

A Crosser's Guide to Apology IV (Part Three of Six)

Co-missioners,

We're devoting this current stretch of weeks to guided tour by Paul Jaster of the Fourth Article of *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*. When last Thursday's installment ended, Paul was walking us through Philip Melanchthon's take on the essential disagreement between Lutheran confessors and the papal theologians who opposed them. Today's third installment opens with a conclusion of that discussion. Then it takes us into Melanchthon's extended description of the confessors' position.

Have fun as you learn!

Peace and Joy,
The Crossings Community

A Crosser's Guide to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article Four: Justification by Faith Alone

by Paul Jaster

(Third of Six Installments, [continuing from August 31](#))

The Two Opposing Syllogisms

Following the method of late-medieval scholarly debate, Melanchthon reduces the contrasting positions of the Confessors and Confutators into two simple syllogisms. A syllogism is a powerful device of logical reasoning used by the Greek

philosophers. A syllogism consists of three parts: a Major Premise, a Minor Premise, and a Conclusion. The Major Premise and Minor Premise are simple statements that are either assumed as true by both parties in a debate and therefore not a matter of contention, or which can be grounded in some logical or concrete evidence. The Major and Minor Premise combine to produce a persuasive Conclusion that “proves” the point at issue.

The Augsburg Confessors’ Syllogism	
Major Premise	Forgiveness (Justification) is a promise
Minor Premise	The only way a promise can be received is by trusting in it (the very nature of a promise per Abraham and Romans 4)
Conclusion	We are made right (justified) by faith alone

The Roman Confutators’ Syllogism	
Major Premise	We are justified by God’s saving grace
Minor Premise	God gives saving grace to those who do what is in them (per Gabriel Biel)
Conclusion	We are not made right (justified) by faith alone

Note here the primacy of *sola fide* (faith alone). It is “faith alone” that guarantees “grace alone” and “Christ alone” and “Scripture alone” and “glory to God alone” not the other way around. “Scripture alone” does not guarantee “faith alone.” The Confutators believed in ***sola Scriptura***. They, too, were basing their interpretation on the Bible and not papal decrees or tradition. But that did not mean they believed in ***sola fide***, rather they rejected it. And so, it does matter which *sola* comes first.

Personal Faith and Its Amazing Benefits

Benefits Of Personal Faith



- Receives the forgiveness of sins and justifies you
- Consoles and uplifts your heart
- Regenerates you
- Brings you the Holy Spirit which enables you to
- Live according to the law of God, that is,
- To love God
- Truly fear God
- Truly assert that God hears prayer
- To obey God in all afflictions, and
- To mortify strong unhealthy desires, including sexual ones
- Sets against the wrath of God Christ as the mediator and the one who pleases God on our behalf
- Uses the benefits of Christ
- Renews your heart
- Precedes your fulfilment of the law

From Canva

Melanchthon calls the faith by which an individual believes that his or her sins are remitted on account of Christ and that God is reconciled and gracious on account of Christ “personal faith,” the faith of a single person—say, for example, you. Personal faith does not bring to God trust in your own merits, but only trust in the promise or the mercy promised in Christ [44-45].

And then in bullet fashion, he lists the benefits of “personal faith.” Personal faith...

- Receives the forgiveness of sins and justifies you
- Consoles and uplifts your heart
- Regenerates you
- Brings you the Holy Spirit which enables you to
- Live according to the law of God, that is,

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Whew! What a breathless list! Do you want to get in on it? You can, by faith alone.

When Crossers talk about using the Crossing Method so that the benefits of Christ may abound, these are the benefits that first come to mind.

What is Justifying Faith?

In his section on “justifying faith,” Melanchthon asserts that the Confessors’ opponents “imagine that faith is nothing more than a knowledge of history... As a result they say nothing about the faith by which...we are justified.” “But the faith that justifies is not only a knowledge of history; it is to assent to the promise of God, in which the forgiveness of sins and justification are bestowed freely on account of Christ” [48].

And here is the real kicker: **Faith is worship!** Faith is that worship **which God wants the most**. “Faith is that worship which receives the benefits that God offers... God wants to be honored by faith so that we receive from him those things that he promises and offers” [49]. Faith is “the foremost act of worship.” It “is how God wants to become known and worshiped.” For as God says in Psalm 50:15, “*Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you*” [59-60].

Thus, when reciting the Apostles' Creed, "it is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, and was raised again unless we also add this article, which is the real purpose of the narrative: 'the forgiveness of sins.'" For otherwise, why was it necessary to give Christ for our sins if "doing what is in you" could make satisfaction for them? [31].

What is so great about justifying faith is not the quantity, which you may or may not have, but rather what is great is the "object of faith," which is God's great promised mercy on account of Christ. The story of Abraham shows that the patriarchs of the Hebrew Scriptures also knew the promises of God in Christ. Thus they, too, were justified not through the law, but through the promise and faith [55, 59].

Part Two: Main Exposition

Only Faith in Christ Justifies

Paragraph 61 is where Melanchthon explicitly states that he has structured Article Four of the *Apology* in the form of a disputation. So far (1-60), he has stated the question (justification by faith alone, yes or no), talked about the contrasting methods of biblical interpretation for both sides (their "sources," *fontes*), given clear definitions, stated the position of both sides from the Confessors' viewpoint, and critiqued his opponents' position. Now he will methodically explain "how faith comes into being" (62-68), show both "that it justifies" (69-74) and "how this is to be understood" (75-182). And then he will "remove the objections of the opponents" by addressing the Bible passages that his opponents cite against the Confessors (182-400).

So first, how does faith come into being? Answer: "The gospel accuses (*arguit*) all people of being under sin and subject to eternal wrath and death and for Christ's sake offers the

forgiveness of sin and justification, which are received by faith" [62]. The sequence goes like this:

1. The proclamation of repentance, which accuses us, terrifies consciences with genuine and serious terrors.
2. In the midst of these, troubled hearts must once again receive consolation.
3. This happens when they believe the promise of Christ, namely, that on his account we have the forgiveness of sins.
4. This faith, which arises and consoles in the midst of those fears, receives the forgiveness of sins, justifies us, and makes alive.
5. This consolation brings on a new and spiritual life [62].

In short, "God cannot be dealt with and cannot be grasped in any other way than through the Word." Here the word "Word" means gospel proclamation. The original Lutherans tended to use "Word" for the gospel, especially as it is spoken and proclaimed. They used the word "Scriptures" when they talk about the Bible, as we throughout Article Four. "Justification takes place through the Word, just as St. Paul notes [Rom. 1:16]: the gospel *'is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.'* Likewise [Rom. 10:17], *'Faith comes from what is heard.'*"



Disputation – [From Wikimedia Commons](#)

Faith comes through your ears! Hearing the gospel proclaimed. Faith is not a work. At least not *our* work. Not at first. Faith is *God's* work created by God's promise in Christ. The gospel Word invites us to believe it. [67].

In the next section, Melanchthon will say, faith is “sparked” or “conceived” by the Word (*fidem ex verbo concipi*; *concipi* can mean “conceive,” “grasp by the mind or senses,” or “catch fire”). And so, the highest praise goes to the ministry of the Word and sacraments. Certainly, love and good works **are bound** (*debent*) to follow faith. But they are excluded from *meriting* justification [74].

However, note well: A different way of faith coming into being (in dispute with Melanchthon) **was proposed by Johann Agricola**, one of the most promising of Luther's early students. He insisted that Melanchthon's emphasis upon sorrow for sin out of fear of punishment contradicted Evangelical theology because

true sorrow for sin arose not from the law but from the gospel and thus from true love for God. Agricola describes the Christian life as moving from the gospel of God's Word to faith and finally repentance. Thus, in his catechism, he handles Baptism and the Lord's Supper first, then the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and finally the Ten Commandments. "How does God help your soul?" he asks. Answer: "As soon as I was born from my mother, God let me come to his Word of grace and made me holy and believing in Baptism." This latter sequence is the way many experience faith coming into being today. Luther brokered a truce between Melanchthon and Agricola and insisted that Christians are repentant on the basis of *both* fear and love, which is then reflected in Luther's own catechisms: "We should fear and love God..." [Kolb-Nestingen, *Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord*, pp. 14-18].

Second, proving that Faith Alone Justifies: "The law does not teach the free forgiveness of sins." Nor, can the law be kept "without the prior reception of the Holy Spirit." Therefore, "the promise of Christ is needed" for the giving of the Holy Spirit. And the promise of Christ cannot "be received in any other way than by faith." Those who deny that faith justifies do away with both the gospel and Christ and teach nothing but law [70].

Three biblical texts prove the assertion that faith alone justifies: Paul in Romans 3:28, "*For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law*"; in Ephesians 2:8-9, "*It is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast*"; and in Romans 3:24, "*...justified by his grace as a gift...*" [73].

We Obtain the Forgiveness of Sins Only by Faith in Christ Jesus

Third, Melanchthon begins to address **How Is This to Be**

Understood by means of a second syllogism [75-80].

The Confessors' Second Syllogism	
Major Premise	To obtain forgiveness of sins is to be justified
Minor Premise	We obtain the forgiveness of sins only by faith in Christ, not through love, nor on account of love or works, although love follows faith
Conclusion	Therefore, we are justified by faith alone.

Regarding the Major Premise, Melanchthon judges that even his opponents will admit that in justification forgiveness of sins is necessary, for we are all under sin. So that's a "give me." The Minor Premise is proved by 1 Corinthians 15:56-57: *"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Melanchthon continues with a long list of Bible passages, citations from the church fathers, and "Paul's chief argument" based on the nature of a promise to make "the essential point" of the entire discussion: "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law." [84].

Melanchthon points out that their opponents evade the Confessors' overwhelming proof from the Bible and the church fathers by "a piece of sophistry." They say that these passages ought to be interpreted as referring to "formed faith," that is, a faith formed and shaped by love. But the problem with "faith fashioned by love" is that it leads to uncertainty. It causes you to worry. "If faith received the forgiveness of sins on account of love, the forgiveness of sins will always be uncertain because we never love as much as we should" [109-110].

The Confessors, too, say "love should [*debeat*, **is bound to**]

follow faith,” as Paul says in Galatians 5:6 *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything: the only thing that counts is faith made effective through love.”* Love does not precede faith, but **“necessarily follows”** (*necessario sequiter*) faith [111, 115].

By the end of this section, Melanchthon announces mission accomplished! “We have demonstrated fully enough both from the testimonies of Scripture and from arguments derived from Scripture that by faith alone we obtain the forgiveness of sins on account of Christ and by faith alone we are justified, that is, out of unrighteous people we are made righteous or are regenerated” [117].

This is not just a scholarly issue, but a pastoral one. For “it can easily be determined how necessary the knowledge of this faith is, because [A] through it we understand the work of Christ and **by it alone we received the benefits of Christ.**” [B] This alone **brings a sure and firm consolation to godly minds.**” **The double dipstick test!** “There needs to be a teaching in the church from which the faithful may receive the certain hope of salvation.” “The opponents give bad [pastoral] advice when they command people to doubt whether or not they have obtained the forgiveness of sins” [118-119].

“By...rejecting this faith, our opponents fail to see that they thereby abolish the entire promise of the free forgiveness of sin and the righteousness of Christ” [121].