

The People of Law and of Grace

Sunday After Christmas

Sermon on Galatians 4:1-7

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Text

¹ But I say that so long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a bondservant though he is lord of all; ² but is under guardians and stewards until the day appointed of the father. ³ So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world: ⁴ but when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. ⁶ And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. ⁷ So that thou art no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:1-7)

Sermon

¹ This text is very characteristic of the apostle Paul. It is not generally understood. Not because of any obscurity in itself, but because the doctrine of faith, a doctrine it is very necessary to understand if we are to comprehend Paul, for his energetic and zealous mind is, in all his epistles, occupied with the subject of faith—because, I say, this doctrine is almost obsolete in the world, today. A lengthy exposition is necessary to make it plain. To gain space to treat the subject clearly, we will let this suffice for the introduction.

Man's Justification

² We must know it is one thing to handle the subject of good works and another that of justification; just as the nature or personality of an individual is one thing and his actions or works another. Justification has reference to the person and not to the works. It is the former, not the latter, which is justified and saved, or is sentenced and punished.

³ Therefore, it is settled that no one is justified by works; he must first be justified by other means. Moses says (Genesis 4:4-5), "*Jehovah had respect unto Abel and to his offering.*" First, he had respect to Abel the person, and then to his offering. Abel being godly, just and acceptable in person, his offering was acceptable. The sacrifice was accepted because of the person, and not the person because of the sacrifice. "*But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.*" In the first place, God had not respect unto Cain the person; hence later he respected not his offering. From this quotation we may conclude it is impossible for any work to be good in God's sight unless the worker

first be good and acceptable. Conversely, it is impossible for any work to be evil before God unless the worker first be evil and not acceptable.

⁴ Now, let it be sufficiently proven for the present that there are two kinds of good works; some precede and others follow justification. The former merely appear to be good and effectual; the latter are really good.

⁵ Now, this is the point of contention between presumptuous saints and God. Right here carnal nature contends, even rages, against the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures everywhere treat of this contention. Therein God concludes all man's works, previous to his justification, evil and ineffectual; he requires justification and goodness on the part of the individual first. Again, he concludes that all persons in the state of nature and of the first birth are unjust and evil. As said in Psalm 116:11, "*All men are liars.*" And in Genesis 6:5, "*Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually.*" Hence the natural man can perform no good work, and all his attempts will be no better than Cain's.

⁶ Here Madam Huldah with her scornful nose—human nature—steps in and dares to contradict her God and to charge him with falsehood. She hangs upon herself her old frippery, her straw armor—natural light, reason, free-will and human powers. She introduces the heathenish books and doctrines of men, and proceeds to harp upon these, saying: "*Good works do precede justification. And they are not, as God says, the works of Cain. They are good to the extent of justifying. For Aristotle taught that he who does much good will thereby become good.*" To this doctrine Madam *firmly* cleaves, perverting the Scriptures and presuming that God *must* first respect the works and then the doer. This satanic doctrine universally reigns at present in all the high schools and other institutions, and in the cloisters. Its advocates are but Cain-like saints, disregarded of God.

⁷ In the second place, Madam Huldah, basing her position simply on works and attaching very little importance to the justified individual, proceeds still further and attributes all merit and supreme righteousness to the works following justification. She quotes James 2:26, "*Faith apart from works is dead.*" Not understanding this statement, she undervalues faith. Consequently she continues to hold to good works, presuming to require of God acceptance of the doer for the sake of the works. So the two continually strive against one another. God respects the individual, Cain the works. God rewards the works for the sake of the doer; Cain would have the doer crowned because of his works. God will not yield his just and righteous position, and the young nobleman Cain will never while the world stands allow himself to be convinced of his error. We must not reject his works, slight his reason or look unto his free-will as powerless; for so he will become angry with God and slay his brother Abel, a fact to which all history gives abundant testimony.

⁸ Do you ask: "*What then am I to do? How shall I make myself good and acceptable in person to begin with? how secure that justification?*" The Gospel replies: "*Hear Christ and believe in him, utterly despairing of yourself and resting assured you will be changed some Cain to an Abel and then present your offerings.*" Just as faith is proclaimed without merit or work on your part, it is also bestowed regardless of your works, without any of your merits. It is given of pure grace. Note, faith justifies the individual; faith is justification. Because of faith God remits all sins, and forgives the old Adam and the Cain in our nature, for the sake of Christ his beloved Son, whose name faith represents. More, he bestows his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit changes the individual into a new creature, one with different reason and different will, and inclined to the good. Such a one, wherever

he is, performs wholly good works, and all his works are good; as taught in the preceding epistle lesson.

⁹ Then nothing else is necessary to justification but to hear and believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior. But that is not a work of the natural man; it is a work of grace. He who presumes to attain justification by works, only obstructs the way of the Gospel, of faith, grace, Christ, God and all good. On the other hand, nothing but justification is necessary to render works good. The justified man and none other does good; all he does, being justified, is good, without distinction of works. Therefore, the order of man's salvation, the beginning and the sequel, is first to hear and then believe God's Word as supreme, and then to act. Thus shall man be saved. He who perverts this order and acts accordingly is certainly not of God.

¹⁰ Paul prescribes this order where he says (Romans 10:13-15): "*Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?*" Christ teaches us to pray the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest; that is, faithful preachers. When they come they preach the true Word of God. Hearing it, we are enabled to believe, and such faith justifies us and renders us godly; then we call upon God and do only good. Thus are we saved. So then, the believer shall be saved, but he who works without faith shall be damned. Christ says (Mark 16:16), "*He that disbelieveth shall be condemned;*" here works avail nothing.

¹¹ Now, observe what people commonly do and say. "Yes," they tell you, "*I expect to become godly. Yes, we must be godly.*" But if they are asked what we are to do to accomplish it, they go on to say, "*Indeed, we must pray, fast, attend Church, abstain from sin, and so on.*" One will enter a monastery, another some order. One will become a priest, another will don a hair-garment. One will punish himself in a certain way, and another in another way. They are like Cain and do the works of Cain. Personally they are as at first—without justification. They but assume an external change, an alteration of works, clothing, condition and habits. They are really apes, assuming the habits of saints but remaining unholy. Unmindful of faith, they rush along with their good works toward heaven—as they imagine—torturing themselves.

Relative to them, Christ in the Gospel (Luke 13:24) says: "*Strive to enter in by the narrow door: for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*" And why not? Because they do not recognize the narrow door. It is faith. Faith humbles one, reduces him to nothing, until he must despair of all his good works and cleave only to God's grace; for that he must forsake all else. But the Cain-like saints imagine good works to be the narrow door. Hence they do not humble themselves. Nor do they despair of their good works; no, lading themselves with the cumbersome bundles of their collected deeds, they strive to pass through the door. They will pass as the camel with his great hump passes through the eye of the needle.

¹² Mention faith to them and they scoff and laugh, saying: "*Are we Turks or heathen that we must first learn what faith is? Is it possible that our multitude of monks, nuns and priests do not know? Who can be ignorant of what believing is when even they who openly sin know its meaning?*" As if having finished with faith, they imagine they must henceforth devote themselves to works. As before said, they regard faith of slight importance; for they do not understand that it is our sole justifier. To accept as true the record of Christ—this they call faith. The devils have the same sort of faith, but it does not make them godly. Such belief is not Christian faith; no, it is rather deception.

¹³ In the preceding epistles we have heard that to be a Christian it is not enough simply to believe the story of Christ true—the Cain-like saints possess such faith—but the Christian must without any hesitancy believe himself one to whom grace and mercy are given, and that he has really secured them through baptism or through the Holy Supper. When he so believes, he is free to say of himself: *“I am holy, godly and just. I am a child of God, perfectly assured of salvation. Not because of anything in me, not because of my merits or works, am I saved; it is of the pure mercy of God in Christ, poured out upon me.”* To such extent will he appreciate God’s precious mercy, he cannot doubt that it renders him holy and constitutes him a child of God. But he who doubts, disparages to the utmost his baptism and the Holy Supper, and censures as false God’s Word and his grace in the sacraments.

¹⁴ The Christian should entertain no fear—he should not doubt—that he is righteous and a child of God through grace. Rather he needs to entertain anxiety as to how he shall endure steadfast to the end. There is where all fear and anxiety are due. For while he assuredly is given to possess full salvation, it may be somewhat doubtful whether or no he will steadfastly retain it. Here we must walk in fear. True faith does not hang upon works nor rely’ upon itself; it relies only upon God and his grace. Grace cannot forsake the individual so long as reliance continues. But he knows not how long it will continue. Should temptation force him to lose his confidence, grace also will fail. Solomon (Ecclesiastics 9:1) says: *“The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God; whether it be love or hatred, man knoweth it not; all is before them.”* He does not say it is uncertain at present, but in the future, because man knows not whether he will withstand the attacks or temptation.

¹⁵ When the Cain-like saints hear the doctrine of faith, they cross themselves, both with hands and feet, and exclaim: *“God forbid! How could I call myself holy and righteous? How could I be so egotistical and presumptuous? No, no; I am a poor sinner.”* You see how they make faith of no value to themselves, and so must regard as heresy all doctrine based upon it. Thus they do away with the whole Gospel. These are they who deny the Christian faith and exterminate it from the world. Paul prophesied concerning them when he said (1 Timothy 4:1): *“In later times some shall fall away from the faith.”* The voice of faith is now silenced all over the world. Indeed, faith is condemned and banished as the worst heresy, and all who teach and endorse it are condemned with it. The Pope, the bishops, charitable institutions, cloisters, high schools, unanimously opposed it for nearly four hundred years, and simply drove the world violently into hell. Their conduct is the real persecution by Antichrist, in the last times.

¹⁶ Tell them what the prophet says in Psalm 86:2: *“Preserve my soul; for I am godly”*; and Paul’s words in Romans 8:16: *“The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God;”* and they reply: *“Yes, but the prophet and the apostle did not mean by these statements to establish a doctrine or leave an example of what others may claim. They were enlightened and their holiness was revealed to them.”* Similarly, they construe every passage relating to the subject as not doctrinal in design, but exhibiting a remarkable miracle, a special prerogative of certain individuals not to be possessed by every believer. This explanation is a mere invention of their own minds. Themselves unbelievers, tasting not the Spirit, they think no one else should so believe or taste. By such conduct—their own fruits—they may be clearly identified as thorns and thistles; not as Christians, but as enemies and destroyers of Christians, and persecutors of the Christian faith.

¹⁷ Such, however, is the character of their own faith, they are led to believe they are made godly and holy through their works, and that therefore God must save them. Note, in their opinion, to become

godly through works is Christianity; but to become godly through divine grace is heresy. Apparently their works are of greater importance and value than the grace of God. Their faith can rely upon works, but not upon God's grace. Since they reject the rock and build upon the sand, they but get their deserts when they fall into the error of their own works and torture themselves to death, to the devil's advantage. It is all because they will not rely upon the grace of God and render him reasonable service.

¹⁸ They who possess the Christian faith must in consequence of it be confidently happy in God and his grace. They will even delight in good works. The prayers the Cain-like ones offer, and the costume they affect, are not good works. Only such works as minister to the profit of a neighbor are good, as we said in the last Gospel lesson. Yes, Christians will readily suffer everything, for they doubt not God's presence with them, and his favor. These are they who honor God and are useful to man.

¹⁹ But the Cain-like people profit not God, the world nor themselves. They are mere useless burdens to the earth, harmful to themselves and everyone else. Lacking faith, they do not serve nor honor God. They do no work that contributes in any way to the benefit of their neighbor's bodily or property, his honor or his soul. Their works exclusively their own, consisting in certain gestures, apparel and meats and performed in honor of certain places and times.

Tell me, how does it benefit me for you to affect a large bald pate or to wear a gray cowl? Who profits by your fasting on a certain day and observing a certain other day as holy? by your abstaining from particular meats, and secluding yourself in a certain place, to read and mutter so much every day? So doing, you simply murder yourself to please the devil, leaving a pernicious example, that others may follow in the same life and conduct as if it were good, and consistent with the principles of Christianity. Having not a Christian belief, you cannot pray in a Christian manner. Hence your fasting is not, as it should be, a mortification of the body; it is performed as a good work. Such a life is nothing else than the idolatry of Baal and of Moloch formerly practiced among the Jews, who tortured, burned and otherwise murdered their children for the devil's honor.

The Use and Necessity of the Law

²⁰ Perhaps you ask, "*If it is true that we are justified not by works, but by hearing of Christ and believing in him as ours personally, what is the need and use of the commandments? Why has God so urgently taught them?*" I answer: We come now to this our epistle lesson. It tells us the object of the commandments. The Galatians first learned the Christian faith from Paul. Afterward, being perverted by certain false teachers, they turned back to their works, imagining they must become righteous through the deeds of the Law. In our lesson Paul recalls them from their works unto faith, and with multiplied terms points out to them the two kinds of works of the Law. His conclusion is: the works preceding justification—or faith—are unprofitable and merely constitute us servants; but faith makes us children of God—his sons—whereupon really good works must follow.

²¹ But we must acquaint ourselves with Paul's language, his distinction between the servant and the child. The self-righteous he terms a servant. Concerning that individual much has been said heretofore. The believer in Christ he calls a child. The believer is and will be justified by faith alone—without works. This distinction is based upon the fact that the self-righteous one does not serve in the same spirit that actuates the child and heir conscious of his own inheritance. He renders his service in the spirit of a day-laborer upon another's property. Although the works of the two may

be precisely of the same character, the spirit that moves them—the conscience, and faith makes a difference. The child confidently expects to remain heir to the estate. The servant, recognizing his ultimate dismissal, does not await inheritance. As Christ declares (John 8:35): “*The bondservant abideth not in the house for ever: the son abideth for ever.*”

²² Now, the Cain-like saints have not, as they themselves confess, the Christian faith which would assure them of being the children of God. They protect themselves from that awful heretical presumption by making the sign of the cross. So they continue to hang in doubt. As they believe, so is it with them. They are not children of God and never will become his happy children in the way they are going, notwithstanding they may perform the requirements of the Law, may faithfully put it into practice. Observance of the Law will constitute them servants, and servants will they continue to be securing no more than a temporal reward—a competence on earth, and rest, honor and pleasure. We see this in the spiritual orders, where all the wealth, power, pleasure, honor and favors of the world are enjoyed. Here is the reward of the self-righteous. They are servants and not children; therefore in the hour of death they will all be cast out from the eternal inheritance which they refused in this life to believe in and to receive through faith. You see, so far as the works are concerned, there is scarcely a difference between the child and the servant. Faith, however—the spirit of service—makes the distinction.

²³ The apostle’s design is to make plain the fact that, lacking faith, the Law, with all its works, constitutes us simply servants. Only faith can make us children. Not the Law, nor the works of the Law, nor human nature can create faith within us; the Gospel alone brings it. It is present when we give ear to the Gospel, the Word of grace, which Word is accompanied by the Holy Spirit when preached and heard in quiet sincerity. Witness the example of Cornelius and his family (Acts 10:44), who received the Holy Spirit simply upon hearing Peter preach.

²⁴ The Law was given merely to reveal to man his graceless and servile condition and his lack of filial affection; to show him how he serves God without faith and confidence, and a free, spontaneous spirit. The self-righteous saints confess to their utter want of confidence; and, if they would but make further confession, they must admit that they prefer to have no Law, and do not submit to it from choice. Destitute of faith as they are, their whole conduct is regulated by restraints. They must acknowledge the Law powerless to yield them any higher perfection. Let them learn from the Law their condition as servants and not as children, and be led to come out of their servitude into the prerogative of the child, regarding their own efforts ineffectual. Thus through faith and the grace of God they may attain their rightful place in life.

²⁵ Such is the right way to view the Law; such is the use we are to make of it. It is calculated simply to convict and vanquish all who presume to fulfill it without faith. For these, being servants, undertake its requirements with no free, spontaneous spirit and with no reliance on grace. The Law is designed to try men, to teach them *by* defeat in the conflict with it how unwilling, how faithless, they are, and thus lead them to seek help elsewhere and not to presume by their own strength to meet its demands. A voluntary spirit is necessary, and only the child of God can fulfill the Law.

The Law is an *enemy* to the unwilling and to servants.

²⁶ But the self-righteous go so far as to acknowledge their utter lack of faith, yes, they reject the faith which would constitute them children; they are sensible of their unwillingness, and really prefer freedom from the Law; yet they presume by their own works to render themselves godly; they desire to remain servants instead of children, but at the same time to cleave to the inheritance, so perverting

all order. Though, as we said, the purpose of the Law is to bring them into conflict and teach that they are servants lacking a voluntary spirit, and to lead them to despair of their own efforts and cleave to faith, which would afford grace and constitute them children—notwithstanding all this, they pervert the Law to the extent of undertaking to fulfill its demands by their works. Thus they frustrate the end of the Law and its true meaning, striving against faith and grace, to which the Law points, even urges, them. So they remain forever a blind, perverse, laboring and servile people. Such is the teaching of Paul where he fearlessly says (Romans 3:20), “*By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified in his sight.*” Why not? He answers (Romans 7:7), Because the Law effects only the knowledge or experience of sin.

²⁷ Beloved, how does the Law do this? Study a Cain-like individual and you will see. In the first place, only with great pains and labor does he perform all his works in obedience to the Law. Yet, as he readily confesses, he does not believe himself a child of God and holy. Indeed, as before said, he condemns such faith as the most abominable presumption and heresy. He continues in doubt, expecting to become a child through his own works.

²⁸ You see plainly, that individual is not good nor righteous, for he is destitute of faith, in fact is an enemy to faith. Being an enemy to faith, he is an enemy to righteousness. Consequently his works are not meritorious, no matter how admirable they may appear judged by the standard of the Law. So you see Paul is right when he says, “*By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight.*” In God’s sight the doer must be good before his works are good. True, his works may justify him before men, who judge according to the deeds performed and not according to the doer’s spirit—the state of his heart. While men judge individuals by their works, God judges the works by the individual.

The first commandment of the Law demands that we have one God and honor him, that is, trust and confide in him, build upon him. This is true faith, whereby we are made children of God. Thus the Law clearly reveals the sin of the Cain-like—their unbelief. In like manner you experience whether you believe or not. Without such a law no one could experience or know this. Note, this is what Paul calls a knowledge of sin by the Law.

²⁹ You cannot extricate yourself from unbelief, nor can the Law do it for you. All your works in intended fulfillment of the Law must remain works of the Law and powerless to justify in the sight of God, who regards as just only believing children. For only these fulfill the first commandment and hold him true God. Though you torture yourself to death with works, yet they will not afford your heart the faith this commandment requires. Indeed, as before stated, works neither know nor tolerate faith. They do not recognize that the Law requires faith. Therefore, he who puts his trust in works must continue the devil’s martyr and a persecutor of faith and the Law through those very works wherein he trusts, until he comes to himself, knows himself and, despairing of himself and his works, gives honor to God; until, perceiving his own worthlessness, he ardently desires pure grace, driven to it by God, through the Law. Then faith and grace come to fill the empty heart, to feed the hungry soul. Then follow really good works. These works are not of the Law; they are works of the Spirit of grace, in the Scriptures styled the works of God—works he produces in us. All not produced in us by God through grace, all that we perform of ourselves without grace, is really wrought of the Law and avails nothing to justification. Rather it is evil and opposed to God, because of the unbelief in which it is wrought.

³⁰ In the second place, one like Cain never performs his duty willingly and voluntarily unless he is hired and is permitted to exercise his own pleasure, to have his own desires. He is precisely like the

servant who will not do his duty unless he is driven, or is given his own way. Now, servants that have to be driven or coaxed or flattered are very disagreeable. Likewise the Cain-like are displeasing, and by no means acceptable in the sight of God. For they perform no work of the Law unless driven by fear of punishment and of hell; or only after being coaxed and given their own way; or again, unless they do it to secure from God a competence to use as they desire.

You see they are not actuated by heartfelt love for the Law, but by the expectation of reward or fear of punishment. Being with all their hearts enemies to the Law, evidently they would prefer that the Law did not exist. If the doer be evil, the work is also evil. It is merely extorted by fear, or secured by conceding the doer his own pleasure in the matter; just as entreaty and persuasion move one to action.

³¹ The Law teaches us to recognize the unwillingness and perversity of our minds. They are wholly sinful before God. Where is the holiness in performing with the hands required duties when our hearts are unkindly disposed toward the Law and the Law-giver? Indeed, ill-will toward the Law is very sinful.

Note, what Paul calls knowing sin by the Law, is coming into conflict with it, feeling and experiencing the perversity of our hearts and in consequence shuddering, despairing of ourselves, and eagerly striving after grace. Grace removes disinclination and generates a willing, cheerful spirit, a spirit giving us sincere good-will for the Law and enabling us to perform our duties voluntarily, without constraint, our only motive being pure delight in righteousness and the Law, while we are uninfluenced by expectation of reward or by fear of punishment. Thus, of the slave, the child is made; of the bond-servant, an heir. The faith of Christ alone can create such a spirit, as sufficiently stated before. Now let us consider the epistle.

“So long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a bond-servant, though he is lord of all.”

³² Paul introduces a figure from material life. As we know, a minor, a child, who is heir to an estate left from parents or bequeathed by will, is reared in restraint like a servant so far as control of the estate is concerned. He is powerless to exercise his own pleasure in regard to it. He is kept under restraint and discipline, being permitted to derive from the estate only enough for food and raiment, notwithstanding the property is really his own. In the matter of his own possessions, he is but as a stranger and a servant.

³³ Similarly, in spiritual matters God made a testament when he gave Abraham the promise (Genesis 22:18) that in his seed, Christ, should all the nations of the earth be blessed. This testament was afterward established by the death of Christ; and after his resurrection it was published through the Gospel. The Gospel is merely a revelation, a manifestation, of this testament wherein it is declared to the world that in Christ, the seed of Abraham, grace and blessing are willed and given to all men, and may be received by every one if only he believes it.

³⁴ Before this testament was opened and published, children of God were under the Law, burdened and constrained by its works. Nevertheless, their works did not justify; rather they were servile and unprofitable. But because God's children were predestined to a future faith which should constitute them children, they were unquestionably heirs of the grace and blessing conveyed in the testament; though not then in possession of it and able to appropriate it, but, like others without faith, servile and occupied with works. Just so, it is the case now, and always has been, that many believe, and

acknowledge faith, after having been previously overwhelmed with works and in ignorance of faith; after having been, with hypocrites, occupied in works. From the fact of their now apprehending faith and receiving the inheritance, they certainly must have been all the time heirs and predestined of God, though in ignorance of the fact, and though servants, self-righteous and Cain-like.

³⁵ So some who are now occupied with works and whose holiness is like Cain's, who are servants as he was, are nevertheless future heirs and children, because they will yet believe. Faith will enable them to lay aside their servility, to surrender their works and to obtain the great blessing, the vast inheritance, of justification. And being justified, righteousness and salvation are theirs without works. Then will they voluntarily do all their works to the honor of God and the benefit of their neighbors, without expectation of reward or intent to secure righteousness or a reward. For they are in possession of the inheritance and blessing; they have what Christ has bequeathed to them in his testament and caused to be opened, proclaimed and distributed through the Gospel, all of pure grace and mercy.

³⁶ Abraham and every other patriarch, you will observe, recognized God's testament or covenant. It was delivered to them just as much as to us, although not at that time read and proclaimed to the world as after Christ's ascension. They obtained the very same thing that we and all God's children obtain, and through the very same faith, The grace, the blessing, the testament, the faith—all are the same; the Father is one and the same God of us all.

³⁷ Note, Paul everywhere teaches justification, not by works, but solely by faith; and not as a process, but instantaneous. The testament includes in itself everything — justification, salvation, the inheritance and great blessing. Through faith it is instantaneously enjoyed, not in part, but all. Truly is it plain, then, that faith alone affords such blessings of God, justification and salvation—immediately and not in process as must be the case with works—and constitutes us children and heirs who voluntarily discharge their duties, not presuming to become godly and worthy by a servile spirit. No merit is needed; faith secures all gratuitously—more than anyone can merit. The believer performs his works gratuitously, being already in possession of all the Cain-like saints vainly seek through works and never find—justification and divine inheritance, or grace.

“But is under guardians and stewards until the day appointed of the father.”

³⁸ These guardians and stewards are they who bring up the heir on his father's estate, restraining him from a wild and vagabond life. Though they withhold from him control of the inheritance, they are necessary and benefit the heir in various ways. In the first place, as stated before, they keep him at home on the estate, to better fit him for enjoyment of it. Secondly, the fact of his being carefully and closely restrained will inspire in him stronger desire for control of the inheritance; when he arrives at the age of discretion he will yearn for freedom and be unwilling to continue under others' control.

³⁹ The same is necessarily true of everyone still occupied with works under the Law, and a servant. The Law is his guardian, his steward. He is under its control as one in constraint of another. The Law is designed, in the first place, to train him and keep him in bounds; to restrain him externally, through fear of punishment, from committing evil works; to save him from becoming wholly dissolute, from risking everything and altogether shutting himself out from God and his salvation, as do the profligate.

The Law is intended, in the second place, to teach man to know himself; to bring him to reason, where he may recognize his unwilling allegiance to the Law, how he performs no work willingly as a

child, but by constraint as a bond-servant. The Law gives him experience as to his shortcomings; it shows him his lack of a free, new and ever-willing spirit—a spirit the Law and its works cannot give. Indeed, the more he works, the more unwillingly is it done; and the harder is it to work, for he is influenced by a grudging spirit.

⁴⁰ Being made aware of his unwilling attitude, he sees that his works are only an external observance of the Law, while in his heart he is an enemy and opposer of the Law, so far as cheerful obedience is concerned. Hence he truly is constantly at heart a sinner against the Law, and externally a saint according to the Law; in other words, a real Cain, an egregious hypocrite. Manifestly to himself, his works are works of the Law, but his heart is a heart of sin. His heart being not disposed to the Law, it is disposed to sin, while merely his hands are constrained to observe the Law's requirements.

⁴¹ Very aptly has Paul styled works without faith "*works of the Law.*" For the Law forces them; they are simply compulsory works. Now, the Law demands the heart also. It desires a willing obedience. A willing obedience may be said to be not only "*a work of the Law,*" but "*a heart of the Law*"; not only "*hands of the Law,*" but "*will, spirit and all the powers of the Law.*" As Psalm 1:1-2 declares: "*Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of Jehovah; and on his law doth he meditate day and night.*" Such a spirit the Law demands, but it does not create it; nor is human nature able of itself to produce it. Hence the Law oppresses the soul and condemns it to hell as disobedient to God's *commandments*. Anguish and distress of conscience follow, but there is no help.

This is the time appointed of the Father. Now the child of God will crave grace and help. He will confess his wretchedness, weakness and guilt. He will let go his claim to security in works, and despise himself. For he recognizes that between himself and public sinners there is no difference except as to external conduct. In his heart he is as much opposed to the Law as any other sinner; in fact, his heart may be even more embittered toward it. For the sinner of actual practice may find less desire to sin and *may* become somewhat inimical to sin, in consequence of the resulting unpleasantness and injury he must meet. The child of God, hindered and restrained by its tutor the Law, *may* really burn and rage in his desires and lusts for sin, though he dare not commit the deed. Thus, in expression he may be more righteous than the public sinner, but in heart more wicked.

⁴² Now, it is easily apparent to everyone that to give our hands to the Law and our whole hearts to sin, is a very unequal division of service; for the whole heart means vastly more than the works of the hands. What is such a proceeding but giving the chaff to the Law and the grain to sin, or the shell to God and the kernel to the devil? This explains how, as taught in the Gospel, the sin of the public transgressor is but a mote, while that of the secret offender is a great beam.

⁴³ Now, where circumstances are such that Cain does not see this beam find does not learn to know himself in this sense of the Law, but continues obdurate and blind in his works, disregarding his inner wickedness—where such is the case, he proceeds very inconsistently to judge with malice the world in general, despising sinners as did the Pharisee in the Gospel—presuming to regard himself godly in contrast with others. If any attempt to rebuke him, and justly to condemn his conduct, he rages and raves, kills Abel and persecutes all men, claiming that he does it for the sake of good works and righteousness, to the praise of God. He expects to merit much as a persecutor of blasphemers, heretics, offenders and wicked ones who would lead him astray and lure him from good works. Right here all Scripture denunciations of these venomous spirits come in. Christ calls them serpents and a generation of vipers. Matthew 23:33. They are like Cain, and will continue like him. Servants are they, and will remain servants.

⁴⁴ But the prospective Abels and future children learn to recognize themselves by the Law, to discover how little heartfelt delight they have for that Law. Ceasing to rely upon their own presumption, they let go their hold and with this knowledge are completely helpless in their own eyes. Just here the Gospel comes in. Here is where God gives grace to the humble. These children of God lay hold of the testament and believe. With and in this faith they receive the Holy Spirit. He gives to them a new heart, a heart delighting in the Law and hating sin, and doing right voluntarily and cheerfully. Works of the Law are now superseded by hearts of the Law. This is the time appointed of the father for the heir to come into his own—no longer to be a servant nor under a guardian. Now we understand what Paul means by the words:

“So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the rudiments [elements] of the world.”

⁴⁵ The apostle uses a word familiar to us—“*rudiments*.” But we are not to understand here the four rudiments or elements of nature—fire, water, air and earth. That is not its Scriptural meaning. That use of the term originated in heathen philosophy, and in such sense it would be entirely inadmissible in the Scriptures. The apostle means by “*rudiments*” the literal characters—the letters—of the Law. In both the Latin and the Greek languages, letters are terms the “*rudiments*” of the language.

Similarly, Paul says (Hebrews 5:12), “*When by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God.*” And (Colossians 2:8): “*Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*” Again (Galatians 4:9-10),

“How turn ye back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments, whereunto ye desire to be in bondage over again? Ye observe days, and months, and seasons, and years.”

⁴⁶ It is in a rather contemptuous sense that Paul terms the Law “*rudiments*,” or letters; it is “*weak and beggarly*” because it can afford no relief. It renders us likewise weak and beggarly, for it demands service of the heart and mind; and the heart and mind are not present. Hence the conscience grows weak and beggarly, confessing it has not and can not have what it should have. As the apostle expresses it (2 Corinthians 3:6), “*The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*”

⁴⁷ Some understand by “*rudiments*” not the letter of the law, but the ceremonials and outward forms of worship incident to the religious life, and which we early teach children. In that connection, “*rudiments*” implies the first crude, childish forms of worship.

⁴⁸ Paul qualifies “*rudiments*” by the phrase “*of the world*,” because the self-righteous, while boasting obedience to the Law, observe it only in external and worldly things, such as days, meats, apparel, places, persons, vessels and the like. These are all creatures of this world, and such, practically, is the extent of the works of the Law. [Therefore we rendered the meaning in German by “*Aeuszerliche Satzung*,” outward or worldly laws. Editions of 1540 and 1543.]

⁴⁹ But faith, independent of the world, hangs upon God, his Word and his mercy; and justifies us, not by works or any other worldly thing, but by the eternal, invisible grace of God. To the Christian, one day is like another; and meats, places, apparel and all worldly things are alike. They neither help nor hinder his salvation and justification, as they do in the case of Cain and the self-righteous. Therefore, the Christian gives no heed to the rudiments of this world, but regards the fullness of the eternal blessings.

So, though the Christian has to do with external, temporal affairs, yet he is indifferent to worldly things. He is free to disregard them. All are alike to him—persons, places, days, meats, apparel, etc. He makes no particular choice. Doing the duty that presents, he is unconcerned about what does not. His external conduct does not represent something select and peculiar.

⁵⁰ The Cain-like take a different course. They must make some distinction—must be recognized by some peculiarity. They eat no meat, wear nothing black, pray not in houses, observe days. One is bound to one custom, another to another. Yet these are all temporal and transitory things. The observers are servants of the rudiments of this world. Nevertheless, their practices are styled holy orders, good morals and real ways to salvation.

Upon this point Paul says (Colossians 2:20-23): *“If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances, Handle not, nor taste, nor touch (all which things are to perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility.”*

⁵¹ From this quotation and from our foregoing arguments, clearly all orders, institutions and cloisters, now styled ecclesiastical positions, are directly opposed to the Gospel and to the freedom of Christian life; and they who are bound by them are in greater danger than are actual worldlings. The things they devise are mere rudiments of this world. They pertain only to apparel, persons, conditions, times, forms, meats and vessels—solely worldly and temporal things. Adhering to these as having power to make them pious and spiritual, faith is excluded and they are not Christians. Their whole life is but sin and corruption.

⁵² These ecclesiasts have more need than anyone else to guard against such dazzling devices. They have especial need to adhere steadfastly to faith, the righteousness of which is beyond the world and worldly things. The glitter and show of works tear away from faith with greater violence than do gross, open sins, and place the doers in the condition to which Paul here refers when he says, *“So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world.”* When we were ignorant of faith and occupied with the works of the Law, we performed—yet unwillingly and as servants—works relating to temporal things, presuming thereby to become righteous and saved. It was a false idea, and made of us children and servants. The mere works would have been harmless had it not been for the idea that excluded faith and the doctrine of godliness only through grace, and had all temporal things been left optional.

“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

⁵³ Now, since the law cannot effect justification nor faith, and human nature with all its works cannot merit them, Paul introduces him who merited faith in our stead, and who is master of justification—and justification was not secured without price; it cost much, even the Son of God himself. Him Paul introduces, saying: *“When the fullness of the time was come”*; that is, at the expiration of the time when we were children and servants. The apostle follows a usage of the Scriptures in speaking of the expiration of the time as its *“fulfillment.”* For instance, Acts 2:1: *“When the day of Pentecost was [fulfilled] fully come”*; that is, when it was completed. And Exodus 23:26, *“The number of thy days I will fulfill,”* meaning, *“I will not shorten them; I will give their full measure.”* Also Luke 1:57; *Now Elizabeth’s time was fulfilled that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.”*

⁵⁴ Hence the learned doctors erred in interpreting this passage by Paul to mean that the time of fulfillment was the time of grace following Christ's birth. This is directly contrary to the apostle, who does not say, "*the time of the fulfillment*," but "*the fulfillment of the time*," meaning the previous time appointed of the Father for the heir,—the period of his guardianship.

⁵⁵ Like as the time of the bondservant was fulfilled for the Jews by the bodily advent of Christ, so is it still daily fulfilled for the individual when he is enlightened by faith, and his period of servitude in legal works terminates. Christ's bodily advent would have been to no purpose had it not effected a spiritual advent, the advent of faith. The purpose of the former appearance was the establishment of the latter one. Christ came spiritually to all who, whether previously or subsequently, believed in his bodily advent. Hence, because of their faith, he was always present with the ancient fathers; but he has not yet come to the Jews of today because of their unbelief.

Everything, from the beginning of the world to the end, depends on that bodily advent. Faith therein terminates the state of servitude whenever, wherever and in whomsoever it exists. Therefore, the time is fulfilled for each individual when he begins to believe in Christ as the promised one now come.

What We are to Believe Concerning Christ

⁵⁶ So rich in meaning is this verse, I am not sure I shall be able to do it justice in my explanation. It is not enough merely to believe that Christ is come; we must believe also what Paul here states: that he is sent of God and is the Son of God; that he is true man; that his mother was a virgin; that he alone has fulfilled the Law, and not for his own sake but for our good—to secure grace for us. These points we will examine in order.

On the first point John's entire Gospel insists, as we said on the selection for Christmas. John continually proves Christ the Son of God and sent of the Father. He who does not believe that Christ is true God is lost; witness John 8:24: "*Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*" And (John 1:4) "*In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*" And again (John 14:6): "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*" And the reason that we must believe if we would be saved, is this:

⁵⁷ The soul cannot, and should not, be content with anything but the Highest Good—its Creator and the fountain of its life and salvation. Now, God chose to be himself that one on whom the soul should rely and believe. No one but God deserves the creature's confidence. Therefore, he himself came to earth as man, gave himself for man, and draws man unto himself, inviting him to believe in him. No necessity on God's part demanded that he come to earth as man; the necessity was ours—it was for our benefit. Now, if we were not to cleave by faith unto Christ as true God, God would be robbed of the honor due him, and we of life and salvation. It is our duty to believe in God only, who is the Truth; without him we cannot live or be saved.

⁵⁸ The apostle says, "*God sent his son.*" The fact of sending necessitates previous existence of the Son. Christ must have existed before he manifested himself on earth in human form. Again, if he is a Son, he must be greater than an angel. Being more than man and more than angels, the highest creatures, he must be true God. To be the Son of God is to be superior to an angel, as said in the Epistle for Christmas day. Further, Christ being sent by God, and being God's Son, he must be a distinct person from him who sends. Thus Paul teaches here the existence of one God in two persons, Father and Son. We shall speak later of the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁹ For the second point: We are also to believe Christ to be true, natural man, and the Son of man. Paul says he was born of a woman, or made of a woman. Now, he who is born of a woman must be truly a natural man. A woman can bear only according to her nature—bear true man. In John 6:53, Christ says: “*Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves.*” Eating and drinking here means simply believing that Christ, the Son of God, had a true flesh-and-blood nature, like other men.

This is also the testament or covenant of God to Abraham (Genesis 22:18), “*In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*” To be the seed of Abraham, Christ must surely have Abraham’s flesh and blood—must be his natural child.

⁶⁰ No one, then, must presume by his own devotion, his own efforts, to institute a way of approach to God. It is futile to call on God in the manner of the Jews and the Turks. We must approach him through the seed of Abraham, and be blessed through that seed, according to God’s covenant. God will not make a special way for you. He will not, because of your service, annul his covenant. You must abandon your own efforts and cleave to the seed he mentions, to that flesh and blood; otherwise you will be lost with all the spiritual skill and wisdom you may have gained from God. Christ says (John 14:6), “*No one cometh unto the Father, but by me.*”

⁶¹ Because of the exalted and incomprehensible character of the divine nature, God has for our good manifested himself in the most familiar form—in our own nature. In this character he awaits us. Here, and nowhere else, he may be found. Whosoever calls upon him in this relation will be heard at once. Here is the throne of grace, where no one who comes is excluded. But they who permit Christ to dwell here in vain, and presume in some other way than through his humanity to serve and call upon God, the Creator of heaven and earth, may see their sentence already pronounced in Psalm 18:41, where it is said of such: “*They cried, but there was none to save; even unto Jehovah, but he answered them not.*”

⁶² In the third place, we must believe that Christ’s mother was a virgin. The apostle makes this plain when he declares the Son of God was made of a woman—not of manlike other children. He alone among men is born of woman only. The apostle is not disposed to say “*born of a virgin,*” because “*virgin*” is not naturally consistent here. But “*woman*” represents a state in nature—the natural instrumentality for bearing fruit, for bringing forth children. The mother of Christ is truly woman by nature, who brought forth the divine fruit; yet from herself alone, not by man. Therefore she is a virgin woman—not simply a virgin.

⁶³ Paul attaches more importance to the birth of Christ than to Mary’s virginity. He passes over in silence her virginity, merely a peculiar personal grace that benefited none but herself, and points out her womanhood, advantageous not only to herself but to her fruit. Her virginity ministers not so much to Christ as does her womanhood. She was selected in her virginity not for her own sake, but for Christ’s sake. He chose to be born of a virgin that he might be born without sin. A sinless birth was impossible except through the instrumentality of a virgin woman who was able to conceive and bring forth without the aid of man.

⁶⁴ Such seems to be included in God’s covenant, declaring that all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in the seed of Abraham. From the fact of a blessing being promised, it is evident that men must be under a curse because of their physical birth in sin resulting from Adam. Should this seed of Abraham be a blessing to all, it could not itself be under a curse; therefore, the Savior could not come of Adam’s birth, which is altogether under the curse.

⁶⁵ Further, to verify the testament or covenant of God who cannot lie, Christ must be the natural child of Abraham — his flesh and blood. But to what is such reasoning leading us? Christ is to be a natural child, born of flesh and blood, and yet not to be a child of carnal birth. The inconsistency of the reasoning is removed by the fact that a woman alone, independent of man, was chosen to effect the birth. Thus it was possible for a real, natural child, one truly the seed of Abraham, to be born sinless, of a woman, and productive of abundant blessings. In him, then, mankind, under the curse in consequence of its own sinful birth, may be blessed. Thus the requirements of God's covenant are fully met; the carnal birth of Adam with its inordinate desire is avoided, and a physical birth in spiritual manner really effected.

⁶⁶ If to Mary, the holy virgin, is due great honor for her virginity, infinitely greater honor is due her for her womanhood. For her procreative powers were instrumental in the fulfillment of God's covenant, and in making the blessed seed of Abraham the blessed fruit of her womanhood. Her mere virginity would have been insufficient to accomplish it; in fact, entirely futile.

⁶⁷ In the fourth place, we must believe that none but Christ has fulfilled the law. He says (Matthew 5:17), "*Think not that I came to destroy the law... but to fulfill.*" Such, too, is the meaning of the covenant that says the whole world is condemned, and shall be blessed in Abraham's seed. Genesis 22:18. Now, if all men are condemned and unblessed, the individual cannot be good; he is only Cain-like. Consequently his works cannot be good, as said before. God does not regard the works, but the persons—Abel and Cain. And the works of the law render no one righteous.

⁶⁸ The fact that Christ rejects all works of the Law and demands that the person first be good and blessed, may seem to teach that he rejects good works and designs to destroy the Law altogether. But in reality Christ teaches us to perform good works. For the very purpose of correcting error on this point, he says (Matthew 5:17): "*Think not that I came to destroy the Law*" because I reject the works of the Law. Rather I design its fulfillment through men's faith in me, which first renders the individual good and then enables him to do really good works.

Similarly Paul says, rejecting all works of the Law and exalting faith alone: "*Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law.*" Romans 3:31.

Of us at the present day also it is said that we forbid good works when we condemn the practices of the cathedrals and cloisters in the matter of works. Nevertheless, our actual desire for the people is that they first embrace true faith whereby they may become personally good, and be blessed in Christ the seed of Abraham, and thus be enabled to do good works contributing to the mortification of the body and to the good of mankind. To this end the things wrought in cathedrals and cloisters contribute nothing, as already fully stated.

⁶⁹ Observe, no one is able to fulfill the Law until he first is liberated from it. We must become accustomed to Paul's peculiar phraseology in his reference to some being "*under the Law*" if we would know who is really under it and who is free. All who perform good works simply because commanded, and from fear of punishment or expectation of reward, are under the Law. Their piety and good deeds result from constraint, and not from a willing spirit. The Law is their master, their driver, and they its bondservants and captives. Such is the attitude of all men without Christ the blessed seed of Abraham. Our own experience and the voice of everyone's conscience teach this. Were it not for the restraint of Law—the fear of punishment or the expectation of reward—were each individual left to his own inclinations and there were no punishment or reward, he would do evil and neglect good, particularly under the influence of temptation and allurements. But when the Law with

its threats and its promises interposes, man abstains from evil and endeavors to do good; not from love of good and hatred of evil, but through fear of punishment or hope of reward. Thus the Cain-like saints are under the Law, controlled by it, like servants.

⁷⁰ But they who are liberated from the Law do good and avoid evil, regardless of the threats and promises of the Law—not from fear of punishment or expectation of reward. They act voluntarily, from love for the good and hatred of the evil, because they delight in the Law of God. Even were there no Law, they would not have it otherwise, and be prompted by the same spirit to do good and abstain from evil. Such are really children. Human nature cannot create that spirit; it has origin with the seed of Abraham. The blessing of Christ gives the willing disposition. Willingness is the result of his grace and of the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, “*not under the Law*” does not mean liberty to do evil and to neglect good as we feel inclined. It means doing good and avoiding evil, not in consequence of fear, not from the restraints and requirements of the Law, but from pure love and a willing spirit. Freedom from the Law involves a spirit which would voluntarily do only good, as if the Law did not exist and our nature were prone to do good. It is a freedom paralleled by that of the body, which willingly eats, drinks, assimilates, sleeps, moves and performs all natural functions. No law, no compulsion, is necessary. It acts voluntarily and seasonably, without fear of punishment or expectation of reward. It may truly be said that the body is under no law, still it performs its functions; it acts spontaneously.

⁷¹ Mark you, we must have within ourselves a ready, natural willingness that will incline to good and recoil from evil. This is spiritual liberation, or redemption from the Law. Thus is explained Paul’s words (1 Timothy 1:9): “*Law is not made for a righteous man.*” From his own impulse the righteous man inclines to good and abstains from evil; it is with no fear of penalty or hope of recompense. Again, we read (Romans 6:15), “*We are not under law, but under grace.*” That is, we are children, not bondservants; we incline to good readily, without constraint. Again (Romans 8:15), “*Ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*” The Law produces a spirit of fear; a servile, Cain-like spirit. But grace produces a free, filial, Abel-like disposition, through Christ the seed of Abraham. To that spirit, Psalm 51:10, has reference: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*” Again, in Psalm 110:3, it is said concerning the people of Christ: “*Thy people offer themselves willingly... in holy array.*”

⁷² Thus Christ fulfilled the Law and did all, of his own free will; not because of the compelling or restraining power of the Law. No other has ever fulfilled it, nor will any fulfill it, except in and through him. So Paul here says that Christ was “*born under the law, that he might redeem them that Were under the law.*”

⁷³ In the fifth place, we are to believe that Christ’s motive was to benefit us. He desired to make children of us servants. What is meant by the phrase “*that he might redeem them that were under the law*”? Unquestionably, that he might redeem us from under the Law. But how does Christ effect that? As said before, not by the threats or the rewards of the Law, but by bestowing a voluntary spirit; a spirit prompted neither by compulsion nor restraint; a spirit that regards not the terrors nor the rewards of the Law, but proceeds as if no Law existed and all action were voluntary, as was the case with Adam and Eve before the fall.

⁷⁴ But what is the process whereby Christ gives us such a spirit and redeems us from under the Law? The work is effected solely by faith. He who believes that Christ came to redeem us, and that he has

accomplished it, is really redeemed. As he believes, so is it with him. Faith carries with it the child-making spirit. The apostle here explains by saying that Christ has redeemed us from under the Law that we might receive the adoption of sons. As before stated, all must be effected through faith. Now we have discussed the five points of the verse.

How Christ was Under the Law

⁷⁵ The question, however, still arises: How can Christ be under the Law if to be “*under the Law*” is to be prompted to obedience only by its restraints and compulsion, and if no one under the Law can fulfill it since God requires a voluntary conformity to its demands? I answer: The apostle seems to make a distinction when he says that Christ was put, or made under the Law; that is, he voluntarily placed himself under the Law. Again, with his voluntary consent, the Father placed him under the Law, though properly he was not subject. We, however, were made subject against our desires. We, as Paul says, were naturally and essentially in forced subjection. While Christ was voluntarily, not by nature, under the Law, we were by nature, not voluntarily, in subjection.

⁷⁶ There is a marked difference between being placed under the Law and being of choice under the Law; just the difference there is between volition and the compulsion of nature. Acting according to the pleasures of the will differs materially from obeying the impulses of nature. What is performed by pleasure of the will may be omitted; it is not compulsory. But what is wrought in obedience to the impulses of nature is of necessity; it is not optional. One may go to the Rhine or not, as he pleases; but he must eat, drink, assimilate, sleep, grow and advance in years regardless of his will. Christ put himself under the Law voluntarily, when he had power to refrain. But we were by nature under it; there was no alternative. We could not voluntarily obey and suffer the Law as if under no constraint, as before stated. But Christ, independent of any obligation to obey the Law, observed it voluntarily; he acted as if there were no law for him.

⁷⁷ To illustrate: Peter, the apostle (Acts 12:6-7), lay captive in the prison of Herod, bound with chains to two soldiers, while the keepers stood guard at the door. The angel of God entered the prison in a brilliant light, awoke Peter and led him past all the keepers and out the door, leaving the chains in the prison. This event is an illustration of how Christ liberates us from the Law. Let us analyze it.

Peter was an inmate of the prison not willingly; he was kept there by force. He knew not how to deliver himself. The angel also entered the prison, but willingly. He was not compelled to be there. He was not there for his own sake, but for the sake of Peter. And he knew how to deliver himself. Now, Peter, when he followed the angel obediently, was liberated.

The prison represents the Law, in which our consciences are unwillingly held captive. For no one voluntarily effects the good required by the Law or omits the evil it forbids.

Man acts through fear of punishment or hope of reward. The fear or threat and the reward, or rather the expectation of reward, are the two chains that hold us in prison under the Law. The keepers are the teachers of the Law, who explain it to us. Thus we remain—yes, unwillingly lie—in the Law. Christ is the angel who voluntarily approaches us in prison—approaches us under the Law; he does willingly the works we unwillingly perform. His motive is to benefit us; he would attach us to himself and liberate us. Christ well knows how to liberate, for he is himself independent of will. Then, mark you, if we cleave to him and follow him, we too shall be liberated.

⁷⁸ But how is this done? We cleave to Christ and follow him when we believe that he effects all for our benefit. Such faith introduces the Spirit. Having faith, we too shall perform the requirements of the Law voluntarily, unfettered and liberated from the prison of the Law. The two chains, fear of punishment and hope of reward, will no longer restrain us. All our acts will be spontaneous, prompted by pure love and a cheerful spirit.

⁷⁹ To further understand how Christ was put under the Law: Observe, he placed himself in subjection in a twofold manner. In the first place, he put himself under the works of the Law. He permitted himself to be circumcised and to be presented and purified in the temple. He was submissive to his father and mother, and all those things, when no obligation required. For he was Lord over all laws. He acted voluntarily in this respect, unprompted by fear of punishment or expectation of reward as far as he was himself concerned. When we consider the question of mere external works, we can perceive no difference between his conduct and that of individuals actuated by compulsion and restraint. His liberty and free will were concealed from men, just as the imprisonment and unwillingness of others were not apparent. Thus Christ acts under the Law, though properly not under the Law. He conducts himself like those in bondage to it, but he is himself free. His will being free, he is not under the Law. In the matter of works, which he voluntarily performs, he is subject. But we, both as to our wills and to our works, are under the Law; for we effect works by constraint of will.

⁸⁰ In the second place, Christ willingly put himself under the penalty of the Law. He did more than perform the works of the Law to which he was not obligated; he willingly and innocently suffered the penalty threatened and inflicted of the Law upon all who fail of observance. Now, the Law adjudges to death, condemnation and eternal punishment every transgressor of its commands. Paul, quoting from Deuteronomy 27:26, says: "*Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them.*" Galatians 3:10.

⁸¹ We have now made sufficiently plain the fact that no individual out of Christ is able to keep the Law; all of that class are under the Law, like servants, and fettered and constrained. Consequently, the disregarder of the Law deserves its judgment and penalties. He who is under the Law in the first respect—in the matter of works—must also be subject in the second respect—the matter of punishment. Now, first, all our works are sinful because not performed from a willing spirit but rather in opposition to our will. And second, we are adjudged to death and condemnation.

Christ Redeems Us

But Christ intervenes before sentence is executed upon us. He interposes, approaching us as we are under sentence. He suffers the penalty— death, curse and condemnation; just as if he had himself violated the entire Law, and deserved the full penalty resting upon the transgressor. At the same time he has not broken the Law; he has fulfilled it, and that without obligation. He is doubly innocent. First, even had he observed no Law—and such was his privilege—he was under no obligation to suffer. Second, he observed the Law from superabundant willingness and was liable to no penalty. In contrast, our guilt is also of twofold character. First, we, under obligation to keep the Law, failed so to do; consequently we should justly suffer its calamities. Second, even had we observed it, it would be right that we should suffer whatever God designs.

⁸² Note, the Son of God is put under the Law in that he redeemed us who were under it. For us, for our good, he effected all; not for himself. He purposed to manifest toward us only love, goodness and

mercy. As Paul has it (Galatians 3:13), “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.*” In other words: For us, Christ put himself under the law and complied with its demands, designing every believer of this fact to be redeemed from under the Law with its curse.

⁸³ Mark you, then, the priceless blessing for the believing Christian: To him are attributed as his own all the works and sufferings of Christ. He may rely upon them as if they were his—wrought by himself. For, to repeat, Christ effected all, not for himself, but for us. Christ needed not any of the things he wrought. He accumulated the treasure that on it we might confidently rest. Further, such faith will be accompanied by the Holy Spirit.

⁸⁴ What more should God do? How can the heart avoid being free, joyous and cheerfully obedient in God and Christ? What work can it encounter or what suffering endure to which it will not respond singing and leaping in love and praise for God? When such is not the case, there is certainly some defect in our faith. For the greater our faith, the greater our freedom and happiness; the less our faith, the less our joy. Note, this is the Christian redemption, the Christian freedom from the Law and its curse—sin and death. Not that the Law and death shall be removed, but they shall become as if they were not. The Law shall not lead us to sin, nor death to shame. But faith shall guide us into righteousness and eternal life.

⁸⁵ This is an occasion to admonish the poor Cain-like saints, the ecclesiasts, if that is possible in their condition. Were they to observe their orders, laws, ceremonies, prayers, masses, clothing and meats as Christ observed the Law, these might be retained. For example, if they assigned the Christian faith its true place and allowed it to control the heart; if they confessed that they did not become pious and were not saved through their orders, stations and works, but alone through faith in Christ; and if then they considered their works and laws optional, needed only for the mortification of the body and the benefit of the neighbor; then these ordinances might be retained. But the impression at present is that such practices are essential to piety and eternal salvation. This is nothing but a delusion and very sinful. It drives people to perdition by severe martyrdom, and it merits eternal martyrdom; because full, child-like faith is opposed by servile and compulsory works. Faith cannot tolerate such stupid works; it alone makes us pious and forever happy. With the believer all works are optional; he cheerfully suffers all that God sends and does as his neighbor’s need requires. These are the works of faith, these and no other. Faith inquires not about masses, appointed fasts, particular clothing, special meats, rare positions, persons or works; nay, faith rejects all these as hindrances to its liberty.

⁸⁶ Let this suffice on that verse. We were compelled to treat the subject at length because so little is known concerning the doctrine of faith, a knowledge of which is necessary to a right understanding of Paul. Now follows:

“And because ye are sons [children], God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

⁸⁷ Here we see that the Holy Spirit is communicated, not through works, but through faith; for as it reads, the Spirit is given to men because they are children and not servants. Children believe; servants only work. Children are free from the Law; servants are under it. The foregoing explanations make all this plain. It may be necessary, however, for us to consider in some measure the sense in which Paul uses the words “*child*” and “*servant*,” “*free*” and “*bond*.” Works performed under compulsion are the works of servants, and works wrought of free will are the works of children.

⁸⁸ Why does Paul tell the Galatians the Holy Spirit was given them because they were children, when the fact is, the Holy Spirit creates children from servants, and must be essentially present before they can become children? I reply: He speaks in the same future sense characteristic of verses three and four, where we read that before the time was fulfilled we were under the rudiments. Here the reference is to children prospectively, in the sight of God. The Holy Spirit was sent to transform the servants into the children they were designed to be.

⁸⁹ Paul speaks of the Spirit as the Spirit of the Son of God. Why not the Spirit of God? Because he would emphasize the point he is making. Being children of God, God sends them the Spirit of Christ, himself a child, giving them the right to cry, with him, "*Abba, Father.*" In other words, God sends you his Spirit, who dwells in his Son, that you may be brethren and heirs with him, crying as he cries, "*Abba, Father.*" The unspeakable goodness and grace of God are extolled in the fact that through faith we share with Christ the full blessings, having all he has, and all he is—also his Spirit.

⁹⁰ These words also establish the doctrine of a third person—the Holy Spirit in the Trinity. For not only does the Spirit dwell in Christ as he does in men, but he also is Christ's, deriving his divine substance from him just as he does from the Father. Otherwise the language of Paul—"the Spirit of his Son"—would be false. No creature can claim the Holy Spirit as his own spirit; he is the Spirit of God alone. Creatures are the property of the Holy Spirit; though one might, it is true, say "*my Holy Spirit*" in the sense in which we say "*my God,*" "*my Lord.*" The Son is God, then, because the Spirit of God is his Spirit.

⁹¹ But let everyone be certain that he feels the Holy Spirit's presence in himself and hears his voice. Paul says: When the Holy Spirit is in the heart he cries, "*Abba, Father.*" Again (Romans 8:15), "*Ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*" We recognize that voice when the conscience, without doubt or wavering, is firmly persuaded, fully satisfied, that our sins are forgiven and that we are children of God; and when, having such assurance of salvation, we may with joyous and confident heart approach God and call him our beloved Father. But we must be as certain as we are that we live, and must prefer death in any form, yes, hell with all its pangs, to being deprived of the Spirit or to distrusting him. It would be unreasonable doubt of the unbounded achievements of Christ and of his unlimited sufferings were we not to believe that he freely wrought all for us, and not to let this fact incite us to confidence and strength in him equal to the force wherewith sin or temptation terrifies or dissuades us.

⁹² True, conflict may arise here. The individual may have a fearful feeling that he is not a child of God. He may imagine God to be a judge over him, angry and austere. Such was the case with Job, and many others. In such conflict, filial confidence must gain the victory, however it may tremble and quake; otherwise all will be lost.

⁹³ Now, the Cain-like individual, hearing this doctrine, blesses himself, and crossing his hands and his feet, and affecting great humility, he exclaims: "*Guard me, O God, against such abominable heresy and presumption! Shall I, a poor sinner, be so bold as to say, I am a child of God? No, no; I humbly confess myself a poor sinner*"; and so on. Ignore such a one. Guard against him as the worst enemy to Christian faith and to your salvation.

We, too, know full well what poor sinners we are. But it does no good to contemplate what we are and what we do. Rather we are to consider what Christ is and what he has accomplished and still accomplishes for us. The point is not our nature, but the grace of God, which is as high above us as the heaven is above the earth, or as far removed as the east is from the west. Psalm 103:11-12. If you

regard it a wonderful thing to be a child of God, think it not a small thing that the Son of God came to earth, was born of a woman and was subject to the Law, for the very purpose of enabling you to be a child of God.

⁹⁴ All the works of God are wonderful and of mighty import. Hence they fill us with joy and courage, giving us fearlessness and ability to endure anything that may befall us. But the principles of the Cain-like are narrow, productive only of quaking hearts, which are wholly incapable of endurance and action, hearts that tremble at the sound of a driven leaf, as Leviticus 26:36 has it.

⁹⁵ Let us, then, heed closely the text. We must perceive the cry of the Spirit in our hearts. It is truly the cry of our own hearts; why, then, should we not recognize it? Paul uses the term “*crying*” when he might as easily have referred to the Spirit as “*whispering*,” “*speaking*” or “*singing*.” But the first word is more forcible. The Spirit calls, or cries, with power; that is from our full heart, a heart that always lives and moves in true, child-like confidence. As said in Romans 8:26, “*The Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*” Again (Romans 8:16), “*The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God.*” Then why should not our hearts perceive that crying, intercession and witness-bearing?

⁹⁶ How preciously effective temptations and afflictions are in this direction! They drive us to cry; they rouse the Spirit. But we fear and flee at sight of the cross. Consequently we never feel the Spirit, and we continue Cain’s subjects. If we do not recognize the Spirit’s cry, we must reflect, and must not cease to pray until God hears us; for we are like Cain and our condition is perilous. We are not to expect, however, that no voice but the Spirit’s will cry within us. The voice of murder will cry, to impel us to desire the Spirit’s voice and to exercise ourselves to hear it. So has it ever been with men.

Our sins will also cry: they will produce in our conscience strong tendencies to despair. But the Spirit of Christ must, and shall, outvoice that cry. He will create in us a confidence stronger than the tendency to despair. John says (1 John 3:19-22): “*Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him: because if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.*”

⁹⁷ The Spirit calling and crying within us is simply a powerful assurance, a perfect confidence, from the depths of the hearts of loving children toward God their beloved Father.

⁹⁸ Note how far above mere human nature is the life of the Christian. Human nature is not capable of such a cry, of such confidence in God. It only fears and cries murder upon itself. It exclaims, “*O wo, wo, is me! Thou austere and intolerable judge? Just as Cain cried to God (Genesis 4:13-14): “My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the ground; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth; and it will come to pass that whosoever findeth me shall slay me.”* Such exclamations are necessarily characteristic of Cain-like saints. Why? Because they rely upon themselves and their works, and not upon God’s Son, who was sent to earth, was born of a woman and put under the Law. They do not believe that salvation through him was designed for them; nor are they concerned about it. They are occupied merely with their own works, endeavoring by such means to help themselves and to secure the grace of God.

⁹⁹ In persecuting faith and defaming and condemning it as heresy and presumption, the unbelievers conduct themselves as their father Cain did to his brother Abel. Thus in themselves they slay Christ their brother. His innocent blood will not cease to cry toward heaven against them, as the blood of Abel cried against Cain. God will inquire after Abel; he will demand of each of them, “*Where is Christ your brother?*” Then the disordered Cain will go on to dissemble, saying: “*What do I know about him? am I my brother’s keeper?*” For it is the same thing to say: “*Shall I be presumptuous enough to regard myself righteous and holy and a child of God merely through Christ? No, no; I will work until I become righteous myself, without his aid.*” Mark you, thus the crying blood of Abel continued to be upon Cain; and the crying blood of Christ will continue upon all believers, still demanding vengeance and wrath. But as for the believers, the blood will, through the Spirit of Christ, cry for pure grace and reconciliation.

¹⁰⁰ The apostle places a Hebrew word in apposition with a Greek word; he says Abba, Pater (Father). In the Hebrew, Abba means “*father*”; hence the prelates in certain cloisters are called “*abbots*.” In former times the holy hermits gave their chiefs the name Abba, Father. These terms were introduced also into the Latin and German. Abba, Pater is equivalent to “*Father, Father.*” In full German, Mein Vater, Mein Vater; or Lieber Vater, Lieber Vater—My Father, My Father, or Dear Father, Dear Father.

¹⁰¹ But why does Paul duplicate the word to express the cry of the Spirit? Permit my opinion. In the first place, for the sake of emphasizing the cry. The earnest suppliant frequently makes repetition of his cry. So strenuous must be our appeal and so great our confidence that sin, the cry of Cain, has not power to suppress them.

¹⁰² In the second place, it seems to be Scripture usage to indicate certainty and assurance by duplicating words and phrases. Joseph tells King Pharaoh (Genesis 41:32) that by repetition God indicates it is assured and done even as the words teach. So here the Spirit twice cries “*Father*” to give us the assurance that God is and will be our Father; to make us not only hopeful of great things, but certainly confident.

¹⁰³ In the third place, the apostle may have purposed to show the Spirit’s persistence. The first word, Abba, marks the beginning of the Spirit’s cry. But at that point great conflict will arise. The devil will assail us unceasingly and we must persevere. The addition of the word Father so teaches. We must not cease to cry; as we have begun, we are to continue. So doing, we will come to know what confidence is; the utmost assurance will possess us. Paul may also have designed by employing the word Abba, a somewhat unfamiliar Hebrew word, and supplementing it with Father, a native and familiar Greek term (he was addressing the Greeks and wrote in their own language)—he may also have designed to teach that we hardly know the meaning of confidence at the first. But confidence grows with exercise. In time, seemingly it becomes a part of the believer’s nature and he feels at home with God his Father.

“*So that thou art no more a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through Christ.*”

¹⁰⁴ Christ having come and having been recognized, Paul says, you are no more a bondservant. As before stated, there is a remarkable difference between a child and a servant. Their dispositions are altogether unlike. The child has freedom and is willing; the servant is constrained and is unwilling. The child is ruled by faith; the servant, by works.

¹⁰⁵ Plainly, then, in the sight of God no one by works can accomplish anything toward his salvation. Salvation must be obtained and enjoyed before works are begun. Having salvation, works will follow spontaneously, to the honor of God and to the benefit of our neighbor. They will not be in any wise prompted by fear of punishment or expectation of reward. This is implied in the words: “*If a son, then an heir through Christ.*”

¹⁰⁶ Now we have made it sufficiently plain that faith alone, faith before any works are done and without them, constitutes us children. If it makes us children, it makes us heirs; a child is an heir. When the inheritance is already possessed, can it be first secured through works? It is an inconsistent conclusion that the inheritance bequeathed through grace is already possessed, and at the same time is still to be sought and obtained first through works and merits, as if it were not present or not given. The inheritance is simply eternal salvation. We have frequently asserted that through baptism and faith the Christian instantaneously possesses all, but does not yet behold it visibly. He possesses it only in faith, for in this life he could not bear the open manifestation of such blessings. As Paul says (Romans 8:24-25), we are already saved, but in hope; we do not yet see our salvation, but we wait for it. And Peter tells us (Peter 1:4-5) that our salvation is reserved in heaven ready to be revealed in the last time.

¹⁰⁷ For this reason, the Christian ought not to be influenced, like a servant, by a desire to secure advantage for himself, but by a longing to benefit others in their need. Truly, he must live and act, not for himself, but for his neighbor here on earth. So doing, he will most assuredly live and work for God. Through faith he has sufficient for himself; he is rich, well filled and happy for ever.

¹⁰⁸ Paul adds “*through Christ*” to avoid the implication that the inheritance is bestowed upon us without any merit or cost whatever. Although it costs us nothing, and although it is bestowed without merit on our part, yet Christ was placed under great obligations. For the sake of that inheritance he was put under the Law for us; he paid the cost to secure, or to merit, the inheritance for all who believe in him. When we confer an unmerited favor *upon* a neighbor, it costs him nothing. But what we bestow on him freely, of our pure goodness, as Christ bestows blessings upon us, costs us labor and substance.

¹⁰⁹ The unlearned may be somewhat confused by Paul’s assertion that men are no longer servants, but children, and when the fact is, there are few believers in Christ, few children, while the world is filled with heretics and Cain-like people. But we must remember he speaks in a doctrinal connection. His meaning is: Before Christ came, and before the preaching of the Gospel whereby children are made, only the Law was preached—the Law which can make only servants with its work. The Gospel being preached at the present time, we have no need for the servant-maker, the Law. All who aforesaid were, through the Law and its works, servants like Cain, now may become, through faith, righteous and saved without works. Therefore, to say there are no more servants, but children, is practically saying that now no servile doctrine is to be taught; now we become children, not servants. Only faith and the Gospel are to be preached. Only they are to be our doctrine. This doctrine imparts the Spirit and teaches us to confide in God and to serve only our neighbor. Thus the whole Law is fulfilled.

¹¹⁰ In this manner Paul calls the Galatians again from the teachers who had led them back to the Law and its works. Similarly, the Pope with his foolish laws has for a long time misled the people through his bishops, priests and monks, and has exterminated the Christian faith—conduct foretold in the

Scriptures concerning Antichrist. Then let him who would be saved, shun the Pope and his adherents, and all church orders, as he would Lucifer's own servants and apostles.

History

The Elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise (1463-1525), requested that Martin Luther write a collection of sermons for each Sunday of the year for the benefit of ministers and the common people—those that have the Spirit—to exhort them in sound doctrine but also to convict the gainsayers who oppose the Word and true faith.

This sermon originates from what is commonly called Luther's *Church Postil* collection. He wrote most of the sermons between 1521 and 1527, then supervised editorial assistance with Stephan Roth (1492-1546) until 1535 and Caspar Creuziger (1504-1548) until 1544. During that entire period over seventy-five editions of the collection were published. Many more editions were published after Luther's death in 1546. This sermon can be found in the St. Louis-Walch and the Erlangen editions of Luther's works. It was translated into English by Bruno Lederer (1875-) and edited by John Nicholas Lenker (1858-1929) and published in 1905. Except for his catechisms, Luther's postils were his most influential writings for believers. |

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