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## Lesson 3

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### Justification by Faith Alone

**Seventh.** It should therefore be the sole work and exercise of all Christians that they learn and build within them Christ and the word; that they steadfastly practice such faith and strengthen it. Because no other *works* can create a Christian, like Christ told the Jews in John 6. When they asked Him what *works* they needed to do in order to perform the *works* of God, He answered: “THIS IS THE *WORK* OF GOD, THAT YOU BELIEVE IN HIM WHOM HE HAS SENT”<sup>12</sup>.

For this reason this is such an overflowing treasure: A righteous faith in Christ that brings with it all that is salvation and carries away all that is not salvation, as the Apostle Mark says “THE ONE WHO BELIEVES AND IS BAPTIZED WILL BE SAVED; BUT THE ONE WHO DOES NOT BELIEVE WILL BE CONDEMNED”<sup>13</sup>. For this reason also the prophet Isaiah, when examining the treasure of that same faith, said “DESTRUCTION IS DECREED, OVERFLOWING WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS”<sup>14</sup>. That is: Faith, which is the brief and complete fulfilling of the law, will fill those who believe with such righteousness that they will need nothing else for justification. This, too, says the Apostle Paul in Romans 10:10 “FOR ONE BELIEVES WITH THE HEART AND SO IS JUSTIFIED”.

**Eighth.** But how is it at all possible that faith alone justifies, and provides without *works* such an overflowing treasure, where there are so many laws, commandments, *works* and procedures prescribed to us in the Scriptures? Here it is most important to keep in mind that faith alone – without *works* – makes pious, makes free, and justifies, as we’ll hear more about later on.

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<sup>12</sup> See John 6:29

<sup>13</sup> See Mark 16:16

<sup>14</sup> See Isaiah 10:22. The full verse reads “FOR THOUGH YOUR PEOPLE ISRAEL WERE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, ONLY A REMNANT OF THEM WILL RETURN. DESTRUCTION IS DECREED, OVERFLOWING WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

And it is important to know that the whole of Scripture is divided into two parts. These are precepts, that is: God's *laws*, and *promises*.

The *laws* teach us, and prescribe, various *good works* – but that doesn't mean these *works* are done yet. The laws direct us, but do not assist; they teach, but do not provide strength and power to do them. Therefore, these precepts, or laws, are meant to make man see his own inability to do good and teach him to despair of himself.

For this reason they are called the Old Testament, and all belong into the Old Testament. Like the commandment "thou shalt not covet" proves that we are all sinners, and none of us can help coveting, whatever efforts to the contrary he may make. In the same way we find it impossible to fulfill all the other commands.

**Ninth.** Now that from these commands man has learned and experienced his inability, he becomes deeply worried how he could fulfill even one of the commandments, for he must fulfill them or must be condemned. And in his own view he is now humiliated and utterly destroyed, and can find nothing within himself that would allow him to become righteous.

Into this situation now comes that different word, the divine promise and commitment, and it says: "*If you wish to keep all commands, to shed your evil lusts and sin, just as the commands force and demand, see now, believe in Christ, in which I promise you all mercy, justice, peace and freedom. If you believe you shall have; believe not and you shall have not. For what is not possible for you with all the laws, of which there must be many, and yet none useful, this is made quick and easy for you through faith. For I have made everything dependent on faith, so that he who has faith, has everything and shall be blessed; and he who has it not shall have nothing.*"

Thus, in this way the promises of God fulfill all that the law demands and fulfill what the law orders, so that it all belongs to God. The law and its fulfillment: He alone orders it, and He alone fulfills it<sup>15</sup>. That is why God's promises are in the *New Testament*, and why they belong into the *New Testament*.

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## Review Questions

1. According to Luther's teaching, what is the only thing a Christian need to do in order to be saved?

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<sup>15</sup> See Romans 11:32

2. What two parts is Scripture divided into?

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3. What role do the *laws* play in the process of salvation?

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4. What role do the *promises* play in the process of salvation? When combined, what are laws and the promises together meant to accomplish?

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5. What then is the New Testament, the new promise, that God makes, that of which Luther says “He alone orders it, and He alone fulfills it”?

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### Study and Discussion Questions

1. So, faith in God seems to be all that is required of me in order to be saved. I can't do it alone, try as I may. Pretend for a moment, Luther's essay was to read here: "It is *your own* work that makes you righteous" – What ‘moral hazard’ can you detect in this concept?

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2. “Laws” in the sense Luther and his contemporaries use the word means biblical law – the commandments and all the additional rules the books of the Bible, including the Old Testament set forth. Discuss how this use of the word ‘law’ is different from today’s use.

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3. Do you think the biblical law and modern, secular law could evolve to become the one and the same? Why or why not?

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