

The Apology to the Augsburg Confession: Article IV: Of Justification.

1] In the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and, below, in the Twentieth Article, **they condemn us, for teaching**

A. that men obtain remission of sins not because of their own merits,

B. but freely for Christ's sake, through faith in Christ.

[They reject quite stubbornly both these statements.]

For they condemn us both

A. for denying that men obtain remission of sins because of their own merits, and

B. for affirming that, through faith, men obtain remission of sins, and through faith in Christ 2] are justified.

But since in this controversy **the chief topic of Christian doctrine is treated**, which, **understood aright,**

1. illumines and amplifies the honor of Christ [which is of especial service for the clear, correct understanding of the entire Holy Scriptures, and

2. alone shows the way to the unspeakable treasure and right knowledge of Christ, and

3. alone opens the door to the entire Bible], and

4. brings necessary and most abundant consolation to devout consciences,

we ask His Imperial Majesty to hear us with forbearance in regard to matters of such importance.

3] For since the adversaries understand

1. neither what the remission of sins,

2. nor what faith,

3. nor what grace,

4. nor what righteousness is, they sadly corrupt this topic, and obscure the glory and benefits of Christ, and rob devout consciences of the consolations offered in Christ.

4] But that we may strengthen the position of our Confession, and also remove the charges which the adversaries advance against us, certain things are to be premised in the beginning, in order that **the sources of both kinds of doctrine, i.e., both that of our adversaries and our own, may be known.**

5] **All Scripture ought to be distributed into these two principal topics, the Law and the promises.**

For in some places it presents **the Law**, and in others

the promise concerning Christ, namely,

1. either when [in the Old Testament] it promises that Christ will come, and offers, for His sake, the remission of sins justification, and life eternal,

2. or when, in the Gospel [in the New Testament], Christ Himself, since He has appeared, promises the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal.

6] Moreover, in this discussion, **by Law** we designate **the Ten Commandments**, wherever they are read in the Scriptures. Of the ceremonies and judicial laws of Moses we say nothing at present.

7] Of these two parts **the adversaries select the Law**, because human reason naturally understands, in some way, the Law (for it has the same judgment divinely written in the mind); [the natural law agrees with the law of Moses, or the Ten Commandments] and **by the Law they seek the remission of sins and justification.**

8] Now, the Decalog requires

not only outward civil works, which reason can in some way produce, but it also requires other things placed far above reason, namely,

A. truly to fear God,

B. truly to love God,

C. truly to call upon God,

D. truly to be convinced that God hears us, and

E. to expect the aid of God in death and in all afflictions;

F. finally, it requires obedience to God, in death and all afflictions, so that we may not flee from these or refuse them when God imposes them.

9] Here the scholastics, having followed the philosophers, teach only a righteousness of reason, namely, civil works, and fabricate besides that without the Holy Ghost reason can love God above all things....

17] Although the adversaries, not to pass by Christ altogether, require a knowledge of the history concerning Christ, and ascribe to Him that it is His merit that a habit is given us or, as they say, *prima gratia*, “first grace,” which they understand as a habit, inclining us the more readily to love God; yet, what they ascribe to this habit is of little importance [is a feeble, paltry, small, poor operation, that would be ascribed to Christ], because they imagine that the acts of the will are of the same kind before and after this habit. They imagine that the will can love God; but nevertheless this habit stimulates it to do the same the more cheerfully. And they bid us first merit this habit by preceding merits; then they bid us merit by the works of the Law an increase of this habit and 18] life eternal. Thus they bury Christ, so that men may not avail themselves of Him as a Mediator, and believe that for His sake they freely receive remission of sins and reconciliation, but may dream that by their own fulfilment of the Law they merit the remission of sins, and that by their own fulfilment of the Law they are accounted righteous before God; while, nevertheless, the Law is never satisfied, since reason does nothing except certain civil works, and, in the mean time, neither [in the heart] fears God, nor truly believes that God cares for it. And although they speak of this habit, yet, without the righteousness of faith, neither the love of God can exist in man, nor can it be understood what the love of God is.

Christ merits for us First Grace , a habit given to us

19] Their feigning a distinction between *meritum congrui* and *meritum condigni* [due merit and true, complete merit] is only an artifice in order not to appear openly to Pelagianize. For, if God necessarily gives grace for the *meritum congrui* [due merit], it is no longer *meritum congrui*, but *meritum condigni* [a true duty and complete merit]. But they do not know what they are saying. After this habit of love [is there], they imagine that man can acquire merit *de condigno*. And yet they bid us doubt whether there be a habit present. How, therefore, do they know whether they acquire merit *de congruo* or 20] *de condigno* [in full, or half]? But this whole matter was fabricated by idle men [But, good God! these are mere inane ideas and dreams of idle, wretched, inexperienced men, who do not much reduce the Bible to practice], who did not know how the remission of sins occurs, and how, in the judgment of God and terrors of conscience, trust in works is driven out of us. Secure hypocrites always judge that they acquire merit *de condigno*, whether the habit be present or be not present, because men naturally trust in their own righteousness; but terrified consciences waver and hesitate, and then seek and accumulate other works in order to find rest. Such

Two kinds of Merit

consciences never think that they acquire merit *de condigno*, and they rush into despair unless they hear, in addition to the doctrine of the Law, the Gospel concerning the gratuitous remission of sins and the righteousness of faith. [Thus some stories are told that when the Barefooted monks had in vain praised their order and good works to some good consciences in the hour of death, they at last had to be silent concerning their order and St. Franciscus, and to say: “Dear man, Christ has died for you.” This revived and refreshed in trouble, and alone gave peace and comfort.]

21] Thus the adversaries teach nothing but **the righteousness of reason**, or certainly **of the Law**, upon which they look just as the Jews upon the veiled face of Moses; and, **in secure hypocrites who think that they satisfy the Law, they excite presumption and empty confidence in works** [they place men on a sand foundation, their own works] and contempt of the grace of Christ. On the contrary, **they drive timid consciences to despair**, which laboring with doubt, never can experience what faith is, and how efficacious it is; thus, at last they utterly despair.

22] Now, we think concerning **the righteousness of reason** thus, namely, that God requires it, and that, because of God’s commandment, the honorable works which the Decalog commands must necessarily be performed, according to the passage Gal. 3, 24: *The Law was our schoolmaster*; likewise 1 Tim. 1, 9: *The Law is made for the ungodly*. For God wishes those who are **carnal [gross sinners] to be restrained by civil discipline**, and to maintain this, He has given laws, letters, doctrine, magistrates, penalties. **23]** And **this righteousness reason**, by its own strength, can, to a certain extent, work, although it is often overcome by natural weakness, and by the devil impelling it to **24]** manifest crimes. Now, although we cheerfully assign this righteousness of reason the praises that are due it (for this corrupt nature has no greater good [in this life and in a worldly nature, nothing is ever better than uprightness and virtue], and Aristotle says aright: *Neither the evening star nor the morning star is more beautiful than righteousness*, and God also honors it with bodily rewards), **yet it ought not to be praised with reproach to Christ**.

A. 25] For it is false [I thus conclude, and am certain that it is a fiction, and not true] that we merit the remission of sins by our works.

B. 26] False also is this, that men are accounted righteous before God because of the righteousness of reason [works and external piety].

C. 27] False also is this that reason, by its own strength, is able to love God above all things, and to fulfil God’s Law, namely, truly to fear God, to be truly confident that God hears prayer, to be willing to obey God in death and other dispensations of God, not to covet what belongs to others, etc.; although reason can work civil works.

D. 28] False also and dishonoring Christ is this, that men do not sin who, without grace, do the commandments of God [who keep the commandments of God merely in an external manner, without the Spirit and grace in their hearts].

29] We have testimonies for this our belief, not only from the Scriptures, but also from the Fathers. For in opposition to the Pelagians, Augustine contends at great length that **grace is not given because of our merits**. And in *De Natura et Gratia* he says: *If natural ability, through the free will, suffice both for learning to know how one ought to live and for living aright, then Christ has died in vain, then the offense of the Cross is made void.* 30] *Why may I not also here cry out? Yea, I will cry out, and, with Christian grief, will chide them: Christ has become of no effect unto you whosoever of you are justified by the Law; ye are fallen from grace.* Gal. 5, 4; cf. 2, 21. *For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth.* Rom. 10, 3. 4.

Grace is not given because of our merits

31] And John 8, 36: *If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.* Therefore by reason we cannot be freed from sins and merit the remission of sins. And in John 3, 5 it is written: *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* But if it is necessary to be born again of the Holy Ghost, **the righteousness of reason does not justify us before God, and does not** 32] **fulfil the Law**, Rom. 3, 23: *All have come short of the glory of God, i.e., are destitute of the wisdom and righteousness of God, which acknowledges and glorifies God. Likewise Rom. 8, 7. 8: The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.*

Reason cannot free us

33] These testimonies are so manifest that, to use the words of Augustine which he employed in this case, they do not need an acute understanding, but only an attentive hearer.

A. If the carnal mind is enmity against God, the flesh certainly does not love God;

B. if it cannot be subject to the Law of God, it cannot love God.

C. If the carnal mind is enmity against God, the flesh sins, even when we do external civil works.

D. If it cannot be subject to the Law of God, it certainly sins even when, 34] according to human judgment, it possesses deeds that are excellent and worthy of praise.

The adversaries consider only the precepts of the Second Table which contain civil righteousness that reason understands. Content with this, they think that they satisfy the Law of God. In the mean time they do not see the First Table which commands that we love

Contempt of God and doubt

God, that we declare as certain that God is angry with sin, that we truly fear God, that we declare as certain that God hears prayer. But the human heart without the Holy Ghost either in security despises God's judgment, or in punishment flees from, and 35] hates, God when He judges. Therefore it does not obey the First Table. Since, therefore, **contempt of God, and doubt concerning the Word of God, and concerning the threats and promises, inhere in human nature, men truly sin, even when, without the Holy Ghost, they do virtuous works, because they do them with a wicked heart**, according to Rom. 14, 23: *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.* For such persons perform their works with contempt of God, just as Epicurus does not believe that God cares for him, or that he is regarded or heard by God. This contempt vitiates works seemingly virtuous, because God judges the heart.

36] Lastly, **it was very foolish for the adversaries to write that men who are under eternal wrath merit the remission of sins by an act of love, which springs from their mind since it is impossible to love God, unless the remission of sins be apprehended first by faith.**

It is impossible to love God until after faith, when God's wrath is appeased.

For the heart, truly feeling that God is angry, cannot love God, unless He be shown to have been reconciled. As long as He terrifies us, and seems to cast us into eternal death, human nature is not able to take courage, so as to love **37]** a wrathful, judging, and punishing God [poor, weak nature must lose heart and courage, and must tremble before such great wrath, which so fearfully terrifies and punishes, and can never feel a spark of love before God Himself comforts]. It is easy for idle men to feign such dreams concerning love, as, that a person guilty of mortal sin can love God above all things, because they do not feel what the wrath or judgment of God is. But in agony of conscience and in conflicts [with Satan] conscience experiences the emptiness of these philosophical speculations. **38]** Paul says, Rom. 4, 15: *The Law worketh wrath*. He does not say that by the Law men merit the remission of sins. **For the Law always accuses and terrifies consciences.** Therefore it does not justify, because conscience terrified by the Law flees from the judgment of God. Therefore they err who trust that by the Law, by their own works, they merit the remission of sins. **39]** It is sufficient for us to have said these things concerning the righteousness of reason or of the Law, which the adversaries teach. For after a while, when we will declare our belief concerning the righteousness of faith, the subject itself will compel us to adduce more testimonies, which also will be of service in overthrowing the errors of the adversaries which we have thus far reviewed.

We cannot be freed by the Law

40] Because, therefore, men by their own strength cannot fulfil the Law of God, and **all are under sin, and subject to eternal wrath and death, on this account we cannot be freed by the Law from sin and be justified,** but **the promise of the remission of sins and of justification has been given us for Christ's sake, who was given for us in order that He might make satisfaction for the sins of the world, and has been appointed as the [only] 41] Mediator and Propitiator.**

And this promise has not the condition of our merits

[it does not read thus: Through Christ you have grace, salvation etc., if you merit it],

The Promise has not the condition of our merits.

but freely offers the remission of sins and justification as Paul says Rom. 11, 6: *If it be of works, then is it no more grace.* And in another place, Rom. 3, 21: *The righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, i.e., the remission of sins is freely offered.* Nor does reconciliation depend **42]** upon our merits. Because if the remission of sins were to depend upon our merits, and reconciliation were from the Law, it would be useless. For as we do not fulfil the Law, it would also follow that we would never obtain the promise of reconciliation. Thus Paul reasons, Rom. 4, 14: *For if they which are of the Law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.* **For if the promise would require the condition of our merits and the Law, which we never fulfil, it would follow that the promise would be useless.**

43] But since justification is obtained through the free promise it follows that we cannot justify ourselves. Otherwise wherefore would there be need to promise? [And why should Paul so highly extol and praise grace?] **For since the promise cannot be received except by faith, the Gospel which is properly the promise of the remission of sins and of justification for Christ's sake, proclaims the righteousness of faith in Christ, which the Law does not teach.** Nor is this the righteousness of the Law.

The Promise is Received by Faith

A. 44] For the Law requires of us our works and our perfection.

B. But the Gospel freely offers, for Christ's sake, to us, who have been vanquished by sin and death, reconciliation which is received not by works, but by faith alone.

This faith brings to God not confidence in one's own merits, but only **confidence in the promise**, or 45] the mercy promised in Christ.

This special faith, therefore, by which an individual believes that for Christ's sake his sins are remitted him, and that for Christ's sake God is reconciled and propitious,

obtains remission of sins and justifies us.

And because in repentance, *i.e.* in terrors,

it comforts and encourages hearts,

it regenerates us and

brings the Holy Ghost that then we may be able to fulfil God's Law, namely,

to love God,

truly to fear God,

truly to be confident that God hears prayer, and

to obey God in all afflictions;

it mortifies concupiscence etc.

Faith in the mercy
promised in Christ

46] Thus, because

faith, which freely receives the remission of sins,

sets Christ, the Mediator and Propitiator, against God's wrath,

it does not present our merits or our love [which would be tossed aside like a little feather by a hurricane]. This faith is the true knowledge of Christ, and avails itself of the benefits of Christ, and regenerates hearts, and precedes the fulfilling of the Law. And 47] of this faith not a syllable exists in the doctrine of our adversaries. Hence we find fault with the adversaries, equally because they teach only the righteousness of the Law, and because they do not teach **the righteousness of the Gospel**, which proclaims the righteousness of faith in Christ.

Faith Sets not our merit.
But Christ's Merit
against God's Wrath

What Is Justifying Faith?

48] The adversaries feign that faith is only **a knowledge of the history**, and therefore teach that it can coexist with mortal sin. Hence they say nothing concerning faith, by which Paul so frequently says that men are justified, because those who are accounted righteous before God do not live in mortal sin.

But *that faith which justifies* is not merely a **knowledge of history**, [not merely this, that I know the stories of Christ's birth, suffering, etc. (that even the devils know,)]

but it is **to assent to the promise of God, in which, for Christ's sake, the remission of sins and justification are freely offered.**

[It is **the certainty or the certain trust in the heart**, when, with my whole heart, I regard the promises of God as certain and true, through which there are offered me, without my merit, the forgiveness of sins, grace, and all salvation, through Christ the Mediator.]

And that no one may suppose that it is **mere knowledge**, we will add further:

it is **to wish and to receive the offered promise of the remission of sins and of justification.**

[Faith is that my whole heart takes to itself this treasure.

It is not my doing, not my presenting or giving, not my work or preparation,

but that a heart comforts itself, and is perfectly confident with respect to this, namely, that God makes a present and gift to us, and not we to Him, that He sheds upon us every treasure of grace in Christ.]

Justifying Faith
is not merely history,
but a Promise
concerning the facts of
Christ's merit.

49] And the difference between this faith and the righteousness of the Law can be easily discerned.

A. Faith is the λατρεία [divine service], **which receives the benefits offered by God;**

B. the righteousness of the Law is the λατρεία [divine service] **which offers to God our merits.**

By faith God wishes to be worshiped in this way, that **we receive from Him those things which He promises and offers.**

50] Now, that faith signifies, not only a knowledge of the history, but such faith as **assents to the promise**, Paul plainly testifies when he says, Rom. 4, 16: *Therefore it is of faith, to the end the promise might be sure.* For he judges that the promise cannot be received unless by faith. Wherefore he puts them together as things that belong to one another, and connects promise and faith. [There Paul fastens and binds together these two, thus: **Wherever there is a promise faith is required, and conversely, wherever faith is required, there must be a promise.**] 51]

Although it will be easy to decide what faith is if we consider the Creed, where this article certainly stands: The forgiveness of sins.

Therefore it is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, was raised again,

unless we add also this article, which is the purpose of the history: *The forgiveness of sins.*

To this article the rest must be referred, namely, that for Christ's sake, and not for the sake of our merits, 52] forgiveness of sins is given us. For what need was there that Christ was given for our sins if for our sins our merits can make satisfaction?

Faith Differs From The Righteousness of the Law
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The purpose of that history is the forgiveness of sins,

53-60 Already examined