

Introduction

Many people view the Christian faith as something easy, and some even place it among the virtues. They do this because they have not experienced faith, nor have they tasted its great power. A person must experience the strength faith provides in the midst of trials and misfortune. Otherwise, it is not possible to write well about faith or to understand what has been written about it. But one who has had even a small taste of faith can never write, speak, reflect, or hear enough concerning it. As Christ says, it is a “spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

Although I cannot boast of my own abundance of faith, and I also know quite well how short my own supply is, nevertheless I hope I have attained at least a drop of faith—though I grant that I have been surrounded by great and various temptations.

1. Luther is challenging a tradition of medieval theology that listed faith as one of the theological virtues along with hope and love. As he will try to demonstrate in “The Freedom of a Christian,” faith alone is sufficient—it does not need hope and love to “complete” it. For Luther faith or trust (see also note 7) was the fundamental perspective for all of life. It involves not only intellectual assent but an orientation of the whole self. For example, when discussing the first commandment (“You are to have no other gods”), Luther provides the following explanation for how “god” is to be understood: “A god is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart.” Martin Luther, The Large Catechism, in \textit{BC}386.

2. Luther may be referring here to his experience in the monastery, when he wrestled with God and his sense of unworthiness. Later in life he reflected on this period: “I tried to live according to the (monastic) rule and I used to be contrite, to confess and enumerate my sins; I often repeated my confession and zealously performed my required penance. And yet my conscience would never give me assurance, but I was always doubting and said, ‘You did not perform that correctly. You were not contrite enough. You left that out of your confession.’” “Lectures on Galatians, 1535,” \textit{WA} 40(2):15, \textit{LW} 27:13. Luther's whole life was
However, I hope that in what follows I am able to discuss faith in a way that is more elegant, and certainly with more clarity, than has been done in the past by the literalists and subtle disputants, who have not even understood what they have written.3

In order to make the way smoother for the average or common readers (for only them do I serve), I will put forth two themes concerning the freedom and bondage of the spirit.

A Christian is lord of all, completely free of everything.4

A Christian is a servant, completely attentive to the needs of all.

These two assertions appear to conflict with one another; however, if they can be found to be in agreement, it would serve our purposes beautifully. Both are statements from the Apostle Paul. He says in 1 Corinthians 9:19: “For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all.” And in Romans 13:8 he asserts: “Owe no one anything except to love one another.” It is in the very nature of love to be attentive to others and to serve the one who is loved. So it is the case with Christ. Although he was Lord of all and “born of woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4), he was at the same time a free man and servant, in “the form of God” and in the “form of a slave” (Phil. 2:6-7).

marked by a struggle for faith. This did not disappear when he grasped the meaning of justification by faith.

3. Luther is echoing the complaints of many people in his day (see Erasmus’s The Praise of Folly) who felt that much theological teaching was hopelessly tangled in the discussion of irrelevant questions, thereby neglecting what was really important.

4. Harold Grimm (LW 31:344) translates the Latin nulli subjectus as “subject to none”; however, this fails to comprehend Luther’s concern in this essay that all relationships (including inanimate things like money, property, and diet) are encompassed by Christian freedom.

The Human Being as Inner and Outer Person

The Inner Person

In order to explain this more clearly, let us begin with an example that will eventually lead us to the topic. In every person there are two natures—one that is of the spirit and one that is of the body. When speaking of the spiritual nature or the soul, we are referring to that which is “inner” or “new.” When speaking of the bodily nature, or that which is flesh and blood, we are referring to that which is called “sensual,” “outward,” or “old.” Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:16: “Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.” Given this difference of natures, it is not surprising that they come into conflict with one another. As the Bible notes, these two natures contend against each other like two persons struggling against each other in the same body. This is what Paul means in Galatians 5:17: “For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh.”

Let us begin by looking inside ourselves at the righteous, free, and true Christian, that is, the spiritual, new, and inner person, and observe how the transformation to this state occurs. It is evident that nothing external can produce Christian righteousness or freedom. Nor can anything external produce unrighteousness or servitude. This can be proven by a simple argument. How is the soul able to benefit if the body is in good health—free, active, and in general eating and drinking and doing what it pleases? Is it not the case that even the most godless slaves of wickedness can enjoy such pleasures? On the other hand, how

5. Care needs to be taken so that Luther’s use of “spirit” or “soul” is not confused with other views. Luther did not view the spiritual nature or soul as an independent entity that is somehow separate from the body or, as in some cases, regarded as divine. Luther has a comprehensive view of the Fall: body, mind, and soul all are in rebellion against their Creator. The inner nature is capable of being changed, but it is not in itself something godly or righteous.
will poor health or captivity or hunger or thirst or any other external misfortune harm the soul? Even the most godly people and those with the purest consciences are afflicted with such things. None of this touches upon the freedom or servitude of the soul. Therefore, it does not help the soul if the body wears the sacred robe of a priest or visits holy places or performs sacred duties or prays, fasts, and refrains from certain types of foods. The soul receives no help from any work connected with the body. Such activity does not lead to freedom and righteousness for the soul. The works just mentioned could have been done by any wicked person and produce nothing but hypocrites. Of course, the opposite is also true. The soul is not harmed if the body wears secular or regular clothes, lives in ordinary places, eats and drinks like everyone else, does not pray out loud, and fails to do the things spoken of above that hypocrites can do.

Furthermore, the solution is not to be found in rejecting every kind of work the soul is capable of doing, such as contemplation and meditation. This would result in nothing. One thing and one thing alone leads to Christian life, righteousness, and freedom. This is the holy word of God, the gospel of Christ, as Jesus himself says in John 11:25: “So if the Son makes you free you will be free indeed.” And he says in Matthew 4:4: “One does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

6. It is hard for the modern reader to appreciate the effort made by late medieval people to secure their salvation. For example, before the Reformation took hold, the Castle Church in Luther's own Wittenberg was famous for its collection of relics—including outlandish items like milk from the Virgin Mary and wood from the crib of the infant Jesus. Those who made a visit to Wittenberg and viewed these relics (and made the appropriate contribution) reduced the time they would serve in purgatory.

7. For Luther the word of God is not simply the Bible. The word is also far more than a source of information. He sees the word as powerful and creative, similar to Genesis 1 in which the world comes into existence through God's speech. Finally, the word refers to Christ (who is understood as the Word of God) and

The One Thing Needed: The Word of God

Let us then consider it certain and firmly established that the soul needs only one thing: the word of God. When this is missing, the soul lacks the one item that is essential. Having the word of God makes the soul rich—for what else could it possibly need? The word of God brings life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory, and every other blessing imaginable. This is why in Psalm 119 and in many other places in the Bible there is a yearning and sighing for the word of God. This also makes clear why there is no greater disaster than when God's wrath results in a famine when his word is not heard (for example, see Amos 8:11). Similarly, there is no greater mercy than when God sends his word as in Psalm 107:20: “He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction.” Thus Christ was given to the world for no other ministry than the word. Similarly, all the apostles, bishops, and priests have been called and instituted only for the ministry of the word.

You may ask, “What is the word of God and how should it be used, since there are so many words of God?” I respond by quoting what Paul says in Romans 1. The word is the gospel of God concerning his son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who makes us holy. To preach Christ means to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it, provided the preaching is believed. For faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the word of God. The apostle Paul in Romans 10:9 writes: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Paul also says in Romans 10:4: “For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” Also, in Romans 1:17

the preaching of Christ's death and resurrection in a manner that creates faith in listeners.
it states: “The one who is righteous shall live by faith.” The word of God cannot be received or honored by any works but must be grasped by faith alone. Therefore, it is clear that the soul needs only the word of God for life and righteousness; it is justified by faith alone and not by any works. If the soul were able to be justified by any other means it would not need the word of God, and then it also would not need faith. It should be underlined that this faith cannot exist in connection with works. In other words, if you hold this faith and at the same time claim to be justified by works, whatever their character, you are missing the point. This would be like “limping with two different opinions” (1 Kings 18:21), or it would be like worshiping Baal and kissing one’s own hand (Job 31:27-28), which, as Job says, is a great iniquity. Therefore, when you begin to trust, you discover at the same time that all things in you are wholly blameworthy, sinful, and deserving of condemnation, as Paul says in Romans 3:23: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

8. In making this claim, Luther is swimming against the stream of the entire medieval tradition. In the late Middle Ages there were basically two options with regard to salvation: the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham. In simplified form, Aquinas taught that the divine gift of faith needed to be completed by works of love. God’s grace made these works possible, but it was necessary for the human will to cooperate freely with grace in the performance of works. Ultimately, faith was “empty” until filled by love. Ockham put a greater stress on human involvement in the process of salvation. He said that we had “to do what was in us” (facere quod in se est) in order to qualify for grace in the first place. Further, our free wills then had to cooperate with grace to do the works necessary to be justified. Luther is saying that faith alone makes us right with God.

9. Translation of the Latin credere. It can be translated “to believe” or “to trust.” Both translations are used throughout the text, depending upon the context. Luther did not see faith as merely an act of the intellect. Faith encompassed the whole being of the person, including the heart. Therefore, “trust,” because it includes other faculties besides the mind, is often preferred over “belief.”

10. This subtle point is easily misunderstood. Luther is not saying we have to run ourselves into the ground and then out of desperation look to God. Rather, the birth of God’s grace makes you aware that you are completely undeserving of this gift.

states in Romans 3:10-12: “There is no one who is righteous, not even one . . . all have turned aside, together they have become worthless.” When you grasp this, you will know the necessity of Christ, who suffered and rose again for you. Believing in him, you become a new person—one whose sins are forgiven and one who is justified by the merits of another, namely Christ alone.

It is only possible for this faith to rule in the inner person as Paul says in Romans 10:10: “For one believes with the heart and so is justified.” Since we are justified by faith alone, it is clear that the inner person cannot be justified, freed, or saved by any external work or act, and such works, whatever they may be, have nothing to do with the inner person. Therefore, only ungodliness and unbelief of the heart make a person a condemned servant of sin—this cannot be caused by any external work or act of sin. It follows that it ought to be the primary goal of every Christian to put aside confidence in works and grow stronger in the belief that we are saved by faith alone. Through this faith the Christian should increase in knowledge not of works but of Christ Jesus and the benefits of his death and resurrection. This is what Peter teaches in the fifth chapter of his first letter (1 Pet. 5:10). No other work makes a Christian. Thus, when the Jews asked Christ in John 6:28 what they must do to perform the works of God, he dismissed their multitude of activities and pointed to one work, saying “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (John 6:29), for “it is on him that God the Father has set his seal” (John 6:27).

Therefore, true faith in Christ is an incomparable treasure that brings a person complete salvation and deliverance from all evil, as Jesus says in Mark 16:16: “The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.” The prophet Isaiah contemplated this treasure
righteousness that they will need nothing else to be righteous.” Or as Paul says in Romans 10:10: “For one believes with the heart and so is justified.”

What about the Bible?
You might wonder how faith alone, without the works of the law, can justify and confer so many great benefits when it appears that the Bible commands that we do a multitude of works, laws, and ceremonies. Here is how I handle this question. First, it is crucial to remember what has been said above, namely, that faith alone without works of the law is what justifies, frees, and saves. It should be pointed out that the entire Scripture of God is divided into two parts: commands and promises. The commands teach what is good; however, the good that is taught is not done. The commands show us what we ought to do, but they do not give us the power to do it. Thus the commands function in this way: they teach us to know ourselves. By means of the commandments, we recognize our inability to do the good, and they cause us to despair of our own powers. This explains why they are called the old testament and belong to the old testament. For example, the commandment “You shall not covet”

12. Here Luther introduces his hermeneutic, or way of interpreting the Bible. Luther is not a fundamentalist in the sense that he regards every word of Scripture to be of equal value, nor would he see the Bible as simply another great work of human literature. He believes the Bible is a divine book, written by human beings, through which God speaks to us in two basic ways: the voice of the law (which makes demands of us) and the voice of the gospel (which comforts and liberates us).

13. The reader needs to be careful here. Luther is not saying the Old Testament is composed of commands while the New Testament only contains God’s promises. In this context Luther equates the phrase “old testament” with any part of the Bible that commands the reader to do something. Conversely, he uses “new testament” for any language that contains God’s promises. Consequently, there can be “old testament” in the actual New Testament of the Bible (for example, Jesus’ command in Matthew 5:48 that we “should be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect”). And there can be “new testament” in the actual Old Testament, as is
other words, the purpose of preaching is to make what is said about Christ effectual in us. Such faith is born and preserved in us by preaching why Christ came, what he brought and gave to us, and the benefits we obtain when we receive him. This happens when Christian liberty—which he gives to us—is rightly taught and we are told in what way as Christians we are all kings and priests and therefore lords of all. Thus, as mentioned earlier, we can believe with confidence that whatever we have done is pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God.

What person's heart, upon hearing such things, will not rejoice greatly and grow so tender that he will love Christ in a way not possible by the observance of works or laws? Who would have the power to harm or frighten such a heart? If the knowledge of sin or the fear of death disturbs it, this heart is nevertheless ready to hope in the Lord. Nor is it afraid when confronted with evil, nor is it dismayed when facing enemies. This heart trusts that the righteousness of Christ has become its own righteousness and that its sin has been transferred to Christ and swallowed up by his righteousness. As has been noted above, this is a necessary consequence of faith in Christ. So the heart learns to scoff at sin and death and say with the Apostle Paul: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is the sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57). Death is swallowed up not only in the victory of Christ but in our own victory as well. For through faith his victory has become our own and by this faith we also are conquerors.

At this point we conclude the first part of the essay concerning our inner person, that is, our liberty and the source of that liberty, the righteousness of faith. We have shown that neither laws nor good works are needed for this righteousness. Indeed, it is harmful if we believe that justification comes through them.

**THE OUTER PERSON**

**Discipline of the Body and Service to the Neighbor**
Now let us turn to the second part, which concerns the outer person. Here we shall respond to all of those who are offended by the word "faith." They dismiss what has been said so far and ask: "If faith does all things and alone is sufficient for righteousness, why are good works commanded? Let us take our case and do no works and be content with faith." I would answer such a wicked person with an emphatic "No!" This would be true if we were only inner or spiritual persons. But this will not happen until the last day and the resurrection of the dead. For as long as we live in the flesh we only begin to make progress toward that which will be perfected in a future life. This is the reason the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:23 that we attain in this life only the "first fruits of the Spirit." It is only in the future life that the fullness of the Spirit will be received. Thus, at this point in the essay, it is important to stress what was said at the beginning: A Christian is servant of all and made subject to all. Insofar as a Christian is free, no works are necessary. Insofar as a Christian is a servant, all kinds of works are done. We shall now show how this is possible.

**Controlling the Body**
As I have said, the inner person, in the spirit, is abundantly and sufficiently justified by faith. It can be said that this person lacks nothing. It is true that this faith and its accompanying riches ought to grow day by day to the end of this life. Nevertheless, a Christian remains in this mortal life on earth. In this realm control must be exercised over the body. Also, relationships with the rest of humanity must be cultivated. This is where works begin. In this earthly realm a person cannot enjoy leisure. Here a person must take care to exercise moderate discipline over the body and subject it to the Spirit by means of fasting, vigils, and
The goal is to have the body obey and conform—and not hinder—the inner person and faith. Unless it is held in check, we know it is the nature of the body to undermine faith and the inner person.

The inner person is one with God. By faith he is created in the image of God and he is joyful and glad on account of the benefits of Christ that have been given to him. Therefore, it is his sole desire to serve God joyfully without thought of gain, inspired by a love that is free and unconstrained; however, while attempting to do this, he finds in his own flesh a contrary will that desires to serve the world and seeks its own advantage. The spirit of faith cannot tolerate this, and with a joyful zeal it attempts to put the body under control. Thus St. Paul says in Romans 7:22-23: “For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.” In 1 Corinthians 9:27 he also writes: “But I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.” And in Galatians 5:24 Paul writes: “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

It is important to make clear, however, that the person doing these works is not justified before God by them. Faith could not endure such a false opinion, since it knows that it alone is responsible for righteousness before God. We must also understand that these works serve the purpose of disciplining the body and purifying it of evil desires. The focus should be on these desires and the best means of purging them. Since by faith the soul is made pure and enabled to love God, it wants all things—the body in particular—to join it in loving and praising God. Thus we cannot be idle. The needs of the body compel us to do many good works in order to bring it under control. Nevertheless, it must always be kept in mind that these works do not justify a person before God. Rather, by yielding wholly to God, one does these works out of a spirit of spontaneous love, seeking nothing other than to serve God and yield to him in all earthly labors.

Every person will need to discern the manner and limits of these bodily disciplines. One ought to fast, watch, and labor to the extent that such activities are needed to harness the body’s desires and longings; however, those who presume that they are justified by works pay no attention to the need for self-discipline but see the works themselves as the way to righteousness. They believe that if they do a great number of impressive works all will be well and righteousness will be the result. Sometimes this is pursued with such zeal that they become mentally unstable and their bodies are sapped of all strength. Such disastrous consequences demonstrate that the belief that we are justified and saved by works without faith is extremely foolish and a complete misunderstanding of the Christian faith.

Let us use some analogies to make this clearer. We ought to consider the works of a Christian—who is justified and saved by the free mercy of God—as we would the works of Adam and Eve in paradise as well as those of their children, had they not sinned. We read in Genesis 2:15 that “the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till and keep it.” Now, Adam was created righteous, acceptable, and without sin. He had no need from his labor in the garden to be made righteous and acceptable to God. Rather, the Lord gave Adam work in order to cultivate and protect the garden. This would have been the freest of all works because they were done simply to please God and not to obtain righteousness. Adam was already

26. This recalls the monastic discipline that Luther would have known well.

27. Latin cerebrum ledentes.
righteous—something that would have been our birthright as well [if Adam and Eve had not sinned].

The works of the person who trusts God are to be understood in a similar manner. Through faith we are restored to paradise and created anew. We have no need of works in order to be righteous; however, in order to avoid idleness and so that the body might be cared for and disciplined, works are done freely to please God. Since in this life we are not fully recreated, and our faith and love are not yet perfect, works that discipline the body ought to be increased. These works do not result in righteousness but are useful to discipline the body as described above.

Another example involves the duties of a bishop. When he consecrates a church, confirms children, or performs some other duty pertaining to his office, he is not made a bishop because he does these things. Indeed, if he were not already a bishop, none of these works would be valid. They would be seen as foolish and childish, even ludicrous. Likewise, the Christian who is consecrated by faith does good works, but these do not make him holier or more Christian. This is accomplished by faith alone. Indeed, if one were not first a believer and a Christian, all of one’s works would be nothing more than wicked and damnable sins.

Thus the following statements are true: “Good works do not make a good person, but a good person does good works. Evil works do not make a person wicked, but a wicked person does evil works.” It is always necessary that the substance or essence of a person be good before there can be any good works and that good works follow and proceed from a person who is already good. Christ says in Matthew 7:18: “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.” It is clear that the fruit does not bear the tree nor does the tree grow on the fruit. In reality the reverse is true: the tree bears the fruit and the fruit grows on the tree. It is necessary that the tree is prior to the fruit. The fruit does not make the tree good or bad but the tree itself is what determines the nature of the fruit. In the same way, a person first must be good or bad before doing a good or bad work. For one’s works do not make one good or bad, but it is the essence of the person that determines whether a work is good or bad.

A similar thing can be found among those who build houses. A good or bad house does not make a good or bad builder, but a good or bad builder makes a good or bad house. It is a general rule that the product never makes the worker like itself, but rather it is the worker that makes the product like himself. So it is with the works of human beings. As a person is, whether a believer or unbeliever, so is that person’s work. The work is good if done in faith and wicked if done in unbelief. But the reverse is not true. A work does not make the person either a believer or unbeliever. Works do not make a person a believer and they do not make a person righteous; however, faith does make a person a believer and righteous, and faith does good works as well. Since works justify no one and a person must be righteous before doing a good work, it is manifestly clear that faith alone, because of the pure mercy of God as expressed through Christ and his word, sufficiently justifies and saves a person. A Christian has no need of any law in order to be saved, since through faith we are free from every law. Thus all the acts of a Christian are done spontaneously, out of a sense of pure liberty. As Christians we do not seek our own advantage or salvation because we are already
fully satisfied and saved by God’s grace through faith. Now our only motive is to do that which is pleasing to God.

Furthermore, good works do not justify or save an unbeliever. It is also true that evil works do not make one wicked or worthy of damnation. Rather, it is unbelief that makes the person and the tree bad that then results in evil and damnable works. Thus when a person is good or evil, this is caused not by works but rather the person’s faith or unbelief. As it says in Sirach 10:14: “This is the beginning of sin, that a person falls away from God.” In other words, this happens when there is a lack of trust in God. It also states in Hebrews 11:6: “For whoever would approach God must believe that he exists . . . .” And in Matthew 12:23 Christ says: “Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad and its fruit bad . . . .” as if to say: “Let the one who wishes to have good fruit begin by planting a good tree.” Therefore, let the person who wishes to do good works begin not with the works but with the believing, for this alone makes a person good. For nothing is able to make a person good except faith, and nothing can make a person evil except unbelief.

It is true that, when considered on only a human level, works make a person good or bad. But this sort of judgment of good and evil is an outward or external one, as indicated by the words of Christ in Matthew 7:20: “Thus you will know them by their fruits.” All of this remains on the surface, however. Many have been deceived by outward appearances and have proceeded to write and teach about good works and how they justify without even mentioning faith. On they go, deceiving themselves and forever deceiving others. They progress but only to a lower level, the blind leading the blind.30 Wearying themselves with many works, they never come to true righteousness. Paul speaks of such people in 2 Timothy 3:5-7: “Holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power . . . who are always being instructed and can never arrive at knowledge of the truth.”

Therefore, whoever does not wish to fall into the same error as these blind people must look beyond actions, laws, and teachings about works. One must look away from works and focus rather on the person and ask how one is justified. For the person is justified and saved by faith, not by works or laws but by the word of God (that is, the promise of grace). In this way the glory remains God’s alone, who saves us not by deeds of righteousness that we have done but according to his mercy, which was given to us by grace when we trusted God’s word.

As a result, it becomes easy to understand whether good works are to be rejected or accepted and to fashion a standard by which teachings about works can be evaluated. If works are understood to be the means by which we attain righteousness, they become an oppressive and perversive Leviathan.31 For they are done under the false impression that one is justified by them. Works become compulsory with the result that freedom and faith are destroyed. If this understanding is linked to works, they are good no longer but are rather worthy of damnation. Such works are not free. Moreover, they blaspheme32 the grace of God, since to justify and save belongs to God alone. These works presume to be able to do something they are actually powerless to do. This godless pretense is but the fruit of our own foolishness. The result of this violent intrusion of works is to corrupt and diminish the glory of God’s grace. Let it be understood that we do not reject good works. Indeed, good works are cherished

30. The scriptural reference is to Matthew 15:14.
32. Luther usually chooses his words carefully. Blasphemy was viewed as the worst possible sin. Luther is saying that using good works to obtain God’s favor dishonors God in a profound way, since it indicates a lack of trust that God will keep his word.
and taught by us. We do not condemn them for their own sake but on account of this godless addition to them—namely, that righteousness is to be obtained through them. This makes them appear good on the surface when in reality they are not good. Thus they deceive people and lead to the deception of others. They are like a ravenous wolf in sheep’s clothing (Matt. 7:15).

But this Leviathan, or the false view that works justify, is impossible to overcome when there is a lack of genuine faith. It controls those who see works as the cause of holiness unless faith, the destroyer, comes and rules in their hearts. Nature itself is unable to drive out this monster. Indeed, it does not even recognize this beast but rather sees it as a sign of a most holy will. Even more, if one adds the influence of custom, which only serves to confirm this false opinion, as wicked teachers have done, it is easy to see how this perspective on works becomes an incurable evil that seduces and destroys countless numbers of people. Therefore, while it is fine to preach and write about penitence, confession, and satisfaction, our teaching is undoubtedly deceptive and diabolical if we do not teach about faith as well. Christ, like John the Baptist before him, not only said “Repent” (Matt. 4:17), but also added the word of faith, saying: “The kingdom of heaven has come near.”

We ought to preach not only one of these words of God but both. Out of our treasure comes the old and the new—the voice of the law as well as the word of grace. The voice of the law ought to be made known so that all might fear and know their sins with the ultimate goal being repentance and betterment of life. But our preaching does not stop with the law. That would lead to wounding without binding up, striking down and not healing, killing and not making alive, driving down to hell and not bringing back up, humbling and not exalting. Therefore, we must also preach grace and the promise of forgiveness—this is the means by which faith is awakened and properly taught.

Without this word of grace, the law, contrition, penitence, and everything else are done and taught in vain.

Preachers of repentance and grace still can be found in our time, but they do not explain God’s law and promise in a way that a person might learn the source of repentance and grace. Repentance proceeds from the law of God, but faith or grace come from the promise of God. Paul says in Romans 10:17: “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.” A person is consoled and exalted by faith in the divine promise after being humbled and led to self-knowledge by threats and fear of the divine law. In Psalm 30:5 it says: “Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

Service to the Neighbor

This concludes the section of teaching concerning both works in general and those works which a Christian does for himself. Finally, we shall deal with those things that pertain to the neighbor. For we do not live in this mortal body and focus only on it. Rather, we live with all other people on earth. Indeed, we live for others and for ourselves. The reason we discipline our bodies is to serve our neighbors genuinely and freely. In Romans 14:7-8 Paul says: “We do not live to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die we die to the Lord.” In this life we never can be idle and without works toward the neighbor. Rather, it is necessary to live fully among people, conversing and dealing with them as Christ did, who was made in human likeness (Bar. 3:37).33

Let us be clear that no one needs to do these things to attain righteousness and salvation. Therefore, we should be guided in all our works by this one thought alone—that we may serve and

33. Many church fathers saw this passage as an allusion to the incarnation.