

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Augustine writes that the Manichaeans teach that it is not the corrupt person who sins because of inborn original sin, but something different and foreign in a person. And so, God does not accuse and condemn by the Law human nature as corrupt by sin, but only original sin in it. For, as stated above in the thesis (i.e., in the explanation of the pure doctrine about original sin), the person's entire nature, which is born in the natural way from father and mother, is entirely and to the farthest extent corrupted and perverted by original sin. Human nature is corrupt in body and soul, in all its powers, as regards and concerns the goodness, truth, holiness, and righteousness created with it in Paradise. Nevertheless, human nature is not entirely exterminated or changed into another substance, which could be called unlike our nature according to its essence and, therefore, cannot be of one essence with us.

Because of this corruption, a person's entire corrupt nature is accused and condemned by the Law unless the sin is forgiven for Christ's sake [Galatians 3:10–11].

The Law accuses and condemns our nature, not because we have been created human by God, but because we are sinful and wicked. Since the fall, human nature is condemned, not because its essence is God's work and creation in us, but because and so far as it has been poisoned and corrupted by sin. ...

This article about justification by faith (as the Apology says) is the chief article [see Ap IV 2–3] in all Christian doctrine. Without this teaching no poor conscience can have any firm consolation or truly know the riches of Christ's grace. Dr. Luther also has written about this:

If this one teaching stands in its purity, then Christendom will also remain pure and good, undivided and unseparated; for this alone, and nothing else, makes and maintains Christendom.... Where this falls, it is impossible to ward off any error or sectarian spirit. [LW 14:37]

Paul says especially about this article, “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” [1 Corinthians 5:6]. Therefore, in this article he zealously and earnestly urges the use of exclusive terms [particulars exclusivas], that is, words that exclude people’s works from justification (i.e., “apart from works of the law,” “apart from works,” “by grace” [Romans 3:28; 4:6; Ephesians 2:8–9]). These show how highly necessary it is that in this article, along with the pure doctrine, the antithesis (i.e., all contrary doctrine) be stated separately, exposed, and rejected by this method.

We want to explain this controversy in a Christian way by means of God’s Word, and settle it by His grace. Therefore, this is our doctrine, faith, and confession:

We unanimously believe, teach, and confess the following about the righteousness of faith before God, in accordance with the comprehensive summary of our faith and confession presented above. A poor sinful person is justified before God, that is, absolved and declared free and exempt from all his sins and from the sentence of well-deserved condemnation, and is adopted into sonship and inheritance of eternal life, without any merit or worth of his own. This happens without any preceding, present, or subsequent works, out of pure grace, because of the sole merit, complete obedience, bitter suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Christ alone. His obedience is credited to us for righteousness. ...

This is what the apostle Paul means when he urges so diligently and zealously the exclusive terms in this article of faith (i.e., the words by which works are excluded from the article of justification: by grace, without merit, without works, not of works.) These exclusives are all summed up in this expression: Through faith alone in Christ we are justified before God and saved [Romans 3:28]. For thereby works are excluded. This does not mean that a true faith can exist without contrition, or that good works should, must, and dare not follow true faith as sure and undoubtable fruit. It does not mean that believers dare not or must not do anything good. But good works are excluded from the article of justification before

God because they must not be drawn into, woven into, or mixed with the act of justifying poor sinners before God. They are not necessary. They do not belong to this act. The true sense of the exclusive terms in the article of justification comes from the following, which should also be taught in this article with all diligence and seriousness:

1. Through these terms all our own works, merit, worthiness, glory, and confidence in all our works are entirely excluded from the article of justification. So our works shall not stand or be regarded as the cause or the merit of justification—not entirely, not half, not in the least part—upon which God could or ought to look. We cannot rely on our works in this article and action.
2. This remains the office and property of faith alone. It alone, and nothing else, is the means or instrument with and through which God’s grace and Christ’s merit in the Gospel promise are received, apprehended, accepted, applied to us, and appropriated. Love and all other virtues or works are excluded from this office and property of such application or appropriation.
3. Neither renewal, sanctification, virtues, nor good works are at all a form, part, or cause of justification, that is, our righteousness before God. They are not to stand or be set up as a part or cause of our righteousness. They are not to be mixed into the article of justification under any pretext, title, or name whatever, as though they are necessary and belong to justification. The righteousness of faith stands alone in the forgiveness of sins out of pure grace, for the sake of Christ’s merit alone. These blessings are brought to us in the Gospel promise and are received, accepted, applied, and appropriated through faith alone.