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Faith in the Old and New Testaments: Harmony or Disagreement?

Seth Erlandsson

Many people are rather unclear about the Biblical concept of faith. This lack of clarity especially pertains to faith in the Old Testament, but it also involves faith in the New Testament. Does "faith" really mean the same thing in both testaments? Is not Old Testament religion mainly a religion of law in contrast to that of the New Testament? Are the object and content of faith the same in both testaments? If so, does the harmony consist in this, that our justification in both testaments is based upon faith plus works? Or does it consist in this, that our justification in both testaments is based solely on the Lord and accepted through faith alone? I think that the uncertainties about faith in the Bible are due, first of all, to superficial ideas about the teachings of the Old Testament. Therefore, faith in the Old Testament will attract most of the attention in this study. In order to clarify the nature and content of faith, it is natural to concentrate on two subjects: (1.) the gospel (the object of faith in the two testaments) and (2.) the law and its role in the two testaments.

I. The Gospel

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The gospel presupposes that man, without God's grace and mercy, is hopelessly lost. The Fall of man and its disastrous consequences are the background for the gospel in both the Old and New Testaments. Because of its corrupted nature, mankind cannot produce the new man (that is, the righteousness and holiness) which God demands. Man is, therefore, worthy of death and eternal damnation. The gospel in its proper sense is the good and joyful message that the Lord Himself takes care of the hopeless sinner. To such sinners God promises and gives mercy, forgiveness of sins and eternal life "for His own sake," for man has in no way deserved God's grace and salvation. The Formula of Concord gives this clear definition of the gospel (SD V:21):

For everything which comforts and which offers the mercy and grace of God to the transgressors of the law strictly speaking is, and is called, the Gospel.¹

It ought to be superfluous here to prove that the background for the gospel, man's corrupted human nature and inability to keep the law, is the same in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. But what about the gospel? Is the object of faith the same?

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A. HARMONY

The object of faith in both testaments is God's undeserved goodness and mercy. Through His gracious acts and promises, God shows that He cares for sinful man. He promises sinful man His blessings and salvation "for His own sake," which means that He Himself is the only cause of this grace.

A Short Survey

A short survey will confirm this conclusion. As soon as man has revolted against God and brought about his own ruin, God shows that He cares for sinful man. God does not wait for man's improvement before He promises help and salvation. He always takes the initiative and offers to be the sinner's God and to save him. He helps Adam and Eve to realize their sin (Gen. 3:14-15). Man is given hope and new life through this promise. Then God continues to show His goodness toward man. He makes garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothes them (Gen. 3:21). Even the brother-murderer Cain receives a mark from God so that no one will kill him (Gen. 4:1). Eve praises God's grace when she gives birth to Cain (Gen. 4:1) and Seth (Gen. 4:25). And at that time people start publicly to proclaim — call out and call on (in Hebrew *qara'*) — the name of the Lord (Gen. 4:26). Notice that the basis for true worship is God's blessings (see also Gen. 12:8). The believer knows that the reason for God's mercy and man's life and salvation is only "the name of the Lord." To believe (in Hebrew the *hiphil* of *'mn*) means to say "amen" to God and His promises, to trust Him and His words.

When we reach Abraham's time, about two thousand years before Christ, God makes His promise about the woman's seed more and more specific, first to Abraham and his offspring: "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3); "Through your seed all nations on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). Of Abraham's children, the promise is given specifically to Isaac (Gen. 26:4,24); of Isaac's children, to Jacob (Gen. 28:14); of Jacob's children, to Judah (Gen. 49:8-12); of Judah's many descendents, to Jesse (Is. 11:1); and of his children, to David (2 Sam. 7). And when the time had fully come and God the Father sends His beloved Son, the promised Savior, He is born, in accordance with the promise in Micah 5:2, in Bethlehem, the town of David. So the New Testament is correct when it emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the oath-bound promise to Abraham in Genesis 22 (Luke 1:73; Gal. 3:16), the promise to David (Luke 1:32, 69), the promises through the prophets (Luke 1:70). The basis for the promise of life and victory,

salvation and blessing, which was given to the fathers since the day of the fall, was all the time the promised seed, the Son of Man, the Savior. *He* is the only salvation, peace, comfort, righteousness, and light for every man since the day of the fall till the last day. He Himself says that Moses wrote about Him (John 5:46). Not only is He the decisive content of the gift of God, the gospel; He is also the content of the demand of God. He is the new Man who loves the Father and His fellowman perfectly. He says, "Here I am, I have come — it is written about Me in the scroll" (Ps. 40:7).

What Is Meant by Faith?

It is impossible to speak about faith in the right way if one does not speak of and include the *object* of faith, namely, the promises of grace and mercy. Luther explains the *nature* of faith when he comments on the blessings through Abraham's seed:

It is the nature of faith to believe with certainty that we are blessed, not through ourselves but through Christ, who is our blessing. Hence we bless ourselves and maintain that we are the ones to whom that blessing belongs, for it is faith which apprehends the blessing.²

To believe these most glorious promises and to expect these blessings from God with firm confidence is true faith.³

Accordingly, let us strengthen and fortify ourselves against the doubts of the papists, and let us learn that for God the only completely pleasing worship and obedience is faith, that is, to believe and trust our God.⁴

In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession we get the following definition of true faith:

The faith that justifies, however, is no mere historical knowledge, but the firm acceptance of God's offer promising forgiveness of sins and justification [IV: 48].

Faith is that worship which receives God's offered blessings . . . It is by faith that God wants to be worshiped, namely, that we receive from him what he promises and offers [IV: 49].

He [Paul] says that only faith can accept the promise. He therefore correlates and connects promise and faith [IV: 50].

And so at every mention of mercy we must remember that this requires faith, which accepts the promise of mercy. Similarly, at every mention of faith we are also thinking of its object, the promised mercy. For faith does not justify or save because it is a good work in itself, but only because it accepts the promised mercy. This service and worship is especially

praised throughout the prophets and the Psalms. Even though the law does not teach the free forgiveness of sins, the patriarchs knew the promise of Christ, that for his sake God intended to forgive sins [IV: 55-57].

This is how God wants to be known and worshiped, that we accept his blessings and receive them because of his mercy rather than because of our own merits [IV: 60]

That this definition of faith in the Apology is true not only regarding the New Testament can be shown by a few examples from the Old Testament. Already a look at book one of the Psalms (Ps. 1-41) will convince us:

From the Lord comes deliverance [3:8].

Turn, O Lord, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love [6:4].

I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me [13:5-6].

The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior! [18:46].

O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer [19:14].

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing [23:1].

Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old [25:5-6].

For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great [25:11].

The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid [27:1].?

For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime [30:5].

Be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me [31:2-3].

Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth [31:5].

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered [32:1].

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" — and you forgave the guilt of my sin [32:5].

We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name [33:20-21].

The Lord redeems his servants; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned [34:22].

Say to my soul, "I am your salvation" [35:3].

Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies [36:5].

Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior [38:22].

Is it possible to describe the object of faith and salvation by grace alone in a better way?

If space permitted, we could see in the Old Testament prophets how the demands of the law and the promises of the gospel are presented side by side. For example, after Isaiah presents the law's demand for a new and clean man in 1:16-17, he adds the absolution of the gospel: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (v 18). Only he who believes the promise of the gospel gets a new heart which wants to fulfil the demands of the law. The words "wash and make yourselves clean, stop doing wrong" denounce ungodly hearts and require faith, which only the gospel can create. The gospel shines clearly in the prophets as well as in the Psalms. A few more examples would be appropriate:

I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more [Is. 43:25].

I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you [Is. 44:22].

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness" [Jer. 23:5-6].

B. DISAGREEMENT

The Outward Form of the Gospel

There is no real disagreement between the Old and New Testaments, only slight differences regarding the outward form of the gospel. For obvious reasons the promised salvation and the Savior appear in more detail when the fulfilment of the promise takes place. Let us use the language of Paul in Colossians 2:17 about the shadow of things that were to come, and Christ and His work as the reality behind this shadow. It is natural that the proper interpretation of the shadow in the Old Testament may be found in the reality itself, the New Testament fulfilment; for the shadow emanates from the reality. We can also use the picture in Isaiah 30:26 and apply it to the greater clarity of the New

Testament: "The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days, when the Lord binds up the bruises of His people and heals the wounds He inflicted." The Christian church therefore is not ashamed of interpreting the shadows in the Old Testament from the fulfilment in Christ. When, for example, the promises in the Old Testament do not mention the meritorious cause of God's mercy and the forgiveness of sins or else use the words "for his own sake" or "for the sake of his name," it is possible for the Christian church to state more precisely "for Christ's sake." In the Apology we have many examples of this specifying interpretation of the Old Testament. But the meritorious cause is mentioned also in the Old Testament, even in detail, as in Isaiah 53. And the sacrifices of unblemished animals, which vicariously had to die for human sins, are a very clear shadow of Christ's *satisfactio vicaria*.

The Pictorial Language of the Old Testament

Regarding differences, we ought also mention that the gospel in the Old Testament is often clothed in pictorial language, which refers to the unique conditions of the Old Testament theocracy — the connection of the Old Testament church with a certain land, a certain nation, a certain city, a certain mountain, a certain priestly tribe, etc. In order to picture the realities of the spiritual blessings of the New Testament the Old Testament prophets use the physical realities of the Old Testament church. Against the background of ruined cities, war and desolation, deportation, bad roads, droughts and deserts, a destroyed temple, dangerous lions and vipers, the spiritual blessings of the New Testament salvation might be pictured as reconstructed cities, a return to the promised land, an absence of wars and rough ground, streams in the desert, a new temple, peaceful lions and vipers.

The differences between the Old and the New Testament have nothing to do with the real content of the gospel. It is the same gospel and the same way of salvation in both testaments. The differences refer only to the outward form of the gospel.

II. THE LAW

If many people are unclear about the gospel in the Old and New Testaments, their confusion about the law in the two testaments is even greater. Often they find similarities where there are real differences, and differences when none actually exist. For instance, some demand that the New Testament church obey many of the regulations of the Old Testament theocracy, even though these have been fulfilled and are not intended for the New

Testament church. And at the same time people are unclear about the real harmony.

A. HARMONY

Neither in the Old nor the New Testament is the law intended to create a new man, a believer, out of a sinner. The law displays what the new man looks like and accordingly denounces every man after the fall for not meeting its standard of trust and love. The law cannot create what it demands. It does not give life. It kills and creates despair. Only the gospel can give what the law demands . . . and the gospel offers it freely.

It is important to distinguish between keeping the law *in order to obtain* a gracious God and keeping the law *because*, through the gospel, *we have* a gracious God. When Jesus says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples" (John 8:31), it does not mean that we earn God's grace and discipleship by holding to God's teaching. It means that what we have already, God's grace and our discipleship by grace alone, is thrown away when we no longer trust God and His Word and do not wish to act according to His will. The recipient of God's grace wants in thankfulness to stay close to all that God says. Without belief in the gospel no one can hold to God's teaching. Therefore, grace comes first and the keeping of the law afterwards, and so it is in both the Old and New Testaments.

God did not give His commandments at Sinai to find out whether Israel was good enough to earn His salvation. First He saved them and gave them His grace and undeserved mercy only because of the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then He gave His commandments to *saved* people who needed to know the will of God and their duties as God's people, laws and duties which only a people grateful for God's salvation would want to obey and thereby to confess its thankfulness and faith. The believers did not obey God's commandments in order to earn grace and salvation, but because they *had* grace and redemption. They wanted to remain in fellowship with their gracious God and not to depart from Him and His grace.

If we study the role of law from the first page in the Bible on, we will find that God's great goodness and fellowship with Him come first, His commandments afterwards. Already before the fall God did not deliver His commandment (Gen. 2:16-17) in order to give Adam a possibility to gain fellowship with Him. Adam already had fellowship with God as a gracious gift. Through obedience to the commandment Adam would demonstrate his happiness for

this fellowship, his faith in such a good and gracious God, and his trust in all that God said to him and did for him. And after the fall God always takes the initiative and creates faith and offers fellowship through His word of promise and by grace alone. The basis for grace and forgiveness is never the obedience of man. But the obedience of man is a consequence and a testimony of his faith in God's grace and mercy.

The Exhortation to Do Good Works

Both the Old and New Testaments exhort man to do deeds of love. The apostle says in 1 Corinthians 13:2 that he is nothing if he has not love. This is often misunderstood, as if Scripture taught that we will be justified through our love and good works. The Apology refutes this misunderstanding in a clear way:

In this text Paul is not discussing the mode of justification. He is writing to people who, upon being justified, needed urging to bear good fruits lest they lose the Holy Spirit [IV: 220].

No one can draw anything more from this text than that love is necessary. This we grant. It is also necessary not to steal. It would be a fallacy to reason that because it is necessary not to steal, therefore not stealing justifies [IV: 222].

Melanchthon's last point can be applied to theologians in our time who maintain that the gospel frees them from the necessity of rejecting higher criticism and false prophets. We also have to stand up for the doctrine of justification through faith alone, the gospel of both the Old and New Testaments. But to avoid higher criticism, false prophets, unionism, and stealing is necessary, not in order to *become* justified, but because the one who has received the gift of justification is anxious to remain in God's Word and not to leave the Lord.

God's Dealing with Israel

God's dealing with Israel and His election of this people to a specific task in history during the Old Testament era clearly demonstrate God's grace and that the law did not abolish the gospel. This is emphasized in Romans and Galatians. But Moses had already written:

The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples . . . it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers [Deut. 7:7-8].

It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on

account of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people [Deut. 9:5-6].

Daniel prayed: "We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your name" (Dan. 9:18-19).

B. DISAGREEMENT

The Outward Regulations in the Old Testament

Just as the gospel in the Old Testament often has an outward form due to the special conditions of the Old Testament theocracy, so also the law with its demands of love to God and our neighbor is connected with many outward regulations due to the fact that Israel as a visible nation had a special task during Old Testament times. It was not that Israel would obtain righteousness before God by observing all these regulations, however. God had already given His grace and fellowship to Israel, and He had for His own sake given her both spiritual and physical promises. As God's redeemed people the Israelites ought to have shown their thankfulness for God's gracious salvation by faithfully obeying the regulations of the law. Disobedience was a testimony that they no longer trusted the Lord and no longer were thankful for His grace and blessings. The Old Testament teaches that most of the people lost their faith and rejected the Rock, their Savior (Deut. 32:15). Moses had to say, "You deserted the Rock who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth" (Deut. 32:18). By turning their back on God's salvation the people lost both the spiritual and physical blessings which God had promised them. Just as Moses had foretold, "If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed" (Deut. 8:19). By grace alone the Lord was their God and their salvation. But unbelief, the rejection of His grace, demonstrated in disobedience, meant the loss of God's gracious gifts. Isaiah predicted that only a remnant of Israel would rely on the Lord (Is. 10:20ff.).

The Laws Necessary for a Theocracy

During Old Testament times the summary of the law, trust in

the Lord and love of our neighbor, was closely connected with ceremonial and national laws necessary for a church-state, a theocracy. To live as a believer, therefore, meant to accept the God-given task of the Old Testament church, bound to a certain land, a certain state, a certain sanctuary, a certain priestly tribe, certain ceremonies, etc. Now, under the New Testament, the church is no longer connected with a certain church-state, a certain land, tribe, or temple. Christ is the fulfilment and the end of the Old Testament theocracy. That is the difference. All the outward regulations, which were due to the special task of the church during the Old Testament era, are fulfilled, the rules about "food and drink and various ceremonial washings — external regulations applying until the time of the new order" (Heb. 9:10). Worship is no longer bound to certain days or places.

Luther mentions this difference between the Old and New Testaments in his Genesis commentary:

Moses had a definite command to establish the Levitical priesthood, which pertained to a definite people, definite persons, a definite place, and to a definite time up to Christ. This is the principal part of the Law of Moses . . . But when the time appointed for all these things came to an end, the sacrifices and all the Mosaic regulations came to an end. The priesthood, with its sacrifices, no longer had any validity. Nor did the kingdom, for Moses had come to an end. But the kingdom and the priesthood of Christ followed, without a place, time, or person, and "without any outward sign," as Christ says in Luke 17:20.⁵

Regarding the commandment of the sabbath day Luther writes in his Large Catechism (I:82):

Therefore, according to *its literal, outward sense*, this commandment does not concern us Christians. It is an entirely external matter, like the other ordinances of the Old Testament connected with particular customs, persons, times, and places, from all of which we are now set free through Christ.

Bible passages such as Galatians 4:1-11, Colossians 2:16-23, Romans 14, Hebrews 9:10, and Acts 15:10 underline the New Testament freedom from Mosaic regulations, and these passages are also listed in Article XXVI of the Augustana (24ff.).

Circumcision

Regarding the role of circumcision, we may notice what is said in the Apology (IV:210):

Abraham did not receive circumcision in order to be justified (Rom. 4:9-22). By faith his justification was already accomplished, but circumcision was added to give him a sign written in his body by which he might be reminded and grow in faith, and through his witness testify to his faith before others and induce them to believe.

We have to remember that the Mosaic regulations were not meant as a means of obtaining grace. They were given to a saved people, not to people who were to save themselves by keeping the laws. But the Old Testament regulations became too heavy, “a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10); and, in accordance with our unclean human reason, Israel often misunderstood the purpose of the law and thought it might obtain grace through observing the law *ex opere operato* without faith. Article IV of the Apology (395) observes:

The majority of the people believed that they merited the forgiveness of sins by their works, and so they multiplied sacrifices and devotions. The prophets, on the contrary, condemned this opinion and taught the righteousness of faith.

Worship

In the Old Testament worship was bound to many external regulations. But in both the Old and New Testaments true worship is based upon the undeserved goodness and mercy of God. True worship is to remember God’s gracious deeds, to receive His offered blessings. The Apology says:

Thus the service and worship of the Gospel is to receive good things from God, while the worship of the law is to offer and present our goods to God. We cannot offer anything to God unless we have first been reconciled and reborn [IV: 310]. “If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand?” (Ps. 130:3). Here the psalmist confesses his sins, but he does not lay claim to any merit of his own. He adds, “There is forgiveness with thee” (v.4). Here he comforts himself with his trust in God’s mercy. He quotes the promise: “My soul waits for his word, my soul hopes in the Lord,” that is, because thou hast promised the forgiveness of sins I am sustained by thy promise. Therefore the patriarchs, too, were justified not by the law but by the promise and faith. It is strange that our opponents make so little of faith when they see it praised everywhere as the foremost kind of worship [IV: 58-59].

Jonah says (Jonah 2:8), “Those who forsake mercy observe

lying vanities”; that is, all trust is vain except a trust in mercy; mercy saves us, our own merits and efforts do not save us. Therefore Daniel prays (9:18,19), “For we do not present our supplications before thee on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of thy great mercy”[IV: 330-331].

Thus the difference between the Old and New Testaments concerning the law consists in this, that in the New Testament the demands of the law are not connected with outward regulations about food, days, circumcision, tithes, clothes, washings, sacrifices, etc. Christ is the fulfilment of all these things.

The Summary and True Intent of the Law

The summary and true intent of the law is the same in the Old and the New Testaments, namely, trust in the Lord and love of our neighbor. Christ is the perfect fulfilment of the whole law. Therefore God is gracious toward us “for Christ’s sake,” “for His own sake,” “for the sake of His name.” Only the one who trusts in the promised Savior has a new will to love God and his neighbor.

Luther points out that Moses’ explanation of the law in Deuteronomy

really contains nothing else than faith toward God and love toward one’s neighbor, for all God’s laws come to that. Therefore, down to the twentieth chapter, Moses, in his explanation of the law, guards against everything that might destroy faith in God and from there to the end of the book he guards against everything that hinders love.⁶

Only a believer, a receiver of God’s offered grace, is characterized by faith and love. Therefore we need the gospel about this grace *before* we can begin to keep the law. The Apology says:

We must first take hold of the promise by faith, that for Christ’s sake the Father is reconciled and forgiving. Later we begin to keep the law [IV: 295].

A man keeps the law as soon as he hears that God is reconciled to us for Christ’s sake even though we cannot satisfy the law. When faith takes hold of Christ, the mediator, the heart is at peace and begins to love God and to keep the law. It knows that now it is pleasing to God for the sake of Christ, the mediator, even though its incipient keeping of the law is impure and far from perfect [IV: 270].

Conclusion

We have seen how necessary it is to distinguish between law and gospel and to understand their different functions and purposes.

Without this distinction it is impossible to understand faith in the Old and New Testaments. Let us conclude with a few more quotations from the Lutheran Confessions concerning these matters:

All Scripture should be divided into these two chief doctrines, the law and the promises [Ap. IV:5].

These are the two chief works of God in men, to terrify and to justify and quicken the terrified. One or the other of these works is spoken of throughout Scripture. One part is the law, which reveals, denounces, and condemns sin. The other part is the Gospel, that is, the promise of grace granted in Christ. This promise is repeated continually throughout Scripture; first it was given to Adam, later to the patriarchs, then illumined by the prophets, and finally proclaimed and revealed by Christ among the Jews, and spread by the apostles throughout the world. For all the saints were justified by faith in this promise not by their own attrition or contrition [Ap. XII:53-54].

Since the beginning of the world these two proclamations have continually been set forth side by side in the church of God with the proper distinction. The descendants of the holy patriarchs, like the patriarchs themselves, constantly reminded themselves not only how man in the beginning was created righteous and holy by God and through the deceit of the serpent transgressed God's laws, became a sinner, corrupted himself and all his descendants, and plunged them into death and eternal damnation, but also revived their courage and comforted themselves with the proclamation of the woman's seed, who would bruise the serpent's head; likewise, of the seed of Abraham, by whom all nations should be blessed; likewise, of David's son, who should restore the kingdom of Israel and be a light to the nations, "who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and with whose stripes we are healed" [FC-SD V:23].

We confuse law and gospel and distort the biblical doctrine of faith if we make God's mercy and grace, the object of faith, dependent on our love and our observing of the law. We have to remember that "faith precedes while love follows" (Ap. IV:141). What follows faith never is and never can be a prerequisite for God's mercy and grace, the object of our faith: "If somebody believes that he obtains the forgiveness of sins because he loves, he insults Christ and in God's judgment he will discover that this trust in his own righteousness was wicked and empty" (Ap. IV:150). To avoid the misconception that God's mercy is due in

part to our works, “we must see what the Scriptures ascribe to the law and what they ascribe to the promises. For they praise works in such a way as not to remove the free promise” (Ap. IV:188). The good works ought to be done, because we have a gracious God, not in order to make God gracious. But how can the Bible then speak about a reward for our good works? The Apology explains this phenomenon:

We teach that rewards have been offered and promised to the works of the faithful. We teach that good works are meritorious — not for the forgiveness of sins, grace, or justification (for we obtain these only by faith) but for other physical and spiritual rewards in this life and in that which is to come, as Paul says (1 Cor. 3:8), “Each shall receive his wages according to his labor” [IV: 194].

Yet God exercises his saints in different ways and often puts off the rewards for the righteousness of works. Thus they learn not to trust in their own righteousness, but to seek the will of God rather than the rewards [IV: 198].

Even eternal life can be designated as a reward. How is this possible when eternal life is a free gift without our merits? The Apology gives the answer: “We grant that eternal life is a reward because it is something that is owed — not because of our merits but because of the promise. We have shown above that justification is strictly a gift of God; it is a thing promised. To this gift the promise of eternal life has been added” [IV: 362].

FOOTNOTES

1. All confessional references in this paper are quoted from *The Book of Concord*, ed. and tr. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).
2. *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955 ff.), 4, p. 171.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
5. *LW*, 5, p. 20.
6. *LW*, 35, p. 238-239.