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GRACE.

For establishing whatever there is vital in personal Christianity, as well as for determining the exact doctrinal position of a teacher of Christianity, such Biblical concepts as "grace," "faith," and "righteousness" call for a careful inquiry and analysis. For these concepts are theological quantities of paramount value and importance that enter into the *articulus stantis atque cadentis ecclesiae*.¹⁾ Justification must remain a term of undefined extent as long as its coefficients are not exhibited in the full Scriptural value of their divinely intended meaning. According as a Christian understands, and a theologian explains, the meaning of these terms, he will hold as a net result of his efforts either a living spiritual reality, full of joy and solace, or a fantastic shadow that mocks his efforts at embrace. If the keynote of every genuine Christian hope for peace here and beyond has really been sounded, and the overshadowing issue of the Church's mission to fallen mankind has been fully stated in that momentous conclusion of the apostle: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith

1) "Above other matters in the Holy Scriptures the term grace, in particular, requires an explanation, not only because it is so widely used, but also because it is used in setting forth a matter by far the most important, namely, the article of justification, and, lastly, because ignorance of (the import of) this term has, before this time, occasioned the most pernicious errors." (Flacius, *Glossa*, ed. ultima, Basel, 1617; sub voce gratia, p. 370 a.)

MISSIVE AGAINST THE SABBATARIANS ADDRESSED TO A GOOD FRIEND.

By DR. MARTIN LUTHER. A. D. 1538.

Grace and peace in Christ:—

I have received your communication and the oral request of your messenger, but on account of unavoidable hindrances have not been able to answer as promptly as I should have liked and had promised to do. For this I ask your indulgence.

Now, as regards your information, that everywhere in the world the Jews are spreading their abominable doctrines, and have already misled a few Christians, causing them to submit to circumcision, and to believe that the Messiah, or Christ, is yet to come, and that the laws of the Jews must abide forever, and must, moreover, be adopted by all Gentiles, etc., on all which claims you ask to be advised how to meet them with Holy Scripture, I shall, for the present, until I have greater leisure, briefly state my advice and opinion in this letter.

In the first place, since the Jewish people have become much hardened through their rabbis, so as to be hardly capable of being won over,—for when a person even con-

victs them by Scripture, they take recourse from Scripture to their rabbis, "just as you Christians," they say, "believe your pope and his decretals" (answers which I have myself received from them, when upon a time I was engaged in discussion with them and was citing Scripture against them),—for this reason, I say, you ought to bring forward again, for the comfort of Christians, the old argument which Lyra and many others have employed, and which has not to this day been honestly answered by the Jews, although they have shamefully perverted much Scripture in the attempt, and have contradicted some of their oldest teachers; of which fact, however, I have neither time nor space to speak at present.

This is the argument: The Jews have been in exile from Jerusalem these fifteen hundred years, possessing neither temple, divine service, priesthood, nor royalty; and their law, together with the city of Jerusalem and the entire Jewish monarchy, is in ruins this long time. This they cannot deny, because their miserable condition and experience, and the place, which is still named Jerusalem this day, lying waste and stripped of Jewry before the eyes of the whole world, argues the point too well and too forcibly against them. Now, they cannot, you know, keep the law of Moses except at Jerusalem only, as they themselves know and are compelled to own. For their priesthood, royalty, temple, sacrifices, and whatever Moses by divine command has appointed for their use and with reference to them, they cannot hope to maintain outside of Jerusalem. This is one point, and it is sure indeed.

Basing on this you ought to inquire: What may that sin be, and what its name, on account of which God so terribly chastises them, as to keep them in exile such a long time, without their sacerdotal and royal, *i. e.*, without their Mosaic institutions and government, without sacrifices and other ordinances of the law, especially without the possession of Jerusalem; when, in truth, the promise of God

is still standing, which they also boast, viz., that their law shall abide forever, and Jerusalem shall be God's peculiar dwelling-place, and that there shall be at all times before God both princes from the house of David and priests from among the Levites, in which promises the prophets and Scripture abound, as they know and, as I have stated, boast. And yet this glorious, powerful, and manifold promise has failed these fifteen hundred years, and they themselves sadly feel it.

Now, inasmuch as it is absurd to lay the blame on God, claiming that He has not kept His promise, and has lied for fifteen hundred years, you should ask where the fault lies, since it is impossible that God should lie or deceive. They shall and must reply, that the blame rests on their sins, and that when they shall have atoned for them, God will keep His promise and send the Messiah. On this point, as I stated before, you ought to insist, and demand what the name of that sin is. For such horrible, protracted, and grievous punishment indicates that they must have a grievous and horrible sin resting upon them, the like of which has not been heard of since the world began. For never has God plagued even pagans such a long time, but has dispatched them in a trice; how is it possible, then, that He should torture His own people such a long time, and that in such a manner that they do not see and cannot see the end of it yet?

Now, it amounts to nothing when they say that it is done on account of their sins, and yet are unable to name those sins. They might with better reason claim that they had committed no sin, because they are not able to name any sins, have no knowledge of their guilt, and, hence, seem to be unjustly punished by God. Accordingly, you should strenuously urge this point that they must name that sin. If they will not do it, you have gained this much, that they are seen to prevaricate and are not to be trusted.

If they do name the sin, observe them well: for this argument hurts them. If I were a Jew myself, born from

the very body of Abraham and most carefully instructed by Moses, verily, I should not know how to answer it, and should be forced to forsake the entire Mosaical Jewish ordinances and become God knows what.

Some of their rabbis, in order to blind their poor people with some comfort, make this reply: That sin is their fathers' worshiping the golden calf in the desert; for this sin they must now make atonement, until etc. Is not this fearful blindness? How does this answer run in the ears of people who read their Scriptures? For if that sin is so great, why, then, has God later shown such favors to the people of Israel, why has He continually performed such miracles by prophets, kings, yea, by peasants and women, as the books of Moses, Joshua, Judges, Kings, etc., witness? All these things He should surely not have done, if He had not graciously forgiven all their sins, not mentioning at all this one, for which atonement was made at the time. Why did He not at that time, as He is now doing, forsake His people on account of that sin? Why did He, regardless of that sin, bring them into the promised land, show them every favor, exalt and honor them above all the Gentiles? If He withholds the Messiah at the present time on account of that sin, which was atoned for at the time, He might have said even at that time: "I will not bring you into the land, nor honor you as highly, as I had promised; for you have committed a sin which I will nevermore forget nor forgive."

But if at that time He did not allow any sin to prevent Him from fulfilling His promise spoken to Abraham, — even as He has never omitted His promise on account of man's sin, — how could He now on account of this one sin withhold the Messiah such a long time, whom yet He promised to send by such glorious prophecies as these, viz., that the throne of David and the sacrifices of priests should never cease before Him? Ah, there occurred in those days under the rule of Moses a great many other sins, *e. g.*, that com-

mitted with Baal Peor and with tempting God many a time, as the books of Moses show; why do they not refer to those sins also? Tell these Jews, my dear friend, that their argument is pure knave's work, and they themselves know it, or ought to know it.

Moreover, at that time the Messiah had not been promised to David, so that the sin with the calf cannot be of any moment here. Hence, make them name other sins on account of which they suffer such woeful misery. If they name one or more, I kindly ask you to inform me forthwith, and—old foolish Christian that I am!—I shall have a stone knife made at once and turn Jew, even if I should have to circumcise not the one member alone, but also my nose and ears. But I know they cannot name any.

For here is the testimony of Scripture, which relates that, prior to the Babylonian captivity, the Jews had committed many more and greater sins than they could adduce to explain their Roman captivity. And yet the Babylonian captivity did not last more than seventy years, and during it they were strongly and greatly comforted by prophets, princes, and promises, as I shall set forth anon. During the Roman captivity, however, we find none of these things, but this terrible punishment is beheld by everybody. Tell us, whoever can, what that sin is! Tell us, dear Jew, what is that sin on account of which God keeps anger against you such a long time, and refuses to send His Messiah?

In the second place, if the Jews could even name the sin, no matter whether it were called A or B,—which, however, they cannot do,—still their case would not be improved thereby; they should still be caught in a lie. For it is written Jer. 31: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband to them,

saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

In this beautiful passage there are many points; however, since the Jews, whenever they feel that they are hit, like to skip and flutter from one point to the other, you should, for the present, reserve all other points and strongly urge only this one, on account of which the passage has been cited, viz.: The Jews claim that the advent of the Messiah is being delayed on account of their sin. Against this claim God here says that He will make another, a new covenant, or law, not like the covenant and law of Moses; and the fact that they have sinned shall not prevent Him; yea, for this very reason, because they have not kept the former covenant, He will make a new covenant, which they shall be able to keep, and will not allow their sin, or the fact that they have not kept the former covenant, to influence Him, but will graciously forgive their sin and remember it no more.

On this point you should take your stand, and hold it up to the Jews. For how shall we harmonize these claims? The Jews claim that the advent of the Messiah is being delayed, because they have not kept the covenant of God, but have sinned against it; God says: No, I will not allow the fact that they have not kept my covenant to prevent me; but my new covenant shall come all the more, because they have not kept the former covenant, in order that such sin may be forgiven and forgotten for evermore by the new covenant.

Here the question is in order: Who is lying? Is God lying or the Jews? For they contradict each other. The

Jew says, Yes; God says, No. But there is no need of questioning at all, but it is proved that the Jews lie, and that it is a vain subterfuge when they say that the Messiah is being withheld on account of their sin. And God remains truthful in His statement that He will allow no sin to hinder Him, but has kept and is still keeping His promise concerning the coming of Messiah, regardless of their sin of not having kept His covenant.

In this connection you might well refer the Jews to the ninth chapter of Deuteronomy, or the Fifth Book of Moses, where Moses in a powerful sermon, and with many words, tells them: "Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God has cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of the nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that He may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." As can be further seen in the same chapter, if one will read and take note.

Behold now, Moses himself testifies that the Jews were not brought into the land of Canaan either on account of their righteousness or their repentance, but on account of the promise of God, which He had made under oath to the patriarchs; nor was He prevented from keeping this oath, although the Jews by their sins should have deserved to be utterly destroyed, if He had not regarded His oath and promise. Likewise in his prayer, in the same chapter, Moses indicates that he appeased God's anger with one word, pleading that God should remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were then long dead, but whose memory, on account of the promise made to them, was still alive and all-efficient with God, etc.

Now, if God at that time did not suffer the horrible sin of the people to prevent Him from keeping His promise, and from bringing them into the land at a time when the sin of the people was manifest, and had been clearly named and recognized, as everybody can see in the Scriptures, why should He now, far beyond the due time, delay, or rather not keep, those glorious and mighty promises concerning the Messiah, on account of the people's sin, which they themselves do not know, and are not able to name and recognize, and which no Scripture indicates nor man can reason out? Why should God on account of an unknown sin of the Jews become a liar?

And why should good king David, on account of the sin of the Jews, suffer a forfeiture of the divine promises confirmed to him by an oath? Especially, since his own sins, which he has committed and which are plainly read and named in the Scriptures (such as his adultery, the murder of his faithful servant Uriah, his blasphemy, etc.) did in no wise retard the promises of God; for David joyfully repeats them on his deathbed in his last words and testament, saying: "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure," as we read in the 23. chapter of 2. Samuel; and at the same time he predicted that the ungodly, unbelieving Jews would be cast out and perish.

Yea, why should the chief patriarch Abraham, who was a holier man than David and did not sin after his call from Chaldea, suffer on account of the sins of his posterity, that the promise of God should not be fulfilled to him, which had been repeatedly given him long before a Jew or a people of Israel had been born, much less had sinned? The same may be said of Isaac and Jacob, to whom He has also made and confirmed this promise, and on account of which He calls Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob throughout the Scriptures. Nor can He, indeed, have ceased to be their God, and become a liar, on account of their disobedient chil-

dren and posterity (as Moses calls them), but the Jews make themselves liars and blasphemers by such a lame subterfuge.

Finally, the First Commandment states that God will be angry with the disobedient children of Israel, to whom that commandment was given, to the third and fourth generation. But the Jews are under the wrath of God fifteen hundred years, and there is still no end; and these long years carry our calculation much further than the third and fourth generation; nor have Gentiles ever been visited for such a long time, who never have had any promises from God; why, then, should God so shamefully forget, and so long delay the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, David, and all the prophets, and, moreover, not yet indicate when this misery shall have an end? For there is abundant Scripture for this point that God promises to be and remain the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their seed, and that the throne of David shall not fall nor fail, while it is fallen and has failed these fifteen hundred years, as they are themselves compelled to feel and grasp, though they are loath to see and hear it.

Inasmuch, then, as it is clear and manifest that the Jews cannot name a sin on account of which God delays His promise so long, and they are seen, accordingly, to have lied in this point, and inasmuch as they should still be shown to be liars, though they should be able to name one or more sins, because God convicts them with the statement, that He will not omit His promise to send the Messiah and to preserve the throne of David forever on account of their sins:—therefore, it follows, with great force, that either of two things must be true: either the Messiah must have come fifteen hundred years ago, or, — may I be pardoned for such shameful talk! — God must have lied and not have kept His promise. I repeat it, Messiah must have come fifteen hundred years ago, when the throne of David, the royal house of Judah, the priesthood of Israel, the temple, and Jerusalem were still in existence, and the law of Moses with its

appointed form of worship was still in fore, and the people were still living together under their government at Jerusalem, before everything began to decline and to be destroyed in such an appalling manner; or else, God has lied. This conclusion those Jews who are still in possession of their reason cannot gainsay; the hardened party among them, however, may turn and twist, writhe and squirm, and employ all manner of cunning artifices, still their recourse and subterfuge is vain over and against such a plain truth.

Now, if Messiah is come, and God's promise has been kept and fulfilled, but the Jews have not accepted and believed it, but have continually charged God with falsehood by their unbelief, it is small wonder, to be sure, that the wrath of God has destroyed them, has laid them low together with the city of Jerusalem, the temple, their law, their princely house, their priesthood, has dispersed them among all the Gentiles, and still does not cease afflicting them, while they continue by their unbelief and disobedience to charge lies and to blaspheme against the divine promise and its fulfilment. For they should have accepted from the Messiah the new covenant, of which Jeremiah had spoken, and should have received the Messiah; He had been commissioned to teach them aright concerning the throne of David, the priesthood, the law of Moses, the temple, and all things, as Moses writes, Deut. 18, 15, 18: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken." For God says, that He will "put His words into this Prophet's mouth and speak with them."

They might here raise the objection, that God has on several occasions delayed His help on account of sin, *e. g.*, when He suffered them to be afflicted such a long time in Egypt, and afterwards in the desert changed the forty days of their proposed journey to forty years, and finally, when He left them in exile and prison at Babylon seventy years, etc. Now, when they bring forward this argument, they just run

into your hands, and you should accept their argument, in order that you may again take them in a manifest lie and false subterfuge; and you should reply to them, thus:—

God does indeed punish sinners; He also afflicts His beloved saints with misfortune; but He does not suffer His promise to become a lie, nor to fail; for He is Himself, and essentially, truth, and not capable of lying. Accordingly, when He suffered the children of Israel to be afflicted and tried in Egypt, He still did not allow His promise to fail. Yea, and what is more, before the children of Israel had been begotten or born, even before Abraham had a child, God took such diligent care of them, that He announced and promised to Abraham, Gen. 15, that his seed, which did not yet exist, would be in exile four hundred years, and would then go forth much enriched. This promise He has verily kept, and has after four hundred years led them out of their Egyptian exile, although there was sin enough; for they resisted Moses violently enough, as they themselves boast, Ex. 14, 12.

A like promise, however, regarding their present exile the Jews have not, and never have had. Moreover, in those days God gave to the children of Israel patriarchs, who were great prophets, and sent Joseph ahead of them, who had to engage quarters for them, in order that they might receive an honorable reception before their exile, and thus God was continually with them, maintaining His prophecy and promise, so that they were certain that they would be led out of Egypt; which fact Joseph also stated on his deathbed and, accordingly, directed his bones to be taken with them out of Egypt.

However, in this their latest Roman exile we behold none of these features; there is no prophet, nor have they a prophecy from Scripture as to the duration of this exile, and must thus suffer miserable affliction for an indefinite time, wandering aimlessly about, without prophets and the Word of God,—a thing which God has never before done,

nor would He do it now, if His Messiah had not come, and His promise had not been fulfilled. For He has promised that the throne of David should not fail, and that the sacrifice of the priesthood should not cease, and yet both the throne of David and the altar of Moses, together with Jerusalem, are destroyed and in ruins these fifteen hundred years, and God remains silent, — something He has not done in Egypt nor in any other exile; nor can He or will He do this, viz., suffer His promise to fail.

Likewise, in the desert, when they were vexed forty years, He did not forget His promise to Abraham, that his seed should enter the land of Canaan and occupy it for an inheritance, but He brought them into the land according to promise; however, He had not fixed a time in how many days He would bring them into the land, and if they had not sinned, they should have come in in a short time; but when they sinned He promised them, in His wrath, 'tis true, that they should not come into the land before forty years had passed, after the number of the forty days which the spies had spent in inspecting the country, and thus, on account of their grumbling, the forty days were made forty years, as the text states. Still He kept His promise, and they did enter after forty years, notwithstanding His anger against them.

Moreover, He did not in the meantime forsake them, but manifested Himself by many miracles, made the cloudy and fiery pillar do them service day and night, fed them daily with bread from heaven, gave them water from the rock, flesh of birds, did not suffer their garments and shoes to become worn, built a tabernacle, arranged the tribes of Israel, assisted Moses, Aaron, and other prophets with His presence, punished Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, conferred other blessings of like nature by which they could grasp that God was present with them, and did not forsake them on account of their sin, but faithfully kept His promise, regardless and in spite of their manifold iniquity; and their sins and iniquity in this period have all been named plainly enough, and are not unknown.

In this last exile, however, we notice none of these features: there is no sin named which they could mention; there is no prophet, no fixed time, no sign, no wonder, no public blessing, by which they could note the grace of God, nor is there any certain place or locality of their exile, as was the case in Egypt and in the desert; but they are ever in the winnowing basket, having their abode here to-day, and being driven off to-morrow, their homes destroyed, and no prophet there to tell them: Flee hither, or thither! but they are left in ignorance even as to the place of their exile, and are tossed at the mercy of the wind. All this has never happened before; for Egypt, the desert, and Babylon were certain localities where they suffered exile, and they always had the Word of God and the prophets with them, also the evident manifestation of God; but in the present instance they are, forsooth, too utterly forsaken, and the exile endures too long, the city of David lying waste, and the law of Moses being neglected in the temple at Jerusalem, where it had been appointed.

Likewise, when they were driven into the Babylonian exile God did not forget His promise, nor forsake His people, but appointed them a certain time, namely, seventy years, and a certain place, namely, Babylon, and assured them that after seventy years they should return to Jerusalem, and that their royal house and priesthood should remain. Moreover, He gave them excellent prophets, such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and their fellows, by whom they were comforted and sustained during the interval; He also manifested His presence among them, and the fact that He had not forsaken them, by great blessings and miracles which He did by Daniel. For the royal personage of Jehoniah was greatly exalted at the royal court of Babylon, above all other kings; hence, the throne of David and the priesthood did not fall into desuetude, but even the persons existed to the end of the exile. Moreover, He had long before, by the prophet Isaiah, named Cyrus as their deliverer, ch. 45, which prophet also predicted many details of this

captivity, and did not conceal the sin leading up to it, but clearly named it, as also did Jeremiah, so that it is known well enough for what sin they were punished.

Accordingly, these three afflictions, or exiles, the Egyptian, that in the desert, and the Babylonian, cannot be compared with this last Roman exile; for in the former instance the sin is manifest, prophecy and promise still exist, prophets and representatives both of the throne of David and the altar of Aaron are there, and there is a fixed time. In brief, we cannot call it forsaking the people, nor forgetting the promise on God's part, when God acts toward, and treats, His people thus, takes them up so carefully, and secures them; even as we cannot call it forsaking them, when He cared for the children of Israel in Egypt before they were born, and limited the time of this exile to Abraham before he had a child. Read the 30th and 31st chapters of Jeremiah; and hear God complaining pitifully, like a wailing mother, over the exile of His people at Babylon, even before they had gone into that exile, regardless of the sin for which they were driven into that exile.

Why, then, should He so fatally forget His promise in the present exile, or allow it to fail, and act so strangely, when they have no sin that could be named? And yet, this prophecy regarding the Messiah is the most glorious and powerful, and all other prophecies, promises, and the entire law point to it, so that the other promises, as those in Egypt, in the desert, and at Babylon, must be accounted very light over and against this chief promise regarding the Messiah. Now, if God in those former instances has so strictly kept those minor promises, and has so cordially comforted the people in their lighter exiles, fixing their limit, manifesting Himself as their faithful God, by the persons He placed over them, by the blessings He bestowed upon them, and in every other manner, and caring for them unceasingly; how, then, is it possible, or credible, or conceivable, that in this dreadful, long, and great exile He should so utterly

abandon His glorious promise made to David, that his throne should remain everlasting and firm, as David boasts in his last words in the Second Book of Samuel, in the seventh chapter, and as is done in many other writings of the prophets, as in Jeremiah and Isaiah?

Let the Jews talk as much as they please about sins for which they must suffer (for they lie!), yet God did not promise with an oath an everlasting throne to their sin or righteousness, but to David. And though He should not be willing to keep His promise to the Jews on account of their sin (which, however, they do not name), still He would not lie, or be in arrears to David, to whom He has made the promise, as He says in the 88. Psalm. Now, then, inasmuch as the throne of David has been in ruins these fifteen hundred years, although according to the divine statement it was not to be destroyed nor fall, it is incontrovertible, that either Messiah must have come fifteen hundred years ago and must have taken possession of the throne of His Father, and must forever possess it, or God must have turned liar in His most glorious promise, and that on account of a wicked people, viz., the unbelieving Jews. God never was of such mind, nor ever will be; but the Jews lie in the face of God, and deceive themselves by accusing God of not having kept truth and faith to David, because He did not send the Messiah in the manner they had desired and proposed and outlined for Him.

This argument, I am convinced, must move any reasonable Jew that may still exist, and must even strike the obturate among them somewhat. For they cannot bring forth anything against it that will stand. If it does not impress or strike them, they have nevertheless confirmed us in our faith, so that their vain and useless lies, and their insipid talk can do no harm. And if they do not fairly answer this argument, but dodge it and drift into their foolishness, as their custom is, leave them, and go home; for you can perceive by their practice that they are dealing in folly and falsehood.

(To be concluded.)