

Four Points Raised in John Warwick Montgomery's article, "Christian Apologetics in the Light of the Lutheran Confessions"

1. Does apologetics give reason a place in man's salvation?

Small Catechism, Creed, 3rd, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

SA III, i, 3, "This hereditary sin is so deep and [horrible] a corruption of nature that no reason can understand it, but it must be [learned and] believed from the revelation of Scriptures, Ps. 51, 5; Rom. 6, 12ff; Ex. 33, 3; Gen. 3, 7ff Hence, it is nothing but error and blindness in regard to this article what the scholastic doctors have taught, namely;"

FC SD II. 43] ...Dr. Luther declared ... *Herewith I reject and condemn as nothing but error all dogmas which extol our free will, as they directly conflict with this help and grace of our Savior Jesus Christ. For since outside of Christ death and sin are our lords, and the devil our god and prince, there can be no power or might, no wisdom or understanding, whereby we can qualify ourselves for, or strive after, righteousness and life; but we must be blinded people and prisoners of sin and the devil's own, to do and to think what pleases them and is contrary to God and His commandments.*

Ap XXVIII Free Will, 70] Nor, indeed, do we deny liberty to the human will. The human will has liberty in the choice of works and things which reason comprehends by itself. It can to a certain extent render civil righteousness or the righteousness of works; it can speak of God, offer to God a certain service by an outward work, obey magistrates, parents; in the choice of an outward work it can restrain the hands from murder, from adultery, from theft. Since there is left in human nature reason and judgment concerning objects subjected to the senses, choice between these things, the liberty and power to render civil righteousness, are also left. For Scripture calls this the righteousness of the flesh which the carnal nature, *i.e.*, reason, renders by itself, **71]** without the Holy Ghost. **Although the power of concupiscence is such that men more frequently obey evil dispositions than sound judgment.** And the devil, who is efficacious in the godless, as Paul says, Eph. 2, 2, does not cease to incite **this feeble nature** to various offenses. **These are the reasons why even civil righteousness is rare among men, as we see that not even the philosophers themselves, who seem 72]** to have aspired after this righteousness, attained it. But it is false to say that he who performs the works of the commandments without grace does not sin. And they add further that such, works also merit *de congruo* the remission of sins and justification. For human hearts without the Holy Ghost are without the fear of God; without trust toward God, they do not believe that they are heard, forgiven, helped, and preserved by God. Therefore they are godless. For *neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit*, Matt. 7, 18. And *without faith it is impossible to please God*, Heb. 11, 6. **73]** **Therefore, although we concede to free will the liberty and power to perform the outward works of the Law, yet we do not ascribe to free will these spiritual matters**, namely, truly to fear God, truly to believe God, truly to be confident and hold that God regards us, hears us, forgives us, etc.

2. Elevates historical knowledge

Ap IV 48-52, 99 *What Is Justifying Faith?***48]** The adversaries feign that faith is only a **knowledge of the history**, and therefore teach that it can coexist with mortal sin. Hence they say nothing concerning faith, by which Paul so frequently says that men are justified, because those who are accounted righteous before God do not live in mortal sin. But *that faith which justifies is not merely a knowledge of history*, [not merely this, **that I know the stories of Christ's birth, suffering, etc. (that even the devils know,)**] but it is to assent to the promise of God, in which, for Christ's sake, the remission of sins and justification are freely offered. [It is the certainty or the certain trust in the heart, when, with my whole heart, I regard the promises of God as certain and true, through which there are offered me, without my merit, the forgiveness of sins, grace, and all salvation, through Christ the Mediator.] And that no one may suppose that it is mere knowledge, we will add further: it is to wish and to receive the offered promise of the remission of sins and of justification. [Faith is that my whole heart takes to itself this treasure. It is not my doing, not my presenting or giving, not my work or preparation, but that a heart comforts itself, and is perfectly confident with respect to this, namely, that God makes a present and gift to us, and not we to Him, that He sheds upon us every treasure of grace in Christ.]

49] And the difference between this faith and the righteousness of the Law can be easily discerned. Faith is the *λατρεία* [divine service], which receives the benefits offered by God; the righteousness of the Law is the *λατρεία* [divine service] which offers to God our merits. By faith God wishes to be worshiped in this way, that we receive from Him those things which He promises and offers.

50] Now, that faith signifies, **not only a knowledge of the history**, but **such faith as assents to the promise**, Paul plainly testifies when he says, Rom. 4, 16: *Therefore it is of faith, to the end the promise might be sure*. For he judges that the promise cannot be received unless by faith. Wherefore he puts them together as things that belong to one another, and connects promise and faith. [There Paul fastens and binds together these two, thus: Wherever there is a promise faith is required, and conversely, wherever faith is required, there must be a promise.] **51]** Although it will be easy to decide what faith is if we consider the Creed, where this article certainly stands: The forgiveness of sins. **Therefore it is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, was raised again, unless we add also this article, which is the purpose of the history: The forgiveness of sins.** To this article the rest must be referred, namely, that for Christ's sake, and not for the sake of our merits, **52]** forgiveness of sins is given us. For what need was there that Christ was given for our sins if for our sins our merits can make satisfaction?

99] ... Wherefore that faith of which the Apostles speak is not idle knowledge, but a reality, receiving the Holy Ghost and justifying us [**not a mere knowledge of history**, but a strong powerful work of the Holy Ghost, which changes hearts]

Ap IV Reply to the Arguments, 182] But ours, we hope, is readily understood by pious minds, and brings godly and salutary consolation to terrified consciences. For as the adversaries quibble that also **many wicked men and devils believe**, we have frequently already said that we speak of **faith in Christ, i.e., of faith in the remission of sins, of faith which truly and heartily assents to the promise of grace**. This is not brought about without a great struggle in human hearts. And men of sound mind can easily judge that the faith which believes that we are cared for by God, and that we are forgiven and heard by Him, is **a matter above nature**. For of its own accord the human mind makes no such decision concerning God. Therefore this faith of which we speak is neither in the wicked nor in devils.

183] Furthermore, if any sophist cavils that righteousness is in the will, and therefore it cannot be ascribed to faith, which is in the intellect, the reply is easy, because in the schools even such persons acknowledge that **the will commands the intellect to assent to the Word of God.** We say also quite clearly: Just as the terrors of sin and death are not only thoughts of the intellect, but also horrible movements of the will fleeing God’s judgment, **so faith is not only knowledge in the intellect, but also confidence in the will, i.e.,** it is to wish and to receive that which is offered in the promise, namely, reconciliation and remission of sins.

AC XX Good Works, 23] Men are also admonished that here the term “faith” does not signify merely the knowledge of the history, such as is in the ungodly and in the devil, but signifies a faith **which believes, not merely the history, but also the effect of the history**—namely, this article: the forgiveness of sins, to wit, that we have grace, righteousness, and forgiveness of sins through Christ.

3. Disregards total depravity caused by the fall.

SD II. **9]** For, first, although man’s reason or natural intellect indeed has still **a dim spark of the knowledge that there is a God, as also of the doctrine of the Law,** Rom. 1, 19ff, yet it is so ignorant, blind, and perverted that when even the most ingenious and learned men upon earth read or hear the Gospel of the Son of God and the promise of eternal salvation, **they cannot from their own powers** perceive, apprehend, understand, or believe and regard it as true, but the more diligence and earnestness they employ, **wishing to comprehend these spiritual things with their reason, the less they understand or believe,** and before they become enlightened and are taught by the Holy Ghost, they regard all this only as foolishness or fictions. **10]** 1 Cor. 2, 14: *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him.* 1 Cor. 1, 21: *For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* Eph. 4, 17f.: *They (that is, those not born again of God’s Spirit) walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.* Matt. 13, 11ff; Luke 8, 18: *Seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand; but it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.* Rom. 3, 11. 12: *There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are all together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no, not one.* **Accordingly, the Scriptures flatly call natural man in spiritual and divine things darkness,** Eph. 5, 8, Acts 26, 18. John 1, 5: *The light shineth in darkness (that is, in the dark, blind world, which does not know or regard God), and the darkness comprehendeth it not.* Likewise, the Scriptures teach that man in sins is not only weak and sick, but defunct and entirely dead, Eph. 2, 1. 5; Col. 2, 13.

4. Only by illumination does the Holy Spirit make the Bible understandable to the unbeliever

FC SD VII Lord’s Supper 50] Now, surely there is **no interpreter of the words of Jesus Christ as faithful and sure as the Lord Christ Himself,** who understands best His words and His heart and opinion, and who is the wisest and most knowing for expounding them; and here, as in the making of His last will and testament and of His everabiding covenant and union, as elsewhere

in [presenting and confirming) all articles of faith, and in the institution of all other signs of the covenant and of grace or sacraments, as [for example] circumcision, the various offerings in the Old Testament and Holy Baptism, He uses not allegorical, but entirely proper, simple, indubitable, and clear words; and in order that no misunderstanding can occur, He explains them more clearly with the words: *Given for you, shed for you.* **51]** He also allows His disciples to rest in the simple, proper sense, and commands them that they should thus teach all nations to observe what He had commanded them, the apostles.

Ap IV 254] No sane man can judge otherwise; neither do we here affect any idle subtilty, so as to separate the fruits from the righteousness of the heart; if the adversaries would only have conceded that the fruits please because of faith, and of Christ as Mediator, and that by themselves they are not worthy of grace and of eternal life. **255] For in the doctrine of the adversaries we condemn this, that in such passages of Scripture, understood either in a philosophical or a Jewish manner,** they abolish the righteousness of faith, and exclude Christ as Mediator. From these passages they infer that works merit grace, sometimes *de congruo*, and at other times *de condigno*, namely, when love is added; *i.e.*, that they justify, and because they are righteousness they are worthy of eternal life. This, error manifestly abolishes the righteousness, of faith, which believes that we have access to God for Christ's sake, not for the sake of, our works, and that through Christ, as Priest and Mediator, we are led to the Father, and have a reconciled Father, **256]** as has been sufficiently said above....

FC SD II 55] Now, although both, the planting and watering of the preacher, and the running and willing of the hearer, would be in vain, and no conversion would follow it if the power and efficacy of the Holy Ghost were not added thereto, who enlightens and converts the hearts through the Word preached and heard, so that men believe this Word and assent thereto, still, neither preacher nor hearer is to doubt this grace and efficacy of the Holy Ghost, **but should be certain that when the Word of God is preached purely and truly, according to the command and will of God, and men listen attentively and earnestly and meditate upon it, God is certainly present with His grace, and grants, as has been said, what otherwise man can neither accept nor give from his own powers.** **56]** For concerning the presence, operation, and gifts of the Holy Ghost we should not and cannot always judge *ex sensu* [from feeling], as to how and when they are experienced in the heart; but because they are often covered and occur in great weakness, we should be certain from, and according to, the promise, that the Word of God preached and heard is [truly] an office and work of the Holy Ghost, by which He is certainly efficacious and works in our hearts, 2 Cor. 2, 14ff; 3, 5ff.

57] But if a man will not hear preaching nor read God's Word, but despises the Word and congregation of God, and thus dies and perishes in his sins, he neither can comfort himself with God's eternal election nor obtain His mercy; for Christ, in whom we are chosen, offers to all men His grace in the Word and holy Sacraments, and wishes earnestly that it be heard, and has promised that where two or three are gathered together in His name and are occupied with His holy Word, He will be in their midst.

58] But when such a person despises **the instrument of the Holy Ghost,** and will not hear, no injustice is done to him if the Holy Ghost does not enlighten him, but allows him to remain in the darkness of his unbelief and to perish; for regarding this matter it is written: *How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; and ye would not!* Matt. 23, 37.