

The Doctrine of Vocation – Lesson 2

Introduction

What is the difference between a sacrament and a sacrifice? When we know the difference and what comes first, we have a right understanding of our faith and the fruit we bear because God chose us (John 15:16).

Words that matter: sacrament, sacrifice, faith, justification, sanctification.

Faith, Love, and the Christian Life

Therefore faith always justifies and makes alive; and yet it does not remain alone, that is, idle. Not that it does not remain alone on its own level and in its own function, for it always justifies alone. But it is incarnate and becomes man; that is, it neither is nor remains idle or without love. Thus Christ, according to His divinity, is a divine and eternal essence or nature, without a beginning; but His humanity is a nature created in time. These two natures in Christ are not confused or mixed, and the properties of each must be clearly understood. . . . Just as I am obliged to distinguish between the humanity and the divinity, and to say: "The humanity is not the divinity, and yet the man is God," so I make a distinction here and say: "The Law is not faith, and yet faith does works. Faith and works are in agreement concretely or compositely, and yet each has and preserves its own nature and proper function." Martin Luther, AE 26:272–73



In his first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul commended these new Christians for their “work of faith and labor of love,” which served as “an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia” (1 Thessalonians 1:3, 7). So, too, our union with Christ is made evident by “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6). A proper view of the nature and role of faith and love in the Christian life is necessary to understand the doctrine of vocation.

12. In what ways are *faith* and *love* understood in our society today?

Faith Working through Love

13. Read Genesis 12:1–4. Apart from God’s promise, was there any reason why Abram should have believed that he would become the father of a great nation? What did his faith mean in regard to his status before the Lord (see Romans 4:1–5)?

14. Read Galatians 3:1–9, 14. How did the Galatians receive their faith? What did that mean for their Christian living?

15. Read Hebrews 11:8–12, 17–19. How did Abraham’s faith express itself? Was Abraham righteous because of his works or because of his faith?

16. Read James 2:14–26. What naturally flows from a heart of faith, according to this passage?

17. Read John 15:1–8. Which comes first, bearing fruit for God or being united to Christ?

18. Read Matthew 25:31–46. In this analogy, how did the faith of the sheep express itself? How did the unbelief of the goats express itself?

The Place of Good Works in the Christian Life

"It is God's will, order, and command that believers should walk in good works. . . . Truly good works are done not by our own natural powers, but in this way: when a person is reconciled with God through faith and renewed by the Holy Spirit" (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration IV 7). Further, Paul writes that a person is "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10).

19. According to the Formula of Concord, why are our works as believing Christians pleasing to God but an unbeliever's works are not? What's the difference?

20. Are good works necessary in this life? What must happen first before a person can do anything good?

Living the Faith

James writes, "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:15–17).

21. What are some ways that you can live out your faith in your community? How can your service to others be a witness to the love and mercy of Christ?

22. Read Ephesians 4:1–16. Although as redeemed children of God, we desire to do all things to the praise and glory of His name, what obstacles do we encounter as we attempt to live the faith? How does the Christian community support us?

Spiritual Exercises

- This week, review Luther's explanations to commandments Four through Ten. Note especially how he presents both the prohibitions ("You shall not") and the prescriptions ("You shall") in each commandment. For example, not only do we not murder our neighbor (the Fifth Commandment), we also "help and support him in every physical need."
- Use the hymn "I Know My Faith Is Founded" (*LSB* 587; *ELH* 494; *CW* 403; *LW* 354; *TLH* 381) for meditation in your daily devotions throughout the week. Focus especially on these words of the second stanza:
 - Increase my faith, dear Savior, For Satan seeks by night and day To rob me of this treasure
And take my hope of bliss away. But, Lord, with You beside me, I shall be undismayed;
And led by Your good Spirit, I shall be unafraid. Abide with me, O Savior, A firmer faith bestow;
Then I shall bid defiance To ev'ry evil foe.
- Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8a. First, note how you can express your faith in love to others in the ways described in this passage. Second, rejoice that God expresses His love and service to you in a similar manner through Jesus Christ, His Son.

Point to Remember

"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me," (Matthew 25:40).

To prepare for "Spiritual Living in an Unspiritual Word," read Ephesians 2:1–22.