

hands. Otherwise they would lose their salvation much more easily than was the case with Adam and Eve in Paradise, yes, every hour and moment. But salvation is in God's gracious election, which He has revealed to us in Christ, out of whose hand no person shall snatch us (John 10:28; 2 Timothy 2:19).

If anyone presents the teaching about God's gracious election in such a way that troubled Christians cannot get comfort out of it, but are pushed to despair; or if anyone teaches it so that the impatient are confirmed in their sinfulness, then it is undoubtedly sure and true that such a doctrine is not taught according to God's Word and will. It is taught according to human reason and the instigation of the devil.

For, as the apostle testifies:

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

But when this consolation and hope are weakened or entirely removed by Scripture, it is certain that it is understood and explained contrary to the Holy Spirit's will and meaning.

Furthermore, neither contrition nor love nor any other virtue, but faith alone is the only means and instrument by which, and through which, we can receive and accept God's grace, Christ's merit, and the forgiveness of sins, which are brought to us in the Gospel promise.

It is also correct to say that believers who have been justified through faith in Christ first have the righteousness of faith credited to them in this life. Then, they also have the initial righteousness of the new obedience or of good works. But these two types of righteousness must not be mixed with each other or both be injected into the article of justification by faith before God. For this initial righteousness or renewal in us is incomplete and impure in this life because of the flesh. A person cannot stand with and on the ground of this righteousness before God's court. Before God's court only the righteousness of Christ's obedience, suffering, and death—which is credited to faith—can stand. So only for the sake of this obedience is the person pleasing and acceptable to God and received into adoption and made an heir of eternal life. (This is true even after his renewal, when he has already many good works and lives the best life.)

Here belongs also what St. Paul writes in Romans 4:3. Abraham was justified before God through faith alone, for the sake of the Mediator, without the cooperation of his works. This was true not only when Abraham was first converted from idolatry and had no good works, but also afterward, when he had been renewed by the Holy Spirit and adorned with many excellent good works (Genesis 15:6; Hebrews 11:8). Paul asks the following question in Romans 4:1–3: At that time, on what did Abraham's righteousness before God rest for everlasting life, by which he had a gracious God and was pleasing and acceptable to Him?

He answers:

To the one who does not work but trusts Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as

David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.

Therefore, even though people who are converted and believe in Christ have the beginning of renewal, sanctification, love, virtue, and good works, these cannot and should not be drawn into, or mixed with, the article of justification before God. This is so the honor due to Christ may remain with Christ the Redeemer and tempted consciences may have a sure consolation, since our new obedience is incomplete and impure....

Regarding the necessity or voluntary nature of good works, it is clear that in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology these expressions are often used and repeated—good works are necessary. Likewise, they say it is necessary to do good works, which necessarily follow faith and reconciliation. Likewise, we necessarily are to do, and must do, the kind of good works God has commanded. In the Holy Scriptures themselves the words necessity, needful, and necessary, as well as ought and must, are used to describe what we are bound to do because of God's ordinance, command, and will. (See Romans 13:5; 1 Corinthians 9:9; Acts 5:29; John 15:12; 1 John 4:21).

It is for this reason that the sayings and propositions just mentioned (in this Christian and proper understanding) are unfairly condemned and rejected by some people. These sayings should rightly be employed and used to reject the secure, Epicurean delusion. For many create for themselves a dead faith or delusion that lacks repentance and good works. They act as though there could be true faith in a heart at the same time as the wicked intention to persevere and continue in sin. This is impossible. Or, they act as though a person could have and keep true faith, righteousness, and salvation even though he is and remains a corrupt and unfruitful tree, from which no good fruit comes at all. In fact, they say this even though a person persists in sins against conscience or purposely engages again in these sins. All of this is incorrect and false.

...

He will eternally save and glorify in life eternal those whom He has elected, called, and justified.

God has prepared salvation not only in general in this counsel, purpose, and ordination. In grace He has considered and chosen to salvation each and every one of the elect who are to be saved through Christ. He has also ordained that in the way just mentioned He will, by His grace, gifts, and efficacy, bring them to salvation. He will aid, promote, strengthen, and preserve them....

This doctrine and explanation of the eternal and saving choice of God's elect children entirely gives God all the glory. In Christ He saves us out of pure mercy, without any merits or good works of ours. He does this according to the purpose of His will, as it is written, "He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:5–6). Therefore, it is false and wrong when it is taught that not only God's mercy and Christ's most holy merit, but also something in us is a cause of God's election, on account of which God has chosen us to eternal life. Before we had done anything good, also before we were born, yes, even before the foundations of the world were laid, He elected us in Christ. And "in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of His call—she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'" (Romans 9:11–13; see also Genesis 25:23; Malachi 1:2–3).

Furthermore, this teaching gives no one a cause either for despair or for a shameless, loose life. By this teaching, people are taught that they must seek eternal election in Christ and His Holy Gospel, as in the Book of Life. This excludes no penitent sinner, but beckons and calls all poor, heavy-laden, and troubled sinners to repentance and the knowledge of their sins. It calls them to faith in Christ and promises the Holy Spirit for purification and renewal. It gives the most enduring consolation to all troubled, afflicted people, so that they know their salvation is not placed in their own