed for himself.* Reply: On the contrary, he was a surety and before his advent into the world he had agreed that he would fulfill it for us.
4. *Then we are not held to active obedience, since Christ has fulfilled it for us.* Reply: We are not held to righteousness contractually, by which we might acquire life, but only for gratitude.
5. *Then his death was superfluous, for he has paid twice.* Reply: He has not, since both active and passive obedience had to be paid.
6. *The whole of justification is found in remission of sins (Rom. 4:6, 7).* Reply: On the contrary, a right to life has also been acquired (Rom. 8:3).

Controversy 5 – *Whether we are justified by faith alone as an instrument.*
We affirm against the Papists.

Arguments

1. We are justified by faith, without works (Rom. 3:28).
2. We are not justified except by faith (Gal. 2:16; Luke 8:50).
3. God justifies the ungodly who believe and flee to Christ; therefore, it is by faith alone (Rom. 4:5).

4. Justification is without the law. It is not, "Do this and you will live." Therefore, it is by faith alone (Rom. 3:21-22; Gal. 3:11-12).
5. Unless it were by faith alone, it would not be by grace (Rom. 4:16).
6. By faith we receive Christ (John 1:12; Eph. 3:12, 17).

Objections

1. *Then good works are not necessary.* Reply: Not that we might acquire a right to life but as commanded by God and works of gratitude.
2. *Faith does not justify separated from other virtues (reliquis virtutibus); therefore it is not faith alone.* Reply: Even if faith is not alone, it acts alone, just as the eyes are not alone, although they alone see.
3. *Through faith alone we do not please God; therefore...* Reply: In justification, we certainly do please God by faith alone.
4. *Faith justifies in so far as it cleanses the heart (Acts 15:9).* Reply: It cleanses the heart inasmuch as by an instrument it applies to us the blood of Christ.

Controversy 6 – *Whether faith itself, either alone or with charity, is accepted by God as our righteousness?* We deny against the Remonstrants.

Arguments

1. It is excluded with all works of the law: "Do this and live" (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 3:12).
2. The judgment of God is according to truth (Rom. 2:2). He cannot therefore receive faith as the complete fulfillment of the law.
3. We are justified by the blood and merit of Christ (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Gal. 3:13); therefore, our faith is not imputed to us as our righteousness.
4. God in justification shows himself to be just (Rom. 3:25, 26), but this would not be done if faith were accepted as observance of the whole law.
5. Then Christ would have died in vain, for then we would be able to stand before the face of God by our own righteousness against Galatians 2:21.

Objection

1. *His faith was imputed to him for righteousness (Rom. 4:5).* Reply: That is, faith justifies, but it justifies as an instrument receiving the merit of Christ.

Controversy 7 – *Whether Old Testament believers were justified and had complete remission of sins?* We affirm against the Socinians and Remonstrants.

Arguments

1. Holy Scripture everywhere testifies that their sins were forgiven (Ps. 32:5-6; 65:4; 103:3, 12; Isa. 6:7; 63:25; & c).
2. God promised forgiveness of sins openly to those who converted and repented (2 Chron. 7:14; Isa. 1:18; 55:7; Heb. 2:4).
3. With faith they asked for forgiveness of sins (1 Kings 8:50; Ps. 25:11, 18; 51:3, 4, 9); therefore, they were heard.
4. They were saved and received into glory (Ps. 68:20; 73:24); therefore, their sins were forgiven. This is proved from Psalm 32:1 and Romans 6:7.
5. God was their God from eternity (Ps. 48:14). And the Lord Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). Their sins were forgiven, therefore, on account of Christ.
6. They had the sacraments and signs of remission of sins (Rom. 4:11).
7. They were entirely justified (Rom. 4:2ff.; Gal. 3:6). There is no justification without the remission of sins (Acts 13:38).

Objections

1. *Through the law of Moses they could not be justified (Acts 13:38-39).* Reply: Indeed, not *through the law of Moses*, but *under the law of Moses through the grace of Christ*.
2. *God promised remission of sins as future in the New Testament (Jer. 31:31).* Reply: (1) Not future to the believers of the Old Testament but to those of the New. (2) Remission signifies either the satisfaction of the Mediator or the acquittal of the judge. The first was promised; the other was given.

3. *Christ by his blood atoned for sins in the Old Testament (Heb. 9:15).* Reply: Then atonement is an act of the Mediator by which he satisfies, not of a judge by which he acquits.
4. *They only had a passing over (paresis) or ignoring (dissimulatio) (Rom. 3:25).* Reply: Passing over (*paresis*) and forgiveness (*aphesis*) mean the same thing (Mic. 7:18-19; Heb. 9:22).
5. *Where there is remission of sins, no further sacrifice is required (Heb. 10:10).* Reply: It has already been said. The words to remit or to expiate sometimes denote the actions of the Mediator or his satisfaction. When he had performed these actions, no other sacrifice was required.

Controversy 8 – *Whether God was able to demand payment for the sins of the fathers of the Old Testament from them and punish them on account of their sins?* We deny against the same.

1. He had promised that he would not do it (Ps. 50:8; Isa. 43:25). He is not able to lie (Tit. 1:1).
2. Indeed, by an express oath he had testified that he would not change the covenant (Ps. 89:3-4, 34-36), in which it is impossible for him to lie (Heb. 6:18).
3. He had imputed all things to the Mediator (Isa. 53:6), who also by a solemn contract had accepted them (Ps. 40:8).
4. In order that they could say God no longer demands punishment of their sins from them (*actionem cessam*), he had given to them a sign and confirmed the covenant that he would demand payment of the debts from the Mediator and not from them (Rom. 4:11). He is therefore unable to do otherwise.
5. They were blessed in heaven, from whence they were not able to be dislodged into hell.
6. He has revealed that it is impossible (Isa. 49:15ff.). “A mother of an infant might forget her child, but I will not forget you.”

Objections

1. *It was a yearly reminder of sins (Heb. 10:3).* Reply: These were pointing to the Messiah to come. To him the sins of believers are assigned, and thus payment for them cannot be demanded from them.

2. *Christ had not yet satisfied.* Reply: This obligates him not believers. Neither does this infer any difference before God, to whom [he was] the lamb slain from the foundation of world.

Controversy 9 – *Whether it is possible for truly regenerated sons of God to fall away totally and finally from faith, from the grace of God, and from remission of sins?* We deny against the Papists, Socinians, Remonstrants, and Lutherans.

Arguments

1. It is clearly said to be impossible for the devil, sins, or seducers to prevail against the regenerated sons of God (Matt. 16:18; 24:24; Rom. 6:14).
2. The effect of the grace of God, once being infused into the hearts of the elect, is said to be such that it never withers (Ps. 1:3; 92:13ff.; John 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:23).
3. God in the covenant of grace promises that he will insure that believers will not fall away (Jer. 32:39-40; Isa. 14:10; Phil. 1:6).
4. And therefore he powerfully preserves them to such an extent that no one is able to snatch them away from him (John 10:28ff.; 1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:5).
5. Nor can he do otherwise, because the election of God and the gifts on account of it are unchangeable (Rom. 8:30; 11:29; 2 Tim. 2:19).
6. The will of the Father and the Son is perpetual, so that all those given to the Mediator will be saved and nothing lost (John 6:37, 39).
7. But those who abandon the profession of the truth show themselves to have never truly been believers (John 8:31; 1 John 2:19).

Objections

1. *“If a righteous man falls away . . .”* (Ezek. 18:24). Reply: It is not said what will be but that which would be if he should fall away in terms of the covenant of works.
2. *“When persecution comes, they stumble”* (Matt. 13:20-21). Reply: This is said not of justifying but of historical faith. For it is

- said, "he has no root in himself" (v. 21), and he is distinguished from he who is on good soil (v. 23).
3. *Who tasted the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit and fall away* (Heb. 6:4). Reply: These had certainly been convicted of the truth of the Christian religion in their conscience but not regenerated in their hearts.
 4. *"If after they have escaped the world, they fall back"* (2 Pet. 2:19-20). Reply: These are not sheep and true believers but are called "pigs" and "dogs" (v. 22). By profession and promises they had said goodbye to the world but not in their soul.
 5. *David and Solomon fell away*. Reply: They slipped but did not completely fall away (Ps. 73:24).
 6. *Demas* (1 Tim. 4:10). Reply: He therefore was never a true believer.
 7. *Then why are there exhortations and warnings?* Reply: They are means by which God preserves a man from ruin.