

An Evaluation of H.A. Preus' Doctrine of Objection Justification

Our history colors who we are. It helps to explain our present actions. On page 9 and 10 of "Critique of the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America's Theses on Justification"(from here on simply *Critique*) of February 9, 2014, the Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches(ACLIC) response makes mention of the Absolution Controversy which occurred in the Norwegian Synod in the 1860s and 1870s. *Critique* further directs our attention to a 2013 paper written by the Rev. Martin Diers entitled, "Objective Justification: the Controversy Examined."

Although, I had studied the Election Controversy which occurred in the Missouri Synod, I was unaware of the implications of the Norwegian Absolution Controversy, neither did I fully understand that the terminology ("objective justification") used by the Missouri Synod in the subsequent Election Controversy, seems to have been introduced to American Lutheranism by H. A. Preus for the Absolution Controversy within the Norwegian Synod.

According to Rev. Diers, the Absolution Controversy was a reaction against the effects of the pietistic leanings of at least two professors, August Weenaas and Sven Offerdahl, at Augsburg Theological Seminary who "accused the Norwegian Synod, and H. A. Preus in particular, of universalism." The Rev. Diers explains, "Since Pietism is all about results, when results are not immediately visible from a given activity, Pietism denies the efficacy of that activity, even if it be the preaching of the Gospel, Baptism and the Lord's Supper." According to Rev. Diers, the term "objective justification" was coined by H. A. Preus to address the denial of the Scriptural practice of (Private) Absolution.¹

Rev. Diers' summary of the Absolution Controversy on page 3 is very helpful. Since this Norwegian narrative, as I will call it, serves to inform the ACLC's understanding of the term "objective justification," I have reproduced it below with numbering added, so that I can address each point.

"Their argument went as follows:

- (1) Because no pastor can see the faith of anyone, he cannot know whether a person is truly justified.
 - (2) Only the individual Christian can know whether he has true faith by examining himself. Only then can he know that his sins are forgiven.
 - (3) Therefore, because no pastor can look into the heart of another, so also he cannot absolve anyone of their sins.
- Herman Amber Preus, president of the Norwegian Synod, and one of the founders of St. Olaf College, responded that
- (4) God has *already* absolved the world of sin *by* the death of His Son, Jesus Christ.
 - (5) Therefore, the pastor can absolutely declare the forgiveness of sins to the sinner,
 - (6) because that forgiveness is an objective fact, entirely independent of whether the sinner believes or not.

During the course of this controversy, the term 'objective justification' was adopted to confess this truth."

I. Pietism's Rationale

Walking through the rationale for the introduction of the term and teaching of "objective justification" in this Norwegian narrative will allow us to see whether "objective

¹ Diers' footnote #3 says, "...The writings of H.A. Preus are the earliest examples this author could find of the specific use of the term 'objective justification.'"

http://lutherantheology.com/uploads/works/papers/ObjectiveJustification_2013_mwd.pdf

justification” correctly presents and clearly explains the Scriptural and Confessional teaching regarding justification and the pronouncement of that justification in absolution.

A. Faith is not seen: Statement #1

Statement #1 is true both in its premise and in its conclusion. Man is saved by faith alone. We know that faith cannot be seen. Luke 17:21 says, “The kingdom of God is within you.” Therefore, the determination of whether another person is ultimately saved (justified) or not, cannot be known by man.

Although statement #1 seems like a depressing place to begin a theology, both the premise and the conclusion are taught by the Word of God for very salutary and comforting purposes. Jesus has told us ahead of time that there will be hypocrites in the church until the end of time. We are not to be concerned about the presence of these hypocrites. Since we cannot know who doesn’t have faith, we are not to try to root these hypocrites out of the congregation(Mt 13:28-30). Only when it becomes clear through their outward words and actions that they are unrepentant—and thus cease to be hypocrites—are we to remove them from the congregation(Rom 16:17). Though we don’t know who is a believer and who isn’t, thankfully the Lord knows those who are His. The Lord cannot be fooled by outward or insincere acts. The Lord will welcome those with faith into eternal life, while those who do not believe will be condemned.

Although statement #1 does not go on to say how this pastoral lack of knowledge concerning who has faith is going to be used, when we get to Statement #3 we see that this ignorance concerning faith will, according to Pietism, prevent the pastor from pronouncing individual absolution. With that in mind, Statement #2 seems kind of superfluous. Whether the individual believer can know he, himself, has faith and is saved, doesn’t really matter for the pastor pronouncing absolution on someone else.

The key to understanding the thrust of these statements is the pietistic thinking behind the statements. These first three statements not only seek to stop the pastor from speaking absolution, but they also seek to stop the penitent from trusting in the word of absolution spoken by the Pastor. Pietism does not trust in the faith-creating-Word, but will only trust in the results of the faith-creating-Word.

B. Individual Self-knowledge of Faith: Statement #2

Statement #2 is misleading both in its premise and in its conclusion. Further clarification and explanation is needed, lest the true teaching, hidden below the surface, is twisted into inappropriate applications. Understanding from statement #1 that one person can’t see the faith of another person, the question becomes, “Can the individual believer have knowledge of his own faith?” The Scriptural answer is a resounding, “Yes.” Only the individual himself (and God, or course) knows whether he himself believes/trusts in the Gospel.

The Scriptures assume that this self-knowledge of faith is the normal situation for the believer. After preaching the Gospel, a person is often asked whether the Holy Spirit has created faith in their heart. When the apostles ask, “Do you believe this?” they are asking something which the person can know(John 9:35-37, John 11:26-27, and Acts 26:27). In each instance, the person can and does know whether he believes.

1. Examination

The wording of statement #2 is consistent with pietistic thought. Rather than have the person trust in the Gospel promise, the pietist speaks of truth in the observable fruits of faith. The premise of statement #2 says that the individual Christian can know he has faith

“by examining himself.” These words appear to be a direct reference to 2 Corinthians 13:5-6,

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves.

Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.”

In context, St. Paul is dealing with the infiltration of false apostles(2 Cor 11:13), who are disparaging St. Paul’s authority(12:12) and teaching. The Corinthians are to examine the teaching and actions of all of their teachers—both St. Paul and Titus(12:18) as well as these infiltrators(11:13). The Corinthians are to examine the teaching of all to see whose words agree with the content of the faith.

The examination in 2 Corinthians 13:5 is not a command for individuals to try and determine whether they have justifying faith in Jesus at all! After St. Paul in the letter has exposed the false teachings of these false apostles, the Corinthian congregation is here directed to examine its preachers to see if what they say agrees with the Christian faith, or not? Those who are false “super-apostles”(12:11), who are preaching a different Gospel(11:4) based on the Law, which is bringing the Corinthians into “bondage”(11:20), will be disqualified. However, St. Paul is confident that when they examine St. Paul himself and Titus, “. . .you will know that, we are not disqualified” (13:6). Thus, St. Paul’s words “in the faith” from “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith” are not a reference to saving or personal faith/trust, but to the content of the teaching(the faith).

Before I go on to discuss more clearly the individual believer’s self-knowledge of faith, let me make it clear that the Scriptures do include two references in which St. Paul directs the individual believer to examine himself. Nevertheless, in both references, the commanded examination is not for saving faith. In 1 Corinthians 11:28, St. Paul says, “but let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.” The Corinthians are to see whether they discern the Body and Blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. In Galatians 6:4, St. Paul says, “But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.” This examination in Galatians 6 is not directed to finding justifying faith either, but the fruits of faith.

2. Justifying Faith: Definition

One of the sub-sections within Article IV of The Apology of the Augsburg Confession², entitled, “*What Is Justifying Faith?*” not only gives a plethora of definitions for faith, but speaks of three objects which need to be connected/explained in order to understand the definition of justifying faith. Those three objects are (1) the promise received by faith, (2) the graciousness/mercy of God through which the benefit is

² All references to the Lutheran Confessions are taken from Concordia Triglotta. For those using other editions the numbering is a bit different for some sections. I will include page numbers from both Concordia Triglotta and Tappert to assist the reader. For example:

<u>Concordia Triglotta</u>		<u>Tappert</u>
Ap. IV (II), Of Justification. 1-47	=	Ap. IV, 1-47
What is Justifying Faith? 48-60	=	Ap. IV, 48-60
That Faith in Christ Justifies 61-74	=	Ap. IV, 61-74
That We Obtain Remission of Sins by Faith Alone in Christ 75-121	=	Ap. IV, 75-121
Ap. IV (III), Of Love and the Fulfilling of the Law, 1-61	=	Ap. IV, 122-182
Reply to the Arguments of the Adversaries, 62-279	=	Ap. IV, 183-400

offered, and (3) the merits of Christ as the price/propitiation.³ **At this point, I wish to narrow in on the definition of faith. In just a bit, we will look at the content of the promise which is received by faith.**

Here are the several statements from that sub-section which define justifying faith.

48] ... it is to assent to the promise of God...

...It is the certainty or the certain trust in the heart, when, with my whole heart, I regard the promises of God as certain and true...
...it is to wish and to receive the offered promise...

Faith is that my whole heart takes to itself this treasure.

49] ... Faith is the λατρεία [divine service], which receives the benefits offered by God;

...By faith God wishes to be worshiped in this way, that we receive from Him those things which He promises and offers.

50] ...such faith as assents to the promise,

53] ...The promise is received by faith; ...

55] that faith is there required, which receives the promise of mercy....

56] ... it receives the promised mercy.

57] ...Accordingly, they received gratuitous mercy and remission of sins by faith,

60] ..., that from Him we receive benefits, and receive them, too, because of His mercy, and not because of our merits.⁴

The description of justifying faith as that which receives the promise is mentioned again and again. A further description of that reception of the promise is “to assent to the promise of God” or “It is the certainty or the certain trust in the heart, when, with my whole heart, I regard the promises of God as certain and true....” The description of faith as a receiver of the promise is certainly true.

Furthermore, it is also true that because reception by faith is a gift of God(Eph 2:8), **justifying faith IS a certain trust, confidence and certainty.** When the Apology calls faith, “certainty and confidence,” it is not referring to the fruits of faith, but to faith itself. This confidence is not something which requires examination by a reflexive faith. This confidence in the promise IS the essence of faith. Faith is confidence. Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the substance⁵ of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” In the same sub-section of Apology IV it describes faith this way.

48] ... It is the certainty or the certain trust in the heart, when, with my whole heart, I regard the promises of God as certain and true...

³ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.135-137 (Tappert, p.114), “**53]** As often, therefore, as we speak of justifying faith, we must keep in mind that these three objects concur: the *promise*, and that, too, *gratuitous*, and the *merits of Christ, as the price and propitiation*. The promise is received by faith; the “gratuitous” excludes our merits, and signifies that the benefit is offered only through mercy; the merits of Christ are the price, because there must be a certain propitiation for our sins. **54]** Scripture frequently implores mercy; and the holy Fathers often say that we **55]** are saved by mercy. As often, therefore, as mention is made of mercy, we must keep in mind that faith is there required, which receives the promise of mercy. And, again, as often as we speak of faith, we wish an object to be understood, namely, the promised mercy. **56]** For faith justifies and saves, not on the ground that it is a work in itself worthy, but only because it receives the promised mercy.”

⁴ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.135-137 (Tappert, p.113-115).

⁵ ὑπόστασις: Ground or confidence.

...It is not my doing, not my presenting or giving, not my work or preparation, but that a heart comforts itself, and is perfectly confident with respect to this, namely, that God makes a present and gift to us, and not we to Him, that He sheds upon us every treasure of grace in Christ.⁶

By way of example, David is said to receive comfort from “his trust in God’s mercy.”

58] Here belong those frequent repetitions concerning mercy and faith, in the psalms and the prophets, as this, Ps. 130, 3 sq.: If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? Here David confesses his sins, and does not recount his merits. He adds: *But there is forgiveness with Thee*. Here he comforts himself by his trust in God’s mercy,⁷ and he cites the promise: *My soul doth wait, and in His Word do I hope, i.e.,* because Thou hast promised the remission of sins, **59]** I am sustained by this Thy promise.⁸

The end of this sub-section says that justifying faith, itself, is a consolation.

60] ...This{faith} is the richest consolation in all afflictions [physical or spiritual, in life or in death, as all godly persons know]. And such consolations the adversaries abolish when they extenuate and disparage faith, and teach only that by means of works and merits men treat with God [that we treat with God, the great Majesty, by means of our miserable, beggarly works and merits].⁹

Faith is not only the reception of the promise; it is also a certainty and confidence in that promise. Faith is not an unsure thing, but a sure and certain confidence of salvation. Faith is not an inert something that we have to go looking for to see if we have. Faith is active. Faith itself brings with it confidence and comfort for the believer.¹⁰ 1 John 5:10, “He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who

⁶ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.135 (Tappert, p.113-114).

⁷ **Latin:** Hic erigit se fiducia misericordiae Dei. **German:** Da fühlt er wieder Trost und verläßt sich auf Gnade und Barmherzigkeit, verläßt sich auf die göttliche Zusage und spricht: “Meine Seele harret des Herrn, Und ich warte auf sein Wort.” Vergebung der Sünden, so halte ich mich an die Zusage, so verlasse und wage ich nicht auf die gnädige Verheißung.

⁸ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.137 (Tappert, p.115).

⁹ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.137 (Tappert, p.115).

¹⁰ AP IV (II), p.155 (Tappert, p. 123), **113]** But faith, properly so called, is that which assents to the promise [is when my heart, and the Holy Ghost in the heart, says: The promise of God is true and certain]. Of **114]** this faith Scripture speaks. And because it receives the remission of sins, and reconciles us to God, by this faith we are [like Abraham] accounted righteous for Christ’s sake before we love and do the works of the Law, although love necessarily follows. **115]** Nor, indeed, is this faith an idle knowledge, neither can it coexist with mortal sin, but it is a work of the Holy Ghost, whereby we are freed from death, and terrified minds are encouraged and quickened. **116]** And because this faith alone receives the remission of sins, and renders us acceptable to God, and brings the Holy Ghost, it could be more correctly called *gratia gratum faciens*, grace rendering one pleasing to God, than an effect following, namely, love.

117] Thus far, in order that the subject might be made quite clear, we have shown with sufficient fullness, both from testimonies of Scripture, and arguments derived from Scripture, that by faith alone we obtain the remission of sins for Christ’s sake, and that by faith alone we are justified, *i.e.,* of unrighteous men made righteous, or regenerated. **118]** But how necessary the knowledge of this faith is, can be easily judged, because in this alone the office of Christ is recognized, by this alone we receive the benefits of Christ; this alone brings sure and firm **119]** consolation to pious minds.

does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.” Also Romans 8:16, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God....”

A little later in Apology IV, this language of comforting ourselves returns. The reason for our comfort is faith in the divine promise.

79] ...That is, sin terrifies consciences, this occurs through the Law, which shows the wrath of God against sin; but we gain the victory through Christ. How? By faith, when we comfort ourselves by confidence in the mercy promised for 80] Christ’s sake. Thus, therefore, we prove the minor proposition. The wrath of God cannot be appeased if we set against it our own works, because Christ has been set forth as a Propitiator, so that for His sake, the Father may become reconciled to us. But Christ is not apprehended as a Mediator except by faith. Therefore, by faith alone we obtain remission of sins, when we comfort our hearts with confidence in the mercy promised for 81] Christ’s sake. Likewise Paul, Rom. 5, 2, says: *By whom also we have access*, and adds, *by faith*. Thus, therefore, we are reconciled to the Father, and receive remission of sins when we are comforted with confidence in the mercy promised for Christ’s sake.¹¹

3. Faith is the opposite of Doubt

Due to the presence of our sinful nature, which always doubts the promise, there will be a struggle within the believer. A man said to Jesus, “I do believe, help my unbelief”(Mark 9:24). Whenever unbelief, doubt and sin raise their ugly head, we are to flee to the Word of promise so that our faith which receives the promise will itself comfort our heart. We don’t need something else in addition to faith in order to be sure, we simply need faith¹², which in receiving the promise is also a certain trust, confidence and certainty.¹³

¹¹ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.142-143 (Tappert, p.118). **German: 79]** ... Wenn wir glauben, wenn unsere Herzen wieder aufgerichtet werden und sich halten an die Verheissung der Gnade durch Christum. 80]... Darum erlangen wir allein durch den Glauben Vergebung der Sünden, wenn unser Herz getröstet und aufgerichtet wird durch die göttliche Zusage, welche uns um Christus’ willen angeboten wird. **81]** Item, Paulus zu den Römern am 5, 2: “Durch ihn haben wir einen Zugang zum Vater”; und sagt klar dazu: “durch den Glauben”. Also werden wir nun, und nicht anders, dem Vater versöhnt, also erlangen wir Vergebung der Sünden, wenn wir aufgerichtet werden, festzuhalten, an der Zusage, da uns Gnade und Barmherzigkeit verheissen ist durch Christum. **Latin: 79]** ... Fide, quum erigimus nos fiducia promissae misericordiae propter 80] Christum. ... Igitur sola fide consequimur remissionem peccatorum, quum erigimus corda fiducia misericordiae propter 81] Christum promissae. Item Paulus Rom. 5, 2 ait: *Per ipsum habemus accessum ad Patrem, et addit: per fidem.* Sic igitur reconciliamur Patri et accipimus remissionem peccatorum, quando erigimur fiducia promissae misericordiae propter Christum.

¹² Ap IV (III. Of Love and Fulfilling of the Law) Triglotta, p.209-210 (Tappert IV, §323-324, p.157). **203]** ...Faith looking upon this mercy cheers and consoles us. ... For just as we have above said that the promise and faith stand in a reciprocal relation, and that the promise is not apprehended unless by faith, so we here say that the promised mercy correlatively requires faith, and cannot be apprehended without faith.

¹³ FC SD II, Triglotta, p.903 (Tappert, p. 531-532) **55]** Now, although both, the planting and watering of the preacher, and the running and willing of the hearer, would be in vain, and no conversion would follow it if the power and efficacy of the Holy Ghost were not added thereto, who enlightens and converts the hearts through the Word preached and heard, so that men believe this Word and assent thereto, still, neither preacher nor hearer is to doubt this grace and efficacy of the Holy Ghost, but should be certain that when the Word of God is preached purely and truly, according to the command and will of God, and men listen attentively and earnestly and meditate upon it, God is certainly present with His grace, and grants, as has been said, what otherwise man can neither accept nor give from his own powers. **56]** For concerning the presence, operation, and gifts of the Holy Ghost we should not and

Whenever doubts arise in the hearers, pastors need to direct their hearers' attention to the very Word which they doubt. That is, doubters need to hear the faith-creating-Word, the faith-sustaining Word. The promised mercy creates faith which sets Christ the Mediator against the wrath of God.

Ap XXI 20] And from both, namely, from the promise and the bestowment of merits, **confidence in mercy arises** [upon both parts must a Christian prayer be founded]. **Such confidence in the divine promise**, and likewise **in the merits of Christ**, ought to be brought forward when we pray. For we ought to be truly confident, both that for Christ's sake we are heard, and that by His merits we have a reconciled Father.¹⁴

4. Fruits/effects of faith

In addition to the Word-creating faith itself (which is both the reception of the promise and confidence in the promise), God also works through faith to produce the fruits of faith in believers. The fruits of faith are good works of thought, word, and deed. Because the fruits of faith are not possible for those who have no faith, these fruits of faith serve as an indirect and external testimony that faith is present. 1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death."

We know that these fruits of faith are not optional, nor are they worked in some believers, but not in others. Without exception, faith produces good works. "Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance" (AC XII, 6). Though we describe faith as passive in that it receives the promise, we can also describe faith as active in that it produces the fruits of faith. As a result of the Scriptural teaching that faith produces good works, **the Apology further describes good works as signs and testimonies, along with Baptism and the sacraments**. The Large Catechism explains the fifth petition's "...as we forgive those who sin against us," as God giving us a comforting sign.¹⁵ If we forgive our neighbor, then we must have faith, if we have faith, then we must be saved.

cannot always judge *ex sensu* [from feeling], as to how and when they are experienced in the heart; but because they are often covered and occur in great weakness, we should be certain from, and according to, the promise, that the Word of God preached and heard is [truly] an office and work of the Holy Ghost, by which He is certainly efficacious and works in our hearts, 2 Cor. 2, 14ff; 3, 5ff.

¹⁴Ap XXI (IX) Triglotta, p.349 (Tappert, p.231-232). Similarly Ap IV (II) 79-80 Triglotta, p.142-143 (Tappert, p.118), just quoted on page 6.

¹⁵LC III, Triglotta, p.725 (Tappert, p. 433) **93]** But there is here attached a necessary, yet consolatory addition: *As we forgive*. He has promised that we shall be sure that everything is forgiven and pardoned, yet in the manner that we also forgive our neighbor. **94]** For just as we daily sin much against God, and yet He forgives everything through grace, so we, too, must ever forgive our neighbor who does us injury, violence, and wrong, shows malice toward us, etc. **95]** If, therefore, you do not forgive, then do not think that God forgives you; but if you forgive, you have this consolation and assurance, that you are forgiven in heaven, not on account of your forgiving, for God forgives freely and without condition, out of pure grace, because He has so promised, as the Gospel teaches, but in order that He may set this up for our confirmation and assurance for a sign alongside of the promise which accords with this prayer, Luke 6, 37: *Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven*. Therefore Christ also repeats it soon after the Lord's Prayer, and says, Matt. 6, 14: *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you*, etc. **97]** This sign is therefore attached to this petition, that, when we pray, we remember the promise and reflect thus: Dear Father, for this reason I come and pray Thee to forgive me, not that I can make satisfaction, or can merit anything by my works, but because Thou hast promised and attached the seal thereto that I should be as sure as though I had absolution pronounced by Thyself. **98]** For as much as Baptism and the Lord's Supper, appointed as external signs,

C. Pastoral use of Fruits of Faith: Statement #3

The pastor makes use of these fruits of faith in order to determine repentance and unrepentance. Based on these fruits of faith the pastor applies either the binding key or the loosing key to the individual. Statement #3 states that the pastor must be able to see faith to apply (private) absolution. That statement is simply not true.¹⁶

Due to the presence of hypocrites within the congregation, this determination of repentance or unrepentance based on the presence of works is not fool proof. There will be those who mimic the words and actions of believers. Though their action looks exactly like the action of a believer, it will not have come from faith in thanksgiving for Christ's free salvation. The pastor will not be able to tell. Apology VII and VIII says, "For we grant that in this life hypocrites and wicked men have been mingled with the Church, and that they are members of the Church according to the outward fellowship of the signs of the Church, *i.e.*, of Word, profession, and Sacraments, especially if they have not been excommunicated."¹⁷ Nevertheless, statement #3 is wrong when it says that the pastor cannot absolve without looking into the heart to find faith.

D. A Believer's use of Fruits of Faith

The premise of statement #2 expressed the idea that the believer is going to need to examine himself to see if he has faith—by which pietism means that a person should look for the fruits/effects of faith. The conclusion of statement #2 then says that only by the presence of the fruits/effects of faith can the individual know that his sins are forgiven. Both the premise and the conclusion of statement #2 are false.

The believer does not need to examine himself for faith. The believer by definition has faith, which is the confidence of salvation. When a person through faith in God's promise is confident of his salvation that person is saved. Regarding the #2 conclusion, the effects/fruits of faith are not the only way that a person can know that he is saved. Although the pastor only has the fruits of faith to determine the repentance or lack of in another person, the individual can AND DOES know their own faith. In fact, the primary way that a person knows he is saved is by the preaching of the Gospel which creates the confidence of salvation.

Indeed, good works are used on occasion for the purpose of showing the presence of faith. However, there are times in which the believer is not able to make a right judgment concerning his own works flowing out of faith.¹⁸ Due to the ever-present sinful nature, all of our works are always tainted by sin. In the midst of affliction and persecution, it doesn't take much for our faith-wrought-works to look completely sinful

effect, so much also this sign can effect to confirm our consciences and cause them to rejoice. And it is especially given for this purpose, that we might use and practice it every hour, as a thing that we have with us at all times.

¹⁶ The general absolution—the preaching of the good news to all, as in preaching—doesn't require the pastor to look into the heart for faith, either. I will make mention of this later, in connection with Luther's letter "To the Council of the City of Nurnberg" April 18, 1533.

¹⁷ Ap VII and VIII, 3 Triglotta p.227 (Tappert, p.169).

¹⁸ FC SD II, Triglotta, p.903 (Tappert, p. 531-532) **56** For concerning the presence, operation, and gifts of the Holy Ghost we should not and cannot always judge *ex sensu* [from feeling], as to how and when they are experienced in the heart; but because they are often covered and occur in great weakness, we should be certain from, and according to, the promise, that the Word of God preached and heard is [truly] an office and work of the Holy Ghost, by which He is certainly efficacious and works in our hearts, 2 Cor. 2, 14ff; 3, 5ff.

and devoid of any good.¹⁹ When this happens, the Scripture directs a person to the promise of God for the gift of faith (and the confidence which faith gives). **The primary and direct way to give confidence and assurance of salvation is through the preaching of the promise of God and the administration of the Sacrament, which are the promise of God connected with an element.**

II. The Three Items connected with Justifying Faith²⁰

Now let us examine the Promise of God. Returning to the sub-section within Article IV of The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, entitled, “*What Is Justifying Faith?*” the Confessions speaks of those three items that are to be kept together. (*I have added the numbers for future reference*)

53] As often, therefore, as we speak of justifying faith, we must keep in mind that these three objects concur: (1) the *promise*, and (2) that, too, *gratuitous*, and (3) the *merits of Christ, as the price and propitiation*. (1) The promise is received by faith; (2) the “gratuitous” excludes our merits, and signifies that the benefit is offered only through mercy; (3) the merits of Christ are the price, because there must be a certain propitiation for our sins.²¹

Beginning with the second item, we learn that this “promise” to give out the “merits of Christ” is not a promise based on the merit of the Law, but upon the gratuitous mercy of God. The Law also promises eternal life and many blessings, but they are conditioned by perfect obedience. Due to sin, all have fallen short of the glory of God. This offered promise is not given in exchange for our works or merit. The Apology explains that this promise, to give the merits of Christ, is the result of God’s grace and mercy and not on account of anything which we have done.

The third item is described as “the merit of Christ, as the price and propitiation²².” This merit is none other than the completed vicarious atonement.

Christ has secured a treasury of merits for us. Here are some of the ways in which this sub-section describes it:

“the remission of sins and justification”

“the forgiveness of sins, grace, and all salvation.”

“every treasure of grace in Christ.”

“the forgiveness of sins”

¹⁹ FC SD II, Concordia Triglotta, p. 907 (Tappert, p. 534) **68]** For since we receive in this life only the first-fruits of the Spirit, and the new birth is not complete, but only begun in us, the combat and struggle of the flesh against the spirit remains even in the elect and truly regenerate men; for there is a great difference perceptible among Christians not only in this, that one is weak and another strong in the spirit, but each Christian, moreover, experiences in himself that at one time he is joyful in spirit, and at another fearful and alarmed; at one time ardent in love, strong in faith and hope, and at another cold and weak.

²⁰ FC SD III, Concordia Triglotta, p. 928 (Tappert, p. 543) **25]** For not everything that belongs to conversion belongs likewise to the article of justification, in and to which belong and are necessary only the grace of God, the merit of Christ, and faith, which receives this in the promise of the Gospel, whereby the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, whence we receive and have forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, sonship, and heirship of eternal life.

²¹ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.135-137 (Tappert, p.114).

²² Later in Apology IV it speaks again of the propitiation of Christ, not apart from faith, but through (justifying) faith. Ap IV (III. Of Love and Fulfilling of the Law) Triglotta, p.225 (Tappert IV, §382, p.165). “**261]** ...For Christ is a *propitiation*, as Paul, Rom. 3, 25, says, *through faith*. When timid consciences are comforted by faith, and are convinced that our sins have been blotted out by the death of Christ, and that God has been reconciled to us on account of Christ’s suffering, then, indeed, the suffering of Christ profits us.”

“the merits of Christ are the price, because there must be a certain propitiation for our sins.”²³

Thus, the merits of Christ, gratuitously given, are the content of the promise of God.

A. The Promise of God

Jumping back to our list, the first item is called “the promise” of Christ’s merit. This sub-section most often describes “the promise of God” with the word, “offer”:

48] ...the promise of God, in which, for Christ’s sake, the remission of sins and justification are freely offered.

...the offered promise of the remission of sins and of justification.

49] ...the benefits offered by God;

...those things which He promises and offers.

53] the promise, ...the benefit is offered ...²⁴

The most common designation for the Gospel in the Lutheran Confessions is the word promise. Apology IV, 5 says, “All Scripture ought to be distributed into these two principal topics, the Law and the promises. For in some places it presents the Law, and in others the promise concerning Christ, namely, either when [in the Old Testament] it promises that Christ will come, and offers, for His sake, the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal, or when, in the Gospel [in the New Testament], Christ Himself, since He has appeared, promises the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal.”²⁵

In the New Testament, St. Peter tells the Pentecost day hearers, who had been cut to the heart by the law, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:38-39). When the jailer asked how to be saved, Sts. Paul and Silas spoke of the promise saying, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). St. Paul teaches that concerning this promise in Romans 4:13, “For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith (διὰ δικαιοσύνης πίστεως).”

B. Received by Faith

This offered promise is received only by faith. In two different places in this one sub-section, the connection between the “offered promise” and faith is explicitly defined.

²³ Ap IV (II What is Justifying Faith) Triglotta, p.135-137 (Tappert, p.113-115).

²⁴ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.135-137 (Tappert, p.113-114).

²⁵ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.121 (Tappert, p.108). Also see FC SD XI Triglotta, p.1075 (Tappert, p.622) **37]** For this reason also Christ causes the promise of the Gospel not only to be offered in general, but He seals it through the Sacraments which He attaches as seals of the promise, and thereby confirms it [the certainty of the promise of the Gospel] to every believer in particular.

Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.151 (Tappert, p.121) **101]** Is. 53, 11: *By His knowledge shall He justify many*. But what is the knowledge of Christ unless to know the benefits of Christ, the promises which by the Gospel He has scattered broadcast in the world? And to know these benefits is properly and truly to believe in Christ, to believe that that which God has promised for Christ’s sake He will certainly fulfill.

50] ... For he{*St. Paul*} judges that the promise cannot be received unless by faith. Wherefore he puts them together as things that belong to one another, and connects promise and faith. [There Paul fastens and binds together these two, thus: Wherever there is a promise faith is required, and conversely, wherever faith is required, there must be a promise.]²⁶

And later on it says again,

55] As often, therefore, as mention is made of mercy, we must keep in mind that faith is there required, which receives the promise of mercy. And, again, as often as we speak of faith, we wish an object to be understood, namely, the promised mercy. 56] For faith justifies and saves, not on the ground that it is a work in itself worthy, but only because it receives the promised mercy.²⁷

When the Apology says that “faith is required,” it is not turning faith into a work of man. Faith still remains the gift of God which receives the promise. The Apology is expressing the natural implication of God’s gracious promise/offer of the completed merit of Jesus Christ. Without faith, a person does not have the remission of sins or justification. The offer and promise of God is still valid. The merit of Christ is still a completed act. However, apart from faith it is impossible to please God. Thus the merit is completed, but until the promise is received by faith, the offered benefits have not yet been apprehended.²⁸

So the offered promise of God is that through faith in His Son you will have remission of sins and justification. There is no difference between an offered atonement and a faith-required promise. They are the same. Those who change God’s promise to “You already are justified” do not understand that the nature of an offered promise requires faith.^{29 30} H.A. Preus changes the promise of God into an irresistible

²⁶ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.135 (Tappert, p.114).

²⁷ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.137 (Tappert, p.114).

²⁸ Ap XXIV Triglotta, p.409 (Tappert, p. 262) 70] Therefore the Word offers the remission of sins. And a ceremony is, as it were, a picture or seal, as Paul, Rom. 4, 11, calls it, of the Word, making known the promise. Therefore, just as the promise is useless unless it is received by faith, so a ceremony is useless unless such faith is added as is truly confident that the remission of sins is here offered. And this faith encourages contrite minds. And just as the Word has been given in order to excite this faith, so the Sacrament has been instituted in order that the outward appearance meeting the eyes might move the heart to believe [and strengthen faith]. For through these, namely, through Word and Sacrament, the Holy Ghost works.

²⁹ Ap IV, (II) Triglotta, p.145-147 (Tappert, p.119-120). 84] *Fourthly. Remission of sins is something promised for Christ’s sake.* Therefore it cannot be received except by faith alone. For a promise cannot be received except by faith alone. Rom. 4, 16: Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace, to the end that the promise might be sure; as though he were to say: “If the matter were to depend upon our merits, the promise would be uncertain and useless, because we never could determine when we would have sufficient merit.” And this, experienced consciences can easily understand [and would not, for a thousand worlds have our salvation depend upon ourselves]. Accordingly, Paul says, Gal. 3, 22: But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. He takes merit away from us, because he says that all are guilty and concluded under sin; then he adds that the promise, namely, of the remission of sins and of justification, is given, and adds how the promise can be received, namely, by faith. And this reasoning, derived **from the nature of a promise,** is the chief reasoning [a veritable rock] in Paul, and is often repeated. Nor can anything be devised or imagined whereby this argument of Paul can be overthrown. Wherefore 85] let not good minds suffer themselves to be forced from the conviction that we receive remission of sins for Christ’s sake, only through faith. In this they have sure and firm consolation against the terrors of sin, and against eternal death, and against all the gates of hell. [Everything else is a foundation of sand that sinks in trials.]

³⁰ Especially see paragraphs 260-261 of Ap IV (III. Of Love and Fulfilling of the Law) 260-261, Triglotta, p.223-225 (Tappert IV, §381-382, p.165), which is found on page 12.

declaration which states that apart from faith all people are already righteous (“righteousness for the whole world”). An offered promise that does not require faith in order to receive the benefits is not an offered promise.

In Apology IV the Lutherans were responding to the arguments of the Romanists that salvation is received by good works and love. The Lutherans acknowledge that there are Scripture passages which say that “works merit eternal life,” however the Lutherans explain,

“**256]** ...However, if there is to be and abide a Christian Church, the pure teaching concerning Christ, concerning the righteousness of faith, must surely be preserved.... Now, if passages which treat of works are understood in such a manner as to comprise faith, they are not opposed to our doctrine. And, indeed, it is necessary always to add faith, so as not to exclude Christ as Mediator. But the fulfilment of the Law follows faith; for the Holy Ghost is present, who renews life.... **257]** We are not, therefore, on this topic contending with the adversaries concerning a small matter. We are not seeking out idle subtleties when we find fault with them for teaching that we merit eternal life by works, while that faith is omitted **258]** which apprehends Christ as Mediator.... **260]** of the old writers, which they distort in interpreting. In the schools the boast is made that good works please on account of grace, and that confidence must be put in God’s grace. Here they interpret grace as a habit by which we love God, as though, indeed, the ancients meant to say that we ought to trust in our love, of which we certainly experience how small and how impure it is. Although it is strange how they bid us trust in love, since they teach us that we are not able to know whether it be present. Why do they not here set forth the grace, the mercy of God toward us? And as often as mention is made of this, they ought to add faith. For the promise of God’s mercy, reconciliation, and love towards us is not apprehended unless by faith. With this view they would be right in saying that we ought to trust in grace, **261]** that good works please because of grace, when faith apprehends grace. In the schools the boast is also made that our good works avail by virtue of Christ’s passion. Well said! but why add nothing concerning faith? For Christ is a propitiation, as Paul, Rom. 3, 25, says, through faith. When timid consciences are comforted by faith, and are convinced that our sins have been blotted out by the death of Christ, and that God has been reconciled to us on account of Christ’s suffering, then, indeed, the suffering of Christ profits us. If the doctrine concerning faith be omitted, it is said in vain that works avail by virtue of Christ’s passion.”³¹

Similarly, the proponents of the “(objective) justification of the world,” think that they have found Scriptural or Confessional proof for their novelty when passages speak of an announcement of justification or righteousness because of Christ’s completed merit(atonement) apart from a direct reference to faith. We respond rightly to their arguments when we say, “**260]** ... And as often as mention is made of this, they ought to add faith. For the promise of God’s mercy, reconciliation, and love towards us is not apprehended unless by faith.”³² Even in those instances in which a passage says nothing of faith, but

³¹ Ap IV (III. Of Love and the Fulfilling of the Law) Triglotta, p.223-225 (Tappert, §377-382, p.165).

³² Ap IV (III. Of Love and Fulfilling of the Law) Triglotta, p.223 (Tappert IV, §381, p.165).

only mentions the completed atonement, faith is required. When a passage proclaims justification and righteousness to a sinner, it is to be understood as a Gospel promise in which faith is required. It is the nature of a promise. It is the nature of the Gospel.

No one would deny that faith is required when they tell the jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). However, faith is also required when the Word says, “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). For the “ministry of reconciliation” (v.18) which presents the “word of reconciliation” (v.19) is received by faith. In the same way, St. Paul in Antioch said, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 13:38). By these words, St. Paul is clearly not declaring a pre-existing objective justification apart from faith, as if to say you already have forgiveness. St. Paul is offering the jailer the promise of the forgiveness of sins to be received through faith. The next verse makes that explanation clear saying, “And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).

The announcement to a thirsty man, “Drink this water” explicitly speaks of reception of the water. However, the announcement, “Here is water,” also, implicitly, is an invitation to receive water through drinking. There are times in which we explicitly speak of the reception by faith when our announcement of the gospel-promise is “Believe in the forgiveness of sins, won by Christ.” At other times we might simply say, “Jesus has forgiven you all your sins.” This second announcement is not different from the first in that it also implies that there is to be a reception by faith.

Wherever there is talk of righteousness, we should add “by faith.” Romans 1:17 says, “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

C. The Will of God

The promise of God tells us what God’s will is toward us. His will is not only to save the world, but to save the world through faith in His Son.³³ The Father’s will is not only that His Son should secure the purchase price, but He wants that redemption received by faith. By God’s Word of promise, we know that God’s will includes a reception of the offered atonement by faith.

59] ...Therefore the fathers also were justified, not by the Law, but by the promise and faith. ... **60]** Thus God wishes Himself to be known, thus He wishes Himself to be worshiped, that from Him we receive benefits, and receive them, too, because of His mercy, and not because of our merits....³⁴

Wherever the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confession say that man is justified by faith alone, it is not merely a reaction against justification by works. This exclusive

³³ FC SD XI Triglotta, p.1069 (Tappert, p.619). **23]** And [indeed] in this His counsel, purpose, and ordination God has prepared salvation not only in general, but has in grace considered and chosen to salvation each and every person of the elect who are to be saved through Christ, also ordained that in the way just mentioned He will, by His grace, gifts, and efficacy, bring them thereto [make them participants of eternal salvation], aid, promote, strengthen, and preserve them.

³⁴ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.137 (Tappert, p.115).

particle, alone, will admit no other kind of faith-less justification.³⁵ God-given faith is not optional for justification, but required.³⁶ Is that a condition? No, if we are speaking about human input.

Faith is not a human condition, because man cannot produce it in himself. Our forefathers understood that faith was a gift of God created by the Holy Spirit through the very preaching of the offered promise of salvation through faith in Christ.³⁷ In this way, God gives what he requires.³⁸ God wills to use His Word to lay before us the promise. The offered promise creates faith in the promise. Romans 10:17, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

However, there is a divinely established requirement concerning the receiving instrument called faith. The merit of Christ is not applied apart from the means or instrument called faith. Faith receives the benefits. We usually don't use the term “condition” when speaking of gifts of God. The Gospel is thus defined as unconditional.

³⁵ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.141 (Tappert, p.116). **69]** Now we will show *that faith* [and nothing else] *justifies*. Here, in the first place, readers must be admonished of this, that just as it is necessary to maintain this sentence: Christ is Mediator, so is it necessary to defend that faith justifies, [without works]. For how will Christ be Mediator if in justification we do not use Him as Mediator; if we do not hold that for His sake we are accounted righteous? But to believe is to trust in the merits of Christ, that for His sake God certainly wishes to be reconciled with us. **70]** Likewise, just as we ought to maintain that, apart from the Law, the promise of Christ is necessary, so also is it needful to maintain that faith justifies. [For the Law does not preach the forgiveness of sin by grace.] For the Law cannot be performed unless the Holy Ghost be first received. It is, therefore, needful to maintain that the promise of Christ is necessary. But this cannot be received except by faith. Therefore, those who deny that faith justifies, teach nothing but the Law, both Christ and the Gospel being set aside.”

³⁶ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.135-137 (Tappert, p.114). **50]** Now, that faith signifies, not only a knowledge of the history, but such faith as assents to the promise, Paul plainly testifies when he says, Rom. 4, 16: *Therefore it is of faith, to the end the promise might be sure*. For he judges that the promise cannot be received unless by faith. Wherefore he puts them together as things that belong to one another, and connects promise and faith. [There Paul fastens and binds together these two, thus: Wherever there is a promise faith is required, and conversely, wherever faith is required, there must be a promise.] ...**55]**... As often, therefore, as mention is made of mercy, we must keep in mind that faith is there required, which receives the promise of mercy. And, again, as often as we speak of faith, we wish an object to be understood, namely, the promised mercy. **56]** For faith justifies and saves, not on the ground that it is a work in itself worthy, but only because it receives the promised mercy.

³⁷ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.139 (Tappert, p.116). **67]** ...Accordingly, justification occurs through the Word, just as Paul says, Rom. 1, 16: *The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth*. Likewise 10, 17: *Faith cometh by hearing*. And proof can be derived even from this that faith justifies, because, if justification occurs only through the Word, and the Word is apprehended only by faith, it follows that faith justifies. **68]** But there are other and more important reasons. We have said these things thus far in order that we might show the mode of regeneration, and that the nature of faith [what is, or is not, faith], concerning which we speak, might be understood.

³⁸ Ap XXIV Triglotta, p.409 (Tappert, p.262). **69]** The Sacraments are signs of God's will toward us, and not merely signs of men among each other; and they are right in defining that Sacraments in the New Testament are signs of grace. And because in a sacrament there are two things, a sign and the Word, the Word, in the New Testament, is the promise of grace added. The promise of the New Testament is the promise of the remission of sins, as the text, Luke 22, 19, says: *This is My body, which is given for you. This cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.* **70]** Therefore the Word offers the remission of sins. And a ceremony is, as it were, a picture or seal, as Paul, Rom. 4, 11, calls it, of the Word, making known the promise. Therefore, just as the promise is useless unless it is received by faith, so a ceremony is useless unless such faith is added as is truly confident that the remission of sins is here offered. And this faith encourages contrite minds. And just as the Word has been given in order to excite this faith, so the Sacrament has been instituted in order that the outward appearance meeting the eyes might move the heart to believe [and strengthen faith]. For through these, namely, through Word and Sacrament, the Holy Ghost works.

Nevertheless, faith, worked by the Holy Spirit, is the only divinely established instrument for receiving/appropriating the promise.³⁹

D. Confidence/Faith in the Promise

Galatians 3:22 says, “But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”⁴⁰ The promise by faith is given to those who believe. God promises to save those with faith in His Son, and then God creates the very faith which trusts in that promise. Those holding to Objective Justification say that faith in a promise which includes faith, is a pretzel faith, bent back upon itself. They say that it is faith trusting in faith.⁴¹

We are not saying that you trust in your faith or even the fruits of faith for the assurance of salvation. My faith looks to the promise of God⁴², which cannot lie⁴³. The Promise of God is “Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mk 16:16). God has created faith in my heart so that I trust God’s promise. Like Abraham, I am “fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform” (Romans 4:20-21).

³⁹ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.145 (Tappert, p.118-119). **83]** *Thirdly*. Peter, in Acts 10, 43, says: *To Him give all the prophets witness that through His name, whosoever believeth on Him, shall receive remission of sins.* How could this be said more clearly? We receive remission of sins, he says, through His name, *i.e.*, for His sake; therefore, not for the sake of our merits, not for the sake of our contrition, attrition, love, worship, works. And he adds: *When we believe in Him.* Therefore he requires faith. For we cannot apprehend the name of Christ except by faith. Besides he cites the agreement of all the prophets. This is truly to cite the authority of the Church. [For when all the holy prophets bear witness, that is certainly a glorious, great excellent, powerful decretal and testimony.]...

⁴⁰ ἡ ἐπαγγελία ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοθῆ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν.

⁴¹ Ap IV (III. Of Love and the Fulfilling of the Law) Triglotta, p.215-217 (Tappert, §339-341, p.159). Not that faith helps because of its worth, but because it trusts in God’s promises and mercy. Faith is strong, not because of its worthiness, but because of the divine promise.] For they are very dissimilar, as **the causes and objects of confidence** in the former proposition are far dissimilar to those of the latter. In the former, confidence is confidence in our own works. In the latter, confidence is confidence in the divine promise. Christ, however, condemns confidence in our works; He does not condemn confidence in His promise. He does not wish us to despair of God’s grace and mercy. He accuses our works as unworthy, **219]** but does not accuse the promise which freely offers mercy. And here Ambrose says well: *Grace is to be acknowledged; but nature must not be disregarded.* We must trust in the promise of grace and not **220]** in our own nature. But the adversaries act in accordance with their custom, and distort, against faith, **221]** the judgments which have been given on behalf of faith. [Hence, Christ in this place forbids men to trust in their own works; for they cannot help them. On the other hand, **He does not forbid to trust in God’s promise. Yea, He requires such trust in the promise of God for the very reason that we are unprofitable servants and works can be of no help.** Therefore, the knaves have improperly applied to our trust in the divine promise the words of Christ which treat of trust in our own worthiness.

⁴² Especially see paragraphs 220-221 of Ap IV (III. Of Love and the Fulfilling of the Law) Triglotta, p.215-217 (Tappert, §339-341, p.159), just quoted in footnote 42.

⁴³ Ap IV (II) Triglotta, p.155 (Tappert, p.123). **112]**...But the remission of sins is received by faith alone, and, indeed, by faith properly so called, because the promise cannot be received except by faith. **113]** But faith, properly so called, is that which assents to the promise [is when my heart, and the Holy Ghost in the heart, says: The promise of God is true and certain]. Of **114]** this faith Scripture speaks. And because it receives the remission of sins, and reconciles us to God, by this faith we are [like Abraham] accounted righteous for Christ’s sake before we love and do the works of the Law, although love necessarily follows. **115]** *Nor, indeed, is this faith an idle knowledge, neither can it coexist with mortal sin, but it is a work of the Holy Ghost, whereby we are freed from death, and terrified minds are encouraged and quickened.* **116]** And because this faith alone receives the remission of sins, and renders us acceptable to God, and brings the Holy Ghost, it could be more correctly called *gratia gratum faciens*, grace rendering one pleasing to God, than an effect following, namely, love.

If asked, “How do you know you are saved?” The answer, “Jesus died for me” and “I believe in Jesus’ death” are synonymous. The first emphasizes the atonement implying that I have faith (the words “for me.”). The second explicitly says I have faith, not faith in faith, but faith in the atonement.

God explains that His reason for setting it up this way was so that we could be sure^{44 45}—the very thing which faith is, confidence. His grace sent us His Son. His Son secured the merit. The Holy Spirit creates faith which receives the merit. We are saved/justified by grace through faith. Faith is a gift from Him. Faith holds to Christ. We trust in God’s Promise to give His gifts of Christ’s merit through faith. Thus it all comes from Him. From faith from first to last. Romans 1:17 says, “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

III. Examination of the Response of H.A. Preus and the Norwegian Synod

According to the summary of “Objective Justification: The Controversy Examined,” the first three points are the challenge of Pietism as presented by Weenaas and Offerdahl. As I have gone through these points, I have given my objection to the various presuppositions and conclusions of these three points. In my attempt to return to a sure foundation and time-tested terminology, I have primarily drawn from a sub-section of Article IV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession entitled, “What is Justifying Faith?” lines 48 through 60. I have intentionally narrowed in on the three objects, which the sub-section says we must keep in mind when discussing justifying faith.

A. A Simple Answer: either General or Specific

⁴⁴ FC SD IV Good Works Triglotta, p.949 (Tappert, p.556-557). **34]** But, on the other hand, the sense is not that faith only in the beginning lays hold of righteousness and salvation, and then resigns its office to the works as though thereafter they had to sustain faith, the righteousness received, and salvation; but in order that the promise, not only of receiving, but also of retaining righteousness and salvation, may be firm and sure to us, St. Paul, Rom. 5, 2, ascribes to faith not only the entrance to grace, but also that we stand in grace and boast of the future glory, that is, the beginning, middle, and end he ascribes all *to faith alone*. Likewise, Rom. 11, 20: *Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith*. Col. 1, 22: *He will present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in His sight, if ye continue in the faith*. 1 Pet. 1, 5, 9: *By the power of God we are kept through faith unto salvation*. Likewise: *Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls...*

⁴⁵ Ap IV, (II) Triglotta, p.145-147 (Tappert, p.119-120). **84]** Fourthly. Remission of sins is something promised for Christ’s sake. Therefore it cannot be received except by faith alone. For a promise cannot be received except by faith alone. **Rom. 4, 16: Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace, to the end that the promise might be sure;** as though he were to say: “If the matter were to depend upon our merits, the promise would be uncertain and useless, because we never could determine when we would have sufficient merit.” And this, experienced consciences can easily understand [and would not, for a thousand worlds have our salvation depend upon ourselves]. Accordingly, Paul says, Gal. 3, 22: *But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe*. He takes merit away from us, because he says that all are guilty and concluded under sin; then he adds that the promise, namely, of the remission of sins and of justification, is given, and adds how the promise can be received, namely, by faith... **86]** But since we receive remission of sins and the Holy Ghost by faith alone, faith alone justifies, because those reconciled are accounted righteous and children of God, not on account of their own purity, but through mercy for Christ’s sake, **provided only they by faith apprehend this mercy**. Accordingly, Scripture testifies that *by faith we are accounted righteous*, Rom. 3, 26. We, therefore, will add testimonies which clearly declare that faith is that very righteousness by which we are accounted righteous before God, namely, not because it is a work that is in itself worthy, but because it receives the promise by which God has promised that for Christ’s sake He wishes to be propitious to those believing in Him, or because He knows that *Christ of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*, 1 Cor. 1, 30.

The present challenge from pietism could have easily and quickly been addressed by exposing Weenaas' doubt or refusal to trust in the means of grace. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II says,

52] Now, all who wish to be saved ought to hear this preaching [of God's Word]. For the preaching and hearing of God's Word are instruments of the Holy Ghost, by, with, and through which He desires to work efficaciously, and to convert men to God, and to work in them both to will and to do.... **55]** ...neither preacher nor hearer is to doubt this grace and efficacy of the Holy Ghost, but should be certain that when the Word of God is preached purely and truly, according to the command and will of God, and men listen attentively and earnestly and meditate upon it, God is certainly present with His grace, and grants, as has been said, what otherwise man can neither accept nor give from his own powers. **56]** For concerning the presence, operation, and gifts of the Holy Ghost we should not and cannot always judge *ex sensu* [from feeling], as to how and when they are experienced in the heart; but because they are often covered and occur in great weakness, we should be certain from, and according to, the promise, that the Word of God preached and heard is [truly] an office and work of the Holy Ghost, by which He is certainly efficacious and works in our hearts, 2 Cor. 2, 14ff; 3, 5ff.⁴⁶

In addition to the general doubt of pietism towards the means of grace, H.A. Preus could have addressed the absolution controversy by quoting those Confessional passages which in particular condemn doubt of the absolution.

Ap XI. Confession, Concordia Triglotta, p. 249 (Tappert, §2, p. 180) **59]** ... after they heard that **it is the command of God, nay, rather the very voice of the Gospel, that we should believe the absolution, and regard it as certain that the remission of sins is freely granted us for Christ's sake; and that we should believe that by this faith we are truly reconciled to God [as though we heard a voice from heaven]**. This belief has encouraged many godly minds, and, in the beginning, brought Luther the highest commendation from all good men, since it shows consciences **sure and firm consolation**; because previously the entire power of absolution [entire necessary doctrine of repentance] had been kept suppressed by doctrines concerning works, since the sophists and monks taught nothing of faith and free remission [but pointed men to their own works, from which nothing but despair enters alarmed consciences].⁴⁷

Ap XII. (VI.) Of Confession and Satisfaction, Concordia Triglotta, p. 281-283 (Tappert, §98-101,104-105, p. 197) **2]** For we also retain confession, especially on account of the absolution, as being the word of God which, by divine authority, the power of the keys pronounces upon individuals. **3]** Therefore it would be wicked to remove private absolution from the Church. **4]** **Neither do they understand what the remission of sins or the power of the keys is, if there are any who despise private absolution.** ... Therefore ministers in the Church have the command to remit sin; they have not the command to investigate secret **8]** sins. **And indeed, they absolve from those that we do**

⁴⁶ FC SD II, Concordia Triglotta, p. 901-903 (Tappert, p. 531-532)

⁴⁷ Also Ap XII. (V.) 39-41, Of Repentance, Concordia Triglotta, p. 261 (Tappert, p. 187)

not remember; for which reason absolution, which is the voice of the Gospel remitting sins and consoling consciences, does not require judicial examination.

AC XXV. Of Confession, Concordia Triglotta, p. 69 (Tappert, p. 61-62) **3]** Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, **4]** and pronounced by God's command. The power of the Keys is set forth in its beauty and they are reminded **what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences, also, that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.** Aforetime satisfactions were immoderately extolled;

B. A Complete Three-fold Answer

A more complete answer to Pietism's attack on absolution could have used a three-fold response based on Apology IV's three items that need to be kept together.

1. When Pietism questions the trustworthiness of the absolution pronounced by the pastor, the correct response is to proclaim that the (1) promise of the Word of God is God's promise. When Pietism denies the trustworthiness of the absolution, they are questioning the trustworthiness of God. Simply put, they are calling God a liar.

Ap XII, (V.) Of Repentance, Concordia Triglotta, p. 269 (Tappert, p. 190-191) **61]**That absolution, however, is not received except by faith can be proved from Paul, who teaches, Rom. 4, 16, that the promise cannot be received *except by faith*. But absolution is the promise of the remission of sins [nothing else than the Gospel, the divine promise of God's grace and favor]. **62]** Therefore, it necessarily requires faith. Neither do we see how he who does not assent to it may be said to receive absolution. And what else is the refusal to assent to absolution but charging God with falsehood? If the heart doubts, it regards those things which God promises as uncertain and of no account. Accordingly, in 1 John 5, 10 it is written: *He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son.*

2. When Pietism sees faith as doubtful, but thinks that man's "examined" works as confidence—even if they are the fruits of faith—the correct response is to show forth the (2) gracious mercy of God in giving faith(that is confidence) as a gift, apart from works. Faith is not the unsure product of human will, as Pietism thinks. Faith is a gift of God created by the Word so that it is a sure confidence in the promise.

Ap IV, **84]** *Fourthly*. Remission of sins is something promised for Christ's sake. Therefore it cannot be received except by faith alone. For a promise cannot be received except by faith alone. Rom. 4, 16: *Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace, to the end that the promise might be sure;* as though he were to say: "If the matter were to depend upon our merits, the promise would be uncertain and useless, because we never could determine when we would have sufficient merit." And this, experienced consciences can easily understand [and would not, for a thousand worlds have our salvation depend upon ourselves]. Accordingly, Paul says, Gal. 3, 22: *But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.* He takes merit away from us, because he says that all are guilty and concluded under sin; then he adds that the promise, namely, of the remission of sins and of

justification, is given, and adds how the promise can be received, namely, by faith.⁴⁸

3. If Pietism is concerned about having something objectively true and firm, the correct response is none other than (3) the merit of Christ(the atonement).⁴⁹

Ap XIII, Triglotta, p.311 (Tappert, p.212) **8]** We teach that the sacrifice of Christ dying on the cross has been sufficient for the sins of the whole world, and that there is no need, besides, of other sacrifices, as though this were not sufficient for our sins. Men, accordingly, are justified not because of any other sacrifices, but because of this one sacrifice of Christ, if they believe that they have been redeemed by this sacrifice.⁵⁰

Instead of H.A. Preus calling these pietistic men back to the sound terminology and teaching as found in the Lutheran Confessions, Statement 4 begins by introducing a new teaching, which is described in statement 6 as “objective justification.” Statement 5 is the conclusion and statement 6 is the premise. The response of H. A. Preus to those who doubt the word of absolution is that faith is irrelevant to the pronouncement of absolution. H.A. Preus says that both believers and unbelievers have already been declared righteous or justified. H.A. Preus would have said that the entire world had already been absolved.

When H.A. Preus declares that the absolution is “objective,” he means that the absolution is not a promise requiring faith, but a declaration which is entirely independent of faith. He would say that the pastor’s absolution is a declaration which is true for all men whether there is faith present or not. He reasons that if the whole world is already declared righteous, then the pastor can declare that fact (of the forgiveness of sins) to anyone.

IV. Refutation of Objective Justification

A. A Problem with the Term

Prior to seeing the actual paper by H.A. Preus and having only heard the term, “objective justification,” I assumed that “objective justification” was only an unfortunate and imprecise term for the atonement of Jesus Christ(the third object in Apology, Article IV). I’m pretty sure that was the explanation which I was taught at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis between 1987 and 1991.

⁴⁸ Ap IV, (II) Triglotta, p.145-147 (Tappert, p.119-120).

⁴⁹ FC SD XI. Triglotta, p.1071-1073 (Tappert, p. 620-621) **28]** Therefore, if we wish to consider our eternal election to salvation with profit, we must in every way hold sturdily and firmly to this, that, as the preaching of repentance, so also the promise of the Gospel is universalis (universal), that is, it pertains to all men, Luke 24, 47. For this reason Christ has *commanded that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among ALL nations. For God loved the WORLD and gave His Son*, John 3, 16. *Christ bore the sins of the WORLD*, John 1, 29, *gave His flesh for the life of the WORLD*, John 6, 51; *His blood is the propitiation for the sins of the WHOLE WORLD*, 1 John 1, 7; 2, 2. Christ says: *Come unto Me, ALL ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*, Matt. 11, 28. *God hath concluded them ALL in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon ALL*, Rom. 11, 32. *The Lord is not willing that ANY should perish, but that ALL should come to repentance*, 2 Pet. 3, 9. *The same Lord over all is rich unto ALL that call upon Him*, Rom. 10, 12. *The righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto ALL and upon ALL them that believe*, Rom. 3, 22. *This is the will of Him that sent Me, that EVERY ONE that seeth the Son and believeth on Him may have everlasting life*, John 6, 40. Likewise it is Christ’s command that to all in common to whom repentance is preached this promise of the Gospel also should be offered Luke 24, 47; Mark 16, 15.

⁵⁰ Visitation Articles, IV. Triglotta, p. 1153. The pure and true doctrine of our churches concerning this article: I. That Christ has died for all men, and as the Lamb of God has borne the sins of the whole world.

I do remember reading about those who didn't like the use of the term from an unofficial news source, but I wasn't one to quibble simply over terms. Even though the term justification normally meant that someone was saved, I was told that the term justification was being used in a wide and narrow use of a term. The Word of God includes both Law and Gospel, and yet when we say that it is the pastor's job to preach the Gospel, it includes both Law and Gospel. Thus, even though the world isn't really saved/justified in the atonement (that justification actually occurs later through faith alone), I assumed that H.A. Preus applied the term Objective Justification to explain atonement as that necessary object which faith later receives. Subjective atonement must then be the narrow use, in which the subject (the sinner) believes the atonement and is justified.

Not having been born a Norwegian and not growing up in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod or Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, I did not know the Norwegian Narrative. Furthermore I did not know that, similar to the *uber-tragungs* ministry doctrine of Walther in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod(LCMS), "objective justification" had become enshrined as a badge of identification for those in the smaller synods.

By way of full disclosure, when I was informed by the ACLC that "objective justification" was, in fact, the official teaching of the LCMS, because of the Brief Statement and the old Synodical Conference, I was surprised. Though I was brought up in a LCMS congregation from birth, and went to a LCMS Seminary and served in LCMS from 1991 until 2007, I didn't know that the "justification of the world was the official teaching." Technically, the ACLC is correct. "Objective justification" is still the paper confession of the LCMS, but like many doctrines(true or false), it is not actively taught. I knew the term "objective justification" was used in my copy of Pieper's Dogmatics, the systematics textbook of my Seminary training, but I was surprised when after closer examination, I realized that "objective justification" was explained by Pieper as different from Christ's atonement.

B. Unfamiliar Terms and Definitions

So what is "objective justification?" Concerning Eldona's first definition of Objective Justification "as merely a synonym for atonement," the ACLC Critique says, "the first definition offered for Objective Justification is incorrect. Justification includes acceptance of the payment or sacrifice. It is more than atonement" (p.4).

Based on the sentence immediately prior to this one, I'm going to assume that the sentence, "justification includes acceptance of the payment or sacrifice," is still referring to "objective justification." However, I'm not sure what that sentence means because I don't know who is doing the accepting. If I supply the assumed subject, "God," it would say that "God" accepted the payment or sacrifice of Jesus. Nevertheless, their explanation that the Father accepted the payment doesn't explain to me what Objective Justification is more-than-the-atonement.

I struggled to find a definition from their Critique in which they would explain exactly what Objective Justification is, which is more-than-the-atonement.⁵¹ Part of the problem is that even those who try to uphold the term, find that it is inadequate at best. Already in the third footnote on page 1, the ACLC shies away from using the term, "Objective Justification." The footnote says,

"By 'objective aspect' we are referring to what is commonly called Objective Justification. We prefer to speak of the objective and subjective aspects of

⁵¹ On page 3, the ACLC has accepted the definition as taught by Pieper in his Dogmatics, "'Objective Justification' is the dogmatic assertion that a forensic declaration was made by God in the resurrection (because of a change in His heart effected by the atoning death of the Christ) that Man is without sin."

Justification, because it emphasizes that these two teachings are part of the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone and are never to be taken in opposition to, or apart from, each other.”

Rather than give us a definition of Objective Justification, the ACLC offers us their own definition of Justification (of which they say it has two parts) on page 2.

“The doctrine of Justification is understood by us to be that an individual is subjectively (i.e. personally) declared righteous before God when he believes in the objective righteousness that is provided in Christ for the whole world. To be justified, simply put, is to be declared righteous in a judicial sense.”

Attempting to separate out only the definition of Objective Justification, I come up with “the objective righteousness that is provided in Christ for the whole world.” This definition is not the same thing as the Brief Statement (as found in their appendix 2). The brief statement says,

“Scripture teaches that God has already declared the whole world to be righteous in Christ, Rom 5:19; 2 Cor 5:18-21; Rom 4:25; that therefore not for the sake of their good works, but without the works of the Law, by grace for Christ’s sake, He justifies, accounts righteous, all those who that is, believe, accept, and rely on, the fact that for Christ’s sake their sins are forgiven.”

So what is objective justification? Is it “an acceptance of a payment or sacrifice” (ACLC definition, p.4) or “an objective righteousness”(ACLC, p.2) or “a declaration of righteousness” for the world? The definition of the brief statement is probably the most clear of all of the definitions. The brief statement actually uses the definition for justify(“to declare righteous”) in its definition. It says, “God has already declared the whole world to be righteous in Christ.”

The problem with the Brief Statement definition is that in theology, normed by the Lutheran Confessions, that definition would mean none other than that the whole world is saved. Justify means saved. Does the ACLC understand that justify means to be saved? Yes, they do. Footnote “d” on page 2 says, “Justification means the remission of sins, reconciliation, or the acceptance of a person unto eternal life....” So do they confess that the whole world is saved or accepted “unto eternal life?” Absolutely, not. On page 14 it says “no sinner is justified apart from faith.” They expressly deny any kind of universal salvation. How do they reconcile this? I don’t know.

They conclude their definition on page 2 saying, “To be justified, simply put, is to be declared righteous in a judicial sense.” I would assume that the ACLC would not say that the world is declared righteous in a judicial sense, since they deny that the objective justification of the world results in eternal life. So in what (non-judicial) sense is the world declared righteous? Once again, the terms are not precise.

If the term justify were not used to describe the wicked in the world so that they are described as righteous (which means saved.), the ACLC/Eldona discussion would have been quite different. We had hoped to simply set aside the terms justify and righteous as inapplicable to the unbeliever.

C. The Fourth Object: More than Atonement

In the previously mentioned document, “Objective Justification: The Controversy Examined,” which the ACLC Critique cites positively on page 9 and 10, there is an entire section which is entitled, “The distinction between the Atonement and Justification.” The author explains that Objective Justification is “the objective nature of the Universal Atonement” (p.14) which he said was denied during the 19th century Absolution

Controversy. There is no such thing as the subjective nature of the Universal Atonement, so I have no idea what the objective nature of the atonement is. These terms are not standard theological categories. Without using the common language of theology, we have fallen into Alice in Wonderland's hole so that words mean whatever you want them to mean.

The above author lists "three different categories: The Atonement, Objective Justification, and Conversion, or Subjective Justification" (page 14). He then explains two of them saying,

"The Universal Atonement describes the work of Christ, namely, His active and passive obedience, whereby He lived a perfect life under the Law, came to bear the sins of the whole world in His body, was found guilty of those sins, suffered upon the cross, and died, and thus made satisfaction, or payment, for all sin. This is what the Confessions call "the merits of Christ".

Objective Justification is God's declaration that the Atonement which Jesus accomplished is, in fact, complete. Not only Jesus declares "It is finished" but the Father also declares it, that is, accepts the Sacrifice of His Son, pronounces it complete, declares Himself reconciled, and pronounces the sins of the entire world forgiven, all debt of sin having been paid in the Sacrifice of His Son. This He declares in two ways. First, in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and second through the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments."

We can rejoice that at least one of the defined terms goes back to the three objects of The Apology, sub-section, "What is justifying faith?" He connects "The Universal Atonement" with "the merits of Christ" in the Lutheran Confessions. However, rather than mention the offered promise or the gratuitous mercy of God from Apology IV, he adds a fourth thing—Objective Justification. This definition calls **objective justification the Father's declaration in the Resurrection and through the Ministry about the completeness of the Atonement.**

According to Rev. Diers, this new 4th thing, called "objective justification," and which was introduced by H.A. Preus has four parts.

1. The Father's Declaration – Rev. Diers says, "Objective justification is the Father's declaration that he has accepted what Christ has done in the atonement" (p.9).
2. In the Resurrection – Rev. Diers says, "But if, on the other hand, the resurrection of Christ is declaring something that faith grasps as an objective fact, then in regards to justification, what is the objective fact of the resurrection if it is not the justification of the entire world? What is the resurrection, other than a declaration by God of the finished work of Redemption for the world?" (p.14-15)
3. Through the Ministry of Word and Sacrament – They hold that God the Father is said to be making His declaration that the world is righteous apart from faith through the means of Grace.
4. The completeness of the Atonement – They teach that the completeness of the atonement is not the Son's work being done at the crucifixion, but the pronouncement that this price has been applied to the world. In the resurrection the Father declares both believers and unbelievers as righteous in His sight.

According to OJ proponents, the "It is finished," declaration of the Son at the crucifixion is not the same thing as the declaration of "objective justification" which the Father makes in the resurrection. The Son declares that the work is done and the price

secured at the crucifixion, but the Father declares that He accepts the price and is reconciled in the resurrection.

A quick perusal of the Scriptures will show that there was not an actual declaration from the Father AT the resurrection, as there was at the Transfiguration and the Baptism of Our Lord. It appears that they think there are Scriptural passages which teach that IN the resurrection, itself, is the proof of “the justification of the world.”

They use passages such as Romans 4:24-25, “It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification,” as well as Romans 5:10, 5:18-19, and 2 Corinthians 5:19 to attempt to prove their point. There have been several very good papers, such as “A Summary Exposition of The Doctrine of Justification By Grace Through Faith,” by Walter A. Maier, which have shown the inconsistencies in their exegesis of these very passages. Dr. Maier gives a rather technical explanation of these passages. There is no need to rewrite those papers which clearly show forth what has always been the correct Scriptural interpretation.⁵²

Nevertheless, Diers correctly characterizes these exegetical papers saying,

“The opponents of Objective Justification have objected to the use of these passages on the ground that these do not prove that God is reconciled and has already forgiven the sins of the world, but only that Christ has atoned for all sin. In other words, they say that these passages do not teach Objective Justification, but the Unlimited Atonement” (p.9).

The object of our salvation is not the “righteousness of the world,” but the atonement work of Jesus Christ, which includes His resurrection from the dead. The Gospel Promise to save those who have faith in the atonement is preached through the Pastoral Office as stated in Augsburg Confession V. The Large Catechism explains:

LC II Triglotta p. 689 (Tappert, p. 415-416) **38]** For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the Gospel. **The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, resurrection, etc.** But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us. **39]** Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves.

The Father has not made a specific declaration in the resurrection, that the world has been justified. However, the Lutheran Confessions do speak of a witness of the resurrection (though it is not exclusive), which the Father has revealed to the world.

Ap XXVII, Concordia Triglotta p. 423, (Tappert, p. 271) **13]** “We have said in the Confession that the remission of sins is received freely for Christ’s sake, through faith. If this is not the very voice of the Gospel, if it is not the judgment of the eternal Father, which Thou who art in the bosom of the Father hast revealed to the world, we are justly blamed. But Thy death is a witness, Thy resurrection is a

⁵² <http://www.wlsessays.net/files/MaierJustification.pdf>

witness, the Holy Ghost is a witness, Thy entire Church is a witness, that it is truly the judgment of the Gospel that we obtain remission of sins, not on account of our merits, but on account of Thee, through faith.

As it clearly says, the resurrection is not the proof that we are righteous apart from faith. It is a witness that we are righteous through faith! The resurrection is not a comfort to me apart from faith. Once I have faith, the resurrection is the proof that having been united with Jesus, I, too, will rise to a new life, "... even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true" (Small Catechism).

D. Confusion of Standard Theological Terms

In the first draft of this paper, I purposefully used the adjective "objective" with the word atonement. If OJ proponents wanted something which was objective (true whether one believes it or not), then they should be speaking of Christ's atonement. The atonement is already complete and, therefore, I reasoned "objective." By this adjective, I wanted to emphasize what the Lutheran Confessions call the "universal" nature of the atonement.⁵³ FC SD XI, 28, "...as the preaching of repentance, so also the promise of the Gospel is *universalis* (universal), that is, it pertains to all men, Luke 24,47.... Likewise it is Christ's command that to all in common to whom repentance is preached this promise of the Gospel also should be offered Luke 24,47; Mark 16,15."⁵⁴

Our Lord warns us not to add to or subtract from His revelation. When H.A. Preus introduced a new fourth item, "objective justification," into the doctrine of justification, all of the other theological terms had to be adjusted and moved. When the offered promise of the Gospel was changed to the declaration of a righteousness for the world apart from faith, then standard theological terms began to be used in new ways.

I finally decided to leave off the adjective "objective" from the word atonement, because by the addition of this adjective, even the noun it modifies has been changed to something it is not. The term objective in "Objective justification" does not stress that Christ accomplished the atonement and man need do nothing to appease God's wrath, as it had formerly. "Objective" now means that the righteousness secured by Jesus Christ in the atonement has already been applied to the world apart from faith so that the world is declared righteous in God's eyes. According to OJ proponents, Objective justification means more than that Christ's atonement is universal. Objective justification means that mankind is without sin because the atoning death of the Christ caused a change in God's heart."

Dier's fourth point of Objective Justification from page 21 is described as "the completeness of the Atonement." According to OJ proponents, the completeness of the atonement is not Jesus saying, "It is finished," but that mankind is without sin. What they are actually saying about the atonement is not completeness, but effect or final cause. Although systematic theology customarily spoke of the Word and Sacraments with terms like efficacious, now OJ proponents have applied these terms to the atonement.

⁵³ At other times the Lutheran Confessions use the term, "general." FC SD XI, 23, "And [indeed] in this His counsel, purpose, and ordination God has prepared salvation not only in general, but has in grace considered and chosen to salvation each and every person of the elect who are to be saved through Christ, also ordained that in the way just mentioned He will, by His grace, gifts, and efficacy, bring them thereto [make them participants of eternal salvation], aid, promote, strengthen, and preserve them." Triglotta, p.1069 (Tappert p. 619)

⁵⁴ FC SD XI, 28 Triglotta, p.1071 (Tappert p. 620)

In standard theological language, the atonement is the content of the Gospel. It cannot be effective. The preaching of the Gospel can be efficacious, but not the Gospel itself. For example, standing at the foot of the cross when Jesus died, would not have provided any benefits. However, the preaching of the death of Christ is efficacious for creating faith. By redefining the Gospel as a declaration, they condemn those who refute the existence of objective justification with denying the efficacy of atonement (by which they mean denying that the entire world of people are righteous). For an example of this see the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol 44-1, which includes a lecture by Rev. Rolf Preus. He describes his great-great-grandfather as “defending the inherent efficacy of the absolution” (p.20).

E. Christ as Representative

The first rationale for “The Justification of the World,” in H.A. Preus’ paper is the teaching that Jesus Christ is the representative of all humanity. He says,

“By this we understand that by raising Christ from the dead God declares him righteous and at the same time acknowledges and declares all people, the whole world, whose Representative and Substitute Jesus Christ was because he did not impute their trespass unto them (2 Cor 5:19). If Christ has borne sin of the world and atoned for it, then in the sight of him who gave the ransom for it, the world is loosed and free from sin and its punishment, although it remains in bondage and under the wrath of God if it remains in unbelief.... IF God is reconciled with the whole world since he does not impute transgressions to it but to Christ, then the world must be righteous and guiltless in his eyes” (p.3-4).

Even before the first criticism of thesis one, the ACLC cites 1 Timothy 3:16, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.” According to their explanation, this text says that Jesus was justified and thus “in Christ” all mankind was justified because Christ is the representative of all humanity. They say, “the justification of Christ in 1 Timothy 3:16 includes an absolution of the sins of the whole world.”

By these words the ACLC is attempting to show that Johann Gerhard taught that, “(Christ) was absolved of the sins of the whole world.” They conclude, “At this point it is already seen that the teaching of Objective Justification was the teaching of the Lutheran Fathers of the Age of Orthodoxy as defined in the ELDoNA’s theses, and the matter is in fact, resolved” (p.5-6). The appropriateness of attributing Gerhard with this new teaching has already been answered by “Theses on the Article of Justification: A Refutation of the ACLC’s Critique” and published at eldona.org.

The confusion of terms and shifting of meanings is clearly seen in this example. The teaching that **Christ is the representative of all humanity** is surely taught by the Scriptures as an explanation for Christ’s atonement. How did Christ die for the sins of the whole world? The Father placed them on His Son as the second Adam. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” However, this truth cannot be used to speak of the efficacious application of His benefit of

righteousness, by declaring that the world is in Christ. The world is not “in Christ.” There is no “in Christ” apart from faith.⁵⁵

Ap IV 83] *Thirdly*. Peter, in Acts 10, 43, says: *To Him give all the prophets witness that through His name, whosoever believeth on Him, shall receive remission of sins.* How could this be said more clearly? We receive remission of sins, he says, through His name, *i.e.*, for His sake; therefore, not for the sake of our merits, not for the sake of our contrition, attrition, love, worship, works. And he adds: *When we believe in Him.* Therefore he requires faith. For we cannot apprehend the name of Christ except by faith.⁵⁶

Having examined the writing of H.A. Preus and the recently written documents cited by the ACLC, and the ACLC Critique itself, I have come to understand that the creation of this fourth thing has caused a great confusion by shift and redefining of many terms and teachings.

F. Set Aside the Confusion

The first problem for objective justification proponents is that the term justification means righteousness. The definition of the term justified always includes the effect that the person justified is saved! If the term justified is used in a proper sense, the only logical conclusion of calling the world justified is universal salvation. Thus the first question to those professing Objective Justification is whether they are saying that everyone is saved. When you say, “the world is justified,” that means “The world is saved.” The response we have received from the ACLC is, “No, we don’t teach universal salvation.”

Nevertheless, the confusion remains. It is true, the ACLC does not teach universal salvation, so we ask about the conclusion of the Kokomo theses: So are unbelievers and the damned in hell to be called righteous and saints, even though they are not saved? The ACLC rejects the conclusion of those theses because they took things too far. So finally we assume that the ACLC declaration that “the world is justified” does not mean anything different from the universal atonement of the world. At this point we are told that objective salvation is more than atonement. And what is the more?

⁵⁵ Ap IV Concordia Triglotta p.149, (Tappert p. 121) **97]** Acts 13, 38. 39: *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses.* How could the office of Christ and justification be declared more clearly? The Law, he says, did not justify. Therefore Christ was given, that we may believe that for His sake we are justified. He plainly denies justification to the Law. Hence, for Christ’s sake we are accounted righteous when we believe that **God, for His sake, has been reconciled to us.** **98]** Acts 4, 11. 12: *This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. **But the name of Christ is apprehended only by faith. [I cannot believe in the name of Christ in any other way than when I hear His merit preached, and lay hold of that.]*** Therefore, by **confidence in the name of Christ**, and not by confidence in our works, we are saved. For “the name” here signifies the cause which is mentioned, because of which salvation is attained. And to call upon the name of Christ is to trust **in the name of Christ**, as the cause or price because of which we are saved. **99]** Acts 15, 9: *Purifying their hearts by faith.* Wherefore that faith of which the Apostles speak is not idle knowledge, but a reality, receiving the Holy Ghost and justifying us [not a mere knowledge of history, but a strong powerful work of the Holy Ghost, which changes hearts]

⁵⁶ Ap IV Concordia Triglotta p. 145 (Tappert p.118-119).

When we became aware that a Lutheran pastor was speaking up about the confusion caused by the term Objective Justification, and was abiding by the sound words of the Scriptures and our Lutheran Confessions, we thought it only right to come to the aid of the side of truth. Not expecting to find disagreement, we encouraged those who still used the term as a synonym for universal atonement to finally set it aside for the sake of clarity. Furthermore, we wanted to free those who held false doctrines based on this misunderstanding.

V. Application: There appears to be a Playbook

It is quite difficult to make any progress with those who hold to the teaching of objective justification. The proponents of it concede that the words are not found in the Book of Concord. They concede that the thrust of the Book of Concord is the presentation of subjective justification (as they call it). They admit that it wasn't until 1850s/1860s that the term was coined (though some may admit Samuel Huber's use much earlier). Nevertheless, they declare that "objective justification" is present in all of those places as an underlying principle which, they say, has always been believed by the church.

A. The General Repetition of Accusations

Having read many of the papers written by OJ proponents—in their attempt to respond to specific theological objections to Objective Justification—it becomes quite obvious that they are repeating the same accusations or arguments of H. A. Preus over and over again. The general order of accusations can be seen in H.A. Preus' progression of condemnation which results from Weenaas' rejection of Objective Justification.

1. First, there is the denial of Objective Justification, which is a denial of atonement.
"But now because of the fact that according to Professor Weenaas' view God is not perfectly reconciled through the death of Christ and has not let his wrath be appeased, and after having been obtained, yet the world has not been pardoned and justified, and therefore not completely re-deemed either, and 'access to salvation' is not 'opened for everyone,' ..."
2. H.A. Preus' conclusion is that there is no Gospel, good news, etc.
"...then the professor naturally cannot proclaim this glad tidings either so that the poor sinner could and should believe it to his comfort and salvation."
3. Faith, is not a hand which receives, but must be turned into a merit/work.
"On the other hand he must preach 'another gospel' in which the right faith, as a hand, does not merely grasp the righteousness already gained and bestowed, but obtains a deserving character as a work of a good nature."
4. Without Objective Justification, salvation is a conditional, potential salvation/
righteousness dependent on man's meritorious action
"According to his new gospel the professor must preach that through his suffering and death Christ has only accomplished so much that God has now become willing to let his wrath cease and to be reconciled and to loose, confer grace, forgive, justify and open access to salvation, but that in actuality he can only do and does all this if man on his part fulfills the condition placed on him by God, namely that he is supposed to believe. And the thing which is thus supposed to be believed does not

become this that God already has done this and is reconciled but that God will do it and will be reconciled when he sees the obedience and the good quality in man, that he believes.”⁵⁷

B. The Two Radical Faults

In another place, H. A. Preus declares that Professors August Weenaas and Sven Offerdahl suffer from two radical faults.

“The one is that it places *reason above the Word of God* and does not want to let it apply because it cannot be comprehended. The second consists in this that justifying *faith* is not considered as a plain and a simple *means [organon lepticon]*, a hand which accepts and is filled by the grace and the gifts which are already at hand, lie ready and are offered and given for nothing.”⁵⁸

1. Faith, more than a hand which accepts and is filled

Concerning the second radical fault, H. A. Preus goes on to explain how it is that Professor Weenaas considers faith to be more than “a hand which accepts and is filled.” Preus says, “He regards it as a quality, a new nature which a person obtains....” Thus Preus concludes, “To claim that faith as such a new nature in man is supposed to work a change in God’s disposition toward him and cause God to be gracious and to justify, is papistical.” If H.A. Preus is correctly presenting the position of Professor Weenaas concerning faith as justifying because of a change in man⁵⁹, then I agree that Professor Weenaas “subverts the basis of justification.” I also agree with H.A. Preus’ condemnation that this position is none other than a return to the papal teaching of justification by faith and works.

However, when I teach that “justifying faith receives the promise,” and “because justifying faith is a gift of God(Eph 2:8), justifying faith is (also) a certain trust, confidence and certainty,” they declare that I, like Professor Weenaas, am therefore guilty of teaching faith to be more than a hand which accepts and is filled. But to teach that “Faith is not only the reception of the promise; it is also a certainty and confidence

⁵⁷ H.A. Preus continues and repeats his playbook condemnations. (Numbers added) “But it must however be clear even for weak eyes that according to this teaching 1) Christ did not completely redeem the world and reconcile God with it, but only began the work of redemption which a person is supposed to complete by faith and make God willing to be reconciled, while a person’s faith is first supposed to bring it about that God really becomes reconciled, however, therefore, it is well to notice, only with the believer, not with the world. Thus 2) the Gospel no longer becomes the Good News which bestows the forgiveness of sins and justification and thereby works faith which appropriates this gift to itself, but it becomes a new law which demands faith from man for complete satisfaction. And 3) faith becomes not the poor sinner’s hand which merely grasps and makes one’s own what is already prepared and at hand, namely God’s love, conferring of grace, forgiveness of sins and justification, but it becomes a fulfilling of the new law, a work of man or a new quality in him who has such a power and merit in himself that it finishes the work of redemption begun by Christ and works a change in God’s heart so that now he lets his wrath cease, becomes reconciled with the believer, loves, confers grace and justifies him And finally 4) salvation no longer comes by grace alone for the sake of Christ, but by merit, namely by the merit of faith.”

⁵⁸ “Justification of the World” by H. A. Preus.

⁵⁹ This author was unable to gain access to the writings of Professors Weenaas and Offerdahl. According to Gregory Jackson, these writing are not available, much less in English. Thus it is impossible to verify the statements. We are left with determining the objections of these professors based on H.A. Preus’ response to them in “The Justification of the World.”

in that promise,” is not the same thing as teaching that faith justifies because it is a quality of a new nature in man. Neither I, nor the Lutheran Confessions have the same position as Professor Weenaas, nor do we fall under the same condemnation of synergism by trusting in the new man or the new man’s fruits of faith. Professors Weenaas trusted in his faith-as-a-change-in-man, and thus should be guilty of fideism. Nevertheless, even when that accusation of Weenaas is established, it doesn’t follow that everyone who denies Objective Justification” is guilty of fideism. As I have shown in pages 3-7, the Lutheran Confessions describe faith not only as a receiving means, but also as “a certainty or the certain trust in the heart.”

If H. A. Preus’ accusations were applicable, that would be fine. However, the difficult work of showing from our teaching and writing that by our rejection of Objective Justification we have committed a particular error, has not been done. We are labeled with an error, based on a pre-determined condemnation. There seems to be a kind of playbook so that if the Objective Justification refuter says one thing, then the Objective Justification proponent will declare that the accuser is obviously guilty of a predetermined error.⁶⁰ The label is not backed up with evidence and the rationale for the accusation based on what we have written is not provided. Repeatedly declaring something to be, does not make it such.

2. You Don’t Understand the Paradox, the divine Mystery of OJ?

Concerning the first radical fault, H.A. Preus says that Weenaas “places *reason above the Word of God* and does not want to let it apply because it cannot be comprehended.” H. A. Preus quotes Weenaas who says,

“What meaning, what content, what effect does justification then get when a poor sinner actually is justified and favored on the part of God and yet is lost— can he be loosed and yet remain bound?”

To which H.A. Preus says,

“Because these two divine truths appear a contradiction to him which he cannot ‘grasp,’ he rejects one.... If we come upon two truths in the Holy Scriptures which to our reason appear to contradict each other then we deny neither the one nor the other but believe and insist on both as divine truths.”

I would maintain that H.A. Preus is correct that we are not to place reason above the Scriptures or deny Scriptural truths because that truth is beyond our reason to grasp, as for example in the doctrine of the Trinity. Nevertheless, I disagree with his assumption that the Scriptures teach both the justification of the world apart from faith and also a justification by grace through faith. I disagree that the Scriptures teach both of these contradictory things: a faith-less justification and a justification by faith. The Scriptures only teach a justification by faith.

In defense of justification by faith alone, I have mentioned that God’s Word teaches that unbelievers still have God’s wrath upon them(John 3:36, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”), and that apart from faith no one is righteous(Psalm 143:2, “Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous.”). The response which I was given is that subjective justification and objective justification are a paradox. I was told that I must not

⁶⁰ See Appendix A.

understand Law and Gospel, because according to the Law, the whole world is under God's wrath, and according to the Gospel, the whole world is righteous.

C. Proving the Non-existence of Objective Justification

Once again there is a great difference between Professor Weenaas and myself. H. A. Preus says, "Professor Weenaas also actually does acknowledge this doctrine of ours concerning justification to be 'a logical, reasonable inference from the Christian teaching of the world's redemption in Christ.' But still rejects it and denies its truth."⁶¹ Unlike Weenaas, I refuse to acknowledge this teaching as ever being taught in the Scriptures or the Lutheran Confessions.

When we show passages which teach that the unbeliever is not justified/saved (The Pharisee in Luke 18:14), we are told that justification has two parts. They say that the passage in question must be speaking of subjective justification in which unbelievers are not justified.

When we produce passages in the Scriptures or Lutheran Confessions which say that justification is by faith alone (Romans 4:13-25), they say that those passages are not rejecting objective justification, but are rejecting a subjective justification which is not by faith.

When we deny that there is an objective justification of the world, we are told that we have denied the chief article (the Gospel) and thus don't have the true Gospel at all.

When we say that justify means "to be saved," and thus only faith justifies, they say that we, like Weenaas, have turned faith into work. "[H.A.] Preus argues that if objective justification is not true, faith cannot be the means by which the sinner merely receives God's forgiveness, but it must become meritorious."⁶²

When we say that the Gospel is a promise and a promise requires faith, they say that the Promise is not a possibility but the objective fact of Objective Justification (man is already justified/absolved). They say that we have a potential gospel. They forget that the atonement of Christ is an accomplished and real payment price.

When we say that the promise includes faith and requires faith, they say, that we teach a potential redemption which is conditioned on faith. Therefore they declare that we have obviously turned faith into a work of man. They say we have denied the universality of the Gospel. As you can see there is a great difficulty in trying to prove the non-existence of Objective Justification.

D. We Are Told, We Have Denied Justification

When Pr. Rydecki refused to use the term Objective Justification, but was willing to confess in many other way the three objects of justifying faith found in the Apology, he was told that His proclamation of the Gospel was inadequate. I watched three hours of video taken during a visit of a Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) ecclesiastical supervisor to Pr. Rydecki's congregation. This WELS leader refused to accept anything, except the words of "objective justification." Again, and again, he labeled the supposedly erring pastor with condemnations based on the "objective justification" playbook.

⁶¹ At least H.A. Preus says that Weenaas does. However, the quote sounds more like him denying Objective Justification as being only an inference—an illegitimate use of reason.

⁶² *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol 44-1, p. 25.

The ACLC agrees with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod that Pr. Rydecki “failed to confess the objective aspect of the justification” (p.2). Furthermore the ACLC writes, “We see the objective aspect of justification all over the Scriptures, the Book of Concord, Luther’s writings, etc., **even though the term is not used until relatively recently**. Indeed it is the objective aspect of justification that gives the Pastor something to hold forth to poor sinners in the means of grace, to be received by faith alone. **We do not see how the Gospel can truly be preached to faith without it.**”⁶³ (bold done by original author). The ACLC Critique says, “We admonish the ELDoNA to withdraw these theses and embrace the pure doctrine of Augustana IV. Their footnote “ee” says, “The Eldona has separated from the Lutheran faith in the Chief Article.”

E. Luther’s Response to the City Council of Nurnberg

If the teaching of Objective Justification actually did exist, Luther and Melancthon should have referenced it in their letter to the City Council of Nurnberg in 1533. They did not. A controversy had arisen in Nurnberg over the use of the general public confession and absolution pronounced over the entire congregation. Andrew Osiander was concerned that there might be people (unrepentant “thieves and crooks”) present in the pews who did not believe the absolution and thus would receive false comfort that their sins were forgiven, when they were not. Osiander advocated for the abolition of the general confession and the exclusive use of private confession.

What a wonderful opportunity was missed when Luther and Melancthon do not mention even a whiff of what H.A. Preus calls Objective Justification. They could have said that all of the world was already justified apart from faith at the resurrection, and thus the general absolution is valid, whether men believe it or not. They did not.

The Reformers’ point was simply that an absolution always requires faith. The absolution, whether from the pulpit, or privately, is the good news that through faith in God’s Son you will receive remission of sins, that is, justification. The forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all men in the world, not because they are already justified, but so that through the faith-creating-Word, they might be justified (or for those already justified (believers), they might receive this comfort.

When the letter speaks of the universal context of the absolution, it is not to assure of a previously declared righteousness for all men apart from faith. Instead the universal context is that the promise of justification through faith is for all men.

Therefore, each individual might know that God wants each person to believe and apprehend this righteousness through faith.

Luther says,

“The preaching of the holy gospel itself is principally and actually an absolution in which forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in general and in public to many persons, or publicly or privately to one person alone. Therefore absolution may be used in public and in general, and in special cases also in private, just as the sermon may take place publicly or privately, and as one might comfort many people in public or someone individually in private. Even if not all believe [the word of absolution], that is no reason to reject [public] absolution, for each absolution, whether administered publicly or privately, has to be understood as demanding faith and as being an aid to those who believe in it, just as the gospel itself also proclaims forgiveness to all men in the whole world and exempts no

⁶³ Letter from Supt. Rob Lawson to Bishop James Heiser on April 2, 2013.

one from this universal context. Nevertheless the gospel certainly demands our faith and does not aid those who do not believe it; and yet the universal context of the gospel has to remain [valid].⁶⁴

The entire letter is included in Appendix B.

Summary

Pr. Rolf Preus tells us the importance of Objective Justification for H.A. Preus, “What is the gospel? Is it information about what God has done for us in Christ to which must be added the correct response of faith? Is the gospel a promise of what God will do if we believe in Christ? Or is the gospel the actual imparting of the forgiveness of sins that Jesus has won for us all? For Preus, the vicarious satisfaction of Jesus Christ was meaningless unless God has, for Christ’s sake, forgiven the entire world of sinners. This is objective or universal justification” (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol 44-1, p.24). “In other words, if God has not forgiven all sins of sinners for Christ’s sake, it is not possible to preach the Gospel” (p.25) and “the denial of objective justification makes it impossible to preach the gospel” (p.27).

This novelty, which was not needed for proclaiming the gospel from the time of Adam and Eve until 1850, has now become the test of whether you believe and confess the chief article by which the church stands or falls. When those of us who formed the ELDoNA considered the past heroes of the 19th and 20th Centuries and the triumphal narratives which support the institutions and the peculiar American Lutheran teachings, we intentionally wanted to be judged by the Book of Concord and not by American Lutheran idiosyncrasies. Although we give thanks for the truths which our Lutheran fore-fathers upheld, we don’t want to perpetuate their faults and straw houses.

June 27, 2014

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--revised and expanded August 31, 2015

⁶⁴Luther, M. (1999, c1975). *Vol. 50: Luther's works, vol. 50 : Letters III* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (50:76). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Appendix A.

<p>If we say that the unbeliever is not justified/saved...</p>	<p>Then they say justification has two parts. Though the unbeliever is not justified by faith, he is justified.</p>
<p>If we produce passages which show that only believers are justified... Note: There is a great difficulty with proving non-existence.</p>	<p>They say that those passages are talking about subjective justification, which they do not deny.</p>
<p>If we say that the Lutheran Confessions do not mention Objective Justification...</p>	<p>They will agree. It is not mentioned. However, the teaching is implied and can be found everywhere in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions</p>
<p>When we say that justify means to be saved and thus only faith justifies...</p>	<p>They say that we have turned faith into a work. “[H.A.] Preus argues that if objective justification is not true, faith cannot be the means by which the sinner merely receives God’s forgiveness, but it must become meritorious. The denial of objective justification turns faith into a work” (<i>Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly</i>, vol 44-1, p. 25).</p>
<p>When we say that the Promise requires faith...</p>	<p>They say that the Promise is not a possibility but the objective fact of Objective Justification (man is already justified/absolved). They say that those who deny Objective Justification have a potential gospel.</p>
<p>When we deny that there is an Objective Justification...</p>	<p>We are told that we have denied the chief article(the Gospel) and thus don’t have the Gospel at all.</p>
<p>When we say that the promise includes faith and requires faith</p>	<p>They say that we teach a Potential redemption which is conditioned on faith(which we have obviously turned into a work of man) They say we have denied the universality of the Gospel.</p>
<p>When we say that unbelievers still have God’s wrath. Psalm 143:2 Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no one living is righteous.</p>	<p>They say that we don’t understand law and gospel. According to the Law the whole world is under God’s wrath. According to the Gospel the whole world is righteous. It is a paradox.</p>

To the Council of the City of Nürnberg Wittenberg, April 18, 1533

In addition to many other problems, the evangelical church had to come to terms with the question of ecclesiastical discipline. In this connection confession and absolution were of special importance. While in the papal church private confession and absolution administered in the confessional box were the universal and mandatory practice, there was also the custom of administering a general, public confession and absolution immediately aft the sermon. Luther had summarized his position on these matters in his Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520) and On Confession (1521). In the spring of 1533 he became involved in a controversy on confession and absolution which was boiling in Nürnberg. The issue was private confession and absolution (advocated and demanded by Osiander to the exclusion of general, public confession and absolution) versus general, public confession and absolution (advocated by the majority of the Nürnberg clergy, among them Link, though not to the exclusion of private confession and absolution). While the city council tried to do justice to both sides, it leaned definitely toward Link and his followers. On April 8, 1533, the city council asked Luther and Melanchthon for an opinion on this controversy. In their joint answer, letter No. 255, Luther and Melanchthon set forth what seems to be a compromise, but which nevertheless was based on solid theological considerations. Since the preaching of the gospel is identical with the proclamation that forgiveness of sin is at hand, Luther and Melanchthon say, and since this preaching can and ought to be done both in public and in private, both forms of confession and absolution ought to be retained. Both forms of absolution demand and aid faith. Private absolution, as the personal application of forgiveness, has a great advantage, however, because it speaks to the individual personally, and thus directly helps the faith of the individual and aids in the proper understanding of the public absolution. On the other hand, general public confession and absolution need not be rejected only because there might be people in the congregation who do not believe the word of forgiveness.

Text in German (with some words in Latin): WA Br 6, 454–455.

To the Honorable and Wise Mayors, and to the Council of the City of Nürnberg,
Our Dear Sirs

God's grace through our Lord Jesus Christ! Honorable, Wise, Dear Sirs! Regarding Your Honors' inquiry, we have discussed this matter among ourselves and do not see that public, general absolution is to be censured or rejected, for the [following] reason[s]:

The preaching of the holy gospel itself is principally and actually an absolution in which forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in general and in public to many persons, or publicly or privately to one person alone. Therefore absolution may be used in public and in general, and in special cases also in private, just as the sermon may take place publicly or privately, and as one might comfort many people in public or someone individually in private. Even if not all believe [the word of absolution], that is no reason to reject [public] absolution, for each absolution, whether administered publicly or privately, has to be understood as demanding faith and as being an aid to those who believe in it, just as the gospel itself also proclaims forgiveness to all men in the whole world and exempts no one from this universal context. Nevertheless the gospel

certainly demands our faith and does not aid those who do not believe it; and yet the universal context of the gospel has to remain [valid].

Regarding the idea that no one might desire private absolution if one has public absolution and keeps it in use, we say that this is definitely a weighty issue, [but] that consciences nevertheless are in need of this special comfort. For one has to instruct consciences that the comfort of the gospel is directed to each individual particularly; therefore, as you people who understand these matters know, the gospel has to be applied through Word and sacrament to each individual particularly, so that each individual in his conscience is tossed about by the question whether this great grace, which Christ offers to all men, belongs to him too. Under these circumstances it can easily be understood that one is not to abolish private absolution in favor of public absolution; also, this application makes more clear the meaning of the gospel and the power of the keys. For very few people know how to use public absolution or apply it to themselves, unless in addition this application reminds them that they also ought to apply the general absolution to themselves as if it belonged to each individually; for this is the true office and task of the gospel: definitely to forgive sins by grace.

For these reasons we do not consider that general absolution is either to be rejected or to be abolished, but that nevertheless the personal application and [private] absolution should be maintained.

May God always graciously protect Your Honors. We are always ready and willing to serve Your Honors.

Written at Wittenberg, April 18, 1533

DOCTOR MARTIN LUTHER

PHILIP MELANCTHON⁶⁵

⁶⁵Luther, M. (1999, c1975). *Vol. 50: Luther's works, vol. 50 : Letters III* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (50:75). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Appendix C:

Faith Justifies Scripture Passages

God's Word presents the Law, which commands good works of thought, word and deed, and thus condemns and punishes sin.

Isaiah 64:6, "But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away."

Romans 3:20, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

Romans 7:8, "But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead...."

God's Word presents the Gospel--the good news that by God's Grace, He sent His Son to save mankind from his sin.

John 20:31, "but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

God uses the Gospel to create/work faith.

Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

Romans 10:17, "So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Faith is the trust(reliance) of the heart on the promise of the forgiveness of sins set forth in the Gospel.

Acts 16:14b, "The Lord opened her (*Lydia's*) heart to heed the things spoken by Paul."

Romans 4:5, "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

Mark 16:16, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen...."

1. Faith Justifies (because it holds to Christ & the Promise of forgiveness as its object.)

Romans 10:10, "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Acts 16:31, "So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

2. Faith Produces Fruits/Sanctifies (The exercise of faith in God's promise of temporal blessings as the object.)

James 2:17-18, "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Note A: (Saving) Faith may vary in regard to knowledge, trust, desire, or good works.

Matthew 12:20, "A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench, Till He sends forth justice to victory;"

Romans 14:1, "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things."

1 Thessalonians 4:9-10, "But concerning brotherly love you... we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more...."

Philippians 3:12, "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me."

Note B: The justifying power of faith does not vary with the strength/weakness of (saving) faith. As long as faith clings to the true object, it justifies!

Matthew 14:31, "And immediately Jesus... said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'"
Romans 8:26, "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses."

Note C: The sanctifying power of faith (fruits of faith) varies according to the strength/weakness of (saving) faith.

Ephesians 3:16, "... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man..."

2 Thessalonians 1:3, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other...."

Note D: Spiritual struggles are not signs of unbelief, but true marks of a living & efficacious faith!

Mark 9:24, "...the father of the child cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!'"

2 Corinthians 12:9, "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Note E: Faith is a gift. Strength of faith is a gift, as well. Since God works through means (Word and sacraments), we ought to seek a strong faith there.

Romans 1:17, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"

Romans 10:17, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Philippians 1:9-11, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

Note F: Faith, itself, is the direct and internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. Believers are certain of their justification, because justification is received by faith, created by God through the Gospel. (Faith is the opposite of doubt.)

1 John 5:10, "He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son."

Romans 4:16, "Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith...."

Ephesians 1:19, "... toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power...."

Note G: The Holy Spirit also gives an indirect, external testimony, when He cause faith to produces good works & show forth the fruits of faith, which those without faith could not produce.

Jn 8:47, "He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death."

Note H: During times of affliction, believers may not perceive the external testimony, and thus should disregard their feelings and faulty sight, and cling in faith to the promises of the Gospel.

Romans 5:20-21, "Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Note I: But those who are clinging to carnal security and are neglecting the means of grace, need to be shown their sin by the Law.

2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified."

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An Evaluation of H.A. Preus' Doctrine of Objection Justification

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Summary