

Apology IV, 22

²² We for our part maintain that God requires the righteousness of reason. Because of God's command, honorable works commanded in the Decalogue should be performed, according to Gal. 3:24, "**The law is a custodian,**" and 1 Tim. 1:9, "The law is laid down for the lawless." For God wants this civil discipline to restrain the unspiritual, and to preserve it he has given laws, learning, teaching, governments, and penalties. ²³ To some extent, reason can produce this righteousness by its own strength, though it is often overwhelmed by its natural weakness and by the devil, who drives it to open crimes. ²⁴ We freely give this righteousness of reason its due credit; for our corrupt nature has no greater good than this, as Aristotle correctly says, "Neither the evening star nor the morning star is more beautiful than righteousness." God even honors it with material rewards. Nevertheless, it ought not be praised at the expense of Christ.

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⁸⁴ Fourth, the forgiveness of sins is a thing promised for Christ's sake. Therefore it can be accepted only by faith, since a promise can be accepted only on faith. In Rom. 4:16 Paul says, "That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed," as though he were to say, "If it depended on our merits, the promise would be uncertain and useless inasmuch as we could never determine whether we had merited enough." Experienced consciences can readily understand this. Therefore Paul says (Gal. 3:22), "**God consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.**" Here he denies us any merit, for he says that all are guilty and consigned to sin. Then he adds that the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification is a gift, and further that the promise can be accepted by faith. Based upon the nature of a promise, this is Paul's chief argument, which he often repeats (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:18). Nothing one can devise or imagine will refute Paul's argument. ⁸⁵ So pious men should not let themselves be diverted from this declaration, that we receive the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake only by faith; here they have a certain and firm consolation against the terrors of sin, against eternal death, and against all the gates of hell (Matt. 16:18).

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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.² 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.