

Faith Alone, Grace Alone –Luther

Yet His children must hope in despair; **for fear is nothing else than the beginning of despair, and hope is the beginning of recovery.** And these two things, direct opposites by nature, must be in us, because in us two natures are opposed to each other, the old man and the new man. The old man must fear, despair, and perish; the new man must hope, be raised up, and stand. Both of these are in one person and even in one handiwork at the same time. Just as a wood carver, by chiseling and taking away the wood that does not belong to the carving, enhances the form of his work, **so hope, which forms the new man, grows in the midst of fear that cuts down the old Adam.**

Therefore the psalmist says: “I wait for the Lord; that is, in this crying and cross-bearing I did not retreat or despair; nor did I trust in my own merit. **I trusted in God’s grace alone,** which I desire, and I wait for God to help me when it pleases Him.”¹

I am amazed that anyone can take exception in a matter as evident as this. Just tell me: Is Christ’s death and resurrection our work, that we do, or is it not? Of course it is not our work, nor the work of any law either. Now it is Christ’s death and resurrection alone that saves us and makes us free from sin, as Paul says in Romans 4[:25], “He died for our sins and rose for our justification.” Tell me, further: What is the work by which we lay hold of Christ’s death and resurrection? It cannot be any external work, but only the eternal faith that is in the heart. Faith alone, indeed, all alone, without any works, lays hold of this death and resurrection when it is preached by the gospel. Why then this raging and raving, this making of heretics and burning them at the stake, when the matter itself at its very core is so clear **and proves that faith alone lays hold of Christ’s death and resurrection, without any works, and that his death and resurrection [alone] are our life and our righteousness?** Since, then, the fact itself is so obvious—that faith alone conveys, grasps, and imparts this life and righteousness—why should we not also say so? It is no heresy that faith alone lays hold on Christ, and gives life; and yet it must be heresy, if anyone mentions it. Are they not mad, foolish, and nonsensical? They admit that the thing is right, but brand the saying of it as wrong, though nothing can be both right and wrong at the same time . . . so that they may not continue to hang upon works and wander away from faith and lose Christ, especially in these days, for they have been accustomed to works so long they have to be torn away from them by force. **For these reasons it is not only right but also highly necessary to speak it out as plainly and fully as possible, “Faith alone saves,**

¹ Luther, M. (1999). [*Luther’s works, vol. 14: Selected Psalms III.*](#) (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 14, pp. 191–192). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

without works.” I am only sorry that I did not also add the words *alle* and *aller*, and say, “without *any* works of *any* laws,” so that it would have been expressed with perfect clarity²

Now I was not relying on and following the nature of the languages alone, however, when, in Roman 3[:28] I inserted the word *solum* (alone). Actually the text itself and the meaning of St. Paul urgently require and demand it. For in that very passage he is dealing with the main point of Christian doctrine, namely, that we are justified by faith in Christ without any works of the law. And Paul cuts away all works so completely, as even to say that the works of the law—though it is God’s law and word—do not help us for justification [Rom. 3:20]. He cites Abraham as an example and says that he was justified so entirely without works that even the highest work—which, moreover, had been newly commanded by God, over and above all other works and ordinances, namely circumcision—did not help him for justification; rather he was justified without circumcision and without any works, by faith, as he says in chapter 4[:2], “If Abraham was justified by works, he may boast, but not before God.” **But when all works are so completely cut away—and that must mean that faith alone justifies—whoever would speak plainly and clearly about this cutting away of works will have to say, “Faith alone justifies us, and not works.” The matter itself, as well as the nature of the language, demands it.**

“But,” they say, “it has an offensive sound, and people infer from it that they need not do any good works.” Land, what are we to say? Is it not much more “offensive” that St. Paul himself does not use the term “faith alone,” but spells it out even more bluntly, and puts the finishing touches on it by saying, “Without the works of the law”? And in Galatians 1[2:16] and many other places he says, “Not by the works of the law,” for the expression “faith alone” is susceptible of another interpretation,³

² Luther, M. (1999). [*Luther’s works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I.*](#) (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 35, p. 198). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

³ Luther, M. (1999). [*Luther’s works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I.*](#) (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 35, pp. 195–196). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.