

Martin Luther: Freedom Fighter

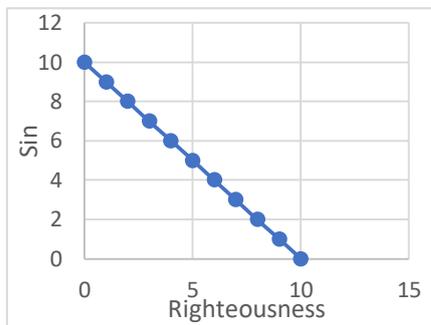
The Headline: Simul justus et peccator

Discussion:

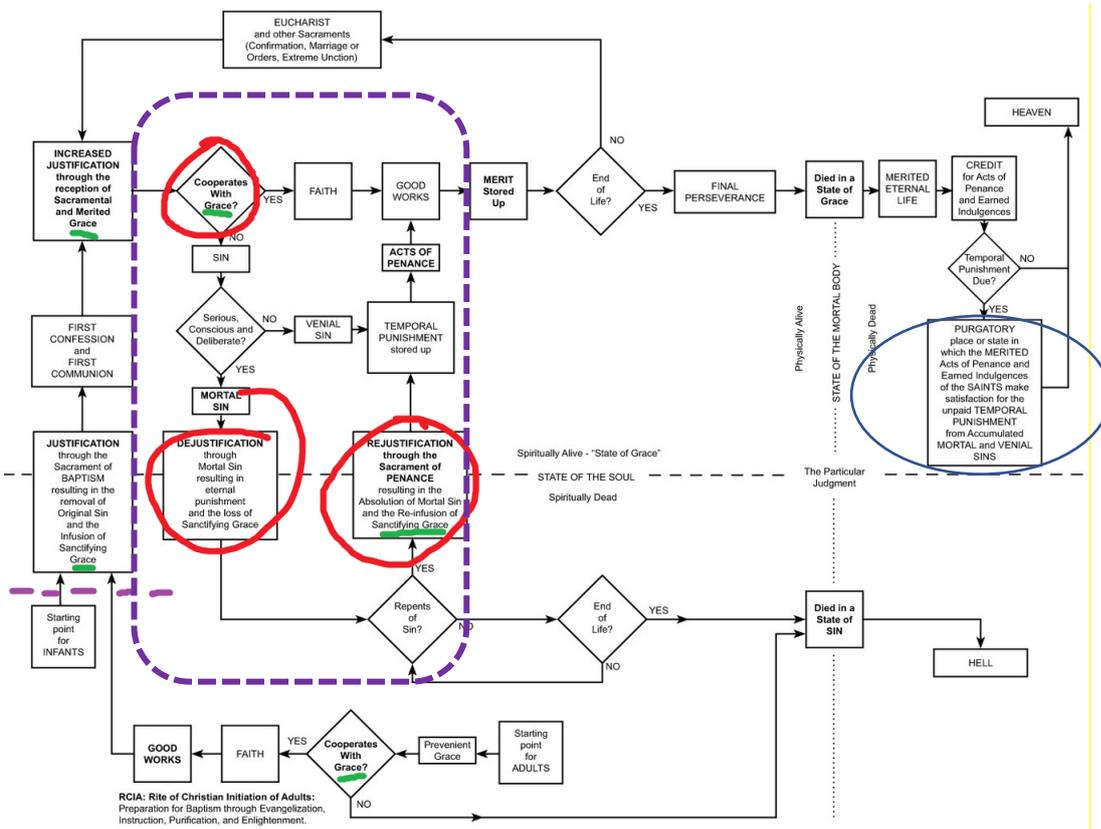
Take a minute to think about our society. What do you have to do to be a "saint"? What do you have to do to be a "sinner"? Could a "sinner" become a "saint"? Could a "saint" remain a "sinner"?

1. Saint or Sinner (1483-1516)

Luther's World Pictured Simply



Luther's World Pictured a bit more accurately



Gabriel Biel: "You do your best, God does the rest."

Martin Luther in Luther's World: A man who did his best?



1505

1507

1510

Gratuitous Martin Luther Portrait

Discussion:

Try to imagine that you were living in Martin Luther's world. How might this system affect your...

... assurance of salvation?

... attitude to God?

... service of your neighbour?

"He himself is in slavery to all things, and all things turn out for evil to him, because he uses all things in an impious way for his own advantage, and not for the glory of God." **Martin Luther**, *Concerning Christian Liberty*

2. Saint and Sinner at the very same time (1516-1519)

i. Joining the anti-corruption crusade

1510

1517 and all that

Leo, Albert and Tetzel

But what moved Luther from internal protest to Reformation?

ii. Theological Breakthrough

1512

1516

1518-19

Discussion:

Have a go at reading the following, and then read Romans 1:16-17 and 3:19-26:

Meanwhile, in that year I had once again turned to the task of interpreting the *Psalms*, relying on the fact that I was in better training for it since I had handled in the schools the epistles of St. Paul to the Romans and Galatians, and the epistle to the Hebrews. I had certainly been seized with a wondrous eagerness to understand Paul in the epistle to the Romans, but hitherto I had been held up—not by a ‘lack of heat in my heart’s blood,’ but by one word only, in chapter 1: ‘The righteousness of God is revealed.’ For I hated this word ‘righteousness of God’, which by the customary use of all the doctors I had been taught to understand philosophically as what they call the *formal* or *active righteousness* whereby God is just and punishes unjust sinners.

For my case was this: however irreproachable my life as a monk, I felt myself in the presence of God to be a sinner with a most unquiet conscience, nor could I believe him to be appeased by the satisfaction I could offer. I did not love—nay, I hated this just God who punishes sinners, and if not with silent blasphemy, at least with huge murmuring. I was indignant against God, as if it were really not enough that miserable sinners, eternally ruined by original sin, should be crushed with every kind of calamity through the law of the Ten Commandments, but that God through the Gospel must add sorrow to sorrow, and even through the Gospel bring his righteousness and wrath to bear on us. And so I raged with a savage and confounded conscience; yet I knocked importunately at Paul in this place, with a parched and burning desire to know what he could mean.

At last, as I meditated day and night, God showed mercy and I turned my attention to the connection of the words, namely—‘The righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written: the righteous shall live by faith’—and there I began to understand that the righteousness of God is the righteousness in which a just man lives by the gift of God, in other words by faith, and that what Paul means is this: the righteousness of God, revealed in the Gospel, is *passive*, in other words that by which the merciful God justifies us through faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ At this I felt myself straightway born afresh and to have entered through the open gates into paradise itself. There and then the whole face of scripture was changed; I ran through the scriptures as memory served, and collected the same analogy in other words, for example *opus Dei*, that which God works in us; *virtus Dei*, that by which God makes us strong; *sapientia Dei*, that by which He makes us wise; *fortitudo Dei*, *salus Dei*, *gloria Dei*.

And now, in the same degree as I had formerly hated the word ‘righteousness of God’, even so did I begin to love and extol it as the sweetest word of all. Thus was this place in St. Paul to me the very gate of paradise. Later I read Augustine on the *Spirit and the Letter*, where beyond all hope I found that he also interprets the righteousness of God in the same way, as that in which God clothes us when he justifies us. And although Augustine’s statement of this is still open to criticism, and he is neither clear nor comprehensive in the matter of imputation, yet he is satisfied that the righteousness of God should be taught to be that by which we are justified.

Luther’s Autobiographical Fragment

What did Martin Luther used to think Romans 1:16-17 was talking about? What does he now understand it to be talking about? Why is that good news? How does 3:19-26 fill that out?

Now read this little excerpt from “Concerning Christian Liberty.” On what grounds has God declared sinners to be saints (righteous)?

Who then can value highly enough these royal nuptials? Who can comprehend the riches of the glory of this grace? Christ, that rich and pious Husband, takes as a wife a needy and impious harlot, redeeming her from all her evils and supplying her with all His good things. It is impossible now that her sins should destroy her, since they have been laid upon Christ and swallowed up in Him, and since she has in her Husband Christ a righteousness which she may claim as her own, and which she can set up with confidence against all her sins, against death and hell, saying, “If I have sinned, my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned; all mine is His, and all His is mine,” as it is written, “My beloved is mine, and I am His” (Song of Songs 2:16)

Summary: “God justifies the *ungodly*” (Romans 4:5) – Sainted Sinners

3. The Sinner-Saint’s Stand (1517-1521)

1517

1519

1520

1521

“Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, not embellished: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or clear reason, for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradict themselves, I am bound to the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand. May God help me, Amen.”

1521 continued

Discussion:

“[Justification by faith] is the head and the cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour.”

What do you make of Luther’s radical commitment to justification by faith alone? Do you share his assessment of its importance? Why / why not?

4. Still sinner, still saint (1521-1546)

Should we leave Luther in 1522? Should we leave him as Saint Luther?

i. The Ongoing Accomplishments of “Saint” Luther

1525

1534

ii. The Persistent Frustrations of Martin Luther

1522

1525

1529

iii. The Undeniable Failures of Luther the “Sinner”

1543

Conclusion: Simul justus et peccator!

Discussion:

Imagine a church that really understood this doctrine. How would it shape...

... our honesty with each other, and with God?

... our joy?

... our assurance?

... our courage?

*What makes it hard to believe that God justifies the **ungodly**? How might you be tempted to deny it in your actions?*