

## A TREATISE ON CHRISTIAN LIBERTY\*

by  
Martin Luther

### INTRODUCTION: The Twofold Nature of Man

(1) Many have thought Christian faith to be an easy thing, and not a few have given it a place among the virtues. This they do because they have had no experience of it, and have never tasted what great virtue there is in faith. For it is impossible that anyone should write well of it or well understand what is correctly written of it, unless he has at some time tasted the courage faith gives a man when trials oppress him. But he who has had even a faint taste of it can never write, speak, meditate, or hear enough concerning it. For it is a living fountain springing up into life everlasting, as Christ calls it in John 4. For my part, although I have no wealth of faith to boast of and know how scant my store is, yet I hope that driven about by great and various temptations, I have attained to a little faith and that I can speak of it, if not more elegantly, certainly more to the point, than those literalists and all too subtle disputants have hitherto done, who have not even understood what they have written.

(2) That I may make the way easier for the unlearned—for only such do I serve—I set down first these two propositions concerning the liberty and the bondage of the spirit:

*A Christian man is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.*

*A Christian man is a perfectly dutiful subject of all, subject to all.*

Although these two theses seem to contradict each other, yet, if they should be found to fit together they would serve our purpose beautifully. For they are both Paul's own, who says, in I Corinthians 9, "Whereas I was free, I made myself the servant of all," and Romans 8, "Owe no man anything, but to love one another." Now love by its very nature is ready to serve and to be subject to him who is loved. So Christ, although Lord of all, was made of a woman, made under the law, and hence was at the same time free and a servant, at the same time in the form of God and in the form of a servant.

(3) Let us start, however, with something more remote from our subject but more obvious. Man has a twofold nature, a spiritual and a bodily. According to the spiritual nature which men call the soul, he is called a spiritual, or inner, or new man; according to the bodily nature, which men call the flesh, he is called a carnal, or outward, or old man, of whom the Apostle writes, in II Corinthians 4, "Though our outward man is corrupted, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." Because of this diversity of nature the Scriptures assert contradictory things of the same man, since these two men contradict each other, since the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh [Galatians 5].

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\*Luther wrote this essay and sent it, along with a letter to Pope Leo X in 1520 at the instigation of parties interested in making one more attempt to reconcile the differences between the rebelling monk and the See of Rome. Luther deals with the problem which the times gave to him—that of a life of trust in God issuing in a radical concern, not for the salvation of the self, but for the neighbor over against a conception of life that was finally oriented toward the self in an effort to win the eternal salvation of the soul through works of righteousness. Luther said of this essay, "unless I am deceived, it is the whole of Christian living in brief form." For the sake of clarity and brevity the article has been considerably condensed. In doing so, however, effort was made to preserve the structure of the whole work. For the convenience of the student, it has been broken into sections and headings added, which are the work of the editor.

## Part One—THE INWARD MAN: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

### Free Lord of All, Subject to None

#### I. The Necessity of Faith: Source of Christian Liberty and Righteousness

First, let us contemplate the inward man, to see how a righteous, free and truly Christian man, that is, a new, spiritual, inward man, comes into being.

##### A. *Works: The Irrelevance of External Things*

It is evident that no external thing, whatsoever it be, has any influence whatever in producing Christian righteousness or liberty, nor in producing unrighteousness or bondage. A simple argument will furnish the proof. What can it profit the soul if the body fare well, be free and active, eat, drink, and do as it pleases? For in these things even the most godless slaves of all the vices fare well. On the other hand, how will ill health or imprisonment or hunger or thirst or any other external misfortune hurt the soul? With these things even the most godly men are afflicted, and those who because of a clear conscience are most free. None of these things touch either the liberty or the bondage of the soul. The soul receives no benefit if the body is adorned with the sacred robes of the priesthood, or dwells in sacred places, or is occupied with sacred duties, or prays, fasts, abstains from certain kinds of food, or does any work whatsoever that can be done by the body and in the body. The righteousness and the freedom of the soul demand something far different, since the things which have been mentioned could be done by any wicked man, and such works produce nothing but hypocrites. On the other hand, it will not hurt the soul if the body is clothed in secular dress, dwells in unconsecrated places, eats and drinks as others do, does not pray aloud, and neglects to do all the things mentioned above, which hypocrites can do.

Further, to put aside all manner of works, even contemplation, meditation, and all that the soul can do, avail nothing.

##### B. *Faith: The One Necessary Thing*

One thing and one only is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and liberty. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the Gospel of Christ. The soul can do without all things except the Word of God, and where this is not, there is no help for the soul in anything else whatever. But if it has the Word it is rich and lacks nothing, since this Word is the Word of Life, of truth, of light, of peace, of righteousness, of salvation, of joy, of liberty, of wisdom, of power, of grace, of glory, and of every blessing beyond our power to estimate. On the other hand, there is no more terrible plague with which the wrath of God can smite men than the famine of hearing of His Word. Nor was Christ sent into the world for any other ministry but that of the Word, and the whole spiritual estate, apostles, bishops and all the priests, has been called and instituted only for the ministry of the Word.

You ask, "What then is this Word of God, and how shall it be used, since there are so many words of God?" I answer, the Apostle explains that in Romans 1. The Word is the Gospel of God concerning His Son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who sanctifies. For to preach Christ means to feed the soul, to make it righteous, to set it free, and to save it, if it believe the preaching.

For faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the Word of God. "The just shall live by faith." The Word of God cannot be received and cherished by any works whatever, but only by faith. Hence it is clear that, as the soul needs only the Word for its life and righteousness, so it is justified by

faith alone and not by any works; for if it could be justified by anything else, it would not need the Word, and therefore it would not need faith. But this faith cannot at all exist in connection with works, that is to say, if you at the same time claim to be justified by works, whatever their character, for that would be to halt between the two sides, to worship Baal and to kiss the hand, which, as Job says, is a very great iniquity. Therefore, the moment you begin to believe, you learn that all things in you are altogether blameworthy, sinful, and damnable, as Romans 3 says, "For all have sinned and lack the glory of God"; and again, "There is none just, there is none that doeth good, all have turned out of the way: they are become unprofitable altogether." When you have learned this, you will know that you need Christ, who suffered and rose again for you, that believing in Him, you may through this faith become a new man, in that all your sins are forgiven, and you are justified by the merits of another, namely, of Christ alone.

Since, therefore, this faith can rule only in the inward man, as Romans 10 says, "With the heart we believe unto righteousness"; and since faith alone justifies, it is clear that the inward man cannot be justified, made free, and be saved by any outward work or dealing whatsoever, and that works, whatever their character, have nothing to do with this inward man. On the other hand, only ungodliness and unbelief of heart, and no outward work make him guilty and a damnable servant of sin. Wherefore it ought to be the first concern of every Christian to lay aside all trust in works, and more and more to strengthen faith alone, and through faith to grow in the knowledge, not of works, but of Christ Jesus, who suffered and rose for him.

## II. The Benefits of Faith: Nature of Christian Liberty and Righteousness

Should you ask how it comes that faith alone justifies and without works offers us such a treasury of great benefits, when so many works, ceremonies and laws are prescribed in the Scriptures, I answer:

### A. *Commands and Promises: Freedom from the Law*

First of all, remember what has been said, faith alone, without works, justifies and makes free and saves, as we shall later make still more clear.

(1) Here we must point out that all the Scriptures of God are divided into two parts—commands and promises. The commands indeed teach things that are good, but the things taught are not done as soon as taught; for the commands show us what we ought to do, but do not give us the power to do it; they are intended to teach a man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inabilities to do good and may despair of his powers. That is why they are called and are the Old Testament. For example: "thou shalt not covet" is a command which convicts us all of being sinners, since no one is able to avoid coveting, however much he may struggle against it. Therefore, in order not to covet, and to fulfill the command, a man is compelled to despair of himself, and to seek elsewhere and from someone else to help which he does not find in himself. But when a man through the commands has learned to know his weakness, and has become troubled as to how he may satisfy the law, since the law must be fulfilled so that not a jot or tittle shall perish, otherwise man will be condemned without hope, then being truly humbled and reduced to nothing in his own eyes, he finds in himself no means of justification and salvation.

(2) Here the second part of the Scriptures stands ready—the promises of God, which declare the glory of God and say, "If you wish to fulfill the law, and not to covet, as the law demands, come, believe in Christ, in whom grace, righteousness, peace, liberty and all things are promised you; if you believe you shall have all, if you believe not, you shall lack all." For what is possible for you in all the works of the law, many as they are, but all useless, you will accomplish in a short and easy way

through faith. For God our Father has made all things depend on faith, so that whoever has faith, shall have all, and whoever has it not, shall have nothing. "For He has concluded all under unbelief, that He might have mercy on all," [Romans 11]. Thus the promises of God give what the commands of God ask, and fulfill what the law prescribes, that all things may be of God alone, both the commands and the fulfilling of the commands. He alone commands, He also alone fulfills. Therefore, the promises of God belong to the New Testament, nay, they are the New Testament.

And since these promises of God are holy, true, righteous, free and peaceful words, full of all goodness, it comes to pass that the soul which clings to them with a firm faith is so united with them, nay, altogether taken up into them, that it not only shares in all their power, but is saturated and made drunken with it.

(3) From what has been said it is easily seen whence faith has such great power, and why no good work nor all good works together can equal it: no work can cling to the Word of God nor be in the soul; in the soul faith alone and the Word have sway. As the Word is, so it makes the soul, as heated iron glows like fire because of the union of fire with it. It is clear then that a Christian man has in his faith all that he needs, and needs no works to justify him. And if he has no need of works, neither does he need the law; and if he has no need of the law, surely he is free from the law, and it is true, "the law is not made for a righteous man." And this is that Christian liberty, even our faith which does not indeed cause us to live in idleness or in wickedness, but makes the law and the works unnecessary for any man's righteousness and salvation.

#### *B. Highest Worship: Freedom and Disobedience*

(1) This is the first power of faith. Let us now examine the second also. For it is a further function of faith, that whom it trusts it also honors with the most reverent and high regard, since it considers him truthful and trustworthy. So when the soul firmly trusts God's promises, it regards Him as truthful and righteous, than which nothing more excellent can be ascribed to God. This is the very highest worship of God, that we ascribe to Him truthfulness, righteousness, and whatever else ought to be ascribed to one who is trusted. Then the soul consents to all His will, then it hallows His name and suffers itself to be dealt with according to God's good pleasure, because clinging to God's promises, it does not doubt that He, who is true, just and wise, will do, dispose, and provide all things well. And is not such a soul, by this faith, in all things most obedient to God? What commandment is there that such obedience has not abundantly fulfilled? What more complete fulfillment is there than obedience in all things? But this obedience is not rendered by works, but by faith alone. On the other hand, what greater rebellion against God, what greater wickedness, what greater contempt of God is there than not believing His promises: For what is this but to make God a liar or to doubt that He is truthful?—that is, to ascribe truthfulness to one's self, but to God lying and vanity? Does not a man who does this deny God, and in his heart set up himself as his own idol? Then of what avail are works done in such wickedness, even if they were the works of angels and apostles? Rightly, therefore, has God concluded all—not in anger or lust, but in unbelief; so that they who imagine that they are fulfilling the law by doing the works of chastity and mercy required by law (the civil and human virtues) might not be confident that they will be saved; they are included under the sin of unbelief, and must either seek mercy or be justly condemned.

(2) But when God sees that we count Him to be true, and by the faith of our heart pay Him the great honor which is due Him, He in turn does us the great honor of counting us true, and righteous for our faith's sake. For faith works truth and righteousness by giving to God what belongs to Him; therefore, God in turn gives glory to our righteousness. Abraham's faith was counted unto him for righteousness, because by it he most perfectly gave glory to God, and that for the same reason our faith shall be counted unto us for righteousness if we believe.

### *C. Union with Christ: Freedom from Condemnation*

(1) The third incomparable benefit of faith is this, that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. And by this mystery as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the Soul become one flesh. And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage, nay, by far the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but frail types of this one true marriage, it follows that all they have, they have in common, the good as well as the evil, so that the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as if it were its own, and whatever the soul has, Christ claims as His own. Let us compare these and we shall see things that cannot be estimated. Christ is full of grace, life and salvation; the soul is full of sins, death, and condemnation. Now let faith come between them, and it shall come to pass that sins, death, and damnation are Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation are the soul's. For it behooves Him, if He is bridegroom, to take upon Himself the things which are His bride's and to bestow upon her the things that are His. For if He gives her His body and His very self, how shall He not give her all that is His? And if He takes the body of the bride, how shall He not take all that is hers?

(2) From this you see once more why so much is ascribed to faith that it alone may fulfill the law and justify without works. You see that the First Commandment which says, "Thou shalt worship one God," is fulfilled by faith alone. For though you were nothing but good works from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head, yet you would not be righteous, nor worship God, nor fulfill the First Commandment, since God cannot be worshipped unless you ascribe to Him the glory of truthfulness and of all goodness, which is due Him. And this cannot be done by works, but only by the faith of the heart. For not by the doing of works but by believing, do we glorify God and acknowledge that He is truthful. Therefore, faith alone is the righteousness of a Christian man and the fulfilling of all the commandments. For he who fulfills the First, has no difficulty in fulfilling all the rest. But works being insensate things, cannot glorify God, although they can, if faith be present, be done to the glory of God. At present, however, we are not inquiring what works and what sort of works are done, but who it is that does them, who glorifies God and brings forth the works. This is faith which dwells in the heart, and is the head and substance of all our righteousness. Hence, it is a blind and dangerous doctrine which teaches, that the commandments must be fulfilled before any works can be done, and the works proceed from the fulfillment of the commandments as we shall hear.

### *D. Kingship and Priesthood: Freedom from all Things*

But that we may look more deeply into that grace which our inward man has in Christ, we must consider that in the Old Testament, God sanctified to Himself every first-born male, and the birthright was highly prized, having a two-fold honor, that of priesthood, and that of kingship. For the first-born brother was priest and lord over all the others, and was a type of Christ, the true and only First-born of God the Father and of the Virgin Mary, and true King and Priest, not after the fashion of the flesh and of the world. For His kingdom is not of this world. He reigns in heavenly and spiritual things and consecrates them—such as righteousness, truth, wisdom, peace, salvation, etc. Now just as Christ by his birthright obtained these two prerogatives, so He imparts them to and shares them with everyone who believes on Him according to the law of the aforesaid marriage, by which the wife owns whatever belongs to the husband. Hence we are all priests and kings in Christ, as many as believe on Christ, as I Peter says, "Ye are a chosen generation, a peculiar people, a royal priesthood and priestly kingdom, that ye should show forth the virtues of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

This priesthood and kingship we explain as follows: First, as to the kingship, every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that by a spiritual power he is lord of all things without exception, so that nothing can do him any harm whatever, nay, all things are made subject to him and compelled

to serve him to his salvation. Thus Paul says in Romans 8, "All things work together for good to them who are called." And in I Corinthians 3, "All things are yours, whether life or death, or things present or things to come, and ye are Christ's. Not as if every Christian were set over all things, to possess and control them by physical power—a madness with which some churchmen are afflicted—for such power belongs to kings, princes, and men on earth. Our ordinary experience in life shows us that we are subjected to all, suffer many things and even die; nay, the more Christian a man is, the more evils, sufferings, and deaths is he made subject to, as we see in Christ the first-born Prince Himself, and in all His brethren, the saints. The power of which we speak is spiritual; it rules in the midst of enemies, and is mighty in the midst of oppression, which means nothing else than that strength is made perfect in weakness, and that in all things I can find profit unto salvation, so that the cross and death itself are compelled to serve me and to work together with me for my salvation. This is a splendid prerogative and hard to attain, and a true omnipotent power, a spiritual dominion, in which there is nothing so good and nothing so evil, but that it shall work together for good to me, if only I believe. And yet, since faith alone suffices for salvation, I have need of nothing, except that faith exercise the power and dominion of its own liberty. Lo, this is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.

Not only are we the freest of kings, we are also priests forever, which is far more excellent than being kings, because as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another the things of God. For these are the functions of priests, and cannot be granted to any unbeliever. Thus Christ has obtained for us, if we believe on Him, that we are not only His brethren, co-heirs and fellow-kings with Him, but also fellow-priests with Him, who may boldly come into the presence of God in the spirit of faith and cry, "Abba, Father!" pray for one another and do all things which we see done and pre-figured in the outward and visible works of priests. But he who does not believe is not served by anything, nor does anything work for good to him, but he himself is a servant of all, and all things become evils to him, because he wickedly uses them to his own profit and not to the glory of God. And so he is no priest, but a profane man, whose prayer becomes sin and never comes into the presence of God, because God does not hear sinners. Who then can comprehend the lofty dignity of the Christian? Through his kingly power he rules over all things, death, life, and sin, and through his priestly glory is all-powerful with God, because God does the things which he asks and desires, as it is written, "He will fulfill the desires of them that fear Him: He also will hear their cry, and will save them." To this glory a man attains, surely not by any works of his, but by faith alone.

From this anyone can clearly see how a Christian man is free from all things and over all things, so that he needs no works to make him righteous and to save him, since faith alone confers all these things abundantly. But should he grow so foolish as to presume to become righteous, free, saved, and a Christian by means of some good work, he would on the instant lose faith and all its benefits: a foolishness aptly illustrated in the fable of the dog who runs along a stream with a piece of meat in his mouth, and deceived by the reflection of the meat in the water, opens his mouth to snap at it, and so loses both the meat and the reflection.

### III. Summary: Proclamation and Response

#### A. *The Christ and My Christ*

I believe it has now become clear that it is not enough, nor is it Christian, to preach the works, life, and words of Christ as historical facts, as if the knowledge of these would suffice for the conduct of life, although this is the fashion of those who must today be regarded as our best preachers; and far less is it enough or Christian to say nothing at all about Christ and to teach instead the laws of men and the decrees of the Fathers. And now there are not a few who preach Christ and read about Him that they may move men's affections to sympathy with Christ, to anger against the Jews and such like childish and womanish nonsense.

Rather, ought Christ to be preached to the end that faith in Him may be established, that He may not only be Christ, but be Christ for thee and for me, and that what is said of Him and what His Name denotes may be effectual in us. And such faith is produced and preserved in us by preaching why Christ came, what He brought and bestowed, what benefit it is to us to accept Him. This is done when that Christian liberty which He bestows is rightly taught, and we are told in what way we who are Christians are all kings and priests and so are lords of all, and may firmly believe that whatever we have done is pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God as I have said.

### *B. The Victory and Our Victory*

What man is there whose heart, hearing these things, will not rejoice to its very core, and in receiving such comfort grow tender so as to love Christ, as he never could be made to love by any laws or works? Who would have power to harm such a heart or to make it afraid? If the knowledge of sin or the fear of death break in upon it, it is ready to hope in the Lord, it does not grow afraid when it hears tidings of evil, it is not disturbed when it sees its enemies. For it believes that the righteousness of Christ is its own, and that its sin is not its own, but Christ's; and that all sin is swallowed up by the righteousness of Christ and is, as has been said above, a necessary consequence of faith in Christ. So the heart learns to scoff at death and sin, and to say with the Apostle, "Where, O death, is thy victory? where, O death is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." For death is swallowed up not only in the victory of Christ, but also by our victory, because through faith His victory has become ours, and in that faith we also are conquerors.

Let this suffice concerning the inward man, his liberty and its source, the righteousness of faith, which needs neither laws nor good works, nay, is rather injured by them, if a man trusts that he is justified by them.

## **Part Two—THE OUTWARD MAN: FAITH WORKING BY LOVE**

### **Dutiful Servant of All, Subject to All**

Now let us turn to the second part, to the outward man. Here we shall answer all those who, misled by the word "faith" and by all that has been said, now say: "If faith does all things and is alone sufficient unto righteousness, why then are good works commanded? We will take our ease and do no works, and be content with faith." I answer, not so, ye wicked man, not so. That would indeed be proper, if we were wholly inward and perfectly spiritual men; but such we shall be only at the last day, the day of the resurrection of the dead. As long as we live in the flesh we only begin and make some progress in that which shall be perfected in the future life. For this reason the Apostle, in Romans 8, calls all that we attain in this life "the first fruits" of the spirit, because, forsooth, we shall receive the greater portion, even the fulness of the spirit, in the future. This is the place for that which was said above, that a Christian man is the servant of all and made subject to all. For in so far as he is free he does no works, but in so far as he is a servant he does all manner of works. How this is possible we shall see.

### **I. The Body: Works of Self-Discipline**

#### *A. Contrary Will: Good Works for the Body*

Although, as I have said, a man is abundantly justified by faith inwardly, in his spirit, and so has all that he ought to have, except in so far as this faith and riches must grow from day to day even unto the future life: yet he remains in this mortal life on earth, and in this life he must needs govern his

own body and have dealings with men. Here the works begin; here a man cannot take his ease; here he must, indeed, take care to discipline his body by fastings, watchings, labors, and other reasonable discipline, and to make it subject to the spirit so that it will obey and conform to the inward man and to faith, and not revolt against faith and hinder the inward man, as it is the body's nature to do if it be not held in check. For the inward man, who by faith is created in the likeness of God, is both joyful and happy because of Christ in whom so many benefits are conferred upon him, and therefore it is his one occupation to serve God joyfully and for naught, in love that is not constrained.

While he is doing this, lo, he meets a contrary will in his own flesh, which strives to serve the world and to seek its own advantage. This the spirit of faith cannot tolerate, and with joyful zeal it attempts to put the body under and to hold it in check, as Paul says in Romans 7, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin"; and, in another place, "I pommel my body, and bring it into subjection: lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway," and in Galatians, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its lusts."

#### *B. Trees and Fruit: Good Works in General*

In doing these works, however, we must not think that a man is justified before God by them: for that erroneous opinion, faith, which alone is righteousness before God, cannot endure; but we must think that these works reduce the body to subjection and purify it of its evil lusts, and our whole purpose is to be directed only toward the driving out of lusts. For since by faith the soul is cleansed and made a lover of God, it desires that all things, and especially its own body, shall be as pure as itself, so that all things may join with it in loving and praising God. Hence a man cannot be idle, because the need of his body drives him and he is compelled to do many good works to reduce it to subjection. Nevertheless, the works themselves do not justify him before God, but he does the works out of spontaneous love in obedience to God, and considers nothing except the approval of God, whom he would in all things most scrupulously obey.

These two sayings, therefore, are true: "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works; evil works do not make a wicked man, but a wicked man does evil works"; so that it is always necessary that the "substance" or person itself be good before there can be any good works, and that good works follow and proceed from the good person, as Christ also says, "a corrupt tree does not bring forth good fruit, a good tree does not bring forth evil fruit." It is clear that the fruits do not bear the tree nor does the tree grow on the fruits, but, on the contrary, the trees bear the fruits and the fruits grow on the trees. As it is necessary, therefore, that the fruits do not make trees either good or corrupt, but rather as the trees are, so are the fruits they bear; so the person of a man must needs first be good or wicked before he does a good or a wicked work, and his works do not make him good or wicked, but he himself makes his works either good or wicked.

We must not, therefore, reject good works; on the contrary, we cherish and teach them as much as possible. We do not condemn them for their own sake, but because of this godless addition to them and the perverse idea that righteousness is to be sought through them; for that makes them appear good outwardly, when in truth they are not good; they deceive men and lead men to deceive each other, like ravening wolves in sheep's clothing.

Let this suffice concerning works in general, and at the same time concerning the works which a Christian does for his own body.



## II. The Neighbor: Works of Service to Others

### A. *The Law of Christ: Self-Discipline and Service*

Lastly, we will also speak of the things which he does toward his neighbor. A man does not live for himself alone in this mortal body, so as to work for it alone, but he lives also for all men on earth, nay, rather, he lives only for others, and not for himself. And to this end he brings his body into subjection, that he may the more sincerely and freely serve others. But none of these things does a man need for his righteousness and salvation. Therefore, in all his works he should be guided by this thought and look to this one thing alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, having regard to nothing except the "need" and the advantage of his neighbor. And this is what makes it a Christian work to care for the body, that through its health and comfort we may be able to work, to acquire and to lay by funds with which to aid those who are in need, that in this way the strong member may serve the weaker, and we may be sons of God, each caring for and working for the other, bearing one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ. Lo, this is a truly Christian life, here faith is truly effectual through love; that is, it issues in works of the freest service cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward, and for himself is satisfied with the fullness and wealth of his fruit.

### B. *The Mind of Christ: Example of Service*

As an example of such a life the Apostle cites Christ, saying, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto death." Paul means this: Although Christ was filled with the form of God and rich in all good things, so that He needed no work and no suffering to make Him righteous and saved (for He had all this always from the beginning), yet He was not puffed up by them, nor did He lift Himself up above us and assume power over us, although He could rightly have done so; but, on the contrary, He so lived, labored, worked, suffered and died, that He might be like other men, and in fashion and in actions be nothing else than a man, just as if He had need of all these things and had nothing of the form of God. But He did all this for our sake, that He might serve us, and that all things He accomplished in this form of a servant might become ours.

### C. *Christ to One Another: Bondage of Service*

So a Christian like Christ, his Head, ought in this liberty to empty himself, to take upon himself the form of a servant, to be made in the likeness of men, to be found in fashion as a man, and to serve, help and in every way deal with his neighbor as he sees that God through Christ has dealt and still deals with himself. And this he should do freely, having regard to nothing except the divine approval. He ought to think: "Though I am an unworthy and condemned man, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so that henceforth I need nothing whatever except faith which believes that this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will, do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father, who has overwhelmed me with His inestimable riches? I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered Himself to me; I will do nothing in his life except what I see is necessary, profitable and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ."

Lo, thus from faith flows forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing and free mind that serves one's neighbor willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain or loss. For a man does not serve that he may put men under obligations, he does not distinguish between friends and enemies, nor does he anticipate their thankfulness or unthankfulness; but most freely and most willingly he spends himself and all that he has, whether he waste all on the thankless or whether he gain the reward. For as his Father does, distributing all things to all men richly and freely, causing His sun to rise upon the good and upon the evil, so also the son does all things and suffers all things with that freely bestowing joy which is his delight when through Christ he sees it in God, the dispenser of such great benefits.

Therefore, if we recognize the great and precious things which are given us, as Paul says, there will be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost the love which makes us free, joyful, almighty workers and conquerors over all tribulations, servants of our neighbors, and yet lords of all. But for those who do not recognize the gifts bestowed upon them through Christ, Christ has been born in vain; they go their way with their works, and shall never come to taste or to feel these things. Just as our neighbor is in need and lacks that in which we abound, so we also have been in need before God and have lacked his mercy. Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our help, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each should become as it were a Christ to the other, that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all; that is, that we may be truly Christians.

See, according to this rule the good things we have from God should flow from one to the other and be common to all, so that everyone should "put on" his neighbor, and so conduct himself toward him as if he himself were in the other's place. From Christ they have flowed and are flowing into us: He has so "put on" us and acted for us as if He had been what we are. From us they flow on to those who have need of them, so that I should lay before God my faith and my righteousness that they may cover and intercede for the sins of my neighbor, which I take upon myself and so labor and serve in them as if they were my very own. For that is what Christ did for us. This is true love and the genuine rule of a Christian life. The love is true and genuine where there is true and genuine faith. Hence, the Apostle says of love in I Corinthians 13, that it seeketh not its own.

We conclude, therefore, that a Christian man lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love; by faith he is caught up beyond himself into God, by love he sinks down beneath himself into his neighbor; yet he always remains in God and in His love.

#### **RECAPITULATION: Works and "No-Works"**

##### **I. The Middle Course: Right Opinion Toward Works**

Finally, something must be added for the sake of those for whom nothing can be so well said that they will not spoil it by misunderstanding it, though it is a question whether they will understand even what shall here be said.

There are very many who, when they hear of this liberty of faith, immediately turn it into an occasion for the flesh, and think that now all things are allowed them. They want to show that they are free men and Christians only by despising and finding fault with ceremonies, traditions, and human laws; as if they were Christians because on stated days they do not fast or eat meat when others fast, or because they do not use the accustomed prayers, and with upturned nose scoff at the precepts of

men, although they utterly disregard all else that pertains to the Christian religion. The extreme opposite of these are those who rely for their salvation solely on their reverent observance of ceremonies, as if they would be saved because on certain days they fast or abstain from meats, or pray certain prayers; these make a boast of the precepts of the Church and of the Fathers, and care not a fig for the things which are of the essence of our faith. Plainly, both are in error, because they neglect the weightier things which are necessary to salvation, and quarrel so noisily about those trifling and unnecessary matters.

How much better is the teaching of the Apostle Paul, who bids us take a middle course, and condemns both sides when he says, "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth. Here you see that they who neglect and disparage ceremonies, not out of piety, but out of mere contempt, are reprov'd, since the Apostle teaches us not to despise them. Such men are puffed up by knowledge. On the other hand, he teaches those who insist on the ceremonies not to judge the others for neither part acts toward the other according to the love that edifies. Wherefore, we ought here to listen to the Scriptures, which teach that we should not go aside to the right nor to the left, but follow the statutes of the Lord which are right, rejoicing the heart. For as man is not righteous because he keeps and clings to the works and forms of the ceremonies, so also will a man not be counted righteous merely because he neglects and despises them.

Our faith in Christ does not free us from works, but from false opinion concerning works, that is, from the foolish presumption that justification is acquired by works. For faith redeems, corrects, and preserves our consciences, so that we know that righteousness does not consist in works, although works neither can be nor ought to be wanting; just as we cannot be without food and drink and all the works of this mortal body, yet our righteousness is not in them, but in faith; and yet those works of the body are not to be despised or neglected on that account. In this world we are bound by the needs of our bodily life, but we are not righteous because of them. Thus, what we do, live, and are in works and in ceremonies, we do because of the necessities of this life and of the effort to rule our body; nevertheless we are righteous not in these, but in the faith of the Son of God.

Hence, the Christian must take a middle course and face these two classes of men. He will meet first the unyielding, stubborn ceremonialists, who like deaf adders are not willing to hear the truth of liberty, but, having no faith, boast of, prescribe, and insist upon their ceremonies as means of justification. These we must resist, do the very opposite and offend them bodily, lest by their impious views they drag many with them into error. In the presence of such men it is good to eat meat, to break the fasts and for the sake of the liberty of faith to do other things which they regard the greatest of sins.

The other class of men whom a Christian will meet are the simple-minded, ignorant men, weak in faith, as the Apostle calls them, who cannot yet grasp the liberty of faith, even if they were willing to do so. These he must take care not to offend; he must yield to their weakness until they are more fully instructed. For since these do and think as they do, not because they are stubbornly wicked, but only because their faith is weak, the fasts and other things which they think necessary must be observed to avoid giving them offense. For so love demands, which would harm no one, but would serve all men.

Now, since we cannot live our life without ceremonies and works, and the forward and untrained youth need to be restrained and saved from harm by such bonds; and since each one should keep his body under control by means of such works, there is need that the minister of Christ be far-seeing and faithful, He ought so to govern and teach Christians in all these matters that their conscience and faith will not be offended and that there will not spring up in them a suspicion and a

root of bitterness and many will thereby be defiled, as Paul admonishes the Hebrews; that is, that they may not lose faith and become defiled by the false estimate of the value of works and think that they must be justified by works. Yet it would be death for them to be always held in bondage to ceremonies, thinking that these justify them. They are rather to be taught that they have been so imprisoned in ceremonies, not that they should be made righteous or gain great merit by them, but that they might thus be kept from doing evil, and might be more easily instructed unto the righteousness of faith. Such instruction they would not endure if the impulsiveness of their youth were not restrained. Hence ceremonies are to be given the same place in the life of a Christian as models and plans have among builders and artisans. They are prepared not as permanent structures, but because without them nothing could be built or made. When the structure is completed they are laid aside. You see, they are not despised, rather, they are greatly sought after; but what we despised is the false estimate of them, since no one holds them to be the real and permanent structure.

## II. Conclusion: Dependence on the Grace of God

But since human nature and natural reason, as it is called, are by nature superstitious and ready to imagine, when laws and works are prescribed, that righteousness must be obtained through them; and further, since they are trained and confirmed in this opinion by the practice of all earthly lawgivers, it is impossible that they should of themselves escape from the slavery of works and come to a knowledge of the liberty of faith. Therefore there is need of the prayer that the Lord may give us and make us *theodidacti*, that is, taught of God, and Himself, as He has promised, write His law in our hearts; otherwise there is no hope for us. For if He Himself does not teach our hearts this wisdom hidden in a mystery, nature can only condemn it and judge it to be heretical, because nature is offended by it and regards it as foolishness. So we see that it happened in olden times, in the case of the Apostles and prophets, and so godless and blind popes and their flatterers do to me and to those who are like me. May God at last be merciful to them and to us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that we may know His way upon earth, His salvation among all nations, God, who is blessed forever. Amen.