

Apology of the Augsburg Confession

Preface¹

Greetings from Philip Melanchthon to the reader.

Following the public reading of our princes' Confession, a number of theologians and monks prepared a Confutation of our writing, which His Imperial Majesty then had read before the assembly of the princes. At that time he also ordered our princes to accept this Confutation.

Since we had heard that the Confutation condemned many articles that we could not in good conscience surrender, our party requested a copy of the Confutation in order to see what the opponents condemned and to refute their arguments. Since this matter involves religion and the teaching of consciences, we assumed that the opponents would readily provide us with a copy of the document. Unfortunately, we could have obtained it only on terms so perilous that we could not accept them.²

In the negotiations that followed, it was clear that our side was willing to put up with anything, however unpleasant, as long as it did not violate our consciences. But the opponents stubbornly insisted that we approve some obvious abuses and errors. When we could not do this, His Imperial Majesty again ordered our princes to accept the Confutation, which they refused to do. How could they accept a document on matters of religion that they had not even seen—especially a document that purportedly condemned several articles on which we could not reconcile with the opponents' position without doing wrong?

They [the princes] commanded me and several others to prepare a defense [*apologia*] of our Confession in order to address the opponents' objections for His Imperial Majesty and to explain to why we could not accept the Confutation. We did this on the basis of notes on the main points of its argumentation that that some of us had taken during its reading. The princes finally offered the apology to His Imperial Majesty, to show him that very weighty reasons prevented us from approving the Confutation. His Imperial Majesty, however, did not accept it.³ Later, a decree

1 This preface was written for the first edition of the Apology in April 1531 and reprinted in the second edition. MBW #1148.

2 The emperor demanded that the Evangelical party not respond in print to the Confutation if its representatives, among them Melanchthon, received a copy of its text.

3 On 22 September 1530, while the imperial diet was still in session, the Evangelical princes presented to Charles V an earlier version of the Apology. The Emperor refused to receive it.

appeared in which the opponents boasted that they had refuted our Confession from the Scriptures.

Therefore, dear reader, you now have our Apology. It will show you both the judgments of the opponents (we have reported faithfully) and their condemnations of several articles in opposition to the clear writing of the Holy Spirit. Only, they fail to undermine our positions using the Scriptures. At first, we undertook the composition of the Apology in consultation with others, but as it was going to the press I added some things. Therefore I am signing my name so that no one can complain that the book has appeared anonymously. In these controversies I have always made it a point to adhere as closely as possible to traditional doctrinal formulas in order to promote the attainment of concord. I am doing much the same thing here, even though I could lead our contemporaries still further from the opponents' position. But the opponents show by their actions that they care for neither truth nor concord; they want only our blood.

Now, I have written as moderately as I could. If any expression seems too strong, let me explain that my quarrel is with the theologians and monks who wrote the Confutation, not with the emperor or the princes, whom I hold in due esteem. But recently, when I saw the Confutation, I realized it was written so cleverly and slanderously that in some places it could deceive even the cautious reader. I have not taken up all of their sophistries since this would be an endless task. I have instead assembled their principal arguments in order to bear witness to the entire world that we hold to the gospel of Christ correctly and faithfully. We take no pleasure in discord, nor are we unaware of our danger, the extent of which is evident from the bitter hatred inflaming the opponents. But we cannot surrender truth that is so clear and necessary for the church.

We believe, therefore, that we must endure difficulties and dangers for the glory of Christ and the good of the church. We trust that God approves our dutiful action, and we hope that posterity will judge us more equitably. For neither is it possible to deny that we have brought to light many topics of Christian teaching that the church desperately needs. We need not describe here how they lay hidden under all kinds of dangerous opinions in the writings of the monks, canonists, and sophistical theologians. Many good people have testified publicly and thanked God for this great blessing, that on many topics our Confession's teaching is better than that which appears everywhere in the opponents' writings.

And so we shall commend our cause to Christ, who will one day judge these controversies. We pray that he will help his afflicted and scattered churches and restore them to a godly and lasting concord.

[I: God]

Our opponents approve the first article of our Confession.¹ In it we explain that we believe and teach that there is one divine essence, undivided, etc.,² and that there are nevertheless three distinct and coeternal persons of the same divine essence, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We have always taught and defended this article, maintaining that its testimonies in the Holy Scriptures are solid, firm, and cannot be overthrown. And we constantly affirm that those who believe otherwise³ stand outside the church of Christ, are idolaters, and regard God with contempt.

[II:] Original Sin

The opponents approve the second article concerning “Original Sin,”⁴ but do so in such a way that they nevertheless find fault with the definition of original sin that we had related in passing. Here, immediately at the very outset, His Imperial Majesty will discover that those who wrote the Confutation lack not only judgment, but honesty. For whereas we simply wished to review those things that original sin includes, they severely distort a statement—by fabricating vicious interpretations of it—that in itself had nothing wrong with it. As a result, they say that to be without the fear of God and without faith is actual guilt; and so they deny that it is original guilt.⁵

It is quite clear that these subtle arguments originated in the schools⁶ and not in the council of the emperor. Even though this sophistry can easily be refuted, nevertheless, in order that all good

1 Roman Confutation: “Especially when in the first article they confess the unity of the divine essence in three persons according to the decree of the Council of Nicea, their confession must be accepted, since it agrees in all respects with the rule of faith and the Roman Church . . .” (pt. I, art. I). For the Latin text of the Confutation, see CR XXVII, 82–183, and Herbert Immenkötter, ed., *Die Confutatio der Confessio Augustana vom 3. August 1530* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1979).

2 The “etc.” probably refers to the other attributes predicated of the godhead in CA I such as eternity and incorporeality. It would also include those attributes named in the Athanasian Creed (par. 8–12) to describe the unity of the Trinity.

3 See CA I for a listing of some of the Antitrinitarian groups to which Melancthon is probably referring.

4 Roman Confutation (pt. I, art. II): “In the second article we approve their confession, in common with the Catholic Church, that the fault of origin is truly sin, condemning and bringing eternal death upon those who are not born again by baptism and the Holy Spirit. . . .”

5 Roman Confutation (pt. I, art. II): “2. But the declaration of the article, that Original Sin means that people are born without the fear of God and without trust in God, is to be entirely rejected, since it is manifest to every Christian that to be without the fear of God and without trust in God is rather the actual guilt of an adult than the offense of a recently born infant, which does not possess as yet the full use of reason. . . .”

6 Much of Apology II deals with medieval scholastic theology.

people might see that we teach nothing absurd on this matter, we ask that the text of the German confession first be examined. This will clear us from the suspicion of innovation. For there it is written . . .

Furthermore, it is taught among us that since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God.⁷

This passage testifies that we deny to those conceived and born according to the course of nature not only the act of fearing and trusting God, but also the ability or gifts needed to produce such fear and trust. For we say that those who have been born in this way have concupiscence and are unable to produce true fear and trust in God. What is wrong with this? Indeed, we think that in the eyes of fair-minded people we are sufficiently exonerated. For in this sense the definition in the Latin text denies the ability to human nature⁸ (that is, the gift and power needed to produce fear and faith in God), and it also denies to adults the act of producing it. So when we use the word “concupiscence,” we understand not only its acts or fruits, but the continual tendency of our nature.⁹

Later we shall show at length that our definition agrees with the traditional one. But in order to make our explanation clear, we must first show why we used these terms. Even our scholastic opponents admit that concupiscence is the so-called material element of original sin.¹⁰ Hence concupiscence must not be left out of the definition, especially now when so many philosophize about original sin irreligiously. For some¹¹ argue that original sin is not a fault or corruption in human nature, but only a subjection to or a condition of mortality that those descended from Adam endure through no fault of their own, but on account of someone else’s guilt. Furthermore, they add that no one is eternally damned on account of original sin, just as children born to a slave woman inherit their enslaved condition through no fault of their own, but on account of

7 CA II.1, quoted in the German.

8 The German translation adds, “even to innocent infants.”

9 Augustine, *Against Julian* 5, 12 (MPL 44:682). See also Martin Luther’s lectures on Romans (WA 56:351; LW 25:340).

10 Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 2, q. 82, a. 3 (Eng. trans.: 26:39).

11 Ulrich Zwingli, *An Account of the Faith* (in *On Providence and Other Essays*, ed. W. J. Hinke [reprint, Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth, 1983]), 40. Original sin “is therefore properly a disease and condition—a disease, because just as he fell from self-love, so also do we; a condition, because just as he became a slave and subject to death, so also are we born slaves and children of wrath and subject to death. . . . For Adam is the one by whose fault death hangs upon our shoulders. . . . Therefore we also die, but by his [Adam’s] guilt, yet by our own condition and disease, or, if you prefer, by our sin, improperly so called.” See also his *Declaration regarding Original Sin* (in *On Providence*, 5). “For this reason, I have said that the original contamination of man is a disease, not a sin, because sin implies guilt. . . .”

their mother's misfortune. In order to show our displeasure with this ungodly opinion, we mentioned "concupiscence." With the best of intentions we identified and diagnosed it as a disease because human nature is born corrupt and faulty.¹²

We not only mentioned "concupiscence," but we also said that the fear of God and faith were lacking. We added this point because the scholastic teachers, who do not sufficiently understand the definition of original sin that they inherited from the Fathers, trivialize original sin. They contend that the "tinder of sin"¹³ is a condition in the body and, in their usual ineptitude, they ask whether this condition was contracted through contact with the fruit or from the breath of the serpent, and whether it can be cured with medicine.¹⁴ With such questions they have suppressed the main point. Thus, when they speak about original sin they fail to mention the more serious defects of human nature like being ignorant of God, despising God, lacking fear and confidence in God, hating the judgment of God, fleeing this judging God, being angry with God, despairing of his grace, and placing confidence in temporal things, etc. The scholastics do not even notice these maladies, which are completely opposed to the law of God. Indeed, they attribute to human nature the unimpaired powers to love God above all things and to keep the commandments of God "according to the substance of the act."¹⁵ Nor do they see how they contradict themselves. For what else is the ability to love God above all things with one's own power and to keep the commandments of God than original righteousness? What becomes of original sin if human nature by itself has the power to love God above all things, as the scholastics confidently affirm?¹⁶ What need will there be for the grace of Christ if we can become righteous by our own righteousness? What need will there be for the Holy Spirit if by our human power alone we can love God above all things and keep God's commandments?

12 Augustine had used the term "concupiscence" in connection with original sin. By the late Middle Ages it was understood as sensuality unchecked by reason or the will.

13 The tinder of sin (*fomes peccati*) is often equated with concupiscence itself and thus used synonymously. Most often it was used in the sense of a "weakness" or "inclination" to sin that was not sin in itself unless a person yielded to it. It was not considered to be original sin itself, but a punishment or burden that was imposed by God upon the human race on account of sin. See Peter Lombard, *Sentences* II, d. 30, 7 (*MPL* 192:722), and Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, q. 15, a. 2; q. 27, a. 3.

14 According to Gregory of Rimini, the infection of the flesh was a new element introduced by the poisonous breath of the devil. Gabriel Biel, who summarized late-medieval theology, did not reject this opinion, but for him this diabolic attack merely actualizes a potentially present rebellion.

15 Doing something "according to the substance of the act" was often distinguished from doing it "according to the intention of the lawgiver (God)." The distinction means that although the sinner can perform the substance of the acts required by God's law, these are nevertheless not fully meritorious (*meritum de condigno*; cf. Ap IV) without the presence of the grace-assisted *habitus* of love, since God intends the law to be fulfilled with the assistance of such grace. Biel, *II Sent.*, d. 28, q. 11, a. 2, concl. 3.

16 Biel, *III Sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 3, dub. 5 Q; *IV Sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 2, concl. 55. Duns Scotus, *Sent.* III, d. 27, q. 1.

Who cannot see how ridiculously the opponents think? They acknowledge the lesser maladies in human nature; but they do not acknowledge the more severe ones, about which, nevertheless, the Scripture everywhere warns us and about which the prophets continually complain, namely, carnal complacency, contempt for God, hatred of God, and similar defects with which we are born. Now the scholastics mingled Christian teaching with philosophical views about the perfection of nature and attributed more than was proper to the freedom of the will and to “elicited acts”¹⁷ by teaching that human beings are justified before God by philosophical or civil righteousness (which we also admit are subject to human reason and are somehow within our ability). As a result they failed to see the inner impurity of human nature. For this cannot be diagnosed except by the Word of God—something the scholastics do not often use in their discussions.

These were the reasons why in our definition of original sin we mentioned concupiscence and also denied to the natural powers of the human creature fear of and trust in God. We wanted to show that original sin also included these maladies: ignorance of God, contempt for God, the absence of the fear of and trust in God, and the inability to love God. These are the chief defects of human nature—in conflict especially with the first table of the Decalogue.¹⁸

We have said nothing new here. The traditional definition, rightly understood, says precisely the same thing when it states, “Original sin is the absence of original righteousness.”¹⁹ But what is righteousness? Here the scholastics quibble over philosophical questions and do not explain what original righteousness is. Furthermore, in the Scriptures this righteousness includes not only the second table of the Decalogue, but also the first, which requires fear of God, faith, and love of God. Thus original righteousness was intended to include not only a balanced physical constitution,²⁰ but these gifts as well: a more certain knowledge of God, fear of God, and confidence in God, or at least the uprightness and power needed to do these things. And Scripture affirms this when it says [Gen. 1:27*] that humankind was formed in the image and

17 From the time of Augustine, it was believed that our actions were elicited by the will and ordered by reason.

18 That is, the first three commandments.

19 Anselm of Canterbury in *The Virgin Conception and Original Sin*, c. 27, defines original sin as the deprivation of original righteousness.

20 In the German translation, Justus Jonas lists “perfect health in all respects, pure blood, and unimpaired powers of the body.” Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 1, q. 82, a. 1: Original sin “is a disordered disposition growing from the dissolution of that harmony in which original justice was founded.”

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²⁷ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

likeness of God. What else does this mean except that a wisdom and righteousness that would grasp God and reflect God was implanted in humankind, that is, humankind received gifts like the knowledge of God, fear of God, trust in God, and the like?

This is how Irenaeus interpreted the likeness of God.²¹ After having discussed many other things related to this topic, Ambrose then says, “That soul is not in the image of God in which God is not always present.”²² And in Ephesians [5:19*] and Colossians [3:10*] Paul shows that the image of God is the knowledge of God, righteousness, and truth. Even Peter Lombard is not afraid to say that original righteousness is the very likeness of God, which was implanted in the human creature by God.²³ The statements of the ancients that we cited do not contradict Augustine’s interpretation concerning the image of God.²⁴

Thus, when the traditional definition says that sin is the absence of righteousness, it excludes not only the obedience of the lower human powers but also the knowledge of God, trust in God, fear and love of God, or certainly the power needed to produce those things. Even the scholastic theologians teach that these cannot be produced without certain gifts and without the assistance of grace.²⁵ In order to make things clear, we identify these gifts as the knowledge of God, fear of

21 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V, 11, 2 (MPG 7:1151; ANF 1:537).

22 Ambrose, *Hexameron* VI, 8, 45: “Is not that, therefore, in which God is ever-present, made to the likeness of God?” (MPL 14:260A; CSEL 32/1: 236, 17; *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, The Fathers of the Church 42 [New York: Fathers of the Church, 1961], 258).

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¹⁹ as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts,

[Ephesians 5:19 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁰ and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.

[Colossians 3:10 \(NRSV\)](#)

23 Peter Lombard, *Sentences* II, d. 16, c. 4 (MPL 192:684). “Therefore humankind, with respect to the soul, was made in the image and likeness not of the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit, but the entire Trinity. Thus with respect to the soul it is said that humankind is the image of God, because the image of God is in it.”

24 Augustine, *On the Trinity* XII, 7, 12 (MPL 44:1003, 1048, 1051; NPNF, ser. 1, 5:273–74).

25 For example, see Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 1, q. 109, a. 6; q. 112, a. 2, ad 1.

God, and trust in God. From this it is evident that the traditional definition says exactly the same thing we do when we deny to human nature the fear of God and confidence in God, namely, not only the actions but also the gifts and power needed to produce them.

This is the intention of the definition that appears in Augustine, who usually defines original sin as concupiscence.²⁶ He means that concupiscence follows the loss of righteousness. For our weak nature, because it cannot fear, love, or believe in God, seeks and loves carnal things; it either despises the judgment of God in its complacency or hates it in its terror. Thus Augustine also includes both the deficiency and the defective disposition [*habitus*] that follows it.

However, concupiscence is not simply a corruption of the physical constitution, but a perverse turning toward carnal things in the higher powers. Thus, those who attribute to the human creature simultaneously both a concupiscence that has not been put to death by the Holy Spirit and a love for God above all things do not realize what they are saying.

Therefore we correctly expressed both components in our description of original sin, namely, these deficiencies: the inability to believe God and the inability to fear and love God; and concupiscence, which seeks carnal things contrary to the Word of God, that is, it pursues not only the desires of the body, but also carnal wisdom and righteousness in which it trusts while despising God.

Not only the ancient theologians, but even the more recent ones—at least the more judicious ones among them—teach that both of these things are truly original sin, namely, the deficiencies that I have enumerated and concupiscence. Thus Thomas says: “Original sin denotes the absence of original righteousness together with a disordered disposition [*habitus*] among the parts of the soul. Consequently, it is not pure privation, it is indeed a corrupt disposition [*habitus*].”²⁷ And Bonaventure writes, “When it is asked, ‘What is original sin?’ it is correct to answer that it is unrestrained concupiscence. It is also right to respond that it is an absence of required righteousness. And in either of these responses, the other is included.”²⁸ Hugh means the same thing when he says that original sin is ignorance in the mind and concupiscence in the flesh.²⁹ He implies that from birth we bring along the ignorance of God, unbelief, distrust, contempt, and hatred of God. For he included all these things when he mentioned ignorance.

26 Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence* I, 27 (MPL 44:429; NPNF, ser. 1, 5:274).

27 Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 1, q. 82, a. 1, ad 1 (Eng. trans.: 26:31). “As in bodily illness there is privation, in that the balance of health is upset, yet also something positive, the disturbed bodily humours, so also in original sin there is privation, the lack of original justice, yet along with that there are the disturbed powers of the soul. Thus it is not pure privation, but also a corrupt habit of sorts.”

28 Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Sentences*, lib. II, d. 30, q. 1, a. 2c.

29 Hugh of St. Victor, *The Sacraments of the Christian Life* I, 7, c. 28 (MPL 176:299).

These statements agree with the Scriptures. At times Paul expressly identifies the deficiency as in 1 Corinthians 2[:14*]: “Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit.”³⁰ Elsewhere [Rom. 7:5*], he identifies the concupiscence at work in our members bringing forth evil fruits.

We could quote many passages with regard to both parts of our definition, but the matter is so clear that there is no need for further testimonies. The discerning reader can easily see that to be without the fear of God and without faith is not merely actual guilt but is an abiding deficiency in an unregenerate nature.

So we teach nothing about original sin that is alien either to Scripture or to the church catholic. We have simply cleansed and brought into the light the most important statements in the Scriptures and the Fathers that had been obscured by the sophistic quarreling of recent theologians. Now the issue itself suggests that recent theologians have not noticed what the Fathers meant to say about this deficiency.

Knowledge of original sin is a necessity. For we cannot know the magnitude of Christ’s grace unless we first recognize our malady.³¹ The entire righteousness of the human creature is sheer hypocrisy before God unless we admit that by nature the heart is lacking love, fear, and trust in God. Thus the prophet says [Jer. 31:19*], “And after I was discovered, I struck my

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¹⁴ Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

[1 Corinthians 2:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

30 The Vulgate reads: “The unspiritual person does not perceive those things that are of the Spirit of God.”

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⁵ While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

[Romans 7:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

31 The German translation adds, “As Christ says in Matthew 9[:12*] and Mark 2[:17*]: ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician.’ ”

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¹⁹ For after I had turned away I repented; and after I was discovered, I struck my thigh; I was ashamed, and I was dismayed because I bore the disgrace of my youth.”

[Jeremiah 31:19 \(NRSV\)](#)

thigh.” Again [Ps. 116:11*], “I said in my consternation, ‘Everyone is a liar,’ ” that is, they do not think rightly about God.

Here the opponents lash out at Luther, who wrote that “original sin remains after baptism.”³² They add that this article was rightly condemned by Leo X.³³ But His Imperial Majesty will detect an obvious slander here. For the opponents know in what sense Luther intended the statement that original sin remains after baptism. He has always written that baptism removes the guilt of original sin, even if the “material element” of sin, as they call it, remains, namely, concupiscence.³⁴ He even added about the material element that when the Holy Spirit is given through baptism he begins to put concupiscence to death and to create new impulses in the human creature.³⁵ Augustine also says the same thing when he states, “In baptism sin is forgiven, not that it no longer exists, but that it is not accounted [as sin].”³⁶ Here he clearly confesses that sin remains, even if it is not accounted [as sin]. This position so pleased subsequent generations that it was cited in the decretals.³⁷ And in *Against Julian*, Augustine says, “That law, which is in the members, is forgiven by the regeneration of the spirit, but it remains in mortal flesh. It is

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¹¹ I said in my consternation, “Everyone is a liar.”

Psalm 116:11 (NRSV)

32 See John Eck, *404 Articles*, no. 186: “Original Sin always remains (Luther).” Eck first heard this at the Leipzig Debates (cf. WA 2:160, 34–35; LW 31:317). See also Luther’s *Against Latomus* (1521) (WA 8:101–102; LW 32:220–21).

33 Roman Confutation (pt. I, art. II): “3. Moreover, the declaration is also rejected whereby they call the fault of origin concupiscence if they mean thereby that concupiscence is a sin that remains sin in a child even after baptism. For the Apostolic See has already condemned two articles of Martin Luther concerning sin remaining in a child after baptism, and concerning the *fomes* of sin hindering a soul from entering the kingdom of heaven. 4. But if, according to the opinion of St. Augustine, they call the vice of origin concupiscence, which in baptism ceases to be sin, this ought to be accepted.” Cf. the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* of 15 June 1520 (WA 7:328–45; LW 32:19–29).

34 Already in Luther’s marginal notes on Lombard’s *Sentences* (1509/10) (WA 9:74–75).

35 E.g., Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) (WA 6:534; LW 36:65–67).

36 Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence* I, 27 (MPL 44:430; NPNF, ser. 1, 5:275). “This is the carnal concupiscence, which, while it is no longer accounted sin in the regenerate, yet in no case happens to nature except from sin. It is the daughter of sin, as it were; and whenever it yields assent to the commission of shameful deeds, it becomes also the mother of many sins.” See also I, 25 (MPL 44:430; NPNF, ser. 1, 5:274).

37 Melancthon probably had in mind Gratian, *Decretum* III, “Concerning Consecration,” dist. 4, chap. 2, citing Augustine, *On the Baptism of Infants* I, 39 (MPL 44:131; NPNF, ser. 1, 5:30).

forgiven because the guilt is absolved in the sacrament by which the faithful are reborn. But it remains because it produces desires against which the faithful struggle.”³⁸

The opponents know that this is what Luther thinks and teaches. But since they cannot refute the principle, they twist the words in order to crush an innocent man by their fabrication.

They contend that concupiscence is punishment, not sin.³⁹ Luther maintains that it is sin. But earlier it was shown that Augustine defined original sin in terms of concupiscence. So let them take issue with him if this definition has anything wrong with it. In any case, Paul says [Rom. 7:7*], “Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’”⁴⁰ Again [Rom. 7:23*], “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.” These testimonies cannot be overthrown by sophistry. For clearly they call concupiscence sin, which nevertheless is not reckoned to those who are in Christ even though it is by nature worthy of death where it is not forgiven. This is undoubtedly what the Fathers thought. For with lengthy arguments Augustine refuted the opinions of those who maintained that concupiscence in the human creature is not a defect, but an *adiaphoron* [neutral thing] as the color of skin or ill health are said to be neutral matters.⁴¹

38 Augustine, *Against Julian II*, 3 (MPL 44:675; The Fathers of the Church 35 [New York: Fathers of the Church, 1957], 61).

39 See John Eck, *Enchiridion locorum communium* (1529), chap. 5: “In Christ’s faithful, who with the mind keep the law of God and by the concupiscence of the flesh fight against the law of the mind, there can be no sin. The Apostle calls this sin because it is caused by sin and is the punishment of sin.”

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⁷ What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”

[Romans 7:7 \(NRSV\)](#)

40 The Latin Vulgate reads: “I would not have known that concupiscence is sin if the law had not said: do not covet” [*concupisces*].

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²³ 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.

[Romans 7:23 \(NRSV\)](#)

41 Augustine, *Against Julian IV*, 9ff. (MPL 44:740ff.; The Fathers of the Church 35:213).

But if the opponents contend that the “tinder of sin” is a neutral matter, they will contradict not only the many statements of Scripture but clearly the entire church. Even if a perfect consensus is not attainable, no one would dare say that the following things are neutral: doubting the wrath of God, the grace of God, and the Word of God; being angry with the judgment of God; being indignant that God does not rescue us immediately from afflictions; grumbling that the ungodly experience more good fortune than the upright; being stirred up by rage, lust, desire for glory, wealth, and the like. And devout people acknowledge that these things are present in them as the Psalms and the prophets make clear. In the schools, however, they have taken over from philosophy the completely alien notions that our passions make us neither good nor evil, neither praiseworthy nor contemptible.⁴² Again, they say that nothing is sin unless it is voluntary.⁴³ These statements in the philosophers speak about the judgment of civil courts, not about the judgment of God.⁴⁴ It is no wiser to say, for example, that “nature is not evil.” In its place, we do not object to this statement; but it is not right to distort it for the purpose of trivializing original sin. And yet these things are said among the scholastics who improperly mingle philosophical or social ethics with the gospel. These things were not simply debated in the schools, but, as often happens, instead of remaining purely in academe these ideas spread among the people where they prevailed and fostered trust in human powers and suppressed the knowledge of the grace of Christ. Therefore, when Luther wanted to expose the magnitude of original sin and human weakness, he taught that the remnants of original sin in the human being are not in their essence neutral, but need both the grace of Christ, so that they might not be held [against us], and also the Holy Spirit, so that they might be put to death.

Although the scholastics trivialize both sin and its penalty when they teach that individuals by their own power are capable of keeping the commandments of God, Genesis describes a different penalty imposed on account of original sin. For there human nature was not only subjected to death and other bodily ills,⁴⁵ but also to the reign of the devil. There this horrible

42 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II, 5 (following the English translation of Martin Ostwald [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962], 40–41): “Now the virtues and vices cannot be emotions, because we are not called good or bad on the basis of our emotions, but on the basis of our virtues and vices. Also, we are neither praised nor blamed for our emotions. . . . For the same reason, the virtues cannot be capacities, either, for we are neither called good or bad nor praised or blamed simply because we are capable of being affected.” Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 1, q. 24, a. 1, ad 3 (Eng. trans., 19:35), comments: “Aristotle means that we are not praised or blamed for our emotions considered intrinsically; but he does not deny that they may become praiseworthy or blameworthy to the extent that they are under rational control.”

43 Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 1, q. 71, a. 5 (Eng. trans., 25:17), citing Augustine, *On True Religion* 14 (MPL 34:133): “So true is it that every sin is voluntary that unless it be voluntary, it is no sin at all. But nothing can be called voluntary unless an act of the will is involved. Every sin, therefore, implies an act.”

44 The German version adds, “For it is true, as the lawyers say, there is the law of thinking [*L(ex) cogitationis*], where thoughts are exempt from restraint and punishment. But God searches the heart. It is thus different with God’s judgment.” The proverb is used by both Ulpian and Cicero.

45 Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 1, q. 85, a. 5, ad 3.

sentence is pronounced [Gen. 3:15*]: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers.” The deficiency and concupiscence are both penalty and sin. Death and other bodily ills, together with the tyranny of the devil, are penalties in the proper sense. For human nature is enslaved and held captive by the devil, who deceives it with ungodly opinions and errors and incites it to all sorts of sins. However, just as the devil is not conquered without Christ’s help, so we, by our own powers, are unable to free ourselves from that slavery. World history itself shows how great is the strength of the devil’s rule. Blasphemy and wicked teachings fill the world, and in these bonds the devil holds enthralled those who are wise and righteous in the eyes of the world.

In others even greater vices appear. But since Christ was given to us in order to bear both these sins and penalties as well as to destroy the reign of the devil, sin, and death, the benefits of Christ cannot be recognized unless we understand our evil. Therefore our preachers have diligently taught about these matters, and in the process they have said nothing new. Instead they have set forth the Holy Scripture and the statements of the holy Fathers.

We think that this will satisfy His Imperial Majesty with regard to the childish and trivial quibbling with which the opponents have slandered this article. For we know that we believe rightly and in agreement with Christ’s church catholic. But if the opponents reopen this controversy, there will be no lack of those who will respond and defend the truth. For in this matter the opponents frequently do not know what they are talking about. They often contradict themselves and fail to explain logically and correctly either the “formal element” of original sin or its “deficiency,” as they say. But we have been reluctant at this point to take up their arguments at greater length. Instead, we have thought it worthwhile to cite in customary and familiar phrases the view of the holy Fathers, which we also follow.

[III: Christ]

The opponents approve the third article,⁴⁶ in which we confess that there are two natures in Christ, namely, that the human nature was assumed by the Word into the unity of his person; and that this same Christ suffered and died in order to reconcile the Father to us and rose from the dead in order to rule over, justify, and sanctify believers, etc., according to the Apostles’ Creed and Nicene Creed.

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¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”

[Genesis 3:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

46 Confutation (pt. I, art. III): “In the third article there is nothing to offend, since the entire Confession agrees with the Apostles’ Creed and the right rule of faith.”

[IV:] Justification

In the fourth, fifth, and sixth articles, as well as later in the twentieth, they condemn us for teaching that people receive the forgiveness of sins not on account of their own merits but freely on account of Christ, by faith in Him. They condemn us both for denying that people receive the forgiveness of sins on account of their own merits⁴⁷ and for affirming that people receive the forgiveness of sins by faith and are justified by faith in Christ.⁴⁸ But since this controversy deals with the most important topic of Christian teaching which, rightly understood, illumines and magnifies the honor of Christ⁴⁹ and brings the abundant consolation that devout consciences need, we ask His Imperial Majesty kindly to hear us out on this important matter. Since the opponents understand neither the forgiveness of sins, nor faith, nor grace, nor righteousness, they miserably contaminate this article, obscure the glory and benefits of Christ, and tear away from devout consciences the consolation offered them in Christ. But in order both to substantiate our confession and to remove the objections that the opponents raise, we need first to say a few things by way of a preface in order that the sources of both versions of the doctrine, the opponents' and ours, can be recognized.

All Scripture should be divided into these two main topics: the law and the promises.⁵⁰ In some places it communicates the law. In other places it communicates the promise concerning Christ, either when it promises that Christ will come and on account of him offers the forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life, or when in the gospel itself, Christ, after he appeared, promises the forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life. Now when we refer to the "law" in this discussion we mean the commandments of the Decalogue, wherever they appear in the Scriptures. For the present we will say nothing about the ceremonial and civil laws of Moses.

Of these two topics, the opponents single out the law (because to some extent human reason naturally understands it since reason contains the same judgment divinely written on the mind), and through the law they seek the forgiveness of sins and justification. But the Decalogue requires not only outward civil works that reason can produce to some extent; it also requires

47 Confutation IV (pt. I, art. IV): "For it is entirely contrary to Holy Scripture to deny that our works are meritorious."

48 The first draft of the Confutation is even more explicit here: "On the other hand, when they say that we are justified by faith, this is the great and principal error of the preachers. For to faith alone they ascribe that which is proper to charity and to the grace of God."

49 Jonas's German translation adds the words: ". . . which is especially useful for the clear, correct understanding of the entire Holy Scriptures, and alone shows the way to the unspeakable treasure and right knowledge of Christ, and alone opens the door to the entire Bible."

50 Melancthon defined this arrangement in his *Loci* 1521 (Eng. trans., pp. 70–71). There he distinguished law and gospel with respect to their function (killing and making alive) and explained that both Testaments contain law and gospel.

other works that are placed far beyond the reach of reason, such as, truly to fear God, truly to love God, truly to call upon God, truly to be convinced that he hears us, and to expect help from God in death and all afflictions. Finally, it requires obedience to God in death and all afflictions so that we do not flee or avoid these things when God imposes them.

Here the scholastics in line with the philosophers teach only the righteousness of reason, namely, civil works. In addition, they fabricate the idea that reason, without the Holy Spirit, can love God above all things. Now as long as the human mind is undisturbed and does not feel God's wrath or judgment, it can imagine that it wants to love God and that it wants to do good for God's sake. In this way the scholastics teach that people merit the forgiveness of sins by "doing what is within them,"⁵¹ that is, whenever reason, while grieving over sin, elicits an act of love for God or does good for God's sake.⁵² Because this opinion naturally flatters people, it has brought forth and multiplied many kinds of worship in the church, like monastic vows and abuses of the Mass. On the basis of this opinion some devised some types, others other types of devotional acts or observances. And in order to nourish and increase trust in such works, the scholastics have asserted that God necessarily gives grace to those who do these things, by a necessity not of coercion but of unchanging order.⁵³

Many great and destructive errors, which would take too long to enumerate, lurk behind this opinion. But let the discerning reader consider only this: if this is Christian righteousness, what is the difference between philosophy and the teaching of Christ? If we merit the forgiveness of sins by these elicited acts⁵⁴ of ours, what does Christ provide? If we can be justified through reason and the works of reason, why do we need Christ or regeneration? As a result of these opinions, the matter has degenerated to such an extent that many ridicule us for teaching that we must seek another righteousness beyond that offered by philosophy.⁵⁵ We have heard of some who, having laid aside the gospel, expound on the *Ethics* of Aristotle in their sermons. And indeed they

51 For Gabriel Biel and others, "to do what is in one" (*facere quod in se est*) was to exercise one's natural powers without the assistance of grace. This did not justify a person but constituted a merit of congruity, that is, a work rewarded with righteousness not because of its intrinsic worth but out of God's goodness.

52 Biel held that the requirement for love of God for God's sake or above everything else, while not easy, was still within the reach of human beings without the assistance of grace. They ascend from self-love to a love of everything that is to their advantage (including God) to a love of God as such.

53 Bonaventure, in *Sent.* III, d. 12, a. 2.9.1. See Martin Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will* (1525) (WA 18:634; LW 33:64).

54 Elicited acts are those performed by the strength of the human will, which has freedom of choice in matters of salvation.

55 Melanchthon had in mind such things as Erasmus of Rotterdam's attack on Luther in *On the Freedom of the Will* or John Cochlaeus's attack on Melanchthon in a book of the same name. Jonas's German translation mentions the schools of Louvain and Paris that condemned Luther.

should, if the things that the opponents defend are true. After all, Aristotle wrote so eruditely about social ethics that nothing further needs to be added. We also see that there are books that compare certain teachings of Christ with the teachings of Socrates, Zeno, and others, as though Christ had come to bring certain kinds of laws through which we merit the forgiveness of sins rather than receiving it freely on account of his merits. So if we accept the opponents' doctrine that we merit the forgiveness of sins and justification by the works of reason, there will indeed be no difference between philosophical—or at least Pharisaic—righteousness and Christian righteousness.

So that they do not bypass Christ entirely, the opponents require a knowledge of the story of Christ and credit him with meriting for us a certain disposition [*habitus*], or, as they call it, “initial grace,”⁵⁶ which they understand to be a disposition [*habitus*] that inclines us to love God more easily.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, what they attribute to this disposition [*habitus*] is of little consequence, because they imagine that the acts of the will prior to this disposition [*habitus*] and subsequent to this disposition [*habitus*] are of the same kind.⁵⁸ They imagine that the will can love God, but that this disposition [*habitus*] nevertheless stimulates it to do so more willingly.⁵⁹ They first urge us to earn this disposition [*habitus*] through preceding merits; then they urge us to earn an increase of this disposition [*habitus*] and eternal life by the works of the law.⁶⁰ Thus they bury Christ so that people do not use him as a mediator and on account of him believe that they freely receive the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation. Instead, they should foolishly imagine that by their own fulfillment of the law they merit the forgiveness of sins and that by their own fulfillment of the law they are accounted righteous before God—in spite of the fact that no one ever lives up to the law and in spite of the fact that reason does nothing except some works for society's welfare, while neither fearing God nor truly believing that God cares. And even though they speak about this disposition [*habitus*], yet without the righteousness of faith a person can neither love God nor understand the love of God.

56 Disposition of grace (*habitus gratiae*) or of love (*habitus dilectionis*) elevates a person's nature to a higher level and replaces the added gift of stabilizing grace (*donum superadditum*) lost as a result of the fall into sin. This grace was an inner power that enhanced a person's natural qualities and provided supernatural virtues. In Biel's thought this *habitus* is bestowed on the basis of doing what is in one.

57 Duns Scotus, for example, argued that the natural ability to love God was intensified by the infused *habitus* of love, leading to meritorious works.

58 Scotus argued that in both cases the will can be directed to love God.

59 Scotus said that love (*caritas*) strengthened natural ardor (*dilectio*).

60 This is an outline of Gabriel Biel's doctrine of justification.

And when they invent a distinction between a merit of congruity⁶¹ and a merit of condignity,⁶² they are only masquerading lest they appear to be outright Pelagians. For if God gives grace for the merit of congruity of necessity, it is then no longer the merit of congruity but the merit of condignity.⁶³ But they do not realize what they are saying. They suppose that after receiving “the disposition [*habitus*] of love”⁶⁴ a person can perform a merit of condignity. Yet they demand that people doubt whether this disposition [*habitus*] is present.⁶⁵ How, therefore, do they know whether they perform a merit of congruity or a merit of condignity? But this entire matter was invented by idle people who have no idea how the forgiveness of sins takes place and how, confronted by the judgment of God and the terrors of the conscience, trust in works shakes us. Complacent hypocrites always think that they perform everything deserving a merit of *condignity*, whether or not that disposition [*habitus*] is present, because people naturally trust in their own righteousness. But terrified consciences waver and doubt, and then immediately seek to accumulate other works in order to find rest. They never believe that they perform anything deserving a merit of condignity, and so they rush headlong into despair unless, beyond the teaching of the law, they hear the gospel concerning the gracious forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of faith.⁶⁶

Thus the opponents teach nothing but the righteousness of reason or at the very least, the righteousness of the law, upon which they fasten their attention just as the Jews did upon the veiled face of Moses [2 Cor. 3:13*]. And in complacent hypocrites, who suppose that they

61 Merit of congruity (*meritum de congruo*): good works that merit a reward solely on the basis of God’s generosity. For Biel, when persons in a state of sin do what is in them and love God according to the substance of the act, God rewards them (*de congruo*) with the infusion of first grace.

62 Merit of condignity (*meritum de condigno*): good works that merit a reward from God on the basis of their intrinsic worth. For Biel it is an act performed in a state of grace that is then worthy of divine acceptance. Persons first earn congruent merit by doing what is in them; upon receiving a grace-induced habit of love they can then perform condign merit for eternal reward.

63 That is, grace must be earned; God’s generosity means nothing.

64 Identical with the habitus of *grace* (cf. par. 17).

65 This demand was made to Luther already in 1518 by Cardinal Cajetan at Augsburg. See the *Proceedings at Augsburg* (1518) (WA 2:13, 6–16, 3; LW 31:270–74).

66 Jonas’s German translation adds a story about Franciscans who praised their order and good works in vain to some pious consciences who were dying. In the end they could only say: “Dear man, Christ has died for you.” This revived and refreshed them in their time of trouble and alone gave them peace and comfort.

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¹³ not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside.

satisfy the law, our adversaries arouse a presumptuous and futile trust in works as well as a contempt for the grace of Christ. Conversely, they drive frightened consciences to despair who, beset by doubt, can never experience what faith is and how efficacious it is. In the end they utterly despair.

Now we maintain that God requires the righteousness of reason and that because of God's command honorable works prescribed in the Decalogue are necessary according to [Gal. 3:24*]: "The law was our disciplinarian"; and [1 Tim. 1:9*]: "The law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient." God wants those who live according to the flesh to be restrained by such civil discipline, and to preserve it he has given laws, learning, teaching, governments, and penalties. And to a certain extent, reason can produce this righteousness by its own powers, although it is often shackled by its natural weakness and by the devil, who drives it to shameful acts. Moreover, we willingly give this righteousness of reason the praises it deserves, for our corrupt nature has no greater good than this, as Aristotle rightly said: "Neither the evening star nor the morning star is more beautiful than righteousness."⁶⁷ God even honors it with temporal rewards. Still, it ought not be praised at Christ's expense.

For it is false that we merit the forgiveness of sins through our works.

It is also false that people are accounted righteous before God because of the righteousness of reason.

And it is furthermore false that reason by its own powers is able to love God above all things and to fulfill God's law, namely, truly to fear God, truly to conclude that God hears prayer, willingly to obey God in death and in other visitations of God, and not to covet things that belong to others, etc.—although reason can produce civil works.

[2 Corinthians 3:13 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁴ Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.

[Galatians 3:24 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁹ This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers,

[1 Timothy 1:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

⁶⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics* V, 3, 2.

It is also false and an affront to Christ to say that people who observe the commandments of God without grace do not sin.

We have support for our position not only from the Scriptures but also from the Fathers. Augustine argues at length against the Pelagians that grace is not given on account of our merits. In *On Nature and Grace*, he says, “If natural capacity with the help of free will is in itself sufficient both for learning how one ought to live and for leading a holy life, then Christ died for nothing [Gal. 2:21*], and then the scandal of the cross [Gal. 5:11*] has been removed. Why should I also not cry out here? Yes, with a Christian’s sorrow I will cry out and I will chide them: ‘You who want to be justified by nature have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace’ [Gal. 5:4*, Vulgate]; for ‘being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish your own, you have not submitted to God’s righteousness’ [Rom. 10:3*]. For just as Christ is the ‘end of the law,’ so Christ is the Savior of corrupted human nature, for the righteousness to ‘all who believe’ [Rom. 10:4*].”⁶⁸

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²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

[Galatians 2:21 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹¹ But my friends, why am I still being persecuted if I am still preaching circumcision? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.

[Galatians 5:11 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁴ You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

[Galatians 5:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

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³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God’s righteousness.

[Romans 10:3 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁴ For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

And John 8[:36*] says, “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” Therefore reason cannot free us from sins and merit the forgiveness of sins. And in John 3[:5*] it is written, “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” But if we must be born anew through the Holy Spirit, then the righteousness of reason does not justify us before God; it does not keep the law. And Romans 3[:23*] says: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” that is, they lack the wisdom and righteousness of God, which acknowledges and glorifies God. Again Romans 8[:7–8*], “The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” These witnesses are so clear that, to use the words of Augustine as he used them in discussing this case, they do not require an acute intellect, only attentive listening.⁶⁹

Romans 10:4 (NRSV)

68 Augustine, *On Nature and Grace* 40, 47 (MPL 44:270; NPNF, ser. 1, 5:137).

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³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8:36 (NRSV)

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⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.

John 3:5 (NRSV)

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²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;

Romans 3:23 (NRSV)

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⁷ For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot,

⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:7–8 (NRSV)

69 In Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 8, 19 (MPL 44:892–93; NPNF, ser. 1, 5:451).

If the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God, the flesh certainly does not love God. If it cannot submit to the law of God, it cannot love God. If the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God, the flesh sins even when we perform outward civil works. If it cannot submit to the law of God, it certainly sins even when we perform works that are excellent and praiseworthy in human eyes. The opponents consider only the commandments of the second table, which entail the civil righteousness that reason understands. Being content with this they suppose that they satisfy the law of God. Meanwhile they fail to notice the first table, which instructs us to love God, to conclude that God is angry with sin, truly to fear God, truly to conclude that God hears our prayers. But without the Holy Spirit the human heart either despises the judgment of God in its complacency or in the face of punishment flees and hates God who judges them. Thus it does not obey the first table. Therefore since these things (contempt for God, doubt about the Word of God and about its threats and promises) cling to human nature, people truly sin even when they do respectable works without the Holy Spirit, because they do them with a godless heart, according to the text [Rom. 14:23*], “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” Such people perform their works with contempt for God, just as when Epicurus did not think that God cared for him, paid attention to him, or heard his prayer.⁷⁰ This contempt for God corrupts works that appear to be honorable, because God judges the heart.

Finally, it was very foolish for the opponents to write that human beings, guilty of eternal wrath, merit the forgiveness of sins through an elicited act of love⁷¹ since it is impossible to love God until the forgiveness of sins is first grasped by faith. For the heart that truly believes that God is angry is unable to love God until he is shown to be reconciled. For as long as he terrifies us and appears to be casting us into eternal death, human nature cannot bring itself to love such a wrathful, judging, and punishing God. It is easy for complacent minds to fabricate some foolish dreams about love, namely, that a person guilty of mortal sin can love God above all things, because they themselves do not realize what the wrath or judgment of God is. But in its agony and its battles⁷² the conscience experiences the emptiness of such philosophical speculations. Paul says [Rom. 4:15*]: “The law brings wrath.” He does not say that through the law people

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²³ But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

[Romans 14:23 \(NRSV\)](#)

⁷⁰ Cicero, *Laws* I, 7, 21–22.

⁷¹ Roman Confutation (pt. I, art. IV): “As was rejected and disapproved above so now we reject and disapprove . . . concerning good works that we do not merit forgiveness of sins.”

⁷² Jonas’s German translation: “with Satan.”

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¹⁵ For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

merit the forgiveness of sins. For the law always accuses and terrifies consciences. Therefore it does not justify since the conscience that is terrified by the law flees the judgment of God. They err, therefore, who trust that they merit the forgiveness of sins through the law and through their own works. Enough has been said for now about this righteousness of reason or of the law, which the opponents teach. Later, when we set forth our position on the righteousness of faith, the subject matter itself will compel us to marshal more testimonies, which will also be useful for refuting those errors of the opponents that we have considered to this point.

Therefore, because people cannot by their own powers live according to the law of God and because all are under sin and guilty of eternal wrath and death, we cannot be set free from sin and be justified through the law. Instead, what has been given us is the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification on account of Christ, who was given for us in order to make satisfaction for the sins of the world, and who has been appointed as the mediator and propitiator.⁷³ This promise is not conditional upon our merits; it freely offers the forgiveness of sins and justification, just as Paul says [Rom. 11:6*]: “If it is by works, it is no longer on the basis of grace.”⁷⁴ And elsewhere he says [Rom. 3:21*]: “Apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed,” that is, the forgiveness of sins is offered freely. Reconciliation does not depend upon our merits. But if the forgiveness of sins depended upon our merits and reconciliation were by the law, it would be useless. For since we do not keep the law, it would also follow that the promise of reconciliation would never apply to us. Thus Paul argues in Romans 4[:14*]: “If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the

[Romans 4:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

73 Throughout this article and occasionally in Ap XII and XXI, Melancthon calls Christ *propitiator* (the one who atones for our sins by sacrificing himself), echoing the Latin translation of Romans 3:25* (NRSV: “sacrifice of atonement”) and 1 John 2:2* (NRSV: “atoning sacrifice”). See below, Ap IV.82. Jonas translates the word as *Versöhner*, “reconciler.”

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⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

[Romans 11:6 \(NRSV\)](#)

74 Cited according the alternate reading in the NRSV.

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²¹ But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets,

[Romans 3:21 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁴ If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

promise is void.” For if the promise required the law and condition of our merits, it would follow that the promise is useless since we never keep the law.

But since justification takes place through a free promise, it follows that we cannot justify ourselves. Otherwise, why would a promise be needed? And since the promise cannot be grasped in any other way than by faith, the gospel (which is, strictly speaking, the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification on account of Christ) proclaims the righteousness of faith in Christ, which the law does not teach. Nor is this a righteousness of the law. For the law requires of us our own works and our own perfection. But the promise freely offers to us, who are oppressed by sin and death, reconciliation on account of Christ, which is received not by works, but by faith alone. This faith does not bring to God trust in our own merits, but only trust in the promise or the mercy promised in Christ.

Therefore it follows that personal faith—by which an individual believes that his or her sins are remitted on account of Christ and that God is reconciled and gracious on account of Christ—receives the forgiveness of sins and justifies us. Because in repentance,⁷⁵ that is, in terrors, faith consoles and uplifts hearts, it regenerates us and brings the Holy Spirit that we might then be able to live according to the law of God, namely, to love God, truly to fear God, truly to assert that God hears prayer, to obey God in all afflictions, and to mortify concupiscence, etc. Thus because faith, which freely receives the forgiveness of sins, sets against the wrath of God Christ as the mediator and propitiator, it does not offer up our merits or our love. This faith is the true knowledge of Christ; it uses the benefits of Christ, it renews hearts, and it precedes our fulfillment of the law. Concerning this faith, not a syllable exists in the teaching of our opponents. Hence we criticize our opponents for teaching only a righteousness of the law and not the righteousness of the gospel, which proclaims the righteousness of faith in Christ.

What Is Justifying Faith?

The opponents imagine that faith is nothing more than a knowledge of history, and so they teach that it can coexist with mortal sin.⁷⁶ As a result they say nothing about the faith by which (as Paul so often says) we are justified, because those who are accounted righteous before God do not continue living in mortal sin. But the faith that justifies is not only a knowledge of history;

[Romans 4:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

75 Throughout this article, the Latin word *poenitentia* is translated “repentance.” It also may mean “penance” or “penitence.” See CA XII and Ap XII.

76 In late-medieval theology, faith alone, “unformed faith” (*fides informata*), was the assent of the human being to the truth of Christian teaching. Even the devils possessed this “dead faith.” Only when infused with the disposition (*habitus*) of love was faith “formed” and hence justifying. Thomas Aquinas in *STh* II, 1, q. 71, a. 4 (Eng. trans., 25:15): “This takes into account the fact that faith and hope remain in an imperfect state [unformed] after mortal sin, thus lacking the habitual perfection necessary for virtue.” See also *STh* III, q. 49. a. 1, ad 5.

it is to assent⁷⁷ to the promise of God, in which forgiveness of sins and justification are bestowed freely on account of Christ. To avoid the suspicion that it is merely knowledge, we will add further that to have faith is to desire and to receive the offered promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification.

It is easy to determine the difference between this faith and the righteousness of the law. Faith is that worship⁷⁸ which receives the benefits that God offers; the righteousness of the law is that worship which offers God our own merits. God wants to be honored by faith so that we receive from him those things that he promises and offers.

But faith signifies not merely a knowledge of history but the faith which assents to the promise, as Paul clearly testifies when he says [Rom. 4:16*] righteousness “depends on faith, in order that the promise may . . . be guaranteed.” He realizes that the promise cannot be received in any other way than by faith. Therefore he compares how the promise and faith relate to one another and connects them together. It will be easy to determine what faith is if we consider the Creed where this article, “the forgiveness of sins,” is set forth. Thus it is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, and was raised again unless we also add this article, which is the real purpose⁷⁹ of the narrative: “the forgiveness of sins.” The rest must be referred back to this article, namely, that on account of Christ and not on account of our merits, the forgiveness of sins is given to us. For why was it necessary to give Christ for our sins if our merits could make satisfaction for them?

Therefore, whenever we speak about justifying faith, we must understand that these three elements belong together: the promise itself; the fact that the promise is free; and the merits of Christ as the payment and atoning sacrifice. The promise is received by faith; the word “free” excludes our merits and means that the blessing is offered only through mercy; the merits of Christ are the payment because there must be some definite atoning sacrifice for our sins. Scripture contains frequent pleas for mercy, and the holy Fathers often teach that we are saved through mercy. Therefore, every time mercy is mentioned, we must bear in mind that faith is also required, for it receives the promised mercy. Conversely, every time we speak about faith, we

77 Jonas’s German translation: “to embrace.”

78 *Latreia* (Rom. 12:1*). According to John of Damascus, this is proper only to God (in contrast to *proskunasis* offered to icons). See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* I.III, c. 120.

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¹⁶ For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us,

[Romans 4:16 \(NRSV\)](#)

79 *causa finalis*: final cause or goal. Melanchthon uses the technical language of Aristotelian logic to describe the Creed.

want the object [of faith] to be understood as well, namely, the promised mercy. For faith does not justify or save because it is a worthy work in and of itself, but only because it receives the promised mercy.

This worship, this *latreia*, is especially praised throughout the Prophets and Psalms. Although the law does not appear to teach about the free forgiveness of sins, the patriarchs knew about the promise concerning Christ, that God intended to forgive sins on account of Christ. Therefore, since they understood that Christ would be the payment for our sins, they also knew that our works could not make so high a payment. Thus they received the free mercy and forgiveness of sins by faith, just like the saints in the New Testament. The frequent pleas for mercy and faith in the Psalms and Prophets also belong here, as, for example [Ps. 130:3*]: “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?” Here the psalmist confesses his sin, but does not bring up his merits. He adds [v. 4*], “But there is forgiveness with you.”⁸⁰ Here he encourages himself with confidence in the mercy of God. And he quotes the promise: “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his Word I hope,” that is, “because you have promised the forgiveness of sins, I am sustained by your promise.”

And⁸¹ Paul cites this text concerning Abraham [Rom. 4:3]: “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” that is, Abraham realized that he had a gracious God only on account of God’s promise. He assented to the promise and did not allow himself to be pulled away from it, even though he saw that he was unclean and unworthy. He realized that God keeps a promise on account of his faithfulness and not on account of our works or merits. Terrified hearts are unable to find rest if they are supposed to think that they please God on*

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³ If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

[Psalm 130:3 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁴ But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

[Psalm 130:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

80 Literally, following the Latin Vulgate and the Greek Septuagint, “atoning sacrifice.” Jonas’s German translation renders this, following the German Bible, “forgiveness.”

81 Melancthon inserts this italicized portion in the second, octavo edition.

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³ For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”

[Romans 4:3 \(NRSV\)](#)

account of their own works or their own love or the fulfilling of the law, because sin clings to the flesh and always accuses us. However, hearts only find rest when in these terrors they are convinced that we please God because he has promised, and that God keeps his promise on account of his faithfulness, and not on account of our worthiness. Thus Abraham heard this voice, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield,” etc. [Gen. 15:1]. This revived him and he realized that God was gracious to him, not because he deserved it, but because God’s promise had to be judged as true. This faith, therefore, is reckoned to him as righteousness. That is, because he assents to the promise and receives the reconciliation offered, he is now truly righteous and acceptable to God, not on account of his own worthiness, but because he received the free promise of God. It was not without reason that this testimony from Genesis found favor with Paul. We can see how he expands on it, and how attentively he dwells on it, because he saw that the nature of faith was easily ascertained in this passage. He saw that the testimony about the reckoning of righteousness is clearly included. He saw that the credit for meriting justification and quieting the conscience is denied to works. Since Abraham is pronounced righteous because he assents to the promise and receives the offered reconciliation, he does not set his merits or works against the wrath of God. Therefore, once this passage has been diligently considered, it can teach godly minds abundantly about the entire subject. Indeed, it can be understood in this way whenever terrified minds apply it to themselves and are convinced in the same way that they ought to assent to the free promise. For they are not able to find rest in any other way until they convince themselves that they are reconciled to God because he promises it and not because our nature, life, and works are worthy.*

Thus the patriarchs, too, were justified not through the law, but through the promise and faith. It is incredible that the opponents belittle faith so much, although they see it praised everywhere as the foremost act of worship as in Psalm 50[15*]: “Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you.” This is how God wants to become known and worshiped, namely, that we receive blessings from him, and indeed, that we receive them on account of his mercy and not on account of our merits. This is the richest consolation in all afflictions, which the opponents destroy when they trivialize and disparage faith and only teach people to deal with God through works and merits.

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¹ After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”

[Genesis 15:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁵ Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

[Psalm 50:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

*Only*⁸² *Faith in Christ Justifies*

First, lest anyone think that we are speaking about an idle knowledge of history, we must first explain how faith comes into being. Thereafter, we will show both that it justifies and how this ought to be understood. We will then remove the objections of the opponents.⁸³

In the last chapter of Luke [24:47*], Christ commands the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name. The gospel accuses⁸⁴ all people of being under sin and subject to eternal wrath and death and for Christ's sake offers the forgiveness of sins and justification, which are received by faith. The proclamation of repentance, which accuses us, terrifies consciences with genuine and serious terrors. In the midst of these, hearts must once again receive consolation. This happens when they believe the promise of Christ, namely, that on his account we have the forgiveness of sins. This faith, which arises and consoles in the midst of those fears, receives the forgiveness of sins, justifies us, and makes alive. For this consolation is a new and spiritual life. These things are plain and clear. They can be understood by the faithful, and they have the testimonies of the church. Nowhere can our opponents say how the Holy Spirit is given. They imagine that the sacraments confer the Holy Spirit *ex opere operato*⁸⁵ without the recipient being favorably stirred as if in actual fact the bestowing of the Holy Spirit were without any effect.

Because we are speaking about the kind of faith that is not an idle thought, but which frees us from death, produces new life in our hearts, and is a work of the Holy Spirit, it does not coexist with mortal sin. Instead, as long as it is present, it brings forth good fruit—as we will discuss later.⁸⁶ What can possibly be said more simply and clearly about the conversion of the ungodly

82 Added to the second, octavo edition.

83 These sections begin with par. 69, 75, and 183 (cf. 122), respectively.

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⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

[Luke 24:47 \(NRSV\)](#)

84 Cf. John 16:8–11*.

85 Since the thirteenth century, *ex opere operato* (by the mere performance of the rite or by the outward act) was a formula customarily applied to grace in the sacraments in order to affirm their objective efficacy, namely, that they did not depend upon the condition of their recipient or distributor. Or, as was usually said, the sacraments were efficacious as long as the recipients did not impose an obstacle and if they had a “historical faith” (that is, if they assented to the facts of revelation) rather than trust.

86 See par. 122ff.

or about the manner of regeneration? Let them bring forward a single commentary on the *Sentences* out of such a vast array of writers that has indicated how regeneration takes place.⁸⁷ When they speak about the disposition [*habitus*] of love, they imagine that people merit [the Holy Spirit] through works—just as the present-day Anabaptists teach—and do not teach that it is received through the Word.⁸⁸ However, God cannot be dealt with and cannot be grasped in any other way than through the Word. Accordingly, justification takes place through the Word, just as St. Paul notes [Rom. 1:16*]: the gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.” Likewise [Rom. 10:17*], “Faith comes from what is heard.” At this point we could even take up the argument that faith justifies, because if justification takes place only through the Word and the Word is grasped only by faith, it follows that faith justifies. But there are other and more important arguments. We have discussed these things so far in order to show how regeneration takes place and in order that it might be understood what kind of faith we are talking about.

Now we shall show that faith⁸⁹ justifies. First of all, we would remind the readers that just as it is necessary to uphold the proposition that Christ is the mediator, so it is necessary to maintain that faith justifies. For how will Christ be the mediator if we do not use him as a mediator in justification and if we do not realize that on his account we are regarded as righteous? But this means to believe in and rely on the merits of Christ, that on his account God certainly wants to be reconciled toward us. Likewise, just as we ought to maintain that the promise of Christ is needed beyond the law, so we must maintain that faith justifies. After all, the law does not teach the free forgiveness of sins. Likewise, the law cannot be kept without the prior reception of the Holy Spirit. Therefore we must maintain that the promise of Christ is needed. It cannot, however, be received in any other way than by faith. Therefore those who deny that faith justifies do away with both the gospel and Christ and teach nothing but law.

87 The *Sentences* of Peter Lombard was the basic theological textbook of the Middle Ages, on which many scholastic theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and Gabriel Biel, wrote commentaries.

88 See the rejection of the Anabaptists’ position in CA V, 4.

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¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

[Romans 1:16 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁷ So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

[Romans 10:17 \(NRSV\)](#)

89 Jonas’s German translation adds, “and nothing else.”

But perhaps when we say that faith justifies, some will think that it refers to a foundational principle, namely, that faith is the beginning of justification or the preparation for justification. As a result, it is not by faith itself that we are accepted by God, but by the works that follow. They foolishly imagine that faith is therefore praised so highly because it is foundational.⁹⁰ For the foundation is very important, as people commonly say, “the beginning is half of everything.”⁹¹ It is as if someone should say that grammar produces the teachers for all the disciplines since it prepares the way for all other disciplines, even though it is a person’s own field that really makes each one an expert. We do not think of faith in this way. Instead, we maintain that, properly and truly, by faith itself we are regarded as righteous for Christ’s sake, that is, we are acceptable to God. And because “to be justified” means that out of unrighteous people righteous people are made or regenerated, it also means that they are pronounced or regarded as righteous. For Scripture speaks both ways. Accordingly, we first want to show that faith alone makes a righteous person out of an unrighteous one, that is, it alone receives the forgiveness of sins.

The little word “alone” offends some, even though Paul says [Rom. 3:28*]: “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law”; and again in Ephesians 2[8–9*]: “It is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast”;⁹² and again in Romans [3:24*]: “. . . justified by his grace as a gift . . .” If anyone dislikes the exclusive

90 This position, held by such Roman controversialists as Caspar Schatzgeyer, was later supported by the Council of Trent, session VI, 8.

91 Plato, *Laws* 753E (bk. 6).

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²⁸ For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

[Romans 3:28 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—

⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

[Ephesians 2:8–9 \(NRSV\)](#)

92 Latin: literally, “not from you and not by works.” Cf. Martin Luther, *On Translating: An Open Letter* (1530) (WA 30/2: 632–43; LW 35:182–98).

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²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

[Romans 3:24 \(NRSV\)](#)

particle “alone,” let them banish the exclusive terminology, “freely,” “not by works,” “it is a gift,” etc., from Paul as well. For these, too, are exclusive. However, we reject the notion of merit. We do not exclude the Word or sacraments, as the opponents falsely charge. For we said above that faith is sparked by the Word, and we give the highest praise to the ministry of the Word. To be sure, love and good works ought to follow faith. For this reason they are not excluded as though they did not follow faith. However, trust in the merit of love or works in justification is excluded. This we will clearly show.

We Obtain the Forgiveness of Sins Only by Faith in Christ

First,⁹³ we think that even the opponents will admit that in justification the forgiveness of sins is necessary,⁹⁴ for we are all are under sin. Given this, we argue as follows:

To obtain the forgiveness of sins is to be justified according to [Ps. 32:1*]: “Blessed [NRSV: Happy] are those whose transgression is forgiven.” We obtain the forgiveness of sins only by faith in Christ, not through love, nor on account of love or works, although love follows faith. Therefore we are justified by faith alone, justification being understood as the making of a righteous person out of an unrighteous one or as regeneration.

It will thus be easy to explain the minor premise⁹⁵ if we know how the forgiveness of sins takes place. Our opponents debate quite feebly whether or not the forgiveness of sins and the infusion of grace constitute a single transformation.⁹⁶ Being lazy people, they have no answer. In the forgiveness of sins, the terrors of sin and eternal death in our hearts must be conquered, just as Paul testifies in 1 Corinthians 15[:56*, 57*]: “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is

93 For the other “admissions,” see par. 82–84.

94 True for Duns Scotus and his followers. Thomas Aquinas defined the logical structure of the process of justification, beginning with the infusion of grace. See *STh* I–II, q. 113, a. 8c.

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¹ Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Psalm 32:1 (NRSV)

NRSV New Revised Standard Version of the Bible

95 The statement of par. 77: “We obtain the forgiveness of sins only by faith in Christ.”

96 Duns Scotus in *Sent.* IV., d. 16., q. 2, 4: “The infusion of grace and the expulsion of guilt or, more properly speaking, the remission of guilt, are not simply one change.” Both are bound only according to the ordained power of God.

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⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In other words, sin terrifies consciences. This happens through the law, which shows us the wrath of God against sin. But we gain the victory through Christ. How? By faith, when we encourage ourselves by confidence in the mercy promised on account of Christ. Therefore, we prove the minor premise as follows: the wrath of God cannot be conciliated as long as we set our own works against it, because Christ has been set forth as the propitiator in order that on account of him the Father may be reconciled with us. But Christ is not grasped as the mediator in any other way than by faith. By faith alone, therefore, we obtain the forgiveness of sins when we are encouraged by trust in the mercy promised on account of Christ.

Likewise, in Romans 5[:2*] Paul says: “Through him we have access to the Father,” and he adds, “through faith.”⁹⁷ Therefore we are reconciled to the Father and we receive the forgiveness of sins when we are comforted by a confidence in the mercy promised on account of Christ. Our opponents think that Christ is a mediator and propitiator because he has merited the disposition [*habitus*] of love,⁹⁸ and so they do not urge us to use him as our mediator now. Instead, they completely bury Christ by imagining that we have access to God through our own works, and through them merit this disposition [*habitus*], and then by this love *find peace of conscience*.⁹⁹ Does this not completely bury Christ and do away with the entire teaching of faith? Paul, on the contrary, teaches that we have access, that is, *peace*,¹⁰⁰ through Christ. To show how this happens, he adds that we have access “through faith.” By faith, therefore, on account of Christ,

[1 Corinthians 15:56 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 Corinthians 15:57 \(NRSV\)](#)

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² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

[Romans 5:2 \(NRSV\)](#)

⁹⁷ Citing the Vulgate and Erasmus’s Greek text. NRSV: “. . . through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.” The words “by faith,” inserted after the word “access,” are placed in a footnote as the reading of “other ancient authorities.”

⁹⁸ For example, Duns Scotus in *Sent.* III, d. 19, q. 1, along with II, d. 27, q. 1, par. 3–4.

⁹⁹ Quarto: “gain access to God.”

¹⁰⁰ Quarto: “reconciliation.”

we receive the forgiveness of sins. We cannot set our own love and our own works against the wrath of God.

Second, it is certain that sins are forgiven on account of Christ, the atoning sacrifice, according to Romans 3[:25*]: “. . . whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement . . .” Moreover, Paul adds: “effective through faith.” Thus, this atoning sacrifice benefits us when by faith we grasp the mercy promised in him and set it against the wrath and judgment of God. Hebrews 4[:14–16*] was written with the same meaning: “Since, then, we have a great high priest . . . let us approach with confidence.”¹⁰¹ For it urges us to approach God, not with confidence in our own merits, but with confidence in Christ the high priest. Therefore it requires faith.

Third, in Acts 10[:43*] Peter says: “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” How could he say it more clearly? We receive the forgiveness of sins, he says, through his name, that is, on account of him, and therefore not on account of our merits and not on account of our contrition, attrition, love,

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²⁵ whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed;

[Romans 3:25 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁴ Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.

¹⁶ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

[Hebrews 4:14–16 \(NRSV\)](#)

101 NRSV: “with boldness.” Melanchthon follows the Vulgate.

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⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

[Acts 10:43 \(NRSV\)](#)

acts of worship, or works. And he adds: “When we believe in him.” He therefore requires faith. For we cannot take hold of the name of Christ in any other way than by faith. In addition, he cites the consensus of all the prophets—which is really to cite the authority of the church. But we will have to speak about this topic again a little later when we consider repentance.¹⁰²

Fourth, the forgiveness of sins is something promised on account of Christ. Therefore it cannot be received in any other way than by faith alone, since a promise cannot be received in any other way than by faith alone. In Romans 4[:16*], Paul says, “For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed.” It is as though he said, “If the matter depended upon our merits, the promise would be uncertain and useless since we could never determine when we had earned enough merit.” Experienced consciences can readily understand this. Therefore Paul says in Galatians 3[:22*] that “Scripture has consigned everyone under sin, so that, by faith in Jesus Christ, the promise might be given to those who believe.”¹⁰³ Here he excludes our merits because he says that all are guilty and imprisoned under sin. Then he adds that the promise, namely, the forgiveness of sins and justification, is given. And he then proceeds to show how the promise can be received, namely, by faith. Thus Paul’s chief argument, which he often repeats, is based upon the nature of a promise. Nothing that one can either devise or imagine is able to overthrow Paul’s argument. Therefore faithful minds should not allow themselves to be diverted from this declaration that we receive the forgiveness of sins on account of Christ only by faith. In this they have certain and firm consolation against the terrors of sin, against eternal death, and against all the gates of hell [Matt. 16:18*].

102 See Article XII, 66ff.

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¹⁶ For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us,

[Romans 4:16 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²² But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

[Galatians 3:22 \(NRSV\)](#)

103 Melancthon cites the Vulgate. The NRSV reads: “scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”

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Since we receive the forgiveness of sins and *reconciliation on account of Christ*¹⁰⁴ by faith alone, faith alone justifies. This is because those who are reconciled are regarded as righteous and children of God, not on account of their own purity, but through mercy on account of Christ, as long as they take hold of this mercy by faith. Thus Scripture testifies [Rom. 4:5*] that we are reckoned righteous by faith. Therefore we will add some testimonies¹⁰⁵ that clearly state that faith is the very righteousness by which we are reckoned righteous before God, not because it is a work that is worthy in and of itself, but because it receives the promise by which God has pledged that on account of Christ he desires to be gracious to those who believe in him and because it knows that “Christ Jesus . . . became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” [1 Cor. 1:30*].

Paul discusses this topic especially in the Epistle to the Romans and advances the thesis that we who believe that God is reconciled with us on account of Christ are justified freely by faith. And in chapter 3[:28*] he sets forth this proposition, which contains the essential point of the

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

[Matthew 16:18 \(NRSV\)](#)

104 Quarto: “the Holy Spirit.”

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⁵ But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

[Romans 4:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

105 Par. 86–121.

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³⁰ He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

[1 Corinthians 1:30 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁸ For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

[Romans 3:28 \(NRSV\)](#)

entire discussion:¹⁰⁶ “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.” The opponents interpret this as referring to the Levitical ceremonies.¹⁰⁷ But Paul is talking not only about the ceremonies, but about the entire law. For later [Rom. 7:7*] he quotes from the Decalogue: “Do not covet.” If moral works merited the forgiveness of sins and justification, there would be no need for Christ, and the promise and everything that Paul says about the promise would be overthrown. He would also be wrong when he writes to the Ephesians [2:8*], “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” Likewise, Paul refers to Abraham and David who at least had a command from God regarding circumcision [Rom. 4:1–6*]. Thus if any works did justify, surely

106 The words “proposition” (*propositum*), “essential point” (*status*), and “discussion” (*disputatio*) are technical terms in rhetoric, employed especially by Melancthon to interpret Romans. See Philip Melancthon, *Commentary on Romans* (1540), trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 98–103.

107 See the *Confutatio* (pt. I, art. VI), citing Ambrosiaster. This was also Erasmus’s opinion.

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⁷ What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”

[Romans 7:7 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—

[Ephesians 2:8 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹ What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh?

² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

³ For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”

⁴ Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due.

⁵ But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

⁶ So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:

[Romans 4:1–6 \(NRSV\)](#)

these works (since they had a command) would have had to justify. However, Augustine correctly teaches in his lengthy argument in *On the Spirit and the Letter* that Paul is talking about the entire law. He concludes, “Now that we have considered these matters and treated them thoroughly according to the abilities which the Lord sees fit to give us, we conclude that a person is not justified by the precepts of a good life, but only through faith in Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁸

And lest we think that the statement “faith justifies” slipped from Paul at random, he reinforces and supports it with a lengthy discussion in Romans 4 and then repeats it in all of his letters. Thus in the fourth chapter of Romans [4:4–5*] he says: “Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.” Here he clearly says that faith itself is reckoned as righteousness. It is faith, therefore, that God pronounces to be righteousness. Paul adds that it is reckoned freely and denies that it could be reckoned freely if it were owed on account of works. Therefore he excludes even the merit of those works done according to the moral law. For if justification before God were owed for these works, faith would not be reckoned as righteousness apart from works. And later [4:9*], “Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.” In chapter 5[:1*] he says: “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God,” that is, we have tranquil and joyful consciences before God. And in Romans 10[:10*]: “For one believes with the heart and so is justified.” Here he states that faith is the

108 Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter* 13, 22 (MPL 44:214f.; CSEL 60:176, 13; NPNF, ser. 1, 5:93).

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⁴ Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due.

⁵ But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

[Romans 4:4–5 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁹ Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, “Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.”

[Romans 4:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹ Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

[Romans 5:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁰ For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

righteousness of the heart. Galatians 2[:16*]: “And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by . . . works of the law.” Ephesians 2[:8–9*]: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”

John 1[:12–13*]: “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.” John 3[:14–16*]: “And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may . . . not perish but may

Romans 10:10 (NRSV)

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¹⁶ yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.

Galatians 2:16 (NRSV)

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⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—
⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NRSV)

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¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,
¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:12–13 (NRSV)

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¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

John 3:14–16 (NRSV)

have eternal life.” Likewise [John 3:17–18*], “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned.”

Acts 13[:38–39*]: “Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you; by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free¹⁰⁹ from all those sins from which you could not be freed¹¹⁰ by the law of Moses.” How is it possible to speak more clearly about the work of Christ and justification? The law, he says, did not justify. As a result, Christ was given in order that we might believe that we are justified on account of him. He clearly denies justification to the law. Therefore we are reckoned righteous on account of Christ when we believe that God has been reconciled with us on account of him.

Acts 4[:11–12*]: “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under

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¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

[John 3:17–18 \(NRSV\)](#)

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³⁸ Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you;

³⁹ by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

[Acts 13:38–39 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹⁰⁹ Melancthon follows the Vulgate, which has “justified.”

¹¹⁰ Melancthon follows the Vulgate, which has “justified.”

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¹¹ This Jesus is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.’

¹² There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

[Acts 4:11–12 \(NRSV\)](#)

heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” But the name of Christ is grasped only by faith. Therefore we are saved by trusting in the name of Christ and not in our works. For here “name” signifies the cause called upon, because salvation takes place on account of it. To call upon the name of Christ is to trust in the name of Christ as the cause or the payment on account of which we are saved. Acts 15[9*]: “and in cleansing their hearts by faith.” Therefore that faith about which the apostles speak is not vain knowledge, but is that which receives the Holy Spirit and justifies us.

Habakkuk 2[4*]: “But the righteous live by their faith.” Here he writes first that people are righteous by faith, by which they believe that God is reconciled, and he adds that this same faith makes alive, because it produces peace, joy, and eternal life in the heart. Isaiah 53[11*]: “By the knowledge of him he will justify many.”¹¹¹ But what is it to know Christ other than to know the blessings of Christ,¹¹² the promises, which through the gospel he has scattered throughout the world? And to know these blessings, in a proper and true sense, is to believe in Christ, to believe that God will keep the promises which he makes on account of Christ. But Scripture is full of such testimonies. In some places it commends the law, in other places it commends the promises concerning Christ and concerning the forgiveness of sins and our gracious acceptance on account of Christ. Similar testimonies are also found scattered throughout the holy Fathers. Ambrose¹¹³ wrote in a letter to a certain Irenaeus: “Moreover, the world was subjected to him through the

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⁹ and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us.

[Acts 15:9 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁴ Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

[Habakkuk 2:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹¹ Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

[Isaiah 53:11 \(NRSV\)](#)

111 Following the Vulgate. NRSV: “He shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.”

112 See Philip Melancthon’s *Loci communes theologici* (1521) in *Melancthon and Bucer*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 21.

113 Ep 73 (MPL 16:1307f.; *St. Ambrose: Letters*, trans. Mary M. Beyenka, *The Fathers of the Church* 26 [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1954], 464–68).

law, because by the prescriptions of the law everyone was indicted and by the works of the law no one is justified. In other words, through the law sin is recognized, but its guilt is not relieved. The law was shown to be harmful since all are made sinners, but when the Lord Jesus came, he forgave the sin for everyone, which no one could avoid, and he blotted out the bill of indictment that stood against us by the pouring out of his blood [Col. 2:14*]. This is what Paul says [Rom. 5:20*], ‘the sin abounded through the law; but grace superabounded through Jesus.’ For after the entire world was placed in subjection, he took away the sin of the entire world, just as John testified, saying [John 1:29*], ‘Behold the Lamb of God, behold, the one who takes away the sin of the world.’ And so let no one glory in works, because no one is justified by their deeds. But those who are righteous have it as a gift, because after the washing [of baptism] they were justified. It is faith, therefore, that frees people through the blood of Christ: ‘blessed are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered’ [Ps. 32:1*].” These words of Ambrose clearly support our position. He denies justification to works and attributes it to faith, which frees us through the blood of Christ. Let them gather into one place all the commentators on the *Sentences* who are adorned with magnificent titles. Some of them are called “angelic”; others, “subtle”; and others “irrefutable.”¹¹⁴ Read and reread all of them. They will still contribute less to an understanding of Paul than this one statement from Ambrose.

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¹⁴ erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross.

[Colossians 2:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁰ But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

[Romans 5:20 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

[John 1:29 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹ Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

[Psalm 32:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and Alexander of Hales, respectively.

Augustine writes many things in the same vein against the Pelagians. In *On the Spirit and the Letter*, he says this: “The righteousness of the law is set forth in this statement, ‘the person who does it shall live by it’ [Rom. 10:5*; cf. Lev. 18:5*], so that all who have recognized their own infirmity, may—conciliating the one who justifies—attain to, do, and live in the law not by their own strength or by the letter of the law itself but by faith.” Here he clearly says that the Justifier is conciliated by faith and that justification is obtained by faith. And a little later Augustine says: “By the law we fear God; by faith we hope in God. But to those who fear punishment, grace is hidden; let the soul that labors under this fear . . . flee by faith to the mercy of God, in order that he may give what he commands.”¹¹⁵ Here he teaches that our hearts are terrified by the law, but that they receive consolation by faith. And he teaches [us] to take hold of the mercy by faith before we attempt to keep the law. A little later we shall quote several other statements as well.

It is truly amazing that the opponents remain unmoved by so many passages from Scripture that clearly attribute justification to faith and moreover deny it to works. Surely, they do not think that the same thing is repeated over and over for no reason, do they? Surely they do not think that these words fell from the Holy Spirit inadvertently, do they? But they have devised a piece of sophistry with which to evade them. They say that these passages ought to be interpreted as referring to “formed faith.”¹¹⁶ In other words, they do not attribute justification to faith except on account of love. Indeed, they do not in any way attribute justification to faith, but only to love, because they imagine that faith can exist alongside mortal sin. For where does this end but with the abolition of the promise again and a return to the law? If faith receives the forgiveness of sins on account of love, the forgiveness of sins will always be uncertain because we never love as much as we should. Indeed, we do not love at all until our hearts truly realize that the

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⁵ Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.”

[Romans 10:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁵ You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live: I am the Lord.

[Leviticus 18:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

115 Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter* 29, 51 (MPL 44:232–33; NPNF, ser. 1, 5:105).

116 Scholastic theologians, using Aristotelian categories of form and matter, argued that faith (defined as assent to the historical truths) provided only the “material,” but that this material must be “formed” (shaped and given reality) by love (*caritas*). They often cited as proof Galatians 5:6* (see below, par. 111), “faith working through charity.” Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II, 1, q. 113, a. 4, ad 1: “The movement of faith is only perfect if it is informed by charity; therefore in the justification of the unrighteous, there is also a movement of charity together with the movement of faith.”

forgiveness of sins has been given to us. Thus as long as our opponents require a trust in our own love for the forgiveness of sins and justification, they completely abolish the gospel concerning the free forgiveness of sins. For they neither render love nor understand it unless they believe that the forgiveness of sins is freely received.

We, too, say that love should follow faith, as Paul also says [Gal. 5:6*], “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith made effective through love.”¹¹⁷ But we should not conclude from this that we receive the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation by trusting in this love or on account of this love, just as we do not receive the forgiveness of sins on account of any other works that follow it. Only by faith, and indeed, by faith in the strict sense of the word, do we receive the forgiveness of sins, because a promise cannot be received in any other way than by faith. But faith, strictly speaking, is that which assents to the promise. This is the faith about which Scripture speaks. And because faith receives the forgiveness of sins and reconciles us to God, we are first regarded as righteous by this faith on account of Christ before we love and keep the law, although love necessarily follows. And this faith is no idle knowledge, nor can it coexist with mortal sin; but it is a work of the Holy Spirit that frees us from death and raises and makes alive terrified minds. And because this faith alone receives the forgiveness of sins, makes us acceptable to God, and *brings peace and tranquillity to the conscience*,¹¹⁸ it can more correctly be called a “grace that makes us pleasing to God”¹¹⁹ than an effect that follows, namely, love.

Up to this point, in order to make the matter very clear, we have demonstrated fully enough both from the testimonies of Scripture and from arguments derived from the Scripture that by faith alone we obtain the forgiveness of sins on account of Christ and by faith alone we are justified, that is, out of unrighteous people we are made righteous or are regenerated. It can easily be determined how necessary the knowledge of this faith is, because through it alone we understand the work of Christ and by it alone we receive the benefits of Christ. This alone brings a sure and firm consolation to godly minds. Moreover, there needs to be a teaching in the church from which the faithful may receive the certain hope of salvation. For the opponents give bad advice when they command people to doubt whether or not they have obtained the forgiveness of

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⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love.

[Galatians 5:6 \(NRSV\)](#)

117 Following the alternate reading in the NRSV.

118 Quarto: “brings the Holy Spirit.”

119 Latin: *gratia gratum faciens* (grace that makes us acceptable), as distinguished in medieval theology from *gratia gratis data* (grace given freely). The *gratia gratum faciens* designated the sacramental infusion of the disposition (*habitus*) of charity that formed the material of faith, transported people into a state of grace, and made them inclined toward meritorious work.

sins.¹²⁰ How will their people, who have heard nothing about this faith and who assume that they must doubt whether or not they have obtained the forgiveness of sins, sustain themselves when dying? Furthermore, the gospel, that is, the promise that sins are remitted freely on account of Christ, must be retained in the church of Christ. Those who teach nothing about the faith that we are discussing completely destroy that gospel. But the scholastics do not teach a single word about this faith. By following them and rejecting this faith, our opponents fail to see that they thereby abolish the entire promise of the free forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of Christ.

*Love and the Fulfilling of the Law*¹²¹

At this point, the opponents raise objections with such texts as: “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments” [Matt. 19:17*]; “It is . . . the doers of the law who will be justified” [Rom. 2:13*]; and many other such passages about the law and works. But before we respond to these, we must first set forth what we believe about love and the fulfilling of the law.

120 Thus Gabriel Biel, in *Sent.* II, d. 27, q. 1, a. 3, dub. 5Q, wrote that “it is difficult to know whether one possesses this love, and perhaps it is by nature impossible.” This question was first posed to Luther by Cardinal Cajetan in Augsburg in 1518 (WA 2:6–26; LW 31:255–92).

121 Some editions of the Book of Concord treat this as a separate article.

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¹⁷ And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

[Matthew 19:17 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

[Romans 2:13 \(NRSV\)](#)

It is written in the prophet, “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts” [Jer. 31:33*]. And in Romans 3[:31*] Paul says: “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.” And Christ says [Matt. 19:17*]: “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” Again, “If I . . . do not have love, I gain nothing” [1 Cor. 13:3*]. These statements, and others like them, assert that we ought to begin to keep the law and then keep it more and more. Now, we are not talking about ceremonies, but about that law which deals with the impulses of the heart, namely, the Decalogue. Because faith truly brings the Holy Spirit and produces a new life in our hearts, it must also produce spiritual impulses in our hearts. The prophet shows what those impulses are when he says [Jer. 31:33*], “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” Therefore, after we have been justified and

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³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

[Jeremiah 31:33 \(NRSV\)](#)

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³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

[Romans 3:31 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁷ And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

[Matthew 19:17 \(NRSV\)](#)

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³ If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

[1 Corinthians 13:3 \(NRSV\)](#)

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³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

[Jeremiah 31:33 \(NRSV\)](#)

reborn by faith, we begin to fear and love God, to pray for and expect help from him, to thank and praise him, and to obey him in our afflictions. We also begin to love our neighbor because our hearts have spiritual and holy impulses.

These things cannot happen until after we have by faith been justified, reborn, and received the Holy Spirit. This is because, first, it is impossible to keep the law without Christ and, second, it is impossible to keep the law without the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit is received by faith according to the passage in Paul, Galatians 3[:14*]: “So that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Again, how can the human heart love God as long as it believes that he is terribly angry and that he is oppressing us with temporal and eternal calamities? However, the law always accuses us; it always shows that God is angry. Therefore God is not loved until after we grasp his mercy by faith. Not until then does he become someone who can be loved.

Even though civil works, that is, the outward works of the law, can be carried out to some extent without Christ and without the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, it is evident from what we have said, that those things which go to the heart of the divine law (that is, those attitudes of the heart toward God that are taught in the first table) cannot be rendered without the Holy Spirit. But our opponents are fine theologians. They focus on the second table and civil works; they pay no attention to the first, as though it were irrelevant, or at best they require only outward observances. They do not at all consider that eternal law, which is placed far above the sense and understanding of all creatures, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart” [Deut. 6:5*].

But Christ was given for this very purpose: that on account of him the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit, who produces in us a new and eternal life and also eternal righteousness, may be given to us. *First,*¹²² *the Spirit reveals Christ, just as it is written in John 16[:14*], “He will*

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¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

[Galatians 3:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

[Deuteronomy 6:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

122 Added in the second, octavo edition.

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¹⁴ He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

[John 16:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” Then he also brings the other gifts: love, prayer, thanksgiving, chastity, endurance, etc.

Therefore we cannot truly keep the law until we have received the Holy Spirit through faith [John 16:15*]. Therefore Paul states that the law is established, not abolished, through faith, because the law can be kept only when the Holy Spirit is given. And Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 3[:15*] that the veil, by which the face of Moses was covered, cannot be removed except by faith in Christ, by which the Holy Spirit is received. For this is what he says, “Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” [3:15–17*]. Paul understands the “veil” to be human opinion about the entire law (the Decalogue and ceremonial laws), as when hypocrites suppose that external and civil works satisfy the law of God and that sacrifices and rituals justify before God *ex opere operato*.¹²³ But this “veil” is removed from us (that is, this error is taken away) when God shows our hearts our impurity and the magnitude of our sin. Then we see for the first time that we are far from fulfilling the law. Then we learn how our smug and indifferent flesh does not fear God and does not truly believe that God looks out for us, but instead thinks that human beings are born and die by chance. Then we experience how we fail to believe that God pardons us and hears us. But when we are consoled by faith through hearing the gospel and the forgiveness of sins, we receive the Holy Spirit, so that we are now able to think rightly about God, to fear God, and to believe

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¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

[John 16:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁵ Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds;

[2 Corinthians 3:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁵ Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds;

¹⁶ but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

[2 Corinthians 3:15–17 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹²³ See p. 131, n. 85, for an explanation of this term, “by the mere performance of the rite.”

him, etc. These things make it clear that the law cannot be kept without Christ and without the Holy Spirit.

We openly confess, therefore, that the keeping of the law must begin in us and then increase more and more. And we include both simultaneously, namely, the inner spiritual impulses and the outward good works. Therefore the opponents' claims are false when they charge that our people do not teach about good works since our people not only require them but also show how they can be done.¹²⁴ Experience proves that hypocrites who try to keep the law by their own strength cannot accomplish what they set out to achieve. For human nature is far too weak to resist the devil by its own strength. He holds everyone captive who has not been set free through faith. Against the devil the power of Christ is needed. That is, because we know that on account of Christ we have the promise and are heard, we pray for the Holy Spirit to govern and defend us so that we may neither be deceived and thus err nor be driven to undertake anything against God's will. So the psalm [68:18*] teaches, "You ascended the high mount, leading captives in your train and receiving gifts from people." For Christ conquered the devil and gave us his promise and the Holy Spirit so that with God's help we, too, might conquer. And 1 John 3[:8*], "The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil."

Furthermore, we not only teach how the law can be kept, but also in what way it pleases God when we keep any of it, that is, not because we live up to the law but because we are in Christ—as we shall show a little later. It is clear, then, that our teachers require good works. In fact, we add that it is impossible to separate love for God (however meager it may be) from faith. For through Christ we have access to the Father, and, having received the forgiveness of sins, we now truly realize that we have a God (that is, a God who cares for us), we call upon him, give thanks to him, and fear and love him. Thus John teaches in his first epistle [4:19*]: "We love him

124 Cf. CA XX.

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¹⁸ You ascended the high mount, leading captives in your train and receiving gifts from people, even from those who rebel against the Lord God's abiding there.

[Psalm 68:18 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

[John 3:8 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet.

[John 4:19 \(NRSV\)](#)

because he first loved us,” namely, because he gave his Son for us and forgave our sins. In this way he shows that faith comes first and love follows. Likewise, the faith about which we are speaking exists in repentance, that is, it is conceived in the terrors of the conscience that experiences the wrath of God against our sin and seeks forgiveness of sins and deliverance from sin. In such terrors and other afflictions, this faith ought to grow and be strengthened. Therefore, it cannot exist in those who live according to the flesh, who take pleasure in their lusts, and who succumb to them. Accordingly, Paul asserts [Rom. 8:1*, 4*], “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” Again [Rom. 8:12–13*], “We are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Therefore the faith that receives the forgiveness of sins for the heart that is terrified and fleeing sin does not remain in those who succumb to their lusts, nor does it coexist with mortal sin.

From among these results of faith the opponents single out only one, namely, love, and teach that love justifies.¹²⁵ From this it is clear that they teach only the law. They do not teach that we first receive the forgiveness of sins through faith. They do not teach about Christ as the mediator, namely, that on account of Christ we have a gracious God. They teach that it is on account of our love. And yet, they do not and cannot say what the nature of that love is. They claim to fulfill the law when this glory properly belongs to Christ. They set over against the judgment of God a trust

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¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[Romans 8:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁴ so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

[Romans 8:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—

¹³ for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

[Romans 8:12–13 \(NRSV\)](#)

125 Cf. the Confutatio (pt. I, art. VI): “Often the opponents attribute justification to faith, when the same belongs to grace and love.”

in their own works when they say that they merit *de condigno* grace and eternal life.¹²⁶ This is simply a wicked and futile trust. For in this life we cannot live up to the law, because our sinful nature does not stop bringing forth evil desires, even though the Spirit in us resists them.

But someone might ask: “Since we also grant that love is a work of the Holy Spirit, and since it is righteousness because it is the fulfillment of the law, why do we not teach that it justifies?” We must respond to this. In the first place, it is certain that we do not receive the forgiveness of sins either through our love or on account of our love, but on account of Christ, by faith alone. By focusing on the promise and thus by realizing that faith alone conquers the terrors of sin and death, it is certainly firm that God pardons (because Christ did not die in vain, etc.). Whoever doubts the forgiveness of sins insults Christ by thinking that such sin is greater or stronger than the death and promise of Christ, even though Paul says [Rom. 5:20*] that “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,” that is, mercy is more plenteous than sin. Whoever thinks that receiving the forgiveness of sins is a consequence of acts of love insults Christ and will discover in the judgment of God that such faith in one’s own righteousness is wicked and futile. Therefore, it must be that faith reconciles and *makes a righteous person out of an unrighteous one*.¹²⁷ And just as we do not receive the forgiveness of sins through other virtues of the law or on account of them, namely, on account of patience, chastity, obedience to magistrates, etc. (although these virtues ought to follow), so, too, we do not receive the forgiveness of sins on account of love for God, although it is necessary for love to follow faith.

Besides, the figure of speech called synecdoche, by which we sometimes combine cause and effect in the same phrase, is well known.¹²⁸ And in this sense Christ says in Luke 7[:47*],

126 For these two types of merit see above, p. 123, nn. 61 and 62. Bonaventure and Biel, among others, believed that in a state of sin a person produced merits of congruity. Infused with a disposition (*habitus*) of love in a state of grace, such a work was a merit of condignity.

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²⁰ But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

[Romans 5:20 \(NRSV\)](#)

127 Quarto: “justifies.”

128 In his copy of the quarto edition, Luther added marginal comments to par. 152–54, arguing first that because of Jesus’ words in Luke 7:50* faith receives forgiveness and second that other words of Jesus in v. 47* (“the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little”) demonstrate the priority of forgiveness. Jesus said these words to counter the Pharisees’ pride. The woman they thought a sinner was above them in faith and in love, outstripping them even in the righteousness of the law. Luther called this a rhetorical inversion. Third, the parable Jesus tells (vv. 41–43*) also demonstrates the priority of forgiveness over love. Not only did the woman believe in God, but she demonstrated that faith publicly. Jesus declares her righteous before God by her (hidden) faith and before the Pharisees publicly by her works according to their own law.

“Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love.” For Christ interprets this very statement when he adds [v. 50*], “Your faith has saved you.” So Christ did not intend to say that the woman had merited the forgiveness of sins by her work of love. For that reason he clearly states, “Your faith has saved you.” But faith is that which grasps God’s free mercy on account of God’s Word. Whoever denies that this is faith completely misunderstands the essence of faith. And the story itself shows what he calls “love.” The woman came with this conviction about Christ: that she should seek the forgiveness of sins from him. This is the highest way to worship Christ. Nothing greater could she ascribe to Christ. By seeking the forgiveness of sins from him, she truly acknowledged him as the Messiah. Now to think about Christ in this way, to worship and take hold of him in this way, is truly to believe. Moreover, Christ used the word “love” not with respect to the woman but against the Pharisee, because he was contrasting the entire worship of the Pharisee with the entire worship of the woman. He reprimands the Pharisee for not acknowledging that Christ was the Messiah, even though he showed Christ the outward courtesies due to a guest who is a great and holy man. He points to the poor woman and praises her worship, her anointing, and her tears, etc., all of which were signs of faith and a kind of confession, namely, that she sought the forgiveness of sins from Christ. It was not without reason that this truly powerful example moved Christ to reprimand the Pharisee, who was a wise and honorable man, but an unbelieving man. He charges him with ungodliness and admonishes him with the example of the poor woman. He shows that it is a disgrace to the Pharisee that an unlearned woman believes in God while he, a very teacher of the law, does not believe, does not acknowledge the Messiah, and does not seek the forgiveness of sins or salvation from him.

Therefore he praises her entire act of worship in this way—as often happens in Scripture—so that we may understand many things under this one phrase. Later we shall take up at greater length similar passages, such as, “So give for alms those things that are within. . . . everything will be clean for you” [Luke 11:41*]. He requires not only alms but also the righteousness of

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⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.”

[Luke 7:47 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

[Luke 7:50 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁴¹ So give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you.

[Luke 11:41 \(NRSV\)](#)

faith. In the same way he says here [Luke 7:47*], “Her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; because¹²⁹ she has shown great love,” that is, because she truly worshiped me with faith and with the acts and signs of faith. He includes the entire act of worship but teaches that it is faith, strictly speaking, that receives the forgiveness of sins even though love, confession, and other good fruits ought to follow. Therefore by this he does not imply that these fruits are the payment or the sacrifice that earns the forgiveness of sins, that reconciles us to God.

We are debating about an important matter, namely, about the honor of Christ and the source from which the faithful might seek a sure and certain consolation—whether we should place our confidence in Christ or in our own works. But if we put it in our works, Christ will be robbed of his honor as our mediator and propitiator. And, faced with God’s judgment, we will discover that such confidence was futile, and consciences will then plunge into despair. For if the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation take place not freely on account of Christ but on account of our love, then no one will have the forgiveness of sins until he or she has kept the entire law, because the law does not justify as long as it can accuse us. Thus it is clear that, since justification is reconciliation on account of Christ, we are justified by faith, because it is most certain that the forgiveness of sins is received by faith alone.

Now then, let us respond *to the question set forth above on why love does not justify.*¹³⁰ The opponents are right in thinking that love is the fulfillment of the law,¹³¹ *and that obedience to the law would be righteousness if we kept the law. However, up to this point we have shown that the promises have been given precisely because we are unable to keep the law. Thus for this reason Paul denies that we are justified by the law. The opponents err because in this entire controversy they pay attention to nothing but the law. For human reason is unable to reach any other conclusion than that righteousness must be sought from the law, because obedience to the law is righteousness.*

But the gospel calls us back from the law to the promises, and it teaches that we are not regarded as righteous on account of obedience to the law for we do not live up to the law. But we are regarded as righteous for the very reason that reconciliation is given us on account of Christ, and we receive this reconciliation only by faith. Before we keep the law, therefore, we must receive by faith the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation. Good God, how do those who deny that we receive the forgiveness of sins by faith alone on account of Christ dare to speak

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⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.”

Luke 7:47 (NRSV)

129 NRSV: “hence.” Melancthon cited the Vulgate.

130 Quarto: “Now then, let us respond to the objection that we mentioned earlier.”

131 The following italicized passage is an expansion of par. 159–60 in the quarto edition.

Christ's name with their lips? How do they dare to look upon the books of the gospel with their eyes?

*Second, the very fulfillment of the law, which follows our renewal, is scanty and impure. For although the renewal has begun, nevertheless the remnants of sin still cling to this nature and always accuse us unless by faith in Christ we take hold of the forgiveness of sins, and we know that we have access to God not on account of our fulfillment of the law but on account of Christ. Therefore the fulfillment of the law is not accepted on its own account but on account of faith.*¹³²

Therefore, Paul says [Rom. 3:31*] that the law is established through faith. This should not only be understood to mean that by faith the regenerate receive the Holy Spirit and that they have impulses which agree with God's law, but it is by far more important to add this as well: that we should realize that we are a long way from the perfect keeping of the law. Therefore we dare not hold that we are regarded as righteous before God on account of our observance of the law. *Instead,*¹³³ *it must be realized that we are regarded as righteous or accepted on account of Christ, not on account of the law or our works, and that this incipient observing of the law pleases God because we are in Christ. Likewise, that on account of faith in Christ what is lacking in fulfilling the law is not reckoned to us.*¹³⁴

Paul teaches this in Galatians 3[:13*] when he says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us," that is, the law condemns all people, but by undergoing the punishment of sin while remaining sinless and by becoming a sacrifice for us, Christ has taken into himself the right of the law to accuse and condemn those who believe in him, because he himself is the atoning sacrifice for them, on account of which they are now reckoned righteous.

132 Par. 162–74 of the quarto edition are omitted in the second, octavo edition. The material in par. 162–64, 167–69, and 172–74 is included in the octavo edition after par. 179 below.

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³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

[Romans 3:31 \(NRSV\)](#)

133 This italicized section parallels par. 177 in the quarto edition.

134 For par. 178 in the quarto edition, see the next italicized paragraph ("For far above our purity . . . satisfaction of Christ").

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¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us— for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"—

[Galatians 3:13 \(NRSV\)](#)

In the same vein, he writes to the Colossians [Col. 2:10*], “and you have come to fullness in him.” It is as if he were saying, “Even though you are still far from the perfection of the law, nevertheless the remnants of your sin do not condemn you, because on account of Christ you have a certain and firm reconciliation when you believe, even though sin still clings to your flesh.”

For far above our purity, indeed far above the law, ought to be placed the death and satisfaction of Christ, which have been given to us that we may realize that we have a gracious God on account of his satisfaction and not on account of our fulfillment of the law. Trust is ungodly when placed in our fulfilling the law. However, that trust, which is placed in the satisfaction of Christ, is necessary.

Third,¹³⁵ only that which brings peace to consciences justifies before God. For we are not righteous and made alive as long as the conscience flees the judgment of God and is angry with God. Furthermore, faith alone brings peace to consciences, according to the passage [Rom. 5:1], “Since we are justified by faith we have peace.” Likewise [Hab. 2:4*; Rom. 1:17*], “The*

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¹⁰ and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.

[Colossians 2:10 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹³⁵ The text beginning at the word “third” and running through the sentence, “Therefore faith alone justifies, and good works please God on account of faith,” later in this paragraph replaces par. 180–82 of the quarto edition.

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¹ Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

[Romans 5:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁴ Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

[Habakkuk 2:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

[Romans 1:17 \(NRSV\)](#)

*one who is righteous through faith will live,*¹³⁶ *that is, by faith a person conquers the terrors of death, by faith a person is uplifted and receives joy and life. And faith brings this peace not because it is a worthwhile work in and of itself, but only because it receives the promise that is offered and does not look upon its own worthiness. Therefore faith alone justifies, and good works please God on account of faith. What could the opponents possibly bring forward against this argument? What could they possibly come up with against this clear truth?*

*For the minor premise*¹³⁷ *is most certain, that is, that our works are unable to bring peace to the conscience when God judges and convicts us and shows us our impurity. Thus Scripture often impresses this thought upon us: in Psalm [143:2*], “Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.” Here he simply takes away the glory of righteousness from everyone, even the saints and servants of God, if God did not forgive but instead judged and convicted their hearts. Now when the psalmist boasts of his own righteousness elsewhere, he speaks about his own cause against the persecutors of the Word of God and not about his personal purity. And so he asks that God’s cause and God’s glory be defended, as in Psalm 7[:8*], “Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness.”*

Elsewhere [Ps. 43:1]: “Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause.” Again, Psalm 130[:3*] teaches that no one is able to withstand the judgment of God if he should mark our*

136 According to the alternative reading in the NRSV.

137 In logic, the “minor premise” is the second in a syllogism. Here the *major premise* states that only that which gives the conscience peace justifies; the *minor premise* states that only forgiveness through faith alone gives peace; the *conclusion* is that faith alone justifies.

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² Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.

Psalm 143:2 (NRSV)

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⁸ The Lord judges the peoples; judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me.

Psalm 7:8 (NRSV)

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¹ Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people; from those who are deceitful and unjust deliver me!

Psalm 43:1 (NRSV)

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sins: “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?” And Job 9[:28]: “I became afraid of all my works.”¹³⁸ Again [9:30–31*], “If I wash myself with soap and cleanse my hands with lye, yet you will plunge me into filth.” And Proverbs 20[:9*]: “Who can say, I have made my heart clean?” And 1 John 1[:8*]: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” And in the Lord’s Prayer the saints ask for the forgiveness of sins; therefore the saints also have sins. In Numbers [14:18*]: “. . . by no means clearing the*

³ If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

Psalm 130:3 (NRSV)

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²⁸ I become afraid of all my suffering, for I know you will not hold me innocent.

Job 9:28 (NRSV)

138 Following the Vulgate. NRSV: “suffering.”

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³⁰ If I wash myself with soap and cleanse my hands with lye,

³¹ yet you will plunge me into filth, and my own clothes will abhor me.

Job 9:30–31 (NRSV)

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⁹ Who can say, “I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin”?

Proverbs 20:9 (NRSV)

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⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:8 (NRSV)

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¹⁸ ‘The Lord is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation.’

Numbers 14:18 (NRSV)

guilty . . .” And Zechariah [2:13*] says, “Be silent, all people, before the Lord.” And Isaiah [40:6–7*]: “All people are grass, their constancy [glory] is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it,” that is, the flesh and the righteousness of the flesh cannot endure the judgment of God. And Jonah says in chapter 2 [v. 8*]: “Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty,” that is, every confidence is futile except a confidence in mercy. Mercy preserves us; our own merits and our own efforts do not preserve us. These declarations and others like them in the Scriptures testify that our works are impure and in need of mercy. Therefore, so works do not bring peace to consciences, but mercy grasped through faith does.

Fourth,¹³⁹ Christ does not stop being our mediator after we are reborn. They err who imagine that he has merited only a first infusion of grace and that afterward we please God and merit eternal life by our fulfillment of the law.¹⁴⁰ Christ remains the mediator, and we must always affirm that because of him we have a gracious God, even though we are unworthy. This is just as Paul says [Rom. 5:2*, Vulgate], “. . . through whom we have obtained access to God

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¹³ Be silent, all people, before the Lord; for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.

[Zechariah 2:13 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁶ A voice says, “Cry out!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.

⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass.

[Isaiah 40:6–7 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁸ Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty.

[Jonah 2:8 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹³⁹ This paragraph is equivalent to par. 162–63 in the quarto edition.

¹⁴⁰ According to Thomas Aquinas, while human beings cannot merit first, or justifying, grace, they do merit the increase of grace as the justified. This is a merit of congruity with respect to our humanity and a merit of condignity with respect to the Holy Spirit’s work.

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through faith.” As we have said, our observance of the law is impure because our nature is horribly corrupted. Therefore the psalm says [32:1], “Blessed are those whose transgression is forgiven.” Therefore we need the forgiveness of sins even when we have good works. Moreover, this forgiveness is obtained always by faith. In this way Christ remains the high priest and mediator. Therefore the fulfillment of the law pleases God not on account of itself, but because by faith we grasp Christ and believe that we have a gracious God, not on account of the law but on account of Christ.*

Fifth,¹⁴¹ if we had to believe that after our renewal we must become acceptable not by faith on account of Christ but on account of our keeping of the law, our conscience would never find rest. Instead, it would be driven to despair. For the law always accuses since we never satisfy the law. The entire church confesses this. For Paul says [Rom. 7:19], “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” Likewise [7:25*], “With my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.” For who loves or fears God enough? Who endures patiently enough the afflictions imposed by God? Who does not often doubt whether human affairs are ruled by the counsel of God? Who does not often doubt whether one is heard by God? Who is not often angry that the wicked enjoy a better lot than the pious and that the godly are oppressed by the wicked? Who is not often enraged by the judgment of God when he seems to abandon us? How many live up to their calling? How many love their neighbor as themselves? Who is not incited by concupiscence? About these sins the psalm says*

² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

[Romans 5:2 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹ Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

[Psalm 32:1 \(NRSV\)](#)

141 For this paragraph in the quarto edition, see par. 164, 167–69.

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¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

[Romans 7:19 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

[Romans 7:25 \(NRSV\)](#)

[Ps. 32:6*], “Therefore let all who are the saints¹⁴² offer prayer to you.” Here he says that the saints pray for the forgiveness of sins. Those who do not think that the wicked desires of the flesh are sins are more than blind.¹⁴³ Paul [Gal. 5:17*] says about these things, “For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit” and vice versa. The flesh distrusts God, trusts the things around it, seeks human help in calamities, and, contrary to the will of God, flees from afflictions that, according to God’s command, it ought to bear, and doubts the mercy of God. The Holy Spirit contends with such desires in our hearts in order to restrain and mortify them and in order to implant new spiritual impulses.

Augustine¹⁴⁴ says, “All the commandments of God are fulfilled, when whatever is not done is forgiven.”¹⁴⁵ Therefore, he requires faith even when doing good works, that is, that we believe that we are pleasing to God on account of Christ and that the works themselves which please God are not worthy in and of themselves. And in *Against the Pelagians*, Jerome says, “Therefore we are righteous at the very point when we confess that we are sinners. And our righteousness consists not in our own merit, but in God’s mercy.”¹⁴⁶ Therefore it is necessary when we begin to fulfill the law for that faith to be present which affirms that we have a gracious God on account of Christ. For mercy cannot be grasped except by faith. Therefore it is nothing but a doctrine of utter despair to teach that we are accepted by faith not on account of Christ, but on account of our own fulfillment of the law.

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⁶ Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

[Psalm 32:6 \(NRSV\)](#)

142 Following the Vulgate. NRSV: “all who are faithful.”

143 For the debate over concupiscence, see Ap II, 38–45.

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¹⁷ For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.

[Galatians 5:17 \(NRSV\)](#)

144 This paragraph equals par. 172–74 in the quarto edition.

145 Augustine, *Retractions* I, 19, 3 (MPL 32:615; CSEL 36:90 [designated I, 18, 4]; *The Retractions*, trans. Mary Bogan, *The Fathers of the Church* 60 [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1968], 80–81).

146 Jerome, *Dialog against the Pelagians* I, 13 (MPL 23:527; NPNF, ser. 2, 6:454).

From all these things it is sufficiently clear that faith alone justifies. That is, first, that it obtains the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation on account of Christ, and that faith alone regenerates (for by faith alone the Holy Spirit is received). Second, when we begin to fulfill the law it is not pleasing before God in and of itself. Moreover, since justification must still be sought elsewhere (namely, in the promise of Christ), and since only faith brings peace to the conscience, it follows that faith alone justifies. For we must always believe that we are accepted not on account of the law, but on account of Christ. For we are not justified by the law but by the promise. Moreover, the honor of Christ should not be transferred to the law. Just because in the beginning we are regarded as righteous on account of Christ when we believe in him, we must not then think that afterward he is cast aside as our mediator and that we are righteous by our own fulfillment of the law, even though it is necessary for those renewed to do good. The virtues of the law, insofar as they are in accordance with the law, are righteous acts, and to that extent this obedience of the law justifies with the righteousness of the law. But this imperfect righteousness of the law is not accepted except on account of faith, nor is it able to bring peace to consciences. Only faith brings that about—faith which is confident that on account of Christ the high priest we have a gracious God. In this promise godly and terrified consciences ought to seek reconciliation and justification; with this promise they ought to revive and sustain themselves, just as these words [Rom. 1:17] teach: “The one who is righteous will live by faith.” For they mean that faith justifies, and it justifies in this way: that it simultaneously makes alive, that is, it cheers and consoles consciences and produces eternal life and joy in the heart.*

Response to the Arguments of the Opponents

Having acknowledged the fundamentals in this issue (namely, the distinction between the law and the promises or gospel), it will be easy to remove the objections raised by the opponents. For they quote passages about the law and works *but* omit passages about the promises. To all their statements about the law we can give one reply: the law cannot be kept without Christ. And if any civil works are done without Christ, they do not conciliate God. Therefore when works are commended, we must add that faith is required—that they are commended on account of faith, because they are the fruits and testimonies of faith. *What could be simpler to explain than our doctrine? For one has to distinguish the promises from the law in order to recognize the benefits of Christ.*¹⁴⁷

Ambiguous and dangerous issues give rise to many and varied solutions. For what the ancient poet says is true: “An unjust cause, being in itself sick, requires skillfully applied

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¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

Romans 1:17 (NRSV)

147 An addition in the second, octavo edition.

remedies.”¹⁴⁸ But in just and clear-cut issues, one or two explanations drawn from the sources will correct everything that seems offensive. Such is also the case in our discussion. For the rule as I have just stated it interprets every passage that they quote about the law and works.

We acknowledge that in some places Scripture presents the law and in other places it presents the gospel, the free promise *of the forgiveness of sins* on account of Christ. However, our opponents simply abolish the promise¹⁴⁹ when they deny that faith justifies and when they teach that we receive the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation on account of our love and works. If indeed the forgiveness of sins depended upon the condition of our works, it would be completely uncertain. *For we never do enough works.* Therefore the promise would be abolished. Therefore we call godly minds back to a consideration of the promises, and we teach them about the free forgiveness of sins and reconciliation that come through faith in Christ. Later we add also the teaching of the law, not *because we merit the forgiveness of sins by the law or because we are regarded as righteous on account of the law and not on account of Christ, but because God requires good works. For the law and the promises need to be “rightly distinguished” [2 Tim. 2:15*] with care.*¹⁵⁰ We must see what Scripture attributes to the law and what it attributes to the promises. For it praises *and teaches good works* in such a way as not to abolish the free promise *and not to eliminate Christ.*

*For*¹⁵¹ *good works are to be done because God requires them. Therefore they are the results of regeneration, just as Paul teaches in Ephesians 2[:10*]. “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of*

148 Euripides, *Phoenissae*, vv. 474, 475, cited in the Greek. Melanchthon often lectured on this play.

149 Quarto: “free promise.”

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¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

[2 Timothy 2:15 \(NRSV\)](#)

150 Replaces in the quarto edition: “And we must ‘rightly distinguish’ these as Paul affirms [2 Tim. 2:15*].” In both texts he uses the Greek word *orthotomein*.

151 This short paragraph replaces par. 189–200 in the quarto edition.

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¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

[Ephesians 2:10 \(NRSV\)](#)

life.”¹⁵² *Thus good works ought to follow faith as thanksgiving toward God. Likewise, good works ought to follow faith so that faith is exercised in them, grows, and is shown to others, in order that others may be invited to godliness by our confession. Thus Paul says [Rom. 4:11*] that Abraham received circumcision, not because he was regarded as righteous on the basis of this work, but in order to have a sign written on his body, by which he might be reminded and constantly be brought to a greater faith. Likewise, he could confess his faith before others by it and could invite others to believe by his testimony. Thus by faith Abel offered a more pleasing sacrifice [Heb. 11:4*]. For the sacrifice pleased God not ex opere operato,¹⁵³ but because by faith Abel acknowledged that he was reconciled to God on account of mercy. Indeed, he carried out that work in order to exercise his faith and by his example and confession to invite others to believe.*

Although good works ought to follow faith in this way, people who cannot believe or establish in their hearts that they are freely forgiven on account of Christ use works for a very different purpose.¹⁵⁴ When they see the works of the saints, they think in a human fashion that the saints have merited the forgiveness of sins¹⁵⁵ *by those works and that they are regarded as righteous before God on account of those works.* Accordingly, they imitated those works and think that through similar works they also merit the forgiveness of sins. They try to *appease the wrath of God and trust that they are regarded as righteous on account of such works.*¹⁵⁶

152 Cf. par. 201–2 in the quarto edition.

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¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them,

[Romans 4:11 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain’s. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks.

[Hebrews 11:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

153 By mere performance of the rite. See above, p. 131, n. 85.

154 The quarto edition adds: “and that they have a gracious God freely on account of Christ.”

155 The quarto edition adds: “and grace.”

156 The quarto edition adds after “forgiveness of sins”: “and grace, and that through these works they will appease the wrath of God and achieve their goal of being declared righteous on account of these works.”

We condemn these wicked notions about works for several reasons. First, *such notions obscure* the glory of Christ when people present these works to God as a payment and atoning sacrifice. They attribute this honor, which belongs only to Christ, to our works. Second, they still fail to find peace of conscience in these works. Instead, in genuine terror they pile up good works upon good works and end up in despair. For, because they never find any work pure enough, the law always accuses them and brings wrath with it. Third, such people never attain the knowledge of God, since *their consciences, while fleeing the wrath of God, are unable to find peace or ever to be convinced that God hears them. But when faith, which believes that we are freely regarded as righteous, is added, it dares to call upon God and it senses that God hears. Thus it attains true knowledge of God.*¹⁵⁷

This ungodly opinion about works always *clings* to the world. The Gentiles had sacrifices, which they took over from the patriarchs. They imitated their works but did not retain their faith. Instead, they thought that those works were an atoning sacrifice and payment that on account of which God was reconciled to them. The people of Israel also imitated these sacrifices with the notion that on account of those works God was appeased *ex opere operato*,¹⁵⁸ *as it is customary to say*. Here we see how vehemently the prophets rebuke the people. Psalm 50[:8*], “Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you.” And Jeremiah [7:22*], “I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Such passages do not condemn the sacrifices that God had certainly commanded as outward training in this sphere of life, but they do condemn their ungodly belief because they kept rejecting faith and maintaining that they appeased the wrath of God through these works. And because no work can bring the conscience peace, people keep thinking up new works above and beyond those commanded by God. *But the examples of the saints greatly move people to imitate them in the hope that they may obtain reconciliation just as the saints obtained it.* The people of Israel had seen the prophets sacrifice

157 The quarto edition: “since in their anger they flee God, who judges and afflicts them, and never believe that God hears them. But faith reveals God’s presence when it establishes that God freely forgives and hears us.”

158 From the mere performance of the rite. See p. 131, n. 85.

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⁸ Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me.

[Psalm 50:8 \(NRSV\)](#)

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²² For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.

[Jeremiah 7:22 \(NRSV\)](#)

on the high places.¹⁵⁹ The people began to imitate this work with remarkable zeal in order to appease the wrath of God through it.¹⁶⁰ But the prophets did not sacrifice in high places to merit the forgiveness of sins through those works, but because they were teaching in these places and hence giving testimony to their faith.

The people had heard that Abraham had sacrificed his son.¹⁶¹ Therefore they also put their sons to death in order to appease the wrath of God by this most cruel and severe act.¹⁶² But Abraham did not offer up his son with the idea that this work was the payment and atoning sacrifice on account of which he would be regarded as righteous. Thus in the church the Lord's Supper was instituted that our faith might be strengthened by the remembrance of the promises of Christ—of which this sign reminds us—and that we might publicly confess our faith and proclaim the benefits of Christ, just as Paul states [1 Cor. 11:26*], “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” But the opponents contend that the Mass is a work that justifies *ex opere operato* and removes the burden of guilt and punishment in those for whom it is offered.¹⁶³

Anthony, Bernard, Dominic, Francis,¹⁶⁴ and other holy Fathers chose a certain kind of life, either for the sake of study or for the sake of other useful exercises. At the same time, they

159 1 Samuel 9:12*, 13*; 1 Kings 18:20ff*. The quarto edition adds: “The examples of the saints greatly moved the minds of those who hoped that by similar works they could obtain grace just as the [saints] did.”

160 The quarto edition has instead: “in order that they could merit the forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness.”

161 Genesis 22.

162 Leviticus 20:21ff*.; 2 Kings 23:10*; Jeremiah 7:31*; 19:5*; 32:35*.

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²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

[1 Corinthians 11:26 \(NRSV\)](#)

163 The quarto edition adds: “For so writes Gabriel [Biel].” See his *Exposition of the Canon of the Mass* 26:81. See above, p. 131, n. 85.

164 Anthony is regarded as the father of Christian monasticism. Born in Egypt, he organized hermit colonies in which monks lived separately but met for religious services. Bernard of Clairvaux was the most influential monk of his day. A member of the Cistercian Order, he gave new impetus to monasticism as the ideal of Christianity. The Spaniard Dominic founded the Dominican order in 1215. Engaged in mission, it dedicated itself to teaching, preaching, and scholarship for strengthening faith and combating heresy. Francis of Assisi resolved to imitate Christ's voluntary poverty and preached repentance and mutual love.

maintained that they were declared righteous and had a gracious God by faith on account of Christ and not on account of those exercises. But ever since then, a multitude of people have imitated not the faith of the Fathers, but their examples without their faith, in order that through those works they might merit the forgiveness of sins,¹⁶⁵ *and that on account of those works they might be declared righteous before God. The human mind errs in this way concerning works because it does not understand the righteousness of faith. The gospel, which teaches that human creatures are regarded as righteous not on account of the law but on account of Christ alone, rebukes this error. However, Christ is grasped by faith alone. Therefore we are declared righteous by faith alone on account of Christ.*

But the opponents object with the passage from 1 Corinthians [13:2], “If I have all faith . . . but do not have love, I am nothing.” Here they celebrate a great victory. Paul bears witness before the entire church, they say, that faith alone does not justify.¹⁶⁶ But it is easy to reply after what we have shown above concerning our understanding of love and works. This passage of Paul requires love. We also require it. For we said earlier that the renewal and incipient keeping of the law ought to exist in us.¹⁶⁷ Whoever throws away love will not retain faith, however strong it may be, for that person does not retain the Holy Spirit.*

However,¹⁶⁸ it does not follow that love justifies, that is, that on account of love we receive the forgiveness of sins, that love conquers the terrors of death and sin, that love ought to be set against the wrath and judgment of God, that love satisfies the law, and that once we are reborn, we are acceptable to God on account of the fulfillment of the law and not freely on account of Christ. Paul does not say the things that our opponents nevertheless imagine. Now if we overcome the wrath of God by our love, if we merit the forgiveness of sins before God by our love, if we are acceptable by our observance of the law, let the opponents destroy the promise of Christ. Let them abolish the gospel that teaches that we have access to God through Christ, the propitiator, and that we are accepted not on account of our fulfilling the law but on account of Christ.

165 What follows in this paragraph is parallel to the first half of par. 212 in the quarto edition. The octavo edition omits par. 213–17 of the quarto edition.

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² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:2 (NRSV)

166 See the Confutation’s evaluation (in pt. I, art. VI) of CA VI: “Here St. Paul certifies to the princes and the entire church that faith alone does not justify. Accordingly, he teaches that love is the chief virtue.”

167 The quarto edition adds: “according to the passage [Jer. 31:33*], ‘I will put my law within them.’ ”

168 The octavo edition omits par. 220–22 (to the words in the Tappert translation: “no matter how great it may have been”) and rephrases the remainder of par. 222 and par. 223.

The opponents corrupt many passages, because they read into them their own opinions rather than deriving the meaning from the texts themselves. Now this text poses no problem if we remove the interpretation that our opponents add to it on their own because they do not understand what justification is or how it takes place. Upon being justified, the Corinthians had received many excellent gifts. In the beginning they were very zealous, as is usually the case. Then, as Paul indicates, dissensions began to arise among them and they began to loathe sound teachers. Accordingly, Paul reprimands them and calls them back to works of love.

He¹⁶⁹ is not discussing the forgiveness of sins here or the manner of justification, but rather he is speaking about its fruits. Moreover, he understands love to be that directed toward the neighbor. But it is foolish to dream that this love by which we act toward human beings justifies us before God. For in justification we have to do with God, his wrath must be conciliated, and consciences must find peace with God. None of these things takes place through that love. They happen only when mercy is grasped, and this occurs through faith. Now it is true, that when love is lost, the Holy Spirit is lost, and when the Holy Spirit is lost, faith is driven away. Accordingly he says [1 Cor. 13:2], "If I . . . do not have love, I am nothing." He does not add the affirmative proposition that love justifies.*

They *argue* that love is preferred to faith and hope¹⁷⁰ since Paul says [1 Cor. 13:13*]: "The greatest of these is love." It therefore follows that the greatest and most important virtue should justify. In this passage, however, Paul is speaking strictly about love for the neighbor, and he indicates that love is the greatest because it bears the most fruits. Faith and hope deal only with God whereas love has an infinite number of outward responsibilities toward others. Nevertheless, let us concede to the opponents for the moment that love for God and neighbor is the greatest virtue because it is the greatest commandment [Matt. 22:37*]: "Love the Lord *your* God, *etc.*"

169 In the octavo edition the remainder of this paragraph replaces and expands on the last half of par. 224 in the quarto (Tappert translation: "Even though . . . second table").

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² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:2 (NRSV)

170 The Confutation (pt. I, art. VI) argued that love was the greatest virtue according to Colossians 3:14*.

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¹³ And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13 (NRSV)

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How then will they draw the conclusion that love justifies? The greatest virtue, they say, justifies. However, just as even the first or greatest law does not justify *in the least*, neither does the greatest virtue of the law justify.

For¹⁷¹ there is no law that accuses us more, that does more to make the conscience enraged against the judgment of God, than this summary of the whole law, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart.” For who among the saints other than Christ dares to boast of having satisfied this law? Therefore the virtue of the law does not justify. But that virtue justifies, which receives the reconciliation given on account of Christ. That virtue is faith. Moreover, it does not justify on account of its own worthiness, but only because it receives the mercy by which we are regarded as righteous on account of Christ. For we are righteous, that is, accepted by God, not on account of our perfection but through mercy on account of Christ, as long as we take hold of it and set it against the wrath of God.

But the opponents attribute righteousness to love for this reason: they teach the law and think that righteousness is obedience to the law. For human reason only focuses on the law and does not understand any other righteousness except obedience to the law. And the scholastics, ingenious people, seeking a method,¹⁷² imagine it is the law, just as the philosophers in ethics imagine it is moral precepts. But Paul protests loudly and teaches that righteousness is something different, namely, obedience to the promise of reconciliation given on account of Christ, that is, the reception of mercy given on account of Christ. For we are acceptable to God and our consciences find peace in this way: when we sense that God is gracious to us on account of Christ. Therefore godly minds must be called back from the law to the promise, as we have already said many times and as we will explain more fully a little later when we deal with the scholastic argument concerning the word “righteousness.”

In the Confutation the opponents also cited against us this passage¹⁷³ from Colossians [3:14*], “Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which is the bond of perfection.”¹⁷⁴ From this

³⁷ He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’

[Matthew 22:37](#) (NRSV)

¹⁷¹ The following paragraphs represent a reworking of par. 227 (from “but that virtue” in the Tappert translation) through par. 230 of the quarto edition.

¹⁷² A technical term used by Melanchthon and other contemporary teachers of dialectic and rhetoric as an order of investigating and explaining a text. At this time Melanchthon had begun lectures on Aristotle’s *Ethics*.

¹⁷³ Melanchthon appears to be taking his opponents’ texts from the Confutation in sequence.

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¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

they reason that love justifies because it makes people perfect. Although we could respond to this statement about perfection in a number of different ways, we shall simply present Paul's meaning. He is obviously talking about love for our neighbor. There is no reason to think that Paul has attributed either justification or perfection before God to the works of the second table of the law rather than to the first.

Besides,¹⁷⁵ if love is the perfect fulfillment of the law and satisfies the law, then there is no need for Christ as the propitiator. However, Paul teaches that we are acceptable on account of Christ and not on account of the observance of the law, because our observance of the law is imperfect. Thus because he clearly denies perfection to us elsewhere, we must not think that here he is speaking about the personal perfection of individuals. Instead, he is speaking about community in the church. For he says that love is a bond or unbroken chain in order to show that he is talking about linking and binding together the many members of the church with one another. In all families and communities harmony needs to be nurtured by mutual responsibilities, and it is not possible to preserve tranquillity unless people overlook and forgive certain mistakes among themselves. In the same way, Paul urges that there be love in the church to preserve harmony, to bear with (if need be) the crude behavior of the brothers [and sisters], and to overlook certain minor offenses, lest the church disintegrate into various schisms and lest enmities, factions, and heresies arise from such schisms.

For harmony will inevitably dissolve whenever bishops impose excessive burdens upon the people or have no regard for their weakness. Dissensions also arise when the people judge the conduct of their teachers too severely or scorn them on account of some lesser faults, going on to seek other kinds of doctrine and other teachers. On the contrary, perfection (that is, the integrity of the church) is preserved when the strong bear with the weak, when people put the best construction on the faults of their teachers, and when the bishops make some allowances for the weakness of their people. The books of all the wise are all filled with these instructions about fairness and how in everyday life we should make many allowances for the sake of mutual peace. Paul often enjoins this both here and elsewhere. Therefore, it makes no sense for the opponents to deduce from the word "perfection" that love justifies, when Paul is speaking about the common integrity and tranquillity of the church. Ambrose interprets this passage in this way. It is just as a building is said to be perfect or whole when all the parts fit together properly with one another.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, it is disgraceful for the opponents to preach so much about love when they themselves never show it. What are they doing now? They are breaking up churches. They are writing laws in blood and are asking his most merciful prince, the emperor, to promulgate these laws. They are slaughtering priests and other good people if they even slightly intimate that

[Colossians 3:14 \(NRSV\)](#)

174 Citing the Vulgate. The NRSV reads: "which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

175 "Besides . . . the law is imperfect" in the octavo edition is a reworking of par. 231.

176 This reference is not in Ambrose or in the works ascribed to him (Ambrosiaster) but may be a paraphrase of Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Colossians* VIII.2 (MPG 62:354; NPNF, ser. 1, 13:295).

they do not completely approve of some obvious abuse. These actions are not consistent with their praises of love; if the opponents lived up to them, both church and state would have peace. These tumults would die down if the opponents did not so harshly demand compliance with those traditions that are useless for piety—most of which are not observed even by those who most vehemently defend them. But they readily forgive themselves, but others they do not, just like that passage in the poet, “‘I forgive myself,’ Maenius says.”¹⁷⁷ But this is completely different from those praises of love that they recite here from Paul; they have no more understanding than the walls of a house that bounce back an echo.

From Peter they also quote this statement [1 Peter 4:8*], “Love covers a multitude of sins.”¹⁷⁸ It is evident that Peter is also speaking about love toward the neighbor because he connects this passage to the text that commands love for one another. Indeed, it could not have entered the mind of any apostle to say that our love overcomes sin and death; or that love is an atoning sacrifice on account of which God is reconciled apart from Christ the mediator; or that love is righteousness without Christ the mediator. For even if there were such a love, it would be a righteousness of the law rather than of the gospel, because the latter promises us reconciliation and righteousness when we believe that on account of Christ as the propitiator, the Father is gracious to us, and that the merits of Christ are bestowed upon us. Therefore a little earlier Peter urges [1 Peter 2:4*, 5*] us to come to Christ so that we might be built upon Christ. And he adds [1 Peter 2:6*], “Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” Our love does not free us

177 Porphyry on Horace, *Satires* 1, 3, 23.

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⁸ Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.

[1 Peter 4:8 \(NRSV\)](#)

178 Although not in the Confutation it may be found in opponents such as Nicholas Ferber (Herborn).

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⁴ Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and

[1 Peter 2:4 \(NRSV\)](#)

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⁵ like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

[1 Peter 2:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

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from shame when God judges and accuses us. But faith in Christ does free us in the midst of these fears because we know that on account of Christ we are forgiven.

Furthermore, Peter's statement about love is taken from Proverbs [10:12*], where the antithesis clearly shows how it ought to be interpreted, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses." This teaches precisely the same thing as Paul's statement in Colossians [3:13*], namely, that if any dissensions flare up, they should be extinguished and settled by fairness and kindness on our part. Dissensions, he says, grow by means of hatred, as we often see that the greatest tragedies arise from the most trifling offenses. Certain minor disagreements arose between Julius Caesar and Pompey, in which if one had yielded to the other just a little, civil war would not have broken out. But when each gave in to his own hatred, a major commotion arose from an insignificant issue. And many heresies have arisen in the church simply from the hatred of the teachers. Thus, this text does not speak about one's own sins, but of others' when it says, "love covers sins," namely, the sins of others, more precisely offenses between people. That is to say, even though these offenses flare up, love conceals them, forgives, yields, and does not carry everything to the fullest extent of the law.

Peter, therefore, does not intend to say with this text that love merits the forgiveness of sins in God's eyes; or that it is an atoning sacrifice excluding Christ the mediator; or that we are accepted on account of love, not on account of Christ the mediator.¹⁷⁹ He means that in human relations love is not obstinate, harsh, or intractable; instead, it overlooks certain mistakes of its friends and puts the best construction on even the more offensive conduct of others, just as the common proverb admonishes, "Know, but do not hate, the conduct of a friend."¹⁸⁰ It is not without reason that the apostles speak so often about this responsibility of love, which the

⁶ For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

[1 Peter 2:6 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹² Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

[Proverbs 10:12 \(NRSV\)](#)

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¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

[Colossians 3:13 \(NRSV\)](#)

¹⁷⁹ The quarto edition adds: "or that it regenerates and justifies."

¹⁸⁰ Porphyry on Horace, *Satires* I, 3, 32.

philosophers call “fairness.”¹⁸¹ For this virtue is necessary for preserving public harmony, which cannot last long unless pastors and churches overlook and pardon many things among themselves.

From James [2:24*] they quote, “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”¹⁸² No other single passage is supposed to contradict our position more, but the response is easy and clear. James’s words do not pose a problem if the opponents would not read into it their own opinions about the merits of works. But wherever works are mentioned, the opponents attach their own ungodly opinions: that we merit the forgiveness of sins through good works; that good works are the atoning sacrifice and payment on account of which God is reconciled to us; that good works conquer the terrors of sin and death; that good works are acceptable in God’s sight on account of their own intrinsic goodness; and that they neither need mercy nor Christ as the propitiator. None of these things ever entered into James’s mind, and yet the opponents now defend all these things under the pretext that this is James’s meaning.

In the first place, we must note that this passage works more against the opponents than against us. For they teach that a person is justified by love and works, but they say nothing about the faith by which we take hold of Christ, the propitiator. Indeed, they reject this faith. Not only do they reject it in statements and writings, but they also attempt to wipe it out in the church by the sword and torture. How much better is the teaching of James, who does not omit faith or substitute love for faith. Instead, he retains faith so that Christ is not excluded as the propitiator. In the same way, Paul too includes faith and love when he deals with the sum of the Christian life in 1 Timothy 1[:5*], “But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.”

In the second place, the subject matter itself shows that the works spoken of here are those that follow faith and show that faith is not dead but living and active in the heart. James, therefore, did not think that we merit the forgiveness of sins and grace through good works. After

181 Greek: *epieikeia*. See CA XXVI, 14, for an explanation of this term used by Aristotle and some Stoic philosophers.

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²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

[James 2:24 \(NRSV\)](#)

182 From the Confutation (pt. I, art. VI).

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⁵ But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.

[1 Timothy 1:5 \(NRSV\)](#)

all, he is talking about the works of those who have been justified, who have already been reconciled and accepted, and who have obtained the forgiveness of sins. Therefore the opponents err when they argue from this passage that James teaches that we merit the forgiveness of sins and grace through good works and that we have access to God through our works apart from Christ the propitiator.

In the third p

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¹Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. 2000. *The Book of Concord : The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* . Fortress Press: Minneapolis