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## Liberty or Death?

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Scripture foretells that in the latter times many apostasies are marked by lawlessness. *2Timothy 3:1-8 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.* These times are upon us. Many churches accept hypocrites, and fight against orthodoxy. A few examples: Wisconsin Synod and ELS pastors now commonly say that gambling is only covetousness if you have an evil desire in your heart when you are gambling. The Bible says: *thou shalt not covet Exodus 20:17*, but people want to gamble. Missouri synod has women voters and deaconesses who, I have been told, do in an official capacity everything that the pastor does except be called a pastor. The Bible says: *I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. 1Timothy 1:2.* But some women want to serve as voters and even in the pastor's office. Non-conservative or non-lutheran churches are far more obvious in the same apostasy. For example, the ELCA says that a pastor cannot be a practicing homosexual, leaving members free to be homosexuals, and pastors free to endorse homosexuality, just not to practice it. There are churches that accommodate abortion on-demand, that endorse pride, that endorse rebellion, that endorse unscriptural divorce, and every other kind of selfish sin. The error exposed in 2 Timothy 3 is a twofold error: an error of the public teacher, and also of those who accept his corrupt and unholy doctrine.

We have a twofold duty then, with respect to the apostasy of lawlessness: first to avoid becoming lawless, and second to withdraw fellowship from the lawless. But when we are to a certain extent outwardly successful in avoiding lawlessness, we will hear the accusation from those who are lawless that we are legalists. This accusation will be brought whether or not it is true, because, as the passage informs us, those who are lawless are *despisers of those that are good*. I have heard that the rumor circulates within conservative circles in Missouri Synod that "the LCR is a legalistic body. Women must wear hats, are forbidden from wearing pants, etc." How shall we clear ourselves from this accusation? We cannot simply shrug it off, even though the specific legalistic practices are not found among us, because it is a very real temptation to overcome lawlessness by legalism. That is the natural inclination of the heart of fallen man. That is how the Moslems prevent women from usurping authority over men. They jail and torture them. The Roman Catholics likewise fight divorce with canon law. Which still punishes those who want an unlawful divorce, in effect refusing divorce to those who haven't been giving money to church. If we achieve obedience in a legalistic way, then we have forsaken the way of life, as Paul says: *Rom 8:5-6 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.* There are two groups of people: those who are not born

again are carnally minded. They only sin even when they outwardly obey all laws. Those do not recover from lawlessness who are led to obey laws unless they are first led to faith in the Gospel. Nor will they value Christ or faith as long as they only consider law. Even though you were to make a perfect outward system of laws, and if it were followed outwardly to the last letter they would still abide in death without faith. Meanwhile, those who are born again by the Gospel are able to delight in the good news of salvation, and in the glory of faith. They alone are raised again to life and peace with God. Only believers obey God willingly and joyfully as He requires. Legalism has never been the solution to lawlessness. Nor will it ever solve things.

What is the solution? The doctrine of Christian Liberty. This provides the solution and answer to both legalism and to lawlessness. But our intuition fails us, and Christian liberty seems like a dangerous doctrine to teach at times when law is coarsely disregarded. Though they have not been stubbornly held by those who remain in fellowship with us, the following legalistic statements have been publicly made or defended in recent controversies:

- 1: I don't overtly teach you must do this work to be justified, therefore I am not a legalist.
- 2: If our state makes rules that are not fair, then we must follow a better rule, and bind our members to follow it too.
- 3: If our state makes no penalty for sin, then we must not sin, and bind our members not to sin with penalties.
- 4: If I establish that something is adiaphora, then as a Christian I am free to do whatever I feel like.
- 5: We have to separate fellowship immediately when a sinful practice has begun, or grown, or become established as tradition.
- 6: The congregation should make laws about things that look bad and bind members to follow them.
- 7: If you have exceptions to laws, then you are a moral relativist.
- 8: If there is an exception to a rule, then we are teaching false doctrine if we do not make a new rule.
- 9: If it is adiaphora, then Christians are supposed to make rules and punishments that clarify when to use it, and when not to use it.

The aim of this study is to illustrate the doctrine of Christian Liberty in all its glory, to identify where in our confessions this doctrine is stated, and to provide clear proofs that the above statements and those like them are legalistic, and so are to be avoided. In order to do so, I will follow the definitions of legalism found in the Lutheran Cyclopedia[Lueker, p. 577], illustrating at each step the principle of Christian liberty that is abrogated by each particular kind of legalism. I did not understand that this definition of legalism is correct until I first made a study of Christian Liberty.

Legalism is

- 1) seeking salvation through works rather than through grace,
- 2) living according to laws,
- 3) undue emphasis upon external form without proper realization of the inner spirit,
- 4) insisting on strict application of church rules without proper regard to the specific circumstances in a given situation.

Christian liberty is

- 1) a corollary to justification by faith alone without the deeds of the law,
- 2) the truth that a Christian is redeemed from all laws so that obedience is not necessary to salvation,
- 3) the truth that a Christian is a willing servant of all laws and cheerfully obeys them whenever they are helpful to faith,
- 4) the truth that a Christian Church is not a legislative body.

I. Christian liberty is a corollary to justification by faith alone without the deeds of the law, (Note: A corollary is a proposition inferred immediately from a proved proposition with little or no additional proof. [Webster's 9<sup>th</sup> Collegiate dictionary])

It is very natural when confronted with lawlessness to turn to the law and to preach the law. It would be misuse of the Gospel to preach it alone when lawlessness is the problem. But if you persuade a lawless person that his lawlessness is sin, you still have not helped that person. Scripture tells us that all men naturally understand God's law to a certain extent. Therefore, when it comes to telling someone about law, it is not a matter of informing that person, as much as waking him up to what he really knows, deep down. You will find preachers in every religion who may wax eloquent, and reveal guilt and sin by thinking about and explaining rules and law. You can see this when men describe moral law, civil law, federal law, state law, local law, contract law, or natural law. All men, from the most careful believer to the most crass unbeliever can explain matters of law. There are many ways to preach law, and people everywhere who can do it. They can ask you what you have done, or show it to you. They can parade your victims before you, or remind you of evil desires such as hatred, envy, greed, perversity, selfishness. They can appeal to your ideals, by asking you: "Is this the best that you can do, or be?" Or they can appeal to experience: pointing out the harm to your neighbor. It hurts him, that you smacked him, confused him about God, stole his wife, ruined his property, encouraged him to follow the devil to hell, bought something from him below market value, etc. Even when a person is a terrible preacher of law, his behavior reflects the fact that deep down he knows it: *Romans 2:14-15 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;*)

Actually agreeing in matters of law may give you the feeling of kinship; of being united with unbelievers against evil. As if, we are not the cause of any wicked and hurtful things in the world, but it is all those people "out there" doing all these things that we know are wrong. We are the "good guys", they are the "bad guys." Law can make society outwardly better and more peaceful through this means, because those who have no restraints will be constrained by the club of shame. Everybody knows right and wrong, and you do too. But this does not earn us any merit before God. He reminds us: *Romans 2:11-13 there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified..)*. The law condemns all men together, both those who can explain it, and those who can't. Those who seem to do pretty well outwardly, and those who don't. It is an unfortunate side-effect of law that we are found to be sinners. We are condemned by our sins. One failure, and we deserve to suffer forever. The law

only pronounces us innocent if we are perfect, and have never transgressed any law of God. Hearing law isn't enough, we have to do it, perfectly to be saved by it. The Apostle Paul says: *what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh Romans 8:3.* In other words, our sinful flesh is too weak to fulfill the law, therefore law only condemns. We would like to find an escape from hypocrisy and guilt. No system of law can do that. We have this principle explicitly stated, and we can put it into practice by preaching the law in all its severity, without compromise, as Jesus did. *Luk 6:34-35 And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.* We learn: *Romans 7:12-16 the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good... we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.* Before God, We cannot be justified by the law.

The Bible teaches us instead that we can only be justified by faith alone, without the deeds of the law. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1* Luther observed regarding this verse [LW 4, p. 239] that it does not say there is no sin to them which are in Christ Jesus, but it says there is no condemnation. Those who are saved do have sins. There are even sins that are committed after they are saved and come to faith in Christ Jesus, but these sins are not counted against us. They are forgiven for Christ's sake who took away the condemnation, suffering the pangs of hell for us on His cross. It is written: *To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Rom 4:5* Nobody who has ever been born of man and woman has lived without sin. *All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Rom 3:23* We are pronounced innocent by God as a free gift, simply because God is gracious and good, without the least shadow of any work from us having any bearing on the matter, as this passage I just quoted above continues: *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus Rom 3:24.*

We are justified independent of the doctrine of the law, by another doctrine. Scripture explicitly says that the law does nothing for our salvation and is incapable of aiding it. All is earned by the merits of Christ Jesus alone: *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: Romans 8:3* Instead of finding innocence in the doctrine of law, there is a different doctrine (or law) that saves us from condemnation. *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:2.* We must not deny that there is lust or sin that remains in believers after they come to faith. All other religions make that mistake when they seek their salvation somewhere else besides Christ Jesus. They are looking for a justification by law. But Christians alone see only guilt in law, and freely acknowledge their sins, and sorrow over them, still knowing however that they have a blessing on account of Christ Jesus whose holiness and chastity are so great that He blesses the entire world. To those with faith there is complete victory over every law that may accuse us of sin. Romans 8:2 promises us freedom not from guilt only, but from the law of sin and death. This means that our sins cannot harm us, even those we should commit in the future, so long as we still have faith and believe in Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus freed us from the law that condemns our sin. He freed us from the law that brings about our death. Howso? By fulfilling it perfectly in our place, and by taking the full punishment of hell on the cross.

Our catechism explains with respect to “the forgiveness of sins” in the creed: (p. 138-141) that the doctrine of the law has been conquered by another doctrine, the doctrine of salvation through the merits of Christ Jesus. When the conscience begins to accuse, we must sue God for freedom first, without and before any works of our own. Independent of them as Paul says. *A man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law. Rom 3:28* Or as God explains in the book of Genesis: *Abram believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness. 15:6* To find peace with God, we should not look into any kind of works, or any kind of law, but into the words that promise us all sins are forgiven: past, present, future, black, white, and everything between. Sins against moral law, civil law, ceremonial law, new testament ordinances, natural law, or any other law imagineable. *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases. Psa 103:2-3* *If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee that thou mayest be feared. Psa 103:3-4*

The law could not conquer sin, so *God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: Romans 8:3* Sin is an eternal and mortal enemy from which we could not escape. Therefore God gave us Jesus to become a master to sin, and condemn it instead of us. The law may be a glorious doctrine, but it is not able to deliver us from this monster: sin. But the good news about Jesus tells us that the law is erased by the blood of Christ (Col 2:14) sin is condemned and conquered. Therefore we say that the law is sterile, hungry, futile, and as weak as we can depict it. God’s Son gave us this victory and conquered sin, and chained it up. He did this by becoming like us in all things, becoming man, and suffering the punishment which sin requires.

When the doctrine of Justification by faith alone without the deeds of the law is viewed from the perspective of the person who is forgiven, it has another name: Christian Liberty. One of the passages quoted above to teach the doctrine of justification by faith alone without the deeds of the law concludes as follows: *Romans 8:35-39* *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* God is telling us in the Gospel that even the sins that we may commit in the future do not destroy the love of Christ. He died for all sins, even future sins.

It is tempting for preachers to omit the teaching of Christian Liberty, particularly when they are accused of lawlessness, or when they are attempting to correct the lawless. It seems much more practical to de-emphasize the fact that future sins are forgiven. The preacher is tempted to think: “Leave the hearer in doubt concerning future sins, and perhaps he will obey the law slavishly, out of fear or doubt about whether or not those sins are forgiven.” This practical temptation is not new. Paul encountered this temptation. He began his letter to the Galatians asking: *1:10-11* *For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.* Yet, in the face of this temptation, Paul said: *Gal 5:1-4* *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is*

*circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. Also, after Paul outlines the depravity of the sinful nature that still clings to him in chapter 7 of Romans, he still teaches a few chapters later: Rom 10:1-8 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;*

The temptation was there at the time of Luther from the very beginning of the Reformation. The Roman Catholics called the Lutherans lawless, and thought that the doctrine of justification by faith alone was dangerous. Yet Luther taught the doctrine of Christian Liberty as a fundamental doctrine, before he was even thoroughly reformed, and he maintained it throughout his life.

“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, as Peter teaches (1Pe 5:10, Joh 6:28f, Joh 6:27” [WML Phil. V2, p. 316]

“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 prefigured in the outward and visible works of priests... From this any one can 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 meat and the reflection.”[WML Phil. V2, p. 325]

“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. 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 law 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, nor is it disturbed until it shall look down upon 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 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?' [WML Phil. V2, p. 326-7]

“If works are sought after as a means to righteousness, are burdened with this perverse leviathan and are done under the false impression that through them you are justified, they are made necessary and freedom and faith are destroyed; and this addition to them makes them no longer good, but truly damnable works. For they are not free, and they blaspheme the grace of God, since to justify and to save by faith belongs to the grace of God alone. What the works have no power to do, they yet, by a godless presumption, through this folly of ours, pretend to do, and thus violently force themselves into the office and the glory of grace. We do 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.” [WML, Phil. V2, p. 233-4]

We know that Luther held to the doctrine of Christian Liberty because he continued to hold to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession which makes the following statements identifying Christian Liberty with the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and identifying the main antithesis in the Papacy.

31] Neither have the bishops the power to institute services, as though they justified, or were necessary for justification. Yea, the apostles, Acts 15, 10, say: Why tempt ye God to put a yoke, etc., where Peter declares this purpose to burden the Church a great sin. And Paul forbids the Galatians, 5, 1, 32] to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Therefore, it is the will of the apostles that this liberty remain in the Church, that no services of the Law or of traditions be judged as necessary (just as in the Law ceremonies were for a time necessary), lest the righteousness of faith be obscured, if men judge that these services merit justification, or are necessary for justification. 33] Many seek in traditions various [mitigations] in order to heal consciences; and yet they do not find any sure grades by which to free consciences from these chains. [Trigl. Apol. XV(VIII); para.31-33]

“18] And what need is there of words on a subject so manifest? If the adversaries defend these human services as meriting justification, grace, and the remission of sins, they simply establish the kingdom of Antichrist. For the kingdom of Antichrist is a new service of God, devised by human authority rejecting Christ, just as the kingdom of Mahomet has services and works through which it wishes to be justified before God; nor does it hold that men are gratuitously justified before God by faith, for Christ's sake. Thus the Papacy also will be a part of the

kingdom of Antichrist if it thus defends human services as justifying. For the honor is taken away from Christ when they teach that we are not justified gratuitously by faith, for Christ's sake, but by such services; especially when they teach that such services are not only useful for justification, but are also necessary, as they hold above in Art. VII, where they condemn us for saying that unto true unity of the Church it is not necessary that rites instituted by men should everywhere be alike."

[Trigl. Apol. XV(VIII); para.18]

This doctrine Luther confirmed in the Smalcald articles when he wrote:

3] Likewise: All have sinned and are justified without merit [freely, and without their own works or merits] by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood, Rom. 3, 23f

4] Now, since **it is necessary to believe this, and it cannot be otherwise acquired or apprehended by any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies** us as St. Paul says, Rom. 3, 28: For we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law. Likewise 3, 26: That He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Christ.

5] **Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered [nor can anything be granted or permitted contrary to the same], even though heaven and earth, and whatever will not abide, should sink to ruin.** For there is none other name under heaven, given among men whereby we must be saved, says Peter, Acts 4, 12. And with His stripes we are healed, Is. 53, 5. And upon this article all things depend which we teach and practice in opposition to the Pope, the devil, and the [whole] world. Therefore, we must be sure concerning this doctrine, and not doubt; for otherwise all is lost, and the Pope and devil and all thing gain the victory and suit over us.

[Trigl. SA, I, para. 3-5] (Emphasis added)

This doctrine is confirmed also by the Formula of Concord which states in article IV:

"10] 5. Nevertheless, by the words mentioned, necessitas, necessarium, necessity and necessary, if they be employed concerning the regenerate, not coercion, but only due obedience is to be understood, which the truly believing, so far as they are regenerate, **render not from coercion or the driving of the Law, but from a voluntary spirit; because they are no more under the Law, but under grace**, Rom. 6, 14; 7, 6; 8, 14."

[Trigl., FC Art. IV, para. 10.] (Emphasis added)

Rom 6:14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Rom 7:6, 8, 14 But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter... But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead... For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Thus we have it in very clear terms that the doctrine of Christian Liberty is a very close corollary to the doctrine of justification by faith alone without the deeds of the law. Luther



understood this as we see in the Smalcald Articles. When we contemplate omitting the doctrine of Christian Liberty, we are contemplating at the same time omitting the central article of the Christian faith, for the two are so intimately connected. The Roman Catholics legalistically allow a Christian to remain in doubt concerning Christian Liberty, and do not mention that doctrine. They offer to Christians either to be justified by works, or to depart to purgatory where, they say, that one can be redeemed by the treasury of works that are performed by those who are still in the earth.

It's funny isn't it. People think of Luther as a tottering old man. "If I would have had those opponents, I would have been winsome. I would not have been so extreme as he was. What a zealot. Blathering about Christian liberty, and about adiaphora as if they are central. I know what the center is, it is Christ." Oh, but do you? The Mormon's claim to have Christ too. But then they proceed to tell you that you can be innocent by the law too, and so earn salvation as Christ did. How shall you cling to Christ without keeping justification by faith alone? If works are added to the formulation in any way, then Christ is gone to you. If there is any work added outside of what Christ has done, then the corner-stone of your salvation is removed. You no longer have Christ protecting you, though you have His name tattooed on your forehead. The central doctrine of the Christian religion is justification by faith alone for Christ's sake without the deeds of the law. The minute you decide to add anything to this formulation with the result that it is no longer free, or not accomplished before it is offered, you destroy the center. You don't have to wait for such an error to grow to be alarmed. It has already gone for the jugular and torn it out.

I recently wrote a sermon on justification by faith alone, and one of the ladies in the nursing home was so over-joyed to hear it, that she was willing to join the church right now, even though we were in the midst of studying the Lord's Prayer in catechism. She tasted the grace of God which the Lutherans hold out so freely and so richly, and she was willing to sell all that she had for it. From that day forward she gave me an offering upon my visit from her meager possessions. This is the proper reaction. For it is the pearl of great price, you should be willing to let go of everything to keep it. Yet the treasure sits there in our confessions, and our people yawn at it, and think that it is some relic of ancient history, which is safely stacked among the cobwebs. When some smooth-talking salesman, lawyer, or spiritual whore comes along and offers you something in place of it, you have no feeling how important this truth is that is being bargained for. How rarely Justification by faith alone is ever heard in the Baptist church or the Roman Catholic. I was confused and wandering among those ignorant spiritual advisors for many years. I was as happy as this woman was too once, when I first discovered it. When I run across someone who is thankful, it chokes me up too. For what am I? Why did God lead me to know His tremendous mercy, when I did everything possible to flee from it? He is good. His divine goodness overflows all His works.

II. Christian liberty is the truth that a Christian is redeemed from all laws so that obedience is not necessary to salvation,

In opposition to this thesis, stands the legalistic principle of "living according to laws." In other words, looking at any law slavishly as if it is necessary to obey that law to have spiritual life, or to get to heaven. For example, conscientiously following canon law, believing that you must obey a church rule for conscience sake, fearing that a baby baptized by a layman in an emergency may go to hell since the ordained minister did not perform it, fearing that a layman

who performs such an emergency baptism is impenitent of despising the ministry, or living in fear of dying with unconfessed sin. These slavish fears are built upon an implicit trust in works, and an implicit doubt that God gives full and free salvation in Christ. The kind of law that is considered is not really important to the thesis, for any law turns the confidence away from what Christ has done for us, and places it upon what we do instead. It turns confidence away from God who gives His blessing in the Word of promise, and it turns us inward to our own sinful flesh and what we do. The apostle writes: *Phi 3:1-3 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.* This passage contrasts the liberty of those who believe in Christ with the bondage of those who trust in themselves and begs us not to cast it away for any confidence in anything that comes from us. That includes even obedience to the moral law. Again, when those in Galatia began to be entangled with bondage to the law, the Apostle turned them not only away from ceremonial law, but from every law that eclipses the freedom purchased with Christ's blood. *Gal 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.* When the apostle spoke of the yoke of bondage he had in mind also the moral law. For he continued by saying that he who is circumcised becomes *A debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.* Even when the matter that bothers your conscience is truly moral law, you cannot find peace of conscience by trusting in your obedience. By doing so you cast away Christ, and His righteousness, and the grace of God. Therefore, spiritual knowledge begins with understanding the liberty of faith, not by understanding all the regulations and laws that you should be concerned with as a Christian. The apostle writes to the *Hebrews 13:9 Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.* And to the Corinthians: *2Co 3:13-18 And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.* The vail was there because man is not able to approach God by the law. The consideration of any law leads us not to the conclusion of peace with God, but to the realization of sin, and sorrow, and fear. But through Christ we can look upon God without the vail, because we have the merits of Christ through faith. This is the glorious liberty of the sons of God. We can look upon Christ and be conformed to His image without fear and without the burden of obedience added to our consideration of salvation.

“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 wickedness, but makes the law and works unnecessary for any man's righteousness and

salvation.”

[WML, Phil. v2, p. 318-19]

In answer to legalistic statement 1: repeated above: It is a legalistic mistake to think that if you do not consciously decide to be a works-righteous Pharisee, then you are not being legalistic. There are very subtle ways to introduce doubt of salvation by thinking or acting as if you have life and salvation through obedience to some law. This can be done subtly by mixing law and Gospel. The first practical thesis that Walther takes up after preliminary definitions is this: “*Thesis V. The first manner of confounding Law and Gospel is the one most easily recognized—and the grossest. It is adopted, for instance, by Papists, Socinians, and Rationalists and consists in this, that Christ is represented as a new Moses, or Lawgiver, and the Gospel turned into a doctrine of meritorious works, while at the same time those who teach that the Gospel is the message of the free grace of God in Christ are condemned and anathematized as is done by the papists.*” [Walther, L&G p. 79] When, in practice, Christian Liberty is omitted, or left in doubt, the preacher becomes a silent partner to Rome which tells us to shut up about Liberty or suffer the anathema. “If anyone says that Christ Jesus has been given by God to men that He should be their Redeemer, in whom they are to trust, and not also their Lawgiver, whom they are to obey, let him be anathema.” [Walther, L&G, p. 70, ](from Trent VIth session Canon 21) The Roman Catholics practice this torture of consciences not only formally in their symbols, but also practically in their pulpits. It is obvious even to the secular humorist Garrison Keiler who illustrates the doctrine of Rome with the congregational name “Our lady of perpetual responsibility.” At times the Roman Catholics bind consciences to superfluous man-made doctrines that are easily shown to be adiaphora. But at other times the Roman Catholics tell people to obey the moral law slavishly, and to trust in that obedience to be saved. As “penance,” for example, the priest may assign you to say the “our Father” and to trust in that obedience for the remission of sins. But prayer is required by God in the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. Walther gives an example of the Roman Catholic “new laws”. They claim that the yoke of Christ in Mat 11:29-30 is evangelical law, or commands that are issued by Christ, such as the speaking of an idle word, or obedience that is not done whole-heartedly. [Walther, L&G p. 75] But these are among the most difficult dictates of the moral law. Then they are at a great disadvantage to prove how this is easier than the ceremonial law. The papists say that the moral law is a burden upon the Christian, that he must fulfill it, or his salvation is lost. The reformed also commonly make this error. The reformed Seeberg admits “Zwingli does not perceive that the Law gives expression to another world view; imperceptibly the Gospel becomes for him a ‘new law’” [Pieper, vol. 3 p. 168]

The Scriptures on the other hand refute this false doctrine as Walther shows [Walther, L&G p. 75] when he explains *Jer. 31:31-34 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.* This prophecy frankly tells us that in the

Christian era the covenant of the Gospel has no obligation for a Christian to obey any law to become or remain God's child. Not even the moral law is binding upon the salvation of Christians. But instead there is forgiveness reigning and God forgets sin. This is the liberty of the new covenant.

There were people in Jesus' day who wanted to separate Christendom into good guys and bad guys. Those who met some standard of outward obedience and those who did not. They brought the accusation against Jesus that He was making company with sinners. Walther observes [Walther, L&G, p. 72] that he answered them in a very clear way: That is right, He says. That is what I do, I carry the broken wounded lambs who have wandered away. No matter how tattered they are I rescue them and carry them on my shoulders all the way to heaven. A physician must be found among the sick. Christ Jesus is not of the kind who say: I don't want sinners, but only righteous people around me. He is not a proud philosopher or moralist who surrounds himself with champions of virtuous endeavors. He tells the story of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. Those Pharisees were losing track of Christian Liberty, and so losing Christ among the jumble of their laws. It is not that there was something wrong with the ceremonial law at the time. God had ordained it for those Jews. It was a virtue to fulfill it at the time, but it was not a virtue to treat those laws as if they made righteous for this was to bring an argument against grace. *Mat 23:23-26 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*

Walther warned us not only of the coarse legalism of the Roman Catholics, but also of the subtle legalism that can rear its ugly head in the practice of an otherwise orthodox minister. "Thesis XVI: The Word of God is not rightly divided when the preacher tries to make people believe that they are truly converted as soon as they have become rid of certain vices and engage in certain works of piety and virtuous practices." [Walther, L&G, p. 299-306] Instead of this, we are supposed to teach of repentance that it is an entirely new mind and heart. Mat 3:1-10, That we need to be born again with a new nature (John 3:3). That the person must first be good before any of his works can be good (Mat 12:33) That only God can make a tree good. (Mat 15:13) That a perfect heart is required for good works (1Co 13:3) That a work is only good if it flows from saving faith (Rom 14:23)

The Formula of Concord confesses the Liberty of a Christian in this way:

"22] But here we must be well on our guard lest works are drawn and mingled into the article of justification and salvation. Therefore the propositions are justly rejected, that to believers good works are necessary for salvation, so that it is impossible to be saved without good works. For they are directly contrary to the doctrine de particulis exclusivis in articulo iustificationis et salvationis (concerning the exclusive particles in the article of justification and salvation), that is, they conflict with the words by which St. Paul has entirely excluded our works and merits from the article of justification and salvation, and ascribed everything to the grace of God and the merit of Christ alone, as explained in the preceding article. 23] Again, they [these propositions concerning the necessity of good works for salvation] take from afflicted, troubled consciences

the comfort of the Gospel, give occasion for doubt, are in many ways dangerous, strengthen presumption in one's own righteousness and confidence in one's own works; besides, they are accepted by the Papists, and in their interest adduced against the pure doctrine of the alone-saving faith. 24] Moreover, they are contrary to the form of sound words, as it is written that blessedness is only of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Rom. 4, 6. Likewise, in the Sixth Article of the Augsburg Confession it is written that we are saved without works, by faith alone. Thus Dr. Luther, too, has rejected and condemned these propositions:

25] 1. In the false prophets among the Galatians [who led the Galatians into error].

26] 2. In the Papists, in very many places.

27] 3. In the Anabaptists, when they present this interpretation: We should not indeed rest faith upon the merit of works, but we must nevertheless have them as things necessary to salvation.

28] 4. Also in some others among his own followers, who wished to interpret this proposition thus: Although we require works as necessary to salvation, yet we do not teach to place trust in works. On Gen. 22.

29] Accordingly, and for the reasons now enumerated, it is justly to remain settled in our churches, namely, that the aforesaid modes of speech should not be taught, defended, or excused, but be thrown out of our churches and repudiated as false and incorrect, and as expressions which were renewed in consequence of the Interim, originated from it, and were [again] drawn into discussion in times of persecution, when there was especial need of a clear, correct confession against all sorts of corruptions and adulterations of the article of justification.

[Trigl. FC, SD, Art. IV para. 22-29]

The power and might of Christian liberty is so great that we cannot sufficiently extol or describe it. A Christian is exalted to Christ's side. It boggles the mind that we are brethren to Him who is divine, so that we call God Our Father. Let's hear Luther on this subject:

“Now, just as Christ by his birthright obtained these two prerogatives [interceding before God and preaching], so He imparts them to and shares them with every one 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 1Pe 2:9 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 Rom 8:28 ‘All things work together for good to them who are called.’ And in 1Co 3:22f ‘All things are yours, whether life or death, or things present or things to come, and ye are Christ’s’... 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, 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 for my 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.” [WML, Phil. V2, p. 324-5]

Every attempt to make a difference within the Christian kingdom according to the outward obedience of laws tarnishes the merits of Christ with which the believers are clothed. When Peter came to Jesus and *Mat 18:21-22 said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.* And he told him the parable of steward who is freely forgiven, and who should freely forgive, thus illustrating the 5<sup>th</sup> petition of the Lord’s Prayer. Likewise, when the Pharisees came and asked Jesus to stone the adulterous woman, those Pharisees were enemies of the doctrine of justification by faith alone because, to establish Moses’ political law, they trampled on Jesus Bible class (*Joh 8:1-2*) to have this woman stoned. They eclipsed the preaching of the Gospel and wanted Jesus to stop His preaching about that, so that He would become a teacher of political law. But Jesus did a very surprising thing for them. He preached in such a way that He condemned the adultery of the woman, but at the same time, He condemned the accusers and forced them to see their own sin and guilt. *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. Joh 8:7* By saying this, He agreed with the moral law of Moses. It is true indeed that adultery is a sin, and that the woman deserves to die because of her sin. But what about you? Are you worthy to carry out the punishment for sinners? If you are going to carry out the sentence against her don’t stop there. Stone also those with lust in the heart. *Mat 5:28 whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* As Luther teaches us [LW, vol. 23, p. 317] Jesus spoke to their hearts. He preached as God does who knows all the wickedness that dwells in the secret places of the mind and heart. It was as if lighting flashed from heaven and revealed not only the wickedness of the adulteress, but also of her accusers. These people who thought of themselves as pure saints were suddenly terrified by their own guilt. Their hearts were opened and they forgot all about this woman and her guilt. Each felt as if his sins were bare for all to see, written on their foreheads. Rather than claim to be innocent by throwing a stone, they snuck away, one by one. It is as if God had shouted from heaven: “shame on you.” Just as a master smacks the snout of his dog when he is caught rooting around in the garbage. These outwardly upright and blameless people each escaped knowing that they were not fit to punish her since they also are sinners.

Yet Jesus preached the law so severely so that He could lead them all to the mercy of the forgiveness of sins that is found in the Gospel alone. Jesus gave to this woman the gift of forgiveness. Jesus was without sin. It would have been fair for Jesus to throw stones at her, since He never sinned. But He refused, because He wanted to teach her that He is her savior, and the savior and friend of all sinners. He said: “Neither do I condemn thee.” He frankly forgave her. Yes, He carried her adultery on Himself when He went to the cross, just as He carried the guilt of all the sins of all men on His own shoulders when He was nailed to the tree for our sins. She believed in Him as her savior. She called Him her Lord, and recognized Him as her savior.

In Jesus’ preaching we learn many things about the Christian church of believers which Jesus came to establish. We learn that this kingdom is not one of condemnation, but of forgiveness toward all. If one person is condemned in this kingdom, then all are condemned together and are just as bad as the others. If one is forgiven and made free and innocent, then all are forgiven. Since all are sinners, the slogan of Christ’s church is that your sins are forgiven. It is a shame that those other sinners had themselves excused and that they were not interested in hearing this mercy which Jesus was preaching. The same forgiveness was present there for them

too. What about their accusation: Are those souls within this kingdom coarse sinners, who continue to go against conscience? No. That is a better description of the Pharisees. They fled from the accusation, and would not admit their sins, and sorrow over them. They escaped so that they could keep a good opinion of themselves. They hid their sins, and so they did not hear the forgiveness Christ Jesus gave to the woman taken in adultery. Jesus was saying: In my kingdom you must ask this adulteress to forgive you, for you are a sinner too. She must ask you to forgive her. Everyone must ask Me to forgive. All are in the same boat. Just as we pray in the Lord's prayer: *forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Mat 6:12.* Before the world one church member may be an adulterer or thief, the next is not. But through faith, God makes us all equal and takes away all of our sins. It comes about as Isaiah foretold: *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid... the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain. Isa 11:6-9*

The most amazing thing about Walther's practical advice on Church and Ministry is that from beginning to end, he retains this equality of the redeemed and avoids hierarchy and schism within the practice of this doctrine. "Our venerable orthodox teachers indeed also say that the church consists of people of all classes [Staende] and that in matters pertaining to the rule of the church no class may be excluded; but they do not mean to say that the classes as such are in the church and that they have special rights in it, but [they say] that no class, however secular it may appear, deprives the Christian of his spiritual and priestly character and his part in the rights of the church."

[Walther, "The form of a Christian Congregation...", p. 10-11]

The Liberty of a Christian then results in this that the Christian is entirely free from all external laws that he must fulfill for the sake of his salvation. He is free to follow his conscience, and to follow the dictates of love freely and willingly, without any doubt or fear that perhaps his salvation depends upon it.

Rom 14:5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. 6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. 7 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. 8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

Joh 13:34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

1Co 11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

Our confessions warn against violating Christian Liberty by laying "snares of conscience," and by that it means making works of any kind necessary to salvation.

"39] Again, the authors of traditions do contrary to the command of God when they find matters of sin in foods, in days, and like things, and burden the Church with bondage of the law, as if

there ought to be among Christians, in order to merit justification a service like the Levitical, the arrangement of which God had committed to the Apostles and bishops. 40] For thus some of them write; and the Pontiffs in some measure seem to be misled by the example 41] of the law of Moses. Hence are such burdens, as that they make it mortal sin, even without offense to others, to do manual labor on holy-days, a mortal sin to omit the Canonical Hours, that certain foods defile the conscience that fastings are works which appease God that sin in a reserved case cannot be forgiven but by the authority of him who reserved it; whereas the Canons themselves speak only of the reserving of the ecclesiastical penalty, and not of the reserving of the guilt. 42] Whence have the bishops the right to lay these traditions **upon the Church for the ensnaring of consciences, when Peter, Acts 15, 10, forbids to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples,** and Paul says, 2 Cor. 13, 10, that the power given him was to edification not to destruction? Why, therefore, do they increase sins by these traditions?"

[Trigl. AC XXVIII, Para. 39-42]

"61] There are monstrous disputations concerning the changing of the law, the ceremonies of the new law, the changing of the Sabbath-day, which all have sprung from the false belief that there must needs be in the Church a service like to the Levitical, and that Christ had given commission to the Apostles and bishops to devise new ceremonies as necessary to 62] salvation. These errors crept into the Church when the righteousness of faith was not taught clearly enough. 63] Some dispute that the keeping of the Lord's Day is not indeed of divine right, but in a manner so. **They prescribe concerning holy-days, how far it is lawful to work. What else 64] are such disputations than snares of consciences?** For although they endeavor to modify the traditions, yet **the mitigation can never be perceived as long as the opinion remains that they are necessary, which must needs remain where the righteousness of faith and Christian liberty are not known.**"

[Trigl. AC XXVIII, Para. 39-42]

"49] This topic concerning traditions contains many and difficult questions of controversy, and we have actually experienced that traditions are truly **snares of consciences. When they are exacted as necessary, they torture in wonderful ways the conscience omitting any observance [as godly hearts, indeed, experience when in the canonical hours they have omitted a compline, or offended against them in a similar way].**"

[Trigl. Apol. XV, para. 49]

"We also praise true continence. But now we are disputing concerning the law, and concerning those who do not have the gift of continence. **The matter ought to be left free, and snares ought not to be cast upon the weak** through this law."

[Trigl. Apol. XXVIII, para. 22]

Against these temptations we should turn to the Scriptures which urge Christian Liberty.

Rom 8:15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. 16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: 17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ;



Luk 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, 19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. 20 And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. 22 And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.

Gal 4:25-31 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

Rom 8:1-3 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

Joh 8:30-36 As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

Mat 17:24-27 And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

III Christian Liberty is the truth that a Christian is a willing servant of all laws and cheerfully obeys them whenever they are helpful to faith,

To the mind of fallen man, the doctrine of Christian Liberty is indistinguishable from lawlessness. We naturally fear that the doctrine of liberty will be abused and result in only

hypocritical faith. To the flesh, it seems like the doctrine of justification by faith alone is superfluous finery, and that the heart of every matter is obedience and law. The more quickly we get to the law, the more quickly we are treating things that seem practical and important. As long as outward obedience seems respectable to the eyes of men, it seems that the doctrine must be better because the outward result is better. This opinion does not reckon that faith in the heart of the worker is of any consequence. In other words, the outward obedience of a hypocrite seems like a tremendous success. This is the third definition of legalism: “undue emphasis upon external form without proper realization of the inner spirit.”

Christian Liberty, on the other hand says in an opposite manner that faith is everything. If faith is missing, then no work that may be done is pleasing to God. And if faith is present, then good works of every sort naturally flow from faith as good fruits naturally grow from a good tree. Therefore if faith is present, good works will also be present. But if good works are sought directly, without faith, only evil works will result. The works will be hypocritical works unless saving faith is first preached into the heart of the worker.

Christ Jesus came and destroyed sin so *that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.* Romans 8:4 The law has a place, after faith has been established. God intends that after we have come to faith we should conform to the law that reflects His holy and good will. He does not save us by faith so that we can live without fear of God, and indulge in wicked lusts against conscience. He saves us by faith with the result that we are free to begin to do works that do please Him. For without faith in the heart, nothing that a soul does pleases God. There are two kinds of people in the world. *For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.* Romans 8:5 Those who do not have faith do nothing but sin. Even their best works are corrupt and unacceptable to God. Those without faith have flawed works. They do them slavishly out of fear, with a contrary will in their heart. Or they do them proudly for a reward. Those without saving faith do not do any works joyously and willingly simply to give God pleasure, with only trust and joy in their hearts. Only those who have been born again and who have faith can follow after works with a mind that is like God’s. Only believers can have peace of mind, since they know Christ Jesus has already done everything they need to get to heaven.

“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. For there is no other honor equal to the estimate of truthfulness and righteousness with which we honor him whom we trust. Or could we ascribe to a man anything greater than truthfulness, and righteousness, and perfect goodness? On the other hand, there is no way in which we can show greater contempt for a man than to regard him as false and wicked and to suspect him, as we do when we do not trust him. 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.”

[WML, Phil. V2, p. 319]

It is ironic, but true, as Luther observes [LW, vol. 9, p. 260] that those who are infatuated with the law never fulfill it. *As many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. Gal 3:10* This is an amazing thing that those who practice the words of the Law with works are said not to abide in the words of the Law or to confirm them. He who does works does not do the words of the law. This applies to any one part of the law, and to the law as a whole. If you look at the external show, there are many who fulfill the Law at least externally; They do not seem to be under the law. But those who love the law do not fulfill one jot or tittle of it. They are all under the curse. They are forced by penalty or lured by advantage, hence they inwardly hate the law. Therefore even though they outwardly fulfill it, even while they do it, they do not do it. They do it hypocritically and emptily for reward. But God looks at the heart 1Sam 16:7. God is not satisfied with hypocrisy. Jesus said: *Mat 23:27-28 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.* The apostle James: *the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. Jam 3:17* Again, Jesus said: *woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Mat 23:13.* And again: *The congregation of hypocrites shall be desolate. Job 15:34*

This all seems like madness to the fallen mind of man. We cannot conceive the truth that those who try by works alone to fulfill law commit the worst sins, and that those who have faith alone naturally conform to the law, and yet we are not justified before God by the law. Therefore God pities us and explains it very clearly by way of parable when He says that faith is the tree, and works are the fruit. Mat 7:18 A tree does not grow out of its fruits when they are good, but it is the other way around. First the tree must be of the sort that it produces good fruit, and then the tree gives birth to the fruit. Even so it is with man the tree is faith, the fruit is good works. God first makes the tree good by creating faith in the heart through the free promise of salvation. Then as a fruit of this the Spirit yields good works through faith. As Luther explains [WML, Phil. V2, p. 330-331], good works do not make the man good any more than good fruits nailed to a tree will make the tree good. If you go and nail apples onto a hawthorne tree, the tree still has barbs and thorns. If you want the tree to give birth to apples, you must first make it into an apple tree. We see the same truth in the garden of Eden when men were still innocent, before the fall, God gave works, and they were good, because Adam was good. But now the same work is cursed and cannot earn heaven, because that man who does it is a sinner. Gen 3:19 The same thing is true in all trades. A good house does not produce a good builder, but the reverse: a good builder builds a good house. Likewise, God establishes good works by giving saving faith, and no good works can be done without faith.

Our intuition fails us, because it seems like preaching law, adding penalties and rewards can make someone godly. At least they often get better outward behavior through hypocrisy. But God tells us that the law does not serve the function of making anyone godly. The laws themselves do not help people become godly, for no law is able to do that. If it were possible then we would not need Christ. The apostle said: *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: Rom 3:3* And again: *Gal 3:21-22 if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture*

*hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. It is a misuse of the law to try to make people godly with it, for the apostle tells us it has the opposite effect of increasing transgressions. Rom 7:7 I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. 8 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. 9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. 10 And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. 11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. And again, Rom 8:6 For to be carnally minded is death; ... Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. 8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.*

Legalism is a horrible plague that undermines not only Gospel but also law. By trying to compel everyone to obey, even good works are opposed. For what is done by constraint, and not willingly is not acceptable to God. Consider in yourself whether you would regard that to be a good work for your son to clean up his room if you had to hold a gun to his head to get him to do it. Even so, God does not receive works as good and perfect that are extracted with torture and extortion. We are supposed to do works cheerfully, as it is written that truly good works are done by *2Co 9:7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.* Truly good works are not done without any consideration for how our works make us look better than others, but solely for the glory of God *1Co 10:31.* Good works are spoiled that are done by compulsion, or for some reward or to avoid some punishment. Luther illustrates this truth very vividly:

“Who can comprehend the riches and the glory of the Christian life? It can do all things, and has all things, and lacks nothing; it is lord over sin, death and hell, and yet at the same time it serves, ministers to and benefits all men. But, alas, in our day this life is unknown throughout the world; it is neither preached about nor sought after; we are altogether ignorant of our own name and do not know why we are Christians or bear the name of Christians. Surely we are so named after Christ, not because He is absent from us, but because He dwells in us, that is, because we believe on Him and are Christs one to another and do to our neighbors as Christ does to us. But in our day we are taught by the doctrine of men to seek naught but merits, rewards and the things that are ours; of Christ we have made only a taskmaster far more harsh than Moses... our works also should be done, not that we may be justified by them; since, being justified beforehand by faith, we ought to do all things freely and joyfully for the sake of others. St. Paul also circumcised his disciple Timothy, not because circumcision was necessary for his righteousness, but that he might not offend or despise the Jews who were weak in the faith and could not yet grasp the liberty of faith. But on the other hand, when they despised the liberty of faith and insisted that circumcision was necessary for righteousness, he withstood them and did not allow Titus to be circumcised. For as he was unwilling to offend or to despise any man’s weak faith, and yielded to their will for the time, so he was also unwilling that the liberty of faith should be offended against or despised by stubborn work-righteous men... Christ also, in Matthew 17, when the tribute money was demanded of His disciples, argued with St. Peter, whether the sons of the king were not free from the payment of tribute, and Peter affirmed that they were. None the less Christ commanded Peter to go to the sea, and said, ‘Lest we should offend them, go, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.’ This incident fits beautifully to our subject, since Christ here calls Himself and those that are His, children and sons of the King,

who need nothing; and yet He freely submits... Of the same nature are the precepts which Paul gives in Romans 8 and Titus 3, that Christians should be subject to the powers that be, and be ready to do every good work, not that they shall in this way be justified, since they already are righteous through faith, but that in the liberty of the Spirit they shall by so doing serve others and the powers themselves, and obey their will freely and out of love.” [WML, Phil. v2 p. 339-340]

If we keep this liberty of faith in mind, then we see clearly how to steer clear of the various legalistic formulations that have been proposed. When people say things like this: 2: *If our state makes rules that are not fair, then we must follow a better rule, and bind our members to follow it too.* or this 3: *If our state makes no penalty for sin, then we must not sin, and bind our members not to sin with penalties.* We can respond simply and say: It does not follow at all. For we are required to keep the liberty of the Christian, or no good works will be done. If the state fails and permits sin, or if it does things that are not fair, our Christianity is not harmed by a broken political law. Nor should we turn Christianity into a political system of laws. For then we oppose and destroy that organization which wants willingly to do what is right. How? By attempting to compel them to do what is good. A Christian wants also to retain his free will and to do things joyfully. This cannot be done when there are self-imposed penalties and rewards that force us to do it. To add penalties or rewards in the name of the church completely misunderstands the fundamental difference between the political kingdom and the spiritual kingdom of the church. Jesus taught very clearly that His kingdom is totally different from a political kingdom. Joh 18:36 And when he was asked to deny this in practice by stoning the woman taken in adultery, Jesus refused to do so. In that case we see a very bold challenge to the doctrine of Christian Liberty from its most fierce and bitter enemy (that is, from the Pharisees, who are legalists.) They believed that by His preaching of justification by faith alone, Jesus was a false teacher who was corrupting the nation, and bringing about the destruction of the state law, of Moses, and of their religion. Rather than debating the point with Him, they brought this challenge into His Bible class: “Tell us whether or not to stone this adulterer.” They were probably hoping most of all that He would tell them not to do so. Then they would have proof that Jesus despised the doctrine of the law and spoke against Moses, and therefore against Scripture and God. Lev 20:10. But even if He would have stoned her, then they would have turned Jesus over to the Romans as one who broke their political law. Or worse yet, they would have been able to brand Jesus as a deceiver, because He formerly had preached justification by faith alone, but when presented with an example, He changed His tune. “See they would have said: this is what His grace brings: death by stoning, the same as we have.” Does Jesus, by preaching forgiveness, destroy morality? Certainly not. For Jesus turned an adulteress into a child of God by forgiving her sins. He took her sins on Himself and suffered and died for them. He gave to her His innocence, and told her: **sin no more.** All believing souls are likewise free through the merits of Christ. We are endowed with eternal righteousness, life, and salvation. All believers are lifted up from the depravity of our sins and we learn to cry out in faith that God is our father. We reckon that we are heirs of heaven who possess all things. Therefore we need nothing for ourselves, and we turn to fulfill the commandments of God joyfully and willingly. We are concerned about our neighbor and God. When a believing soul becomes discouraged with failure or worried about sin, it is refreshed with the knowledge of the merits of Christ Jesus. The heart learns to remain strong against all the lies of the devil, and to stretch toward the full measure of Christ the perfect Lord. If the political law advocates would have shown concern for the soul, the bodily needs would have taken care of themselves. If they would shut up, and let

the Gospel be preached, Jesus would make of her the best citizen, through faith. But since they are unconcerned with the soul, they begin to turn the church into a tending of pigs. Where no law is sufficient, and there is endless labor and endless law. As a teacher, souls are not harmed if you cannot point out everything that each soul should do to obey or satisfy the law at every point, the conscience is still there. I remind you of the Luther quote paraphrased above:

“This [forgiveness of sins] is the message proclaimed in the kingdom of Christ. Where this is preached, there sword, judge, judgment seat, town hall, jurists, and executioner are all abolished. If one person is godly, all are godly; if one has sinned, all have sinned. Now if they are all in the same class and there is no difference among them, it follows that there can be no judge; for she who sins is just as godly as he who would judge. In Christ’s sight and in His kingdom no worldly rule or regime is in force. The sword has no place there. For all are already sentenced, and the verdict has been pronounced that all are under the wrath of God and under death. There is no higher court to condemn them. Here a much sharper and more stringent justice prevails that is found elsewhere in the world.” LW vol. 23 p. 312

Dear man, if you understand the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, you know also that political law is unnecessary if people truly have faith and act according to faith.

“Civil government is a remedy required by our corrupted nature. It is necessary that lust be held in check by the bonds of the laws and by penalties. For this reason you may correctly call civil government the rule of sin, just as Paul calls Moses also the minister of death. This is the one and foremost function of government, to hold sin in check, as Paul says Rom 13:4. If it had not become evil through sin, then there would have been no need of civil government; but Adam, together with his descendants, would have lived in utmost serenity and would have achieved more by moving one finger than all the swords.” LW 1:104

It is a little more difficult to answer the following legalistic statement: *If I establish that something is adiaphora, then as a Christian I am free to do whatever I feel like.* Theodore Graebner fell into this trap in his book *Borderland of Right and Wrong*. He was trying to combat legalism by proving that something that is adiaphora is in an area that is morally neutral. He wound up in a later edition endorsing sins like unionism. But he really went awry early on when he failed to approach the subject from the standpoint of Christian Liberty, and to stir up the Christian to use his Liberty to help his neighbor and to glorify God. When he began to follow the outline that proved something was adiaphora and therefore you couldn’t sin with it, he was in the devil’s house already. His approach ignores the fact that a Christian has feelings that issue from the sinful nature as well. It also forgets that a Christian according to the nature of the new man does not serve himself, but God and his neighbor out of real love in the light of his conscience. Different circumstances call for different actions according to conscience. Just as the examples above illustrated. In one set of circumstances it was helpful to the weak in faith to circumcise. In another it was helpful to faith not to circumcise. Even though Peter and Jesus had freedom not to pay the tribute, Jesus sent Peter to pay it. To be self-serving denies the second half of Christian liberty which Luther taught clearly that a Christian is a willing servant of all laws and lives for the benefit of his neighbor and the glory of God. The new man does not say: yippee, I don’t have to help my neighbor or glorify God, I can serve my own belly. Such an attitude is also legalistic in this sense that it seeks to justify itself by consideration of law rather

than consideration of Gospel. He was justifying himself with the lack of a law. This is an expression of the first form of legalism. We justify ourselves not by considering anything that we do or omit, but by what Christ has done for us. Exercising your liberty as a Christian is not as simple as always giving 10% to church or not giving 10% to church. Nor observing any other law rigidly like this. Christian liberty considers, as Luther observed [WML, p. 344-345] that there are two kinds of men who need our help. There are stubborn people who boldly cling to and teach works righteousness. "These we must resist, do the very opposite and offend them boldly, 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 as the greatest sins." But there are also simple-minded ignorant men, who are weak in faith, and who can't grasp the liberty of faith because their faith has not matured to this point. For such, the Christian serves God by obeying all laws. "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 offence. For so love demands, which would harm no one, but would serve all men. It is not by their fault that they are weak, but their pastors have taken them captive with snares of their traditions and have wickedly used these traditions as rods with which to beat them. From these pastors they should have been delivered by the teaching of faith and liberty."

This leads us into the next antithesis. The saying that *we have to separate fellowship immediately when a sinful practice has begun, or grown, or been established as tradition*. This may be stated in many milder forms where the law considered is not definitely moral law; As for example, when the practice is against a new testament ordinance such as the office of the ministry or the local congregation; or when the practice is in violation of a church rule in a case of adiaphora where the violation of the rule does result in sin because it causes harm. The violation of these other ordinances and rules is of less concern than a violation of the ten commandments. In many circumstances the ordinance can be set aside without sin. There is a need to prove that the practice does involve sin which in general may or may not be the case. But even if it is granted that sin involved, as is definitely the case where the practice is against the ten commandments, it does not necessarily require immediate withdrawal of fellowship. The Christian church is not a society of people who lack sin, or who lack a certain degree of sin. We do not cast people away because of sin, but because of impenitence. But a Christian may be truly penitent and yet have miserable behavior. A person who is overtaken in a fault is not a person who has sinned, but a person who does not repent of his sin. The same thing can be true of a church or church-body. They may begin to tolerate some practice without everyone agreeing or taking part in it. God informed the prophet that there were still 7,000 in Israel who did not bow the knee to Baal. Rom 11:3-4. There may be people who even participate in the sinful practice ignorantly while still retaining faith in the heart, they are unaware that they should change that practice because their conscience is not aware of the sin. For it is written in the Psalm, 19:12 *Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults*. Even when a practice is truly sinful, if it is not stubbornly held or defended, the pastor can in good conscience not take part in the practice himself, but preach to those who remain in the practice while he remains in fellowship with them, so that he might call them to repentance and correct the church. That is the example that Paul gave to us when Corinth had begun to tolerate incest. He wrote them a stern letter and called them to repentance, but meanwhile he did not withdraw fellowship

or admonish them as if they were stubborn errorists. He still addressed them in multiple ways as brethren 1Co 1:1-4. Many other examples could be given from the Scriptures. If this is true of the moral law, then it is also true of the violation of new testament ordinances such as the public ministry or the local congregation, and much more so of church rules. For in these latter cases, there is a delicate argument that must be made so that the conscience perceives the harm present in violating the New Testament ordinance, or the church rule, without the preacher however becoming legalistic in his effort to correct and inform.

Of all the things that Luther did throughout his life, I marvel most of all at his consistent practice of the doctrine of Christian Liberty to reform the church where he was a pastor. His patience with the weak and his recognition of them is truly amazing. In every writing that he made he considered them and gave space to them. He continued with the old practices even when they were just a hair away from a sinful practice. This he did until such a time that the slowest and weakest believer understood. Only then was the outward behavior reformed. There are many examples that could be cited like this. I think first of all of practicing the Lord's Supper in both kinds. This is a new testament ordinance given gravely and seriously by our Lord at His last supper. This example is informative as to how to reform doctrine concerning new testament ordinances such as church and ministry. If I had rediscovered that the supper should be practiced in both kinds as it says in the Bible, I would probably have knocked over the church as Dr. Karlstadt also did and chased away the weak souls who didn't understand the meaning of the supper, and who looked on it only as law. It is true that Karlstadt first practiced the supper in both kinds when Luther was in Wartburg. But he only changed the outward behavior upon his own authority, even though the congregation did not understand it. He thought that he had healed the church by changing outward behavior. Even though the practice he sought to establish was correct, he established it in an evil manner, without the willing hearts and minds of the congregation of believers. He didn't understand the deep, powerful, and abiding love that is present in Christian Liberty. He knew the practice was sinful, since it had grown from the false doctrine in the Roman Catholic church concerning the matter, and so he charged ahead into a host of other sinful practices in response. But Luther did the right thing. He began to teach the correct doctrine, and then he was patient with the people until such a time that they understood why they should change the external practice. In a way, you might say that Luther behaved like the dumbest and slowest believer. That is exactly what Christian love requires. He waited until the congregation began to demand that he serve them the supper in both kinds. Then he knew that they understood, and that they were not just doing what the pastor said. This is truly to understand Christian Liberty with your feet, and with your behavior. But the source of this behavior is not a mystery. Luther explained Christian Liberty this way from 1520.

“Fight strenuously therefore against the wolves, but for the sheep, and not also against the sheep. This you will do if you inveigh against the laws and the law-givers, and at the same time observe the laws with the weak, so that they will not be offended, until they also recognize the tyranny and understand their liberty. But if you wish to use your liberty, do so in secret, as Paul says Rom 14, ‘Hast thou the faith? Have it to thyself before God’; but take care not to use your liberty in sight of the weak. On the other hand, use your liberty constantly and consistently in the sight of the tyrants and the stubborn, in spite of them, that they also may learn that they are impious, that their laws are of no avail for righteousness, and that they had no right to set them up.”

[WML, Phil., V2, p. 346]



#### 4) Christian Liberty is the truth that a Christian Church is not a legislative body.

To this point, I have largely avoided discussing church rules even though many of the quotes have mentioned them. I did this not on accident, but in order to emphasize the greater law from which we are redeemed and free, namely the moral law. If a Christian is free from an obligation to obey the moral law for the sake of his salvation, then it follows as a corollary that neither does any other law bind consciences for salvation: not political, ceremonial, the observance of new testament ordinances such as church and ministry, or least of all church law. For a person may reason according to political law that it is required under the fourth commandment, and therefore we may preach obedience as required or necessary for salvation. But if the fourth commandment itself is not necessary to salvation, then the political law cannot be binding either. Likewise the ceremonial law was earnestly ordained by God at one time. You can point to passages that seem to tell us to observe the ceremonial law. But the ceremonial law Christ ended, and God specifically says that those who bind consciences to obey it are leading souls to destruction, turning away from faith. Gal 4:9-11 Likewise new testament ordinances such as the public ministry or the local congregation may be established with proof passages from the Scriptures. One may conclude erroneously that such ordinances have the force of a new ceremonial law, but such legalism can be erroneously adorned with passages from Scripture. Scripture explicitly says in Jer 31:31-34 that there isn't any law like the Levitical in New Testament times. Therefore at least the political law has a better case for being binding upon consciences, yet even in that case we are taught to avoid making even the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment binding upon the conscience. And if you begin to teach that church law is binding, whether it has been established by the pastor, an official body within the church, a church group such as a synod, or by the congregation, then you are also shattering Christian liberty, opposing justification by faith, and losing Christ among the jumble of your laws. Why? Because God has forbidden His Christians to speak where He is silent in the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. He specifically condemns such rules in Mat 15:9, and Jesus taught us to disobey such rules. Moreover, political law and ceremonial law each have a better case for binding consciences to obey them, yet we are taught in an opposite manner to avoid teaching this way. Why? Because even the moral law is not binding in this way, and all of the other laws are less than moral law. A Christian church is free to make ordinances that are helpful and necessary for the preaching of the Gospel. But when these are used to bind the consciences of the believers they have crossed a vital line. They are not helpful to the Gospel, but an obstacle to it. The same result occurs even when undue emphasis is placed upon such laws, for men will automatically conclude that the works justify. If we first perceive Christian Liberty in the light of justification by faith alone, then it is abundantly clear why a church rule cannot be binding upon a soul. This is the same order in which the Scriptures argue.

Col 2:13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; 15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Col 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: 17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is

of Christ. 18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. 20 Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, 21 (Touch not; taste not; handle not; 22 Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

We could simply refer to Jer. 31:31-34 where we had the prophecy of the Christian church that there is no external law that is taught or observed in Christendom, but only the law of the mind and of conscience. But that might have been legalistically understood to mean that we must never have or observe any rules, and that when we do as sinful flesh desires then we are safe. Now, in the light of the great importance of Justification by faith alone, and of Christian Liberty, we can see the many evils contained within those movements that seek to establish a set of external laws within Christendom that bind Christians with misbehavior as outlined by the apostle.

- 1) They glorify shadows and trample the body of Christ, the church. v17
- 2) They deceitfully trick us out of our inheritance and freedom. v18
- 3) They lead hearts to trust in works and in vain teaching. v18
- 4) They give reign to the ignorance of sinful flesh. v18
- 5) They do not behold Christ, or His body v19
- 6) They return to slavery v20.
- 7) They deceitfully worship willpower and humility and self abuse. v23
- 8) They do not honor God, but sinful flesh. v23

The matter that we argue against when we oppose those who legislate in the name of the church is not a matter of adiaphora, but it is a matter of Christian Liberty, and therefore of Justification by faith alone. We have a duty to oppose those who destroy the Liberty of a Christian by man-made law, even if this should be drawn up or ordained in an orderly fashion. For we do not have freedom to despise our Christian Liberty and to throw it away any more than we have freedom to despise justification by faith alone without the deeds of the law. If the pope himself had been a weak Christian, then Luther would have gone along with his papal laws to show him the liberty of a Christian. But Luther took aim against the office whereby the pope legislated, for that was an attack upon Christ.

“most excellent Leo... I have never thought evil of thy person, but that I am a man who would wish thee all good things eternally, and that I have no quarrel with any man concerning his morality, but only concerning the Word of truth... But thy See, which is called the Roman Curia, and which neither thou nor any man can deny that it is more corrupt than any Babylon or Sodom ever was, and which is, as far as I can see, characterized by a totally depraved, hopeless and notorious wickedness—that See I have truly despised, and I have been incensed to think that in thy name and under the guise of the Roman Church the people of Christ are mocked.” [WML, Phil. v2 p. 303]

“But that stewardship [the ministry] has now been developed into so great a pomp of power and so terrible a tyranny, that no heathen empire or earthly power can be compared with it, just as if laymen were not also Christians. Through this perversion the knowledge of Christian grace, faith, liberty and of Christ Himself has altogether perished, and its place has been taken by an unbearable bondage of human words and laws, until we have become, as the Lamentations of Jeremiah say, servants of the vilest men on earth, who abuse our misfortune to serve only their base and shameless will. To return to our purpose, 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 conduct of life, although this is the fashion of those who must to-day 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.” [WML, Phil. v2 p. 326]

“From what has been said, every one can pass a safe judgment on all works and laws and make a trustworthy distinction between them, and know who are the blind and ignorant pastors and who are the good and true. For any work that is not done solely for the purpose of keeping under the body or of serving one’s neighbor, so long as he asks nothing contrary to God, is not good nor Christian. And for this reason I mightily fear that few or no colleges, monasteries, altars and offices of the Church are really Christian in our day: no, nor the special fasts and prayers on certain saints’ days either. I fear, I say, that in all these we seek only our own profit, thinking that through them our sins are purged away and that we find salvation in them. In this way Christian liberty perishes altogether. And this comes from our ignorance of Christian faith and liberty. This ignorance and suppression of liberty very many blind pastors take pains to encourage: they stir up and urge on their people in these practices by praising such works, puffing them up with their indulgences, and never teaching faith.” [WML, Phil. v2 p. 341-2]

We do not need to comb through the confessions again to find quotes that oppose church ordinances that are binding upon consciences because the quotes that were supplied above from the time of the Augsburg confession particularly had the antithesis of Rome in mind which admits that she speaks where Scripture is silent, and also defended the right to make such church ordinances, and to bind consciences with them. I will however, offer the following few quotes which overtly forbid the church from becoming a legislative body.

“34] But just as Alexander once for all solved the Gordian knot by cutting it with his sword when he could not disentangle it, so the apostles once for all free consciences from traditions, especially if they are taught to merit justification. The apostles compel us to oppose this doctrine by teaching and examples. They compel us to teach that traditions do not justify; that they are not necessary for justification; that no one ought 35] to frame or receive traditions with the opinion that they merit justification. Then, even though any one should observe them, let him observe them without superstition as civil customs, just as without superstition soldiers are clothed in one way 36] and scholars in another [2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” [Triglot Apol. 15(8) vii; para. 34-35]

It is a denial of justification by faith alone when human traditions are looked upon as worship which pleases God, or which ought to be observed.

“How without God’s command and Word will he render men certain of God’s will? Does He not everywhere in the prophets prohibit men from instituting, without His commandment, peculiar rites of worship?” [Trigl. Apol. XV, para. 14]”

“1. Therefore we reject and condemn as wrong when the ordinances of men in themselves are regarded as a service or part of the service of God.

2. We reject and condemn also as wrong when these ordinances are by coercion forced upon the congregation of God as necessary.” [Trigl., FC, SD, X, para. 26-27]

Our confessions recognize as legalistic not only the explicit admission that the services are necessary for justification, but also the mere demand that they are necessary. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession explains how the lighter and seemingly harmless form of legalism is transformed into the coarse kind.

“Paul writes to the Colossians 2:23, that traditions have a show of wisdom. And they indeed have. For this good order is very becoming in the church, and for this reason is necessary. But human reason, because it does not understand the righteousness of faith, naturally imagines that such works justify men because they reconcile God, etc. Thus the common people among the Israelites thought, and by this opinion increased such ceremonies, just as among us they have grown in the monasteries [as in our time one altar after another and one church after another is founded]. Thus human reason judges also of bodily exercises, of fasts; although the end of these is to restrain the flesh, reason falsely adds that they are services which justify... the semblance of wisdom and righteousness in such works deceives men. And the examples of the saints are added [when they say: St. Francis wore a cap, etc.]; and when men desire to imitate these, they imitate, for the most part the outward exercises; their faith they do not imitate. After this semblance of wisdom and righteousness has deceived men, then infinite evils follow; the Gospel concerning the righteousness of faith in Christ is obscured, and vain confidence in such works succeeds. Then the commandments of God are obscured; these works arrogate to themselves the title of a perfect and spiritual life, and are far preferred to the works of God’s commandments [the true, holy, good works], as , the works of one’s own calling, the administration of the state and married life, in order to embrace these observances as better and holier.” [Trigl., Apol. XV, Para. 22-26]

Scripture (Mark 2:27-9) and our confessions teach that ordinances are for the benefit of man, not for his bondage.

“They observed human rites for the sake of bodily advantage, that the people might know at what time they should assemble; that, for the sake of example all things in the churches might be done in order and becomingly; lastly that the common people might receive a sort of training.” [Trigl., Apol. XV, para. 20]

“Likewise they require universal traditions, as they call them, as necessary for justification [and place them in Christ’s stead]. Here we have Paul as a constant champion, who everywhere contends that these observances neither justify nor are necessary in addition to the righteousness of faith. And nevertheless we teach that in these matters the use of liberty is to be so controlled

that the inexperienced may not be offended, and, on account of the abuse of liberty, may not become more hostile to the true doctrine of the Gospel, or that without a reasonable cause noting in customary rites be changed, but that, in order to cherish harmony, such old customs be observed as can be observed without sin or without great inconvenience.’ [Trigl., Apol., XV, para. 52]

The minute that we begin to make articles of faith from the rules or behavior of Christians, we return to the doctrine of Rome, and to the bondage of conscience.

“For it will not do to frame articles of faith from the works or words of the holy Fathers; otherwise their kind of fare, of garments, of house, etc., would have to become an article of faith, as was done with relics. [We have, however, another rule, namely] The rule is: The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel.” [Trigl., SA II, para. 15]

We also have this principle summarized for us in [McGlaughlin, p. 135, sec. 157]

“Keeping church ordinances, in so far as they are not opposed to God’s Word can only be asked for the sake of love and peace, not as a work of obligatory obedience which is to be rendered for the sake of God and conscience.”

AC XV p. 49, AP. XV (VIII) Trigl. p. 35-329, FC. p. 829, 831, 1053-1063

Rom 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

1Co 14:26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

1Co 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

1Co 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

1Pe 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

Eph 5:21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Gal 2:3 But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: 4 And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: 5 To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

Gal 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. 2 Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

Act 15:10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

Act 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

Act 16:3 Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.

Rom 14:19, 1Co 14:26, 33, 40, 1Pe 5:5, Eph 5:21, Gal. 2:3-5, Gal 5:1-2, Acts 15:10, 28, 29, 16:3

The contrary false doctrine is rejected which is taught by Rome, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Salvation Army: church ordinances commanded the same as God's commandments: 1Co 7:35, Rom 14:1, Col. 2:16-23

1Co 7:35 And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.

Rom 14:1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

(Note that in the light of Christian liberty we see clearly what doubtful disputations are. They are those which lead men to doubt whether or not it is necessary for a man to do certain works to be saved.)

Col. 2:16-23 (quoted above)

The application of this principle is explained clearly and calmly by Chemnitz.

“Concerning this question the Council of Trent says, ch. 10, that through keeping of the commandments of God and of the church the justified grow in righteousness and are justified still more... A more modest man might perhaps understand by the commandments of the church... those things which the church sets forth... from the Scripture... But the interpreter of the council does not permit this.. he expressly distinguishes between the commandments of God and the commandments of the church... the commandments of the church are about the things which have no express command or testimony in the Word of God.” [Chemnitz, Examen I, P. 625]

“There are certain indifferent rites which really do not conflict with the Scripture, yet they have no express command or testimony in the Scripture. Concerning these the simple and clear answer is: If they serve good order, decorum, and edification and are set forth in such a way that they do not conflict with Christian liberty, that is, that they are not set forth or observed from the notion or necessity, worship, or merit, the church can decide concerning them, as in its judgment will serve for edification for a variety of times, customs, and peoples.” [Chemnitz, Examen I, P626]

“What greater act of shamelessness can be thought out than to compare the traditions of men on an equal, yes, on the same plane with the commandments of God?” 2Th 2, Isa 14:13-15, Deu

12:8, 32; Num 15:39-40; Eze 20:18-19; Deu 5:32-33, Isa 1:12, Mat 15:9, Isa 29:13, Col. 2:23, Eph 2:10, Rom 12:2; Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14, 2Ti 1:5, 2Ti 3:16-17, Deu 12:32, Jos 1:7, Deu 5:32, 1Co 9:3-12. [In acts 15:23-29, “necessary things” are listed by Paul, some of which are within Christian liberty] “offering to idols, blood, things strangled... The reason for the other three appears more obscure, but the principles are clear. For those legal rites were obsolete; not that their observance had simply forbidden and prohibited, but their observance was now no longer necessary in the same manner as it had been simply forbidden and prohibited, but their observance was now no longer necessary in the same manner as it had been under the Law but had been made free. However, the Word of God teaches that this liberty in indifferent things, or adiaphora, should not be used when love shows that the weak in faith are offended and when foregoing the use of that liberty can, without harm to faith, invite the weak to faith. Because that was how matters stood at that time with those who were weak among the Jews, the apostles made this decree from this principle of the Word of God, that those who had been converted from among the Gentiles should, for the time being, not use their liberty in those things which had already become indifferent, lest they give offense to the weaker among the Jews, but that thus through their love they should invite them to faith in Christ.” [Chemnitz, Examen I, P. 634] “we by no means grant [that the prelates of the church have divine authority to bring in laws which have no command or testimony in the Word of God.], that from this there is established the tyranny of the Roman pope, all kinds of ungodly decrees, superstitious opinions, and snares for consciences. For we must stand in that liberty with which the Son of God has made us free, lest we be subjected to the yoke of slavery. Gal 5:1, Col. 2:16-23.” [Chemnitz, Examen I, P. 637-8]

In light of this we see how to answer those who propose to destroy Christian Liberty by making the church into a legislative body with their legalistic statements. The Lutheran Cyclopaedia rightly marks that as legalism: *insisting on strict application of church rules without proper regard to the specific circumstances in a given situation*. We won't have a perfect set of rules codified in the church because it is not the business of the church to control behavior or to establish orthodoxy by rules. The rules are there for the sake of men, so that we will be edified and served by a helpful order. But unforeseen circumstances will always arise that require that we set aside a rule.

In an effort to clean up or unify the outward behavior of church members, it is tempting to turn to legalism. It is argued, for example, that in particular circumstances 6: *the congregation should make laws about things that look bad and bind members to follow them*. Answer: We can't do that because we would be denying the Christian Liberty that was purchased with Christ's blood. We would be binding and enslaving those within the church who have been redeemed to the liberty of the brethren of Christ, who are kings and priests before God. By asking such people to make binding laws we would be asking them to cast overboard the many warnings of Scripture against traditions that are binding upon consciences. We can only ask for the sake of love and peace. To ask more is to destroy justification by faith alone.

When Jesus was first given the question of whether or not to stone the adulteress, Jesus ignored them, and refused to answer. He did nothing but silently bend over the ground and write with his finger, as if he did not hear them. They were sinning after all, asking Him to quit teaching the Gospel so that they could establish their new law. They were also usurping the office of God that was given to the Roman government. They had a law which forbade them from stoning anyone to death without turning that person over to the Romans to be punished. It

pleases me very much that Jesus at first said nothing to them. For it is the incessant cry of the legalist that by silence you are guilty. You must parrot their laws and judgments. You must punish the transgressors or you are lawless. If they condemn those who are silent, they condemn Jesus Christ. He was silent to a similar request.

Another way for legalism to appear is, in the midst of controversy, to think 8: that we need to record every possible exception to every rule in another rule. That would be true if we were allowed to make the church into a legislative body. But that is not the case. We do not destroy our orthodoxy by having an incomplete set of rules, but by thinking that we are supposed to have such a system of laws. Nor do we need 9: to make rules and punishments that govern the use of adiaphora, for that destroys liberty in the same way, and it destroys the freedom of conscience that should remain within the church. This is another form of legislation from which the Christian is free.

Another attack is found in the idea that *if you have exceptions to laws, then you are a moral relativist*. I heard this statement originally from someone who was trying to deny the moral law. It reminds me of the attack of most teen-agers when they begin to question parental laws. “You are not perfect, therefore I do not have to honor you or follow your rules.” There is this little problem of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment in which God says honor thy Father and mother, as our large catechism explains. God didn’t say that parents must be perfect to make rules, but only that your parents belong to you, therefore His Word is behind what they say. Likewise with law, God never said obey my laws because there are no exceptions to them. Nor did He say obey my laws unless there are some exceptions, then there really isn’t a law to begin with. It is a mistake of logic to reason that since you are guilty too my guilt doesn’t matter. If we are both guilty then we are both condemned. There is a similar faulty logic in reasoning that since there is an exception to a law, the law is faulty. And the person who makes such an argument really knows better, deep down. Luther somewhere repeated this maxim of philosophy: An exception does not violate the rule, but it confirms it. Or as it is more commonly said in English: An exception proves the rule. You must understand that there is a law, because you admit that you see an exception to it. Now if there were no law, how could you understand it well enough to articulate an exception? Your argument betrays you. It shows that you really do understand the law, and that you are arguing against your own conscience. You see an example where God says: thou shalt kill. For example, when the person who is killing is a civil servant carrying out the sentence of the judge. But this does not mean that where this exceptional circumstance is lacking you are innocent. You make the argument that since you know an exception the law does not exist, but you really know better because you understand that there is an exception. The worst and most coarse criminal justifies himself this way. “It isn’t fair that I go to prison for armed robbery because everybody steals towels when they stay at hotels.” “I shouldn’t be punished even though I raped this woman because everybody has lust in his heart.” Nay, but invert the argument. You should be punished more severely than the others because you not only recognize the fine and subtle transgressions of the law, but you are also wicked enough to use those lighter transgressions to justify your own coarse wicked crimes over which you do not sorrow. This doesn’t seem like legalism on the surface, but it still is. We must recognize that such a person does justify himself on the basis of behavior and obedience. This is the first and most coarse definition of legalism that we introduced above. He who brings it is just foolish enough to justify himself with things that he unknowingly admits are sins.

Here, however, we are led back to the beginning of our essay. “Exactly” says the legalist.



Now you get it. I must burden consciences with laws so that the hearers do not become like this coarse person. He is lawless, and so, in the interest of opposing lawlessness, I have to tell him that his salvation depends upon obedience, don't I? No! There is an evangelical way to preach against lawlessness, and it is in perfect harmony with the doctrine of Christian liberty. The Scriptures, when teaching Christian Liberty often preach against lawlessness at the same time. Here are some examples:

2Pe 2:19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

Freedom of conscience is the opposite of freedom from conscience. When the Christian is truly acting according to freedom, he behaves exactly the way Christ did when He was visibly present in the earth. He behaves excellently according to God's holy laws and the ten commandments, and he does so willingly with a pure heart. False teachers take tainted money and give permits to continue in sin without repentance. They go against what the conscience tells them so that God must open the mouths of dumb animals to correct them. What they call liberty in this case is deceit. The apostle wakes up such people not by binding them to some outward behavior, but by witnessing that they are serving sin slavishly and have abandoned Christ when they begin to be indifferent to sin.

Jam 1:23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: 24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. 25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. 26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. 27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

James gently wakes up the Christian by saying: Have you forgotten what Christ is like already? That is not what liberty is. It does not remain in the prison house and slavishly do as the devilish task-masters ask. You are continuing in liberty when you remember what sort of fruits your faith should have, and you strive to fulfill them. True liberty is not indifferent to any harm. Especially that which is seen in the light of the holy law. True liberty is striving for mighty and glorious works that give God the praise, and show men how good Christ is.

Jam 2:12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. 14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

Here James testifies that whatever is called faith when it despises good works and has no mercy on his fellow man is phony faith. Don't be satisfied with such fake faith, but look for real and genuine faith that would like to imitate Christ and become like Him.

Rom 6:15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God

forbid. 16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? 17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. 18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. 19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. 20 For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. 21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. 22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

See how gently he argues with the Christian. He wakes him up to the deceit of using liberty to sin. Do you really want to serve death by sin? Wouldn't you rather help other people find the righteousness of Christ by obeying God's law. Let us thank God that we have been freed from such bondage to sin. Let us willingly obey all that God asks of us now that we are free. Shouldn't we aid righteousness now that we are free from the guilt of our sins? Isn't it time to bring forth holy fruits and to head for heaven where we will receive eternal life. He does this however while still emphasizing that eternal life is a free gift through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The antinomians have this statement: "If somebody were an adulterer, provided only that he believed, he would have a gracious God." There are two kinds of sinners: first those who are sorry for their sins and repent earnestly, feel sorry for them and desire and endeavor never to commit that again. Secondly, there are those who feel no sorrow, but continue to look for opportunities smugly to indulge. This latter type need the law Heb 13:4, 1Co 6:9-10, Rom 8:8 [LW, Vol. 3 p. 224]

A Christian is urged to listen to his conscience and so follow freedom. 2Co 4:2, Heb 9:14, Col 2:18-23, 1Co 11:28-30, 1Co 8:6-13, Rom 14:1-23

Many examples can be drawn from [Walther, L&G, p. 381ff], of which I give only a few. "Thesis XXIII In the nineteenth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when an attempt is made, by means of the demands or threats or the promises of the Law, to induce the unregenerate to put away their sins and engage in good works and thus become godly; on the other hand, when an endeavor is made, by means of the commands of the Law rather than by the admonitions of the Gospel to urge the regenerate to do good."

"The attempt to make men godly by means of the Law and to induce even those who are already believers in Christ to do good by holding up the Law and issuing commands to them, is a very gross confounding of Law and Gospel... Jer 31:31-34... We see from it that, while the Law was written into the hearts of men even before the fall, it did not serve the purpose of making men godly;... We are by nature carnal, and manifestations of the spirit are not forced from us by the Law. God says: 'I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.' That is why the Law is written into our hearts. That means nothing else than this, that what the Law could not effect is accomplished by the Gospel, by the message of the forgiveness of sins." [Walther, L&G, p. 381-2]

“Psa 119:32 I will run the way of Thy Commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart. The psalmist does not say: ‘When thou smitest me with the thunder of thy law, I shall run the way of thy commandments. No; in that case I do not run. But when thou comfortest me so that my cramped heart is made large, I become cheerful and willing to walk the strait, the narrow, way to heaven.’ This is an experience which you may have had personally. After a long season of sluggishness and lukewarmness, during which you began to hate yourself because you saw no way to change your condition, you happen to hear a real Gospel sermon, and you leave the church a changed man and rejoice in the fact that you may believe and are a child of God. You suddenly become aware of the fact that it is not difficult to walk in the way of God’s commandments; you seem to walk in it of your own accord. How foolish, then, is a preacher who thinks that conditions in his congregation will improve if he thunders at his people with the Law and paints hell and damnation for them. That will not at all improve the people.” [Walther, L&G, p. 384]

“Gal 3:2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the Law or by the hearing of faith? The Galatians had suffered themselves to be misled into regarding Paul’s preaching of salvation by faith, through the grace of Christ alone, as very imperfect, to say the least, and hence as a dangerous doctrine by which a person might easily be led into perdition. Accordingly, they accepted the false prophets’ doctrine of the Law. With great sadness Paul learned that these congregations, which he had founded himself and which had flourished wonderfully, were being disrupted and devastated by false teachers. Accordingly, he asked them the question in our text, his object being to remind them of the great change which had taken place in them when he preached to them the sweet Gospel of God’s mercy... Remember what the apostle is saying in this text. If you want to revive your future congregations and cause the Spirit of peace, joy, faith, and confidence, the childlike spirit, the Spirit of soul-rest, to take up His abode among the members of your congregation, you must, for God’s sake, not employ the Law to bring this about. If you find your congregations in the worst condition imaginable, you must, indeed, preach the Law to them, but follow it up immediately with the Gospel.” [Walther, L&G, p. 385]

“this confounding of Law and Gospel occurs when ministers become aware that all their Gospel-preaching is useless because gross sins of the flesh still occur among their hearers. There may be drunkards among them or people who indulge in fist-fights, etc. These people come to church occasionally but rarely to Communion and refuse to contribute when a collection is taken up. Now, the preacher may come to the conclusion that he has preached too much Gospel to them and must adopt a different policy; he must hush the Gospel for a while and preach nothing but Law, and conditions will improve. But he is mistaken; the people do not change, except that they become very angry with their minister for not permitting them to do what they very much like to do.” [Walther, L&G, p. 387]

“Luther’s comment on Rom 12:1 I beseech you brethren, by the mercies of God. Paul does not say: I command you; for he is preaching to such as are already Christians and godly by faith, in newness of life. These must not be coerced by means of commandments, but admonished to do willingly what has to be done with the old sinful man in them. For any person who does not do this willingly, simply in answer to kind admonitions, is not a Christian; and any person who

wants to achieve this result by force applied to such as are unwilling is not a Christian preacher or ruler, but a worldly jailor. A preacher of the Law comes down on men with threats and punishments; a preacher of divine grace coaxes and urges men by reminding them of the goodness and mercy which God has shown them... Any person who will not permit himself to be coaxed and urged with sweet and pleasant words, which remind him of the mercy of God abundantly bestowed upon him in Christ, to do good joyfully and lovingly to the honor of God and for the benefit of his fellow-man, is worthless, and all that is done for him is labor lost. If he is not melted and dissolved in the fire of heavenly love and grace, how can he be softened and made cheerful by laws and threats?" [Walther, L&G, p. 388]

"An enforcer of laws, like a jailer, is not concerned about the condition of the heart of the person with whom he must deal, but only about enforcing that person's obedience. He stands before his victim with a scourge and tells him that the scourge will come down on his back if he does not obey." [Walther, L&G, p. 389]

The same is mentioned in Pieper although it seems to me that it could have had a heavier treatment.

"in uncovering sins of omission let us not be legalistic taskmasters; we should rather, as behooves a Christian teacher, invite and encourage Christians with the mercy of God in Christ which they have experienced (Rom 12:1) so that they take pleasure in performing the will of God and 'walk in paradise'" [Pieper, Vol. 1, p. 358]

"the only motive for good works is the pure grace of God, which we have experienced in Christ Jesus. St. Paul knew of no other incentive to good works. [Pieper, Vol. 3 p. 8]

"The lawmonger compels with threats and punishments; the teacher of grace persuades and incites men by reminding them of the goodness and mercy of God which they have experienced, for he wants no unwilling works or grudging service; he wants men to render a glad and joyous service to the Lord. Whoever will not let himself be moved and drawn by the consoling and lovely words of God's mercy, granted to and bestowed on us without measure in Christ, so that he gladly and joyfully does all this to the glory of God and welfare of his neighbor, amounts to nothing and labor is wasted on him. Rom 12:1, 2Co 8. [Pieper vol. 3, p. 49]

"Both pastor and congregation must most carefully guard against denying the Lord's Supper to anyone to whom Christ wants it to be given. In his day Luther had to warn not only against laxity in practice, but also against legalism and unnecessary rigor. he writes to Balth. Thuring in Koburg. 'I have written the pastor not to torture the ignorant with long examinations when they announce for communion, but also not to refrain entirely from exploring and examining them... our men are stern and inclined to severity. I pray you therefore for God's sake, to endeavor most earnestly to teach the Gospel in all humility.'" [Pieper, vol. 3, p. 445-6]

We conclude therefore that in order to steer clear of lawlessness, it is vital that we keep the doctrine of justification by faith alone without the deeds of the law at the forefront of our thoughts. This truth is the heart of our religion which gives life, and causes us to overcome all sin. And if this is at the center of our preaching, then we will also make frequent use of Christian

Liberty in our efforts to establish and maintain good Christian behavior. May God bless our fellowship, and the Lutherans in modern times, and all Christians everywhere with a correct and abundant knowledge and practice of this glorious liberty.

AMEN.

Soli Deo Gloria

## Appendix A: Alphabetical listing of References

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Appendix B: Citations in order of appearance

- [Lueker, p. 577]  
 [Webster's 9<sup>th</sup> Collegiate dictionary]  
 [LW 4, p. 239]  
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 [WML Phil. V2, p. 325]  
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 [Walther, L&G, p. 70, ](from Trent VIth session Canon 21)  
 [Walther, L&G p. 75]  
 [Pieper, vol. 3 p. 168]  
 [Walther, L&G p. 75]  
 [Walther, L&G, p. 72]  
 [Walther, L&G, p. 299-306]  
 [Trigl. FC, SD, Art. IV para. 22-29]  
 [WML, Phil. V2, p. 324-5]  
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 [Trigl. AC XXVIII, Para. 39-42]  
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