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# Law and Gospel:

## Repentance and Good Works.

(Primarily according to the 4th, 5th and 6th articles  
of the Formula of Concord).

### A gift for the 400th anniversary of the Reformation.

By F. Bente.

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## Law and Gospel: Repentance and Good Works.

(Primarily based on Articles IV, V, and VI of the Formula of Concord)

The fourth article of the Formula of Concord, “On Good Works,” is primarily directed against the assertion that good works are necessary for salvation—a statement that Melanchthon had presented in his *Loci* of 1535, but which he had deleted in subsequent editions of the *Loci*, only to renew it in the Leipzig Interim of 1548, whereupon it was zealously defended by Georg Major and others as a great and necessary truth. The fifth article, “On the Law and the Gospel,” is directed in particular against the teaching that the law should no longer be preached in the church, but only the gospel, from which alone repentance should be taught — an error that Agricola von Eisleben had first defended against Melanchthon in 1527 and against Luther in 1537. The sixth article, “On the Third Use of God's Law,” is also directed against the antinomians, as Agricola and his followers, among whom Andreas Poach in Erfurt and Anton Otto in Nordhausen were prominent, were called. “On the Third Use of God's Law,” which turns its point against the assertion that Christians, as they are here on earth, no longer need the preaching of the law, especially not to show them what works are pleasing to God.

Even from these brief hints, it is clear that the points of doctrine that are at issue in these three articles and are dealt with in a thorough and careful manner are of the utmost importance for the correct understanding of Christianity as a whole. These points reveal whether one has truly understood the doctrine of Law and Gospel, justification and sanctification, repentance and conversion, faith and good works. Here it becomes apparent whether one has completely and thoroughly freed oneself from the theology of the old Adam, from papist Pharisaism with its works, as well as from the Epicureanism of the flesh. It has been said that in the doctrine of conversion and election by grace, the theologian faces a rigorous examination as to whether he has understood the doctrine of grace in Scripture and in the Lutheran symbols, and whether it has truly become second nature to him. The same applies with regard

to the questions of the difference between Law and Gospel and their relationship to repentance, faith, and good works. Here, too, it becomes apparent whether one truly allows grace alone to prevail or whether one leaves a hidden back door open for one's own works. Here it becomes apparent whether our Lutheranism is thoroughly genuine and healthy at its core, or whether it is still secretly afflicted by papist works. Those who are able to give certain answers to the questions at issue here know what Christianity is, have mastered theology, and will take certain steps everywhere. But those who fail this test cannot be trusted in theology anywhere else. Those who, on any point of theology, place human works and deeds alongside grace in a coordinating manner, have a broken Lutheranism, and if they continue to follow the wrong path, they will eventually return to essentially the same papacy from which God freed us through Luther.

Just as the United Church accuses Lutherans of making incidental and secondary matters in Christianity the main issue, so too has the accusation been made against us Missourians that we confuse incidental matters and special teachings of Walther with essential Lutheran teachings. But we cannot agree with this; for it is precisely our conviction that what is often attacked in us as something specifically Missourian (the doctrines of the spiritual priesthood, of church and office, of absolution and universal justification, and of pure grace and the mystery of conversion and the election of grace) is precisely what highlights and adequately expresses the essential and central tenets of Lutheranism. This accusation made against the Missourians is only analogous to the accusation that the Papists, Reformed, and United have made against the Lutherans since the days of Eck, Zwingli, and Bucer. Here, too, on closer inspection, what they tend to treat as false or incidental and peculiarly Lutheran special teachings is nothing other than the essential Christian itself, the heart of Christianity, fundamental Christian truths, founded on the crystal-clear word of Scripture. This also applies to the questions of law and gospel, repentance and good works. Our confession here expresses nothing but essential Christian teachings. As everywhere else, what is peculiarly Lutheran proves to be essentially Christian.

It can therefore only be beneficial to our salutary understanding if we remind ourselves how the articles of the Formula of Concord, to which we will primarily adhere, answer the main questions concerning law and gospel, repentance, and good works. And when we realize once again how the Lutheran symbols, from the Augustana to the Formula of Concord, have preserved the glorious heritage of the Reformation in unadulterated, undisguised

clarity, this will also contribute to increasing the grateful joy with which God wants to refresh us in this jubilee year, despite the sad current world situation.

## 1.

What is the significance of the correct distinction between law and gospel? The *Epitome* answers: "We believe, teach, and confess that the distinction between law and gospel is a special and glorious light that must be preserved with great diligence in the churches, so that the Word of God may be rightly divided according to the admonition of St. Paul." ([Ep 5. 2](#)) *Solida Declarati*: "Since the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is a special glorious light, which serves to divide God's Word rightly and to explain and understand the writings of the holy prophets and apostles properly, it must be maintained with special diligence, so that these two teachings are not mixed together or the Gospel is made into a law, thereby obscuring the merit of Christ and robbing troubled consciences of the comfort they otherwise have in the Holy Gospel when it is preached purely and plainly, and they can stand firm in their greatest trials against the terror of the law." ([SD 5. 1](#)) *Solida Declarati*: "Accordingly, and so that both teachings, of the law and of the Gospel, are not mixed and conflated, and so that what belongs to one is not attributed to the other, thereby easily obscuring the merit and good deeds of Christ, and the Gospel in turn being made into a doctrine of the law, as has happened in the papacy, and thus depriving Christians of the true comfort they have in the Gospel against the terror of the law, and the door to the churches of God is opened again to the papacy, the true, actual difference between the law and the gospel must be diligently pursued and maintained, and anything that might cause confusion *inter legem et evangelium*, that is, that might confuse the two teachings, law and gospel, and mix them into one teaching, must be diligently prevented." ([SD 5. 27](#)) The core of the Gospel is the article of justification, about whose significance the Apology writes: "But since there is such strife over the highest and most important article of the whole Christian doctrine, so that a great deal depends on this article, which also serves primarily to give a clear and correct understanding of the whole Holy Scripture and points the way to the inexpressible treasure and the true knowledge of Christ alone, and also opens the door to the entire Bible alone, without which article no poor conscience can have true, lasting, certain comfort or recognize the riches of Christ's grace: we therefore ask that Your Imperial Majesty graciously hear us on this great, brave, and highly important matter, as is necessary." ([121, 2](#); cf. Luther in the Smalcald Art., [p. 463, 5](#))

As the highest article of our faith, we Lutherans praise the doctrine of justification, according to which God forgives the sinner without merit of works, solely by grace, for Christ's sake. It is the heart of all Christianity. It is the joy of life, without which the Christian suffocates; the element in which he lives like a fish in water, and without which he perishes miserably. It is the almighty power of God, which alone creates, preserves, and increases all that is good in man. It is the sun in whose light all truly Christian beings alone germinate, grow, and flourish. When this doctrine was corrupted soon after the time of the apostles, the day of Christianity came to an end and the night of medieval darkness fell. When it was proclaimed again by Luther, the sun rose again and a new day dawned, the time of the blessed Reformation in which we still live today. This doctrine made Luther a reformer and restored the church to apostolic purity. Neither reason nor experience, neither art nor science, neither ancient humanism nor modern culture can substitute for the doctrine of justification. Neither the moon nor the stars can replace the light of this sun.

Without the doctrine of justification, all other Christian doctrines remain meaningless, worthless, useless, powerless, and unusable: blind cartridges, empty shells, ruins in which no one can dwell. The doctrine of justification is the life of all Christian doctrines. It alone gives them meaning and value. It relates to them as the soul to the body, as electricity to the motor, as form to matter. Without knowledge of this doctrine, even the most extensive theological knowledge is a relatively useless and worthless polymathy. It is the life principle of all Christian faith and knowledge, the center of all Christian truths. Without this doctrine, all others are only fragmented, incomprehensible, splintered partial insights torn from their context. Those who do not know this doctrine may have all other truths and yet not have the truth. Nor do they have all the others right. Indeed, without this doctrine, everything that is and happens in the world and in the church, everything that is thought and done, becomes a series of inextricable riddles. It is the only light in the darkness of this sinful world. Luther writes: "For where this knowledge is gone, it takes everything with it, and you may then lead and confess all the articles (as the papists do), but it is neither serious nor right understanding, but like groping in the dark, and a blind man hearing talk of a color he has never seen." "For in this everything hangs and stands and draws all others with it, and everything is to be done around this, so that whoever errs in the others certainly does not have this right either; and even if he holds the others and does not have this, it is all in vain." "If we understand this article rightly and purely, we have the right heavenly sun; but if we lose it,

we have nothing but vain hellish darkness." (Compare Dr. F. Pieper's lectures on these and the following passages from Luther)

Without the doctrine of justification, man is exposed to every delusion and error, every superstition and unbelief. Where it is not, there is only error in the world. Without it, the church is also helpless against all heresy, helpless against rationalism and enthusiasm, against papacy and sectarianism. Luther: "If we have lost this article, then the whole Christian doctrine is lost at the same time, and we will not be able to resist any heresy, any false doctrine, no matter how ridiculous and vain it may be." Indeed, without this article, we are helpless even against Judaism, Islam, and paganism. Luther: "I know this for certain and have tried it so much that I could not convert either the Turks or the Jews if I had to act without this piece." Like modern Freemasonry, Christianity without the article on justification no longer differs significantly from paganism, Judaism, or Islam. That is why the sects are so completely helpless against the lodges, because they have lost the article on reconciliation, justification, and salvation through Christ alone.

As with every error, the doctrine of justification also protects against the seduction of Rome, which otherwise no human reason and power can withstand. It teaches us to recognize Christ correctly and at the same time gives us a keen eye for the Antichrist. Once you have seen Jesus in faith, you can no longer be deceived by his counterimage, the Pope in Rome. When Luther first saw the lovely image of Christ, the merciful Savior, in Scripture, he also recognized and saw through the Pope as the Antichrist. The doctrine of justification makes one secure and immune against Rome. In addition, it thoroughly clears away doubt and unbelief, works and ceremonial worship, as well as the tyranny of the papal church. But experience teaches us that those who do not have the doctrine of justification are not safe for a moment against the antichristian power of seduction, even if they are otherwise the wisest and most learned. Strictly speaking, they are already sitting in the midst of it; their conversion is only a formality.

Those who have the doctrine of justification stand at the center of all truths, from where alone everything is rightly recognized and appreciated. Luther: "For in this article all other articles of our faith are understood; if this is pure and righteous, then all the others are right and good." Before this doctrine, all clouds disappear, and everything becomes a clear, blue sky above us. With it, we are equal to every situation in life, every error, and all hostile powers. It keeps us on the right path, leads us into all truth, and makes us divinely certain of it. Without it,

there is only human delusion and opinion in the world. It brings with it the Holy Spirit, makes us certain of Scripture, gives us the key to it, teaches us to understand it correctly, and does not allow us to err or become heretics. And if we should err through the deceitfulness of our flesh, this doctrine brings us back to the right path or at least ensures that the error does not lead to our destruction.

Luther writes: "Where this doctrine remains in the pulpit, there is no need to fear; one is safe from all heretics and errors. This article suffers no error; the Holy Spirit is also present, and those who believe this do not tolerate error." "Again, this article also has the grace that, if one remains diligent and earnest in it, it does not allow one to fall into heresy or run counter to Christ and true Christianity. For it certainly brings with it the Holy Spirit, who thereby enlightens the heart and keeps it in right and certain understanding, so that it can give pure and clear discernment and judge all other articles of faith and powerfully maintain and defend them." "For if this one piece remains pure in the plan, then Christianity also remains pure and fine, harmonious and without any divisions, since this piece alone, and nothing else, makes and preserves Christianity." "For this piece does not allow any divisions to arise, since it cannot be otherwise, for the Holy Spirit must also be there, who does not allow divisions to begin, but gives and maintains harmony." "Therefore, everything depends on this article of Christ, and everything hangs on it; whoever has this has everything, and Christians must therefore stand in the highest battle and fight constantly so that they may remain in it." This article is therefore also "what all the prophets have pursued most." "God has also explained no article to us as publicly and clearly as this one." From it, "all theological disputes shall be seen and judged." Without the article on justification, "neither can the church exist, nor can God retain his honor, which honor is that he is gracious and merciful, and that for his Son's sake he wants to forgive our sins and make us blessed."

The church stands or falls with the doctrine of justification. Without it, no one becomes a Christian, let alone a theologian or Christian preacher. Luther: "For this point is the main piece and the cornerstone that alone bears, strengthens, builds, preserves, and protects the church of God, and without it the church of God cannot exist for an hour." Where this article is, there is the church. Where it is preserved, there the church remains. Luther: "Mohammed may have devastated the church and the pope may have obscured the doctrine of faith, but where this article has remained, there God has preserved his church." Where this article is publicly in vogue, there the church flourishes and comes forth openly. Where it is despised and distorted, there the church degenerates and becomes ragged. Where it must hide away in a corner, as in the Middle Ages, there the church is hidden. Where it is completely lost,

there the church is also gone. Luther: "As long as this article remains pure, the church also remains pure; but if it is falsified or falls away, the church has become a whore and is gone, as we have seen and experienced in the papacy." The church is nothing other than the people who have this article in their hearts. And we recognize the existence of the church by the fact that people profess this faith. If the latter no longer exist, the church has disappeared from view. And if at any time the former no longer existed, the church would have disappeared from reality.

This article on justification also shows the dignity and glory, the necessity and divine justification of the Reformation and its church. It is the Magna Carta of the church in general and of the Reformation church in particular. If the article on justification is true, then Luther is right, then our church is justified. If it is false, the result will be a debacle, a general collapse, not only of Lutheranism, but of all Christianity and the Church in general. If we preserve the doctrine of justification, everything is won. If we abandon it, everything that Christ has acquired for us, that the apostles have proclaimed, and that Luther has fought for, is lost. And just as without the doctrine of justification the invisible church no longer exists at all, so without it the visible ecclesiastical connections have no meaning or purpose, and the ecclesiastical offices no longer have a message. Without this doctrine, the church becomes salt without salt, a lantern without light, a machine without steam, a body without life, a ship without a compass, rudder, or sails. Without it, the church becomes a community that misses its calling, misunderstands its purpose, and does not know what it is supposed to do or why it exists. Without it, the church becomes a body without a calling or a task, incapable of fulfilling its divine mission.

The Church loses the war between the woman and the serpent, between Satan's kingdom and God's kingdom, between Babylon and the Bible, between the world and the Church, if it abandons the article on justification; the Church wins if it preserves it. To be or not to be, that is the question for both at this point. The world knows this too. Instinctively, the old Adam, whose marrow and bone is works righteousness, feels that justification by grace means his death. And so it happens that all the hatred, all the persecution of Christians by the world, the papists, the Jesuits, and the false teachers is directed against the article by which alone Christians depart from the world and differ essentially from all other men. The article on justification is an offense to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. It is the very opposite of everything that the world, the carnal mind, thinks, ponders, recognizes as true and right, loves, values, desires, and seeks to attain. It is ultimately the sole reason why the world despises, hates, and persecutes Christianity. Luther: "For this is also the only article that must always suffer persecution

from the devil and the world.” “Where this article arises, the devil is mad and foolish and burns the world in vain fire and blazing with wrath and rage.” “For I see and experience daily all too well how manifoldly the wretched devil pursues this main point, that he may root it out again.” “Abel was slain for this article, and all the saints, and all Christians must also die for it.”

And yet it is this article alone that stands between the world and the final wrath of God and has saved it from sudden destruction until now. Only for this reason does the world still exist, so that this doctrine can be preached. If there are no more Christians who believe in this article, and no more churches that proclaim it, then the world also has no purpose anymore, and it may, indeed must, come to ruin. Where this article is out of the way, nothing can withstand the bowls of wrath. Luther: “Because of this article, the world has so often been destroyed by floods, storms, wars, and all kinds of plagues.” Judged spiritually, the present world war [World War I] also has its ultimate cause in the fact that the world and secularized Christianity have long been disgusted by the blessed doctrine that God is gracious and merciful only in Christ and for Christ's sake. It was the endeavor of the Lutheran confessors at Augsburg to make this doctrine heard before the Kaiser and kingdom. ([Trig.121:2-3](#)) And to bring this article, where possible, to the ears of all people in the world is the glorious task of all Christians, especially Lutherans. He alone can help the religiously, morally, and physically rotten world to a new spiritual life.

But everything we praise about justification also applies to the Gospel, whose core is the doctrine of justification, which is basically nothing other than this justification itself. Those who know the doctrine of justification know what the Gospel is and how it is a doctrine very different from the law. And those who do not know the difference between the law and the gospel do not yet know what justification is. “From this we can clearly see,” says Luther, “that all those who do not understand the article on justification cannot help but confuse the two parts, the law and the gospel.” (VIII, 1855) As important as the doctrine of justification is, equally important is the correct distinction between law and gospel. Indeed, the knowledge of the gospel in its difference from the law is the one great divine light in the darkness of sin in this world. If the church loses this light, it loses Christianity itself and sinks back into the dark night of paganism. But the gospel is lost if it is not clearly distinguished from the law. Anyone who mixes the gospel with the law in any way destroys it, transforming it into law or into a counterfeit that is neither law nor gospel.

Those who confuse law and gospel lack the key to understanding Holy Scripture; for them, the Bible remains a book sealed with seven seals; they understand neither the New nor the Old Testament correctly. Only those who carefully distinguish between law and gospel are able to handle the Word of God in a salutary manner. Those who mix the two are fit for nothing less than to be servants of the church and teachers in Christianity. Those who mix the law into the gospel obscures and eliminates the merit of Christ and gives mankind the honor that belongs to God alone—the honor that grace alone is what saves us.. Those who mix the law into the gospel rob troubled consciences of the only comfort that can lift them up in the terror of the law. Every falsification or distortion, even the slightest, renders the gospel powerless in a corresponding trial and incapable of providing the necessary comfort. Those who mix the law into the gospel eliminate the essential difference between Christianity and Roman anti-Christianity, reopen the door to the papacy in the church, and thereby effectively declare the Reformation superfluous and the church of the Reformation illegitimate. Yes, whoever transforms the gospel into law thereby abolishes the difference between church and world, believers and unbelievers, Christianity and paganism. And conversely, whoever mixes the gospel with the law takes away the power and sharpness of the law, turning it into a wooden sword and rendering it incapable of performing the service that, according to God's will, it should perform in the interest of the gospel. The church must therefore always be very serious about preventing any mixing of law and gospel in doctrine and practice. Apology: "But if a Christian church is to be and remain such, the pure doctrine of Christ and the righteousness of faith must always be preserved. Therefore, we must challenge such great Pharisaical errors in order to save the name of Christ and the honor of the Gospel and Christ and to preserve a true, constant, and certain comfort in the Christian heart." ([Trigl. 223, 256](#))

Luther writes: "Therefore, whoever is able to separate the law from the gospel, set him above and call him a doctor of Holy Scripture. For without the Holy Spirit it is impossible to make this distinction. I experience it myself, and see it daily in others, how difficult it is to separate the teaching of the law and the gospel from each other. The Holy Spirit must be the master and teacher here, or no man on earth will be able to understand or teach it. Therefore, no pope, no false Christian, no fanatic can separate these two from each other." ([IX, 802](#)) Moreover, the proper separation of law and gospel "is not an art that can be learned or boasted of; it is an art that wants to keep us as students and remain our teacher."

## 2.

What is the law, actually, and how does it differ from the gospel? The *Epitome* answers: "We believe, teach, and confess that the law is actually a divine doctrine, that teaches what is right and pleasing to God and punishes everything that is sin and contrary to God's will. Therefore, everything that punishes sin is and belongs to the preaching of the law." ([Trigl. 801, 3-4](#)) *Solida Declaratio*: "Accordingly, we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that the law is actually a divine teaching in which the righteous, unchanging will of God is revealed, how man should be in his nature, thoughts, words, and deeds, that he may be pleasing and acceptable to God, and threatens the transgressors of the same with God's wrath, temporal and eternal punishment. Then, as Luther speaks against the lawbreakers: Everything that punishes sin is and belongs to the law, whose own office is to punish sin and lead to the knowledge of sins, Rom. 3 and 7; and since unbelief is the root and source of all punishable sins, the law also punishes unbelief." ([957, 17](#)) *Epitome*: "Thus, the law is and remains one and the same for both the repentant and the unrepentant, for those who are born again and those who are not, namely the unchanging will of God (*una eademque lex est manetque, immota videlicet Dei voluntas*)." ([807, 6 \(7\)](#)) *Solida Declaratio*: "But in order to prevent misunderstanding as much as possible, and to teach and maintain the difference between the works of the law and the works of the Spirit, it is necessary to note with particular care when good works are spoken of that are in accordance with the law of God (otherwise they are not good works), that here the word law means only one thing, namely the unchanging will of God, according to which all men should conduct their lives (*quod hoc loco vocabulum legis unam tantum rem significet: immutabilem videlicet voluntatem Dei, secundum quam homines omnes vitae suae rationes instituere debeant*)." ([967, 15](#)) *Solida Declaratio*: The "written law" is "a certain rule and guideline for a godly life and conduct, according to the eternal and unchangeable will of God. *Illud enim certissimam esse regulam et normam, ad quam vita secundum immutabilem voluntatem Dei sit pie instituenda.*" (963, 3) *Solida Declaratio*: "Then the law is a mirror in which the will of God and what is pleasing to him is actually depicted, which should always be held up to believers and diligently pursued with them without ceasing. *Est enim lex Dei instar speculi limpidissimi, in quo voluntas Dei et quae ipsi placent, perspicue oculis nostris proponuntur.*" ([963, 4](#))

The law is a divine doctrine and does not differ from the Gospel in that the latter is revealed by God, while the law is invented and established by men, priests, and tyrants, or even by devils. The law is the just,                      unchanging,                      eternal                      will

of God, according to which all people must conduct themselves in their lives. God himself has revealed this will, this law, in the Holy Scriptures, and in the most certain and reliable manner. There is no other such absolutely reliable rule and guideline anywhere else, not even conscience, which can only be described as the voice of God in man insofar as it agrees with the law. The revealed law is a clear mirror in which God himself has precisely depicted all the works that are pleasing to him. This law is therefore a certain rule and guideline for arranging one's life according to the eternal, unchanging will of God. No one errs with regard to the righteous will of God when he judges and judges himself according to the law. Those who live according to it walk according to the will of God. The revealed law teaches us how human beings must be in every respect—in their nature, thoughts, words, and deeds—in order to satisfy the righteous will of God. And in doing so, the law also shows what is contrary to the unchanging will of God and punishes it as sin. Yes, this is the true office of the law: to punish sin and lead to the knowledge of sin. Therefore, everything that punishes sin is law and belongs to the preaching of the law. The law also punishes unbelief, the root and source of all sins. And to punish sin means not only to show transgressors where and how they have done wrong, but also to threaten them with the wrath of God and temporal and eternal punishment.

Towards sinners and transgressors, therefore, the law or the righteous will of God takes on a demanding, threatening, condemning form. The very wording of the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt," "Thou shalt not," indicates this. Because of sin and the corruption that follows it, the holy will of God is no longer the immanent law of their hearts and lives, to which they spontaneously obey, but a foreign power that stands opposite them, demanding and condemning them. It is therefore right to distinguish between the holy, unchanging will of God as such and this cursing form, which applies only to transgressors, not to the righteous. The statements will also differ depending on whether one speaks of the holy will of God as such or of the condemning, cursing form of it, as it has come about through sin. What applies to the former does not yet apply to the latter, and vice versa. For example, the holy will of God applies to the holy angels; it does not stand before them as a demanding, cursing law. However, as far as the use of language in the Formula of Concord is concerned, it does not reserve the term "law" solely for the cursing form of the law, but also uses it to refer to the holy will of God in general, as can be seen from the passages cited. Nor does the Formula of Concord address the difference between the moral law, which applies to all people,

and the ceremonial and police laws, which were given only to the Jews in the Old Testament but have no significance in the New Testament. Only occasionally does it indicate that it is, of course, only the moral law that is relevant, the law that man knows to some extent by nature (959.22) and which was, in fact, given to the first humans (803, 2; 963.5). Elsewhere, too, when our confession speaks of God's law and the righteousness it demands of us, it always refers only to the Decalogue, whose summa is love for God and neighbor (Apology, 109.16) and which Paul also has primarily in mind (147.87). The Apology writes: "But here we call the law the Ten Commandments of God, where they are read in Scripture. We will not speak here of the ceremonies and laws of court proceedings." The law of which it speaks is "the natural law, which is in accordance with the law of Moses or the Ten Commandments, is innate and written in the hearts of all men, and thus reason can comprehend and understand the Ten Commandments to a certain extent." (121.6-8) Furthermore: "But we are not talking here about the ceremonies of Moses, but about the Ten Commandments" (as opposed to ceremonial and political laws), "which require us to fear and love God from the bottom of our hearts, *de illa lege, quae praecipit de motibus cordis, videlicet de Decalogo.*" (157.3)

In his 1524 treatise "Against the Heavenly Prophets," Luther writes: "For Moses is given only to the Jewish people and has nothing to do with us Gentiles and Christians. We have our Gospel and the New Testament. . . . Yes, but the Ten Commandments also apply to Christians! Answer: Yes, what are natural laws in the Ten Commandments, to which our hearts and consciences also say yes, remain; but the Ten Commandments also contain a number of things about images and the Sabbath that have been abolished." "Why then are the Ten Commandments taught and kept? Answer: Because nowhere are the natural laws so finely and neatly arranged as in Moses. That is why we rightly take Moses as our example." But images and the Sabbath and everything that Moses has set beyond the natural law, that is, because it does not have the natural law, is free and set aside and is commanded only to the Jewish people in particular. "The Gentiles," says Luther, "are not obliged to obey Moses; Moses is the Jews' *Sachsenspiegel.*"

### 3.

What is the gospel actually, and how does it differ from the law? The *Epitome* answers: "The gospel is actually a doctrine that instructs what a person who has not kept the law and is condemned by it should believe, namely that Christ has atoned for and paid for all sins and, without any merit of his own,

has obtained and acquired forgiveness of sins, righteousness before God, and eternal life." (801.5) Furthermore: "But when the law and the gospel, as well as Moses himself as a teacher of the law and Christ as a preacher of the gospel, are held against each other, we believe, teach, and confess that the gospel is not a sermon of repentance or a sermon of punishment, but actually nothing other than a sermon of comfort and a joyful message that neither punishes nor frightens, but comforts consciences against the terror of the law, points solely to the merit of Christ, and uplifts them again with the lovely sermon of the grace and favor of God, obtained through Christ's merit." (803.7) *Solida Declaratio*: "But the Gospel is actually a doctrine (according to which man has not kept God's law, but has transgressed it, and his corrupt nature, thoughts, words, and deeds contend against it, and he is subject to the wrath of God, death, all temporal plagues, and the punishment of hellfire) that teaches what man ought to believe in order to obtain forgiveness of sins from God, namely, that the Son of God, our Lord Christ, took upon himself and bore the curse of the law, atoned for and paid for all our sins, through whom alone we come again into God's grace, obtain forgiveness of sins through faith, are delivered from death and all the punishments of sin, and become eternally blessed: Then everything that comforts, the favor and grace of God offered to transgressors of the law, is and is called the gospel, a good and joyful message that God does not punish sin, but wants to forgive for Christ's sake. Accordingly, every repentant sinner should believe, that is, place his trust solely in the Lord Christ, that he was given up for our sins and rose again for our justification, who became sin for our sake, who knew no sin, so that we might become in him the righteousness that is valid before God, who made us righteous, the obedience of Christ is credited to us as righteousness before God in his strict judgment, so that the law, as explained above, is a ministry that kills through the letter and preaches condemnation, but the gospel is the power of God to save all who believe in it, preaching righteousness and giving the Spirit. How then Dr. Luther has with particular diligence driven home the difference in almost all his writings and actually shown that the knowledge of God that comes from the Gospel is very different from that which is taught and learned from the law, because even the Gentiles had some knowledge of God from the natural law, yet they neither knew him rightly nor honored him rightly, Rom. 1." (957.20—22)

The Gospel is a message to people whom the law condemns because they have not kept it: in other words, a message to moral and spiritual bankrupts and convicted criminals. The

Gospel therefore presupposes that there is a righteous will of God, a law, which every human being is obliged to fulfill; that human beings have not kept this law; that they are also incapable of fulfilling it; that, on the contrary, human nature, thoughts, words, and deeds are directly contrary to the law; that, therefore, as far as it depends on them, human beings are irretrievably lost; that they are subject to the wrath of God, death, and hell; that the law has passed this death sentence on human beings and continues to ring in their ears. To this lost and damned man, the Gospel preaches and brings forgiveness and salvation. It extends a saving hand to the worm surrounded by the flames of hell. It tells man that despite his terrible situation, he should not despair, telling him what he should believe, what can save him from the fires of hell. The gospel is the declaration of faith in defiance of the condemnation of the law.

For the gospel proclaims to man that Christ, the God-man, took upon himself the burden and curse of the law and bore it for us humans and in our place, thereby atoning for all our sins, paying for our guilt, and reconciling us to God. It proclaims that through his suffering and death, Christ alone has freed us from sin, death, and hell and has earned God's favor, grace, forgiveness, and eternal salvation. And the Gospel offers these blessings to man as a gift and at the same time tells him that it is God's earnest will that every frightened, repentant sinner should believe this and put all his trust in the Lord Christ and thus be assured of divine grace and forgiveness. Yes, every sinner should believe for himself in particular that Christ was given up for his sin and rose again for his justification. Everyone should place his firm trust in this, that Christ, who knew no sin, was made sin in his place, so that he might become righteousness in him before God. Everyone should believe that God has long since been completely reconciled with him, has long since forgiven him completely in his heart, and that in God's judgment Christ's obedience is credited to him as righteousness. Although the law condemns me, Christ is my righteousness, my life—this is what every sinner should now say.

Harnack and the liberals say that Christ does not belong in the Gospel, or at least only insofar as he preached the Gospel and perfectly represented the ideal of humanity in his person and illustrated it in his life. In truth, however, Christ not only belongs in the Gospel, but he himself is the Gospel, because through his vicarious life, suffering, and dying, he reconciled us to the angry God and acquired for us the righteousness

that is valid before God. To preach the Gospel is to preach Christ. To believe in the Gospel is to believe in Christ. The gospel of Christ [*Christi*] is at the same time the gospel of Christ [*Christo*]. We are called Lutherans because we accept the gospel that Luther brought back to light and proclaimed to us. But we are not called Christians simply because we believe what Christ proclaimed to us from his Father, but because Christ himself is the one in whom we believe as our God and Savior.

This also implies that we do not need to do anything to earn forgiveness or make ourselves worthy of it. The gospel is not an instruction on how man can earn forgiveness, but is in itself the gift of forgiveness. In the gospel, as Luther says, there is “utter forgiveness of sins.” ([Large Catechism 723, 88](#)) Even faith, which alone brings us into the possession of forgiveness, is not considered a condition under which God forgives us in his heart and in his word, but only as the means by which God grants us forgiveness, which God himself produces in us, namely through this very Gospel of forgiveness that already truly exists, long since acquired through Christ, given out of pure grace, and offered in the Word. The absolution of the Gospel does not depend on us, on our repentance or worthiness. On the contrary, says Luther, our repentance, our works, our hearts, and what we are should be based on absolution. We should repent, but not with the opinion that this will make absolution certain. And we should believe, but not in order to bring about forgiveness, but to receive it. Absolution in the Gospel is not conditional on faith; rather, it produces, increases, and sustains faith. God does not forgive sin in view of faith or for the sake of faith, but for His own sake, for Christ's sake, out of pure grace, through faith. In heaven, God has long since forgiven sin before we believe. Therefore, absolution on earth through the Word is certain by virtue of the mere announcement. The Word of absolution merely expresses the fact that God in His heart not only wants to forgive us, but has long since forgiven us. Forgiveness on earth can therefore never contradict forgiveness in heaven. The absolution of the Gospel never leads to false conclusions! Luther: “So also, whoever does not believe that he is free and his sins forgiven (through absolution) shall in time learn how certain it is that his sins have now been forgiven and that he did not want to believe it.”

In contrast to the law, the gospel is therefore not a sermon of punishment that exposes and condemns sin, but a sermon of comfort that forgives sin, justifies the sinner, and makes him

blessed child of God. "Everything that comforts, the favor and grace of God, is and is actually called the gospel." The gospel is "a good and joyful message that God does not want to punish sin, but to forgive it for Christ's sake." It is a sermon that offers vain comfort to the condemned transgressors of the law against the horrors of the law, against the torments of conscience, against fear and dread of death and hell. And the gospel offers such comfort because it distracts sinners from themselves and all their own deeds and points them "solely to the merit of Christ." So while the law is a ministry that kills through the letter and preaches damnation, the gospel is a power of God to save all who believe in it. While the law demands righteousness from man without helping him in any way to attain it, the gospel bestows the righteousness that Christ has acquired and, at the same time, gives man the Holy Spirit, who fights against the flesh and its works. While the law shows an angry God who fills us with dread and drives us into desperate and yet futile flight, the gospel paints a lovely, miraculous picture of God's favor, grace, and forgiveness, which gently but powerfully draws fleeing sinners into the merciful arms of the Father. While the law, although also revealed by God, is in some ways known to the heathens by nature, the gospel is a new, blessed revelation of God that is hidden from man in every respect.

The greatest benefit of the Reformation is that Luther, who as a monk knew only the law and saw in Christ only a strict judge, discovered through God's providence in the Gospel the merciful Savior and the God of all grace, and then proclaimed to the whole world in almost all his speeches and writings "that there is a very different knowledge of God that comes from the Gospel than that which is taught and learned from the law." [958. 22] Nothing in the wide world is as beautiful and glorious and delightful and comforting and powerful as the spiritual beauty and power of the Gospel, but the world has no sense of this and instead despises, hates, and persecutes it. This contempt for the spiritual beauty and glory of the Gospel and the Church also gave rise to the papacy. Luther says in the Smalcald Articles: "That Christ was crowned with thorns in his suffering and led out in a purple robe and thus mocked was all an interpretation that, in time, the true spiritual kingdom of Christ would be despised and his gospel suppressed, and another external kingdom would be established in its place, under the guise of spiritual power." (513. 32) In the papacy, there prevailed the gloomy, murky delusion that also captivated Luther in the monastery: that the

Gospel preaches the righteousness of God, that is, the works of righteousness that God demands of us. “Dear Lord,” exclaims the Apology, “how blind they are, how their writings are nothing but night, nothing but darkness!” (255, 7) And when the light shone again into this darkness, the papists called it “Lutheran.” The Apology: “But they can preach nothing about the knowledge of Christ, about faith, about the comfort of conscience, but they call this blessed doctrine, this dear, holy Gospel, Lutheran” (327, 44). The realization that the righteousness of God is precisely that which Christ has acquired for us and which God gives us in the Gospel made Luther a Reformer. When this truth began to dawn on him, heaven was transfigured for Luther into a blissful blue. Luther: “Here I immediately felt that I had been completely and newly born and had now found a wide-open door to enter paradise itself.” “Just as I had previously hated this little word ‘God’s righteousness’ with great earnestness, I now began to cherish and hold it in high esteem as my most beloved and comforting word, and it was to me” (Rom. 5:17) “in St. Paul’s, truly the right gate of paradise.” “Then the whole Holy Scripture and heaven itself were opened to me.” And from that time on, Luther never tired of singing the song of faith: “In my heart reigns alone and shall reign this one article, namely, faith in my dear Lord Christ, who is the beginning, middle, and end of all my spiritual and divine thoughts, which I may have day and night.” And it is this faith alone that made Luther the Reformer of the church and gave him victory over all his enemies. Right from the start of his fight against the pope’s false indulgences, he was certain of his success, for in the Gospel he had found the true indulgence that Christ had earned and God himself had proclaimed. But whoever has it has enough, enough for time and eternity.

#### 4.

How does the Apology describe the Gospel? It writes: “These two things are dealt with in Scripture: the law of God and the promise of God” (151, 102). But the two are fundamentally different. “For in order to rightly recognize Christ’s benefit and the great treasure of the Gospel (which Paul so highly esteems), we must separate God’s promise and offered grace on the one hand, and the law on the other, as far apart as heaven and earth.” (173, 65) “The Gospel teaches, praises, preaches, and extols the righteousness that comes from faith in Christ, which is not the righteousness of the law. The law teaches nothing of this, and it is a much higher righteousness than the righteousness of the law. For the law demands our works and wants us to be

godly and completely righteous in our hearts. But the divine promise indicates to us, as those who are overwhelmed by sin and death, help, grace, and reconciliation for Christ's sake, which grace no one can grasp by works, but only through faith in Christ. The same faith brings and gives God the Lord no work, no merit of its own, but builds solely on pure grace and consecrates itself to nothing else for comfort or abandonment than the mercy that is promised in Christ." ([133, 43-45](#)) "The law condemns all men; but Christ, because he took upon himself the punishment of sin without sin and made himself a sacrifice of atonement for us, endured that right of the law so that it would not accuse or condemn those who believe in him, because he himself is the reconciliation for us, for whose sake we are now considered righteous. But if they are declared righteous, the law cannot condemn them, even though they have not actually fulfilled the law." ([171, 58](#)) "And this is the very voice of the Gospel itself, that we obtain the forgiveness of sins through faith for Christ's sake, not for our works' sake." (199, 153; cf. 165, 38)

According to the Apology, the Gospel and absolution are interchangeable terms: absolution is the Gospel and vice versa. "Absolution is nothing other than the Gospel, a divine promise of God's grace and favor, etc. Therefore, it cannot be had or attained except through faith alone." (261, 61) "The word of absolution proclaims peace to me and is the gospel itself." (261, 39) This absolution is an unconditional execution of grace. "For absolution is not the command to acquit, and is not a new judgment to investigate sin. For God is the judge, who has not commanded the apostles to judge, but to execute grace, to acquit those who desire it, and to release and absolve them from sins that do not occur to us. Therefore, absolution is a voice of the Gospel, through which we receive comfort, and is not a judgment or law — *quare absolutio, quae est vox evangelii remittens peccata et consolans conscientias, non requirit cognitionem.*" ([281, 283](#), 8)

God, the supreme judge, has long since passed judgment, and this judgment is the unconditional and universal absolution of the sinful world. And God has now given the apostles and the Church the task not of passing judgment, but of granting forgiveness to the world. God absolves the guilty not only in exceptional cases, but universally. He does not hold their transgressions against them and does not send them the bill, but wipes out their guilt and gives them a receipt. This sounds absurd, of course. For "all human reason and wisdom can judge no other way than that one must become pious through laws, and whoever outwardly keeps the

law is holy and pious.” (167, 38) But it is precisely this absurdity, this folly, that is the very core of the blessed divine wisdom of the Gospel. "In worldly affairs and in worldly courts of justice, there are two things: mercy and justice. Justice is certain through laws and judgments, but mercy is uncertain. Here, for God, it is a different matter; for mercy and compassion are promised through a certain Word, and the Gospel is the word that commands us to believe that God is merciful to us and wants to make us blessed for Christ's sake," as the text reads in John 3:17: "God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him shall not be condemned." (213, 324) The new "absurd" law that God has established through the Gospel is this: transgressors shall be acquitted and be certain in their faith that God has forgiven them.

According to the Gospel, therefore, man is justified by faith alone. "For faith alone is the certainty that the heart is assured that God is gracious, that Christ did not die in vain. And that same faith alone overcomes the terror of death and sin." (163, 27) Faith says to God: "Since you have promised forgiveness of sin, I hold fast to that promise, and I abandon myself and venture on the gracious promise." (137, 60) This faith is not general, but special, applying the Gospel to itself. "This must be said, that I believe for myself that my sins are forgiven." Faith is personal certainty of the heart about the truth of the Gospel. "But it is the handwriting" (which, according to Col. 2:14, is against us by the law, and which Christ has blotted out) "that condemns and condemns us. And the word that condemns and condemns sin is the law. So this voice that says, 'I have sinned against the Lord,' as David says in 2 Sam. 12:13, is the handwriting. And the wicked and the confident do not seriously bring forth this voice. For they do not see, do not read the judgment of the law written in their hearts. This judgment is recognized in true pain and terror. The handwriting is therefore the repentance that condemns us. To erase this handwriting means to revoke the judgment by which we are declared to be those who would be condemned, and to inscribe the judgment according to which we consider ourselves to be freed from that condemnation. But faith is that new judgment which overturns the former judgment and gives peace and life to the heart." (265, 48)

Faith is the certainty of the forgiveness of sins. And this certainty has a firm, irrefutable foundation in the divine word of the Gospel. "For it is not the work of man to assure a frightened conscience of the forgiveness of sin and to comfort it,

that God no longer wants to be angry; one must have testimony of God's will from God's Word, just as Daniel knew and understood the high promises of the future seed." (195, 141) Faith is therefore not something that man can give himself. "Reasonable people can easily judge that the faith which believes that God cares for us, that he forgives us, that he hears us, is something that goes beyond nature (*rem esse supra naturam*); for the human spirit does not claim anything of the kind about God on its own." (205, 179) The Gospel is a free ticket to paradise and at the same time the power that allows us to use this ticket and thus transports us into the kingdom of heaven itself, where God is already our Father here on earth and we are his blessed children and heirs. The Gospel is that miraculous power of God which in every respect gives and works everything that is necessary for us to attain and enjoy salvation here and there.

When the Apology says that the Gospel, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper "require" faith, this does not mean that faith is a human achievement, or that it counts as a work and virtue in justification, or that it is the condition under which God forgives sin, but only that God earnestly wants us to accept the forgiveness offered and not spurn it through unbelief, and that such acceptance can only happen through faith, the correlate of the Gospel. "Whenever Scripture speaks of faith, it means faith that is based on pure grace; for faith does not make us pious and righteous before God because it is our own work and our own, but solely because it accepts the promised, offered grace without merit from a rich treasure." (137, 56) "Not that faith helps because of its worthiness, but because it trusts in God's promise and mercy." "The Gospel demands faith precisely because we are unworthy servants and have no merit." "It demands that same trust in God's promise precisely because we are unworthy servants and our works cannot help." (215) The word "for you" demands hearts that are wholly believing.

## 5.

But what should be noted with regard to the use of the word gospel? The *Solida Declaratio* answers: "Since we now have this dispute" (whether the gospel punishes sin and thus makes the preaching of the law in the church superfluous), "it has been caused primarily by the fact that the little word 'gospel' has not always been used and understood in the same way, but in two different ways in Holy Scripture and by the old and new church teachers. Then

it is used to mean the entire doctrine of Christ, our Lord, which he carried out on earth in his ministry and commanded to be carried out in the New Testament, and thus it includes the explanation of the law and the proclamation of the mercy and grace of God, his heavenly Father, as it is written in Mark 1: "This is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." And soon after that, the summary of the main points is set forth: repentance and forgiveness of sins. Thus, when Christ commanded the apostles after his resurrection to preach the gospel throughout the world, Mark 16:15, he summarizes the sum of his teaching in a few words, as he says in Luke 24:46-47: "Thus it is written, and thus Christ must suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name among all nations." Likewise, Paul also calls his entire doctrine the gospel in Acts 20. But he summarizes his doctrine in these main points: Repentance toward God and faith in Christ. And in this sense, the general definition, that is, the description of the word Gospel, when used in a broad sense and outside the actual distinction between the Law and the Gospel, is correct when it is said that the Gospel is a sermon on repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Then John, Christ, and the apostles began their preaching of repentance and thus not only interpreted and promoted the gracious promise of forgiveness of sins, but also the law of God. After that, the word Gospel is used in another, namely in its actual meaning, since it does not comprise the preaching of repentance, but only the preaching of God's grace, as follows immediately afterwards, Mark. 1, where Christ says, "Repent and believe in the gospel" (953, 4-6). *Solida Declaratio*: "It is therefore dangerous and wrong to want to make the gospel, when it is actually called that, as it is distinguished from the law, a sermon of repentance or punishment. Otherwise, when it is commonly understood to mean the whole teaching, the Apology also says at times that the Gospel is a sermon on repentance and the forgiveness of sins. However, the Apology also indicates that the Gospel is actually the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification through Christ, while the law is a word that punishes and condemns sin." (961, 27)

In Holy Scripture and in ecclesiastical theology, the word gospel is used in a broader and narrower sense. In the broader sense, it encompasses the entire teaching that Christ and the apostles presented and commanded the church in the New Testament. In this sense, the word gospel also includes the preaching of the law; and one can then also say: The gospel reveals and punishes sin. Of course, this is to be understood

in such a way that the condemnation of sin occurs through that part of the preaching of the gospel in the broader sense which is otherwise referred to as the law. In the narrower, proper sense, however, and in contrast to the law, the gospel always refers only to the preaching of the forgiveness of sins, never to the preaching of God's wrath and condemnation upon those who transgress the law. And what applies to the word gospel also applies to the terms "law" and "statute." They are also used by Scripture in a broader and narrower sense. In the broader sense, they include the promises in the Old Testament of the coming salvation in Christ.

Like Scripture, our confession also speaks in this way on occasion. It says that both the "law" and the 'gospel' preach sin and grace. Apology: "Then, although the law does not primarily preach grace and forgiveness of sin like the gospel, the promise of the future Christ is nevertheless inherited from one patriarch to another." The Latin text is different: "*Et hic cultus, haec latreia in prophetis et psalmis passim praecipue laudatur, quum tamen lex non doceat gratuitam remissionem peccatorum.*" (Müller 171, 31) And when Luther says in the Smalcald Articles that in the Old Testament "no prophet, neither Elijah nor Elisha, received the Spirit except through or without the Ten Commandments" (Müller 323, 11), he does not want the expression "Ten Commandments" to be understood in the narrower sense and in contrast to the Gospel. As for the word "Gospel," the Apology writes, following Luke 24:47: "The Gospel also condemns (*arguit*) all men, that they are born in sin and that they are all guilty of eternal wrath and death, and offers them forgiveness of sin and righteousness through Christ." (98, 62) Furthermore: "For in these two parts lies the sum of the Gospel: First, it says, 'Repent! and makes everyone a sinner. Second, it offers forgiveness of sins, eternal life, bliss, all salvation, and the Holy Spirit through Christ, through whom we are born again. Thus, the sum of the Gospel also encompasses Christ, as he says to Luke at the end," etc. (Müller 171, 31) At times, our confession also uses the word 'Gospel' as synonymous with the New Testament. For example, Melancthon says in the "Treatise" on the primacy of the pope: "Therefore, we want to show first from the Holy Gospel that the pope should not presume to have any authority ..." and then quotes Luke 22, John 18, etc. (Müller 329, 7) Furthermore, in Article 7 of the Augustana, the term "Gospel" clearly refers to the teachings of the New Testament writings as opposed to human ordinances. (Müller 40, 2)

In theology, too, it should not be overlooked that all expressions are ambiguous in themselves and that each word only takes on a fixed and specific meaning in a particular

context. For example, the terms command, obey, enjoin, demand, promise, etc., are not always used in the same sense, so that some are always applied only to the law and others only to the gospel. This reminds us that we should not immediately conclude that unfamiliar language is a false doctrine or a mixture of law and gospel. According to our confession, ambiguous statements should not be condemned outright, but carefully explained. (875, 51) Verbal differences do not necessarily mean real differences in doctrine. And it is part of the freedom that Christians should insist on that they do not forbid the use of expressions that can be understood correctly and that they explain correctly, or even expressions that are also used in Scripture, nor do they make them into sin or allow them to be condemned.

## 6.

Why does the law, which knows nothing of Christ, punish unbelief in the gospel? The *Solida Declaratio* writes: "The other party, however, maintained and argued that the gospel is not actually a sermon of repentance or punitive sermon, which actually belongs to the law of God, which punishes all sin and therefore also unbelief, but that the Gospel is actually a sermon of the grace and favor of God for Christ's sake, through which the unbelief in which the converted to Christ were previously stuck, and which was also punished by the law of God, is forgiven and pardoned." (633, 2) The Formula of Concord agrees with this part and answers the above question as follows: "Thus, the law punishes unbelief when one does not believe God's Word. Since the Gospel, which alone teaches and commands belief in Christ, is the Word of God, the Holy Spirit also punishes unbelief through the ministry of the law, that they do not believe in Christ, which Gospel alone teaches the saving faith in Christ." (957, 19)

It goes without saying that the law punishes unbelief, which is directly forbidden in the first commandment, unbelief against any word of the law and everything that this presupposes and includes. What some deny, but what our confession affirms, is the teaching that the law also punishes the sin of people not believing in Christ, in the word of the gospel. However, the law itself knows nothing at all about this greatest and most glorious word of God's favor and grace toward sinners, which God has sealed with solemn oaths. But it does not follow that because the law knows nothing of the gospel and faith in it, it does not punish unbelief against it. Nor does the law enumerate the individual words of God to which

man owes belief. But the law does say that it is a damning sin to refuse to believe any word of God, whatever its nature, and however and whenever it may be made known. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit punishes unbelief against Christ, he does so through the office of the law. It is the law that we preach when, in punishing sin, we aim above all at unbelief in the gospel. But it would be foolish to conclude from this that, strictly speaking, the law also knows the gospel and includes the preaching of God's grace and mercy, and is thus also a doctrine of saving faith. The doctrine that it is not the gospel but the law that punishes unbelief against the gospel does not blur the difference between the two, but rather highlights it. All punishment and condemnation comes through the law, and the gospel is always and only the message of God's favor, grace, and forgiveness of all sins, including previous unbelief.

## 7.

To what extent does the gospel “illustrate and explain” the law? The *Solida Declaratio* writes: “But it is also true that the law with its teaching is illustrated and explained by the gospel, and yet the actual function of the law remains to punish sin and teach good works.” (957, 18) Luther says: “Everything that preaches our sins and God's wrath is preaching the law, however and whenever it happens. Again, the Gospel is such a sermon that shows and gives nothing but grace and forgiveness in Christ, although it is true and right that the apostles and preachers of the Gospel (as Christ himself did) confirm the preaching of the law and begin with those who do not yet recognize their sin nor are afraid of God's wrath, as he says in John 16: 'The Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin because they do not believe in me.'” Yes, what is a more serious, more terrible indication and preaching of God's wrath over sin than the suffering and death of Christ, his Son? But as long as all this preaches God's wrath and frightens people, it is not yet the gospel or Christ's own preaching, but Moses and the law concerning the unrepentant. For the gospel and Christ are not ordained and given to frighten or condemn, but to comfort and uplift those who are frightened and timid. And again, Christ says in John 16: “The Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin,” which cannot happen without the explanation of the law. (955, 12. 13) *Epitome*: “Accordingly, although the sermon on the suffering and death of Christ, the Son of God, is a serious and terrible sermon and manifestation of God's wrath, through which people are led into the law,

after the veil of Moses has been taken away, so that they may recognize all the more how great things God requires of us in the law, none of which we can keep, and therefore we should seek all our righteousness in Christ: but as long as all this [namely Christ's suffering and death] preaches God's wrath and frightens people, it is not yet the actual preaching of the Gospel, but the preaching of Moses and the law, and therefore a foreign work of Christ, through which he comes to his own office, which is to preach grace, to comfort and to give life, which is actually the preaching of the Gospel." (803, 9. 10)

It remains true that the true office of the law is to punish sin and teach good works. And it also remains true that the true office of the Gospel is and never will be to punish sin, but to comfort with the forgiveness of sins. Nevertheless, it also remains true that the law with its teaching is illustrated and explained by the gospel. Such illustration already takes place through the contrast between the gospel and the law, in that the concepts of giving and demanding, forgiving and condemning, cursing and blessing, killing and bringing to life, leading to hell and to heaven are clarified by the contrast. Hunger and enjoyment, thirst and quenching thirst, work and rest, pain and well-being, heaven and hell, night and day are clarified by their contrast. Luther: "If a horse had reason and could speak, it would have to say that it would be quite another thing if the stable master gave it feed, than if he sat on it and spurred it on to run or pull."

But the presentation of the Gospel also directly and immediately illustrates and explains the law. "Yes, what is a more comforting, more terrible indication and preaching of God's wrath over sin than the suffering and death of Christ, his Son," of whom the Gospel speaks? Passion sermons are at the same time the sharpest and most shocking sermons on the law. In a concrete example, we see here as nowhere else the terrible wrath of God against sin. The sermon on Christ's suffering and death leads the sinner even more deeply and thoroughly into the law than the law of Moses alone can do. It removes the veil of Moses, which "hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear only the mere preaching of the law and nothing of Christ, and thus do not learn to recognize their sin from the law" (803, 7). This veil blinds people and causes them, even when they read Moses, "not to recognize the law spiritually, and how great things it requires of us, and because we cannot keep or fulfill them, how deeply it curses and condemns us" (635, 10). Nowhere was this veil thicker than in the monasteries, where people were nevertheless very much occupied with Moses. Luther: "Where there were some who did not

confess themselves guilty of such actual sins (*actualia peccata*) in thought, word, and deed, as I and my kind wanted to be monks and priests in monasteries and convents, who with fasting, vigils, prayer, holding mass, wearing rough clothes and sleeping rough, etc., to ward off evil thoughts and wanted to be holy with earnestness and force (violent), ... yet each one thought of the other that some were as holy as we taught, that they were without sin and full of good works, so that we sent and sold our good works to others as superfluous to heaven. This is true, and there are seals, letters, and examples to prove it." (487, 28) The sermon on Christ's suffering and death destroys this delusion that we can fulfill the law with outward works, as the Pharisees believed. It teaches us to recognize how great things God demands of us in the law, none of which we can keep. The same is true of the holy, spotless life of Jesus. It illustrates the law, and no one can seriously consider it without feeling within themselves the judgment upon themselves and their own spotless life.

But if the preaching of Christ's suffering and death illustrates the law, is not the gospel itself, in essence, the law, and indeed the strictest law? Is not all difference between law and gospel then eliminated? That would indeed be the case if the mere preaching of Christ's holy life and his bitter suffering and death were in themselves the true gospel. But as long as and insofar as the preaching of Christ's life, suffering, and death only reveals the holiness of God and illustrates his wrath against sin, it is preaching of the law and not yet the voice of the gospel. Insofar as and as long as Christ frightens and terrifies us with his holy life and his suffering and death, revealing to us sin and God's wrath against it, he is not yet performing his true office of the gospel, but the foreign office of Moses, which is certainly not superfluous, but necessary in the interest of his true office. But the true office of Christ and the true purpose of his holy life and bitter suffering and death is not to preach God's wrath to us, but grace, not to kill us, but to comfort us and make us alive. Reconciliation, forgiveness, justification, divine favor and grace toward the sinner—that is the *finis historiae*, the purpose of Christ's suffering. It is only through the words, "For you, in your place, for your benefit and for the forgiveness of your sins," that the life, suffering, and death of Christ become a life-giving sermon of comfort about God's favor and grace to the sinner. "For you, in your place, for your benefit and for the forgiveness of your sins!" It is the great *Pro nobis*, "For us," that transforms even the most terrible sermon on the law into the sweetest sermon of the Gospel. Anyone who omits or conceals this

“for us” from the story of Christ's suffering and death, as is the case with Papists and all too often with sects, has nothing at all of the true Gospel. The crosses, crucifixes, and stations of the cross in Catholic churches remain sermons on the law until the divine interpretation is added: “For us lost and damned sinners, for forgiveness, righteousness, and salvation!”

The suffering and death of Christ was still preached in the Dark Ages. But the “for us” was omitted. It was not considered vicarious atonement for our sins, for our comfort and forgiveness, but as a precept, an example for us to follow. It was not the merciful Savior who was preached, but Jesus the exemplary, meek sufferer, the penitent righteous man to be imitated. Jesus showed us how to do it, how to impose penance on ourselves in order to become righteous and blessed by patiently bearing it. And so it remains in the papacy today. The blood of Christ does not purify us from all sin, but only exhorts us to seek our own reconciliation with God through Christ by means of our own penances, mortifications, and works. Beneath countless crosses and crucifixes and images of Christ, the Savior is still buried in the papacy. [Robert Speer](#) says of South America: “*There the natives have many crosses, but no cross, no Word of the Cross.*” And even if Papists in Protestant countries talk more about the cross, they still do not have the evangelical comfort of the cross: “For you, for the forgiveness of your sins!” From the life, suffering, and death of Christ, true Papists always hear only the voice: “Behold this love, gentleness, and patience! Imitate this, and you too will be righteous and blessed!” Thus, despite all the crosses, Papists do not know Christ, the Crucified One. They imagine that they must first appease Christ through their own penances and the intercessions of the saints! The priests, whose power is based on the delusion of their own righteousness, ensure that the suffering of Christ does not become the God-willed, all-satisfying drink of life for Catholics, but that they suck only deadly poison for the frightened soul from the flower of Golgotha. Indeed, one can talk a lot about Christ's suffering and death without having touched on the actual Gospel with even a single syllable. Even Unitarians and Universalists promote the story of Christ, yet they want nothing to do with substitution, atonement, reconciliation, and forgiveness through Christ, and thus with the actual purpose of the Passion story! What they preach about Christ is, on closer inspection, nothing but the most terrible, most desolate law. Only the miracle word “for you” suddenly transforms the terrible, dark night on Golgotha into the sunny, joyful day of the gospel.

## 8.

Why are both the preaching of the law and the preaching of the gospel necessary for “complete,” ‘salvific’ conversion? The *Solida Declaratio* answers: “Just as the little word ‘but’ is not used in the same sense throughout Holy Scripture. In several places in Holy Scripture, it is used and taken to mean the whole conversion of man, as in Luke 13:5: ‘Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.’ And in v. 7:15: ‘There will be joy over one sinner who repents.’ But in this place, Mark 1:15, as well as elsewhere, where repentance and faith in Christ are set apart, Acts 20, or repentance and forgiveness of sins, Luke 24, repentance means nothing other than truly recognizing sin, sincerely repenting, and turning away from it; which recognition comes from the law, but is not enough for a salutary conversion to God unless it is accompanied by faith in Christ, whose merit is offered by the comforting preaching of the Holy Gospel to all repentant sinners who are frightened by the preaching of the law. Then the Gospel preaches forgiveness of sins not to the hard, secure hearts, but to the broken or repentant, Luke 4. And lest the repentance or fear of the law turn into despair, the preaching of the Gospel must be added, that it may be repentance unto salvation, 2 Cor. 7:10.” (953, 7-9) Augustana: “Although this doctrine [that we obtain grace through faith in Christ] is greatly despised by those who have not been tried, it is nevertheless very comforting and salutary to dull and frightened consciences. For the conscience cannot come to rest and peace through works, but only through faith, if it concludes with certainty that it has a gracious God for Christ’s sake, as Paul also says in Romans 5:1: ‘If we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God.’” (“*Tota haec doctrina ad illud certamen perterrefactae conscientiae referenda est, nec sine illo certamine intelligi potest.*”) (55. 15—18)

The word “repentance” is also taken in a narrower and broader sense. Sometimes it refers to “complete conversion,” repentance, and faith, and sometimes only to repentance. If it refers only to repentance, then to do penance means “to truly recognize sin, to repent sincerely, and to refrain from it.” However, man cannot attain such repentance without the preaching of the law. Mere repentance and recognition of sin are not sufficient for “salvific conversion to God.” Faith is also necessary, which takes comfort in Christ’s merit and thus overcomes the terrors of the law and hell. It is not the law, but the gospel that preaches Christ’s merit and the comfort of faith against the terrors of conscience. Again, however, the gospel cannot comfort hardened, secure hearts, but only frightened sinners. Only those who are thirsty can have their thirst quenched,                      only                      those                      who                      are

hungry can have their hunger satisfied, only those who are weary can be refreshed. Those who consider themselves spiritually healthy, sinless, and righteous spurn the physician and despise the forgiveness and righteousness offered by the Gospel. To offer sinners who feel their terrible situation the saving comfort of forgiveness is the purpose and power of the gospel. But such people must also be given the comfort of the gospel, so that their repentance does not turn into despair. Thus, both the preaching of the law and the gospel are necessary for conversion. Untouched by this remains the truth that only the gospel makes lost people blessed children of God by giving them, in the horror of sin wrought by the law, faith and the comfort of forgiveness, through which alone true conversion takes place. And to this end, the law serves in the hand of God insofar as it brings the sinner to the realization of his terrible situation under sin and the wrath of God, which realization is necessary because only frightened sinners, sinners who feel their terrible situation, can be subjectively made happy by the gospel. F. Pieper: "Faith arises and exists only under the terror of conscience, that is, faith can only ever be present where someone acknowledges before God that they are guilty of eternal damnation. Faith exists only against the backdrop of the terror of conscience." Apology: "This faith is in those who truly repent, whose frightened conscience feels God's wrath and sin, and seeks forgiveness of sins and grace." ([161, 21](#))

## 9.

How must the law be applied in order to bring people to the true knowledge of their sins? The *Epitome* answers: "As for the revelation of sins, because the veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear only the preaching of the law and nothing of Christ, and thus do not learn to recognize their sin rightly from the law, but either become presumptuous hypocrites like the Pharisees or despair like Judas, Christ takes the law into his own hands and interprets it spiritually, Matt. 5:21 ff.; Rom. 7:14. And thus God's wrath is revealed from heaven upon all sinners, however great it may be, by their being referred to the law and then learning from it to recognize their sin, which Moses could never have forced them to recognize." (803, 8) *Solida Declaratio*: "Then, because the mere preaching of the law, without Christ, either makes presumptuous people who think they can fulfill the law with outward works, or causes them to fall into complete despair, Christ takes the law into his own hands and interprets it spiritually, Matthew 5:21 ff., Rom. 7:14 and 1, and thus reveals his wrath from heaven upon all sinners, how great it is, whereby they are instructed in the law and learn from it all the more to recognize their

in which knowledge Moses could never have forced out of them. Then, as the apostle testifies in 2 Corinthians 3:1 ff., when Moses is read, the veil that hung before his face remains uncovered, so that they do not recognize the law spiritually, and how great things it requires of us, and because we cannot keep or fulfill them, how deeply it curses and condemns us. But when they have turned to the Lord, then such a veil is taken away, 2 Corinthians. 3:16. Therefore, the Spirit of Christ must not only comfort, but also punish the world for sin through the office of the law, and thus do in the New Testament, as the prophet says, *opus alienum, ut faciat opus proprium*, that is, he must perform a foreign office (which is to punish) until he comes to his own work, that is, to comfort and preach of grace, therefore he is then acquired and sent through Christ, and is also called the Comforter." (955, 10-11)

Before the gospel can comfort man, he must have recognized what sin and the wrath of God are all about. Before the gracious face of God in Christ Jesus can refresh him, he must have looked into God's unveiled face of wrath. But natural man cannot produce this knowledge of sin in himself. True repentance is not self-made. God must reveal sin to man. The veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of natural man, so that he never sees the burning sun of divine righteousness without clouds. The people, as the gospel finds them, are presumptuous and imagine that they can fulfill the law, indeed, that they have fulfilled it with their outward works. At the very least, they do not recognize their helplessness and imagine that, if they want to and decide to do so, they can earn salvation for themselves through their works. Man cannot escape this delusion as long as he is left to himself, administers the law himself, and Christ, who wants to save us, does not intervene. The fault lies not with the law, but with man, who, in the interest of his righteousness by works, externalizes the law and does not allow it to come into effect. The clouds are not before the law, but man suffers from spiritual cataracts with regard to the knowledge and application of the law. Instead of comparing himself and his life with the real norm of the law, he compares himself with other people whom he considers worse than himself. With ever new self-conceived works, they seek to earn their salvation. Of the scholastics who sought their righteousness in the law of love, the Apology writes: '*Sed decepti humana sapientia non viderunt faciem Moysi resectam, sed velatam, sicut Pharisei, philosophi, Mahometistae.*' (182, 108) Despite all their preoccupation with the law, men like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the scholastics were devoted to the delusion that they loved God with all their hearts or

could love him if only they tried hard enough. The law does not achieve its God-given purpose in the hands of man. Sin and God's wrath over it are thus not revealed to man. He does not come to the realization that, as far as he is concerned, he is irretrievably lost. Repentance does not come, because man despairs of all his own actions and abilities.

If the law is to achieve its purpose, God, who wants to save man through the gospel, must Himself ensure that its effect is not thwarted by man. Christ must take the law into His own hands and apply it according to His plans for salvation. He has done this and continues to do so today through the Church and its preachers. In order to bring people to the realization that they are lost and damned sinners who cannot save themselves, Christ also preaches the law and interprets it spiritually, as in the Sermon on the Mount. In doing so, Christ does not impose a foreign meaning on the law, but only brings out its deep, true meaning. Christ removes Moses' veil and destroys the delusion that one can satisfy the law through works of outward respectability. He dispels the clouds and allows people to glimpse the wrathful face of God. He allows the blazing sun of divine righteousness to burn into people's eyes and the curse of the law, the thunder of Sinai, to penetrate their ears. Through such handling of the law, God's wrath is revealed from heaven upon all sinners, however great it may be. Christ thus leads man into the law and shows him its demands with such sharpness and clarity that he collapses in the realization that he has not fulfilled a single one of them, nor is he even capable of fulfilling them. Such realization could not have been brought about by the law itself, administered by unrepentant and carnally secure man. Indeed, man does not bring knowledge of sin and repentance with him or to the gospel. He does not produce them himself, but suffers them as *contritio passiva*, which God's Spirit evokes in him through the right use of the law. Even in repentance, God must do everything alone. Christ, the Spirit of Christ, must wield the scourge of the law and punish the world for sin. The fact that the preaching of the law breaks the secure human heart, like a hammer smashing rocks, is because the Holy Spirit is at work in the words of the law. Left to themselves, natural men do not come to the collapse of true knowledge of sin and repentance. The heathen, who still have some knowledge of the law, do not come to the missionary of their own accord with the lament: "We are lost; do you know of any salvation for us?" Rather, they all believe that they can save themselves through their own works. By nature, no one knows or wants to know anything about his spiritual

lostness and helplessness. This knowledge must be brought about by the Spirit of God through the law in man.

In order to destroy the Pharisaic delusion, Christ, who wants to save us, must therefore take the law into his own hands. But in another respect, too, it is important that Christ himself does this. For if the law, for example in the case of a gross sin, makes itself free, it startles the conscience, falls upon man, strangles him, and plunges him, like Saul and Judas, into the abyss of despair. Woe and sorrow forever if the Savior is not there with his saving gospel! If man himself wields the knife of the law, he either uses the blunt back side and becomes a Pharisee, or he cuts himself to death when his conscience awakens. Only Christ is able to use the law appropriately, in accordance with its salvific purposes, because he also comes with the consolation of the gospel. He cuts, cuts deeply, kills, leads to hell; but at the same time, with his other hand, he offers the drink of life, the antidote of the gospel (769, 70), which rebirths us to new spiritual life and saves us from final despair. And it is precisely in saving us from despair and from hell that the true office of Christ consists, for which reason he also performs the foreign office of the law. "Therefore, the Spirit of Christ must not only comfort, but also punish the world for sin through the office of the law, and thus do in the New Testament, as the prophet says, *opus alienum, ut faciat opus proprium*, that is, he must perform a foreign office (which is to punish) until he comes to his own work, which is to comfort and preach of grace, therefore he is then acquired and sent through Christ, and is also called the Comforter." (955, 11) To seek and save what is lost; to refresh the weary and burdened, for this purpose Christ came into the world, Matthew 18:11; 11:28. And to glorify Christ, the merciful Savior, therein also consists the actual office of the Holy Spirit. And as far as Scripture is concerned, the Formula of Concord writes: "because all Scripture is inspired by God, not for security and impenitence, but to serve for punishment, chastisement, and improvement, 2 Tim. 3; item, because everything in God's Word is prescribed for us, not that we should be driven to despair, but that we may have hope through the patience and comfort of Scripture, Rom. 15:4." (1067, 12)

In this sense (because it is not man himself who produces repentance, but God alone, who wants to save us, who reveals sin and God's wrath over it), it is also meant when our confession speaks of "complete conversion" and describes repentance as part of it, since true conversion only happens through the effect of faith through the Gospel. In order to make the sinner His blessed child, God must do both: bring him to the knowledge of sin through the law

and give him the comfort of faith through the gospel. However, it is fundamentally wrong to conclude from this that the fear, dread, and terror that the law produces in man already signify, even before and without faith, a partial, initial movement of the sinner toward God, which faith only has to complete in the same direction. The law knows nothing of the grace in Christ, but only of the curse and damnation of sinners. The law does not make natural man better and more pious, but only brings his wickedness to light, indeed, increases his sin and his anger and defiance against God. Through the law comes knowledge of sin, not fulfillment of the law. Nor does the law produce in natural man a secret longing for the grace of Christ Jesus. The law does not preach grace, but condemnation. And thus it only produces fear, terror, and flight from God, and enmity against the author of a law which he neither wants nor is able to keep, and which condemns him. The effect of the law without and apart from the gospel, repentance before and without faith, is always only a movement toward despair, toward hell, never the seed and beginning of faith in Christ. F. Pieper: "Through the law, the Holy Spirit works on the heart of man, but does not enter into it, and the human heart does not become a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit." The preaching of the law is necessary and must precede the preaching of the gospel. But new spiritual life comes solely and exclusively from the gospel. It is often said that "true penitence always grows into faith. Faith springs from a penitent heart." Although faith arises in repentance, yet it does not spring from repentance, but from the gospel. Where there is no repentance, no recognition of sin, there can be no faith. But where the law has broken a heart and the gospel has created a desire for grace in that heart, there is new life, there is faith. And this, thank God, is precisely the blessing of Christ: that when the law drives us to hell, he stands ready with the gospel to save us from hell. If man does not perish in the terror of the law, but rather finds himself saved in the arms of the Savior, he owes this not to the law, which always drives sinners into hell, but to the merciful Savior, who catches him in his fear and flight from God and from the law that pursues him in his loving arms and snatches him from the hell to which he is rushing through the comfort of the gospel. The ceremonial law of the Old Testament was, of course, also directly and positively a schoolmaster unto Christ, insofar as it foreshadowed Christ and his beneficence and was thus at the same time a preaching of the Gospel and a source of comfort for the faith. But the moral law, which knows nothing of Christ, which always demands and curses

and condemns the sinner, which only produces fear and flight from God, which does not give faith, does not kindle love, but only causes anger and reveals natural enmity against God, and which can only deter gross transgressions outwardly, but is unable to turn the heart away from sin, is in the manner indicated a disciplinarian of Christ (127, 22) only *per accidens*, only in the hand of the Savior, who is always mindful and ready to comfort sinners whom he has frightened with the law with the gospel and to awaken them to spiritual life.

## 10.

When does man attain complete, God-pleasing spiritual knowledge of sin and childlike sorrow for it? The *Epitome* writes concerning the "revelation of sins" that "the veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear only the preaching of the law and nothing of Christ, and thus do not learn to recognize their sin rightly from the law," etc. (803, 7) *Solida Declaratio*: . . . "when they are born again by the Spirit of God, converted to the Lord, and thus the veil of Moses is lifted from them, they live and walk in the law," etc. (963, 1) Again: "Then, as the apostle testifies in 2 Cor. 3:14 ff., when Moses is read, the veil remains, so that they do not see the glory of Christ, but the veil remains, so that they do not recognize the law spiritually, and how great things it requires of us, and because we cannot keep or fulfill them, how deeply it curses and condemns us. But when they have converted to the Lord (*convertuntur*), then such a veil is removed, 2 Cor. 3:16." (955, 10)

The recognition of sin and repentance brought about by the law without the simultaneous application of the gospel and before faith is saturated with bitterness, anger, and hatred against God and His holy law. It is not the beginning of godliness, but a carnal, servile repentance, such as can only be found in an unregenerate, God-hostile person, and in which God therefore cannot take any heartfelt pleasure. Recognition of sin becomes righteous, spiritual, and pleasing to God, and repentance becomes divine, childlike sorrow only through the gospel and only at the moment when a person is born again, becomes a child of God, only through faith and after faith. As long as someone has not yet become a believer, he may, through the effect of the law, come to the realization that he is a cursed and damned person who must flee from the just and angry God. In particular, he may come to realize the terrible consequences of sin and then not find peace until he has found the Savior in the gospel. However, as long as he is still unconverted and a slave to sin, the whole reprehensibility, abominability, and sinfulness of sin will not be revealed to him. Only the Christian, who as a child of God has gained the right perspective on sin and knows how much it cost the Savior to redeem him from sin, has a truly

accurate and spiritual judgment of sin, both in content and scope. The same applies to repentance, which is and can only be a truly spiritual, childlike, divine, and God-pleasing sorrow in a person who has become a child of God through faith. Even the bitterest tears that a person weeps remain tears of bitterness against God as long as he has not yet come to faith. Only a child cries childish tears. If a person is converted to God through faith in the Savior, then the words "No one can look upon your hot blood without repentance" also apply to him. Then, in place of the bitterness, anger, and hostility that the knowledge of sin animates and evokes in man before and without faith, there arises grateful love for the God of all grace, who forgives us even before we ask Him to do so, the love that wonderfully transfigures repentance into a childlike sadness, whose tears are like dewdrops in which the morning sun is reflected.

Even without and before faith, the effect of the law in man, when it strikes his heart, produces a real recognition of sin and of God's wrath against it, and at the same time fear and terror of the threatened punishments: death, hell, and damnation. F. Pieper: "And whoever has been struck by the lightning of Sinai, who has recognized that he is a sinner judged and condemned by God, will not find peace of conscience until he has recognized the doctrine of justification. When the law struck Luther's heart, he would have sunk into despair if the monk had not comforted him: 'There is forgiveness of sins.'" Even if a person has not yet become a Christian through faith, the law convicts him that he has done many things that are contrary to the holy will of God. It also shows him that many things he previously considered right are in fact sins. It forces upon him the truth that even evil desires are truly sins before God, damning sins. And, willingly or unwillingly, the law with its curses also drives him into terror and horror, into fear and trembling before the coming judgment and wrath of God, before death, hell, and damnation. The law has such and similar effects when it penetrates the heart, even where there is no faith yet. However, such recognition of sin before and without faith is not of a true spiritual nature. It remains something imposed on man. It is a recognition of sin whose truth he would deny if he could. It is a pain, a horror, a fear that, if he could, he would rather shake off and put out of his mind. The willing concession and deepest confession that affirms the law and judgment of God concerning sin and agrees with it from the heart, as well

as the recognition that and why sin is something so utterly reprehensible, ugly, abominable, and accursed, all this arises in man only when he becomes a believer through the gospel and now stands on the foundation of God and His law and judgment, and he is heartily opposed to sin itself and not merely its evil consequences, only then, when he has recognized from the Gospel that the God whom he has offended with his sins and struck in the face is the very God who has mercy on him in Christ Jesus, forgiven him all his sins, and given him heaven out of pure grace. Such knowledge of sin arises only with and after faith.

The same applies to repentance. It only becomes spiritual through faith. Childlike, heartfelt, willing repentance connected with love for God cannot be produced by the law. It only springs forth when God adds the gospel to the law and lets his face of grace shine upon the frightened sinner and, through faith, grants him the comfort of forgiveness. Childlike repentance, like spiritual knowledge of sin, is a fruit of the Spirit and faith. It lives and thrives only under the sunshine of the gospel. It arises only at the moment when man realizes through faith how he has misunderstood, even misjudged, his God, when he sees and realizes how the God from whom he flees as from a tyrant is in truth pursuing him with ardent love in order to embrace him, the sinner, in the arms of his incomprehensible, infinite mercy and press him to his fatherly heart. A sinner's heart that grasps this—how can it remain cold and hard, unmoved and unloving any longer! Blessed, healing, divine repentance thus becomes the sadness brought about by the law only when the Gospel gives man the comfort of forgiveness. Without this comfort in the heart, the sadness that the law brings about is vain despair, hell, and death. Also, any change in life that the law brings about is only external, only a shying away from sin because of its evil consequences, not an inner aversion to sin itself, not a desire and willingness to do good. Despite all aversion to sin as a result of the curses of the law, the unconverted person still turns his heart and face toward sin and his back toward God. Only through faith does that childlike repentance arise, that inner aversion and turning away from sin and that willingness to do good, since man does not merely recoil outwardly from evil deeds, but turns his back on sin, flees from it, and turns his heart, mind, and courage toward God and pursues what is good.

## 11.

How does the Apology express the effect of the Law and the Gospel on repentance? According to the Apology, the state of original sin consists in “the fact that we all by nature flee from God as a

tyrant, and are angry and murmur against His will.” (Müller 79, 10) This natural enmity against God is not healed by the preaching of the law, but only intensified and brought to light. “For God's law is no joke; it accuses consciences without ceasing, except in Christ, as Paul says in Romans 4:15: ‘The law brings wrath.’ Therefore, ‘when consciences feel God's judgment and have no certain comfort, they fall into despair.’” (Müller 142, 212) “The law will always accuse us, for no man fulfills the law, as Paul says: ‘The law brings wrath upon us’” (Müller 183, 88) These effects of the law are “not mere thoughts in the mind, but also terrible movements of the will fleeing from God's judgment, *horribiles motus voluntatis fugientis iudicium Dei.*” (Müller 139, 183) “Sin frightens the conscience, which happens through the law, which shows us God's seriousness and wrath. Against sin; but we are saved through Christ.” (Müller 101, 179) Without the peace that the Gospel gives, “the heart flees from God's wrath and despairs and wishes that God would not judge.” (Müller 116, 40) We cannot love the wrathful God as revealed by the law. The papist doctrine of the law, that we should overcome God's wrath through our love, is nothing other than a doctrine of despair, *doctrina desperationis.* (139, 179) It demands of man what is absolutely impossible for him. “If we were not comforted by faith, such terror and punishment” (which the law evokes in us and thereby judges the sin in us) “would be vain sin and time.” (Müller 195, 52)

Just as the physician mocks the consumptive who wants to cure him by urging him to stop wheezing and coughing and to breathe quietly and gently, so too does everyone mock the sinner who wants to save him by exhorting him to love God, who is angry with him, from the heart. “It is certain that the opinion that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it, that in preaching repentance, the preaching of the law is not sufficient, because the law causes wrath and always accuses, but it is necessary that the preaching of the gospel be added, that we may be granted forgiveness of sins in this way, if we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake.” Why else would Christ and the gospel be necessary? (Müller 132, 136, 139) Those who put the gospel in the background have forgotten the main thing, have forgotten everything. For what saves man is not the terror of the law, but the comfort of forgiveness, that faith “since I believe for myself that my sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. We argue from this faith, which must and should follow after terror, comfort the conscience, and restore contentment to the heart in the heavy struggle and fear.” (Müller 177, 60) “Therefore, all those who have true repentance

seize

the promise of grace through faith and believe with certainty that we are reconciled to the Father through Christ." (Müller 181, 80)

Only the gospel, faith, can save the sinner; but that does not make the law and repentance superfluous. For faith is not "in carnal, secure people who live according to the lusts and will of the flesh," but "in those who have true repentance, that is, whose frightened conscience feels God's wrath and sin and seeks forgiveness of sin and grace." (Müller 112, 23) If man is to put his trust in Christ, he must come to the realization that even with his supposedly good works, he cannot earn salvation, either in whole or in part, but that they are all an abomination before God, and their only reward is hell. "But to teach this point truly and correctly, and what original sin is or is not, is very necessary, and no one can sincerely long for or desire Christ, the inexpressible treasure of divine favor and grace that the Gospel conveys, who does not recognize his misery and affliction, as Christ says in Matthew 9:12; Mark 2:17: 'Those who are well have no need of a physician.' All holy, honorable living, all good works, however much a man may do on earth, are mere hypocrisy and abomination to God, unless we first recognize that we are by nature miserable sinners, who are in disgrace with God, neither fearing nor loving Him. Thus says the prophet Jeremiah (Müller 31:19): "When you showed me this, I was terrified," and Psalm 116: "All men are liars," that is, they are not right-minded before God. *Neque enim potest intelligi magnitudo gratiae Christi, nisi morbis nostris cognitis.*" (Müller 83:34) "If Christ is given to us to take away these sins and the heavy punishments for sins, to overcome sin, death, and the devil's kingdom for our benefit, no one can rejoice wholeheartedly in this great treasure, no one can recognize the overflowing riches of grace, unless he first feels this burden, our innate great misery and wretchedness." (Müller 86, 50)

This feeling of the burden of sin and fear of God's wrath is repentance. "But when we speak of *de contritione*, that is, of true repentance, we separate ourselves from the countless useless questions, since they (the scholastics) pretend to ask questions about when we have repentance out of love for God, again, when we have repentance out of fear of punishment. For these are mere words and vain chatter of those who have not experienced what a frightened conscience feels like." In the terror of sin, one should take comfort in grace without asking whether repentance also flows from love for God. As if forgiveness depended on our love and this had to precede faith instead of following it as its fruit! "We say that *contritio*, or true repentance, is when the conscience is frightened and begins to feel its

sin and the great wrath of God over sin, and is sorry that it has sinned. And this same *contritio* occurs when our sin is punished by God's Word. For in these two parts lies the sum of the Gospel. First, it says: Repent! And makes everyone a sinner. Second, it offers forgiveness of sins, eternal life, bliss, all salvation, and the Holy Spirit through Christ, through whom we are born again." (Müller 171, 29) "And the examples of how the saints became pious also indicate the two points mentioned above, namely the law and the gospel. For when Adam fell, he was first punished so that his conscience was frightened and he fell into great anguish; this is true repentance or *contritio*. Afterward, God promises him grace and salvation through the blessed seed, that is, Christ, through whom death, sin, and the devil's kingdom would be broken; then he again offers him grace and forgiveness of sin. These are the two parts. Then, although God afterward imposes punishment on Adam, he does not deserve forgiveness of sin through the punishment." (Müller 175, 55) In the same way, David was first frightened by Nathan and then comforted by absolution. "These two parts always belong to true repentance: first, that our conscience recognizes sin and is frightened; second, that we believe in God's promises." "But the fruits and good works, as well as patience, that we willingly suffer the cross and punishment that God imposes on the old Adam, all this follows when sin is first forgiven through faith and we are born again." (Müller 176, 58)

The Apology describes the effect of the law on the conscience as follows: "In these same fears, the conscience feels God's wrath and severity against sin, which is a completely unknown thing to such idle and carnal people as the sophists and their ilk. For it is only then that the conscience realizes what a great disobedience to God sin is, and it is only then that the conscience is truly oppressed by the terrible wrath of God, and it is impossible for human nature to bear it unless it is upheld by God's Word. ... For the law alone accuses the conscience, commands what one should do, and frightens it. And there the adversaries do not speak a word about faith; they teach nothing about the Gospel or about Christ, but only empty legalism, saying that people deserve grace through such pain, repentance, and suffering, through such fears, but only when they repent out of love for God or love God. Dear Lord, what kind of sermon is this for consciences in need of comfort! How can we love God when we are in such great fear and unspeakable struggle, when we feel such great and terrible God's seriousness and wrath, which feels stronger than any human being on earth can describe or speak of? What do such preachers and doctors

teach other than vain despair, who in such great fears preach no gospel, no comfort, only the law to a poor conscience?" (Müller 171, 34) "For they invent and dream that when the *habitus* of God's love is present, man deserves, *de congruo*, the grace of God. . . . But, alas, dear Lord God! These are vain, cold thoughts and dreams of idle, hopeless, inexperienced people who do not put the Bible into practice very much" (for whom these are only academic questions and professorial wisdom), "who do not know or experience what is in the heart of a sinner, what the temptations of death or the devil are, who do not know how we forget all merit, all works, when the heart feels God's wrath or the conscience is in anguish. These confident, inexperienced people probably always go about in the delusion that they deserve grace *de congruo* with their works. For it is natural to us, anyway, to want to think highly of ourselves and our works. But when a conscience truly feels its sin and misery, all jesting and playful thoughts cease, and there is only great, true seriousness; then no heart or conscience can be quieted or satisfied, seeking all kinds of works and yet more works, wanting certainty, wanting to feel a foundation and to rest securely on something. But these frightened consciences feel well that one cannot earn anything *de condigno* or *de congruo*, and soon sink into despair and despondency if they are not preached another word than the teaching of the law, namely the gospel of Christ, that he is given for us." (Müller 90, 20)

Only the gospel can save frightened consciences from despair. "Therefore, we know from several stories that when the barefoot monks, at the hour of death, had long praised their order and good works in vain, they finally had to renounce their order and St. Francis and say these words: Dear man, Christ died for you! This has refreshed and cooled them in their fears, giving them peace and comfort alone." (Müller 90, 20) "We add the other part of penance, namely faith in Christ, and say that in such terror the conscience should be reminded of the Gospel of Christ, in which forgiveness of sins is promised by grace through Christ. And such consciences should believe that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. This same faith restores, comforts, and revives such broken hearts, as Paul says to the Romans (5:1): 'If we are justified, we have peace with God.'" (Müller 172, 35; Müller 130, 126)

Even the best Christians can only save themselves from these terrors of the law by taking refuge in the Gospel. "And it would also be impossible for a saint, however great and exalted

he may be, to remain or endure against the accusations of divine law, against the great power of the devil, against the terror of death, and finally against the despair and fear of hell, if he did not grasp the divine promise, the Gospel, like a tree or branch in the great flood, in the strong, mighty stream, under the waves and billows of the fear of death, if he did not hold fast by faith to the Word that proclaims grace, and thus, without any works, without law, purely by grace, attained eternal life. For this doctrine alone sustains Christian consciences in trials and fears of death, of which the adversaries know nothing and speak of them as the blind man speaks of color." (Müller 143)

To the question, "How does it happen that a heart begins to believe, how does it come to faith?" the Apology answers: "The Gospel also condemns all people for being born in sin and for being guilty of eternal wrath and death, and offers them forgiveness of sin and righteousness through Christ. And this same forgiveness, reconciliation, and righteousness are received through faith. For the preaching of repentance, or this voice of the Gospel: "Repent, do penance!" when it enters the heart rightly, frightens the conscience and is not a joke, but a great terror, since the conscience feels its misery and sin and God's wrath. In this terror, hearts should seek comfort again. This happens when they believe in Christ's promise that through him we have forgiveness of sins. Faith, which in such fear and terror lifts up and comforts the heart, receives and feels the forgiveness of sin, makes righteous, and brings life; for this strong comfort is a new birth and a new life. ... But when we speak of such faith, which is not an idle thought, but such new light, life, and power in the heart, which renews the heart, mind, and courage, makes us a different person and a new creature, namely a new light and work of the Holy Spirit, then let everyone understand that we are not speaking of such faith, in which there is mortal sin, as the adversaries of faith speak. For how can light and darkness be together? For faith, where it is and while it is there, bears good fruit, as we will say afterwards. This is spoken of in clear, distinct, simple words, as it happens when a sinner truly repents, what the new birth is or is not. *Quid potest dici de conversione impii seu de modo regenerationis simplicius et clarius?* (98, 62 f)

God frightens us with the law and comforts us with the gospel, but the former only as a means to the latter, its actual purpose and function. "The whole Scripture speaks of these two things: first, that it frightens our hearts and shows us sin; second, that it comforts us, lifts us up, and makes us alive. That is why

the entire Scripture teaches these two things. One is the law, which shows us our misery and punishes sin. The other doctrine is the gospel, for God's promise, in which he promises grace through Christ, and the promise of grace is repeated throughout the entire Scripture from Adam onwards. . . . For through faith in the Gospel or in the promise of Christ, all the patriarchs, all the saints from the beginning of the world, have become righteous before God, and not because of their repentance or suffering or any kind of work." (Müller 175, 51 f.; 171, 31; 174; 176, 57) But God's real work is not to kill, but to give life. "Again, Isaiah 28: 'The Lord will be angry to do his work, which is not his work.' He says: God will terrify, even though this is not God's work; for God's own work is to give life. Other works, such as terrorizing and killing, are not God's own work. For God alone gives life, and when he frightens, he does so in order that his blessed comfort may become all the more pleasant and sweet to us; for secure and carnal hearts, which do not feel God's wrath and their sin, do not value any comfort. In this way, Holy Scripture usually places the two pieces together, first the fright, then the comfort, so that it shows that these two things belong to true repentance or conversion, first heartfelt remorse, then faith, which lifts up the conscience again."

Only through the gospel and faith is man truly freed from the delusion that he can and must be saved by the law. "For it is true that when a man's heart is idle and not in temptation, and because it does not feel God's wrath and judgment, it may invent such a dream for itself, as if it loved God above all else and did much good, much work for God's sake; but it is all vain hypocrisy." (88, 9) Even by studying the law himself, man cannot destroy this delusion within himself. The scholastics teach the law, "which they nevertheless do not understand, what kind of love for God it demands, but see, like the Jews, only the veiled face of Moses." (Müller 181, 78) And so it is by nature with all people. "Then all human reason and wisdom can judge no other way than that one must become pious through laws, and whoever outwardly keeps the law is holy and pious." (Müller 115, 38) "This opinion of the law is inherent in human nature and cannot be expelled unless we are taught by God (divinitus)." (Müller 134, 144) "Then all human reason and wisdom can judge no other way than that one must become pious through laws, and whoever outwardly keeps the law is holy and pious. But the Gospel turns us around and points us from the law to the divine promises and teaches us that we are not justified by the law (for no one can keep it), but by the fact that we are given atonement for

Christ's sake, and we receive this solely through faith." (Müller 115, 38)

True spiritual knowledge of sin also arises only when a person is converted and becomes a believer. "And Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:15 that the veil over their faces cannot be removed except through faith in the Lord Christ, through whom the Holy Spirit is given. For he says, 'To this day, when Moses is read, the veil remains over their hearts; but when they turn to the Lord, the veil will be taken away. For the Lord is a Spirit; but where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.' Paul calls the veil the human thoughts and delusions of the Ten Commandments and ceremonies, namely that the hypocrites want to imagine that the law can be fulfilled and kept through outward works, and that sacrifices and all kinds of worship *ex opere operato* make someone righteous before God. But when the veil is taken away from the heart, that is, when error and delusion are removed, God shows us our misery in our hearts and lets us feel God's wrath and our sin. Then we realize how far and distant we are from the law. Then we recognize how surely and blindly all people go about their business, how they do not fear God, in short, do not believe that God created heaven, earth, and all creatures, sustains our breath and life and all creatures every hour, and protects us against Satan. Only then do they learn that we believe so weakly or not at all that God forgives sin, that he hears prayer, etc. When we hear the Word and the Gospel and recognize Christ through faith, we receive the Holy Spirit, so that we may hold God in proper regard, fear him, believe in him, etc." (Müller 111, 12-14).

Through the law, God instills fear and repentance for sin; but repentance out of love for God cannot be produced by the law without the gospel. Only through and according to faith does repentance become a childlike, God-pleasing fruit of the Spirit. "The same faith" (through which alone we have peace with God) "clearly shows the difference between the repentance of Judas and Peter, Saul and David. And that is why the repentance of Judas and Saul was of no use. For there was no faith that held fast to the promise of God through Christ. On the other hand, the repentance of David and St. Peter was righteous. For there was faith that grasped the promise of God, which offers forgiveness of sin through Christ. For in truth there is no love of God in any heart unless we are first reconciled to God through Christ. For no one can fulfill or keep God's law or the first commandment without Christ, as Paul says to the Ephesians (2:18; 3:12): Through Christ we have access to God. And faith struggles against sin throughout life and is tested by various trials and grows. Where there is faith,

then the love of God follows, as we have said above. And that is what is rightly taught, namely that *timor filialis* is such fear and dread of God, yet faith in Christ comforts us in turn. *Servilis timor autem*, servile fear, is fear without faith, which becomes mere anger and despair." (172, 36 f)

## 12.

How does Luther describe the effect of the law and the gospel on repentance in the Smalcald Articles? Luther explains here that God gave the law to control sin with his threats and promises. However, as a result of human wickedness, all this has gone wrong. For some have become angrier as a result, so that they now transgress the law more than before, because they are hostile to it, since it forbids what they like to do. Others, blinded by their own delusion, believe that they keep the law and are capable of keeping it. The main purpose and power of the law is therefore to reveal to man his spiritual helplessness, original sin and its fruits, and to show him how fundamentally corrupt his nature is. "This frightens them, humbles them, discourages them (*prosternitur*), makes them despair (*desperat de se ipso*), makes them want to be helped, and not knowing where to turn (*et anxie desiderat auxilium, nec scit, quo fugiat*), they begin to become enemies of God and to murmur, etc. (*incipit irasci Deo et obmurmurare prae impatientia*). That is what Romans 4 means when it says, 'The law arouses anger,' and Romans 5 when it says, 'Sin increases through the law.'

This function of the law is retained and carried on in the New Testament. It is God's thunder axe, with which he strikes everyone, even the false saints, into a heap and drives them into terror and despair, into true heartache, suffering, and the feeling of death. But just as there is an imagined love of God, an imagined fulfillment of the law, and an imagined faith, so too is there an imagined repentance. True repentance is not something made by man himself, not *activa contritio seu factitia et accersita*, but *contritio passiva*, the feeling of death that God works in him through the law. And thus to repent means to begin true repentance. To this function of the law, however, the New Testament quickly (*statim*) adds the comforting promise of grace through the Gospel. The preacher of repentance, John, calls before Christ (*ante Christum*) all without exception, so that they may recognize themselves as lost sinners "and thus become ready to receive grace from the Lord and to await and accept the forgiveness of sins from him, *atque ita Deo apparentur ad gratiam amplectendam et remissionem peccatorum ab eo sperandam et accipiendam*."

Of course, according to Luther, it is not the law but the gospel that produces such embracing, awaiting, and receiving of

grace and forgiveness, which happens through faith, which the gospel kindles in those who are frightened by John's preaching of repentance or, where it already exists, revives. "But where the law performs this function alone, without the aid of the gospel, there is death and hell, and man must despair, like Saul and Judas, as St. Paul says: 'The law kills through sin.'" The gospel therefore remains the main thing in the sermon of repentance; the sermon of the law is only secondary to it. To give the sinner the comfort he so badly needs because of his transgressions is the one great goal to which everything else must serve. That is why the Gospel does not offer the consolation of forgiveness in one way only, but in all possible forms, through preaching, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and brotherly encouragement, "so that redemption may be abundant with God, as Psalm 130 says, against the great prison of sins." The Gospel does not give "advice and help against sin in the same way, for God is exceedingly rich in His grace" (Müller 313, 8; 319).

It is God who, through the law and the gospel, brings about true repentance, remorse, and faith. For the papists, repentance is from beginning to end a work of man, through which he earns forgiveness. In the papacy, everything is based on the delusion that man himself must overcome sin with his works. "Here, Christ and faith were not considered, but people hoped to overcome and erase sin before God through their own works; we priests and monks also came to believe that we ourselves wanted to oppose sin." (Müller 314, 14) If man repented, confessed, and made sufficient amends, he had thereby earned forgiveness and paid for his sin. "Thus, in penance, people placed their trust in their own works. Hence the words spoken from the pulpit when the common confession was pronounced to the people: 'Spare my life, Lord God, until I atone for my sins (*pro meis peccatis satisfecero*) and improve my life!" (Müller 314, 13) Sins were forgiven because of the good work of repentance. Yet everything they said about repentance, half-repentance, and the beginning of repentance (*contritio* and *attritio*) was mere delusion and hypocrisy. "If one considers it in the light of day, such repentance is a contrived and fictitious thought (*factitia et fictitia cogitatio seu imaginatio*) from one's own strength without faith, without knowledge of Christ, in which sometimes the poor sinner, when he thought of pleasure or revenge, would rather have laughed than wept, except those who either struck the mark with the law or were vainly tormented by the devil with a sad spirit; otherwise, such repentance was certainly pure hypocrisy and did not kill the desire for sin. For they had to repent, would rather have sinned more, if it had been free." (Müller 314, 18) Papists are unable to teach true repentance because they do not recognize true sins, deny the

original sin, consider only actual sins and approved thoughts to be sins, but not evil desires, and because they teach that man himself can and must do something for his salvation, thus denying man's complete helplessness. Confession was also considered a meritorious work. "The more purely he confesses and the more he is ashamed and humiliates himself before the priest, the sooner and better he atones for his sin; for such humility certainly earns grace from God. Here, too, there was no faith or Christ, and the power of absolution was not revealed to him, but his comfort lay in counting his sins and feeling ashamed." (Müller 315, 19. 20) This is in keeping with the third part of their penance, which is their own atonement for sins, here on earth or in purgatory, and its substitute, indulgences for money. Thus, from beginning to end, Roman penance is a human endeavor, in which the first part is self-made, feigned repentance, and the second part of true penance, faith in the Gospel, is completely absent.

In addition to this, many, especially in monasteries, were under the delusion that they no longer needed penance at all, since they had enough good works to even give some away to others. In monasteries and convents, it was believed "that some were as holy as we taught, that they were without sin, full of good works, so that we shared and distributed our 'good works' to others as superfluous to heaven. ... These do not thirst for repentance." (Müller 317, 28) All vain lies and deceit, delusion and hypocrisy! The fiery angel John, the true preacher of repentance, strikes both of them down with a thunderclap and says: "Repent, both of you, for you" (works-repenters) "are false penitents, and these" (who think they no longer need repentance) "are false saints, and you may both receive forgiveness of sins, because you both do not yet know what true sin is, so that you may repent of it or avoid it. None of you are good, you are full of unbelief, ignorance, and unawareness of God and His will. Then He is present, from whose fullness we must all take grace upon grace, and no man without Him can be righteous before God. Therefore, if you want to repent, repent rightly; your repentance is not enough. And you hypocrites, who need no repentance, you brood of vipers, who has assured you that you will escape the wrath to come?" (Müller 317, 30)

The right sermon on repentance makes everyone a sinner, finds nothing good in them, compels them to confess all their sins, knows only of Christ's perfect satisfaction, and teaches repentance throughout life with constant struggle against the flesh. "So also St. Paul preaches in Romans 3, saying, ' There is no one who understands, no one who is righteous, no one who seeks God, no one who does good, not even one; all are useless and rebellious'; and in Acts 17: 'Now God commands all people everywhere to repent.' All

people (he says), no one excepted who is human. This repentance teaches us to recognize sin, namely that we are all lost, that nothing about us is good, and that we must become new and different people.“ (317, 35) This repentance ”does not dispute what is sin and what is not sin, but piles everything up and says: Everything about us is nothing but sin. ... Therefore, repentance here is not uncertain. For there remains nothing with which we might remember something good to pay for sin, but only a mere, certain despair of everything we are, remember, speak, or do.” The same applies to confession. “For whoever confesses that everything with him is vain sin understands all sin, leaves none out, and forgets none.” And satisfaction “is not our uncertain, sinful work, but the suffering and blood of the innocent Lamb of God, who bears the sin of the world.” (Müller 318, 36 f)

”And this repentance increases among Christians until death; for it gnaws at the remaining sin in the flesh throughout life, as St. Paul testifies in Romans 7, that he struggles with the law of his members, etc., and not by his own strength, but by the gift of the Holy Spirit, which follows the forgiveness of sins. This same gift purifies and sweeps away the remaining sins daily and works to make man truly pure and holy.” (Müller 318, 40) Therefore, this repentance is not compatible with mortal sins, as some evil spirits in Luther's time believed, that Christians could not lose their faith and spirit through a conscious life of sin. The Lutherans, on the other hand, teach that ”when David fell into adultery, murder, and blasphemy, his faith and spirit were gone. For the Holy Spirit does not allow sin to reign and gain the upper hand so that it may be accomplished, but controls and resists it so that it does not have to do what it wants. But if it does what it wants, then the Holy Spirit and faith are not present.“ So although Christians are never without sin, they do not consent to sin, but rather fight against it. (Müller 319, 43)

”John and then Christ preach this repentance in the Gospel, and so do we.” ”The pope, theologians, lawyers, and no human being knows anything about this, but it is a doctrine from heaven, revealed through the Gospel, and must be called heresy by the godless saints.” ”With this repentance, we knock down the pope and everything that is built on our ‘good works’. For everything is built on a rotten, vain foundation, which is called ‘good works’ or laws, yet there is no good work, but only evil work, and no one does the law, but all transgress it. Therefore, the building is full of lies and hypocrisy, where it is most holy and most beautiful.” (Müller 318, 39. 41) Luther denounces the “most holy and most beautiful” aspects of the papacy as empty lies, hypocrisy, and anti-Christianity. His campaign is directed primarily not against the vices of

the papacy, but against its supposed advantages and virtues. The worst thing about the papacy is precisely what papists praise and consider the best: their transformation of the Gospel into law and of the Christian faith into pagan works.

### 13.

What does it mean when we say that Christians are free from the law? The *Epitome* answers: "We believe, teach, and confess that although orthodox and truly converted people are freed and delivered from the curse and compulsion of the law through Christ, they are not without law, but have been redeemed by the Son of God so that they may practice it day and night, Ps. 119. Just as our first parents did not live without law before the Fall, for the law of God was written in their hearts when they were created in the image of God." (Müller 536, 2) *Solida Declaratio*: "Then, although no law is given to the righteous, as the Apostle testifies, but to the unrighteous, this is not to be understood merely to mean that the righteous should live without law. For the law of God is written in their hearts, and the first man was also given a law immediately after his creation, according to which he should behave. But St. Paul's opinion is that the law cannot burden those who are reconciled to God through Christ with its curse, nor should it torment the reborn with its compulsion, because they desire God's law according to their inner man." (640, 5) *Solida Declaratio*: "To explain and finally settle this dispute, we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that, although orthodox and truly converted and justified Christians are freed and liberated from the curse of the law, they should nevertheless practice the law of the Lord daily, as it is written in Psalms 1 and 119: Blessed is the man who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night.' Then the law is a mirror in which the will of God and what is pleasing to him is actually depicted, which should always be held up to believers and diligently pursued with them without ceasing." (Müller 640, 4)

Concerning their justification and salvation, Christians know that they are free from the law in every respect and in every sense. We Christians, praise God, are not under the law, but under grace; not under grace and the law, but in every respect under grace alone. That we are people who are pleasing to God and blessed has nothing to do with our good works and the holy will of God. We owe this solely to the grace that Christ has acquired for us and revealed in the Gospel. Christ has fulfilled the law for us and borne all punishment, and this obedience has become our

righteousness through faith. But just as good works are not only unnecessary for justification, but must be completely excluded from the work of justification (Formula of Concord, Art. III and IV), so also the law, not only as demanding, threatening, and cursing, but also as the holy will of God, has nothing to do with it. And as far as the Christian life is concerned, God has written His holy will in their hearts through the gift of faith and the Spirit, making them willing to obey and thus freeing them from all compulsion of the law.

This freedom does not, of course, mean that Christians are without law and can and may wallow in sin at will, contrary to the law, the holy will of God. Their freedom from the law does not mean that the unchangeable, holy will of God no longer has any significance for the conduct of Christians. Christians are under grace, not under the law, but that does not mean that they are without law. God has graced, redeemed, justified, and made us believers for the very purpose of enabling us to live in holiness, innocence, and good works! The purpose of redemption, justification, and conversion is precisely to restore the image of God in man. God has created us as Christians, as new creatures, so that we may do good works, works that are in accordance with the holy will of God. To this end, Christians have been redeemed by the Son of God, that they may practice the law day and night. And through faith, this holy will of God has once again become the very norm of the Christian's heart, will, and life, as it was with Adam and Eve before the Fall. Insofar as Christians are born again, the holy will of God no longer stands before them as a demanding, threatening will, but has become their own, immanent law of their hearts and wills. If they are born again, the holy will of God is no longer a foreign, external prescription with demands and threats for Christians, but their own inscription on their hearts, an inherent law of will and life. If they are born again, Christians do what is in accordance with God's holy will willingly, spontaneously, and of their own accord, without any compulsion or coercion from the law. If they are born again, the image of God is already restored in Christians, and their own will coincides with God's holy will.

#### 14.

What would be the point of preaching the law to Christians if they were already perfect in this life? The *Solida Declaratio* answers: "Namely, if the faithful and chosen children of God were completely renewed in this life by the indwelling Spirit, so that they were entirely free from sin in their nature and all their powers,

they would have no need of any law and therefore no need of any driver, but they would do before themselves and entirely voluntarily, without any teaching, admonition, urging, or driving of the law, what they are bound to do according to God's will, just as the sun, the moon, and all the heavenly bodies have their regular course without admonition, without urging, driving, coercion, or compulsion, for themselves, unhindered according to the order of God, which God once gave them, yes, just as the dear angels perform a completely voluntary obedience." (Müller 641, 6)

Insofar as Christians are reborn in mind, will, and all their powers, they already have no need here on earth for threats, demands, admonitions, or the doctrine of the law. Yes, not even the doctrine of the law—for faith as such never goes astray morally, always drives itself toward God and love, and instinctively finds what is right, just as the magnetic needle always finds north. But just as a sailor sometimes has to correct his compass when obstacles get in his way, using the unchanging North Star as his guide, so too does the Christian in this imperfect world, where he still has flesh and encounters a thousand obstacles, need the unerring fixed stars of the Decalogue so that he does not stray from the right path in his walk. Christians know this, and that is why they adhere to God's Word, not only concerning the doctrines of faith, but also concerning their conduct. It is part of the nature of faith that they search the law of the Lord day and night in order to take sure and certain steps in all matters.

But if, with regard to the holy will of God, our knowledge were already completely unclouded here on earth, our will completely pure and unweakened, and our accomplishments unhindered in every respect, then all teaching with regard to the holy will of God would already be completely superfluous. In such perfection, the will of God would already be as completely immanent to Christians here on earth as it is to the stars in the firmament, the flowers in the meadow, the fish in the water, the birds in the air, the animals in the field, and the holy angels and all the blessed in heaven. But then the preaching of the Gospel would also have become superfluous. However, as the *Solida Declaratio* says, this state of perfection will not come about "until the flesh of sin is completely stripped away and man is completely renewed in the resurrection, when he will no longer need the preaching of the law or its threats and punishments, nor the gospel, which belong to this imperfect life. But as they behold God face to face, they will, by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, voluntarily, freely, unhindered, completely pure, and with utter joy, do the will of God and rejoice in it eternally" (Müller 645, 24. 25).

## 15.

Why, then, is the preaching of the law still necessary for Christians here on earth? The *Solida Declaratio* answers: "But since believers are not completely, wholly, *complete vel consummative*, renewed in this life; then, although their sin is covered by the perfect obedience of Christ, so that it is not imputed to believers for condemnation, and even though the Holy Spirit has begun the mortification of the old Adam and the renewal of their minds in the Spirit, the old Adam still clings to them in their nature and in all his internal and external powers, of which the Apostle writes: 'I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, there dwells no good thing. And again: "I do not know what I do; for I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate." Again: "I see another law in my members, warring against the law in my mind and taking me captive to the law of sin." Again: "The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you do not do what you want." Therefore, because of such desires of the flesh, the orthodox, chosen, and reborn children of God need in this life not only the law of daily teaching and admonition, warning and exhortation, but also, at times, punishment, so that they may be encouraged and follow the Spirit of God, as it is written: "It is good for me, Lord, that you humble me, that I may learn your statutes." And again: "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." And again: "If you are without discipline, of which they have become partakers, then you are bastards and not children." as Dr. Luther has explained in more detail in the church postil, in the summer section, on the epistle of the 19th Sunday after Trinity." (965, 7-9) Furthermore: "Then the old Adam, as the 'unruly,' 'contentious' donkey, is also still a part of them, which must be forced into obedience to Christ not only with the teaching, admonition, driving, and threatening of the law, but also often with the club of punishment and plagues until the flesh of sin is completely stripped away and man is completely renewed in the resurrection." (Müller 969, 24)

In conversion, the law is necessary to produce repentance, so that the gospel may give the comfort of faith. And the law does not become superfluous after man has become a believer, because the whole Christian life here on earth is a continuous repentance and a constant struggle between the spirit and the flesh. Christians do not need the preaching of the law because they are born again, but because they still have the old Adam in them. In sermons to Christians, therefore, one must never forget that one is dealing with people who, by virtue of their faith, are willing and

eager to do good works. However, we must not overlook the fact that these Christians, who are willing to do good in spirit, still have the flesh within them and are therefore still imperfect in their right understanding, will, and deeds. And this is the reason why Christians, as they truly are here on earth, must be preached both the law and the gospel with regard to their conduct: the law and the gospel, both with the right distinction. Yes, as long as Christians need the preaching of the gospel, the preaching of the law will not become superfluous. And as soon as the day dawns when the law no longer needs to be preached, then the preaching of the gospel will also no longer be necessary. So anyone who says that the preaching of the law is no longer necessary for Christians is, strictly speaking, claiming that all preaching in the church is superfluous, including that of the gospel, according to which God comforts sinners who are condemned and frightened by the law and forgives their sins.

## 16.

In what threefold way do Christians still need the preaching of the law because of their old Adam? The *Epitome* answers: "Even though they are reborn and renewed in the spirit of their minds, such rebirth and renewal are not perfect in this world, but only begun, and believers are in constant struggle with the spirit of their minds against the flesh, that is, against the corrupt nature and character that clings to us until death. Because of the old Adam, who still dwells in the understanding, will, and all the powers of man, so that they do not perform self-willed and chosen acts of worship out of human devotion, it is necessary that the law of the Lord always shine before them, likewise, that the old Adam does not use his own will, but is compelled against his will, not only by the admonition and threat of the law, but also by punishments and plagues, to follow the Spirit and surrender himself." (536, 4) *Solida Declaratio*: "But as for the old Adam, who still clings to them, he must be driven not only by law but also by plagues, since he does everything against his will and under compulsion, no less than the ungodly are driven by the threats of the law and kept in obedience, 1 Cor. 9; Rom. 7. Such teaching of the law is also necessary for believers, lest they fall into their own holiness and devotion and, under the guise of the Spirit of God, perform their own chosen worship without God's word and command, as it is written in Deut. 12: "You shall not do any of these things, each according to what seems right to him, but you shall listen to the commandments and statutes that I command you, and you shall not add to them or take away from them." So also the doctrine of the law is necessary in and for the

good works of believers, for otherwise man can easily imagine that his works and life are completely pure and perfect. But the law of God prescribes good works to believers in such a way that it simultaneously shows and points out, as in a mirror, that we are still imperfect and impure in this life, so that we must say with dear Paul: "Even though I am not conscious of anything, I am not therefore justified." So, when Paul exhorts the newborns to good works, he expressly holds them to the Ten Commandments, Rom. 13; and he recognizes from the law that his "good works" are imperfect and impure, Rom. 7; and David says in Ps. 119: "Viam mandatorum tuorum cucurri, I walk in the way of your commandments; but do not enter into judgment with your servant, lest no one living be righteous before you," Ps. 143." (969, 19-21)

Christians need to be taught the law because their old Adam does not want what is good, but rather stubbornly resists it; because he is blind and pretends to be devout to God's will; and because he is pharisaical and prides himself on his good works. The law must be used as a threat so that Christians do not give way to the carnal desires that still dwell within them. The law must be taught so that Christians do not fall into self-chosen works as a result of the blindness of the flesh that still clings to them. The law must be used to reveal the sinfulness of Christians as well, so that they may be preserved from self-exaltation and spiritual pride; for even Phariseeism dies only with the old Adam. The new man, who is essentially nothing other than faith itself, receives his life and strength solely from the Gospel, not from the law. But even in this, the new man reveals his life, his strength, and especially his willingness to fight, crucify, and kill the old Adam with his delusions and madness, his lusts and desires, at every turn, and in doing so, he also resorts to the rod of the law to strike down the lusts of the flesh in order to clear the way for the new will of the Spirit. The new man, born and nourished by the Gospel, wages this war. And in his struggles with the old Adam and victories over the flesh, in the good works in which he grows, the new man reveals and shows his power, which comes solely from the Gospel and is constantly growing.

## 17.

What is the service that the preaching of the law renders to Christians, especially with regard to their new obedience? The *Solida Declaratio* writes: "1. Since the law of God is not only useful for maintaining external discipline and respectability against wild, disobedient people, 2. likewise, that through it people are brought to the knowledge of their sins, 3. but also,

when they are reborn through the Spirit of God, converted to the Lord, and thus the veil of Moses is lifted from them, they live and walk in the law, there has been a dispute among some few theologians about this third and last use of the law, since one part taught and held that the regenerate should learn their new obedience or in which good works they should walk, should not learn from the law, nor should the same teaching be derived from it, because they have been set free by the Son of God, have become temples of his Spirit, and are thus free, just as the sun, without any impulse of its own, performs its regular course, so also they, out of themselves, from the prompting and impulse of the Holy Spirit, do what God requires of them. On the other hand, the other part has taught: although the orthodox truly are driven by the Spirit of God and thus do the will of God according to the inner man out of a free spirit, yet the Holy Spirit uses the written law to teach them, so that even the orthodox learn to serve God not according to their own thoughts, but according to His written law and Word, which is a certain rule and guideline for a godly life and conduct, according to the eternal and unchangeable will of God." (963, 1—3) Furthermore: "But it must also be explained differently what the Gospel does, creates, and accomplishes for the new obedience of believers, and what, as far as the good works of believers are concerned, is the function of the law. For the law says that it is God's will and command that we should walk in newness of life, but it does not give us the power and ability to begin and do so. Rather, it is the Holy Spirit, who is given and received not through the law but through the preaching of the gospel (Gal. 3:14), who renews the heart. After that, the Holy Spirit uses the law to teach the reborn and to show them in the Ten Commandments what is the will of God, Rom. 12:2, in which good works they should walk, which God has prepared beforehand, Eph. 2:10; admonishes them to do so, and since they are lazy, negligent, and rebellious because of the flesh, he punishes them for it through the law, so that he performs both offices together: he kills and gives life, he leads into hell and leads out again, which office is not only to comfort but also to punish, as it is written: When the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world (including the old Adam) of sin, righteousness, and judgment; but sin is anything that is contrary to the law of God. And St. Paul says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof," etc., and reproof is the actual office of the law. Therefore, whenever believers stumble, they are punished by the Holy Spirit from the law and by the same Spirit raised up again and comforted with the preaching of the Holy Gospel." (965, 10—14)

Faith is by its nature a willing desire for good, and as such it therefore does not need the instructions, admonitions, and punishments of the law in order to do good works. Insofar as Christians believe and are born again, they are driven by the Holy Spirit, driven by their faith, driven by themselves, and do not need the law as a driver to good works. According to the inner man, Christians render God willing obedience out of a voluntary spirit, which is completely incompatible with any external legalistic driving. Nevertheless, one can and must speak of a function of the law, also with regard to the good works of Christians, as they are still always and everywhere here on earth. Just as in repentance or conversion Christ takes the law into his own hands and makes it serve his purposes of salvation, so in the hands of the Holy Spirit the law still serves Christians after they have become believers, serving them also in their Christian walk. This office consists in the law telling Christians what works are pleasing to God, saying that it is God's will that Christians do such works, and punishing Christians when they sin. The desire and willingness, the ability and strength to will and accomplish, to begin and do good, do not come from the law. The power and willingness to do good works are given by the Holy Spirit, who is not imparted and received through the law, but only through the gospel. But the Holy Spirit, who alone renews the heart through the gospel, uses the law to teach the born-again what good works are, in which they are to walk according to God's will. Through this, Christians learn to serve God not according to their own thoughts, according to the thoughts of the old Adam, but according to the written law and word. The Holy Spirit also exhorts Christians to walk in these works that God has prepared beforehand. In doing so, He makes it clear to them that it is precisely God's will and purpose for Christians to be diligent in good works. And because the flesh of Christians is always lazy and negligent, even rebellious, toward good works, the Holy Spirit therefore chastises Christians, and He does so through the law. When Scripture says that the Holy Spirit will chastise the world, the world is to be understood as including the old Adam of Christians. And when it says that the Holy Spirit will punish sin, it means that he will preach the law; for sin is what is contrary to God's law. Furthermore, when Paul says that Scripture is useful "for punishment," this also means the preaching of the law, for punishing sin is precisely the peculiar office of the law.

So when Christians show the sluggishness of the flesh toward good, or when they stumble and fall into sin, the Holy Spirit punishes them through the law. The Holy Spirit performs both offices among Christians: he kills and gives life, he leads into hell and out again,

he punishes with the law, and with the gospel he comforts them and makes them capable and willing to do good. The ability, strength, and motivation for new obedience always come solely from the gospel. To Christians, who are imperfect, as they are here on earth, the law only tells them what good works are in accordance with the will of God, and punishes their lazy, stubborn flesh. So even if the good works of Christians are done according to the standard of the law, they do not originate from the law and its motives, but flow and come solely from the new life of faith, which alone the gospel creates and nourishes. Christians do what the law prescribes, but not because the law demands it with its threats, but out of their own willing impulse of faith and spirit, out of gratitude for the grace received in the Gospel.

### 18.

How does the Formula of Concord judge the claim that the law should not be preached in the New Testament? The *Epitome* writes: "We believe, teach, and confess that the preaching of the law is to be diligently pursued not only among unbelievers and the unrepentant, but also among the true believers, the truly converted, the reborn, and those justified by faith" (805, 2). Furthermore: "Accordingly, we reject as a harmful doctrine and error, contrary to Christian discipline and true godliness, the teaching that the law should not be preached in the manner and to the extent mentioned above to Christians and the orthodox, but only to unbelievers, unchristians, and the unrepentant." (807, 8; 971, 26) Furthermore: "Christ commanded that 'the explanation of the law and the proclamation of God's grace and mercy' be carried out in the New Testament." (953, 3) Furthermore: "These two sermons have been carried out side by side in the churches of God since the beginning of the world, always with due distinction. Then the descendants of the beloved forefathers themselves not only constantly remembered how man was originally created by God righteous and holy and, through the deceit of the serpent, transgressed God's commandment, became a sinner, and corrupted himself and all his descendants, plunging them into death and eternal damnation, but also raised themselves up again and comforted themselves through the preaching of the seed of the woman, who would crush the head of the serpent; item of the seed of Abraham, in whom all nations would be blessed; again of David's son, who shall reestablish the kingdom of Israel and be a light to the Gentiles, who shall be smitten for our sins and wounded for our transgressions, by whose wounds we are healed." (959, 23) Furthermore: "Thus also say the Smalcald Articles: The New Testament retains and carries on the office of the Law,

which reveals sin and God's wrath, but to this office it quickly adds the promise of grace through the Gospel. And the Apology says: For true, salutary repentance, it is not enough to preach the Law alone, but the Gospel must also be added. Thus, both doctrines are together and must also be carried out side by side, but in a certain order and with due distinction, and the antinomians or assailants of the Law are rightly condemned, who cast the preaching of the law out of the churches and want sin to be punished, repentance and sorrow to be taught not from the law, but from the gospel alone." (957, 14-15) Finally: "We believe and confess both of these teachings, that they should be diligently pursued in the churches of God until the end of the world, but with due discernment, so that through the preaching of the law and its threat in the ministry of the New Testament, the hearts of unrepentant people may be frightened and brought to the knowledge of their sins and to repentance; but not so that they despair and lose heart, but (because the law is a schoolmaster to Christ, that we may be justified by faith, Gal. 3, and thus not from Christ, but to Christ, who is the end of the law, points and leads, Rom. 10), that through the preaching of the holy Gospel of our Lord Christ they are again comforted and strengthened, namely, that if they believe the Gospel, God will forgive them all their sins through Christ, accept them as His children for His sake, and make them righteous and blessed out of pure grace, without any merit on their part; but not in such a way that they abuse God's grace and sin against it, as Paul thoroughly and powerfully demonstrates the difference between the law and the gospel in 2 Corinthians 3. (961, 24)

The law is to be diligently pursued not only among the unrepentant, but also among Christians. Although Christians are redeemed from the curse of the law, they should nevertheless practice the law of the Lord daily and diligently. Christian preachers should also constantly and unceasingly hold up the law to believers. It is a harmful error, contrary to Christian discipline and true godliness, to deny that the law should also be enforced among Christians. Christ commanded both the ministry of the law and the ministry of the gospel to be carried out in the New Testament. From the beginning of the world, these two ministries have been carried out side by side in the church of God. The children of God in the Old Testament constantly remembered the Fall with all its terrible consequences. In this way, they practiced the law. And they were lifted up again by the preaching of the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the son of David. In this way they carried out the gospel. Until the end of the world, both the law and the gospel are to be carried out in the church. The Lutheran symbols therefore emphasize the truth that the

New Testament also retains and carries out the office of the law. And of the antinomians, who cast the preaching of the law out of the church and want to teach repentance and suffering not from the law but from the gospel, the confession judges that they are rightly condemned.

It must not be overlooked, however, that such preaching of law and gospel must be done “with a clear distinction between them.” The law must not be taught and administered in such a way that, as with the papists and sects, the gospel, to which the preaching of the law is only subservient, is displaced and overthrown. (203, 165) The law should be preached in the church, not to supplant the gospel and take its place, but to prepare the way for it, as for King Christ, always and only for the purpose of enabling the gospel, grace, to assert itself, ascend the throne, and be the sole and all-ruling power in the church. The law is to be preached to certain sinners for the purpose of giving them the comfort of the gospel. The purpose of preaching the law in the church is neither to show sinners how they can earn forgiveness for themselves, nor to plunge sinners into despair so that they are lost, but to bring them to the knowledge of their sin and their own helplessness, so that the gospel may comfort, save, and make them blessed. In this way, the preaching of the law serves the gospel, according to which sinners, whom the law condemns and frightens, are saved solely through faith in Christ, through the reception of the grace and forgiveness he has acquired.

And as for the change in Christians, whom God has not pardoned and made blessed so that they may serve sin unrestrainedly, but so that they, as newly created good trees, may now also bear much good fruit, the purpose of preaching the law to Christians is not to make them skilled, capable, and willing to do good works, or to compel them to do so with the threats of the law, but to show Christians, since they are still imperfect in their knowledge, will, and deeds here on earth, what the holy will of God is, and to punish the sloth and wickedness of their flesh. Against the blindness, stubbornness, and pharisaism of their old Adam, the law is also to be preached to Christians, so that the willingness of faith, which comes from and is nourished solely by the gospel, may be exercised as freely as possible in good works. In the church, in the hand of Christ and his Spirit, the preaching of the law is never an end in itself, but always only a means to an end, namely, that the gospel, with its comfort and power, may gain validity and sole dominion.

Thus, the law serves the gospel by revealing sin,

instilling fear and terror, showing good works, and defeating the old Adam. In turn, the Gospel serves the law insofar as, through faith, which alone the Gospel works and increases, the holy will of God, which the law expresses, becomes the inherent principle of life for Christians; for by its nature, faith is nothing but a willingness to do good works. As far as our justification and salvation are concerned, the Gospel and faith abolish the law for us, so that it can no longer condemn us; for Christ is the end of the law, and whoever believes in him is righteous. But as far as our Christian walk is concerned, it is precisely this faith in the Gospel that restores and fulfills the law in us in the manner indicated.

### 19.

In what did all Lutherans agree concerning the doctrine of good works in the disputes after Luther's death? The *Solida Declaratio* answers: "First, there is no dispute among us in this article concerning the following points: that it is God's will, order, and command that believers should walk in good works, and that righteous good works are not those which each one good intentions, or those done according to human statutes, but those which God Himself has prescribed and commanded in His Word, that even righteous good works are not done by one's own natural powers, but are done when the person is reconciled with God through faith and renewed by the Holy Spirit or (as Paul says) is created anew in Christ Jesus for good works. It is also beyond dispute how and why the good works of believers, even though they are impure and imperfect in this flesh, are pleasing and acceptable to God, namely for the sake of the Lord Christ, through faith, because the person is acceptable to God. Then there are the works that pertain to the maintenance of outward discipline, which are also done and required of unbelievers and the unconverted, although they are praiseworthy in the eyes of the world, and are also rewarded by God in this world with temporal goods, but because they do not proceed from true faith, they are sin to God, that is, stained with sin, and are considered sinful and unclean before God because of their corrupt nature and because the person is not reconciled with God. Then an evil tree cannot bear good fruit, as it is also written in Romans 14: 'Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.' Then the person must first be pleasing to God, and that alone for Christ's sake, otherwise the works of that same person will not please Him." (939, 7. 8) The *Epitome* teaches "that good works certainly and undoubtedly follow true faith, if that faith is not dead but alive, as the fruit of a good tree." (797, 6)

According to this, the Lutherans agreed on the following points: 1. that it is God's will, order, and command that believers do good works; 2. that only those works are good works which God has commanded; 3. that a person must be reconciled with God and recreated before he can do good works; 4. that faith is the mother of all good works; 5. that good works "certainly and undoubtedly follow faith as the fruits of a good tree"; 6. that good works, although still imperfect, nevertheless please God for Christ's sake; 7. that the honorable works of unbelievers, which are praiseworthy before the world and also rewarded by God in this life, are sinful and unclean before God; 8. that the good works of Christians are not necessary for justification. (799, 7; cf. 943, 13) On the other hand, the Lutherans were not entirely in agreement on the following questions: 1. whether good works are necessary for salvation; 2. whether good works are harmful to salvation; 3. whether the statement is accurate: good works are "necessary," "essential," Christians are "obligated," "should," and 'must' do good works; 4. how the statement should be understood: Christians do good works "freely," "voluntarily."

Sanctification and good works must not be mixed with justification. However, they must also not be underestimated as mere incidental accompaniments, as superfluous appendages and mere counterparts of faith and justification. For even if good works do not belong to the essence of justification and faith, they are nevertheless their purpose and goal, just as good fruits are the purpose and goal of the tree. Good works do not make anyone a Christian; but God makes Christians so that they may do good works. God has made us branches of Christ, the vine, for the purpose of bearing fruit. God has redeemed us through Christ and recreated us through faith, made us new creatures, so that we may be diligent in good works. Christ therefore died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and rose again for them. We must beware of both deviations: the papist deviation on the right, which mixes works with justification and declares them necessary for obtaining forgiveness and salvation, and the antinomian deviation on the left, which does not know what to do with good works at all and declares them unnecessary, superfluous, useless, or even harmful. Good fruits should neither be spurned nor made the root of the tree. The tree should not be turned upside down and buried with its crown and fruit, with the root facing upwards. This is the folly of the Papists, who imagine that man can make himself into a new good tree through his good works. As if a thorn bush could turn itself into a vine or a tiger into a lamb! If there are to be good fruits, the first thing is that God makes us into new trees.

This happens when God gives us faith; then we become new creatures. And God's purpose and intention in this is that we, as newly created creatures, should now also do good works. This position distinguishes Lutherans from both Papists and antinomians.

## 20.

Are good works necessary for salvation, as Melanchthon and Major had taught? The *Solida Declaratio* answers: "We believe, teach, and confess that good works, both when salvation is asked for and in the article on justification, are to be completely excluded before God, as the apostle clearly testifies when he writes: In the same way, David says that salvation belongs only to those to whom God imputes righteousness without the contribution of works, when he says, 'Blessed are those whose iniquity is not imputed to them,' Rom. 4:6 ff.. And again, 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast,' Eph. 2:8-9." (799. 7) Furthermore: "But here one must be very careful that works are not drawn into and mixed up with the article of justification and salvation. Therefore, the propositions that good works are necessary for the salvation of believers, so that it is impossible to be saved without good works, are rightly rejected. For they are directly contrary to the doctrine *de particulis exclusivis in articulo justificationis et salvationis*, that is, they contradict the words with which St. Paul has completely excluded our works and merits from the article of justification and salvation and attributed everything solely to the grace of God and the merits of Christ, as explained in the preceding article. Again, they take away the comfort of the Gospel from troubled and afflicted consciences, give cause for doubt, are dangerous in many ways, strengthen the presumption of one's own righteousness and trust in one's own works, are accepted by the Papists and used to their advantage, contrary to the pure doctrine of the faith that alone saves. Thus, they are also contrary to the model of sound doctrine, since it is written that salvation belongs solely to those to whom God imputes righteousness, without the addition of works, Rom. 4:6. Again, in the Augsburg Confession, in the sixth article, it is written that one is saved without works, by faith alone. Dr. Luther also rejected and condemned these propositions: 1. in the case of the false prophets among the Galatians; 2. in the case of the papists in many places; 3. in the case of the the Anabaptists, since they gloss thus: one should not place faith in the merit of works, but one must nevertheless have them as necessary things for salvation; 4. also among some of his own followers who wanted to gloss over this proposition as follows: even though we require works as necessary for salvation, we do not teach

to place our trust in works, in Gen. chap. 22. Accordingly, and for the reasons now stated, it is only right that our churches should continue to refrain from teaching, defending, or glossing over the aforementioned manner of speaking, but rather expose and reject it as false and wrong, as was necessary at the time of persecution, when the clearest and most correct confession, against all kinds of *corruptelas* and falsification of the article of justification was necessary, renewed from the Interim, flowed forth, and was drawn into disputation.“ (945, 22-29; cf. 939, 1. 2)

The Apology writes: "Just as justification belongs to faith, so eternal life also belongs to faith. ... "For the adversaries confess that the justified are children of God and co-heirs with Christ." (217, 233) "But faith, because it makes us children of God, also makes us co-heirs with Christ. Since we do not deserve justification, through which we become children of God and co-heirs with Christ, by our works, we also do not deserve eternal life by our works. For faith obtains it, because faith justifies us and has a reconciled God. But according to Romans 8:30, it belongs to the justified: 'Whom he hath justified, the same also hath he glorified.'" (175, 75)

Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. That is the doctrine of Holy Scripture and of the Lutheran Church. Through faith alone we obtain forgiveness, we are justified before God, we are children and therefore also heirs of God and of salvation. Not merely indirectly, but in so many words, Scripture teaches that forgiveness includes salvation. And both forgiveness and salvation, which are basically one and the same, are obtained by faith alone and not by works. Good works do not come between faith and justification. Nor, however, should good works be placed between faith and salvation, and the latter made dependent in any way on works. Good works have absolutely nothing to do with the attainment of justification. The same applies to the attainment of salvation: good works have absolutely nothing to do with it. Through faith, the Christian has forgiveness and, precisely because of this, also salvation, even though the full enjoyment of it only occurs in the next life.

It is fundamentally wrong to make salvation dependent on good works; this turns the truth on its head. For salvation is not conditioned by man's good works, but these are entirely dependent on man knowing that he is already blessed through faith. Before a person can do any truly good work, they must first have the certainty that they are a blessed child of God, an heir to eternal life. We say: Faith alone is the source of

good works. One can also say: Only from the certainty that I am a child of God gifted with heaven do true gratitude, willingness, joy, and a happy, childlike disposition flow, without which there are no good works. Before man is righteous and blessed, everything that makes a work truly good is lacking. How foolish, then, to regard good works as a prerequisite for blessedness! It is like putting the cart before the horse, making the effect the cause and the cause the effect.

Now it is obvious that works are placed between faith and salvation when one says, "Good works are necessary for the salvation of believers" or "It is impossible to be saved without good works." These statements do not allow for any other meaning. They make works precede salvation, make them a prerequisite for salvation, and make salvation follow works as their fruit, instead of letting works flow from justification and salvation as their source. Our confession therefore rightly rejects the above statements with great emphasis, no matter how they may be explained and qualified, as erroneous, because they contain an error that runs directly counter to Scripture, because they attribute to the works of man what belongs solely to the grace of God and the merit of Christ, because they take away the comfort of the Gospel from those who are afflicted, because they shake the certainty of salvation, strengthen works righteousness and Phariseeism, and because they are used by the Papists in opposition to the doctrine of faith alone as the means of salvation. We believe with Peter that it is not by the works of the law, but by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we are not only justified, but also saved. (Acts 15:11) We praise works, but not in the article on justification and salvation. Good works must know their place, where they belong. If any work wants to take the place of justification and salvation, then it is time to call out to it: Friend, step down, for only faith belongs at the top here!

## 21.

But can faith, righteousness, and salvation be lost through sins against conscience? The *Solida Declaratio* answers: "Thirdly, because it is also disputed whether good works obtain salvation, or whether they are necessary to obtain faith, righteousness, and salvation, and this is a matter of great importance; for 'he who endures to the end will be saved,' Matthew 24:13; again Hebrews 3:1, 14: We have become partakers of Christ, if we otherwise keep the work begun until the end': it must also be explained very well and properly how righteousness and salvation are preserved in us, so that they are not lost again. And therefore, first of all, this false Epicurean delusion must be seriously punished and

rejected, that some write that faith and the righteousness and salvation received cannot be lost by any even wilful and deliberate sin or evil work', but that even if a Christian follows evil desires without fear or shame, resists the Holy Spirit and deliberately sins against his conscience, he nevertheless retains faith, God's grace, righteousness and salvation. Against this harmful delusion, these true, unchanging divine threats and serious punishments, admonitions to Christians who have been justified by faith, should be repeated and impressed upon them with all diligence and earnestness, 1 Cor. 6:9: "Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor covetous . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God." Gal. 5:21, Eph. 5:5: "Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Rom. 8:13: "If you live according to the flesh, you will die." Col. 3:6: "For this reason the wrath of God comes upon the disobedient." But when and in what way the exhortations to good works can be sharpened for this reason, without obscuring the doctrine of faith and the article of justification, is shown by the Apology as a fine example, since it says in Article 20, concerning the saying in 2 Peter 1:10 ("Be diligent to make your calling sure"), "Peter teaches why we should do good works, namely, that we may confirm our calling, that is, that we may not fall from our calling when we sin again. Do good works," he says, "that you may remain in your heavenly calling, that you may not fall away again and lose the Spirit and gifts that have come to you not because of your works, but by grace through Christ, and are now preserved by faith. But faith does not remain in those who lead sinful lives, lose the Holy Spirit, and reject repentance." Thus far the words from the Apologia. (947, 30-33) *Epitome*: "We also reject and condemn the doctrine that faith and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are not lost through wilful sins, but that the saints and the elect retain the Holy Spirit even when they commit adultery and other sins and persist in them." (801, 19)

Only those who believe will be saved; not those who once believed, but those who persevere in faith until the end. For Christians, therefore, it is an important question: How are faith, righteousness, and salvation preserved in us? It is self-deception to imagine that faith, and thus also salvation itself, cannot be lost through wilful sins against conscience. It is Epicurean delusion to think that the saints and the elect retain the Holy Spirit even when they fall into adultery and other sins and persist in them. Those who follow their evil desires, resist the Holy Spirit, and deliberately commit sins against their conscience lose faith, grace, righteousness, and blessedness. That is why there are

many divine threats, punishments, and admonitions in Holy Scripture against the pernicious Epicurean delusion that faith is compatible with deliberate sins against conscience.

These threats should also be repeated and impressed upon Christians because of their flesh. Yes, the truth must also be preached to Christians that faith is lost through sins against conscience. And even if Christians are exhorted to zeal and earnestness in good works for this reason, this does not obscure the doctrine of faith and justification. In this sense, Peter exhorts: Be diligent to make your calling sure through good works. That is, Christians should be diligent in good works so that they do not fall from their calling through sin and lose the Spirit and gifts they have received by grace and not for the sake of subsequent works, and which are preserved through faith, but which can be lost through impenitence and a life of sin. That God has forgiven us for Christ's sake is something we can only experience and learn from the Gospel, from the objective Word and sacrament. And also the certainty of whether we are truly God's children, whether we have truly accepted the grace offered to us, and whether God's Spirit is truly powerful and effective in us through the Word, is ultimately based, especially in times of trial, not on anything in us, but likewise on the objective Word, through which God has promised to be effective in us. Lutherans are not subjectivists. However, this does not contradict our statement that the good works that the Holy Spirit works in us also provide a basis for recognizing our Christian status. From our good works, we can recognize that we are truly God's children. Let us see from them how God is at work in us! Sanctification and good works form a testimony of deeds for us, from which the Holy Spirit speaks and testifies to us that we are God's children. (Cf. F. C.. 903, 56; 1087, 73)

Even in Luther's time, as the Smalcald Articles report, there were corrupt spirits who taught "that all those who had once received the Spirit of forgiveness of sins or had become believers, if they subsequently sinned, nevertheless remained in the faith and such sin did not harm them, and they cried out: Do what you will; if you believe, it is all nothing, faith destroys all sin, etc." Slandorous papists also sought to brand Luther as such a heretic. But Luther says that in such "senseless people" the "devil is at work," and he impresses upon them the truth: When Christians fall into public sin, like David in adultery, murder, and blasphemy, faith and spirit are gone. "For the Holy Spirit does not allow sin to reign and gain the upper hand so that it may be consummated, but controls and resists it so that it cannot do what it wants." (491, 42 f)

## 22.

The statement is correct: faith, righteousness, and salvation can be lost through evil works and willful sins. But does it follow from this, as Justus Menius and others taught, that good works are necessary for the preservation of salvation and faith? The *Solida Declaratio* answers: "On the other hand, however, it does not hold the opinion that faith alone attains righteousness and salvation at the beginning and then hands over its office to works, so that the latter must henceforth preserve faith, the righteousness and salvation received, but rather that the promise of righteousness and salvation may not only be received but also retained, may be firm and certain, Paul gives faith in Romans 5:2 not only the entrance to grace, but also that we stand in grace and boast of future glory, that is: he gives everything to faith alone as beginning, means, and end. Item Romans 11:20: "They have been broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand by faith." Colossians 1:22: "He will present you holy and blameless before himself, if you continue in the faith." 1 Peter 1:5, 9: "We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Item: "You will bring to pass the end of your faith, namely, the salvation of your souls." Because it is clear from God's Word that faith is the actual means by which righteousness and salvation are not only received, but also obtained from God, it is reasonable to reject what was concluded at the Council of Trent and what else has been directed toward the same opinion, that our good works obtain salvation, or that the righteousness of faith received, or even faith itself, is obtained and preserved either wholly or in part by our works. Then, although before this dispute some very pure teachers used such and similar words in their interpretation of Holy Scripture, but by no means intended to confirm the aforementioned error of the Papists, nevertheless, because disputes arose later about such a way of speaking, all kinds of annoying extensions resulted from it: it is safest to follow St. Paul's admonition to hold fast to the example of sound words as well as to pure doctrine itself, thereby cutting off much unnecessary quarreling and protecting the church from much offense." (949, 34-36) *Epitome*: "We also believe, teach, and confess that faith and salvation in us are not obtained by works, but solely by the Spirit of God through faith, whose presence and indwelling are witnessed by good works." (799, 15)

Faith is the only means by which man can attain righteousness and salvation. This is not only the case at the beginning, but throughout one's entire life. Faith does not cede this office to good works, as if these

were at least necessary to preserve our righteousness and salvation. As with the reception of righteousness and salvation, Paul also attributes the preservation of these to faith alone. He attributes the entrance into grace and the perseverance and standing in grace solely to faith. Through unbelief, grace is lost, and through faith alone we retain it. If we remain in faith, we remain in grace and bear the end of it, salvation. And as for faith itself, it is not sustained and preserved by good works. It is not the fruit that bears the tree, but the tree that bears the fruit. It is therefore fundamentally wrong when the Council of Trent teaches that good works preserve salvation, or that the righteousness received or even faith itself is preserved in whole or in part by our works.

Even Lutherans have not always expressed themselves correctly and cautiously in this regard, although their opinion was not in the least to confirm the error of the Papists. However, good intentions do not justify dangerous, false statements. According to Paul's admonition, we should also hold fast to the example of sound words in the interest of pure doctrine, so that the church may be preserved from strife and offense. Misleading speech has no place in the church. As it stands, however, the statement "Good works are necessary for the preservation of justification, salvation, and faith" expresses the same error that lies in the sentence "Good works are necessary for justification and salvation." For if good works are necessary for the preservation of salvation, or if they contribute to the preservation of our faith, then they are no longer the consequence and fruit of justification, salvation, and faith, but the cause of them. They then no longer come after faith and justification, but before them. This would turn Christian truth on its head and restore the fundamental papist error of justification by works. It is within the power of man to kill a living being, but no man has the power to bring a living being into existence. Thus, man also has and retains the power to prevent faith or to destroy the faith wrought by God through a godless life. But man can contribute nothing at all to bringing about and maintaining faith; only God can and does this.

### 23.

In his zealous battle against Major, Amsdorf had put forward the proposition: "Good works are harmful to salvation." What is the Formula of Concord's judgment on this? The *Solida Declaratio* writes: "Fourth, concerning the proposition that good works are harmful to salvation, we declare clearly as follows: When someone brings good works into the article of justification, placing his

righteousness or trust in salvation on them in order to earn God's grace and thereby become saved, it is not we who say this, but Paul himself, who repeats it for the third time in Phil. 3:7 ff., that such a person's works are not only useless and hindering, but also harmful. However, the fault lies not with the good works themselves, but with the false trust that is placed in them contrary to the express Word of God. But from this it does not follow at all that one should simply and merely say: Good works are harmful to believers or to their salvation; for in believers there are good works when they are done propter veras causas et ad veros fines, that is, in the opinion required by God of the regenerate, as a sign of salvation, Phil. 1:20. Since it is God's will and express command that believers should do good works, which the Holy Spirit works in believers, God also allows them to please Him for Christ's sake, promising them glorious rewards in this life and the life to come. For this reason, the proposition is punished and rejected in our churches, because it is false and offensive when taken at face value, weakening discipline and honorability and introducing and strengthening a crude, wild, and secure Epicurean lifestyle. Therefore, whatever is harmful to one's salvation, one should guard against it with the utmost diligence. But since Christians are not to be discouraged from good works, but rather exhorted and encouraged to do them diligently, this bare proposition cannot and should not be tolerated, taught, or defended in the churches. (949, 37–40)

Good works are a hindrance and harmful to Christians if they place their trust in them and seek to earn grace and justification through their works. This is not only the doctrine of the Lutheran Church, but is repeatedly affirmed in the Holy Scriptures. It is also what Luther defended against the papists. In such cases, however, the fault lies not with good works as such, but with the false, idolatrous trust that man places in his works, contrary to the express Word of God. But even if good works are harmful to salvation in the manner indicated, it does not follow that one could also say "*simpliciter* and thus straight away": "Good works are harmful to the salvation of believers." If good works are done for the right reasons and with the right intention, they are by no means harmful to Christians, but very useful. They are then a "sign of salvation" for them. This means that from the good works he does, the Christian can and should recognize that he has faith and is therefore a justified, blessed child of God. From his good works, he can and should conclude that he is a good tree created by God, a person reborn by the Holy Spirit.

Good works have not made him a

Christian, but he can recognize from them that he is a Christian, a child of God, just as one can otherwise conclude from the fruits the life, health, and goodness of the tree. Good works are not the real reason for our Christian status, but they are a reason for recognizing it.

How could the good works of Christians be harmful to their salvation, since God has made Christians into new creatures precisely so that they may bear good fruit; since God himself has commanded Christians to do good works; since it is the Holy Spirit who works good works in Christians; since, furthermore, good works please God for Christ's sake; since, finally, God wants to crown and reward the good works of Christians in this life and the next with a reward of grace! As it stands, and simply put, the statement "Good works are harmful to salvation" is false and offensive, contrary to Christian discipline and honor, and designed to nourish an Epicurean life. For if good works were harmful to salvation, Christians would have to guard against them with the utmost diligence! According to Scripture, however, Christians should not be discouraged from good works, but rather diligently exhorted and encouraged to perform them. What Amsdorf said was therefore false. What was correct, however, was the opinion that trust in good works is harmful, and that even good works themselves can become dangerous to Christians *per accidens* or by virtue of the old Adam, who is a Pharisee and prides himself on his good works. Like all natural human beings, the old Adam of Christians has the delusion in his flesh and blood that one can only become righteous and blessed through one's own works. Even the best Christians are therefore in danger until death (for as long as the old Adam clings to them) of falling into Phariseeism and reverting to pagan works. Christians should therefore diligently do good works, but at the same time be constantly on their guard lest their old Adam play a nasty trick on them and turn their good works into poison, which is precisely what happens when Christians allow their good works to lead them into spiritual pride.

## 24.

What is the relationship between faith and good works? The *Epitome* answers: "For a thorough explanation and resolution of this conflict, our doctrine, faith, and confession is: 1. that good works certainly and undoubtedly follow true faith, if that faith is not dead but alive, as the fruit of a good tree." (531, 5. 6) *Solida Declaratio*: "Therefore, the mother and origin of the truly good and God-pleasing works, which God will reward in this and the future world, must be faith, for they are then called the true fruits  
of

faith as well as of the spirit of St. Paul. Then, as Dr. Luther writes in the preface to St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: "Faith is a divine work in us that transforms us and gives us new birth from God and kills the old Adam, makes us completely different people in heart, courage, mind, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it. Oh! Faith is a living, busy, active, powerful thing, so that it is impossible for it not to work good without ceasing. It does not ask whether good works can be done, but before one asks, it has done them and is always doing them. But whoever does not do such works is an unbelieving person, groping and looking around for faith and good works, knowing neither what faith nor good works are, yet wishing and chattering much about faith and good works. Faith is a living, confident confidence in God's grace, so certain that he would die a thousand times for it. And such confidence and knowledge of divine grace makes one joyful, defiant, and cheerful toward God and all creatures, which the Holy Spirit does in faith, therefore man becomes willing and cheerful without compulsion to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer all kinds of things, to love and praise God, who has shown him such grace, so that it is impossible to separate works from faith, as impossible as it is to separate burning and shining from fire." (941, 9-12)

Where faith is, good works follow without fail and of their own accord. Works cannot be separated from faith any more than burning and shining can be separated from fire. Faith is by its nature a vain impulse, desire, and willingness to do good works. Faith is not dead wood on which all kinds of fruit are hung, but a living tree that sprouts buds, leaves, blossoms, and fruit from within itself. Faith is an inner impulse toward good works. Faith is not a cistern into which good works are poured, but a living spring that drives forth from within itself a constant stream of love and good works. Good works are therefore not acts that are pulled, knocked out, squeezed out, screwed out, and forced out of people by the law, but fruits that faith spontaneously produces from within itself through its own inner urge and impulse. Faith is the mother, the sole mother, of all good thoughts, intentions, desires, words, and deeds.

Good works do not come from outside to justify and add to faith, but are given with and in faith and flow out of it. Sanctification is not an effect of the Spirit that is separate from the gift of faith, coming later and from outside, but a fruit that is decided in and follows from it. With faith and justification, God has not granted man a mere first and partial

grace, which would have to be followed by a second, later, completing and sanctifying gift, but through and with faith, God has given us everything, everything that Christ has acquired for us, including the Spirit of sanctification and good works. True, living Christianity is not an ellipse with two separate focal points, one of which would be justification and faith and the other sanctification and works, but it is a circle, a sphere, with only one center from which all radii emanate. This one central point is faith, which grasps forgiveness and is at the same time the fountainhead of sanctification and good works. Good works follow faith certainly and without doubt (*certissime et indubitato*) as the effect follows the cause.

Faith is the source of good works, not one among many, but the only, sole source of them. Good works flow from faith, and conversely, what does not flow from faith is not a good work. Good works are the infallible *consequens* of faith. And the necessary *antecedens* of every good work is faith. Heat is generated not only by the sun, but also by fire, electricity, friction, etc. But good works are produced by faith alone. A person who does not believe in his Savior may have all kinds of thoughts, desires, resolutions, etc., but in his mind there is not a single thought, in his will no resolution, in his heart no desire, on his lips no word, and in his conduct not a single work that is truly good and pleasing to God. Without the faith that God has reconciled us for Christ's sake, all the thoughts and desires of the heart are always evil before God, every word is sin, every prayer is mere babbling, every work is an abomination. Faith is the necessary prerequisite for all good works. Just as nothing is completely true and rightly known, so too nothing is truly good and truly pleasing to God that is not related to and oriented toward faith and the doctrine of justification.

Nothing is more nonsensical than the claim that faith hinders good works. If someone has no good works, it is solely because he does not truly believe that God has forgiven him for Christ's sake. And the works with which people who do not have this faith boast are nothing but lies and hypocrisy. Apology: "It is impossible to love God before we recognize and grasp His mercy through faith. For only then does God become *objectum amabile*, a lovely, blessed sight." (157, 8) "Then, before we fulfill a title in the law, there must first be faith in Christ, through whom we are reconciled to God and only then obtain forgiveness of sins." (167, 38) Luther: "For who could love a God who is angry, judges, and condemns?" ([II, 321](#)) Apology: "All this" (the good works

prescribed by the law) "cannot happen until we are justified by faith, until we are born again by the Holy Spirit. " (157, 5) It is said of the Russians that they know no gratitude because, from long and gloomy experience, they no longer believe that the kindness and offers of friendship shown to them are really sincere and without selfish motives. Likewise, those who are not grateful to God and do not serve Him willingly and wholeheartedly do not trust Him, do not have the certainty that God has forgiven all their sins out of pure grace for Christ's sake, and do not believe in the divine promise.

## 25.

How does the Augustana respond to the papist slander that the Lutheran doctrine of faith hinders and forbids good works? "It is falsely alleged that our people forbid good works. For their writings on the Ten Commandments and others prove that they have given good and useful advice and exhortation concerning right Christian conduct and works, of which little was taught before this time, but rather, in most sermons, childish and unnecessary works such as rosaries, veneration of saints, becoming a monk, pilgrimages, prescribed fasting, celebrations, brotherhoods, etc. Our opponents no longer praise such unnecessary works as highly as they did in former times." (53, 1-3) "And he who now knows that he has a gracious God through Christ, thus knows God, calls upon him, and is not without God like the heathens. For the devil and the ungodly do not believe in this article, the forgiveness of sins, and therefore they are without God, cannot call upon him, and can hope for nothing good from him." (55, 24-25) "Furthermore, it is taught that good works should and must be done, not that one may trust in them to earn grace, but for God's sake and to the praise of God. Faith alone always grasps grace and forgiveness of sin. And since the Holy Spirit is given through faith, the heart is also enabled to do good works. For before, because it is without the Holy Spirit, it is too weak, and moreover it is in the power of the devil, who drives poor human nature to commit too many sins; as we see in the philosophers, who presumed to live honestly and blamelessly, but nevertheless did not accomplish this, but fell into many great public sins. So it is with man when he is without the Holy Spirit and without the true faith, and governs himself solely by his own human powers. Therefore, the doctrine of faith is not to be criticized for forbidding good works, but rather to be praised for teaching good works and offering help in how to achieve them. For apart from faith and apart from Christ, human nature and ability are far too weak to do good works, call upon God, be patient in suffering, love one's neighbor,

diligently perform one's duties, be obedient, and avoid evil desires. Such lofty and righteous works cannot be done without the help of Christ, as he himself says in John 15:5: "Without me you can do nothing," etc. (57, 27—40)

No, Lutherans do not forbid, prevent, or neglect good works. Their writings, especially Luther's, show that they do not lack proper instruction and admonition in this matter. Of course, they teach that one should not trust in good works to earn grace. However, they do not deny that good works should and must be done, namely "for God's sake and to God's praise." Christians do not perform good works in order to earn forgiveness, but because they already have God's forgiveness and grace, because God has already made them righteous and blessed, Christians gratefully and willingly do what God wants them to do. Only faith makes truly good works possible and real. The belief that we have a gracious God for Christ's sake, without any works of our own, is the source from which all ability, all willingness, and all zeal for good works flow. Without this faith, we would be like the pagans, without the right knowledge of God, and therefore unable to call upon God or serve Him with good works. Those who do not believe in the article of justification, like the devils and the ungodly, are inwardly enemies of God and can hope for nothing good from him. It is only through faith that willingness and childlike disposition arise, without which there can be no truly good works at all. Before and without this faith, through which alone the Holy Spirit is given, man has no power to do good works and is moreover in the power of the devil, who drives him to many gross sins, as the example of even the noblest among the pagans shows. But where there is faith, there are also good works, there is right invocation of God, there is patience in suffering, love of neighbor, fidelity to one's profession, obedience, and struggle against the flesh.

The papist slander that Lutherans despise good works is based on the foolish conclusion that good works cannot earn piety before God and attain salvation, and therefore they are completely pointless and superfluous! (217, 227) But why then do the holy angels and the blessed, who are confirmed in their bliss, still do God's will, if good works only have meaning when they are done in order to make oneself pious before God and to earn salvation? Through their slanderous accusation against Luther, however, the papists only reveal their own carnal blindness and genuinely pagan way of thinking and attitude. "All human reason and wisdom," writes the Apology, "can judge no other way than that one must become pious through laws." (167, 38) "To want to be saved by works

is the religion of the flesh, of natural man. To want to be saved by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith in the Gospel, can only be done by those who, through the Holy Spirit, have been born again and have become new men." (F. Pieper) The fiery angel John pounces on all the works we offer to God as atonement for our sins and as a reason why God should forgive us, and tears them to shreds. No one experienced this more powerfully than Luther. "The more I ran," he says, "and desired to come to Christ, the further He moved away from me." Strictly speaking, the papist attack on Luther and his doctrine of good works is nothing more than a mockery of God and His holy law (as if one could satisfy Him with all kinds of rags) and a blasphemy against Christ and His gospel (as if our works made His merit superfluous).

With regard to good works, the difference between Lutherans and Papists is not that the Papists taught and did good works while the Lutherans despised them, or that the Papists took good works more seriously than the Lutherans, but rather that what the Papists pass off as good works are nothing but pagan abominations before God, while Lutherans point to works that are truly good and pleasing to God. The works of the Roman Catholics differ from the good works as we teach them according to the above statements of the Augustana primarily in the following points: 1. The papists pass off the observance of human statutes as good works and place it on the same level as obedience to God's commandments. In doing so, they confuse their priestly and idolatrous worship with true worship. 2. The Roman Catholics declare purely mechanical and outward actions, quite apart from the right disposition of the heart, to be good works, thereby showing that they have no idea what the essence of a good work actually is. 3. The papists imagine that a person can do good works before he is reconciled to God and justified by faith. In doing so, they reveal that they also do not know how the Holy Spirit is received and how good works come about in man. 4. The papists teach that good works should be done in order to earn forgiveness of sins and salvation. But with such works they not only fail to serve God, but only blaspheme the grace of God, dishonor the merit of Christ, reject the Savior, falsify the Gospel, strike the Scriptures in the face, and make the sinner his own savior. If righteousness comes from the law, then Christ died in vain, then he was mistaken; for his whole work is based on the premise that one's own works cannot save man.

The reviling of many indifferentists and dogma-hostile liberals, among whom, for example,

Hanne writes, is also absurd and groundless: "It is a sad fact that orthodoxy and morality seem to be almost mutually exclusive and were at least in inverse proportion: the more the former proliferated, the more the latter declined. A peculiar and serious phenomenon!" But the faith of which Luther and our confession speak is not a mere intellectual and verbal faith, but holds fast to the truths of the Gospel from the heart. And such faith is not an obstacle to good works, but through it, as has been shown, truly good works become possible; indeed, without it, all works are vain and hypocritical before God. The liberals say, "The ideal of humanity is the sonship of God, since we humans know and feel ourselves to be children of the Father in heaven." But this ideal is also made possible and realized solely through faith in the gospel of forgiveness for Christ's sake, of which liberals want to know nothing. The moment a person comes to this faith, the ideal human being becomes real, praying to God from the heart: Abba, dear Father! The fear that preaching about justification and faith might neglect good works and Christian life is just as absurd as the delusion that night and cold will descend when the sun, which illuminates and warms everything, rises. What the earthly sun means for life in nature, true faith means for spiritual life.

## 26.

Is it right to say that good works are necessary and that those who are born again are obliged to do good works, or that they should and must do good works? The *Epitome* writes: "We believe, teach, and confess that all people, but especially those who are born again and renewed by the Holy Spirit, are obliged to do good works (*ad bona opera facienda debitores esse*). In what sense the words 'necessary', 'shall' and 'must' are rightly and used in a Christian manner even by those who are regenerate, and in no way contrary to the model of sound words and speech." (799. 8-9) *Solida Declaratio*: "For in believers good works are indications of salvation when they are done *propter veras causas et ad veros fines* (from true causes and for true ends), that is, in the sense in which God requires them of the regenerate, Phil. 1:20; for it is God's will and express command that believers should do good works, which the Holy Ghost works in believers for Christ's sake, and to which He promises a glorious reward in this life and in the life to come." (951, 38) Furthermore: "And first, concerning the necessity or voluntariness of good works, it is evident that in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology these words are used and often repeated, that good works are necessary; again, that

it is necessary to do good works, which must also necessarily follow faith and atonement; again, that we must and ought to do good works, as God has commanded. Thus, in Holy Scripture itself, the words 'necessary', 'required' and 'essential', again 'ought' and 'must' are used in the sense of what we are obliged to do by God's order, command and will, as in Rom. 13:5, 1 Cor. 9:9, Act. 5:29, John 15:21, 1 John 4:21." (Müller 627, 14) Augustana: "It is also taught that such faith should bear good fruit and good works, and that one must (*debet, oporteat*) do good works." (45, 1)

From the fact that good works are not necessary for justification and salvation, nor are they necessary for the preservation of justification, salvation, and faith, and from the fact that Christians are free from the curse and compulsion of the law, and also from the fact that good works flow naturally from faith and that Christians do good works voluntarily and out of their own inner impulse, it does not follow, according to the Formula of Concord, that one cannot speak at all among Christians of a necessity and duty to do good works, or that it is wrong to say that Christians should do good works, or are obliged to do them. After all, Holy Scripture also uses these very words "need," "necessary," "essential," "should," and "must" in reference to good works. According to the Formula of Concord, such expressions are appropriate because good works necessarily result from faith, analogous to the necessity with which a logical consequence flows from its premises, and because it is God who has ordained this and wills it to be so, and it is His will and command that Christians do good works. Good works follow faith with inner necessity, and according to God's will, they should do so. But what obliges Christians to do good works, as prescribed by the law, are not reasons and motives taken from the law, but willing gratitude for the grace and sonship of God bestowed upon them through the Gospel, as well as the fact that all people are "obligated and bound to obedience" to their Creator according to His eternal, unchanging order.

It is therefore a temptation of the devil when the sight of the imperfection of our Christian walk seeks to mislead us about the fact that, quite independently of our works, we stand in God's grace for Christ's sake through faith alone. As if, after all, forgiveness and salvation did not depend on faith alone, but also on our own piety! As if God lured us into his kingdom with the call, "Freely and by grace alone!" but then made us understand that his grace is conditional on the good works we do. Certainly, through faith God makes us skilled and willing to serve him, and it is also God's intention and will that Christians be zealous in good works.

However,

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truth remains that the new obedience is always only the purpose and effect of the grace that forgives sins and never and nowhere becomes a prerequisite for it.

Good works are necessary, not for the reason that faith was not sufficient for the Christian, at least not in terms of Christian life, since good works would have to be added to faith from outside and elsewhere. In every respect, nothing else is necessary for man than faith in the gospel of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake. If man has this, he does not merely have a part of what he needs, which would still have to be supplemented and completed in some other way, but in and with faith he has everything, he also has good works. Faith not only does not exclude good works, but carries them within itself and brings them forth from itself. So although only faith is necessary for the Christian, it does not follow that good works are not necessary. According to its own nature and divine purpose, faith itself drives us to good works, and only those good works that flow from faith are good. According to divine intention, many things must and should come from faith; but nothing else needs to be added to faith. Much should spring forth from it, but nothing needs to be added to it. The same is true of repentance, which, although faith alone is necessary for man, is not superfluous. Why? Because faith is nothing other than the consolation of the Gospel in the terror of sin and the law.

## 27.

How should we understand, and how should we not understand, the use of words such as "necessary" and "ought" in reference to the good works of Christians? The *Solida Declaratio* writes: "It has also been disputed by some that good works are not necessary but voluntary, since they should not be enforced by fear and punishment of the law, but done out of a willing spirit and a joyful heart. On the other hand, the other party has argued that good works are necessary. Such a dispute initially arose over the words *necessitas* and *libertas*, that is, 'necessary' and 'free', because the word *necessitas*, 'necessary', in particular, refers not only to the eternal, unchanging order according to which all people are obliged and duty-bound to obey God, but also sometimes means compulsion, so that the law urges people to do good works. Later, however, the dispute was no longer limited to words, but the doctrine itself was vehemently contested and argued against, claiming that the new obedience in the reborn was not necessary because of the aforementioned order of God." (939, 3-5) The Formula of Concord emphasizes "that it is God's will, order, and command that believers walk in good works."

(939, 7) Furthermore: "But the distinction must also be noted here, namely that it should be understood as *necessitas ordinis, mandati et voluntatis Christi ac debiti nostri, non autem necessitas coactionis*; that is, when this word ('necessary') is used, it should not be understood as coercion, but solely as the order of the unchanging will of God, to whom we are indebted, in accordance with His commandment that creatures should be obedient to their Creator; otherwise, as in 2 Cor. 9:7 and in St. Paul's epistle to Philemon v. 14, again 1 Peter 5:2, it is called 'necessity' when something is done against one's will, through coercion or otherwise, which one does outwardly for appearance's sake, but without and against one's will. Then God does not want such outward works, but the people of the New Testament should be a willing people, Psalm 110:3, and sacrifice willingly, Psalm 54:6, not unwillingly or under compulsion, but obedient from the heart, 2 Corinthians 9:7, Romans 6:10. Then God loves a willing giver, 2 Corinthians 9. In this understanding and opinion, it is rightly spoken and taught that true good works should be done willingly or out of a voluntary spirit by those whom the Son of God has redeemed, as is then primarily argued in the dispute about the voluntariness of good works by some. (943, 16-18) The reborn are obliged to do good works; they are *debitores ad bona opera facienda*, and it is right to use the terms "necessary," "should," and "must" in this context. "However, when speaking of the reborn, the aforementioned words *necessitas, necessarium*, and 'necessary' should not be understood as compulsion, but only as the obedience that is due, which the orthodox, insofar as they are reborn, perform not out of compulsion or the driving force of the law, but out of a voluntary spirit, because they are no longer under the law, but under grace, Rom. 6:14; 7:6; 8:14." (799, 10)

Only those works are good works which are done of a willing spirit and with a cheerful heart. Voluntariness is an essential characteristic of the works that God desires. What is enforced by fear and punishment of the law is not a truly good work. Christians do the works that the law shows, not because the law obliges, compels, and urges them to do so, so that they would not do them if the law did not threaten them with punishment for not doing them. What is forced upon someone by compulsion or against their will is a sham work that God does not want. True good works are done by people whom the Son of God has made free and willing to do all that is good. Christians are a willing people who are obedient from the heart. And from the fact that they are not good works at all if and insofar as they are done reluctantly or out of compulsion and pressure from the law, it also follows that Christians as such neither need nor can nor may be driven to good works by the law, nor should they be driven by it according to God's will.

However, it would be wrong to conclude from this that good works are not necessary at all, and one should not say that good works are necessary; or that God has made good works optional and left it to the discretion of Christians whether they want to do them or not; or that Christians are not at all guilty and in no way obliged to do good works, and one should not say so either. It is a false contradiction to claim that one is not obliged or bound to do anything that one does voluntarily and willingly, or that everything one is obliged and bound to do can only be done reluctantly, under compulsion, and without inner willingness. What is objectively their duty and ethically their obligation, Christians do as such subjectively and psychologically with a willing spirit, without any mental compulsion. On June 5 [1917, WW I], the message throughout the country was: "Now everyone has the duty and obligation to register for military service." "I am on my way," said one man here, "to fulfill my duty to register." And another said, "I have just done my duty and registered." The emphasis and tone of voice may have betrayed the inner attitude with which people complied with what the law required. However, it was not possible to draw any conclusions about subjective willingness or unwillingness from such statements alone. All could make use of it, although some performed what they described as their duty and obligation only with reluctance and under compulsion, while others performed what they also recognized and described as their duty and obligation with enthusiasm. Objective, ethical duty does not in itself logically imply subjective, psychological compulsion.

This example from the natural realm is not, of course, intended to suggest that the willingness that is essential to Christian good works can also be found in non-Christians (Christian willingness is of a completely different nature and is generated and motivated differently), but only to illustrate the statement that when we Christians speak of the necessity of good works, we do not mean *necessitas coactionis*, but *necessitas ordinis, mandati et voluntatis Christi ac debiti nostri*. This statement should not be understood as coercion, but as the order of the unchanging will of God, to whom we are indebted and to whom, as their Creator, creatures should be obedient. Christians are and remain bound to obedience to the God who created and redeemed them. Christ has freed us from sin and everything connected with sin, including the demanding and cursing law that was added because of sin. However, the fact that we are creatures of God, and what that involves, is not thereby abolished. Christians are also obliged to do the works that the law shows,

and they do them willingly and gladly. But what motivates and drives them to do so is not the law or any motive of the law, but the gospel, gratitude for the grace and forgiveness they have received in Christ.

## 28.

What carnal delusion is rejected by the words "necessary," "should," and "must"? *Solida Declaratio*: "Therefore, the aforementioned words or propositions are unjustly punished and rejected by some in this Christian and proper sense, which should be used to punish and reject the certain Epicurean delusion, since many attribute to them a dead faith or delusion that is without repentance and without good works, as if true faith and evil intent to persist and continue in sin could coexist in one heart, which is impossible, or as if one could have and retain true faith, righteousness, and salvation while remaining a lazy and barren tree that bears no good fruit, even if he persists in sin against his conscience or again deliberately commits such sin, which is wrong and false." (943, 15) *Epitome*: "Then, especially in these last days, it is no less necessary to admonish and remind people of Christian discipline and good works, how necessary it is that they practice good works as a sign of their faith and gratitude to God, than that works are not mixed into the article of justification, because through an Epicurean delusion of faith, people can be condemned as well as through papist and Pharisaic trust in their own works and merits. We also reject and condemn the doctrine that faith and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are not lost through wilful sins, but that the saints and the elect retain the Holy Spirit even when they fall into adultery and other sins and remain in them." (801, 18. 19)

Works must not be mixed into the article on justification. Those who rely on their own works in a papist, pharisaical manner will be lost. The way of pure grace is the only way to salvation, not merely one of many ways. The gospel approaches man with the claim of complete, but also sole salvation. Christ is not merely a Savior, but the only Savior. There is no other salvation. Whoever believes in anything else and not in him alone will die in his sins. Whoever does not believe will be condemned. God's grace and forgiveness are completely independent of our good works. It is through faith alone that we are justified and saved before God. If this truth is lost, then all is lost, then Christ and salvation and everything are gone, then we sink back into the night and lostness of paganism.

No less necessary, especially in these last days, when many are content with a mere outward and hypocritical Christianity, is it also to exhort people to good works and to remind them how necessary it is that they practice good works as a sign of their faith and gratitude to God. Why? Because no one can grasp Christ and grace, no one can become righteous and blessed, through a mere delusion of faith. But it is such an Epicurean delusion of faith when one is content with a faith that is without repentance and without good works. This is an illusion because such faith is invented, imagined, but not really present. Such faith exists only in the imagination. Not as if works constituted the essence of faith, either wholly or in part, but because they are effects and consequences without which faith cannot be and remain. It is impossible for a person to truly have true faith, righteousness, and salvation if he remains a lazy, barren tree. It is in the nature of faith to abhor sin and to have a heartfelt desire and inclination toward good. Therefore, where a heart is still full of aversion to good works and is dominated by the desire for evil, there can be no faith. Faith that remains without good works is a dead faith of the head and mouth, which neither grasps nor has the forgiveness of sins. Good works are therefore necessary because they belong to faith as its inevitable fruits, and because faith that does not bear such fruits proves that it is only a pretended faith, not a real one. A fire that illuminates and warms nothing is not a real fire, but a painted one. A tree that bears no leaves or fruit is not a tree, but dead wood that no longer draws nourishment from the earth. A body in which nothing moves or stirs is not a real body, but a corpse. An organism that no longer produces anything also no longer assimilates anything and is in a state of decay. Likewise, a faith that remains without works is not a real faith, but only a shadow image of the imagination that wants nothing, grasps nothing, and therefore also has no Christ and no grace.

Furthermore, the terms “necessary” etc. are rightly used in reference to the good works of Christians in order to punish the analogous, pernicious delusion that believers themselves cannot lose their faith and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit through wilful sins. Rather, as already shown, Christians should also be impressed with the truth that by sins against conscience they can destroy their faith and drive out the Holy Spirit. It is simply impossible for both to be and remain in one heart at the same time: true faith and evil intent to persist in sin. By living in sin, faith is destroyed and the grace it brings is lost. Where

sin regains its dominion, the old Adam has strangled the new man. "The certainty of God's grace and forgiveness is found only in those who, through God's grace, lead a cautious life." It follows from this, however, that even for Christians, warnings against sin and corresponding exhortations to good works are by no means superfluous.

## 29.

How is it to be understood, and how not, when it is said that Christians do good works voluntarily? Concerning the new obedience of Christians, the Formula of Concord says that "the true believers, insofar as they are reborn, do this not out of compulsion or the driving force of the law, but out of a voluntary spirit, because they are no longer under the law but under grace." All Lutherans agreed that "the true believers are truly driven by the Spirit of God and thus do the will of God according to the inner man out of a free spirit (*libero et spontaneo spiritu*)." (Müller 640, 3) Nor did anyone object when it was said of the reborn as such that, "just as the sun, without any impulse (*absque alieno impulsu*), accomplishes its regular course of its own accord (*sponte*), so also they [the reborn] do of their own accord (*sua sponte*), do what God requires of them out of the prompting and impulse (*instinctu et impulsu*) of the Holy Spirit." (Müller 639, 1-3; cf. Müller 627, 16 f) However, the Formula of Concord rejects the doctrine that it is up to Christians to decide whether or not they want to do good works. The *Epitome* writes: "Accordingly, we also believe, teach, and confess that when it is said that the regenerate do good works out of a free spirit, this is not to be understood as if it were at the discretion of the regenerate person to do good or to refrain from doing good whenever he wishes, and yet still retain his faith when he deliberately persists in sin. This should not be understood in any other way than as explained by the Lord Christ and his apostles themselves, namely, that the liberated spirit does not do such things out of fear of punishment like a servant, but out of love for righteousness, like children, Rom. 8." (Müller 532, 10-12) Furthermore: "But it is wrong and must be punished when it is pretended and taught that the good works of believers are so free that it is up to their free will whether they do or do not do them, or whether they want to or may act contrary to them, and that they can nevertheless retain their faith, God's favor, and grace." (Müller 628, 20)

Insofar as they are born again, Christians do everything out of a voluntary spirit and nothing out of external compulsion and the drive of the law. Through faith, they have received the Holy Spirit, who drives them from within. According to the inner man, they do the will of God spontaneously, of their own accord, out of their own drive and urge. In their  
new

obedience, Christians resemble the sun, which completes its course without any external compulsion. However, this does not mean that it is up to the Christian's free choice whether he wants to do good works or not, and certainly not that a Christian may persist in deliberate sins and still retain his faith. Just as the statement "good works are necessary" does not mean that Christians do good works out of compulsion of the law, so too the statement "good works are done voluntarily" does not mean that it is up to the discretion of Christians whether they want to do good works or not. When we say that Christians do good works voluntarily, we mean rather this: Through faith, Christians are freed from the demanding, cursing law; they no longer do good works out of fear of punishment like a servant; through faith, they have become children of God who are obedient with a willing heart; they do good out of their own love of righteousness and desire for good, which springs from their faith. According to the Formula of Concord, works are good "when they are done *propter veras causas et ad veros fines*, that is, in accordance with what God requires of those who are reborn." (Müller 632, 38) This is the case when the Christian does what the law prescribes and what he is also obliged to do according to the will of God, not out of external compulsion and the motive of the law, but by virtue of faith, out of his own urge and impulse, out of willing, joyful gratitude for the grace that has been bestowed upon him through the Gospel. By nature, all people are children of Hagar, slaves to the law, who at best can only perform an external, forced service and therefore do not belong in the house of the heavenly Father. But all true Christians, the children of Sarah, supernaturally begotten through the promise, are free children through faith, who render God a truly spiritual, willing, and pleasing obedience, and as such are also heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ.

### 30.

Is the willingness that is essential to good works already perfect in Christians here on earth? The *Epitome* answers: "Although this willingness is not perfect in the chosen children of God, but is burdened with great weakness, as St. Paul complains about himself in Rom. 7, Gal. 5." (Müller 532, 13) *Solida Declaratio*: The good works of believers are "unclean and imperfect in this flesh." (Müller 626, 8) Furthermore: "But here again the distinction is well noted, of which Paul says in Romans 7: 'I am willing and have a desire for God's law according to the inner man, but in my flesh I find another law, which is not only unwilling or displeased, but also opposed to the law of my mind. And concerning the unwilling and rebellious flesh, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9: 'I subdue and tame 'a body,' and

Galatians 5, Romans 8: 'Those who belong to Christ crucify, indeed kill, their flesh with its passions, desires, and activities.'" (Müller 628, 19) Furthermore: "But since believers in this world are not completely renewed, but the old Adam clings to them until the grave, the struggle between the spirit and the flesh remains in them. Therefore, they have a desire for God's law according to their inner man, but the law in their members resists the law in their minds, so that they can never be without the law, and yet not under it, but in it, living and walking in the law of the Lord, and yet doing nothing out of the impulse of the law." (Müller 643, 18)

Justification is complete from the first moment and throughout their entire lives for all Christians. Quite apart from their own nature, God has forgiven them all their sins completely and wholly out of pure grace, for Christ's sake. However, this does not apply to the sanctification and piety of Christians themselves. Here one must distinguish between believers as such, or insofar as they are born again, and how they actually are in this world, where they still have the flesh. Insofar as they believe and are born again, Christians are already perfect here on earth in terms of their thoughts, desires, and actions. Whoever is born of God does not sin, insofar as he is born of God. Insofar as a Christian believes, he conforms exclusively to God's Word. And insofar as this is truly the case, he does not err and he does not sin. Faith is in every respect the deepest willingness of man, also with regard to everything that flows from him and insofar as it flows from him. All compulsion is foreign and repugnant to faith. Faith desires and longs for the grace offered to it in the Gospel. It is not forced upon it. And faith is also willing to do good works. No one is forced to accept grace or to do good works. It is absurd to speak of compulsion here. Conversion consists in God giving man the will to grace, to the forgiveness offered to him in the Word. And good works are done only when the Spirit of God makes man willing to obey the law of the Lord through faith. Christianity is the pure opposite of any compulsion in any respect. I am willing and desire to obey God's law according to the inner man, says Paul in Romans 7:22.

However, the other thing remains true, that here on earth Christians and their works are still imperfect. Yes, as long as a person is not yet born again and still carries the old Adam within himself, he is full of unwillingness, sloth, and stubbornness against what God wants. In my flesh I find another law, which is not only unwilling or displeased, but also opposed to the law of my mind, says the same Paul in Romans 7:22. This state of affairs leads to a struggle between spirit and flesh, namely a struggle for being or not being, for life or death, without compromise, without

mercy or pardon. Christians crucify and kill their flesh along with its lusts, desires, and activities. This struggle does not cease in this world, for the old man clings to Christians until they are in the grave. Every day and every hour, the old Adam with his lusts and desires must be drowned and die within us. Believers are not completely renewed in this life. The situation remains that Christians, according to their inner man, have a desire for God's law, while the law in their limbs contradicts the law in their minds. In this struggle, however, the spirit triumphs over the flesh, willingness over unwillingness. Good works are victories that Christians achieve over the stubbornness of their flesh by virtue of the willingness of the spirit.

But like Christians themselves, these works are still imperfect and impure, precisely because of the old Adam. The fruits show the good tree, but at the same time betray its imperfection. They reveal the willingness of the spirit and yet also bear the marks of the flesh. All kinds of motives and traits that originate from the flesh creep into the good works of Christians, even the best ones. The joy and willingness that are essential to good works are still fraught with great weakness. But the weakness and unwillingness of the flesh does not mean the absence of the willingness of the spirit. Even in the most difficult struggles, this joy of the spirit for good is not lost, but rather proves itself in them. How would such a struggle be possible without such strong willingness of the spirit? It is precisely in the struggle with the stubborn, rebellious flesh that it becomes apparent that Christians "are never without law, and yet are not under the law, but in the law, living and walking in the law of the Lord, and yet doing nothing out of the impulse of the law." What drives Christians, day after day, to fight against the flesh is the joyful and determined new will to do good that springs from faith and gratitude for the grace they have received. No matter how weak and miserable Christians may feel, the willingness of their faith is still stronger than the devil, the world, and the flesh combined. Our faith is the victory that has overcome the world (1 John 5:4) and continues to overcome as long as it is not lost. To believe is to conquer, to conquer the law with its terrors and also to conquer the flesh and its allies.

### 31.

How is it that the same work is apparently a worthless work of the law in one person and a godly fruit of the Spirit in another? The Formula of Concord answers: "But in order to prevent misunderstanding as much as possible and to teach the distinction between the works of the law and the works of the Spirit properly,

special care must be taken to note when good works are being discussed that are in accordance with God's law (otherwise they are not good works), that here the word law means the same thing, namely the unchanging will of God, according to which people should conduct themselves in their lives. The distinction, however, is to be maintained in the works because of the difference between people who strive to follow such law and will of God. For as long as a person is not born again and abides by the law and does the works because they are commanded, out of fear of punishment or desire for reward, he is still under the law, and his works are actually called works of the law by St. Paul, for they are compelled by the law like servants; and that is Cain's holiness. But when a person is born again through the Spirit of God and freed from the law, that is, freed from this driver and driven by the Spirit of Christ, then he lives according to the unchanging will of God as understood in the law and does everything as much as he is born again, out of a free and joyful spirit, and such things are not actually called works of the law, but works and fruits of the Spirit or, as St. Paul calls it, the law of the mind and the law of Christ. Then such people are no longer under the law, but under grace, as St. Paul says in Romans 8." (Müller 642, 15-17) *Epitome*: "As for the difference between the works of the law and the fruits of the Spirit, we believe, teach, and confess that the works done according to the law are and are called works of the law as long as they are forced upon men solely by the driving of punishment and the draining of God's wrath. But the fruits of the Spirit are the works which the Spirit of God, dwelling in believers, works through the reborn, and which are done by believers insofar as they are reborn, as if they knew no commandment, threats or rewards (*ita quidem sponte ac libere, quasi nullum praeceptum unquam accepissent, nullas minas audivissent, nullamque remunerationem exspectarent*); thus the children of God live in the law and walk according to the law of God, which St. Paul in his epistles calls the law of Christ and the law of the mind. Thus, the law is and remains one and the same for both the repentant and the unrepentant, for those who are born again and those who are not, namely the unchanging will of God, and the difference as far as obedience is concerned, lies solely with human beings, since those who are not yet reborn obey the law out of compulsion and unwillingly (as do those who are reborn according to the flesh), doing what it requires of them, but believers, without compulsion and with a willing spirit, do what they are reborn to do, which no demands of the law could ever compel them to do." (Müller 537, 5-7)

When distinguishing between the works of the law and the fruits of the Spirit, obvious sins and gross

transgressions of the law, as well as self-chosen works, must be excluded from the outset, and only those works that are at least outwardly in accordance with God's law can be considered. However, there is a great difference between these seemingly similar and outwardly identical works. Some are works of the law, works of pretense that displease God, while others are truly good works or fruits of the Spirit that are pleasing to God. The distinction, however, is not to be found in the commandment and outward work, as if there were certain outward actions that were more pleasing to God than other works commanded by Him, as the papists imagine. Works commanded by God all have equal dignity, precisely because it is God who has commanded them. The minor tasks of a maid can be fruits of the Spirit just as much as the greatest works of an apostle. And conversely, the seemingly greatest deeds can just as well be works of the law as other minor and insignificant tasks.

The difference between the apparent works of the law and the fruits of the Spirit lies not in the external commandment and work, but in the disposition and inner nature of the people who perform these works. It is due to different inner motives that, even though two people do the same thing outwardly, it is not the same, and, for example, Abel's sacrifice pleases God, but Cain's sacrifice displeases God. One person does the same work unwillingly, under compulsion, with grumbling, because he has to, out of the compulsion and pressure of the law, because God demands it threateningly, or out of greed for reward and pharisaism. The other person does the same outward work, but out of an inner impulse of the spirit, voluntarily, gladly, out of a desire to do good, out of gratitude to God and to praise and glorify his name.

Like the outward persons, both works look the same when viewed externally, and yet the difference here is as great as night and day, as great as the difference between the inner disposition of the hearts of the two persons and their vastly different positions toward God, since one is a child of the devil and of wrath, the other a child of God and of grace. In the former case, the whole attitude from which the work flows is only a carnal, filthy, legalistic, sinful, and therefore displeasing to God. In the latter case, however, the attitude from which and in which the outward work is done is a spiritual, faithful, and therefore pleasing to God. In the first case, we are dealing with the work of a servant who obeys merely because he must; in the second case, with the obedience of a child who is willing and happy in his obedience. In the first case, we are dealing with works of the law, performed by Cainite saints, hypocrites, and Pharisees; in the second case, with the fruits of the Spirit, produced by true Christians and newborn children of God, who are no longer under the law but

under grace, and to whom the will of God has become their own, immanent law of the mind, and who therefore also, out of a free and joyful spirit, direct their lives according to the unchanging will of God, as understood in the law. The law not only tells the former what work is in accordance with God's will, but he also does it solely out of motives of the law, because he must, in order to avoid the threatened punishments or to obtain forgiveness, righteousness, and salvation or other advantages. The other, the Christian, also sees from the law what is in accordance with God's will, but he does it out of motives of love and gratitude and with the willingness that has come to him through faith in the gospel. F. Pieper: "Cain and Abel both offered sacrifices to the Lord. Cain's sacrifice did not please God, but Abel's sacrifice did. Why? Abel offered his sacrifice in a pious, childlike spirit, out of gratitude to God; Cain did the same work outwardly, but in a sullen spirit, as a work-righteous person. Abel thus dealt with God as one who was already justified by faith in justification, while Cain dealt with God as one who wanted to earn God's grace through his works."

Truly good works that are pleasing to God are therefore not works of self-chosen devotion, but works that are in accordance with the holy will of God, as commanded by God in His law. However, if such works are to be truly good works, they must be done out of the right impulse and motive. If a work is done because the law compels it with the threat of punishment, it is a work of compulsion, a work of the law, a work that man has no desire to do, that he would not do if it were not for the threats (or expected benefits), and thus a work of pretense that does not please God. But if a Christian does a work that he knows is in accordance with the holy will of God, out of his own inner, free impulse of faith and spirit, out of joyful, willing gratitude springing from faith for the grace that has been bestowed upon him through the Gospel, then this is a fruit of the Spirit, a truly good work of faith that is pleasing to God. Good works are not those that the law squeezes out of people with its threats and demands, but those that the gospel draws out of people, and that faith allows to flow out of itself from the impulse of the indwelling spirit.

Paul calls this impulse toward goodness, which is inherent in Christians through faith, "the law of Christ," "the law of the mind," "the law of liberty." This law of Christ, etc., is therefore not a law with new commandments and works, but the same one, holy will of God revealed in the law, the sum of which is love, **insofar as** it has become the Christian's own innermost will and inherent principle

and spontaneous law of life through faith and the gift of the Spirit, and **insofar as** this will of God has gained a new motive for willing obedience in man in gratitude for the grace of God received in the Gospel through faith and the great love that Christ has shown us.

### 32.

That the good works of Christians please God—do we recognize this from the law or from the Gospel? The *Solida Declaratio* writes: "But how and why the good works of believers, even though they are imperfect and impure in this life because of sin in the flesh, are nevertheless pleasing and acceptable to God, this is not taught by the law, which requires perfect, pure obedience in order to please God, but by the gospel, which teaches that our spiritual sacrifices are pleasing to God through faith in Christ, 1 Peter 2, Hebrews 11. Thus, Christians are not under the law, but under grace, because the person is freed from the curse and condemnation of the law through faith in Christ, and because their good works, even though still imperfect and impure, are pleasing to God through Christ, because they do what is pleasing to God not out of compulsion of the law, but out of renewal of the Holy Spirit from the heart, willingly and without compulsion, insofar as they are born again according to the inner man. Nevertheless, they wage a constant battle against the old Adam." (969, 22-24) Furthermore: "It is also beyond dispute how and why the good works of believers, even though they are impure and imperfect in this flesh, are pleasing and acceptable to God, namely for the sake of the Lord Christ, through faith, because the person is pleasing to God." (Müller 626, 8) *Epitome*: "Although this willingness is not perfect in the chosen children of God, but is burdened with great weakness, as St. Paul complains about himself in Rom. 7, Gal. 5. Yet the Lord does not impute this weakness to his elect for the sake of the Lord Christ, as it is written: 'There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,' Rom. 8." (Müller 532, 13-14)

Here on earth, the Christian still consists of spirit and flesh. And his products, the works he does, also bear this dual character. Even in the best work of the Christian, as already shown, carnal motives creep in. The old Adam worms his way into every fruit of the Spirit. The fruit borne by Christian trees here on earth remains worm-eaten. Before the forum of the law, therefore, these works cannot stand because they are imperfect. The law does not tell Christians that their works please God, but condemns them as unclean. The law is satisfied with nothing less than works that are absolutely perfect in every respect. But even the best works of Christians are not that. Is a Christian

not even able to pray a single Lord's Prayer as it should be prayed? The law condemns Christians and their works.

We Christians know this and therefore ask for forgiveness for the shortcomings in our good works. And at the same time, we rejoice that in order to enjoy the favor of our God, we need not and are not allowed to appear before God with our own works, but solely with trust in His great grace and mercy in Christ. That we are righteous, pleasing, blessed children of God, we owe to the grace that has been given to us in the Gospel and appropriated to us through faith. Whoever appears before God in such faith is pleasing to him, together with his good works, despite all the infirmities and sins that still cling to him and his deeds. Through faith, Christians stand under grace, the grace that forgives sins. This applies not only to their persons, but also to their deeds and omissions. Christians, together with their conduct, are pleasing to God for Christ's sake. The godliness of their person as well as their works is based on the grace in Christ Jesus, of which the Gospel tells us. God's eyes see faith and, in faith, Christ, whom faith embraces. But whoever has Christ does not need to strive for God's favor; he already possesses it. And for the same reason, for Christ's sake, everything that flows from this faith is also pleasing to God. In addition, through this very willingness and desire for good that flows from faith, insofar as it is such, the holy will of God is truly reestablished and fulfilled in us, here in a beginning and imperfect way, but there in a perfect way. When, in that life where we have cast off all the unwillingness and stubbornness of the flesh, the willingness to do good that comes from faith will unfold completely and operate without hindrance, then even the holiness and righteousness of God will find nothing more to reproach us for. In our earthly imperfection, however, this remains our consolation, that we and our works are not under the law, but under grace. This certainty, which has come to us through faith in the Gospel, is and remains for Christians here on earth the all-dominant truth that gives light, comfort, and joy everywhere, even in the imperfection of their lives.

### 33.

How does the Apology express itself about good works? What does it understand by good works? It writes: "Furthermore, we have often said that righteous repentance cannot be without good works and fruits, and what true good works are is taught by the Ten Commandments, namely, to truly and wholeheartedly honor, fear, and love God the Lord above all else, to call upon him cheerfully in times of need, to thank him

at all times, confess His Word, hear that same Word, and comfort and teach others through it, obey parents and authorities, faithfully perform one's duties and profession, not be bitter or hateful, not kill, but be comforting and friendly to one's neighbor, help the poor according to one's means, not commit adultery or fornication, but keep the flesh in check in all things. And all this not to earn eternal death or eternal torment, which is due to Christ alone, but to do so that the devil may not be given room and God may not be angered and the Holy Spirit grieved and dishonored. These fruits and good works have been commanded by God, and they also have their reward, and for the sake of God's glory and divine commandment, they should also be done." ([305-307, 77](#))

The Lutherans not only teach that good works are necessary and should be done by Christians, but also show what good works actually are and how they come about. "It is written in the prophet: 'I will put my law in their hearts.' And in Romans 3:3, Paul says: 'We do not abolish the law through faith, but uphold the law.' Likewise, Christ says: 'If you want to live forever, keep the commandments.' (Matthew 19:16-17) Again, to the Corinthians Paul says: 'If I have not love, I am nothing.' (1 Cor. 14:14) These and similar passages show that we should keep the law when we have been justified by faith, and thus grow more and more in the Spirit the longer we do so." (Müller 109, 2 f) "Therefore we also say that one must keep the law, and every believer begins to keep it and increases in love and fear of God, which is the fulfillment of God's commandment. And when we speak of keeping the law or of good works, we understand both the good heart within and the works without. Therefore, our adversaries do us wrong when they accuse us that we do not teach good works, for we do not say only that one must do good works, but we also say how the heart must be in order for them not to be loose, deaf, cold works of hypocrisy. Experience teaches us that hypocrites, although they presume to keep the law with all their strength, are unable to do so and cannot prove it by their actions. For how refined they are without hatred, envy, strife, wrath, anger, avarice, adultery, etc., so that nowhere are vices greater than in monasteries and convents! All human powers are far too weak to resist the devil's cunning and strength on their own, which holds captive all those who are not redeemed by Christ. It must be divine strength and Christ's resurrection that overcome the devil. And since we know that we share in Christ's strength, his victory through faith, we can ask God, based on the promise we have, to protect and rule us through the strength of his Spirit, so that the devil does not fall or overthrow us; otherwise we would fall into error and horrible vices every hour. That is why Paul says not of us, but of Christ in Ephesians 4:8: "He led captive."

For Christ has overcome the devil and promised the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, that with His help we may also overcome all evil. And in 1 John 3:8 it is written: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." (Müller 111, 15)

We should do good works, for they are the purpose of redemption, justification, and rebirth. "But Christ is presented to us so that for his sake our sins may be forgiven and the Holy Spirit may be given to us, who works a new light and eternal life, eternal righteousness in us, that he may show us Christ in our hearts, as written in John 16:15: ' He will take of mine and declare it unto you.' Again, he also works other gifts: love, thanksgiving, chastity, patience, etc. Therefore, no one can fulfill the law without the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Paul says: We uphold the law through faith and do not abolish it; for we can only fulfill and keep the law when the Holy Spirit is given to us. ... When we hear the Word and the Gospel and recognize Christ through faith, we receive the Holy Spirit, so that we may hold God rightly, fear Him, believe in Him, etc." (Müller 110, 11. 14) "Therefore, we are justified so that, as righteous people, we may begin to do good and obey the law of God. That is why we are reborn and receive the Holy Spirit, so that the new life may have new works, new affections, fear, love of God, hatred of evil lust, etc." (Müller 146, 228)

Love, the sum of the law, is utterly impossible for man as long as he is not reconciled to God through faith. "Finally, even if the most foolish and clumsy of opponents argue that men who are guilty of eternal wrath obtain forgiveness of sins through love or *actum elicited dilectionis*, even though it is impossible to love God if the heart has not first been seized by forgiveness of sins through faith. For a heart that is in fear and rightly feels God's wrath can never love God unless He gives the heart relief, comforts it, and shows Himself gracious again. For while He frightens and attacks us as if He wanted to cast us into eternal death in eternal disgrace, the poor, weak nature must lose heart and courage and must tremble before such great wrath, which frightens and punishes so terribly, and can never feel a spark of love until God himself comforts us. Idle and inexperienced people may well invent a dream of love for themselves, which is why they speak so childishly of it, saying that someone who is guilty of a mortal sin can nevertheless love God above all else; for they do not yet know what a burden sin is, what a great torment it is to feel God's wrath. But pious hearts, which have experienced it in the right struggle with Satan and the right fears of conscience, know well that such words and thoughts are vain thoughts, vain dreams.

Paul says, "The law only brings wrath," Rom. 4:15. (Müller 93, 36 ff) Where there is no faith, all pretense of love is hypocrisy. "Paul says (Rom. 14:23): 'Everything that does not come from faith is sin? But those who cannot do anything out of faith will only receive a gracious God when they have fulfilled the law with their works. For they will always waver and doubt whether they have done enough works, whether they have done enough to fulfill the law. Yes, they will strongly feel and sense that they are still guilty before the law, and therefore they will never be certain that they have a merciful God or that their prayers will be heard. For this reason, they can never truly love God, nor do anything good for God, nor serve God properly. For what are such hearts and consciences other than hell itself, when there is nothing in such hearts but vain doubts, vain despair, vain grumbling, vexation, and hatred against God? And in their hatred they nevertheless hypocritically call upon God, as the godless King Saul did.'" (Müller 143)

The Apology never tires of emphasizing this fundamental truth: that before and without faith, that God is gracious to us for Christ's sake, there can be no question of love for God and fulfillment of His commandments. "Yes, we cannot love God, for the heart must first be certain that its sins are forgiven." (Müller 107, 110) "We cannot obey the law unless we are reborn through the Gospel, because we cannot love God until we have received forgiveness for our sins. For as long as human nature believes that God is angry with us, it flees from his wrath and judgment." (Müller 140, 190) "It is not possible that there should be peace, a quiet or peaceful conscience, when they doubt whether they have a gracious God, whether they are doing right, whether they have forgiveness of sin: how can they call upon God in their doubt, how can they be sure that God respects and hears their prayer? Thus, their whole life is without faith, and they cannot serve God rightly. This is what Paul says to the Romans: 'Whatever is not of faith is sin.'" (Müller 183, 90) "We cannot love an angry God, but the law always accuses us, always shows us the angry God. Therefore, it is necessary that we first grasp through faith the promise that the Father will be reconciled to us and forgive us for Christ's sake. Afterwards, we begin to do the law." (Müller 138, 174) "Therefore, before we fulfill a single jot of the law, there must first be faith in Christ, through whom we are reconciled to God and first obtain forgiveness of sins." (Müller 115, 38) God becomes a loving image to the sinner only through the gospel and faith. "Furthermore, it is impossible for a human heart to love God solely through the law or its works. For the law alone reveals God's wrath and severity;

the law accuses us and shows how He wants to punish sin so terribly, both with temporal and eternal punishments. Therefore, what the scholastics say about the love of God is a dream, and it is impossible to love God before we recognize and grasp His mercy through faith. For only then does God become *objectum amabile*, a lovely, blessed sight." (Müller 110, 8)

Only good trees, not sour vines of Moses, but only good vines of Christ, bear good fruit. Without Christ we can do nothing good; and we become vines of Christ through faith alone. "Therefore, far, far away from us are the Pharisaic teachings of our adversaries, who say that we do not obtain forgiveness of sins through faith, but that we must earn it through our works and our love for God; again, that we must appease God's wrath with our works and love. For it is a truly Pharisaic teaching, a doctrine of the law, not of the gospel, since they teach that man must first be justified by the law before he can be reconciled to God through Christ, even though Christ says, 'Without me you can do nothing.' Item: 'I am the vine, you are the branches.' But the adversaries speak as if we were not Christ's branches, but Moses'. For they want to become pious and righteous before God first through the law, and first offer our works and love to God before they become branches on the vine of Christ. But Paul, who is certainly a much higher doctor than the adversaries, speaks clearly and argues again that no one can do the law without Christ. Therefore, those who have rightly felt or experienced sin and fear of conscience must hold fast to the promise of grace, that they will first be reconciled to God through faith for Christ's sake before they fulfill the law." (Müller 182, 85) "But this law is not fulfilled without Christ, as he himself says, 'Without me you can do nothing.' For without ceasing it accuses the conscience that does not fulfill the law, which is why it flees in fear from the judgment and punishment of the law. For the law incites wrath, Rom. 4:15. But then he fulfills the law when he hears that God is reconciled to us for Christ's sake, even though we cannot fulfill the law. When Christ the Mediator is grasped through this faith, the heart becomes quiet and begins to love God and do the law, knowing that it now pleases God for the sake of Christ the Mediator, even though that beginning fulfillment of the law is far from perfect and very impure." (Müller 134, 148) "And just as a good tree should bear good fruit, and yet the fruit does not make the tree good, so good works must follow after the new birth, although they do not make man pleasing to God, but just as the tree must first be good, so man must first be pleasing to God through faith in Christ. " (Müller 131, 132) "No one can do a truly good work unless he is himself righteous, pious, and good beforehand." (Müller 107, 106)

Faith is a new divine power in the heart that causes love to spring forth and necessarily drives one to good works. "For we do not call it faith to know the bad stories about Christ, which are also in devils, but the new light and power that the Holy Spirit works in the heart, through which we overcome the terror of death, sin, etc. That is what we call faith. Such true Christian faith is not as easy and simple a thing as its opponents would have us believe. As they say, 'Believe, believe, how soon can I believe!', etc. Nor is it a human thought that I can form myself, but it is a divine power in the heart, through which we are born again, through which we overcome the great power of the devil and death, as Paul says to the Colossians: "In whom ye also are risen by the faith which is of God," etc. This same faith, because it is a new divine light and life in the heart, through which we receive a new mind and courage, is alive, active, and rich in good works. Therefore, it is rightly said that faith without works is not true faith. (Müller 130, 129) "Since faith brings with it the Holy Spirit and works a new light and life in the heart, it is certain and follows necessarily that faith renews and changes the heart. And what kind of renewal of the heart this is, the prophet indicates when he says, 'I will put my law in their hearts.' When we are born again through faith and have recognized that God wants to be gracious to us, wants to be our Father and Helper, we begin to fear God, to love Him, to thank Him, to praise Him, to ask Him for all help and to wait upon Him, and also to be obedient to His will in tribulations. We then also begin to love our neighbor; for now there is a new heart, mind, and spirit within us through the Spirit of Christ." (Müller 109, 4) "And we add that it is impossible for true faith, which comforts the heart and receives forgiveness of sins, to exist without the love of God. For through Christ we come to the Father, and when we are reconciled to God through Christ, we believe and conclude with certainty in our hearts that a true God lives and exists, that we have a Father in heaven who watches over us at all times, who is to be feared, who is to be loved for his unspeakable goodness, to whom we should always give heartfelt thanks, praise and glorify him, who hears our prayers, our longings, and our sighs, as John says in his first epistle (1 John 4:19): "We love him because he first loved us." Us namely, because he gave his Son for us and forgave our sins. John clearly shows that faith comes first and love follows." (Müller 112, 22)

The Holy Spirit works good deeds, and He is received only through faith. "We cannot fulfill or keep the law until we receive the Holy Spirit." (Müller 99, 70) "Therefore,

we must first obtain forgiveness of sins through faith before we can fulfill the law. However, as we said above, love certainly follows from faith; for those who believe receive the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they begin to be obedient to the law and to obey it." (Müller 181, 82) "All this cannot happen until we are justified by faith, until we are born again by the Holy Spirit. For, first of all, no one can keep the law without the knowledge of Christ; likewise, no one can fulfill the law without the Holy Spirit. But we cannot receive the Holy Spirit except through faith, as Paul says in Galatians 3:14, that we receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." (Müller 110, 5) "And since faith alone obtains forgiveness of sins and makes us acceptable to God, it brings with it the Holy Spirit and should more rightly be called *gratia gratum faciens*, that is, the grace that makes us acceptable, for the love that follows." (Müller 108, 116)

Faith is incompatible with mortal sins, and where no works follow, there is also no faith. "Item, this faith is in those who have true repentance, that is, where a frightened conscience feels God's wrath and sin, seeks forgiveness of sin and grace. And in such fear, in such anxieties and needs, faith is first proven and must also be preserved and increase. Therefore, faith cannot be found in carnal, secure people who live according to the lusts and will of the flesh. For thus says Paul in Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." And in Romans 8:12-13: "So then, 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, faith, which is only in the hearts and consciences of those who sincerely regret their sins, cannot coexist with mortal sin, as the adversaries teach. Nor can it be in those who live carnally according to the world, according to the will of Satan and the flesh." (Müller 112, 23) "For those who are considered holy and righteous before God are never in mortal sin." (Müller 95, 48) From the description of faith, "everyone understands that we are not talking about such faith, in which there is mortal sin, as the adversaries speak of faith." (Müller 98, 64) With love, faith is also lost. "But it is true that whoever loses love also loses spirit and faith." (Müller 125, 103) "When we are born again, we see that we must keep the law and obey God's law. Therefore, if someone's Christian love slackens, even if he had great, strong faith, he has become cold and is now again carnal, without spirit and faith. For there is no Holy Spirit where there is no Christian love and

other good fruits." (Müller 124, 98) Where works diminish, there is also no longer righteousness in the heart. "For a heart and conscience that has rightly felt its misery and sin, that is rightly frightened, will not regard or seek the lusts of the world. And where there is faith, there it is grateful to God, respects and loves His commandments wholeheartedly. Nor is there any true repentance in the heart if we do not show good works and Christian patience outwardly." (Müller 191, 34) "For Christ tends to put the two together, the law and the gospel, both faith and good works, to show that there is no faith unless good works follow." (Müller 134) With the cause, the effect is set: faith is followed by works. With this effect, the cause is also abolished: with love and works, faith also falls away. If faith is there, works are not lacking, and if works are lacking, faith is also no longer present.

Works of outward respectability, which God wants and rewards for the sake of civil order, man is capable of doing to some extent by nature; but he does not find truly good and God-pleasing works. "We hold and speak of outward piety in such a way that God demands and desires such an outwardly respectable life, and for the sake of God's commandment, one must do the good works that are commanded in the Ten Commandments. For the law is our disciplinarian, and the law is given to the unrighteous. For God the Lord wants gross sins to be prevented by external discipline, and to maintain this, he gives the law, ordains authority, and provides learned, wise people to serve as rulers. And so, to some extent, reason is capable of leading an outwardly honorable life and conduct, although it is often hindered in this by innate weakness and by the influence of the devil. Although I am happy to give such an outward life and good works as much praise as they deserve (for in this life and in worldly affairs there is nothing better than honesty and virtue, as Aristotle says that neither the morning star nor the evening star is more lovely and beautiful than honorability and righteousness, as God also rewards such virtue with physical gifts), one should not exalt good works and such conduct so highly that it brings shame upon Christ." (Müller 91, 22-24) Outwardly, such works may shine; inwardly, however, they are filthy. "If reason and carnal-mindedness are enmity against God, then no man can love God sincerely without the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, if being carnally minded is against God, then truly the best good works are unclean and sinful, which any child of Adam may do. Furthermore, if the flesh cannot be subject to God's law, then truly a man sins even when he does noble, beautiful, precious good works, which the world greatly esteems. The adversaries see only the commandments on the second tablet of Moses, which

also speak of outward respectability, which reason understands better, and they want to imagine that with such outward good works they are keeping God's law. But they do not see the first table, which commands and requires of us that we should love God with all our hearts, that we should not waver or doubt that God is angry because of sin, that we should fear God with all our hearts, that we should be certain in our hearts that God is not far away, that he hears our prayers, etc. Now, before we are born again through the Holy Spirit, we are all of the nature of Adam, in that our hearts despise God's wrath, judgment, and threats in security, and are hostile and enmity toward his judgment and punishment. Since all Adam's children are born into such great sin that we all despise God by nature, doubting His Word, His promise, and His threats, then truly our best good works, which we do before we are born again by the Holy Spirit, must be sinful and damned works to God, even if they are beautiful to the world; for they come from an evil, godless, unclean heart, as Paul says in Romans 14:23: "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." For all such works-righteous people do works without faith, despise God in their hearts, and believe as little as Epicurus believed that God would accept them. The inward contempt of God must always make the works unclean and sinful, even if they are beautiful to people; for God searches the hearts." (Müller 92, 35) "Although leading a respectable life and doing the outward works of the law is possible to some extent without Christ, without the Holy Spirit, from innate light, it is nevertheless certain, as indicated above, that the highest parts of the divine law, such as turning one's whole heart to God, honoring Him with all one's heart, which is required in the first table and in the first highest commandment, no one can do without the Holy Spirit. But our adversaries are good, crude, lazy, inexperienced theologians. They look only at the second table of Moses and the works thereof. But they pay no attention to the first table, which contains the highest theology, on which everything depends; indeed, they consider the highest, holiest, greatest, most distinguished commandment, which surpasses all human and angelic understanding, which concerns the highest worship of God, the deity itself, and the honor of eternal majesty, where God commands that we should wholeheartedly regard him as Lord and God, fear and love him, to be so insignificant, so small, as if it did not belong to theology." (Müller 110, 9. 10)

### 34.

How does the Apology judge the nature, godliness, purpose, and usefulness of good works? In this life, the new obedience of Christians remains imperfect. "On the other hand, it is certain that even those who are reborn through faith and the Holy Spirit are nevertheless not entirely pure as long as this life lasts,

nor do they keep the law perfectly. For although they have received the first fruits of the Spirit, and although new, indeed eternal, life has begun in them, there still remains something of sin and evil desire, and the law still finds much to accuse us of." (Müller 115, 39) "If we believed that, once we have come to the Gospel and been born again, we must thereafter earn God's grace through our works, and not through faith, our conscience would never find peace, but would have to despair; for the law accuses us without ceasing, since we cannot keep it perfectly, etc. As the whole holy Christian Church, all the saints, have always confessed and still confess. For thus says Paul in Romans 7:19: 'The good that I will, I do not do, but the evil that I will not, I do,' etc. Again: 'In my flesh I serve the law of sin,' etc. For there is no one who fears and loves God the Lord with all his heart as he ought to, no one who bears the cross and tribulation in complete obedience to God, no one who does not often doubt through weakness whether God accepts us, whether he respects us, whether he hears our prayers. Because of this, we often murmur against God out of impatience, that the wicked fare well and the pious fare badly. Furthermore, who is there who does his duty well enough, who does not rage against God in trials when God hides himself? Who loves his neighbor as himself? Who is without all kinds of evil desires? Of all sins, the Psalm says, "For this all the saints will pray at the right time." There he says that all the saints must ask for forgiveness of sin. Therefore, those who do not consider the evil desires of the flesh to be sin are completely blind, of whom Paul says, "The flesh strives against the Spirit, and the Spirit strives against the flesh." For the flesh does not trust God, relies on this world and temporal goods, seeks human comfort and help in tribulations, even against God's will, doubts God's grace and help, and murmurs against God in trials and tribulations, all of which is contrary to God's commandment. The Holy Spirit fights and strives against Adam's sin in the hearts of the saints, that he may drive out and kill the poison of the old Adam, the evil and desperate nature, and bring a different mind and courage into the heart. And Augustine also says: 'We keep all of God's commandments when everything we do not keep is forgiven us.'" (Müller 117, 45)

Taken absolutely, considered in themselves, and judged according to the law, even the good works of Christians do not please God. "Therefore, Augustine wants even the good works that the Holy Spirit works in us to please God only insofar as we believe that we are pleasing to God for Christ's sake, not that they themselves should please God. And Jerome says against Pelagius: 'Then we are righteous when we recognize ourselves as sinners,

and our righteousness does not lie in our merit, but in God's mercy.' Therefore, even if we are rich in good works and have begun to keep God's law, as Paul did when he preached faithfully, etc., we must still have faith, through which we trust that God is gracious and reconciled to us for Christ's sake and not for our works' sake. For mercy cannot be grasped except through faith. Therefore, those who teach that we become pleasing to God because of our works, and not because of Christ, lead consciences into despair." (Müller 118, 51) Their imperfection shows clearly enough "that our works, and since we began to keep the law, are not pleasing to God in themselves. ... For we must always adhere to this if we want to teach correctly that we are pleasing to God not because of the Law, not because of works, but because of Christ. For the honor that is due to Christ should not be given to the law or to our miserable works." (Müller 119, 61) Good works "are not pleasing to God unless they are done by those whose sins have already been forgiven." (Müller 148, 246) "Therefore, if one wants to teach or preach about good works, one must always add that faith must be there first, and that they are pleasing to God solely for the sake of faith in Christ, and that they are the fruit and testimony of faith." (Müller 117, 63) "Although love of God and good works should and must be in Christians, they are nevertheless not righteous before God because of such works, but because of Christ through faith. And trust in one's own fulfillment of the law is vain idolatry and blasphemy against Christ, and ultimately falls away and causes consciences to despair. Therefore, this principle must remain firm, that we are pleasing and righteous to God for Christ's sake through faith, not because of our love and works." (Müller 115, 40) "Therefore, we teach not only how to keep the law, but also how to please God in all that we do, not that we can keep the law so perfectly and purely in this life, but that we may be in Christ!" (Müller 112, 21) "The rule explains all passages about good works, that they are of no value to God outside of Christ, but that the heart must first have Christ and believe that it pleases God for Christ's sake, not because of its own works." (Müller 140, 194)

Concerning the purpose and benefit of good works, the Apology writes that Christians should keep the Ten Commandments, "not to atone for eternal death or eternal torment, which is due to Christ alone, but to do so that the devil may not be given room and God may not be angered and the Holy Spirit grieved and dishonored. These fruits and good works have been commanded by God, and they also have their reward, and for the sake of God's glory and divine commandment, they should also be done." (307, 77) When Christ

attaches works to forgiveness (Matthew 6:14), he thereby indicates that good works should necessarily follow as good fruits, and that it is a feigned repentance if they do not follow, and then that external signs of such a great promise are necessary for us, because a fearful conscience needs much comfort. "Just as Baptism and the Lord's Supper are signs that repeatedly remind, uplift, and reassure fearful minds, so that they may believe more firmly that their sins are forgiven, so too is this same promise written and depicted in good works, so that these works may remind us to believe more firmly. Those who do not do good, therefore, do not stir themselves up to faith, but despise those promises. The pious, however, embrace them and rejoice that they have signs and testimonies of such a great promise. Therefore, they practice those signs and testimonies." (Müller 135, 155; 121, 80) "Just as in other sacraments Christ attaches the promise to the outward sign, so here he attaches the promise of forgiveness of sins to outward good works. And just as we do not obtain forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper without faith *ex opere operato*, so also not in this work and our forgiveness; for our forgiveness is also not a good work, unless it is done by those whose sins have already been forgiven by God in Christ. Therefore, if our forgiveness is to please God, it must follow after the forgiveness that God grants us. For Christ is accustomed to put the two together, the law and the gospel, both faith and good works, to show that there is no faith unless good works follow; likewise, that we have outward signs which remind us of the gospel and the forgiveness of sins, whereby we are comforted, that our faith may be strengthened in many ways." (Müller 134)

The Apology enthusiastically sings the praises of Christian works. Good works, it says, should and must be done because of the divine command, the exercise of faith, confession, and thanksgiving. And such works, although stained by the flesh, are "for the sake of faith, holy, divine works, sacrifices, and the polity (*politia*) of Christ, who thereby shows his kingdom before this world. For in these he sanctifies hearts and drives back the devil; and in order to preserve his gospel among men, he opposes the kingdom of the devil with the confession of the saints and reveals his power in our weakness. The dangers, labors, and sermons of the Apostle Paul, Athanasius, Augustine, and the like, who taught the church, are holy works, are true sacrifices pleasing to God, are the battles of Christ, through which he has driven back and expelled the devil from those who became believers. The efforts of David, when he waged war and administered his kingdom at home, are holy works, are true sacrifices, are wars of God,

who defended the people who had God's Word against the devil, lest the knowledge of God be completely wiped out on earth. So we also consider the individual good works in the lowest occupations and in private life. Through these works, Christ triumphs over the devil, just as when the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:1) collected alms, it was a holy work and a sacrifice and a battle of Christ against the devil, who strives to prevent anything from happening for the praise of God. To reproach such works as the confession of doctrine, temptations, acts of love, and the mortification of the flesh would in truth be to reproach the outward constitution of the kingdom of Christ among men.

"And here we add something more about rewards and merit. We teach that rewards are set and promised for the works of believers. We teach that good works deserve something (*meritoria esse*), not forgiveness of sins, grace, or justification (for we obtain these through faith alone), but other physical and spiritual gifts in this life and after this life, because Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:8, "Each one will receive his reward according to his labor." So the rewards will be different because of the different works. But the forgiveness of sins is the same for all, as Christ is one, and it is offered freely to all who believe that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake." (Müller 120, 68 f)

The Apology praises good works, for "through such praise of good works," it says, "the faithful are undoubtedly moved to do good." (Müller 120, 80) However, it does not praise works at the expense of grace and faith. "In all praise of good works, we therefore adhere to these rules in preaching the law, that the law cannot be fulfilled without Christ, as he himself says, 'Without me you can do nothing'; again, that it is impossible to please God without faith, Hebrews 11:6. For it is certain above all that the doctrine of the law does not want to abolish the gospel, does not want to abolish Christ the Reconciler. And cursed are the Pharisees, our adversaries, who interpret the law in such a way that they give the glory of Christ to works, namely that they are atonement and deserve forgiveness of sins. It follows, therefore, that works are always praised in such a way that they please because of faith, because works do not please without Christ the Reconciler. Through him we have access to God, Romans 5:2, not through works without Christ the Mediator." (Müller 134, 148) Dr. Pieper: "Yes, the pastor who does not praise the glory of Christian works and does not in this way encourage Christians to do good works commits a great robbery against his congregation; he sins gravely."