

# The Smalcald Articles

## Lesson Nine

### *A False Hope*

#### *Part III, Article III, 24-43*

**24]** Here the Holy See at Rome came to the aid of the poor Church and invented indulgences. With them, it forgave and removed satisfaction, **[Q1]** first, for a single sin, then for seven years, then for a hundred years, and so on. It spread it out among the cardinals and bishops, so that one could grant indulgence **[Q2]** for a hundred years and another for a hundred days. But the Pope reserved to himself alone the power to remit the entire satisfaction.

**25]** Since this began to yield money, and the traffic in bulls became profitable, the Pope devised the golden jubilee year, and set it at Rome. He called this the remission of all punishment and guilt. Then the people came running, because every one wanted to be freed from this heavy, unbearable burden. That meant finding and raising the treasures of the earth. Immediately the Pope pressed still further, and multiplied the golden years one after another. But the more he devoured money, the wider his jaws grew.

Later he sent them out to the countries through legates, until all churches and houses were full of the Golden Year. **26]** Finally, he rambled around in purgatory among the dead, first, by founding masses and vigils, then, by indulgences and the Golden Year, and finally souls became so cheap that he released one for a penny. **[Q3]**

**27]** That wasn't the half of it. For although the Pope taught men to depend on, and trust in, these indulgences, he made the whole matter uncertain again. For in his bulls he declares: Whoever would share in the indulgences or a Golden Year must be contrite, and have confessed, and pay money. **[Q4]** Now, we have heard above that among them this contrition and confession are uncertain and hypocrisy. In the same way, no one knew which soul was in purgatory. If some were there, no one knew which had properly repented and confessed. So he took the precious money, and comforted them all the while with his power and indulgence, and still directed them to their uncertain work.

**28]** Now there were some who did not believe themselves guilty of such real sins in thoughts, words, and works—as I, and those like me, in monasteries and chapters, who wanted to be monks and priests. We fought against evil thoughts by fasts, vigils, prayers, masses, coarse garments, and hard beds, and so forth, and earnestly and intensely wanted to be holy. And still the hereditary, inborn evil sometimes did in sleep what it usually does (as also St. Augustine and Jerome among others confess). **[Q5]** Nevertheless each one believed of the others that some were so holy that we taught that they were without sin and full of good works. Indeed, because of this we shared and sold our good works to others, as more than what we needed for heaven. This is indeed true, and seals, letters, and instances are at hand. **[Q6]**

**29]** These people did not need repentance. For what would they repent of, since they had not indulged in wicked thoughts? What would they confess, since they had avoided words? For what should they render satisfaction, since they were so guiltless of any deed that they could even sell their overflowing righteousness to other poor sinners? Such saints were also the Pharisees and scribes in the time of Christ. **[Q7]**

**30]** Here comes the fiery angel, St. John, the true preacher of repentance, and with one bolt of lightning strikes both of them down and says: *Repent!* (Matthew 3:2). **31]** Now, the former imagine: Why, we have repented! The latter say: We need no repentance. **32]** John says: Repent, both of you,

for you are false penitents. That is what all false saints are. All of you need the forgiveness of sins, because you do not know what real sin is, to say nothing about your duty to repent of it and shun it. For not one of you is good. You are full of unbelief, stupidity, and ignorance of God and God's will. For here He is present: *of whose grace we have all received one blessing after another* (John 1:16), and without Him no man can be just before God. Therefore, if you wish to repent, repent correctly. Your penance does nothing. And you hypocrites, who do not need repentance, you serpents' brood, who has assured you that you will escape the wrath to come? (Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7). [Q8]

**33]** In the same way Paul also preaches in Romans 3:10-12: *There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.* **34]** And in Acts 17:30: *[God] now commands all people everywhere to repent.* "All people," he says. No one is excepted who is a human. **35]** This repentance teaches us to recognize sin. That is, that we are altogether lost, and that there is nothing good in us from head to foot, and that we must absolutely become new and different people.

**36]** This repentance is not piecemeal and beggarly, like that which does penance for actual sins. Nor is it uncertain like that. For it does not debate what is or is not sin. It throws everything out, and says: Everything in us is nothing but sin. What is the use of investigating, dividing, or distinguishing at length? For this reason, too, such contrition is certain. For there is nothing left to pay for sin. There is only despair over all that we are, think, speak, or do. [Q9]

**37]** In like manner confession, too, cannot be false, uncertain, or piecemeal. For he who confesses that everything in him is nothing but sin includes all sins, excludes none, forgets none. **38]** Neither can the satisfaction be uncertain, because it is not our uncertain, sinful work that does it. It is the suffering and blood of the innocent Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

**39]** Of this repentance John preaches, and later Christ in the Gospel, and we do too. By this repentance we dash the Pope and everything that is built on our good works to the ground. For everything that is called a good work or law is built upon a rotten and useless foundation. So there is no good work there, but only wicked works. No one keeps the Law (as Christ says in John 7:19), but all transgress it. Therefore the building is nothing but falsehood and hypocrisy, even where it seems most holy and beautiful.

**40]** And in Christians this repentance continues until death, because it contends lifelong with sin remaining in the flesh, as Paul testifies in Romans 7:14-25 that he *wars with the law in his members*, etc.; and that, not by his own powers, but by the gift of the Holy Spirit that follows the forgiveness of sins. This gift daily cleanses and sweeps out the remaining sins, and works to make man truly pure and holy. [Q10]

**41]** The Pope, the theologians, the jurists, and every other human being know nothing of this. It is a doctrine from heaven, revealed through the Gospel, and must be called heresy by godless saints.

**42]** On the other hand, certain contentious spirits have arisen, some of whom were perhaps already with us, and in the time of the [peasants'] insurrection came to my attention. They hold that all those who had once received the Spirit or the forgiveness of sins, or had become believers, even though they should sin afterwards, would still remain in the faith, and such sin would not harm them. Therefore, they cry: "Do whatever you please; if you believe, it all amounts to nothing; faith blots out all sins," etc.—they say, besides, that if any one sins after he has received faith and the Spirit, he never truly had the Spirit and faith: I have had before me many such insane men, and I fear that in some such a devil is still remaining. [Q11]

**43]** It is, accordingly, necessary to know and to teach that when holy men, still having and feeling original sin, also daily repenting of and striving with it, happen to fall into open sins, as David into adultery, murder, and blasphemy, that then faith and the Holy Spirit has departed from them. For the Holy Spirit does not permit sin to have dominion, to gain the upper hand, but represses and restrains it so that it must not do what it wishes. But if it does what it wishes, the Holy Spirit and faith are not present. For St. John says in 1 John 3:9: *No one who is born of God will continue to sin, . . . he cannot go on sinning.* And yet it is also true when the same St. John says in 1 John 1:8: *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* [Q12]

### ***Discuss***

1. Thinking back to the previous lesson, what are the three parts of penance in the Roman Catholic system? [Para 24]
2. What is an indulgence? [Para 24]
3. How did the indulgence traffic grow? [Para 26]
4. Why was selling indulgences a “catch-22”? [Para 27]
5. What did Luther and many of his contemporaries hope to gain by entering a monastery? Why didn't it work? [Para 28]
6. You make the call. [Para 28]

Cathy's neighbor is very involved in her church. She talks about it all the time. She spends hours there working on many different projects. She and Cathy often talk about it. One day after talking with her, Cathy remarked to her husband, “That woman makes me feel so guilty.” What misunderstanding did Cathy have about her neighbor's work at the church?
7. How do you understand Luther's words on the righteous saints? [Para 29]
8. Go to the source. [Para 32]

Read Matthew 3:4-10.

  - What was John's reaction when the Pharisees came to be baptized? Why?

- What did John accuse them of?

9. You make the call. [Para 36]

Tom and his brothers were all members of the church, but Tom's brothers didn't get as involved as he did. One day he was talking to them and trying to get them to be more involved. His brothers began to remind him of all the things he had done when he was young and told him not to act "holier than thou." In his frustration, he blurted out, "I'm a much better Christian than you are!" What dangerous idea was trying to settle in his heart?

10. Go to the source. [Para 40]

Read Romans 7:14-25.

- Who is speaking these words? Why is that important?
- What horrible problem did he face?
- What did he cry out? What does that show?
- What peace did Paul find?
- What final conclusion did Paul draw?

11. What twin errors did Luther warn about? [Para 42]

12. You make the call. [Para 43]

Mary's children were being difficult and fussing. After several hours of it, she lost her temper, screamed at them, and punished them. Afterward, she realized this wasn't loving, Christian discipline. It was indulging her own sinful nature. She began to feel guilty and wondered if she had fallen from the faith. Had she?

*During the week*

1. Reread Part III, Article III, paragraphs 24-43.
2. Read Part III, Articles IV-VII.
3. A young woman once asked her pastor: “Why do we start every service out the same way? I come to church to praise God, but we always begin by making ourselves feel so bad.” She was talking about the confession of sins at the beginning of the service. Why do you think that we always begin that way?