

Faith Working Through Love

Ap IV 111-116, p.123

¹¹¹ We say, too, that love should follow faith, as Paul also says, **“In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6).**

¹¹² We are not to think from this that we receive the forgiveness of sins by trust in this love or on account of this love, just as little as we receive the forgiveness of sins on account of the other works that follow it. For the forgiveness of sins is received by faith alone — and we mean faith in the true sense of the word — since the promise can be received only by faith. ¹¹³ **But faith in the true sense, as the Scriptures use the word, is that which accepts the promise.** ¹¹⁴ And because it receives the forgiveness of sins and reconciles us to God, we must be accounted righteous by this faith for Christ’s sake before we love and keep the law, although love must necessarily follow. ¹¹⁵ **This faith is no idle knowledge, nor can it exist with mortal sin; but it is a work of the Holy Spirit that frees us from death, comforting and quickening terrified minds.** ¹¹⁶ And since this faith alone receives the forgiveness of sins, renders us acceptable to God, and brings the Holy Spirit, it should be called “grace that makes us acceptable to God” rather than love, which is the effect resulting from it.

Ap IV 147-151

¹⁴⁷ But someone may ask: Since we also grant that love is the work of the Holy Spirit and since it is righteousness because it is the keeping of the law, **why do we deny that it justifies?** To this we must answer, first of all, that we do not receive the forgiveness of sins **through love or on account of love**, but on account of Christ by faith alone. ¹⁴⁸ Faith alone, looking to the promise and believing with full assurance that God forgives because Christ did not die in vain, conquers the terrors of sin and death. ¹⁴⁹ If somebody doubts that his sins are forgiven, **he insults Christ** because he thinks that his sin is greater and stronger than the death and promise of Christ, though Paul says that grace abounded more than sin (Rom. 5:20), that mercy is more powerful than sin. ¹⁵⁰ If somebody believes that he obtains the forgiveness of sins because he loves, he insults Christ and in God’s judgment he will discover that this trust in his own righteousness was wicked and empty. Therefore it must be faith that reconciles and justifies. ¹⁵¹ We do not receive the forgiveness of sins by other virtues of the law or on account of them (whether patience, chastity, or obedience to the government, etc.), even though these virtues must follow. Just as little do we receive the forgiveness of sins on account of love, though it, too, must follow.

FC Ep III, 11, p.474

¹¹ **8.** We believe, teach, and confess that the contrition that precedes justification and the good works that follow it do not belong in the article of justification before God. Nevertheless, we should not imagine a kind of faith in this connection that could coexist and co-persist with a wicked intention to sin and to act contrary to one’s conscience. On the contrary, after a person has been justified by faith, **a true living faith becomes “active through love” (Gal. 5:6).** Thus good works always follow justifying faith and are certainly to be found with it, since such faith is never alone but is always accompanied by love and hope.

FC SD III. 27-29 , p.543

²⁷ **Love is a fruit which certainly and necessarily follows true faith.** For if a person does not love, this indicates certainly that he is not justified but is still in death, or that he has again lost the righteousness of faith, as St. John says (1 John 3:14). But when St. Paul says, “We are justified by faith apart from works (Rom. 3:28), he indicates thereby that neither the preceding contrition nor the subsequent works belong in the article or matter of justification by faith. For good works do not precede justification; rather they follow it, since a person must first be righteous before he can do good works. ²⁸ Similarly, although renewal and sanctification are a blessing of Christ, the mediator, and a work of the Holy Spirit, it does not belong to the article or matter of justification before God; it rather follows justification, because in this life sanctification is never wholly pure and perfect on account of our corrupted flesh. In his beautiful and exhaustive exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians Dr. Luther well states: ²⁹ **“We certainly grant**

that we must teach about love and good works too. But it must be done at the time and place where it is necessary, namely, when we deal with good works apart from this matter of justification. At this point the main question with which we have to do is not whether a person should also do good works and love, but how a person may be justified before God and be saved. And then we answer with St. Paul that we are justified alone through faith in Christ, and not through the works of the law or through love — not in such a way as if we thereby utterly rejected works and love (as the adversaries falsely slander and accuse us) but so that we may not be diverted (as Satan would very much like) from the main issue with which we here have to do into another extraneous matter which does not belong in this article at all. Therefore, while and as long as we have to do with this article of justification, we reject and condemn works, since the very nature of this article cannot admit any treatment or discussion of works. For this reason we summarily cut off every reference to the law and the works of the law in this conjunction.” So far Luther.

Ap IV 218-221, p.137

²¹⁸ Now we shall answer the texts that our opponents quote to prove that we are justified by love and works. From 1 Cor. 13:2 they quote, “If I have all faith, etc., but have not love, I am nothing.” Here they celebrate a great victory. Before the whole church, they say, Paul asserts that faith alone does not justify. ²¹⁹ Now that we have shown what we believe about love and works, it will be easy to answer this. In this text Paul requires love. We require it, too. We have said above that we should be renewed and begin to keep the law, according to the statement (Jer. 31:33), “I will put my law within their hearts.” Whoever casts away love will not keep his faith, be it ever so great, because he will not keep the Holy Spirit. ²²⁰ **But in this text Paul is not discussing the mode of justification. He is writing to people who, upon being justified, needed urging to bear good fruits lest they lose the Holy Spirit.** ²²¹ Our opponents proceed in reverse order. They quote this one text in which Paul teaches about the fruits, and they omit the many other texts in which he systematically discusses the mode of justification. Besides, to other texts that speak of faith they always add the correction that they should be understood in reference to **“faith formed by love.”**⁹ Here they do not add the correction: We need the faith that we are accounted righteous because of Christ, the propitiator. Thus our opponents exclude Christ from justification and teach only the righteousness of the law. But let us return to Paul.

AC XX Faith and Good Works

⁴ Our opponents no longer praise these useless works so highly as they once did, ⁵ and they have also learned to speak now of faith, about which they did not preach at all in former times. ⁶ They do not teach now that we become righteous before God by our works alone, but they add faith in Christ and say that faith and works make us righteous before God. ⁷ This teaching may offer a little more comfort than the teaching that we are to rely solely on our works....

²³ Instruction is also given among us to show that the faith here spoken of is not that possessed by the devil and the **ungodly, who also believe** the history of Christ’s suffering and his resurrection from the dead, but we mean such **true faith** as believes **that we receive grace and forgiveness of sin through Christ.**

²⁴ **Whoever knows that in Christ he has a gracious God, truly knows God, calls upon him,** and is not, like the heathen, without God. ²⁵ For the devil and the ungodly do not believe this article concerning the

James 2:19, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!”
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⁹ Roman Confutation: “Their [the Lutheran princes’] reference here to faith is approved in so far as not faith alone (as some incorrectly teach) but faith which works by love is understood ... ” (Pt. I, Art. V).

forgiveness of sin, and so they are at enmity with God, cannot call upon him, and have no hope of receiving good from him. Therefore, as has just been indicated, the Scriptures speak of **faith but do not mean by it such knowledge as the devil and ungodly men possess.** Heb.

11:1 teaches about faith in such a way as to make it clear that faith is **not merely a knowledge of historical events but is a confidence in God and in the fulfillment of his promises.** ²⁶

Augustine also reminds us that we would understand the word “faith” in the Scriptures to mean confidence in God, assurance that God is gracious to us, and not merely such a knowledge of historical events as the devil also possesses.

²⁷ It is also taught among us that **good works should and must be done**, not that we are to rely on them to earn grace but that we may do God’s will and glorify him. ²⁸ It is always faith alone that apprehends grace and forgiveness of sin. ²⁹ **When through faith the Holy Spirit is given, the heart is moved to do good works.** ³¹ Before that, when it is without the Holy Spirit, the heart is too weak. ³² Moreover, it is in the power of the devil, who drives poor human beings into many sins. ³³ We see this in the philosophers who undertook to lead honorable and blameless lives; they failed to accomplish this, and instead fell into many great and open sins. ³⁴ This is what happens when a man is without true faith and the Holy Spirit and governs himself by his own human strength alone.

³⁵ Consequently this teaching concerning faith is not to be accused of forbidding good works but is rather to be praised for teaching that good works are to be done and for offering help as to how they may be done. ³⁶ **For without faith and without Christ human nature and human strength are much too weak to do good works, ³⁷ call upon God, have patience in suffering, love one’s neighbor, diligently engage in callings which are commanded, render obedience, avoid evil lusts, etc.** ³⁸ Such great and genuine works cannot be done without the help of Christ, ³⁹ as he himself says in John 15:5, “Apart from me you can do nothing.”

FC SD II 65-69 p.533

⁶⁵ **From this it follows that as soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit, even though we still do so in great weakness.** Such cooperation does not proceed from our carnal and natural powers, but from the new powers and gifts which the Holy Spirit has begun in us in conversion, ⁶⁶ as St. Paul expressly and earnestly reminds us, “Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain.” This is to be understood in no other way than that the converted man does good, as much and as long as God rules in him through his Holy Spirit, guides and leads him, but if God should withdraw his gracious hand man could not remain in obedience to God for one moment. But if this were to be understood as though the converted man cooperates alongside the Holy Spirit, the way two horses draw a wagon together, such a view could by no means be conceded without detriment to the divine truth.

⁶⁷ There is therefore **a great difference** between baptized people and unbaptized people because, according to the teaching of St. Paul, “all who have been baptized have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27), are thus truly born again, and now have a liberated will — that is, as Christ says, they have again been made free. **As a result, they not only hear the Word of God but also are able to assent to it and accept it, even though it be in great weakness.** ⁶⁸ But since in this life we have received only the first fruits of the Spirit, and regeneration is not as yet perfect but has only been begun in us, the conflict and warfare of the flesh against the Spirit continues also in the elect and truly reborn. Again, there is not only a great difference between Christians, one

being weak and the other strong in the Spirit, but even the individual Christian in his own life discovers that at one moment he is joyful in the Spirit and at another moment fearful and terrified, at one time ardent in love, strong in faith and in hope, and at another time cold and weak.

⁶⁹ But if those who have been baptized act contrary to their conscience and permit sin to rule in themselves and thus grieve the Holy Spirit within them and lose him, they dare not be baptized again, though they must certainly be converted again, as we have sufficiently reported above on this matter.

FC SD II 12-14 p.522

¹² **Thus Scripture denies to the intellect, heart, and will of the natural man every capacity, aptitude, skill, and ability to think anything good or right in spiritual matters, to understand them, to begin them, to will them, to undertake them, to do them, to accomplish or to cooperate in them as of himself.** “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God” (2 Cor. 3:5). “They are all incompetent” (Rom. 3:12). “My Word finds no place in you” (John 8:37). “The darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5). “The unspiritual man does not receive (or, as the Greek word actually has it, does not grasp, take hold of, or apprehend) the gifts of the Spirit of God (that is, he has no capacity for spiritual things) for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them” (1 Cor. 2:14). ¹³ **Much less will he be able truly to believe the Gospel, give his assent to it, and accept it as truth.** For the mind that is set on the flesh (the natural man’s understanding) “is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, indeed it cannot” (Rom. 8:7). ¹⁴ Summing up everything, what the Son of God says remains eternally true, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5), and what St. Paul says is also true, “For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). **This appealing passage is of very great comfort to all devout Christians who perceive and discover a little spark and a longing for the grace of God and eternal salvation in their hearts.** They know that God, who has kindled this beginning of true godliness in their heart, wills to continue to support them in their great weakness and to help them to remain in true faith until their end.

⁵⁵ On the one hand, it is true that both the preacher’s planting and watering and the hearer’s running and willing would be in vain, and no conversion would follow, if there were not added the power and operation of the Holy Spirit, who through the Word preached and heard illuminates and converts hearts so that men believe this Word and give their assent to it. On the other hand, neither the preacher nor the hearer should question this grace and operation of the Holy Spirit, but should be certain that, when the Word of God is preached, pure and unalloyed according to God’s command and will, and when the people diligently and earnestly listen to and meditate on it, God is certainly present with his grace and gives what man is unable by his own powers to take or to give. ⁵⁶ **We should not and cannot pass judgment on the Holy Spirit’s presence, operations, and gifts merely on the basis of our feeling, how and when we perceive it in our hearts. On the contrary, because the Holy Spirit’s activity often is hidden, and happens under cover of great weakness, we should be certain, because of and on the basis of his promise, that the Word which is heard and preached is an office and work of the Holy Spirit, whereby he assuredly is potent and active in our hearts (2 Cor. 2:14ff.).**