

The Second Sunday after Trinity

no true faith. The Apology gives this answer: “James calls that a dead faith where good works and fruit of the Spirit of every kind do not follow.” And to this effect the Latin edition of the Apology says, “St. James teaches correctly when he denies that we are justified by a faith that lacks works, which is dead faith.”

James speaks, as the Apology says, about the works of those who have already been justified through Christ, reconciled with God, and received forgiveness of sins through Christ. If the question is about how faith has this result and what belongs to faith so that it justifies and saves, it is false and incorrect to say that faith cannot justify without works. Or, faith justifies or makes righteous if it has love with it, for the sake of which love justification is ascribed to faith. Or, the presence of works with faith is necessary if a person is to be justified by faith before God. Or, the presence of good works in the article of justification, or for justification, is needful, so that good works are a cause without which a person cannot be justified, and that they are not really excluded from the article of justification by the exclusive terms: without works, and such (i.e., when St. Paul says, *absque operibus*). For faith makes righteous only because, as a means and instrument, it lays hold of, and accepts, God’s grace and Christ’s merit in the Gospel promise.

This doctrine about the inability and wickedness of our natural free will and about our conversion and regeneration (that it is God’s work alone and not from our powers) is ‘impiously, shamefully, and maliciously’ abused in an unchristian way by both enthusiasts and the Epicureans. As a result of their speeches, many people have become disorderly and dissolute. They have grown idle and lazy in all Christian exercises of prayer, reading, and devout meditation. They say that, since they are unable by their own natural powers to convert themselves to God, they will always strive against God with all their might, or will wait until God converts them by force, against their will. Or since they can do nothing in these spiritual things, and since everything is the work of God the Holy Spirit alone, they will regard, hear, or read neither the Word nor the Sacrament. But they will wait until God, without means, instills into them His gifts from heaven, so that they can truly feel and see in themselves that God has converted them.

Other discouraged hearts might perhaps fall into difficult thoughts and doubts about whether God has chosen them and will work His gifts also in them through the Holy Spirit. They do this especially when they are aware of no strong, intense faith and sincere obedience in themselves, but only of weakness, fear, and misery...

Many disputes are usefully explained well by this true distinction. The Apology shows this in reference to James 2:20, 24. For when we speak of faith and how it justifies, we refer to the doctrine of St. Paul: that faith alone, without works, justifies. This is because faith alone applies and makes Christ’s merit our own, as has been said. But if the question is about where and how a Christian can see and distinguish, either in himself or in others, a true living faith from a false and dead faith, that is a different matter. Many useless, secure Christians dream up a delusion for themselves in place of faith, even though they have

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