WHAT GRACE IS: God’s favor or help, guiding man to salvation (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1996), both to start salvation and to allow man to merit salvation (CCC, 2010).

HOW IT JUSTIFIES: Poured into man to make him gradually righteous. “Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man” (Trent*,* Ch. 7 on Justification; CCC, 1427).

RELATION TO THE HUMAN WILL: God’s grace is the first grace in justification, which requires man to use his free will (CCC, 2002). “If anyone says that man’s free will … does nothing at all and is merely passive [toward the grace of justification], let him be anathema” (Trent, Canon 4 on Justification).

RELATION TO THE GOSPEL: The Gospel is the New Law, or “the grace of the Holy Spirit … [which] uses the Sermon on the Mount to teach us what must be done and makes use of the sacraments to give us the grace to do it” (CCC, 1966). Since grace includes our own works, there cannot be full certainty of salvation, since this would be arrogance (Trent, Ch. 9 on Justification).

* Reformed (Bound Will)

WHAT GRACE IS: God’s sovereign counsel and good pleasure that certain people chosen for salvation would have the saving power of Christ’s death applied to them (Dort, 2: Article 8).

HOW IT JUSTIFIES: God chose His elect from before the foundations of the world, determining that they would be part of His covenant through faith and determining that Christ’s death would declare them righteous.

RELATION TO THE HUMAN WILL: Man is entirely deprived of any free will, because of his fallen condition (Eph. 2:1–3; Rom. 9:16; Dort 3/4: Article 3).

RELATION TO THE GOSPEL: The ministry of reconciliation, which calls sinners to repentance and faith, is how God makes His grace known. But this grace only applies to those whom God has chosen for eternal life. The grace itself cannot be resisted by the human will (Dort 3/4: Rejection 8). In order to have certainty that you are one of the elect, you must use the Means of Grace and follow God’s Word until you receive the internal witness of the Spirit.

* Reformed (Free Will)

WHAT GRACE IS: “The grace or love of God, from which comes our salvation, is FREE IN ALL, and FREE FOR ALL” (John Wesley in his sermon “Free Grace”).

HOW IT JUSTIFIES: God’s grace does not include our works (“FREE IN ALL”), and it is based on our decision to choose Christ, not on God’s predestination (“FREE FOR ALL”).

RELATION TO THE HUMAN WILL: Part of God’s grace is that He gives man a free will to make a decision to have faith. The human will cooperates in conversion.

RELATION TO THE GOSPEL: The ministry of reconciliation, which calls sinners to repentance and faith, is how God makes His grace known. But this grace also depends on man’s will to choose Christ. The certainty of God’s grace must rest in the experience of how the human will chooses and responds to the Gospel.

* Lutheran/Scriptural

WHAT GRACE IS: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23–24). It is God’s favor revealed in the redemption of Christ by which He declares sinners to be righteous.

HOW IT JUSTIFIES: “Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom. 3:24–25). It is located in the redemptive work of Christ by which He turned God’s wrath away. It is, therefore, received fully through faith, which God counts as righteousness (Rom. 4:5, See AC IV).

RELATION TO THE HUMAN WILL: “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (Rom. 9:16). “You were dead in the trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). It does not depend at all on the human will, but only on God’s mercy, fulfilled and revealed in Christ (See SC Creed Art. 3).

RELATION TO THE GOSPEL: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes … For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:16–17). The Gospel fully contains and reveals this grace of Christ’s righteousness. Therefore, I am certain (not ashamed) of my salvation (See AC V).

Lutheranism: The Spirit bears witness with our spirit

*by Andrew Preus* Now that you’ve read how different denominations view grace, it’s clear that the first three definitions do not ground the grace of God solely in the all-atoning work of Christ given fully in the Gospel for all sinners.

The Roman Catholic Church grounds God’s grace in His cooperation with man’s free will to respond to His call with good works.

The free-will Reformed (Baptists, Evangelical Free and others), contrary to the Roman Catholic Church, say that we are saved without works, and yet turn faith into a decision of the human will.

The bound-will Reformed (Christian Reformed and Dutch Reformed) get it right that natural man is completely corrupt and unable to choose God, and that God’s grace alone has chosen His elect for eternal life from before the foundations of the world (Acts 13:48; Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:29–30). However, grounding God’s grace in His sovereign act to elect certain people to eternal life, they limit Jesus’ work of redemption only to those whom God has chosen for eternal life. Therefore, our certainty that we are elect cannot simply be in the Gospel proclamation, but in our discerning of the Spirit’s internal witness. Both Reformed groups see the Sacraments as signs of God’s grace for Christians to follow, rather than the fullness of God’s grace for sinners to receive through faith.

Though the Reformed will emphasize that we are not saved by works, they end up identifying God’s grace in how the Christian *experiences* God’s Word, rather than fully in the objective and complete work of Christ’s redemption (2 Cor. 5:18), fully given in the Gospel and Sacraments (Rom. 1:16–17; 1 Peter 3:21; Matt. 26:26, 28; Mark 14:22, 24; Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor. 11:24–25). Jesus bore all sin in His flesh (Rom. 8:3). Through this Gospel, the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are God’s children (Rom. 8:16).

Roman Catholicism: Distinction with a difference

*by Jeffrey Ries*

The *Catechism of the (Roman) Catholic Church* teaches “salvation by grace through faith.” It also defines grace as God-given “undeserved help.” However, in their catechism, the word “alone” never follows “grace.” Rome teaches that “justification establishes *cooperation* between God’s grace and man’s freedom,” and “by enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus … man *collaborates* in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work” (emphasis added). According to Rome’s teaching, grace doesn’t *save* us. It *enables* us to behave with virtue, do good works and merit eternal life. According to Rome, grace makes us able to follow the Law, and in following the Law we are saved from sin.

The only real distinction between Rome and Protestantism on grace is that Rome is more formulaic. Both hold equally synergistic views, believing that man (at some level) cooperates with God in their salvation.

Lutherans keep to the simple truth of Scripture. Romans 3:19–25 and 2 Cor. 5:17–21 are two of many passages that declare the truth concerning God’s grace. Jesus Christ kept the Law perfectly, died as a sinner despite His innocence, and by His death and resurrection covered us in His righteousness and justified us before God.

One might be tempted to think this a distinction without a difference. But let us imagine ourselves on our deathbed, contemplating the end of our fallen-flesh life. We look back upon our life, remembering innumerable sins committed in thought, word and deed. Would we worry about whether our so-called “cooperation” with God was sufficient to merit salvation or whether we succeeded in reaching out to receive the grace He gave? Or would we rest secure in the righteousness of God that is ours solely for the sake of Christ’s work for us? Let us rest in the latter. It is what God’s Word declares. It is the grace of God for us and our one true hope.

Reformed: An inner experience

*By Brian Flamme*

The Reformed understandings of grace can be split into two broad categories: Calvinistic and Arminian.

Calvinistic theologians emphasize grace as God’s eternal predestination to save some while He predestines others for condemnation. Because God’s choice is sovereign and immutable, grace is irresistible and extended only to a few. They deny the universality of the Gospel, that Jesus died for the sins of all and that God desires all to be saved. Christian comfort is not found primarily in the preached promise, but by the elect “observing in themselves” the work of the Spirit in their hearts and works.

The Arminians historically accounted for the election of some but not others in the eternal foresight of God seeing that some will believe and not others. On the basis of such foresight, God elects. The problem is that even though grace becomes universal, its work is still dependent on something in man. In today’s “decision theology” that predominates American Protestantism, grace is freely offered to all if they make their choice for Jesus. Grace is universal, but it is also dependent on something found in man: the free exercise of his will.

The nature of grace remains the main point of contention today. In our American context, though confessions or creeds were once an important part of the Reformed churches’ history, they seem to be less-than-satisfactory indicators of what you hear in your neighborhood “nondenominational” churches. If the church claims that they have no creed but the Bible, then the definition of grace might be at the mercy of the opinions of the current pastor. Also, we should not forget the American trend of minimizing theology in favor of experience, so you will likely hear about people “experiencing” grace in Protestant churches without them getting too specific about what it is.

If one thing binds these traditions together, it is that the inner experience, rather than the external Word, confirms God’s grace in a Christian’s life.

*The Rev. Andrew Preus is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, McGregor, Iowa, and Trinity Lutheran Church, Guttenberg, Iowa.*

*The Rev. Jeffrey Ries is pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Tacoma, Wash.*

*The Rev. Brian Flamme is pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Roswell, N.M.*

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| **Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved Psalm 55:22** |

**CNH Mission Prayers**

*So he said to me, "this is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel; "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty.* ***Zechariah 4:6***

**1.** Please remember Aaron Putnam and the staff and leaders who work in difficult areas and with LINC Bay Area. Pray for Aaron's health, the welfare of his family and that God's mission and plan would be expanded as leaders are built up and released through LINC.

**2.** Ask God to bless MCN missionaries who originated from our District, Melissa Kargas and Dr. Haragewen Kinde. Both of these women grew up in our District (in Carson City and Sacramento respectively). Pray that the Lord would enrich their work in Ethiopia. Melissa is an English language teacher and youth leader in Addis Ababa. Haragewen is the driving force for the first Lutheran College (potentially University) in Ethiopia. This school is located in Bishoftu.

**3.** Ask that God would bless the retirement of Rita Konda who served more than 36 years as the Administrative Assistant to the CNH District President. Ask that God would guide Glenna Sanlis who has stepped into that position.

**4.** Pray for Pastor Juan Vallejo working faithfully at the bilingual ministry in Watsonville.

**5.** Pray that God would open doors in the first quarter of this year for the ordination of both Moises Morales, in Richmond, and Berhanu Kumalo, in Sacramento. Ordination will enhance both of their ministry efforts.

**Featured Mission Prayer**

**Please remember Vicar William and Nolani Pierce and their 5 children. Vicar Pierce is the missionary leader of St. Matthew's in Kauai. He is completing school, working 4 days a week at his contracting job, and leading the church. Pray for wisdom, missionary zeal and the ability to make healthy choices.**

**Featured Ministry**

**St. Paul's in Tracy (Prayers for the school and the church.**

**Enrollment in the school is down which not only puts a strain on the budget, but also is limiting the outreach the school has in sharing the Gospel with children and their parents in the community. Pray for increased enrollment.**

**For a while now, the church has been trying different ways to get parents of the kids that are enrolled to attend church services without much success. Please pray for God to work on the parent's hearts so they will want to come to church on Sundays to hear the Gospel message their children hear each day in school.**

**Prayer Communicator, Cora Hicks**

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The 7th and 8th graders had their first confirmation class. It was a blast we are doing a retreat style so they come for two hours each month and we go over the unit, eat some pizza and play some fun games. The kids had a great time and even asked if we could do it every week instead of just once a month! They had some great questions and we had an awesome discussion about a ton of different things from the Bible.

One of the projects the kids will be doing through this year is working on taking over the operation Christmas Child shoe boxes. It will be up to the confirmation kids to figure out a fundraiser for them and the younger kids to help out with to fundraise money for filling the boxes with supplies and shipping costs.

I really hope this responsibility will teach them the importance of serving and how to become involved in ministries in church and how to share the life changing good news of the Gospel.

The OCC boxes spread the Gospel message to kids all around the world. It is an amazing ministry and we are excited to be a part of it.

In peace, Sarah

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| **Birthday blessings**  12. Cora hicks  13. Melinda Johnson  13. Jimmie Palya  15. Laurie Hancock  16. Tom Palya |

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| **COUNCIL NOTES**  Dec. Avg attendance 47.  97 communed.  Christmas Eve attendance - 60   * The Christmas Eve offering was split between the Josh Farler Foundations and the Pregnancy center. * Reached our goal for roof funding. |

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| Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. 1 Corinthians 16:13 |

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| **Events**  3. Church Council 6pm  6. Women's Bible Study 10:30am  13. Men’s Breakfast 7am  14. Babysitting Night 4-9pm  15. Confirmation class 4-6pm  20.-22. Best Practices Conference |

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| **Babysitters Needed**  **February 14th 4-9pm**    Faith is hosting a babysitting night so parents can go out for Valentine’s date night. If you are interested in helping watch kids please let Sarah know. Thanks! |

**Blessings!**

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| **Faith Lutheran Church**  www.faithlutheran.info  Worship Service  8am Sunday  Communion: 2nd & 4th Sundays  Children's church Tuesdays 3-4:15pm  Tutoring  Wednesday a 3-5pm  Bible study  Wednesday 6pm  Contact Phone Numbers  Rick Smith  Church President  775-302-7033  Secretary Gigi Neal  Charles Hicks  Head Elder  775-224-1792  Steve Tomac  Elder  775-750-1579  Sarah Weishaar  DCE  831-32-2686 |