

**DOCTRINAL ESSAY**  
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of the  
**CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CONFERENCE**

by  
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*The Saving Grace of God*

To my dear brothers and sisters in the Concordia Lutheran Conference, “*whom I love in the truth*” (II John 1) of God’s Word (John 17:17) and in the truth of our precious and only Savior, Christ Jesus (John 14:6), and, therefore, with whom I enjoy “*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3), “*Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love*” (II John 3).

We should never tire or get weary of (Galatians 6:9; II Thessalonians 3:13) **repeating and reviewing** the teachings of God’s Word in our **local congregations**, those wonderful, precious, and priceless **divine institutions** (Matthew 18:17) when they **faithfully** (Revelation 2:10c; Jeremiah 23:28) **continue to submit to and follow** the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments in their public **preaching** week-after-week and month-after-month (II Timothy 4:2-5; II Corinthians 4:5); in their public **teaching** (Matthew 28:20; Revelation 3:8, 10-11) through Sunday School, Bible Class, Confirmation Class, Adult Instruction Class, Voters’ Meetings, etc.; in their private **counsel** in ministering to shut-ins, the dying, and those having problems in their marriage, employment, education, parenting, neighborhood, etc.; and in their public and private **practice**, that is, in their consistent application and carrying out of the doctrines of God in His written Word.

Furthermore, we should never tire or get weary of **repeating and reviewing** the teachings of God’s Word in our **Concordia Lutheran Conference**, that wonderful, precious, and priceless **human arrangement** when it also **faithfully continues to submit to and follow** the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments in its periodical, *The Concordia Lutheran*, in its Sunday School materials, in its other published materials such as books and tracts, in its conventions, in its pastoral conferences, in its continuing endeavor to preserve the unity of the true faith

(Ephesians 4:3; I Corinthians 1:10; John 8:31-32), in its opposition to all public errors in doctrine and practice (I Timothy 5:20; Galatians 6:1; Matthew 7:15-20; Titus 3:10; Romans 16:17-18), in its efforts toward God-pleasing unity with other Lutherans, as we have observed and experienced with the Fellowship of Lutheran Congregations at this very convention (Acts 2:42; I Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1-6), in its on-going desire to share the Word of God, with its many blessings, through the cooperative mission work of our congregations as it is being currently implemented with our brethren in Russia (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8), and in its adequate, faithful training of pastors for the work of the public ministry in our midst (II Timothy 2:2, 15; 4:1-5; Titus 1:9; I Timothy 3:1-7; 4:12), as we actually saw such training carried out over a period of five years, publicly acknowledged one year ago at the graduation of our dear brother, Paul E. Bloedel, and then put into much-needed use through his subsequent call to serve as the Pastor of St. Mark's, Sauk Village, Illinois. Such repeating and reviewing of the teachings of God's Word, even though we know them, are very much in order so that we will not forget them. The Apostle Peter, in his Second Epistle, declared: "*I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance*" (1:12-15). The "spotlight" for this convention is focused on the saving grace of God. You know about this doctrine and its profound blessings. However, by concentrating on it at this convention, we want to stir up and build up your knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of this priceless teaching so that you will not forget it but continue to remember it for the everlasting welfare of your own souls and for the never-ending profit of many other souls. So then, with the instruction, counsel, and direction (Psalm 119:24, 104-105) of God's Word alone, let us review the doctrine of

### **THE SAVING GRACE OF GOD.**

We will examine

- I. Its great necessity because of sin,**
- II. Its marvelous definition in Scripture,**
- III. Its changeless attributes for on-going encouragement, and**
- IV. Its inseparable relationship to God-pleasing sanctification.**

Has God ever lied, or will God ever lie? Absolutely not! He "*cannot lie*" (Titus 1:2). This is a changeless fact because God Himself is changeless! He Himself has declared: "*I am the Lord; I change not*" (Malachi 3:6). Therefore, the Holy Scriptures have no lies in them but only the unchanging truth (John 17:17) from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. What a blessing for us and all other human beings to have, at all times, this written Word of God to provide us with **1**) infallible, divine counsel (Psalm 119:24) "*for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*" (II Timothy 3:16), that is, what God wants us to believe and how He wants us to live (Psalm 119:105), **2**) proper distinction between what is really sinful and what is not sinful (Romans 3:20), what is and what is not a "*transgression of the Law*" (I John 3:4), **3**) perfect, eternal comfort in and through "*the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29), that Lamb of God who has removed all of **our** imperfections, **our** faults, **our** failures, **our** shortcomings, and **our** offenses, so that they are not imputed, charged, or held against us (II Corinthians 5:19), and **4**) the preparations that have been totally taken care of by

our Savior (John 19:30) so that we do not have to be afraid or worried about our death and the life after death (Philippians 1:21).

On account of these above-listed blessings from God's Word, plus many others, we are to be in constant awe and reverence toward this divine revelation. The Lord God Himself declared in Isaiah 66: *"To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at [is in awe of] My Word"* (v. 2). We are never to think that we know better than what God's Word teaches; we are never to think that God's Word is out-of-touch with the world in which we live, that its principles and teachings have no application to our "modern" age. After Peter, James, and John had fished all night and came up empty, Jesus said to Peter: *"Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught [catch]"* (v. 4). Peter replied to Jesus: *"Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at Thy Word I will let down the net"* (v. 5). Even though Peter's experience the night before could have easily prompted him to conclude that it would be a waste of time and effort immediately to go out fishing again, yet he did not react to Jesus' words on the basis of his experience and feelings. Rather, he said to Jesus: *"Nevertheless at Thy Word I will let down the net."* This is how we are to respond when our feelings and experiences clash with God's Word: *"Nevertheless at Thy Word"* I will do this or that, believe this or that, and think this or that. The Apostle Paul sets before us this priceless, perfect, and ever timely counsel in II Corinthians 10: *"Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"* (v. 5). Oh, how we need to crucify, oppose, and reject all fleshly thinking (Galatians 5:24) because it always wants to turn us away from God's thinking as revealed in His Word! Galatians 5 confirms this when it tells us that *"the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other"* (v. 17). We need to grow more and more in our appreciation of God's Holy Word and all that it has given us in the past, at the present, and for the future (II Timothy 3:14; Revelation 3:11; John 8:31-32; Psalm 119:14, 16).

As we focus on the wonderful, saving grace of God, we will, first of all, emphasize its great necessity because of sin. And when we speak of sin, we will distinguish between inherited sin and actual sin.

Inherited sin is also called original sin, or *"the flesh"* (Romans 7:18). **This is not the sin which people themselves have actually done or committed, but it is the sin which all people have inherited from their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, etc., and, ultimately, from their first earthly father, Adam.** It was this inherited, inborn sin which produced and brought about two horrible, terrible, disastrous consequences:

**1) Inherited guilt** — Romans 5 is crystal clear in its transmission of these facts: *"By the offense of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation"* (v. 18a). On account of and since Adam's one sin of disobedience (Genesis 3:6), every one of his descendants, without any exceptions, came under the righteous, just, and holy judgment of God, which meant that they were all condemned by God for one sin committed thousands of years ago. Is this unfair and unjust? Of course not, for God is never unfair or unjust in any of His works or in any of His ways! If Scripture teaches that, because of Adam's one sin, all of his descendants, including each of us, are guilty and condemned before God, then that is most certainly the case; it is most certainly true. If it were not for the saving grace of God in Christ, all of Adam's offspring, each of us included, would forever and ever remain guilty and condemned before God in this life and

eternally in hell. Listen carefully to **all** the words of Romans 5, verse 18: “*As by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of **One** the free gift came upon **all** men unto justification of life.*” What a comparison: As **the sin** of Adam brought God’s judgment and condemnation **on all** people, so **the righteousness** of Jesus brought God’s justification and forgiveness **to all** people. The first Adam’s great wrong was taken care of in full by the Second Adam’s great righteousness on behalf of all!

**2) Inherited corruption** — “Not only was the **guilt** of Adam imputed to his descendants, but his children and children’s children have inherited from their first ancestor his **corrupt nature**, being flesh born of the flesh, wholly depraved, totally blind of understanding in spiritual things, of perverse appetites, their will opposed to the will of God and only prone to evil, all their faculties enslaved in the service of sin, without any ability in any measure to work their own spiritual restoration” (*Doctrinal Theology*, A. L. Graebner, page 61). Isn’t this description of inherited corruption overly harsh, extremely insensitive, and completely unrealistic? Not at all! In fact, the description is very temperate and moderate; it “hits” the bulls-eye; it certainly does not go overboard in its characterization of the shocking consequences of Adam’s rebellion, his one sin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). The Holy Scriptures never exaggerate or blow “hot air.” Consider carefully Scripture’s totally reliable testimony and witness concerning the **corruption** inherited from Adam:

- First of all, it is most certainly “flesh born of flesh.” These words summarize what Jesus said to Nicodemus during their night visit: “*Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is **flesh**, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*” (John 3:5-6). Without the saving grace of God in Christ working conversion or the second birth, the flesh will keep souls out of heaven; it will bring souls to hell. The Apostle Paul made this personal confession: “*I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth **no good thing***” (Romans 7:18). The flesh, that inherited corruption passed on from Adam to all human beings, is completely and totally corrupt, wicked, evil, and no good.
- Secondly, what all people inherited from Adam makes them, on their own, “wholly depraved, totally blind of understanding in spiritual things, of perverse appetites, their will opposed to the will of God and only prone to evil, all their faculties enslaved in the service of sin.” This is a shocking, but truthful description. The inherited corruption resulting from the fall of Adam has produced in all of his descendants, beginning at their conception and birth, complete depravity, disgusting, scandalous, and shameful devotion to evil. Genesis 6 provides us with this accurate information concerning the world before the flood which covered the world at Noah’s time,: “*God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that **every imagination** of the thoughts of his heart was **only evil continually**. And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air, for it repenteth Me that I have made man*” (vv. 5-7). This inherited corruption, also identified as the flesh, does not “mellow” with age, nor is it absent in the lives of believers in Jesus. This corrupt flesh is our day-and-night enemy in our lives as followers and disciples of Jesus; it always wants to separate us from the living, powerful Word of God, especially from the living, powerful message of the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus; it always wants us to do other things and have “good” excuses for staying away from the reading, studying, and memorizing of God’s Word at home, from the teaching of God’s

Word at Sunday School, at Bible Class, and from any other opportunity to hear and learn the Word of God in our faithful, Christian congregations, and to hear it in the public preaching of God's Word in our worship services. Furthermore, this degenerate and perverted flesh always wants us to look on the Word of God as unnecessary, restrictive, foolish to believe and follow, and not true, a low priority in our schedule, and out-of-date. First Corinthians 2 shows us the true "character" of this hideous flesh, called "*the natural man*," when it tells us that "*the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*" (v. 14). This inherited corruption, also called "the flesh," is completely blind to what God has graciously revealed in the Holy Scriptures, especially His saving grace in Christ. Furthermore, this grotesque and offensive flesh is completely blind to **God's** marvelous work of **creating** and **preserving** all things here on earth, as well as all things in the sky.

- Thirdly, this awful, inherited corruption leaves people "without any ability in any measure to work their own spiritual restoration." Because all human beings have this inherited corruption, the evil flesh, they are inherently "**dead in trespasses and sins**" (Ephesians 2:1b); this means that they are completely unable to do anything, by themselves, to change their spiritual condition from spiritual death to spiritual life. They cannot, on their own, "make a decision" to come to Christ, to dedicate themselves to Christ, to follow Christ in their lives, etc. The Apostle Paul, considering the past, announced to the believers at Ephesus: "*You hath He [God] quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins*" (Ephesians 2:1). God alone, without any cooperation from the Ephesians, had given them spiritual life by bringing them to faith in the saving grace of God, built on the only Savior for sinners, Christ Jesus. This work of God is beautifully and precisely described later on in Ephesians 2, where the sheep of Christ at Ephesus were given this reminder: "*By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*" (vv. 8-10).

Therefore, on the basis of God's own written, completely-truthful revelation in the Holy Scriptures, we reject and condemn

- 1) The false, commonly-held teaching that babies are not, at their conception and birth, totally guilty and totally corrupt because of their inherited sin, and, therefore, are **not in need of** infant baptism as God's means of grace for the salvation of their souls (See I Peter 3:21; John 3:5);
- 2) The false, far-and-widely-disseminated teaching that human beings, already at birth and thereafter, have the **free will** to do good and to avoid evil (See Romans 3:12c; 7:18; 8:7; II Peter 2:19b);
- 3) The false, misleading teaching that Mary was **not** conceived and born in sin. (See: *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 1563, Fifth Session, Decree Concerning Original Sin; Decree of Pope Pius IX on the Immaculate Conception, 1854; see also Job 14:4; Luke 1:46-50; Romans 3:22b-23; Luke 1:35 – Human sinlessness is attributed *only* to our Lord Jesus Christ, who was miraculously conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the *sinful* Virgin Mary without a human father);

4) The false, repulsive teaching that the Scriptural account of the fall of Adam and Eve into sin is **not** a true, **literal, historically-accurate** account, but is **only a figurative** account (See Genesis 3:1-14; Romans 5:12-19; I Corinthians 15:21-22; I Timothy 2:13-14; II Corinthians 11:3);

5) The false, seductive teaching that the sin inherited from Adam and Eve did not bring about the **total** corruption of our whole human nature, but **only a weakening** of the free will and a **greater inclination** to do evil than to do good (See Romans 7:18; 8:7; John 3:5-6; I Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1);

6) The false, twisted teaching that the inherited sin, with its guilt and corruption, is **no longer sin** in the lives of **the converted, righteous, and regenerate** (See Galatians 5:17, 24; Ephesians 4:22; Romans 7:18; Isaiah 64:6; Ecclesiastes 7:20);

7) Any other false, man-made, and perverted teachings which directly attack the Scriptural doctrine on inherited sin, or in any way undermine that doctrine.

Now, **this inherited or original sin**, this sin which is not done or committed by human beings, this deep, disgusting, and degenerate depravity and corruption passed on at the time of conception from one generation to another, this horrible and hideous spiritual plague **produces the fruit of actual sins**, sins of commission, that is, sinful **acts** committed by human beings when they do what God does not want them to do, as well as sins of omission, that is, sins committed when they fail to carry out God's Commandments. So it can most certainly be said that all the fruit of actual sin comes from the tree of inherited sin, guilt, and corruption. Jesus so pointedly and accurately declared: "***A corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit***" (Matthew 7:17b-18).

How do we know for certain that something is sinful? Romans 3 provides us with the right answer to this question: "***By the Law is the knowledge of sin***" (v. 20b). And what is sin? The correct answer is given in I John 3: "***Sin is the transgression of the Law***" (v. 4b); sin is lawlessness; sin is rebellion against God's Word and God's will. "***To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin***" (James 4:17).

The only standard by which it is determined whether something is sinful or not sinful is the Law of God (Romans 3:20b). And what does the Law of God demand? Complete perfection, complete holiness, complete compliance: "***Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy***" (Leviticus 19:2); "***Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the Law to do them***" (Galatians 3:10); "***Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all***" (James 2:10); "***Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect***" (Matthew 5:48); "***Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind***" (Matthew 22:37); "***Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths***" (Proverbs 3:5-6); "***Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him***" (Psalm 33:8).

The Word of God speaks of many different kinds of actual sins:

- **Sins against better knowledge** (also called **deliberate, premeditated, malicious** sins) — An **example** of such was done by Absalom, one of the sons of King David in the Old Testament. Absalom wanted to be king in the place of his father. To accomplish his evil purpose, he deliberately, maliciously lied to and deceived the people of Israel (II Samuel 15:1-5). He actually “*stole the hearts*” (v. 6) of the people through his premeditated and, as more and more time elapsed, unrepented of lies and deceit, getting them (the people of Israel) to follow him and turn against his father, the king. Sinning against better knowledge is more egregious and brings greater condemnation (Luke 12:47-48; John 19:11; Matthew 23:14; see also Hebrews 10:26ff.) than the
- **Sins of ignorance** — An **example** of such are the two hundred men who believed the lies of Absalom and were deceived by him. They followed Absalom “*in their simplicity, and they knew not anything*” (II Samuel 15:11). Even though they were ignorant of Absalom’s lies and deceit, they still sinned by being accomplices (I Timothy 5:22b) of his crimes, including his rebellion against their king, King David, God’s appointed and chosen leader.
- **Sins against our God** — (Genesis 39:9 – “*How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?*”), **sins against our neighbor** (Leviticus 19:17 – “*Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him.*”), and **sins against ourselves** (I Corinthians 6:18 – “*He that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.*”). A long list of actual sins against God, our neighbor, and ourselves is spelled out in Galatians 5:19ff., where we have the works or fruits of the flesh, the inherited corruption. It is important for us to remember that God not only hates sin (Proverbs 6:16-19), but He also hates the sinner (Psalm 5:5b).

The Holy Scriptures have demonstrated to us once again that sin, without any doubt, is **real** and does exist; it is not imaginary, and it is not a figment of our imagination. Inherited sin, with its terrible guilt and its horrible corruption, is a cesspool of wickedness. The message of Jeremiah 17, verse 9, is very blunt: “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*”

However, the message of Romans 5 is also very blunt, but, at the same time, tremendously wonderful: “*Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord*” (vv. 20-21). The magnitude of sin, both inherited and actual, helps us better and better to understand and more greatly appreciate the magnitude of the saving grace of God and its everlasting victory over sin. Let us now consider the marvelous definition in the Scriptures of this saving grace of God or from God.

## II.

What is this saving grace of God? It is one of the “gorgeous beauty queens” in Holy Scripture. Why is this grace of God in justification and salvation so beautiful and gorgeous? It is because of how wonderfully it is communicated and conveyed to us in the Holy Scriptures in passages such as:

- **Romans 3:24** — “*Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*” Immediately before this verse, we are informed that “*all have sinned and*

*come short of the glory of God*” (v. 23). Now these “*all*,” the world of sinners (John 3:16; II Corinthians 5:19), have most certainly been justified, declared just and righteous, pronounced forgiven, freely as a gift, without deserving such, out of **God’s favor, goodness, mercy, kindness, and love to undeserving sinners on account of the paid ransom, the deliverance in and through Christ Jesus**, the Son of God and the Son of Man. This is all one-sided; it is solely and only God’s work. It is “*the Gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24). This Gospel is the message of what God has marvelously done for all sinners (including each of us) on account of the perfect obedience (Matthew 5:17) and the sinless sacrifice of Christ Jesus for all sinners, “*the Just for the unjust*” (I Peter 3:18).

- **Romans 11:5-6** — “*Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it **no more of works**, otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace, otherwise work is no more work.*” Here we see that the saving grace of **God**, also in our election, is the very opposite of any **human** works, **human** efforts, **human** contributions. What **we** do has absolutely nothing to do with our election; it is completely and totally an “*election of [God’s] grace*,” as we are informed here in Romans 11. In the first chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, we have an amazing reaffirmation of what is written in the verses which we have just touched on from Romans 11. Listen very carefully to verses 3-7 in Ephesians 1: “*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.**” The fact that God carried out His election of grace “*before the foundation of the world*,” when no human being was in this world, is the infallible, never-changing confirmation that we, the sheep of Christ, have been predestinated, called, and justified, and will most certainly be glorified (Romans 8:30) **solely by the grace of God in Christ Jesus, without any works, contributions, or help on our part because we were not even here** to work, contribute, or help in any way. So, especially in the election of grace, all the credit, blessing, honor, glory, and praise go to one Source, the Triune God. There is no indication at all in Romans 11, Ephesians 1, or Romans 8 that God’s election was carried out in view of our foreseen final faith, or on account of some future work on our part, or even because of some imagined “lesser resistance” on our part.*
- **II Corinthians 8:9** — “*Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was*  
*rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye **through His poverty might be rich.**”*  
 In the context of Christian giving, as set forth in II Corinthians 8 and 9, this verse in chapter 8 is not only an excellent example of giving on the part of the Lord Jesus Himself, but it is a powerful, proper incentive “*to prove the sincerity of [our] love*” (v. 8) by being cheerful and grateful givers (II Corinthians 9:7) because of His grace toward us. Consider how this grace is described and defined in II Corinthians 8, verse 9: It has its origin in Christ Jesus who, though He was God, the Owner and Giver of everything, yet, for us and for all sinners (I John 2:2) He became poor; He “***made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and, being found in***



*fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:7-8). How have we been made eternally rich through the poverty, the humility, and the service of Christ Jesus, even unto death, in our behalf, as our Substitute, as our Savior? Romans 4 responds to this question by declaring that Christ “was delivered [into death] for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification” (v. 25), all so that God in Christ would finish that work of “reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (II Corinthians 5:19). This is God’s marvelous grace, His undeserved, unmerited goodness, kindness, love in Christ toward “the world” of sinners (John 3:16).*

- **Ephesians 2:8-9** — *“By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.”* It is “the exceeding riches of [God’s] grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (v. 7) which alone brings souls out of spiritual death to spiritual and eternal life (vv. 1, 5) by bringing them to faith in this saving grace of God. This is God’s gift; it is not in any way the result of our labor, or work, or endeavor. Therefore, there is no basis for boasting in ourselves, even in our smallest efforts. Rather, with the psalmist, let us declare: “My soul shall make her boast in the Lord.... O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together” (34:2-3); “In God we boast all the day long, and praise Thy name forever” (44:8).

The *Brief Statement* of 1932, as we are expounding on Ephesians 2, gives us this excellent, timely review in paragraphs 11 & 12:

All men, since the Fall, are dead in sins, Ephesians 2:1-3, and inclined only to evil, Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Romans 8:7. For this reason, and particularly because men regard the Gospel of Christ, crucified for the sins of the world, as foolishness, I Corinthians 2:14, faith in the Gospel, or conversion to God, is neither wholly nor in the least part the work of man, but the **work of God’s grace and almighty power alone**, Philippians 1:29; **Ephesians 2:8**; 1:19; Jeremiah 31:18. Hence Scripture calls the faith of men, or his conversion, a raising from the dead, Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 2:12, a being born of God, John 1:12-13, a new birth by the Gospel, I Peter 1:23-25, a work of God like the creation of light at the creation of the world, II Corinthians 4:6.

On the basis of these clear statements of the Holy Scriptures we reject every kind of *synergism*, that is, the doctrine that **conversion is wrought not by the grace and power of God alone, but in part also by the co-operation of man himself**, by man’s right conduct, his right attitude, his right self-determination, his lesser guilt or less evil conduct as compared with others, his refraining from willful resistance, or anything else whereby man’s conversion and salvation is taken out of the gracious hands of God and made to depend on what man does or leaves undone. For this refraining from willful resistance or from any kind of resistance is also solely a work of grace, which “changes unwilling into willing men,” Ezekiel 36:26; Philippians 2:13. We reject also the doctrine that man is able to decide for conversion through “powers imparted by grace,” since this doctrine presupposes that **BEFORE conversion man still possesses spiritual powers by which he can make the right use of such “powers imparted by grace.”**

We have provided you with only four locations in Scripture where the saving grace of God is defined and referred to for our instruction. There are many other locations (which we do not have sufficient time to examine), some of which are John 1:14; Acts 20:32; Romans 5:20-21; 6:1, 14-15; II Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 5:4; Ephesians 1:7; II Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:7; Hebrews 4:16; and many others.

### III.

Now, in this third part concerning the saving grace of God, we will consider its changeless attributes for on-going encouragement. What are these attributes?

1) The first attribute or characteristic of this saving grace of God is that it is grace **IN CHRIST**. Romans 3 leaves no doubt that all sinners have been “*justified freely by [God’s] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (v. 24). Galatians 3 likewise confirms that this saving grace does most certainly exist for all sinners because “*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree*” (v. 13). First Timothy 2 removes all question marks when it announces to us that “*there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all*” (vv.5-6). Furthermore, **Christ** Himself declared: “*Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the Prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill*” (Matthew 5:17). Christ, in our place, as our Substitute, did everything which God demanded in His Law; He was “*made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law*” (Galatians 4:4-5). Is there anyone but Christ Jesus who can save souls from the everlasting judgment and condemnation we deserve for our inherited and actual sins? God’s Word provides one clear answer: No! The Apostle Peter confessed: “*Neither is there salvation in any other [but Jesus], for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). There is **no** salvation, **no** justification in Buddha, Allah, the god of the Masonic Lodge, the god of human works, the god of the Unitarians, the god of our fleshly human mind, etc., etc. John 3 conveys to us these never-changing words of truth: “*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...He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him*” (John 3:17, 36). What great encouragement and certainty this attribute of saving grace **in Christ** gives to us!!

2) The second attribute or characteristic of the saving grace of God is that it is **UNIVERSAL** grace; it is not limited to only some people; it is for all. God’s Word repeatedly stresses this truth. Let us listen to its clear testimony: “*The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men*” (Titus 2:11); “[God] will have **all men** to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2:4); “*God so loved the world*” (John 3:16); Jesus “*is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world*” (I John 2:2).

The *Brief Statement* speaks on this truth of universal grace when it says to us:

We reject... the *Calvinistic* perversion of the doctrine of conversion, that is, the doctrine that God does not desire to convert and save all hearers of the Word, but only a portion of them. Many hearers of the Word indeed remain unconverted and are not saved, not because God does not earnestly desire their conversion and salvation, but solely because they stubbornly resist the gracious operation of the Holy Ghost, as Scripture teaches, Acts 7:51; Matthew 23:37; Acts 13:46.

As to the question why not all men are converted and saved, seeing that God’s grace is universal and all men are equally and utterly corrupt, we confess that we cannot answer it.

From Scripture we know only this: A man owes his conversion and salvation, not to any lesser guilt or better conduct on his part, but solely to the grace of God. But any man's non-conversion is due to himself alone; it is the result of his obstinate resistance against the converting operation of the Holy Ghost, Hosea 13:9.

Our refusal to go beyond what is revealed in these two Scriptural truths is not "masked Calvinism" [*Crypto-Calvinism*] but *precisely* the Scriptural teaching of the Lutheran Church as it is presented in detail in the *Formula of Concord* ...: "That one is hardened, blinded, given over to a reprobate mind, while another, who is indeed in the same guilt, is converted again, etc. —in these and similar questions Paul fixes a certain limit to us how far we should go, namely, that in the one part we should recognize God's *judgment*. For they are well-deserved penalties of sins when God so punished a land or nation for despising His Word that the punishment extends also to their posterity, as is to be seen in the Jews. And thereby God in some lands and persons exhibits His severity to those that are His in order to indicate what we all would have well deserved and would be worthy and worth, since we act wickedly in opposition to God's Word and often grieve the Holy Ghost sorely; ...And this His righteous, well-deserved judgment He displays in some countries, nations, and persons in order that, when we are placed alongside of them and compared with them [and found to be most similar to them], we may learn the more diligently to recognize and praise God's pure, unmerited grace in the vessels of mercy. When we proceed thus far in this article, we remain on the right way, as it is written, Hosea 13:9: "*O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thy help.*" However, as regards these things in this disputation which would soar too high and beyond these limits, we should with Paul place the finger upon our lips and remember and say, Romans 9:20: "*O man, who art thou that repliest against God?*" The *Formula of Concord* describes the mystery which confronts us here not as a mystery in man's heart (a "psychological" mystery), but teaches that, when we try to understand why "one is hardened, blinded, given over to a reprobate mind, while another, who is indeed in the same guilt, is converted again," we enter the domain of the unsearchable judgments of God and ways past finding out, which are not revealed to us in His Word, but which we shall know in eternal life, I Corinthians 13:12.

Calvinists solve this mystery, which God has not revealed in His Word, by denying the *universality* of grace; synergists, by denying that salvation is by grace *alone*. Both solutions are utterly vicious, since they contradict Scripture and since every poor sinner stands in need of, and must cling to, both the unrestricted *universal grace* and the unrestricted "by grace *alone*," lest he despair and perish (§ 13-16).

3) The third attribute or characteristic concerning the saving grace of God is that it is **SERIOUS AND EFFICACIOUS** grace. God really wants all people to be converted, and He puts His full power into the means of grace to carry out His purpose. Christ wants the Gospel preached "*to every creature*" (Mark 16:15); He want all to hear that He, for Jesus' sake, is gracious to all people (II Corinthians 5:19). Why then do so many hearers of the Word never come to faith in the Savior? Is it because of a lack of serious effort on the part of God through His Word? Oh, no! It is because of people's resistance to the efforts of the Holy Spirit of God through His Word to convert them. What did Jesus, on one occasion, say to the people of Jerusalem? "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not*" (Matthew 23:37). Stephen said to people before him: "*Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye*" (Acts 7:51). Whoever is saved, is saved by grace alone, and not because of a lesser guilt or a better conduct over against grace; whoever is lost is lost through his own fault, and not through a lack of the

grace of God or of the powerful, gracious operation of God through the means of grace. “*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that **any** should perish, but that **all** should come to repentance*” (II Peter 3:9).

This has been a very brief overview of some of the attributes and characteristics of the saving grace of God. Finally, concerning the saving grace of God, we will take up its inseparable relationship to God-pleasing sanctification.

#### IV.

The universal saving grace of God in Christ is indeed always powerful, even when it is rejected and spurned. In the lives of true believers, this saving grace will always produce good fruits, thank-offerings of praise and evidences of gratitude (John 15:5). Why? God’s words will answer this question very well:

- **Titus 2** — “*The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*” (vv. 11-14). Here we have some of the great blessings of the saving grace of God: salvation from the curse of God’s Law; the blessed hope of heaven, the visible appearing of Jesus on the Last Day, etc. These blessings help and strengthen us to turn away more and more from what is ungodly and worldly, and to be more committed to that which is right and godly, all to glorify and honor our God in an ever greater way because of all that He has done for us and for the forgiveness of our sins.
- **II Corinthians 5** — “*The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge that if One died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again*” (vv. 14-15). Here we see the “Siamese twin” relationship between the saving grace of God in Christ, His death for all sinners, and the response to that great grace in the life of the believers, living day-after-day for Him who lived, died, and rose again for them.
- **I John 4** — “*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.... We love Him, because He first loved us*” (vv. 9-11, 19). Here, once again, we see the inseparable connection between the grace, mercy, and love of God in Christ toward us and all sinners, and the fruits of faith in the only Savior for sinners.

The universal, saving, and powerful grace of God in Christ is the only hope and comfort for sinners. It is this grace of God in Christ which has won the everlasting victory over sin, both inherited and actual. “*Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord*” (I Corinthians 15:57-58).