

Preface To The Acts Of The Apostles (1546 and 1533)

This book should be read and regarded not as though St. Luke had written of the personal works and lives of the apostles for an example of good works and good lives only; though this is the way it has sometimes been taken. Even St. Augustine and many others have looked upon the fact that the apostles had all things in common with Christians as the best example which the book contains; though this did not last long and had to stop, after a time. On the contrary, it is to be noted that by this book St. Luke teaches the whole Church, to the end of the world, the true chief point of Christian doctrine; namely, that we must all be justified only through faith in Jesus Christ, without any addition of law or help from good works.

This doctrine is the chief intention of the book and the author's principal cause for writing it. Therefore he stresses so mightily, not only the preaching of the apostles about faith in Christ and how both Gentiles and Jews must be justified by it without any merits or works, but also the examples and the instances of this teaching, telling how Gentiles as well as Jews were justified through the Gospel only, without the law.

So St. Peter testifies in Acts 10:28 and Acts 15:9, that, in this matter, God made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, but just as He gave the Holy Ghost to the Gentiles through the Gospel though they lived without the law, so He gave Him to the Jews through the Gospel, and not through the law or because of their own works and merits. Thus he puts side by side, in this book, both the doctrine about faith and the example of faith.

This book might well be called, therefore, a commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul. For what Paul teaches and insists upon with words and passages of Scripture, St. Luke here points out and proves with examples and instances which show that it has happened, and must happen, as St. Paul teaches, to wit, that no law, no work justifies men, but only faith in Christ.

Here, in this book, you find, then, a fair mirror, in which you can see that it is true. *Sola fides justificat*, "faith alone justifies," for all the examples and instances of this doctrine contained in it are sure and comforting testimonies, which neither lie nor deceive you.

For see how St. Paul himself was converted; how the Gentile, Cornelius, was converted through St. Peter's word, the angel telling him beforehand that Peter would preach to him, and so he would be saved. Look at the proconsul Sergius, and all the cities where Paul and Barnabas preached; look at the first council of the apostles at Jerusalem, in Acts 15:2; look at all the preaching of St. Peter, Paul, Stephen and Philip; — you will find that it all comes to one thing; it is only through the faith of Christ, without law and works, that we must come into grace and be justified.

By means of this book, used this way, we can stop, in masterly fashion and mightily, the mouths of opponents who point us to the law and our own works and publish their foolish unwisdom to all the world. Therefore St. Luke says that these illustrations of faith amazed the pious Jews, who had become believers, and that the unbelieving Jews became mad and foolish over it. And this was no wonder, for they had been raised in the law and had been accustomed to it from Abraham down and it could not but vex them that the Gentiles, who were without law and God, should be, like themselves, in God's grace.

But that our people, who are all Gentiles, should slander and persecute this doctrine is ten times worse; for here we see, and cannot deny, that the grace of God and the knowledge of Christ came to our forebears without law and merit, nay, when they were in horrible idolatry and blasphemy. But they will gain as much by their slander and persecution as the Jews gained by their raging and raving. He who had before threatened the Jews and had Moses sing, "I will make you wroth with that which is not my people, and with a foolish folk will I make you angry," and said in Hosea 2:23, "I will call 'My people' those who were not my people" (i.e. those who live without law and works), and who kept His word, He, I say, threatens these slanderers of ours with the same things, and He will surely keep His word, as He has already begun to do; but they will not believe it until, like the Jews, they have the experience. Amen.