

The Law and its Works, Faith, and Unity in Christ

New Year's Day

Sermon on Galatians 3:23-29

Author: Dr. Martin Luther (1483-1546) Year: 1528

Text

²³ But before faith came, we were kept in ward under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. ²⁴ So that the law is become our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith is come, we are no longer under a tutor. ²⁶ For ye are all sons of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. ²⁸ There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:23-29)

The Law and its Works

¹ This, too, is really a Pauline Epistle lesson concerning faith as opposed to works, and taken in connection with the preceding lesson is easily understood. What is said there concerning the servant is true here concerning the pupil. Paul employs the two figures to teach us the office of the Law and what it profits. We must, therefore, again refer to the Law and its works, to the fact that works are of twofold origin. Some are extorted by fear of punishment or prompted by expectation of pleasure and gain; others are spontaneous, cheerful and gratuitous, not performed to escape punishment nor to gain reward, but inspired by pure kindness and a desire for what is good. The first class are the works of servants and pupils; the second class, of children and free heirs

² The youth under a tutor follows not his own will; but, from fear of the rod, his master's will. While under control of his master, his real character cannot be detected. Were he free, his true self would be apparent, for he would manifest his natural disposition and his works would be his own. The works he performs under restraint and coercion are not really his own, but those of the tutor who forces them. Were he not under control of the tutor, he would do none of them, but rather things quite the reverse.

³ In this homely but apt illustration Paul presents at once the province of the Law and the limitation of free will, or human nature, with a clearness not to be surpassed. It plainly teaches the meaning, operation and end of the Law, and the extent of human nature's power.

We note that constraint has a twofold effect upon the youth: First, fear of his tutor preserves him from many evils into which he would otherwise fall; he is withheld from indulging in a wicked,

licentious life, in becoming utterly dissolute. Second, his heart is filled with hatred toward the tutor who curbs his will. This is the situation with him: the greater his external restraint from evil, the greater his inward hatred of him who restrains. His character is in the scales; when one side goes up, the other goes down. While outward sin decreases, inward sin increases. We know from experience that those youths most strictly reared are, when given liberty, more wicked than young men less rigidly brought up. So impossible is it to improve human nature with commandments and punishments; something else is necessary.

⁴ Likewise, so long as man is in his natural state and destitute of grace, he does not what he would, but what his tutor the Law obliges him to do. It must be confessed by all that were it not for hell and the Law's penalties, no one would do good. Now, man's works being not wrought of free will, they are not his own; they are the works of the coercive and restraining Law. Well may the apostle declare them not our works, but the "*works of the Law*," because what we do against our will is not our achievement, but that of the constraining power.

⁵ For instance, should one forcibly make my hand the instrument to slay another, or to bestow alms upon a destitute individual, it would not be my deed, though performed by my hand, but the deed of him who forced the action. Consequently, I would be neither injured nor benefited in the least by the act. Likewise, the works of the Law render no one righteous, notwithstanding man performs them. For, so far as our will is concerned, we do them merely from fear of the Law's penalty. The will would much prefer to do otherwise and would if not constrained by the coercive and menacing Law. Such works are not our own, then. Notwithstanding, everyone must be saved through his own act.

⁶ Further, one may not, or may think he does not, do works through fear of punishment; he is, however, inspired by the promises and inducements of the Law. And that motive is as wrong, if not more so, than the other. Such a position implies that if heaven were not promised, if they knew there were no reward, no effort would be made. The deeds wrought from this latter motive are, therefore, likewise not our own; they are the works of the Law with its inducements in the nature of favors and rewards. They are more dangerous and less easily recognized than the former kind, being more subtle and bearing greater resemblance to true, spontaneous works.

⁷ But tribulation will prove them. They will appear in their true character when they are rejected as to merit, when gratuitous service is required, service uninfluenced by hope of reward, service rendered only for the honor of God and for the benefit of one's neighbor. Then human nature utterly fails—is powerless. Then is evident the fact that it does no good work of its own, nothing but the extraneous works of the Law; just as the irrational animal obeys in fear of the lash, or labors for the sake of its food. How many righteous individuals, men of honorable character, think you, would there be today if neither heaven nor shame, punishment and hell were before them? Not one. Order is preserved through fear of punishment or expectation of gain. The works of the Law, then, are all deceptive. As the Scriptures declare: "*All men are liars.*" Psalm 116:11. "*Surely every man at his best estate is altogether vanity.*" Psalm 39:5.

The Office of the Law

⁸ Thus, too, we find with all men two effects of the Law: First, by that tutor they are secured against shameful, dissolute conduct. Under the discipline of the works of the Law, they maintain an honorable outward life. Secondly, in their hearts they really become enemies to the Law with its penalties; and the more severe the chastisement, the greater their hatred. Who is not an enemy to death and hell? And what is that but being an enemy to the Law that imposes such punishment? And what is enmity to the Law but enmity to righteousness? But is not the enemy of righteousness an enemy of God himself? Then do we not arrive at the ultimate conclusion that we are not only unjustified, but we also hate righteousness, love sin and are enemies to God with all our hearts, however beautiful and honorable our outward conduct—our works—may appear?

⁹ Now, unquestionably God desires to be loved with the whole heart. The commandment (Deuteronomy 6:5) reads, *“Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart.”* God wills that our good works should be really our own, not those of our tutor the Law, or of death, hell or heaven. That is, we are not to act from a fear of death or hell, or for the sake of enjoying heaven, but from a willing spirit, a desire and love for righteousness. He who does a good deed through fear of death and hell, does it not to the honor of God. It is a work of death and hell, for they have extorted it. Because of these, he has wrought; otherwise he would not have done the deed. Therefore, he remains a servant, a slave, of death and hell, so long as these inspire his works. Now, if he remains their servant, he must die and be condemned. To him apply the proverbs, *“He that fears hell, enters it”* and *“Trembling will not deliver from death.”*

¹⁰ But you say, *“What must be your conclusion, for who then can be saved? who does not tremble and fear death and hell? who executes his works, or leads an honorable life, without fear?”* I reply: Yes, but who, being filled with such fear and with a hatred of God’s Law and his righteousness, loves God? Where is human nature here? Where is free will? Still you refuse to believe in the absolute necessity of God’s grace; still you will not admit the conduct of all men sinful, and false; still you cannot be persuaded that works do not make one righteous.

¹¹ Here, indeed, is evident the necessity for the Law, and the purpose it serves—God’s design in it—its office being twofold: First, to preserve discipline among us; to impel us to an honorable outward life, a life in which we can dwell together without devouring one another as we would were Law, fear and punishment lacking, and as formerly was the case with certain heathen. This is why God did not, in the New Testament dispensation, abolish the secular sword. He established its place, though he did not make use of it. And it is not necessary for his followers to employ it otherwise than to restrain bold and dissolute conduct; and to enable men to live together in peace, to maintain themselves and to rear their families. Without it, all countries would be demoralized, and overrun with murderers and robbers. No woman or child would escape violence. The sword and the Law preserve men and impel them to a quiet, peaceful and honorable life. But they do not through these restraints become righteous; their hearts are not made better. Their hands are restrained and bound, that is all. Their works, their apparent righteousness, is not their own; it is of the sword, which extorts it by inspiring the fear of punishment.

¹² Similarly, God’s Law impels us, through fear of death and hell, to forsake many evils. Like a tutor, it holds us to an honorable outward life. But by the Law no one becomes righteous before God. The heart remains an enemy to its tutor, hates his chastisements and would prefer freedom.

¹³ Second, God's design in the Law is to enable man to know himself; to perceive the false and unjustified state of his heart; to discover how far he is from God and how utterly impotent his own nature is; to disdain his own goodness and to recognize it as nothing in comparison to what is necessary to the fulfillment of the Law; to be humbled in consequence of such knowledge and come to the cross, yearning for Christ, longing for his grace, despairing of himself and placing all his hope in Christ. Christ will then give him a different spirit and change his heart. No longer will he fear death and hell, no longer look for life and heaven. For, being voluntarily and unselfishly devoted to the fulfillment of the Law, he will maintain a clear and confident conscience toward it during his whole life and even in the hour of death. He will be equally uninfluenced by fear of death, hope of heaven or any other motive. We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews 2:15) how Christ made atonement that he "*might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*" These words make it evident enough that we must have no fear of death, and that they who live in fear of it are servants, nor will they be saved. Now, neither our own nature nor the Law can liberate us from that fear. Indeed, they but increase it. Christ alone has freed us from it. If we believe in him, he will give us that free, undaunted spirit which fears neither death nor hell, which seeks neither life nor heaven, but voluntarily and joyfully serves God.

¹⁴ Therefore, we see, first, how dangerous are the doctrines which urge the attainment of righteousness only through commandments and laws. These things but separate man farther from God, from Christ; yes, from the Law and all righteousness. The effect of the inculcation of such doctrines is simply to render man's conscience continually more fearful, timid, dejected and wretched, and to teach him ever to fear death and hell, and only them; until eventually his heart is filled with naught but despair, and he must become, in any aspect, a martyr of the devil.

¹⁵ Secondly, we see three attitudes toward the Law; that is, mankind conducts itself in three ways with reference to it. Some disregard it utterly, and boldly oppose it by a dissolute life. To them it is practically no Law. Others because of the Law refrain from such a course and are preserved to an honorable life. But while outwardly they live within the Law's prohibitions, inwardly they are enemies of this their tutor. The motive of all their conduct is the fear of death and hell. They keep the Law only externally; rather, it keeps them externally. Inwardly they neither keep it nor are kept by it. The third class observe it both externally and with the heart. This class are the tables of Moses, written upon outwardly and inwardly by the finger of God himself.

¹⁶ The first class are righteous neither without nor within; the second are only outwardly pious and not in heart; but the third are thoroughly righteous. Upon this point Paul says (1 Timothy 1:8), "*But we know that the Law is good, if a man use it lawfully.*" But in what way is it lawfully used? I answer, "*Law is not made for a righteous man, but for the 'lawless'*" (1 Timothy 1:9). And what are we to understand by that? Simply that he who would preach the Law aright must be governed by these three classes. He must not by any means preach the Law to the third class as an instrument of righteousness; this were perversion. But to the first class such preaching is in order. For them is the Law instituted. Its object is that they may forsake their dissolute life and yield themselves to the preserving power of their tutor. However, it is not enough for them to be guarded and kept by the Law; they must learn also to keep it. So, in addition to the Law, and beyond it, the Gospel must be preached, through which is given the grace of Christ to keep the former. There is a considerable difference between observing the Law and being preserved by it; between keeping and being kept. The first class neither keep it nor are kept; the second are kept; and the third keep it.

¹⁷ These three attitudes of mankind toward the Law are prefigured in certain acts of Moses. First, where he broke the tables when the Jews worshiped the golden calf. Exodus 32:19. The breaking of the tables, and the people's consequent failure to receive them, suggest the first class, who do not receive the Law at all, but break it. Second, Moses brought other tables, which were received by the people and the skin of his face shone, but Aaron and the Israelites could not endure the shining of Moses' face, and he was compelled to cover it with a veil when he would speak to them. Exodus 34:30-33. Here is suggested the second class, who receive the Law but only for outward observance. With them it is too bright for inward obedience; they are afraid of it.

¹⁸ Hypocrites make for themselves a veil, as Paul explains (2 Corinthians 3:13-15)—the arrogance of their works, of their external righteousness. They will not look the Law squarely in the face and see how futile is their righteousness. As Paul says, to this very day the veil is upon their hearts.

Then, too, Moses leads the people no farther than to the Jordan, slays only two kings—Sihon and Og—and gives only two and a half tribes of Israel their portion of the land. Here is illustrated half-hearted righteousness; insignificant, outward righteousness. Then, there in the wilderness of Moab, Moses dies; the Law can go no farther.

¹⁹ Now, third: Joshua succeeds Moses and leads the whole multitude dry-shod through the Jordan, into all parts of the promised land. There is now no Moses, no Law; only Joshua, Christ, who leads by faith and fulfils all Moses' commandments. Thus is suggested the class to whom no Law is given, as Paul says, and who become righteous, not through works, but through grace; that is, their good works are not performed through constraint of the Law. Moses is not in evidence with them. With all this explanation, Paul should, I think, be easily understood in this lesson. Let us now consider it.

“But before faith came, we were kept in ward under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.”

²⁰ Paul does not say, Before faith came we were righteous and kept the Law. On the contrary, he says that the Law kept us. Under it we were locked up—preserved—that we might not boldly and independently rush into wickedness. At the same time, the restraint did not render us really and inwardly righteous. Nor was it designed to be permanent. It led to the faith to be revealed in the future, a faith which was to set us free; not free to do the evil from which the Law shut us up, but free to do the good to which the Law impelled us. The “*shutting up*,” the confinement, of the Law should teach us to desire faith and to recognize the evil tendencies of our nature; for faith is a spiritual freedom, liberating only the heart.

²¹ To illustrate: Suppose you were confined in a prison, where you were very reluctant to remain. Your captor might release you in either of two ways: First, he might give you physical freedom by destroying the prison and letting you go where you desire. Secondly, he might make you mentally free by bestowing many blessings upon you in this prison—illuminating and enlarging it, making it pleasant in the extreme, adorning it richly and to an extent rendering it more desirable than any royal palace, more to be desired even than a kingdom; and by so reconciling you to your surroundings, so altering your mind, that you would not, for all earthly possessions, be removed from that prison, but would pray for its preservation that you might continue therein, it being to you no longer a prison, having become a paradise. Tell me, which form of freedom would be the better? Would not the latter be preferable? The former liberation would leave you but a beggar, as before. But in the latter case, your mind being free, you would possess all you might desire.

²² Thus, mark you, has Christ given us spiritual freedom from the Law. He did not abrogate, did not destroy, the Law. But he changed the heart which before was unwillingly under the Law. He so benefited it and made the Law so desirable that the heart has no greater delight and joy than in the Law. The heart would not willingly have the Law fail in one tittle. Again, as the prisoner makes his prison narrow and oppressive for himself by his unwillingness, so, too, are we enemies to the Law and make it disagreeable to ourselves because unwillingly we are shut up from evil and impelled to good.

²³ Thus, in this verse the apostle beautifully presents both the fruit and the office of the Law. To the inquiry, Wherein is the Law good? he answers: Though it truly does not make us righteous, but rather increases our sinfulness and provokes our human nature by its commands and prohibitions, yet it has a twofold office. First, it locks us up, secures us, against breaking out violently into an openly shameless life, as do the class who will not permit themselves to be thus restrained. For this reason it is much better that the Law should exist. Without it, who could withstand the encroachments of his fellows? According to Paul (Romans 13:4), the secular sword is borne for a terror, not to the righteous, but to the evil-doers.

²⁴ Second, constraint of the Law leads to a future faith by revealing to man his wickedness and his dislike for what is good; by teaching him to know himself, to humbly confess his evil nature, to acknowledge its guilt and to desire the grace of God—grace that does not abrogate the Law, which he now recognizes as right, good and holy, but produces another heart in him, a heart to love that right, good and holy Law. Note, this is the true meaning and best office of the Law. It is truly necessary that the Law should exist, to bring man thus to know himself and to implore the grace of God.

²⁵ Over this office of the Law, however, a contention arises between the true and the false saints. False saints will receive the Law only so far as its first office goes. They presume that in submitting to its restraint and preservation they are become righteous. They will not learn from it to perceive their wicked nature, but deem human nature inherently good and truly capable of loving the Law. The true saints deny this doctrine; and indeed it is false. The Word of God and the universal experience of men declare otherwise. And he who does not falsify nor dissemble will confess himself naturally without delight in the Law of God; much more without delight in the punishment of sins, in death and hell, which the Law presents.

The intensely abominable filth of their hearts, great and deep, the self-justifiers palliate by covering it with the fig-leaves of their own works in the Law, as Adam and Eve covered their shame. But the sin in the heart of Adam and Eve was not made less by the covering; so, too, by works of the Law, by self-justification, no one is made better, but rather is made worse. It was because of this very filth that Christ rejected and dispersed the congregations of the synagogues.

²⁶ It is now plain to whom Paul addresses the words of this verse—the work-righteous, who would become godly through the Law and its work, who consider the first office of the Law sufficiently effective to make them righteous. This doctrine gives rise to a class who might be styled “*Absalomites*.” For as Absalom remained hanging by his head, in an oak tree, suspended between heaven and earth (2 Samuel 18:9), so this class hang between heaven and earth. Shut up by the Law, they do not touch the earth; they are restrained from the things their evil nature ardently desires. On the other hand, since the Law, powerless to improve their nature, only irritates and provokes it, making them enemies to the Law, they are not godly and so do not reach heaven.

²⁷ Zechariah (Zechariah 5:9) saw two women, between heaven and earth, carrying an ephah to Babylon, while in the vessel sat a woman called "*Impietas*"—unbelief, or ungodliness. This vessel, the ephah, represents the self-justifiers, vacillating between open vice and true piety. Unbelief sits within. The two women bearing it are Fear and Reward; from fear of punishment or in quest of reward are all their works performed. These two carry and maintain the unbelievers in their self-righteousness; such is the significance of the wings like a stork, or vulture, which the prophet mentions. Wings, in the Scriptures, signify oral preaching, because speech is swift. The false saints preach only of fear and reward. They would make men righteous merely by terror and allurements, but they only increase men's sin. Men become greater enemies to the Law because of its terrors, and for the sake of its allurements are only the more desirous to accomplish their own designs. Therefore, these false saints are simply wings for the stork, the vulture, that devours the chickens—that murders souls.

²⁸ But the true saints do not remain midway between heaven and earth. They, too, hear of the terrors and the persuasions of the Law; but they recognize their own proneness to regard the threats and enticements rather than the purpose of the Law, and so are made aware that truly they are not pure nor righteous. They fall down in confession, crying, "*Grace, grace, O Lord God!*" To them Christ comes, bringing true liberty through his Spirit. Thus they become altogether of heaven.

²⁹ This, mark you, is what is meant by being "*kept in ward under the Law and shut up unto the faith, which should afterwards be revealed.*" Not only were the Jews thus shut up before the revelation of faith, but they are still shut up, as are all who attempt to become righteous through the works of the Law and because of fear of its threats or hope of its rewards, and like reasons. If they be not directed to the faith, if they fail of faith, it being not made known to them, the works of the Law must but render them more wicked, and they will ultimately fall into despair or obdurate presumption, and so pass beyond the reach of help. So perilous is it to fail of making a right use of the Law and of thus arriving at faith.

"So that the Law is become our tutor [schoolmaster] to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

³⁰ Observe the import of these words: no one is justified by the Law and its works. If we could be justified by the Law, faith would be unnecessary, and Paul's statement here—we are justified by faith—would be false. In this matter of justification, faith and works utterly exclude each other. If justification be ascribed to faith, it must not be attributed to works, to the Law, to human nature. If it be ascribed to works, it must not be attributed to faith. If one theory be true, the other must be false. They cannot both be true. The power and virtue of the Law cannot consist in anything but the making of sinners or the permitting men to remain sinners. Whatever does not justify, certainly makes sinners or permits them so to remain. But since the purpose of the Law is to deal with sins and sinners, it must do something more than permit sinners to remain as they are. What kind of an agency would that be which has no effect upon the object of its operation?

³¹ What, then, can the Law accomplish if it does not justify us, and neither makes us better nor leaves us as we are? Wonderful indeed must be its province to help, when it neither justifies nor leaves the sinner as it finds him. Necessarily it must increase sin. Paul says (Romans 5:20), "*The law came in besides, that the trespass might abound.*" As before said, this result is in consequence of the Law's shutting up the sinner, restraining his hands from committing open wickedness and awakening in his heart only increased hatred for and opposition to the Law; just as a pupil's indignation arises in

proportion as he is chastised, or his will is crossed, by his tutor. His hatred or unwillingness is simply an increased development of his restrained evil will, and it never would have been called forth had not that will been opposed.

³² Before the introduction of the Law, man sins voluntarily, of his own evil nature, with no thought of the Law. But the advent of the Law with its threats and constraint irritates his human nature and excites his aversion; he begins not only to love sin but to hate righteousness. Note, this is the province of the Law concerning the sinner and his sins. Paul says the Law increases sin; so far is it from justifying any man. Blessed is he who recognizes this truth. The self-righteous do not at all perceive it. They assign to human nature no such wickedness and no enmity toward the Law; they find much to commend in human nature. Hence they understand not a syllable of the words of Paul, who never speaks of the Law otherwise than as arousing sin; and, if we would but confess it, such is the testimony of our own hearts.

³³ The apostle says “*unto Christ.*” That is, until Christ, the Law is our tutor. No leave is given to embrace any other faith than the faith in Christ. The Law directs us only to Abraham’s seed, Christ, on whom all saints from the beginning have believed, as stated in the preceding epistle lesson.

³⁴ Therefore, it is of no benefit to the Jews and the Turks to believe in God the Creator of heaven and earth; he who does not believe in Christ, neither believes in God. Even were Christ truly not God—a thing impossible—still they who should fail of belief in him would not be believers in God; for God has promised his grace in Abraham’s seed. Abraham’s seed being Christ, as the Jews, the Turks and all the world acknowledge, he who disbelieves in Christ, also disbelieves the promises of God. Hence he is not a believer in the God who created heaven and earth, for no other God is the author of the promise to Abraham, and in the name of no seed of Abraham except Christ has the blessing gone forth, and the faith been preached, in all the world.

³⁵ Outside of Christ, then, no Law, no belief, can secure blessing and justification. God will keep his promise made to Abraham, the promise to bless all the world in his seed, and in no other. God will not establish a new and peculiar faith for each person and neglect or recall his promise. So then, faith in Christ justifies, as Paul says (Romans 10:4): “*For Christ is the end of the Law unto righteousness to every one that believeth.*” What is implied? Simply that all believers in Christ are justified and receive his Spirit and his grace, through faith. Here the Law ends for them because they are no longer under it. This is the final meaning of the Law; for it follows:

“But now that faith is come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

³⁶ The preceding verses make plain enough what is meant by being under the Law, or under a tutor; yet, the doctrine of faith and the expression “*under a tutor or under the Law*” having become obsolete, enough cannot be said in explanation. To be under a tutor, to be subject to the Law, is, briefly, to be a dissembler; to do many good works and yet not be pious; to lead a good life without ever being righteous; always to teach without learning, and to preach without understanding. The reason for such deficiency is, the character of those under the Law does not permit them to do good voluntarily and through love, without fear of punishment or hope of reward. Therefore are they servants, driven by the Law. And since it ever continues to rule and to drive, they remain always its debtors and subjects.

The Law demands a joyous, free and ready will. This its subjects have not, nor can they have it of themselves. Faith in Christ alone produces it. Where such a spirit exists, the Law ceases its demands.

It is satisfied—fulfilled. The pupil then being able to accomplish the requirements of his tutor, the tutor dismisses him, demanding no more. He is no longer his tutor, but his good friend and companion.

Faith Liberates from the Law

³⁷ Similarly, faith liberates us from the Law. Not a physical liberation, effected by separating us from the Law, by removing us forever from its jurisdiction: but freedom in the sense that we satisfy the demands of the Law; we satisfy it by knowing and possessing the Holy Spirit, who brings us to love the Law. The Law did not desire works. Works could not appease it. It desired love. Only our love could satisfy it. Without love it would not release us—would not be remunerated. Destitute of love, we must, even with all our works, remain its debtors and our consciences know no peace. The Law continually chastises us as sinners and transgressors, and threatens us with death and hell, until Christ comes and bestows his Spirit and his love, through the faith preached in the Gospel. Then we are freed from the Law. No longer it demands, no longer chastises, but lets the conscience rest. No more it terrifies with death and hell. It has become our kind friend and companion.

³⁸ The tutor's release of the pupil does not mean the death or departure of the tutor, but spiritually, that the child has been changed, and can do what the father wished the tutor to teach him. Likewise the Law releases us, not by its passing, not by being abrogated, but spiritually; and because a change has been effected in us and we have the experience God designed us to have through the Law.

³⁹ Hence I have called the figure of the pupil and tutor a beautiful and striking illustration whereby we may rightly understand the Law, and the work of grace in ourselves. The first office of the Law, that of shutting us up and producing outward piety, is so well established, so emphasized by all teachers and books, and besides so closely approaches human nature, that it is difficult for us to recognize its second office, of magnifying inward sin. I may well liken the two offices to a pair of scales, one empty and the other full.

So the Law, when producing external piety, increases inward sin. It imposes as much sin inwardly, by arousing hatred and rebellion, as it corrects externally by works; and much more. According to Paul (Romans 7:13), through the Law sin becomes exceeding sinful, sinful beyond measure. And the experience of every man must lead him so to confess.

“For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus.”

⁴⁰ He who is under the Law, and works unwillingly, is a servant, as the preceding sermon declares. But whosoever has faith and cheerfully works, is a child; for he has received the Spirit of God, through Christ. Now, the apostle names Christ, referring to the faith that believes and abides in Jesus Christ. No other faith is effective, no other faith is the right faith, let one believe in God as he will.

⁴¹ Some there are, particularly among our modern high school men, who say: *“Forgiveness of sins and justification depend altogether on the divine imputation of grace; God's imputation is sufficient. He to whom God does not reckon sin, is justified; to whom God reckons sin, is not justified.”* They imagine their position is verified in the testimony of Psalm 32:2, quoted in Romans 4:8, *“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin.”*

Were their theory true, the entire New Testament would be of no significance. Christ would have labored foolishly and to no purpose in suffering for sin. God would have unnecessarily wrought mere mockery and deception; for he might easily, without Christ's sufferings, have forgiven sins—have

not imputed them. Then, too, a faith other than faith in Christ might have justified and saved—a faith relying on God’s gracious mercy not to impute sin.

⁴² In contrast to this deplorable theory, this abominable error, it is the holy apostle’s practice to speak always of faith in Jesus Christ, and he makes mention of Jesus Christ with a frequency surprising to one unacquainted with the important doctrine of faith in him. In fact, it is said that every second word in Paul’s epistles is “*Jesus Christ.*” But these pagan doctors of divinity have maliciously rooted it out, have silenced it for us, by their abominable and hellish dreams of such perversion.

⁴³ Hence our learned university doctors no longer know Christ. They do not recognize the need of him and his benefits, nor understand the character of the Gospel and the New Testament. They imagine Christ to be a mere Moses—a teacher who institutes laws and commandments showing how men may be righteous and lead a faultless life. Then they proceed with free will and the workings of human nature, designing therewith to fit themselves for grace, thus basely storming heaven.

⁴⁴ Now, if God confers his grace because of their works, their careful preparation, Christ must be without significance. What need have they of Christ if they can obtain grace in their own name and by their works? And this doctrine they teach openly; indeed, they defend it with their utmost power and with the Pope’s bulls, condemning a contrary teaching as the very worst heresy. Therefore I have warned, and still warn, all men that the Pope and the universities have cast Christ and the New Testament farther out of the world than ever did the Jews or Turks. Hence the Pope is the true Antichrist, and his high schools are the devil’s own taverns and brothels. What does Christ signify if by effort of my own human nature I can obtain God’s grace? Or, having grace, what more will I desire?

⁴⁵ Let us, therefore, guard against the hellish poison of this false doctrine and not lose Christ, the consoling Savior. He must be retained above all things. True, Psalm 32:2 and Romans 4:8 do say, “*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin.*” But Paul introduces the statement as testimony to the fact that it is only believers to whom Christ does not reckon sin; free will and the works of human nature are not considered. He cites Abraham, whose faith in the divine promise concerning his seed was counted to him for righteousness. Although it is of pure grace that God reckons not to us our sins, yet he would not so forgive were not his Law and his standard of righteousness already completely satisfied. The gracious reckoning had first to be bought for us from the divine righteousness.

It being impossible for us to purchase forgiveness, God ordained in our stead one who took upon himself all our deserved punishment and fulfilled the Law for us, thus averting from us God’s judgment and appeasing his wrath. So it is true that grace is given us gratuitously—without cost to ourselves—and yet the gift to us cost another much, and was obtained with a priceless, an infinite, treasure—the Son of God himself. It is supremely essential, therefore, to possess him who has accomplished the purchase for us. Nor is it possible to obtain grace otherwise than through him.

⁴⁶ Note, from the time of Adam to Abraham’s day, no one was saved except through faith in the woman’s seed, who should bruise the serpent’s head. And after Abraham no one was saved except through faith in his seed. And now no one can be saved otherwise than through faith in the seed of Abraham now come. Oh, you are not sufficient of yourself to come to God; you may not attempt to come without this Mediator—through yourself and of your own energy, as the Jews, the Turks and the Papists teach you may. Who will reconcile you with God in the first place? Christ says (John 14:6), “*No one cometh unto the Father, but by me.*”

In the time of the famine the Egyptians desired to make their complaints to Pharaoh, the king himself, but he referred them to Joseph, saying (Genesis 41:55): “*Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do.*” Similarly, God hears, and aids to salvation, no one of us; we must all come to Christ, who is made Lord over all things, and with whom is the throne of grace. He has obtained salvation for us. Consequently it is in vain to seek it elsewhere. Yes, if we were devoid of sin, as was Adam before the fall, we would have no need of Christ; we might come before God in our own merits. But in the time of famine—since the fall—we must have a Joseph, one who is without sin and who yet will receive us needy sinners when we come to him in earnest.

Error of the Papists

⁴⁷ Consequently the Papists do not believe and teach otherwise of human nature than that it is still undefiled as it was before the fall of Adam. They do not believe it is wholly corrupted in sin, and the enemy of God. God is an enemy to sin; so is sin an enemy to God, as Paul teaches in the fifth and eighth chapters of Romans. The Papists, then, certainly do not believe what Moses writes concerning the fall of Adam (Genesis 3), or else they regard the fall merely a passing disgrace, not affecting our nature, not making it sinful nor subjecting it to God’s wrath. Because they do not believe Moses and have no need of Christ, and in thus rejecting the Old Testament and the New condemn the entire living Scriptures, God has justly permitted them to become disciples of Aristotle, that dead and condemned heathen; permitted them to be a retreat for the devil. Through the laws of the Pope and the doctrines of men, the devil fills them with his pollution to constant overflowing, wherewith they contaminate the whole world. But they ever remain in darkness, attempting, while lacking faith in Christ, to force acceptance with God by their prayers and fasts, their masses, study and preaching.

⁴⁸ Even if they do name and confess Christ, they simply mean that God has superfluously made him Lord, a Lord who requires us to obey God in that we regard himself as Lord; that, independent of Christ’s dominion, free will may, by its natural powers, obtain the grace of God; that for them Christ’s kingdom is not an essential, but is the mere wantonness of God in desiring Christ to be Lord after the fashion of earthly kingdoms; and that they confess him, not because confession is necessary to their salvation, since man may be saved otherwise than through his kingdom, but because God wills and commands obedience to the King.

Consequently, with the Papists Christ is really no Savior. In the depths of their hearts he is a tyrant and a taskmaster, and unnecessary to human nature in its effort to obtain grace; rather, he is to human nature an added burden, for it must then obey not only God as heretofore, but Christ with his commandments.

⁴⁹ Of olden time, many prophesied that in Antichrist’s day all heretics would unite in the extermination of the whole world. And today, under the rule of the Pope and the Turk, heresy has full sway. In the rejection and condemnation of Christ and the entire Scriptures, a rejection leaving nothing but the name, is easily proven that all heresies, errors and darkness existing from the beginning of the world, now reign. I often have fears for the condemnation of all men of the present age except those who die in their cradles. Yet no one sees and deplores the awful wrath of God overhanging us.

⁵⁰ Mark you, Paul’s essential reason for always emphasizing faith in Christ is the fact that he clearly foresaw this virulent doctrine, the doctrine presuming to treat with God independently of Christ, as if God and human nature were harmonious, as if righteousness might love sin and grant its desires.

Let us, therefore, beloved friends, be wise and learn Christ aright, namely: Of first importance, we must hear the Gospel and believe in Christ; believe in him not merely as a Lord to whom honor is due, but as that one who offered himself in place of our sinful nature, who took upon himself all the wrath of God merited by ourselves with our works, and overcame; believe that the fruit of that conquest he did not reserve unto himself, but assigned it to us, for our own; and that all who believe in him as such a conqueror shall thereby surely be redeemed from God's wrath and received into his favor.

So we see how great the need and benefit of Christ is to us, and recognize the fallacy of the position that one may by his own natural powers earn God's grace; yes, recognize it as a device of Satan himself. For if human nature can obtain grace, Christ is unnecessary as an intercessor, a mediator. But, he being essential, human nature can obtain only disgrace; the two are inconsistent—man his own mediator, and Christ the mediator for man.

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ.”

⁵¹ Note the beautiful order in Paul's reasoning. *“But after that faith is come we are no longer under a tutor.”* Why not? *“For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus.”* But how are we become the children of God? *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ.”* Christ is the child of God; therefore, he who clothes himself in Christ, God's son, must be the child of God. He is clothed with divine adoption, which unquestionably must constitute him a child. Now, if a child, he is no longer under the Law, where are none but servants. For the child himself, while under the Law, like a pupil under a tutor, is but as a servant. Such is the word of Paul, as stated in the following and the preceding epistle lessons.

⁵² But what is meant by *“putting on Christ?”* The faithless will readily reply, *“It means to follow Christ, imitating his example.”* But in the same way I might put on Peter, or Paul, or any saint, and thus nothing special would be said of Christ. We will let faith speak here; it is faith which Paul so beautifully suggests in the words *“put on.”* Naturally, until baptism the individual has never followed Christ. In baptism he begins to follow. Therefore, Christ must be *“put on”* before he can be followed. And essentially there is a marked difference between putting on Christ and following his example.

Reference is to a spiritual putting on—in the conscience. This is effected by the soul receiving as its own Christ and all his righteousness, and confidently relying on these as if it had itself earned them; just as one ordinarily receives his apparel. This spiritual reception is the putting on; such is the nature and character of true faith.

⁵³ Unquestionably Christ is given to us in a way that makes his righteousness, all he is and all he has, stand as our surety; he becomes our own. The believer in this doctrine will enjoy the blessing, as Paul teaches (Romans 8:32): *“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?”* Again (1 Corinthians 1:30), *“Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.”*

Note, he who thus believes in Christ puts on Christ. Faith, then, is something great enough to justify and save man. It affords him all the blessings in Christ, giving the conscience comfort and security. Thus man rejoices in Christ and is inclined to work all good and avoid all evil; he no longer fears death or hell, or any evil, richly clothed as he is in Christ. This is satisfying the Law and being no more under it. In connection with Christ as the garment, the Holy Spirit is in the soul, and the

individual is a wholly different person. The soul is clothed in the adoption of God. It must, therefore, be a child.

⁵⁴ Now, no saint can in God's sight be thus put on. It is necessary for every soul to put on Christ for himself. Man has nothing to give to another to put on. After receiving Christ, after putting on the garment of his righteousness, there follows imitation of Christ's example. Man treats his neighbor as Christ has treated him. He gives and helps his neighbor with all the good he has and can command; he permits himself to be put on—clothes his neighbor with what he possesses. But the garment of Christ's righteousness wherein he is himself clothed, he cannot give to his neighbor. No man can confer his faith upon another; he cannot give another man faith like his own. True, man may pray for his neighbor to be clothed with Christ as he is. But everyone must believe for himself. Christ alone must clothe us all with himself.

⁵⁵ He who has not this faith, to believe that Christ with all his blessings is his—he does not yet rightly believe. He is not a Christian and is not in heart cheerful and happy. Only faith renders Christians willing, joyous, secure, saved and children of God. Where faith is, the Holy Spirit must dwell. What a beautiful, rainbow-hued and priceless garment is this Christ's righteousness, which combines in its magnificent and profuse decorations, its jewels and ornaments, all virtue, grace, wisdom, truth, righteousness and every blessing in Christ! Well may Paul exclaim (2 Corinthians 9:15), "*Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift.*" And well may Peter say (2 Peter 1:4) that through Christ great and precious gifts are given to us. Christ is the coat of many colors which Jacob made for Joseph, thus favoring him above his other children (Genesis 37:3); for Christ alone is full of grace and truth. Again, Christ is the precious garment of Aaron the high priest wherein he served God; concerning that figure much might be said. Paul's words here suggest these historical things.

⁵⁶ Further, while we put on Christ—receive him—he also puts on or receives us and all we have as if his own. Now, he finds in us nothing good; he finds naught but sins. These he assumes. He removes them from us as disfigurements from his glorious garment. More, he intercedes for us before God, bearing our sins and saving us from eternal punishment. Paul says in Romans 8:34 that Christ maketh intercession for us before God. Psalm 41:4 testifies: "*I said, O Jehovah, have mercy upon me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee.*" And Psalm 69:5: "*O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee.*" All this testimony has reference to us personally. Paul so construes it in Romans 15:3, where, quoting from Psalm 69, he speaks of how Christ bore our sins and neither rejected us nor regarded his holiness too good for us. He says, "*But, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon me.*"

⁵⁷ Now, we are pleased with the message that Christ is a garment for us, and that he intercedes for us as his garment; but with great reluctance do we suffer him to purify us. However, if we would be his garment, we certainly must suffer him to purify us. He cannot and will not appear in impurity. In the days of the martyrs, when he had but lately clothed himself with us, he began with zeal to purify the garment with death and various forms of suffering. Then he sat, as Malachi 3:3 says, and purified the sons of Levi, as a fuller purifies garments. When Christ effects much suffering, indications are favorable for good. Wherever his garment is in evidence, he unceasingly purifies with various forms of suffering. Where suffering is not present, there his garment is not.

"There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus."

⁵⁸ Of course Paul does not mean that physically there is no Jew and Greek, no man and woman. He means, as related to the subject he is handling. But of what is he speaking? Not of the natural body, but of faith, justification and Christ—how, through faith, we become children of God in Christ, a change effected in the soul, in man’s conscience; not in his flesh and blood, not through his members, but through the Word of the Gospel. In this sense there is no difference in persons, whether they be Jews or Greeks, bond or free, male or female. According to the customs of men, physically the Jew is bound by a different law and a different manner of life from the Greek; the bond from the free; the male from the female. The Jew is circumcised, the Greek is not; the male covers not his hair, but the female wears a veil. Then, too, everyman serves God in his own way; hence the saying, Many countries, many customs. These customs, however, as well as all things external and not of faith, are powerless to render one righteous and pious before God. Neither do they hinder justification. Faith may exist equally well with all classes of persons, differing not with any custom and distinctions.

⁵⁹ The trouble is, one falls into certain habits, adopts certain customs, and adheres to them in the endeavor to become righteous and just; in the attempt to aid the soul in putting off its sins and securing salvation. In such case all is perverted. Christ is denied, God is lost, faith and the Gospel are abandoned, works and the Law rule again, and the conscience is misled into thinking that to fail of observing customs means manifestly to be lost, while observance might effect salvation. This is the most pernicious error existing among men. Against it the apostle vehemently warns. It is impossible for Christian faith to live in connection with such a misguided conscience. The individual will never—he cannot—be justified and saved by anything in heaven or earth except Christ. All temporal manners, laws, labors, customs, and all persons but Christ, are fitted to serve the earthly life and to profit mankind.

Works Cannot Save

⁶⁰ What defect of the Jews, then, prevents their being saved? According to Paul (Romans 9:32), they seek salvation by works and not by faith. They would have none but Jews admitted to heaven. But God designs that none but Christians, whether Jews or Greeks, male or female, shall enter there. The Jews think observance of the Law will save them, and failure to observe it will condemn them. God, however, intends that he who believes in Christ shall be saved, and he who believes not shall be damned. Mark 16:16. Moreover, without faith no one can keep the Law, as stated above, and as Paul testifies again in the sixth chapter and thirteenth verse: “*Not even they who receive circumcision do themselves keep the Law.*” Why not? Because they do not observe the Law willingly, but merely through fear of its threats and hope of its rewards. Since the Jews think it necessary for them to be Jews, to undertake observance of the Law strictly according to the manner of their sect, thus cleaving to Judaism with its laws, while the conscience is lettered, they must eternally perish. For, according to Paul, the conclusion is, there is no Jew nor Greek; but only Christ and Christians.

⁶¹ Now, were they first to believe in Christ and then, if they feel so disposed, to remain Jews in custom, following or omitting the practice of circumcision and observing such laws as they see fit, not presuming thereby to become righteous and to be saved, but to be saved only through the grace of Christ, as were their fathers and the patriarchs, according to Peter’s statement (Acts 15:11)—were the Jews so to proceed, observance of the Law would be no detriment to them. But they will not do thus. So firmly do they cleave to the works, the terrors and the allurements of the Law, they even condemn and persecute all who teach otherwise, who preach faith. Their predecessors, upon this same point of Law-observance, persecuted and killed the prophets under the plea of exterminating, for the sake of

God and his Law, deceivers of the people and blasphemers of the Law and of the service of God as commanded by Moses.

⁶² But note, the Jews of our day are yet more rude and arbitrary. The ancient Jews had at least the plausible excuse that they were bound by the Law of God. But our Jews—the Pope and his followers—drive us to observe things of their own invention, to laws merely human and even forbidden of God. They make a great cry about the noble virtue of obedience, teaching that without it salvation is impossible to any, but with it everyone may be saved; obedience, however, not of God's Law, but of their own laws and inventions.

If we but notice their conduct, we see plainly that their expectation of attaining righteousness and salvation is based, not upon Christian faith, but upon their works, upon the observance of their own laws, as Carthusians, Franciscans, Augustinians, Benedictines, preachers, prebendaries, vicars and so on. They even acknowledge that they regard their orders and positions as the proper medium for attaining righteousness and salvation. Plainly enough, then, their consciences cleave to works and not to the grace of Christ. Reading the words of Paul, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek,*" they yet say, "*There is, nevertheless, Carthusians, Franciscans, Benedictines, Augustinians, preachers of this and that order.*"

⁶³ At the mention of faith in Christ, the Papists exclaim: "*We know, indeed, that faith in Christ is essential, but that only through him can we become righteous and be saved, we do not believe.*" And they demand: "*What would be the use of good works at all then? Our orders and positions would be vain. You would abolish good works and the service of God. Away with such a cursed heretic! Fire here! Fire! Heretic! Heretic! Shall it be that St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Benedict, St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Anthony, have all so erred? What are you thinking about? Where did you get that diabolical faith?*" Now, is not that the manner of our saintly Jews? What, then, shall we do with them? We must take the attitude of Paul when he said to the Galatians, and repeated the statement (Galatians 1:8-9): "*Though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema.*"

⁶⁴ So we also say: "*Our preaching and the foundation of our faith, is that by faith alone, independently of the Law and of works, justification and salvation stand. And were the whole world Carthusians and taught otherwise, let it be accursed. Were the entire world barefooted friars, preachers, Augustines, Benedicts, and taught otherwise, let it be accursed. Or, again, if there were one whole world of holy Augustines, another of holy Francises, a third of holy Dominics, a fourth of holy Benedicts, a fifth of holy Anthonys, a sixth of St. Pauls, a seventh of angelic Gabriels—what then? If they teach otherwise, let them be accursed. The Word of God must stand, and emphatically Christ alone must remain.*" What more do you want?

⁶⁵ Christ said of such sects as the Papists (Matthew 24:24) that many false Christs and prophets should arise who would say, "*Lo, here is the Christ,*" or "*here,*" and these were not to be believed. They would perform signs, he said, calculated to deceive even the elect, if that were possible. Two things for a long time prevented my understanding this passage as having reference to these sects and orders. The first thing was the fact that they are so numerous; they fill the world. Had their numbers been less, I would not have hesitated to believe that the words were spoken of them. But I imagined God would not permit so many to err. I did not perceive the plain import of the text, that many shall err; for even the elect, the minority, will err with the majority. The other reason why I understood not was, there are holy persons among the sects; such as Benedict, Bernard, Augustine, Francis, Dominic

and many of their followers. I thought no error could exist in their case. I failed to perceive Christ's meaning, that the elect should stumble, should be tempted by error, though they should not continue therein.

⁶⁶ Gideon was a man strong in faith, and by faith wrought great things. Yet he was misled when he made an ephod (Judges 8:27)—when he instituted a special form of divine service and a peculiar form of apparel. Many evils later resulted from that act. According to the Scriptures, his whole race was exterminated. Why, then, should it be surprising that St. Benedict, St. Francis, St. Dominic, should err? Who can with certainty say they did not?

⁶⁷ It is possible that in their case, as is generally true in the legends of saints, the people overlooked the worthiest practices and true order of the beloved saints and seized upon the things wherein the saints as men stumbled. Their infirmities are exalted for their strength, and their strength is suppressed. Everyone is disposed to follow what is weakest and most insignificant; the worst rather than the best.

⁶⁸ Yet, if the Papists would make use of these orders and positions as things optional, not as a means of attaining righteousness and salvation, but merely as a medium of bodily exercise, of service to their neighbors and of honor to God; and if they would leave their righteousness and salvation to be secured by faith alone—if they would so do, their orders and positions would not be an intolerable injury to them. However, these things would not even then be without offense to the illiterate mass, who are led to think them the true way, to the disparagement, if not the destruction, of their faith. For faith is sensitive and precious. It is easily injured, especially by hypocritical works and practices so showy as these of the Papists.

⁶⁹ No doubt the holy fathers, in their relation to their disciples, made free and proper use of the orders; yes, with intent to increase the faith of their disciples. Otherwise the fathers would not have been really holy. But the blind Papists only mimic them. In following, they lose sight of the kernel and retain the shell; they do the works of the fathers, but forget their faith. They boastfully desire the appearance of observing the position and the orders of these holy men, and of following their example, when in reality they observe but the shadow of the fathers' religion. They are true apes, mimicking everything they see and yet remaining apes. They do not practice anything like Christian liberty. This is evident from their protest: "*Shall we not become righteous and be saved through our positions, our orders, our works? If salvation depends on faith alone, something all men have, what sought we in the cloisters? Why did we become monks? Why are we priests? What avail the masses we hold and the prayers we offer? We might as well have continued laymen.*"

You see, their own words prove them unbelievers and not Christians, and show their unwillingness to unite with all Christians; a unity to which Paul here refers, saying that all the baptized have put on Christ and are one in him. The Papists seek ways peculiar to themselves and superior to the ways of Christians. Christ is not good enough for them to put on; he is not sufficient to justify and to save them.

⁷⁰ They pervert Paul's statement and say, "*All the baptized are not one in Christ. Not only are there Jews and Greeks, but also Carthusians, barefooted friars, preachers, priests and similar orders. And these orders are true means of salvation.*" Thus they seek to find first in their own works the salvation and righteousness which should have been already theirs through baptism—in faith—as other Christians enjoy. Forgetting their Christian duties and Christian name, they assume instead

human works and human names. No longer are they called Christians, but Carthusians, Benedictines, barefooted friars, and so on.

⁷¹ Paul's reference here to the bond and the free is derived from the ancient custom—formerly common in Germany, but no longer so—making of servants bondmen whom their masters had the right to sell, and the right to deal with as they would with their beasts. They who are not such bondmen spiritually, are here called by the apostle “free.” Well might the occupants of the cloisters be called servants and bondmen, for they give themselves into the possession of men. Would God they might take some thought for themselves and let their spiritual existence be a willing incarceration; not to obtain righteousness and salvation by their bondage, but to use it as a medium for exercising these things already received through faith.

⁷² As little as the fact that you are a man or a woman contributes to or impedes your salvation, just so little is your salvation affected by your being a Carthusian or a priest, your performing certain external works and various duties, or your assuming different orders or ranks. Again, to be a woman renders you neither righteous nor wicked, even if you do all the works appropriate to a woman. Faith in Christ, independently of your womanhood and its duties and works, renders you righteous.

Being a nun does not make you spiritual nor pious. It does not save you, even though you observe most minutely all the regulations and laws, and perform all the works, pertaining to the order of nuns; indeed, not though you alone were to fulfill the combined works, the united duties, of all nuns. Faith in Christ secures to you the blessings of righteousness and salvation—faith which knows neither nuns nor monks, laymen nor priests, shoemakers nor tailors, fasts nor prayers, any more than it knows Jews and Greeks, male and female, bond and free. Faith is in all and above all, without distinction of orders and ranks, of persons and works, of gestures, customs and meats, of days, places and occupations. In short, upon none of these things depend righteousness and salvation.

Unity in Christ

⁷³ But Christians may indeed cleave to righteousness and eternal life—may believe in Christ and unite in him—no matter how different their external pursuits. Paul says, “*Ye all are one man in Christ Jesus.*” And Psalm 133:1 reads, “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.*” Again: “*God setteth the solitary in families.*” Psalm 68:6. Faith is the same experience in all, and renders all alike righteous. Such is not the case with sects and orders. There each individual adopts his own way; consequently he follows a by-path.

Where cloisters have no prelate to teach the true faith they would better be destroyed. They are only gates to perdition. It were better to leave them and learn faith elsewhere than to remain in them an hour. Continence is possible without them. Oh, the numberless snares and scandals! How many noble souls who could be easily helped must be unmercifully strangled and stifled. Wo, wo, wo to you pontiffs, bishops and all who are entrusted with the oversight of these multitudes. Here the words of Christ apply (Matthew 24:19): “*Woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days.*”

⁷⁴ Paul says, “*Ye all are one*”—just the same as one man. He would not give the idea of multitude; his meaning is: “*Ye are not many, but one. Notwithstanding your number and differences externally, notwithstanding your differences of position and occupation, things upon which righteousness and salvation do not depend; inwardly, in the matter of salvation and righteousness, ye are one. True, in the eyes of men the layman differs somewhat from the priest, the monk from the nun, the man from*

the woman; but before God there is neither layman nor priest, monk nor nun, man nor woman. One is like another in faith.” A proverb of Scripture, one generally employed by the apostles, reads, *“There is no respect of persons.”*

⁷⁵The teaching of this passage fulfils the figures in Exodus 16:18, relative to the gathering of the manna by the children of Israel. One gathered more, another less, yet afterward when they measured it by the omer, which contained the amount one was permitted to eat daily, they received an equal share, each his omer. According to the text, *“He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack.”* So should it be with us. In the matter of faith we receive alike one Christ in one omer of faith, even though one individual may hear more of the Gospel than another; so should we share in love. The advantages and blessings of all Christians ought to be common. Thus does the apostle (2 Corinthians 8:15) explain this same figure, that he who gathered much should help him who had little or nothing, and the one having little was to be supplied by the possessor of much. In such case burdens would be equal, as they were in the beginning, with the apostles.

⁷⁶ As Christ treats us in the matter of faith—manifesting his love, pouring out his blessing upon us, making us all like himself and himself like us—so must we follow him in sharing our possessions with our neighbor—if we would be Christians. Is our faith right, we certainly will so act, with willing hearts. So then, all blessings are one, and all Christians one person; and the Law is wholly fulfilled. But if we are unwilling to conduct ourselves in this Christlike way, we have not faith and we have not Christ. It is easily evident that faith is now everywhere prostrate and there are no Christians. Every corner is filled with masses and divine services—sheer idolatry.

⁷⁷ But you will say: *“By your doctrine you will suppress all the cloisters and other institutions, and give occasion for all occupants to leave them speedily, and to forsake their positions.”* I reply: These are not my words, nor my doctrine. You can see that. Go to Paul, Christ, God, about the matter. Ask them why they denounce these institutions, these practices. Among the children of Israel was likewise a singular people, called people of Baal and of Moloch. All the country and the towns were filled with their self-devised and peculiar worship. Jeremiah 2:28 and Hosea 10:1 testify that their altars and gods equaled the number of the towns. All men desired to serve God in that way. Therefore God permitted the country to be destroyed.

The holy King Josiah, in his dissatisfaction with these idolaters, cut off and destroyed all their forms of worship. 2 Kings 23:5. He did not fear the Pope’s ban; he was not afraid of having it said that he had destroyed the worship of God, as Rabshakeh charged the holy King Hezekiah with doing on a similar occasion. 2 Kings 18:22. This doctrine, however, destroys no cloisters or institutions, but teaches their right and Christian use.

⁷⁸ Mark how Paul guards either alternative, purposing to keep us squarely in the middle track. He says, *“There can be neither Jew nor Greek,”* etc. Should a Jew, with reference to this subject, say, *“If being a Jew avails nothing before God, I will let that go and take the opposite course; I will become a Greek”*—should he think thus, he finds Paul meeting him on the other side. *“No,”* Paul says, *“to be a Greek avails nothing either.”* Should the Greek conclude *“I will no longer be a Greek, I will become a Jew,”* Paul says, *“No, it avails nothing to be a Jew.”* Does the woman say, *“Would I were a man since it avails not to be a woman,”* and does the bound say, *“Would I were free since bondage avails not,”* Paul meets them with, *“To be male or female, bond or free, serves not.”* What, then, does avail? Just to turn not to either side, but to pass over, pass above, Jew and Greek, bond and

free, male and female, into faith and Christ. The way of the Jew, the Greek, are earthly ways; the way of faith is the heavenly way.

Paul says also (1 Corinthians 7:18): *“Was any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Hath any been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised.”* What is this but teaching that on one hand a Jew should not say, *“Circumcision profiting nothing, uncircumcision must avail, and I will now obtain righteousness thereby,”* and on the other hand the Gentile must not declare, *“Uncircumcision profiting nothing, if I would be saved I must be circumcised.”* “No,” Paul says, *“neither proceeding is right”*; and then he concludes (1 Corinthians 7:19): *“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God.”* In other words, First believe in Christ. Believing, the commandments of God will be honored. First be righteous and saved; then, be circumcised or uncircumcised, Jew or Greek, male or female, bond or free, do what you will, the efficacy is the same.

⁷⁹ In like manner, a nun, priest or monk should not say: *“My state avails nothing, I will leave it and become a layman.”* No, Paul says, to be a layman also avails nothing. On the other hand, if the layman says: *“O, that I were a priest, monk or nun, for my state as a layman is a secular, unsaved one,”* Paul says, no, the state of a monk, nun or priest likewise avails nothing. It is as secular and unsaved as that of a layman. What, then, does avail? To ascend above yourself, above layman, above monk and nun, above the spiritual and the secular states. To believe in Christ and do to your neighbor as you believe Christ did to you, is the only true way to godliness and salvation. There is none other.

⁸⁰ By way of a crude illustration: Suppose a lad learning the trade of shoemaking were to engage with a master foolish and knavish enough to teach him that such trade is the medium for obtaining righteousness and salvation; and suppose the boy were to believe him and to prosecute his trade under the impression that he will surely be saved thereby, and only so can he be saved, and were to forsake faith, love and all other means of salvation—how would you look at the case? Would you not pity the boy? Would not the master incur your displeasure? Now, how would you help the boy? Would you say: *“My dear son, the trade of shoemaking does not render you righteous. It avails nothing in heaven. You must become a tailor”*? That would be but to lead him from one hell to another. You would be just about as godly as that master. Just so do they do who advise a priest to become a monk, or a monk to enter some more difficult order. They thus cast souls and consciences from one frying-pan into another. The way to help the boy is to say to him: *“My dear son, neither shoemaking nor tailoring counts in this matter. You must believe in Christ and then treat your neighbor as you believe Christ has treated you. Then you may be a shoemaker, a tailor, as you please.”*

Now you have liberated his soul. Now his conscience will have joy and peace. He will thank God and you. He will not need to abandon his trade; no, he may follow it with more pleasure and freedom than before. Christ does not release our hands from labor, our persons from office, our bodies from position or rank. He redeems the soul from a false experience and the conscience from a false faith. He is a redeemer of consciences; a bishop of souls, as Peter says (1 Peter 2:25). Yet he permits our hands to continue their labors; he allows us to retain our offices and positions.

⁸¹ So, too, do thou, O priest, monk or nun. Believe not those who teach you that your position, your rank, is a means whereby to become righteous and be saved. They are but blind leaders of the blind; messengers of the devil and murderers of souls. Learn first that the true way is to believe in Christ and to serve your neighbor. Then remain steadfast where you are.

⁸² You will say, “*But I took clerical orders because I wanted to be righteous and to be saved thereby. Otherwise I would not have taken the step. I believe not one in a thousand entered this station with any other intention. If people knew your teaching to be true, certainly no one would enter the clerical ranks, and in thirty years’ time every cloister and similar institution would pass of itself, needing not to be destroyed.*” I answer: Think you, then, that Christ spoke irresponsibly or foolishly when he said the false Christs would deceive many, even the elect if it were possible (Matthew 24:24)? Peter also prophesies (2 Peter 2:2) that many shall follow these damnable sects. Is it astonishing that Christ spoke the truth? Will you believe the inventions of your own mind rather than the words of Christ?

⁸³ Mark you, then, where the clerical state is not made use of to further faith and love in the way mentioned, I would, not only that my doctrines should be the means of destroying the cloisters and other institutions, but I would they already lay in ashes. If you can, through the doctrine of faith, liberate your conscience and your soul and at the same time make use of your clerical state, not as a supposed means of obtaining righteousness and eternal life, but as a medium for exercising your faith over your body, and for serving your neighbor—if you can do thus, then remain in your order; you need not to flee from it. But if you cannot do this, if your conscience remains captive, it were better you tore your caps and pates, forsook your masses and prayers forever and became a swineherd—if you could not do better. For nothing in heaven or on earth should keep us from liberating our souls, from freeing our consciences.

⁸⁴ Should one reproach you as an apostate, a turn-coat, a vagabond monk, endure it, thinking of Christ’s words (Matthew 7:3) about one with a beam in his eye rebuking another with a mote in his. You are an apostate from men, they from God; you forsook men for God, they forsook God for themselves and for men.

⁸⁵ Be careful, however, not to deceive yourself and forsake your position from wrong motives. Your old Adam nature is very ready to adorn itself, and will take a yard if you allow it a finger-breadth. You may deceive men, but you cannot God. If you leave your station merely for the purpose of a free life, and to be liberated from your order, and not solely because you seek to liberate your conscience, you have not followed my teaching. I have not thus advised you. This I desire you to understand. According to the doctrine you can remain in your orders and maintain a liberated conscience. Recall the illustration of the boy shoemaker I gave you. But, if you are so weak that you cannot maintain a free conscience, it is better to be far from your order.

⁸⁶ In short, one of two things is offered: you must either cast aside your theory or you must get out of the order altogether. Faith will not tolerate the idea of your obtaining righteousness and salvation by the religious life of your order or position. But since faith tolerates the order, it is better to forsake the idea than the order. Otherwise, later the remorse of conscience, because of the forsaken order (if the idea is not dead) might equal a desire of having remained in the order. Aim must be directed solely at the head of the serpent—the false idea. With that disposed of, with men divested of the idea of righteousness and eternal life attainable through works and orders, all danger and dread would be dissipated.

⁸⁷ The serpent protects her head with extreme care. Christ teaches us to be likewise careful of our heads where he says (Matthew 10:16), “*Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*” The serpent will expose all the rest of her anatomy, will risk all, to preserve her head, wherein is her life. We should likewise be careful of our head—faith—and risk all for it, whatever the consequences, for in that is our life. The evil spirit seeks to destroy faith by its showy orders and stations. Further, when

we bruise the head of the serpent, when we destroy our own ideas, which are our false faith resting upon works, all else is harmless to us. Christ called the Pharisees a generation of vipers (Matthew 12:13) because of their tenacious adherence to their works and their opinions. Were we to secure our heads as do serpents, and were we as wise in our ways as are the children of the world in theirs, the simplicity of the dove would naturally follow; we would embrace no external works, positions or orders.

⁸⁸ The greatest fault, however, is not that of Pilate, but of Caiaphas who delivered Christ into Pilate's hands. Caiaphas represents the Pope, the bishops, and the doctors of the high schools, whose duty as shepherds is to prevent destruction, yet who, like wolves, themselves devour the sheep. While they should preserve the faith, they exterminate it. Not only do they permit the rise of orders and stations, but they institute these things. They establish and exalt them. They repose the head of the serpent upon silken pillows and feed her to fullness. They have introduced into the world two principles and inculcated them into men's hearts to the extent of making it impossible for the Christian faith to live. One is, "*The clerical state represents perfection.*" By this claim they have effected such disparity between themselves and ordinary Christians that almost exclusively they have been regarded the Christians, and the common people unworthy, even reprobate, domestics. Thus they have commanded everybody's gaze and attention. All men have come flocking into the order, desiring to be perfect and scorning as unprofitable the common walks of life; until they have come to think that no one can become righteous and be saved unless he embraces a clerical order.

⁸⁹ Thus faith has been neglected for works and orders, as if on these depend not only our righteousness and salvation, but the perfection of our character. The fact is, however, all depends on faith. By faith alone do we attain righteousness and perfection. What a banner the infernal Satan hoisted at this point! With the introduction and establishment of the doctrine of works he unquestionably scaled the citadel of Christianity. Blindly the frantic multitude ever goes on about perfection, knowing nothing whatever of piety even, not to mention perfection, and thinking to become perfect by works and orders.

⁹⁰ Further, they have left an ample loophole for themselves by saying: "*Actual perfection and a state of perfection are different things. Man may be in a state of perfection and yet not be perfect. That is, he may be a clergyman and still not be holy. They of the clerical order generally, are in a state of perfection, yet none of them have become perfect.*" The clergy also quote St. Thomas of Aquin, who teaches that perfection is not necessary; that it is sufficient to be in a state of perfection and looking toward that end.

Therefore the multitude today accepts the principle that one may occupy a perfect state and not be perfect; and that perfection is not necessary—only the striving for it. Blind, frantic, foolish and mad, emphatically so, are the people. Do we not all know that a monk may wear a cap and pate and at the same time be a rogue at heart? In a state of perfection, he is yet not perfect. A "*state of perfection*" now means monk, cap and pate. But let these erring teachers lead the blind. Christ says they are blind leaders of the blind. If St. Thomas Aquinas was holy—which I doubt—he surely attained his holiness in an extraordinary way, judging from his pernicious and poisonous doctrines.

⁹¹ The other principle of the Papists is: "*The Gospel consists of two things, *consilia et praecepta,*" counsels and commandments. In the entire Gospel Christ has presented but one counsel—chastity; and this may be observed as well in the laical state by any individual having sufficient grace. But the clerical order has instituted twelve counsels in the Gospel, proceeding according to their own

pleasure with reference to the Gospel. They have made a division of the world into two classes, their own lives to be directed by the counsels and the lives of the laity by the commandments. They have assumed to live superior to the commandments of God. Consequently, the life of the ordinary Christian, the life of faith, has become repulsive. All men gaze after the clerical ranks, despise the commandments and run after the counsels.

⁹² In the end they find the counsels to be human laws relating to clothing and pates, to meats, to singing and reading, and so on. Thereupon neglect of the commandments of God follows neglect of faith; both are exterminated and forgotten. Today to be perfect and to live according to the counsels is to put on black or white or gray or marked caps; to bawl in the churches; to shave the head; to eat no eggs, meat or butter, but at the same time to fare sumptuously and to live an idle, extravagant life.

⁹³ Such a result, mark you, Satan has desired to accomplish through the two principles mentioned. The first exterminates faith and the whole New Testament, Christ included. The second destroys the commandments and the entire Old Testament, with Moses. The people who teach these principles are they concerning whom all Scripture testifies that in the end of the world they shall reign under Antichrist. Two principles more pernicious and virulent were never advanced on earth—principles that so speedily and forcibly expel from the knowledge of the world the entire Scriptures of God, until none know what commandment or Gospel is. The Gospel does not present commandments; it shows the impossibility of fulfilling them, and teaches faith in Christ, through which they are fulfilled. I would that all the cloisters were supplied with ministers who preach the true doctrine of faith, or else that the cloisters were laid in ashes. For there is no medium condition, as there is with the laity; the layman does not regard the works of his station as productive of righteousness and salvation. The clergy, however, cannot sustain themselves without that false doctrine. There is no alternative; right or wrong they must put their trust in their works.

Now, let this suffice here in the matter of the sects. Alas, that their corruption warrants so much comment. I hardly know if it will be of use that we understand again the plain words of Paul:

“And if ye are Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise.”

⁹⁴ How is it that all who put on Christ, who are his, are in consequence the seed and the heirs of Abraham when perhaps they are not of Jewish descent? It is clear enough from the explanation of the preceding verses that all who, through baptism and faith, put on Christ are his and he is theirs. Now, being all one in Christ and one with him—spiritually, not bodily—they must be all that Christ is and possess all he possesses. Christ being Abraham’s seed, they must through him also be Abraham’s spiritual seed. In the same manner in which they possess Christ are they Abraham’s seed. They possess Christ not bodily, in flesh and blood; but spiritually, in faith. Hence they are not bodily, but spiritually, his seed.

⁹⁵ Note here, the apostle ascribes to Abraham three kinds of seed. First, there are those only physically his children, having in him a flesh-and-blood origin, merely by the law of nature. With them God has no more dealing than with the heathen, as illustrated in the case of Ishmael. Although of Abraham’s flesh and blood, even his first-born son, Ishmael nevertheless was not in the Scriptures reckoned among Abraham’s children. Again, Esau was Isaac’s natural son, and Abraham’s flesh and blood. Later many of Israel, all of them Abraham’s flesh-and-blood children, were destroyed in the wilderness. And subsequently many others have been condemned. The Jews are for the most part still under condemnation.

Believers the True Seed of Abraham

⁹⁶ Second, there are those both physically and spiritually Abraham's children, having not only the flesh and blood but the spirit and faith of Abraham—Isaac, Jacob, the patriarchs, the prophets and all the blessed of the people of Israel. These are the true seed, with whom God deals. This seed he delivered from Egypt, led into the land of Canaan and favored with blessings innumerable, as the Scriptures testify. For the sake of this class he tolerated among them the seed merely physical, permitting the latter to enjoy similar temporal blessings. They to whom Abraham was a spiritual father through the faith of Christ, were his spiritual children, irrespective of their natural relationship.

Of this class of seed, Christ is the head. In him Abraham himself, as well as all his seed, his brethren and joint-heirs, is blessed. Now, this text refers to the seed spoken of in Genesis 12:3 and Genesis 22:18, "*In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*" The prophecy is fulfilled in Christ. This class are wholly with Christ and in Christ, and Christ is with them and in them—one seed. Christ is blessed of God. Joint seed with Christ are blessed through him. The heathen are blessed through the apostles, and the Jews through Christ, which Jews are joint-seed with Christ.

⁹⁷ Third, there are those who have not a flesh-and-blood origin in Abraham, but possess his spiritual character—his faith in Christ his seed. This class is represented by ourselves and all gentiles who are Christians in the true faith. While unbelief is powerful enough to separate even natural flesh-and-blood children from Abraham's relationship, until the Scriptures do not recognize them as Abraham's seed and the children of God; on the other hand, faith is more powerful, even unto constituting them true seed of Abraham who are not of his flesh and blood but who merely have the faith of Abraham, partaking of his spiritual character. Concerning this matter St. Paul speaks in Romans 4:13, Romans 9:8 and Galatians 3. This class of seed is indicated in the promise God makes to Abraham, "*In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*"

⁹⁸ If the nations are to receive this blessing they must become like the seed of Abraham. Abraham and his seed have naught but the blessing. If the inheritance, the chief good, the blessing, is possessed alike by Abraham's seed and by all the nations of earth, all must alike be reckoned heirs, seed and children of Abraham, whether deriving physical existence from him or not. Therefore, the conclusion is that Abraham's seed are only the believers. In the Scriptures believers are reckoned as his seed. To this inference are we forced by God's promise that Abraham's seed shall be blessed and shall be a blessing to others. According to the words of the promise, the blessing must be to all who are seed and heirs of Abraham.

Now, no one is blessed unless he believes. The unbeliever remains under the curse. Well may Paul, then, call the spiritual seed of Abraham the seed of the promise (Romans 4:13 and Romans 9:8). That is, they are not the seed of the flesh, but of faith. They are so designated in the promise. He says (Romans 9:8): "*It is not the children of the flesh that are children of God; but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed.*" With this statement accords John 1:13: "*Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*"

⁹⁹ Now you understand the apostle's meaning here when he says, "*If ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise.*" In other words: "*Ye are not the natural seed of Abraham. That would profit you nothing; it profits no one. But ye are his promised seed. Upon that all efficacy depends.*" Abraham has no seed other than the promised blessed seed—God grant these—whether or no of flesh-and-blood origin in him. We must understand Abraham's seed in a scriptural, not in a natural, sense. The Scriptures regard not natural origin. They recognize alike all

who are blessed and who believe, whether natural seed or not. Yet God foresaw there would undoubtedly be children of the blessing among the natural seed; not children in consequence of their nature, but for the sake of election through grace.

¹⁰⁰ You must properly comprehend the phrase “*Abraham’s seed and heirs*” in the light of the preceding epistle, as opposed to self-righteousness, recognizing that righteousness is not obtained by works, but must precede and induce them. The heir does not work to obtain the inheritance. He does not seek the inheritance as a reward. He already possesses it, and appropriates it with his works. Likewise the believer is already righteous and just, and saved besides, without works—through the grace conferred by faith. The works performed subsequent to believing are but the exercise of his inheritance.

¹⁰¹ Further, in believing, you must feel yourself an heir. You must confidently regard yourself a child of God. If you doubt on this point, you are not a child; you are not an heir; you do not rightly believe. You must not doubt your heirship, whether in life or death. What is the Christian life but the beginning of eternal life? However, at your least intimation that you are a child of God, your acknowledgement of your faith, Caiaphas, as if doing God great service, will rend his garments and exclaim over you “*He blasphemeth God!*” And all will say with him: “*He is worthy of death. We have a law, and according to this law he shall die. He has made himself a child of God. Crucify him! Crucify him! He is a heretic and a deceiver.*” (See John 19:7, 15.) Look for this to be said of you; prepare for it. For so it must be.

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 Louis-Walch and the Erlangen editions of Luther’s works. It was translated into English by Andrew George Voigt (1859-1933) 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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