

The Augsburg Confession *Talking About Faith with Family and Friends*



Article XX: Of Good Works (Part 1 of 2)

Discussion: Is faith, which may be private and invisible, enough for salvation? Can a person believe in Jesus Christ without producing the evidence of good works? How important is regular worship, daily prayers, contributions, service, talking about Jesus Christ for one with faith in Christ?

"Our teachers are falsely accused of forbidding Good Works. For their published writings on the Ten Commandments, and others of like import, bear witness that they have taught to good purpose concerning all estates and duties of life, as to what estates of life and what works in every calling be pleasing to God.

Concerning these things preachers heretofore taught but little, and urged only childish and needless works, as particular holy-days, particular fasts, brotherhoods, pilgrimages, services in honor of saints, the use of rosaries, monasticism, and such like. Since our adversaries have been admonished of these things, they are now unlearning them, and do not preach these unprofitable works as heretofore. Besides, they begin to mention faith, of which there was heretofore marvelous silence. They teach that we are justified not by works only, but they conjoin faith and works, and say that we are justified by faith and works. This doctrine is more tolerable than the former one, and can afford more consolation than their old doctrine.

Forasmuch, therefore, as the doctrine concerning faith, which ought to be the chief one in the Church, has lain so long unknown, as all must needs grant that there was the deepest silence in their sermons concerning the righteousness of faith, while only the doctrine of works was treated in the churches, our teachers have instructed the churches concerning faith as follows:— (continued tomorrow)

Importance: The presentation by the Lutherans is conciliatory in the context that it recognizes a change by the Roman Catholic Church in accepting both faith and works as contributing to salvation. Martin Luther will be explicitly persistent in his emphasis that salvation is freely given to all by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and that man can not influence or earn salvation. We are called to faith by the Holy Spirit and not convinced to believe by our own intellect and thinking.

The Roman Catholic presentation will oppose and admonish Luther and his theological team for their strong position against good works, citing several passages from the Bible regarding the importance of good works. Luther will maintain that good works are necessary, proper and useful but they have no validity in earning salvation. Lutherans will not attend worship to make satisfaction for their sins or earn salvation; but they worship to honor God, hear His Word, and receive Holy Communion.

Article XX: Of Good Works (Part 1 of 2)

Discussion: How do you understand faith? How do you explain faith? Do you share your faith with others?

First, that our works cannot reconcile God or merit forgiveness of sins, grace, and justification, but that we obtain this only by faith when we believe that we are received into favor for Christ's sake, who alone has been set forth the Mediator and Propitiation, [1 Tim. 2:5,6](#), "*For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men...*" Whoever, therefore, trusts that by works he merits grace, despises the merit and grace of Christ, and seeks a way to God without Christ, by human strength, although Christ has said of Himself: "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*" [John 14:6](#).

This doctrine concerning faith is everywhere treated by Paul, [Eph. 2:8](#): "*By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works*", etc.

And lest anyone should craftily say that a new interpretation of Paul has been devised by us, this entire matter is supported by the testimonies of the Fathers. For Augustine, in many volumes, defends grace and the righteousness of faith, over against the merits of works. And Ambrose, in his *De Vocatione Gentium*, and elsewhere, teaches to like effect. For in his *De Vocatione Gentium* he says as follows: Redemption by the blood of Christ would become of little value, neither would the preeminence of man's works be superseded by the mercy of God, if justification, which is wrought through grace, were due to the merits going before, so as to be, not the free gift of a donor, but the reward due to the laborer.

As Paul teaches [Rom. 5:1](#): "*Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.*" This whole doctrine is to be referred to that conflict of the terrified conscience, neither can it be understood apart from that conflict. Therefore inexperienced and profane men judge ill concerning this matter, who dream that Christian righteousness is nothing but civil and philosophical righteousness.

Men are also admonished that here the term "faith" does not signify merely the knowledge of the history, such as is in the ungodly and in the devil, but signifies a faith which believes, not merely the history, but also the effect of the history—namely, this article: the forgiveness of sins, that we have grace, righteousness, and forgiveness of sins through Christ.

Importance: Although Luther's teaching on Good Works appears crystal clear with the evidence above from the Bible, Paul, St. Ambrose, and St. Augustine, it continues to be debated in our time among Christians and theologians. Luther taught that the war of guilt in a conscience that reminds us of past sins and mistakes is at peace for all who have faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior of all mankind! The Roman Catholic Church taught that faith required good works to show God the sincerity of our faith and to repay or make satisfaction for past sins. The battle of the guilty conscience is defeated as stated in Romans 5:1, "*Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.*" This is the enduring legacy of the Reformation!

God allows us as his children to fail, blunder, and make repeated mistakes. But He loves us just as He loved His disciples. This is a revolutionary discovery about love. Our love and memory of a loved one never dies, even when the relationship ends in death or separation. Love endures forever, which is how our love is with Jesus Christ. He loves us and will never forget or neglect. He loves us each and every day - forever and ever!!!!

It is important to note in the last paragraph of Luther's writings how he explains faith. Faith is active, it is an action verb, faith turns the page, faith creates life, faith worships, faith loves, faith endures! Faith is the spiritual "hormone" of love!