

And those whom he justified, he also glorified.

Romans 8:28-30

A sermon for the Season of Pentecost

In the middle of the Nineteenth Century, about 1850, when the British had control of most of India, there was a problem of something called Sati. It was customary that when a husband died, they cremated the body, and the widow was expected to jump into the funeral pyre. Sometimes they had to push her, but this was expected. This was against the law under British rule, but the leader of the Hindu community came to the Governor General of India and said: "This is our custom, and you have to allow us our custom." The Governor General replied: "Yes, I understand that this is your custom, but our custom is that when somebody does that, we hang him."

How do we understand the Hindu religion? It is older than Christianity by at least a thousand or many thousand years. Of the 1.3 billion people in India one billion are Hindu. Buddhism and Sikhism are really reform movements in Hinduism. Hinduism has the caste system. When India became independent in 1948, they put in their constitution that the caste system is absolutely forbidden. Yet it continues just as always. Why is that? Some of that is because some want to keep it. It continues also because it has a religious basis. It is based on karma, the cycle of life. Even though Hinduism has 330 billion gods, it is all basically the same religion. It is really the cycle of nature; things are born and they die, and that's the way life is. Some of their thinkers are so committed to this that they talk about everything repeating itself every four billion years or so. Everything is included in this repeating cycle.

The reason that this is important for us is really that Hinduism is the most reasonable religion in the world. Human reason says: Good is rewarded and evil is punished. You do good, you go up the ladder, you improve in this life and the next, and if you do not, you go down into a different kind of life in your next birth. This goes on until you hope you have reached enough goodness that you can escape into the oversoul, Brahman. Brahman is not a personal god; it is a power and a state of being. It makes sense, real sense. That is one reason why Hindus don't want to interfere with the caste system because that's your fate, your karma, you're born that way because of what you did in a previous life. This is also why it is so difficult to do things for social improvement, because if someone is ill or has an accident or trouble, it's because of what he did in a previous life, and he has to bear it, and you should not interfere.

Nevertheless, Hinduism is basic sense, which continues in its own way. Buddhism is basically atheistic, but there is virtue and goodness in giving alms. Even Islam, which is contradictory to Hinduism and says everything is Allah's will, is also similar in that good is rewarded and evil punished.

We talk about "the Law" in the Old Testament, in Judaism, but that's not really correct. "Law" in the Old Testament should be called "the Way." The first five books of the Torah describe "the Way." You do good, you do evil, you are rewarded, and you are punished.

The earliest materials we have about ancient civilizations have in their law codes the well-known phrase: "Do as you would have done unto you." Once again: Good is rewarded and evil is punished. Of course, there is the law of the jungle: Might is right, but when civilizations took hold, it became an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. That was an improvement over what was in the past. Now we have advanced to: What's fair, what's just.

It is curious that the word "fair" cannot be translated into German. They simply take the English word "fair." It is a very particular conceptuality. The cynics among us will say: "No good deed goes unpunished." Nevertheless, our basic understanding is: You do good and you will be rewarded. You do evil and you will be punished.

What about Christianity? What is it that God does? How does it work?

We'll pass over the New Testament for now and look at what happened in the history of the church. All the problems we have in the church today were already part of the first five centuries. Most important for us is Augustine, who lived in the last part of those first five centuries (354-430 A.D.). Among his major battles was with someone named Pelagius. Pelagius said: Of course you can do good. Of course you have free will. Of course God helps you. And Augustine said: "No, that's not the way it works."

That's where this text from Romans 8:28-30 is decisive:

"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified."

Lutherans in the Seventeenth Century asked: "What about all these other things that are mentioned elsewhere in Scripture? What about redemption? What about

believing and repenting? What about receiving the Holy Spirit and being regenerated and being adopted? The section we just read from Romans 8 does not mention sanctification. Lutheran Orthodoxy tried to put it all together into the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*). They said that for salvation this is what God does, and this is what we do.

Roman Catholic theology does not have this “order of salvation.” In looking at how salvation happens they make various distinctions. For example, they distinguish between prevenient grace, that is, the grace that comes before, and other graces. There’s uncreated grace and created grace. There’s condign grace, the grace you have through merit. And there’s congruent grace, that’s grace that is given to you.

What do we say to this Roman Catholic theology of grace? The answer has to be “No.” Let’s go back to this section in Romans 8:28-30. Many people have memorized Romans 8:28, which in some translations goes: “All things work together for good to those who love God.” But they omit: “Who are called according to his purpose.”

These two statements “those who love God” and “who are called according to his purpose” are in apposition. For example, Mr. Jones, the author, writes books. “Mr. Jones” and “author” are grammatically parallel and refer to the same thing. They are not a matter of cause and effect. Regarding the statements in Romans 8:28 we could just as well say: “All things work together for good to those who are called according to his purpose, to those who love him.” It means “are called” and “love him” are the same thing. What follows continues in the same vein: Whom he foreknew, he predestined, he called, justified, and glorified.

The second grammatical insight is that Romans 8:28-30 is all in the past tense (aorist): “He justified and also glorified.” It’s all done. It means a past and continuing state of being. We’re glorified now.

What happens when we look more widely at the New Testament? For example, when we go to 1 Corinthians 6:11, it says: “You have been sanctified; you have been justified.” Here sanctification comes before justification. Or if you go to the Book of Acts, which has all kinds of accounts of people who come to be Christian, we find it doesn’t follow a pattern. For example, in Acts 8:14-17 Samaritans are saved without having received the Holy Spirit. We can’t say: “‘This way’ or ‘that way’ is the way it was,” because there is no unity about what is said about an order of salvation.

We even see variations in what one author writes. For example, Paul in Romans 8:17 says: "You shall be glorified." And then in 2 Cor 3:18, Paul writes: "We are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another."

Luther said the Bible is not a wax nose. In his time when someone produced a play or drama, the actors used a wax mask. When you were playing comedy, you turned the nose up, and when you were playing tragedy, you turned the nose down. The wax nose is easily turned.

That's what we're tempted to do when we use the Scriptures. There are all these different things that are said. How do we keep from saying: "I have this passage; you have that passage."

How does it all work together? You can understand why we who are in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions center on the cross. The real question is: What diminishes the cross? When we then say: "Well, we're not entirely sinful," that raises the question as to whether such an enormous sacrifice had to be made.

When we say: "We can do some good to contribute to our salvation," then we diminish the cross. The issue is: The cross was needed to save us. It is both necessary and all-sufficient.

Nor are we caught by those who say: "There are degrees or levels of the Holy Spirit," and they ask us: "Do you have the fullness of the Holy Spirit?" They cite a Bible verse, Ephesians 5:18, about "being filled with the Spirit," but their use of that verse is based on a mistranslation. People who are caught in this kind of thinking imply that while you or I may have some of the Holy Spirit, they have more, or they have the fullness of the Spirit." But the Holy Spirit cannot be quantified or divided into degrees or levels. We receive the Holy Spirit in Baptism, and that is all of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit himself.

What about our salvation? We are **not going to be** saved; we **are saved**. We are totally made his own now. At the same time, we are still in this world. When we turn our eyes away from him, we fall into sin again. But the total and sure message of the Gospel is not to be taken away.

We have this decisive place in the Small Catechism in the Third Article of the Creed:

"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or understanding believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the

Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith.”

It is all made clear to us in infant Baptism. That little one is made God’s own, not because the infant knows or decides or understands, but because of what the Lord does, and that little one is given life everlasting.

We are glorified and in that we rest, in spite of ourselves, by looking at him. As Paul writes: “And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Romans 8:30).

Amen