

# 1 Martin Luther: 2 On the Freedom of a Christian

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## 3 **DEDICATORY LETTER OF MARTIN LUTHER TO POPE LEO X.**

4 Among those monstrous evils of this age, with which I have now for three years been waging war, I am  
5 sometimes compelled to look to you and to call you to mind, most blessed father Leo<sup>1</sup>. In truth, since  
6 you alone are everywhere considered as being the cause of my engaging in war, I cannot at any time fail  
7 to remember you; and although I have been compelled by the causeless raging of your impious  
8 flatterers against me to appeal from your seat to a future council--fearless of the futile decrees of your  
9 predecessors Pius and Julius, who in their foolish tyranny prohibited such an action--yet I have never  
10 been so alienated in feeling from your Blessedness as not to have sought with all my might, in diligent  
11 prayer and crying to God, every best gift for you and for your See. But those who have hitherto  
12 endeavored to terrify me with the majesty of your name and authority, I have begun quite to despise  
13 and triumph over. One thing I see remaining, which I cannot despise, and this has been the reason of my  
14 writing anew to your Blessedness; namely, that I find that blame is cast on me, and that that rashness, in  
15 which I am judged to have spared not even your person, is imputed to me as a great offence.

16 Now, to confess the truth openly, I am conscious that, whenever I have had to mention your person, I  
17 have said nothing of you but what was honorable and good. If I had done otherwise, I could by no  
18 means have approved my own conduct, but should have supported with all my power the judgment of  
19 those men concerning me; nor would anything have pleased me better, than to recant such rashness  
20 and impiety. I have called you Daniel in Babylon; and every reader thoroughly knows with what  
21 distinguished zeal I defended your conspicuous innocence against Silvester<sup>2</sup>, who tried to stain it. Indeed  
22 the published opinion of so many great men, and the repute of your [96] blameless life, are too widely  
23 famed and too much revered throughout the world to be assailable by any man of however great  
24 name, or by any arts. I am not so foolish as to attack one whom everybody praises; nay, it has been and  
25 always will be my desire not to attack even those whom public repute disgraces. I am not delighted at  
26 the faults of any man, since I am very conscious myself of the great beam in my own eye, nor can I be  
27 the first to cast a stone at the adulteress.

28 I have indeed inveighed sharply against impious doctrines, and I have not been slack to censure my  
29 adversaries on account, not of their bad morals, but of their impiety. And for this I am so far from being  
30 sorry, that I have brought my mind to despise the judgments of men, and to persevere in this vehement  
31 zeal, according to the example of Christ, who, in his zeal, calls his adversaries a generation of vipers,  
32 blind, hypocrites, and children of the devil. Paul too charges the sorcerer with being a child of the devil,  
33 full of all subtlety and all malice; and defames certain persons as evil workers, dogs, and deceivers. In  
34 the opinion of those delicate-eared persons, nothing could be more bitter or intemperate than Paul's  
35 language. What can be more bitter than the words of the prophets? The ears of our generation have  
36 been made so delicate by the senseless multitude of flatterers, that, so soon as we perceive that  
37 anything of ours is not approved of, we cry out that we are being bitterly assailed; and when we can

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<sup>1</sup> Leo X, born Giovanni di Lorenzo d' Medici, the second son of Lorenzo d' Medici of Florence (1475-1521; reigned as Pope from 1513 to his death)

<sup>2</sup> Sylvester Mazzolini Prierias (1456-1523) Dominican, appointed Master of the Sacred Palace, theologian to Pope Leo X, in 1515; prepared the original case against Luther in 1517.

38 repel the truth by no other pretence, we escape by attributing bitterness, impatience, intemperance, to  
39 our adversaries. What would be the use of salt, if it were not pungent? or of the edge of the sword, if it  
40 did not slay? Accursed is the man, who does the work of the Lord deceitfully.

41 Wherefore, most excellent Leo, I beseech you to accept my vindication, made in this letter, and to  
42 persuade yourself that I have never thought any evil concerning your person; further, that I am one who  
43 desires that eternal blessing may fall to your lot, and that I have no dispute with any man concerning  
44 morals, but only concerning the word of truth. In all other things I will yield to any one, but I neither can  
45 nor will forsake and deny the Word. He who thinks otherwise of me or has taken in my words in another  
46 sense, does not think rightly, and has not taken in the truth.

47 [97] Your See, however, which is called the Court of Rome, and which neither you nor any man can deny  
48 to be more corrupt than any Babylon or Sodom, and quite, as I believe, of a lost, desperate, and  
49 hopeless impiety, this I have verily abominated, and have felt indignant that the people of Christ should  
50 be cheated under your name and the pretext of the Church of Rome and so I have resisted, and will  
51 resist, as long as the spirit of faith shall live in me. Not that I am striving after impossibilities, or hoping  
52 that by my labors alone, against the furious opposition of so many flatterers, any good can be done in  
53 that most disordered Babylon, but that I feel myself a debtor to my brethren, and am bound to take  
54 thought for them, that fewer of them may be ruined, or that their ruin may be less complete, by the  
55 plagues of Rome. For many years now, nothing else has overflowed from Rome into the world--as you  
56 are not ignorant--than the laying waste of goods, of bodies, and of souls, and the worst examples of all  
57 the worst things. These things are clearer than the light to all men; and the Church of Rome, formerly  
58 the most holy of all churches, has become the most lawless den of thieves, the most shameless of all  
59 brothels, the very kingdom of sin, death, and hell; so that not even Antichrist, if he were to come, could  
60 devise any addition to its wickedness.

61 Meanwhile you, Leo, are sitting like a lamb in the midst of wolves, like Daniel in the midst of lions, and,  
62 with Ezekiel, you dwell among scorpions. What opposition can you alone make to these monstrous  
63 evils? Take to yourself three or four of the most learned and best of the Cardinals. What are these  
64 among so many? You would all perish by poison, before you could undertake to decide on a remedy. It is  
65 all over with the Court of Rome; the wrath of God has come upon her to the uttermost. She hates  
66 councils, she dreads to be reformed, she cannot restrain the madness of her impiety, she fills up the  
67 sentence passed on her mother, of whom it is said, "We would have healed Babylon, but she is not  
68 healed; let us forsake her." It had been your duty and that of your Cardinals, to apply a remedy to these  
69 evils, but this gout laughs at the physician's hand, and the chariot does not obey the reins. Under the  
70 influence of these feelings I have always grieved that you, most excellent Leo, who were worthy of a  
71 better age, have been made Pontiff in this. For the Roman Court is not worthy of [98] you and those like  
72 you, but of Satan himself, who in truth is more the ruler in that Babylon than you are.

73 O would that, having laid aside that glory which your most abandoned enemies declare to be yours, you  
74 were living rather in the office of a private priest, or on your paternal inheritance! In that glory none are  
75 worthy to glory, except the race of Iscariot, the children of perdition. For what happens in your court,  
76 Leo, except that, the more wicked and execrable any man is, the more prosperously he can use your  
77 name and authority for the ruin of the property and souls of men, for the multiplication of crimes, for  
78 the oppression of faith and truth, and of the whole Church of God? O Leo! in reality most unfortunate,  
79 and sitting on a most perilous throne--I tell you the truth, because I wish you well; for if Bernard felt  
80 compassion for his Anastasius at a time when the Roman See, though even then most corrupt, was as  
81 yet ruling with better hope than now, why should not we lament, to whom so much additional  
82 corruption and ruin has happened in three hundred years?

83 Is it not true that there is nothing under the vast heavens more corrupt, more pestilential, more hateful  
84 than the Court of Rome? She incomparably surpasses the impiety of the Turks, so that in very truth she,  
85 who was formerly the gate of heaven, is now a sort of open mouth of hell, and such a mouth as, under  
86 the urgent wrath of God, cannot be blocked up; one course alone being left to us wretched men, to call  
87 back and save some few, if we can, from that Roman gulf.

88 Behold, Leo my father, with what purpose and on what principle it is that I have stormed against that  
89 seat of pestilence. I am so far from having felt any rage against your person, that I even hoped to gain  
90 favor with you, and to aid in your welfare, by striking actively and vigorously at that your prison, nay,  
91 your hell. For whatever the efforts of all intellects can contrive against the confusion of that impious  
92 Court will be advantageous to you and to your welfare, and to many others with you. Those who do  
93 harm to her are doing your office; those who in every way abhor her are glorifying Christ; in short, those  
94 are Christians who are not Romans.

95 But, to say yet more, even this never entered my heart, to inveigh against the Court of Rome, or to  
96 dispute at all about her. For, seeing all remedies for her health to be desperate, I [99] looked on her with  
97 contempt, and, giving her a bill of divorcement, said to her, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still and  
98 he that is filthy, let him be filthy still;" giving myself up to the peaceful and quiet study of sacred  
99 literature, that by this I might be of use to the brethren living about me.

100 While I was making some advance in these studies, Satan opened his eyes and goaded on his servant  
101 John Eccius<sup>3</sup>, that notorious adversary of Christ, by the unchecked lust for fame, to drag me  
102 unexpectedly into the arena, trying to catch me in one little word concerning the primacy of the Church  
103 of Rome, which had fallen from me in passing. That boastful Thraso<sup>4</sup>, foaming and gnashing his teeth,  
104 proclaimed that he would dare all things for the glory of God, and for the honor of the holy apostolic  
105 seat; and, being pulled up respecting your power, which he was about to misuse, he looked forward  
106 with all certainty to victory; seeking to promote, not so much the primacy of Peter, as his own pre-  
107 eminence among the theologians of this age; for he thought it would contribute in no slight degree to  
108 this, if he were to lead Luther in triumph. The result having proved unfortunate for the sophist, an  
109 incredible rage torments him; for he feels that whatever discredit to Rome has arisen through me, has  
110 been caused by the fault of himself alone.

111 Suffer me, I pray you, most excellent Leo, both to plead my own cause, and to accuse your true enemies.  
112 I believe it is known to you in what way Cardinal Cajetan<sup>5</sup>, your imprudent and unfortunate, nay,  
113 unfaithful legate, acted towards me. When, on account of my reverence for your name, I had placed  
114 myself and all that was mine in his hands, he did not so act as to establish peace, which he could easily  
115 have established by one little word, since I at that time promised to be silent and to make an end of in  
116 case, if he would command my adversaries to do the same. But that man of pride, not content with this  
117 agreement, began to justify my adversaries, to give them free license, and to order me to recant; a thing  
118 which was certainly not in his commission. Thus indeed, when the case was in the best position, it came  
119 through his vexatious tyranny into a much worse one. Therefore, whatever has followed upon this is the  
120 fault, not of Luther, but entirely of Cajetan, since he did not suffer me to be silent and remain quiet,  
121 which at that [100] time I was entreating for with all my might. What more was it my duty to do?

122 Next came Charles Miltitz<sup>6</sup>, also a nuncio from your Blessedness. He, though he went up and down with  
123 much and varied exertion, and omitted nothing which could tend to restore the position of the cause,

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<sup>3</sup> Johann Maier von Eck (1486-1543)

<sup>4</sup> A metaphorical reference to Eck -

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Cardinal Cajetan, born Tomaso de Vio (1469-1534)

<sup>6</sup> Karl von Miltitz (1490-1529)

124 thrown into confusion by the rashness and pride of Cajetan, had difficulty, even with the help of that  
125 very illustrious prince the Elector Frederick<sup>7</sup>, in at last bringing about more than one familiar conference  
126 with me. In these I again yielded to your great name, and was prepared to keep silence and to accept as  
127 my judge either the Archbishop of Treves or the Bishop of Naumburg; and thus it was done and  
128 concluded. While this was being done with good hope of success, lo! that other and greater enemy of  
129 yours, Eccius, rushed in with his Leipzig disputation, which he had undertaken against Carlstadt, and,  
130 having taken up a new question concerning the primacy of the Pope, turned his arms unexpectedly  
131 against me, and completely overthrew the plan for peace. Meanwhile Charles Miltitz was waiting,  
132 disputations were held, judges were being chosen, but no decision was arrived at. And no wonder; for  
133 by the falsehoods, pretences, and arts of Eccius the whole business was brought into such thorough  
134 disorder, confusion, and festering soreness, that, whichever way the sentence might lean, a greater  
135 conflagration was sure to arise; for he was seeking, not after truth, but after his own credit. In this case  
136 too I omitted nothing which it was right that I should do.

137 I confess that, on this occasion, no small part of the corruptions of Rome came to light; but, if there was  
138 any offence in this, it was the fault of Eccius, who, in taking on him a burden beyond his strength, and in  
139 furiously aiming at credit for himself, unveiled to the whole world the disgrace of Rome.

140 Here is that enemy of yours, Leo, or rather of your Court; by his example alone we may learn that an  
141 enemy is not more baneful than a flatterer. For what did he bring about by his flattery, except evils,  
142 which no king could have brought about? At this day the name of the Court of Rome stinks in the  
143 nostrils of the world, the papal authority is growing weak, and its notorious ignorance is evil spoken of.  
144 We should hear none of these things, if Eccius had not disturbed the plans of Miltitz [101] and myself for  
145 peace. He feels this clearly enough himself, in the indignation he shows, too late and in vain, against the  
146 publication of my books. He ought to have reflected on this at the time when he was all mad for  
147 renown, and was seeking in your cause nothing but his own objects, and that with the greatest peril to  
148 you. The foolish man hoped that, from fear of your name, I should yield and keep silence; for I do not  
149 think he presumed on his talents and learning. Now, when he sees that I am very confident and speak  
150 aloud, he repents too late of his rashness and sees--if indeed he does see it--that there is One in Heaven  
151 who resists the proud, and humbles the presumptuous.

152 Since, then, we were bringing about by this disputation nothing but the greater confusion of the cause  
153 of Rome, Charles Miltitz for the third time addressed the Fathers of the Order, assembled in chapter,  
154 and sought their advice for the settlement of the case, as being now in a most troubled and perilous  
155 state. Since, by the favor of God, there was no hope of proceeding against me by force, some of the  
156 more noted of their number were sent to me, and begged me at least to show respect to your person,  
157 and to vindicate in a humble letter both your innocence and my own. They said that the affair was not as  
158 yet in a position of extreme hopelessness, if Leo X., in his inborn kindness, would put his hand to it. On  
159 this I, who have always offered and wished for peace, in order that I might devote myself to calmer and  
160 more useful pursuits, and who for this very purpose have acted with so much spirit and vehemence, in  
161 order to put down by the strength and impetuosity of my words as well as of my feelings, men whom I  
162 saw to be very far from equal to myself--I, I say, not only gladly yielded, but even accepted it with joy  
163 and gratitude, as the greatest kindness and benefit, if you should think it right to satisfy my hopes.

164 Thus I come, most blessed Father, and in all abasement beseech you to put to your hand, if it is possible,  
165 and impose a curb upon those flatterers who are enemies of peace, while they pretend peace. But there  
166 is no reason, most blessed Father, why any one should assume that I am to utter a recantation, unless

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<sup>7</sup> Frederick III, Elector of Saxony, also known as Frederick the Wise (1463-1525; elector from 1486-death); founded Wittenberg University in 1502

167 he prefers to involve the case in still greater confusion. Moreover, I cannot bear with laws for the  
168 interpretation of the Word of God, since the Word of God, which teaches liberty in all other things,  
169 ought not to be [102] bound. Saying these two things, there is nothing which I am not able, and most  
170 heartily willing, to do or to suffer. I hate contention; I will challenge no one; in return I wish not to be  
171 challenged; but, being challenged, I will not be dumb in the cause of Christ my Master. For your  
172 Blessedness will be able by one short and easy word to call these controversies before you and suppress  
173 them; and to impose silence and peace on both sides; a word which I have ever longed to hear.

174 Therefore, Leo my Father, beware of listening to those Sirens, who make you out to be not simply a  
175 man, but partly a God, so that you can command and require whatever you will. It will not happen so,  
176 nor will you prevail. You are the servant of servants, and, more than any other man, in a most pitiable  
177 and perilous position. Let not those men deceive you, who pretend that you are Lord of the world; who  
178 will not allow any one to be a Christian without your authority; who babble of your having power over  
179 heaven, hell, and purgatory. These men are your enemies and are seeking your soul to destroy it, as  
180 Isaiah says: "My people, they that call thee blessed are themselves deceiving thee." They are in error,  
181 who raise you above councils and the universal Church. They are in error, who attribute to you alone the  
182 right of interpreting Scripture. All these men are seeking to set up their own impieties in the Church  
183 under your name, and alas! Satan has gained much through them in the time of your predecessors.

184 In brief, trust not in any who exalt you, but in those who humiliate you. For this is the judgment of God:  
185 "He hath cast down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble." See how unlike Christ  
186 was to His successors, though all will have it that they are His vicars. I fear that in truth very many of  
187 them have been in too serious a sense His vicars, for a vicar represents a prince who is absent. Now if a  
188 Pontiff rules while Christ is absent and does not dwell in his heart, what else is he but a vicar of Christ?  
189 And then what is that Church but a multitude without Christ? What indeed is such a vicar but Antichrist  
190 and an idol? How much more rightly did the Apostles speak, who call themselves the servants of a  
191 present Christ, not the vicars of an absent one.

192 Perhaps I am shamelessly bold in seeming to teach so great a head, by whom all men ought to be  
193 taught, and from whom, [103] as those plagues of yours boast, the thrones of judges receive their  
194 sentence; but I imitate Saint Bernard in his book concerning "Considerations" addressed to Eugenius, a  
195 book which ought to be known by heart by every Pontiff. I do this, not from any desire to teach, but as a  
196 duty, from that simple and faithful solicitude, which teaches us to be anxious for all that is safe for our  
197 neighbors, and does not allow considerations of worthiness or unworthiness to be entertained, being  
198 intent only on the dangers or advantage of others. For since I know that your Blessedness is driven and  
199 tossed by the waves at Rome, while the depths of the sea press on you with infinite perils, and that you  
200 are laboring under such a condition of misery that you need even the least help from any the least  
201 brother, I do not seem to myself to be acting unsuitably, if I forget your majesty till I shall have fulfilled  
202 the office of charity. I will not flatter in so serious and perilous a matter; and if in this you do not see that  
203 I am your friend and most thoroughly your subject, there is One to see and judge.

204 In fine, that I may not approach you empty handed, Blessed Father, I bring with me this little treatise,  
205 published under your name, as a good omen of the establishment of peace, and of good hope. By this  
206 you may perceive in what pursuits I should prefer and be able to occupy myself to more profit, if I were  
207 allowed, or had been hitherto allowed, by your impious flatterers. It is a small matter, if you look to its  
208 exterior, but, unless I mistake, it is a summary of the Christian life put together in small compass, if you  
209 apprehend its meaning. I, in my poverty, have no other present to make you; nor do you need anything  
210 else than to be enriched by a spiritual gift. I commend myself to your Paternity and Blessedness, whom  
211 may the Lord Jesus preserve for ever. Amen.

212 Wittenberg; 6th September, 1520.

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## 219 **CONCERNING CHRISTIAN LIBERTY**

220 [104] CHRISTIAN faith has appeared to many an easy thing; nay, not a few even reckon it among the  
221 social virtues, as it were; and this they do, because they have not made proof of it experimentally, and  
222 have never tasted of what efficacy it is. For it is not possible for any man to write well about it, or to  
223 understand well what is rightly written, who has not at some time tasted of its spirit, under the pressure  
224 of tribulation. While he who has tasted of it, even to a very small extent, can never write, speak, think,  
225 or hear about it sufficiently. For it is a living fountain, springing up unto eternal life, as Christ calls it in  
226 the 4th chapter of St. John.

227 Now, though I cannot boast of my abundance, and though I know how poorly I am furnished, yet I hope  
228 that, after having been vexed by various temptations, I have attained some little drop of faith, and that I  
229 can speak of this matter, if not with more elegance, certainly with more solidity than those literal and  
230 too subtle disputants who have hitherto discoursed upon it, without understanding their own words.  
231 That I may open, then, an easier way for the ignorant--for these alone I am trying to serve--I first lay  
232 down these two propositions, concerning spiritual liberty and servitude.

233 A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful  
234 servant of all, and subject to every one.

235 Although these statements appear contradictory, yet, when they are found to agree together, they will  
236 be highly serviceable to my purpose. They are both the statements of Paul himself, who says: "Though I  
237 be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all" (1 Cor. ix. 19), and: "Owe no man  
238 anything, but to love one another." (Rom. xiii. 8.) Now love is by its own nature dutiful and obedient to  
239 the beloved object. Thus even Christ, though Lord of all things, was yet made of a woman; made under  
240 the law; at once free and a [105] servant; at once in the form of God and in the form of a servant.

241 Let us examine the subject on a deeper and less simple principle. Man is composed of a twofold nature,  
242 a spiritual and a bodily. As regards the spiritual nature, which they name the soul, he is called the  
243 spiritual, inward, new man; as regards the bodily nature, which they name the flesh, he is called the  
244 fleshly, outward, old man. The Apostle speaks of this: "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward  
245 man is relieved day by day." (2 Cor. iv. 16.) The result of this diversity is, that in the Scriptures opposing  
246 statements are made concerning the same man; the fact being that in the same man these two men are  
247 opposed to one another; the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. (Gal. v. 17.)

248 We first approach the subject of the inward man, that we may see by what means a man becomes  
249 justified, free, and a true Christian; that is, a spiritual, new, and inward man. It is certain that absolutely  
250 none among outward things, under whatever name they may be reckoned, has any weight in producing  
251 a state of justification and Christian liberty, nor, on the other hand an unjustified state and one of  
252 slavery. This can be shown by an easy course of argument.

253 What can it profit the soul, that the body should be in good condition, free, and full of life; that it should  
254 eat, drink, and act according to its pleasure; when even the most impious slaves of every kind of vice are  
255 prosperous in these matters? Again, what harm can ill-health, bondage, hunger, thirst, or any other  
256 outward evil, do to the soul, when even the most pious of men, and the freest in the purity of their  
257 conscience are harassed by these things? Neither of these states of things has to do with the liberty or  
258 the slavery of the soul.

259 And so it will profit nothing that the body should be adorned with sacred vestments, or dwell in holy  
260 places, or be occupied in sacred offices, or pray, fast, and abstain from certain meats, or do whatever  
261 works can be done through the body and in the body. Something widely different will be necessary for  
262 the justification and liberty of the soul, since the things I have spoken of can be done by any impious  
263 person, and only hypocrites are produced by devotion to these things. On the other hand, it will not at  
264 all injure the soul that the [106] body should be clothed in profane raiment, should dwell in profane  
265 places, should eat and drink in the ordinary fashion, should not pray aloud, and should leave undone all  
266 the things abovementioned, which may be done by hypocrites.

267 And, to cast everything aside, even speculations, meditations and whatever things can be performed by  
268 the exertions of the soul itself, are of no profit. One thing, and one alone, is necessary for life,  
269 justification, and Christian liberty; and that is the most holy word of God, the Gospel of Christ, as He  
270 says: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me shall not die eternally " (John xi. 25) ;  
271 and also (John viii. 36) "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed;" and (Matt. iv. 4), "Man  
272 shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

273 Let us therefore hold it for certain and firmly established, that the soul can do without everything,  
274 except the word of God, without which none at all of its wants are provided for. But, having the word, it  
275 is rich and want for nothing; since that is the word of life, of truth, of light, of peace, of justification, of  
276 salvation, of joy, of liberty, of wisdom, of virtue, of grace, of glory, and of every good thing. It is on this  
277 account that the prophet in a whole psalm (Ps. cxix.), and in many other places, sighs for and calls upon  
278 the word of God with so many groanings and words.

279 Again, there is no more cruel stroke of the wrath of God than when He sends a famine of hearing His  
280 words (Amos viii. 11); just as there is no greater favor from Him than the sending forth of His word, as it  
281 is said: "He sent his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions." (Ps. cvii. 20.)  
282 Christ was sent for no other office than that of the word, and the order of apostles, that of bishops, and  
283 that of the whole body of the clergy, have been called and instituted for no object but the ministry of  
284 the word.

285 But you will ask: "What is this word, and by what means is it to be used, since there are so many words  
286 of God?" I answer, the Apostle Paul (Rom. i.) explains what it is, namely, the Gospel of God, concerning  
287 His Son, incarnate, suffering, risen, and glorified through the Spirit, the sanctifier. To preach Christ is to  
288 feed the soul, to justify it, to set it free, and to save it, if it believes the preaching. For faith alone, [107]  
289 and the efficacious use of the word of God, bring salvation. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the  
290 Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be  
291 saved." (Rom. x. 9.) And again: "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that  
292 believeth" (Rom. x. 4); and "The just shall live by faith." (Rom. i. 17.) For the word of God cannot be  
293 received and honored by any works, but by faith alone. Hence it is clear that, as the soul needs the word  
294 alone for life and justification, so it is justified by faith alone and not by any works. For if it could be  
295 justified by any other means, it would have no need of the word, nor consequently of faith.

296 But this faith cannot consist at all with works; that is, if you imagine that you can be justified by those  
297 works, whatever they are, along with it. For this would be to halt between two opinions, to worship  
298 Baal, and to kiss the hand to him, which is a very great iniquity, as Job says. Therefore, when you begin  
299 to believe, you learn at the same time that all that is in you is utterly guilty, sinful, and damnable;  
300 according to that saying: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. iii. 23.) And also:  
301 "There is none righteous, no, not one; they are all gone out of the way; they are together become  
302 unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Rom. iii. 10-12.) When you have learnt this,  
303 you will know that Christ is necessary for you, since He has suffered and risen again for you, that,



304 believing on Him, you might by this faith become another man, all your sins being remitted, and you  
305 being justified by the merits of another, namely, of Christ alone.

306 Since then this faith can reign only in the inward man, as it is said: "With the heart man believeth unto  
307 righteousness" (Rom. x. 10); and since it alone justifies, it is evident that by no outward work or labor  
308 can the inward man be at all justified, made free, and saved; and that no works whatever have any  
309 relation to him. And so, on the other hand, it is solely by impiety and incredulity of heart that he  
310 becomes guilty, and a slave of sin, deserving condemnation; not by any outward sin or work. Therefore  
311 the first care of every Christian ought to be, to lay aside all reliance on works, and strengthen his faith  
312 alone more and more, and by it grow in [108] the knowledge, not of works, but of Christ Jesus, who has  
313 suffered and risen again for him; as Peter teaches, when he makes no other work to be a Christian one.  
314 Thus Christ, when the Jews asked Him what they should do that they might work the works of God,  
315 rejected the multitude of works, with which He saw that they were puffed up, and commanded them  
316 one thing only, saying: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom He hath sent, for him hath  
317 God the Father sealed." (John vi. 27, 29.)

318 Hence a right faith in Christ is an incomparable treasure, carrying with it universal salvation, and  
319 preserving from all evil, as it is said: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that  
320 believeth not shall be damned." (Mark xvi. 16.) Isaiah, looking to this treasure, predicted: "The  
321 consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord God of hosts shall make a  
322 consumption, even determined, in the midst of the land." (Is. x. 22, 23.) As if he said: "Faith, which is the  
323 brief and complete fulfilling of the law, will fill those who believe with such righteousness, that they will  
324 need nothing else for justification." Thus too Paul says: "For with the heart man believeth unto  
325 righteousness." (Rom. x. 10.)

326 But you ask how it can be the fact that faith alone justifies, and affords without works so great a  
327 treasure of good things, when so many works, ceremonies, and laws are prescribed to us in the  
328 Scriptures. I answer: before all things bear in mind what I have said, that faith alone without works  
329 justifies, sets free, and saves, as I shall show more clearly below.

330 Meanwhile it is to be noted, that the whole Scripture of God is divided into two parts, precepts and  
331 promises. The precepts certainly teach us what is good, but what they teach is not forthwith done. For  
332 they show us what we ought to do, but do not give us the power to do it. They were ordained, however,  
333 for the purpose of showing man to himself; that through them he may learn his own impotence for  
334 good, and may despair of his own strength. For this reason they are called the Old Testament, and are  
335 so.

336 For example: "thou shalt not covet," is a precept by which we are all convicted of sin; since no man can  
337 help coveting, whatever efforts to the contrary he may make. In order therefore that he may fulfill the  
338 precept, and not covet, he is [109] constrained to despair of himself and to seek elsewhere and through  
339 another the help which he cannot find in himself; as it is said: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but  
340 in me is thine help." (Hosea xiii. 9.) Now what is done by this one precept, is done by all; for all are  
341 equally impossible of fulfillment by us.

342 Now when a man has through the precepts been taught his own impotence, and become anxious by  
343 what means he may satisfy the law--for the law must be satisfied, so that no jot or tittle of it may pass  
344 away; otherwise he must be hopelessly condemned--then, being truly humbled and brought to nothing  
345 in his own eyes, he finds in himself no resource for justification and salvation.

346 Then comes in that other part of Scripture, the promises of God, which declare the glory of God, and  
347 say: "If you wish to fulfill the law, and, as the law requires, not to covet, lo! believe in Christ, in whom  
348 are promised to you grace, justification, peace, and liberty." All these things you shall have, if you

349 believe, and shall be without them, if you do not believe. For what is impossible for you by all the works  
350 of the law, which are many and yet useless, you shall fulfill in an easy and summary way through faith;  
351 because God the Father has made everything to depend on faith, so that whosoever has it, has all  
352 things, and he who has it not, has nothing. "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might  
353 have mercy upon all." (Rom. xi. 32.) Thus the promises of God give that which the precepts exact, and  
354 fulfill what the law commands; so that all is of God alone, both the precepts and their fulfillment. He  
355 alone commands. He alone also fulfils. Hence the promises of God belong to the New Testament; nay,  
356 are the New Testament.

357 Now since these promises of God are words of holiness, truth, righteousness, liberty, and peace, and are  
358 full of universal goodness; the soul, which cleaves to them with a firm faith, is so united to them, nay,  
359 thoroughly absorbed by them, that it not only partakes in, but is penetrated and saturated by all their  
360 virtue. For if the touch of Christ was healing, how much more does that most tender spiritual touch, nay,  
361 absorption of the word, communicate to the soul all that belongs to the word. In this way, therefore, the  
362 soul, through faith alone, [110] without works, is from the word of God justified, sanctified, endued with  
363 truth, peace, and liberty, and filled full with every good thing, and is truly made the child of God; as it is  
364 said: "To them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."  
365 (John i. 12.)

366 From all this it is easy to understand why faith has such great power, and why no good works, nor even  
367 all good works put together, can compare with it; since no work can cleave to the word of God, or be in  
368 the soul. Faith alone and the word reign in it; and such as is the word, such is the soul made by it; just as  
369 iron exposed to fire glows like fire, on account of its union with the fire. It is clear then that to a Christian  
370 man his faith suffices for everything, and that he has no need of works for justification. But if he has no  
371 need of works, neither has he need of the law; and, if he has no need of the law, he is certainly free  
372 from the law, and the saying is true: "The law is not made for a righteous man." (1 Tim. i. 9.) This is that  
373 Christian liberty, our faith, the effect of which is, not that we should be careless or lead a bad life, but  
374 that no one should need the law or works for justification and salvation.

375 Let us consider this as the first virtue of faith; and let us look also to the second. This also is an office of  
376 faith, that it honors with the utmost veneration and the highest reputation him in whom it believes,  
377 inasmuch as it holds him to be truthful and worthy of belief. For there is no honor like that reputation of  
378 truth and righteousness, with which we honor him, in whom we believe. What higher credit can we  
379 attribute to any one than truth and righteousness, and absolute goodness? On the other hand, it is the  
380 greatest insult to brand any one with the reputation of falsehood and unrighteousness, or to suspect  
381 him of these, as we do when we disbelieve him.

382 Thus the soul, in firmly believing the promises of God, holds Him to be true and righteous; and it can  
383 attribute to God no higher glory than the credit of being so. The highest worship of God is to ascribe to  
384 Him truth, righteousness, and whatever qualities we must ascribe to one in whom we believe. In doing  
385 this the soul shows itself prepared to do His whole will; in doing this it hallows His name, and gives itself  
386 up to be dealt with as it may please God. For it cleaves to His [111] promises, and never doubts that He  
387 is true, just, and wise, and will do, dispose, and provide for all things in the best way. Is not such a soul,  
388 in this its faith, most obedient to God in all things? What commandment does there remain which has  
389 not been amply fulfilled by such an obedience? what fulfillment can be more full than universal  
390 obedience? Now this is not accomplished by works, but by faith alone.

391 On the other hand, what greater rebellion, impiety, or insult to God can there be, than not to believe His  
392 promises? What else is this, than either to make God a liar, or to doubt His truth--that is, to attribute  
393 truth to ourselves, but to God falsehood and levity? In doing this, is not a man denying God and setting  
394 himself up as an idol in his own heart? What then can works, done in such a state of impiety, profit us,

395 were they even angelic or apostolic works ? Rightly hath God shut up all--not in wrath nor in lust--but in  
396 unbelief; in order that those who pretend that they are fulfilling the law by works of purity and  
397 benevolence (which are social and human virtues), may not presume that they will therefore be saved;  
398 but, being included in the sin of unbelief, may either seek mercy, or be justly condemned.

399 But when God sees that truth is ascribed to Him, and that in the faith of our hearts He is honored with  
400 all the honor of which He is worthy; then in return He honors us on account of that faith; attributing to  
401 us truth and righteousness. For faith produces truth and righteousness, in rendering to God what is His;  
402 and therefore in return God gives glory to our righteousness. It is a true and righteous thing, that God is  
403 true and righteous; and to confess this, and ascribe these attributes to Him, is to be ourselves true and  
404 righteous. Thus He says: "Them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly  
405 esteemed." (1 Sam. ii. 30.) And so Paul, says that Abraham's faith was imputed to him for righteousness,  
406 because by it he gave glory to God; and that to us also, for the same reason, it shall be reputed for  
407 righteousness, if we believe. (Rom. iv.)

408 The third incomparable grace of faith is this, that it unites the soul to Christ, as the wife to the husband;  
409 by which mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul are made one flesh. Now if they are one  
410 flesh, and if a true marriage-- [112] nay, by far the most perfect of all marriages--is accomplished  
411 between them (for human marriages are but feeble types of this one great marriage), then it follows  
412 that all they have becomes theirs in common, as well good things as evil things; so that whatsoever  
413 Christ possesses, that the believing soul may take to itself and boast of as its own, and whatever belongs  
414 to the soul, that Christ claims as his.

415 If we compare these possessions, we shall see how inestimable is the gain. Christ is full of grace, life, and  
416 salvation; the soul is full of sin, death, and condemnation. Let faith step in, and then sin, death, and hell  
417 will belong to Christ, and grace, life, and salvation to the soul. For, if he is a husband, he must needs take  
418 to himself that which is his wife's, and, at the same time, impart to his wife that which is his. For, in  
419 giving her his own body and himself, how can he but give her all that is his? And, in taking to himself the  
420 body of his wife, how can he but take to himself all that is hers?

421 In this is displayed the delightful sight, not only of communion, but of a prosperous warfare, of victory,  
422 salvation, and redemption. For since Christ is God and man, and is such a person as neither has sinned,  
423 nor dies, nor is condemned,--nay, cannot sin, die, or be condemned; and since his righteousness, life,  
424 and salvation are invincible, eternal, and almighty; when, I say, such a person, by the wedding-ring of  
425 faith, takes a share in the sins, death, and hell of his wife, nay, makes them his own, and deals with them  
426 no otherwise than as if they were his, and as if he himself had sinned; and when he suffers, dies, and  
427 descends to hell, that he may overcome all things, since sin, death, and hell cannot swallow him up, they  
428 must needs be swallowed up by him in stupendous conflict. For his righteousness rises above the sins of  
429 all men; his life is more powerful than all death; his salvation is more unconquerable than all hell.

430 Thus the believing soul, by the pledge of its faith in Christ, becomes free from all sin, fearless of death,  
431 safe from hell, and endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of its husband Christ.  
432 Thus he presents to himself a glorious bride, without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her with the washing of  
433 water by the word; that is, by faith in the word of life, righteousness, and salvation. Thus he betroths her  
434 unto [113] himself "in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in  
435 mercies." (Hosea ii. 19, 20.)

436 Who then can value highly enough these royal nuptials? Who can comprehend the riches of the glory of  
437 this grace?

438 Christ, that rich and pious husband, takes as a wife a needy and impious harlot, redeeming her from all  
439 her evils, and supplying her with all his good things. It is impossible now that her sins should destroy her,

440 since they have been laid upon Christ and swallowed up in Him, and since she has in her husband Christ  
441 a righteousness which she may claim as her own, and which she can set up with confidence against all  
442 her sins, against death and hell, saying: "If I have sinned, my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned; all  
443 mine is His, and all His is mine;" as it is written, "My beloved is mine, and I am his. (Cant. ii. 16.) This is  
444 what Paul says: "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ;" victory  
445 over sin and death, as he says: "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." (1 Cor. xv. 56,  
446 57.)

447 From all this you will again understand, why so much importance is attributed to faith, so that it alone  
448 can fulfill the law, and justify without any works. For you see that the first commandment, which says,  
449 "Thou shalt worship one God only," is fulfilled by faith alone. If you were nothing but good works from  
450 the soles of your feet to the crown of your head, you would not be worshipping God, nor fulfilling the  
451 first commandment, since it is impossible to worship God, without ascribing to Him the glory of truth  
452 and of universal goodness, as it ought in truth to be ascribed. Now this is not done by works, but only by  
453 faith of heart. It is not by working, but by believing, that we glorify God, and confess Him to be true. On  
454 this ground faith is the sole righteousness of a Christian man, and the fulfilling of all the commandments.  
455 For to him who fulfils the first, the task of fulfilling all the rest is easy.

456 Works, since they are irrational things, cannot glorify God; although they may be done to the glory of  
457 God, if faith be present. But at present we are enquiring, not into the quality of the works done, but into  
458 him who does them, who glorifies God, and brings forth good works. This is faith of heart, the head and  
459 the substance of all our righteousness. Hence that is [114] a blind and perilous doctrine which teaches  
460 that the commandments are fulfilled by works. The commandments must have been fulfilled, previous  
461 to any good works, and good works follow their fulfillment, as we shall see.

462 But, that we may have a wider view of that grace which our inner man has in Christ, we must know that  
463 in the Old Testament God sanctified to Himself every first-born male. The birthright was of great value,  
464 giving a superiority over the rest by the double honor of priesthood and kingship. For the first-born  
465 brother was priest and lord of all the rest.

466 Under this figure was foreshown Christ, the true and only first-born of God the Father and of the Virgin  
467 Mary, and a true king and priest, not in a fleshly and earthly sense. For His kingdom is not of this world;  
468 it is in heavenly and spiritual things that He reigns and acts as priest; and these are righteousness, truth,  
469 wisdom, peace, salvation, etc. Not but that all things, even those of earth and hell, are subject to Him for  
470 otherwise how could He defend and save us from them?--but it is not in these, nor by these, that His  
471 kingdom stands.

472 So too His priesthood does not consist in the outward display of vestments and gestures, as did the  
473 human priesthood of Aaron and our ecclesiastical priesthood at this day, but in spiritual things, wherein,  
474 in His invisible office, He intercedes for us with God in heaven, and there offers Himself, and performs all  
475 the duties of a priest; as Paul describes Him to the Hebrews under the figure of Melchizedek. Nor does  
476 He only pray and intercede for us; He also teaches us inwardly in the spirit with the living teachings of  
477 His Spirit. Now those are the two special offices of a priest, as is figured to us in the case of fleshly  
478 priests, by visible prayers and sermons.

479 As Christ by His birthright has obtained these two dignities, so He imparts and communicates them to  
480 every believer in Him, under that law of matrimony of which we have spoken above, by which all that is  
481 the husband's is also the wife's. Hence all we who believe on Christ are kings and priests in Christ, as it is  
482 said: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should  
483 shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Pet. ii. 9.)

484 These two things stand thus. First, as regards kingship, [115] every Christian is by faith so exalted above  
485 all things, that, in spiritual power, he is completely lord of all things; so that nothing whatever can do  
486 him any hurt; yea, all things are subject to him, and are compelled to be subservient to his salvation.  
487 Thus Paul says: "All things work together for good to them who are the called" (Rom. viii. 28 ); and also;  
488 "Whether life, or death, or things present, or things to come: all are yours; and ye are Christ's. (I Cor. iii.  
489 22, 23.)

490 Not that in the sense of corporeal power any one among Christians has been appointed to possess and  
491 rule all things, according to the mad and senseless idea of certain ecclesiastics. That is the office of kings,  
492 princes, and men upon earth. In the experience of life we see that we subjected to all things, and suffer  
493 many things, even death. Yea, the more of a Christian any man is, to so many the more evils, sufferings,  
494 and deaths is he subject; as we see in the first place in Christ the first-born, and in all His holy brethren.

495 This is a spiritual power, which rules in the midst of enemies, and is powerful in the midst of distress.  
496 And this is nothing else than that strength is made perfect in my weakness, and that I can turn all things  
497 to the profit of my salvation; so that even the cross and death are compelled to serve me and to work  
498 together for my salvation. This is a lofty and eminent dignity, a true and almighty dominion, a spiritual  
499 empire, in which there is nothing so good, nothing so bad, as not to work together for my good, if only I  
500 believe. And yet there is nothing of which I have need--for faith alone suffices for my salvation--unless  
501 that, in it, faith may exercise the power and empire of its liberty. This is the inestimable power and  
502 liberty of Christians.

503 Nor are we only kings and the freest of all men, but also priests forever, a dignity far higher than  
504 kingship, because by that priesthood we are worthy to appear before God, to pray for others, and to  
505 teach one another mutually the things which are of God. For these are the duties of priests, and they  
506 cannot possibly be permitted to any unbeliever. Christ has obtained for us this favor, if we believe in  
507 Him, that, just as we are His brethren, and co-heirs and fellow kings with Him, so we should be also  
508 fellow priests with Him, and venture with confidence, through the spirit of faith, to come into the  
509 presence of God, [116] and cry "Abba, Father! " and to pray for one another, and to do all things which  
510 we see done and figured in the visible and corporeal office of priesthood. But to an unbelieving person  
511 nothing renders service or works for good. He himself is in servitude to all things, and all things turn out  
512 for evil to him, because he uses all things in an impious way for his own advantage. and not for the glory  
513 of God. And thus he is not a priest, but a profane person, whose prayers are turned into sin; nor does he  
514 ever appear in the presence of God, because God does not hear sinners.

515 Who then can comprehend the loftiness of that Christian dignity which, by its royal power, rules over all  
516 things, even over death, life, and sin, and, by its priestly glory, is all powerful with God; since God does  
517 what He Himself seeks and wishes; as it is written: "He will fulfill the desire of them that fear Him: He  
518 also will hear their cry, and will save them"? (Ps. cxlv. 19.) This glory certainly cannot be attained by any  
519 works, but by faith only.

520 From these considerations any one may clearly see how a Christian man is free from all things; so that  
521 he needs no works in order to be justified and saved, but receives these gifts in abundance from faith  
522 alone. Nay, were he so foolish as to pretend to be justified, set free, saved, and made a Christian, by  
523 means of any good work, he would immediately lose faith with all its benefits. Such folly is prettily  
524 represented in the fable, where a dog, running along in the water, and carrying in his mouth a real piece  
525 of meat, is deceived by the reflection of the meat in the water, and, in trying with open mouth to seize  
526 it, loses the meat and its image at the same time.

527 Here you will ask: "If all who are in the Church are priests by what character are those, whom we now  
528 call priests, to be distinguished from the laity? " I reply: By the use of these words, "priest," "clergy,"

529 "spiritual person," "ecclesiastic," an injustice has been done, since they have been transferred from the  
530 remaining body of Christians to those few, who are now, by a hurtful custom, called ecclesiastics. For  
531 Holy Scripture makes no distinction between them, except that those, who are now boastfully called  
532 popes, bishops, and lords, it calls ministers, servants, and stewards, who are to serve the rest in the  
533 ministry of the Word, for teaching the faith of Christ [117] and the liberty of believers. For though it is  
534 true that we are all equally priests, yet we cannot, nor, if we could, ought we all to minister and teach  
535 publicly. Thus Paul says "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the  
536 mysteries of God." (1 Cor. iv. 1.)

537 This bad system has now issued in such a pompous display of power, and such a terrible tyranny, that no  
538 earthly government can be compared to it, as if the laity were something else than Christians. Through  
539 this perversion of things it has happened that the knowledge of Christian grace, of faith, of liberty, and  
540 altogether of Christ, has utterly perished, and has been succeeded by an intolerable bondage to human  
541 works and laws; and, according to the Lamentations of Jeremiah, we have become the slaves of the  
542 vilest men on earth, who abuse our misery to all the disgraceful and ignominious purposes of their own  
543 will.

544 Returning to the subject which we had begun, I think it is made clear by these considerations that it is  
545 not sufficient, nor a Christian course, to preach the works, life, and words of Christ in a historic manner,  
546 as facts which it suffices to know as an example how to frame our life; as do those who are now held the  
547 best preachers: and much less so, to keep silence altogether on these and to teach in their stead the  
548 laws of men and the decrees of the Fathers. There are now not a few persons who preach and read  
549 about Christ with the object of moving the human affections to sympathize with Christ, to indignation  
550 against the Jews, and other childish and womanish absurdities of that kind.

551 Now preaching ought to have the object of promoting faith in Him, so that He may not only be Christ,  
552 but a Christ for you and for me, and that what is said of Him, and what He is called, may work in us. And  
553 this faith is produced and is maintained by preaching why Christ came, what He has brought us and  
554 given to us, and to what profit and advantage He is to be received. This is done, when the Christian  
555 liberty which we have from Christ Himself is rightly taught, and we are shown in what manner all we  
556 Christians are kings and priests, and how we are lords of all things, and may be confident that whatever  
557 we do in the presence of God is pleasing and acceptable to Him. Whose heart would not rejoice in its  
558 inmost core at hearing [118] these things? Whose heart, on receiving so great a consolation, would not  
559 become sweet with the love of Christ, a love to which it can never attain by any laws or works? Who can  
560 injure such a heart, or make it afraid? If the consciousness of sin, or the horror of death, rush in upon it,  
561 it is prepared to hope in the Lord, and is fearless of such evils, and undisturbed, until it shall look down  
562 upon its enemies. For it believes that the righteousness of Christ is its own, and that its sin is no longer  
563 its own, but that of Christ, for, on account of its faith in Christ, all its sin must needs be swallowed up  
564 from before the face of the righteousness of Christ, as I have said above. It learns too, with the Apostle,  
565 to scoff at death and sin, and to say: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The  
566 sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory  
567 through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. xv. 55-57.) For death is swallowed up in victory; not only the  
568 victory of Christ, but ours also; since by faith it becomes ours, and in it we too conquer.

569 Let it suffice to say this concerning the inner man and its liberty, and concerning that righteousness of  
570 faith, which needs neither laws nor good works; nay, they are even hurtful to it, if any one pretends to  
571 be justified by them.

572 And now let us turn to the other part, to the outward man. Here we shall give an answer to all those  
573 who, taking offence at the word of faith and at what I have asserted, say: "If faith does everything, and  
574 by itself suffices for justification, why then are good works commanded? Are we then to take our ease

575 and do no works, content with faith?" Not so, impious man, I reply; not so. That would indeed really be  
576 the case, if we were thoroughly and completely inner and spiritual persons; but that will not happen  
577 until the last day, when the dead shall be raised. As long as we live in the flesh, we are but beginning and  
578 making advances in that which shall be completed in a future life. On this account the Apostle calls that  
579 which we have in this life, the first-fruits of the Spirit. (Rom. viii. 23.) In future we shall have the tenths,  
580 and the fullness of the Spirit. To this part belongs the fact I have stated before, that the Christian is the  
581 servant of all and subject to all. For in that part in which he is free, he does no works, but in that in [119]  
582 which he is a servant, he does all works. Let us see on what principle this is so.

583 Although, as I have said, inwardly, and according to the spirit, a man is amply enough justified by faith,  
584 having all that the requires to have, except that this very faith and abundance ought to increase from  
585 day to day, even till the future life; still he remains in this mortal life upon earth, in which it is necessary  
586 that he should rule his own body, and have intercourse with men. Here then works begin; here he must  
587 not take his ease; here he must give heed to exercise his body by fastings, watchings, labor, and other  
588 moderate discipline, so that it may be subdued to the spirit, and obey and conform itself to the inner  
589 man and faith, and not rebel against them nor hinder them, as is its nature to do if it is not kept under.  
590 For the inner man, being conformed to God, and created after the image of God through faith, rejoices  
591 and delights itself in Christ, in whom such blessings have been conferred on it; and hence has only this  
592 task before it, to serve God with joy and for nought in free love.

593 In doing this he offends that contrary will in his own flesh, which is striving to serve the world, and to  
594 seek its own gratification. This the spirit of faith cannot and will not bear; but applies itself with  
595 cheerfulness and zeal to keep it down and restrain it; as Paul says: "I delight in the law of God after the  
596 inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me  
597 into captivity to the law of sin." (Rom. vii. 22, 23.) And again: "I keep under my body, and bring it into  
598 subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1  
599 Cor. ix. 27.) And: "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." (Gal. v.  
600 24.)

601 These works, however, must not be done with any notion that by them a man can be justified before  
602 God--for faith, which alone is righteousness before God, will not bear with this false notion--but solely  
603 with this purpose, that the body may be brought into subjection, and be purified from its evil lusts, so  
604 that our eyes may be turned only to purging away those lusts. For when the soul has been cleansed by  
605 faith and made to love God, it would have all things to be cleansed in like manner; and especially in its  
606 own body, so that all things might unite with it in the love and praise of God. Thus it comes that from  
607 the requirements of his own body a man cannot take his ease, but is compelled on its account to do  
608 many good works, that he may bring it into subjection. Yet these works are not the means of his  
609 justification before God, he does them out of disinterested love to the service of God; looking to no  
610 other end than to do what is well-pleasing to Him whom he desires to obey dutifully in all things.

611 On this principle every man may easily instruct himself in what measure, and with what distinctions, he  
612 ought to chasten his own body. He will fast, watch, and labor, just as much as he sees to suffice for  
613 keeping down the wantonness and concupiscence of the body. But those who pretend to be justified by  
614 works are looking, not to the mortification of their lusts, but only to the works themselves; thinking that,  
615 if they can accomplish as many works and as great ones as possible, all is well with them, and they are  
616 justified. Sometimes they even injure their brain, and extinguish nature, or at least make it useless. This  
617 is enormous folly, and ignorance of Christian life and faith, when a man seeks, without faith, to be  
618 justified and saved by works.

619 To make what we have said more easily understood, let us set it forth under a figure. The works of a  
620 Christian man, who is justified and saved by his faith out of the pure and unbought mercy of God, ought

621 to be regarded in the same light as would have been those of Adam and Eve in Paradise, and of all their  
622 posterity, if they had not sinned. Of them it is said: "The Lord God took the man, and put him into the  
623 garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." (Gen. ii. 15.) Now Adam had been created by God just and  
624 righteous, so that he could not have needed to be justified and made righteous by keeping the garden  
625 and working in it; but, that he might not be unemployed, God gave him the business of keeping and  
626 cultivating Paradise. These would have indeed been works of perfect freedom, being done for no object  
627 but that of pleasing God, and not in order to obtain justification, which he already had to the full, and  
628 which would have been innate in us all.

629 So it is with the works of a believer. Being by his faith replaced afresh in Paradise and created anew, he  
630 does not need [121] works for his justification, but that he may not be idle, but may keep his own body  
631 and work upon it. His works are to be done freely, with the sole object of pleasing God. Only we are not  
632 yet fully created anew in perfect faith and love; these require to be increased, not however through  
633 works, but through themselves.

634 A bishop, when he consecrates a church, confirms children, or performs any other duty of his office, is  
635 not consecrated as bishop by these works; nay, unless he had been previously consecrated as bishop,  
636 not one of those works would have any validity; they would be foolish, childish, and ridiculous. Thus a  
637 Christian, being consecrated by his faith, does good works; but he is not by these works made a more  
638 sacred person, or more a Christian. That is the effect of faith alone; nay, unless he were previously a  
639 believer and a Christian, none of his works would have any value at all; they would really be impious and  
640 damnable sins.

641 True then are these two sayings: Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good  
642 works. Bad works do not make a bad man, but a bad man does bad works. Thus it is always necessary  
643 that the substance or person should be good before any good works can be done, and that good works  
644 should follow and proceed from a good person. As Christ says: "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit,  
645 neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." (Matt. vii. 18) Now it is clear that the fruit does not  
646 bear the tree, nor does the tree grow on the fruit; but, on the contrary, the trees bear the fruit and the  
647 fruit grows on the trees.

648 As then trees must exist before their fruit, and as the fruit does not make the tree either good or bad,  
649 but, on the contrary, a tree of either kind produces fruit of the same kind; so must first the person of the  
650 man be good or bad, before he can do either a good or a bad work; and his works do not make him tad  
651 or good, but he himself makes his works either bad or good.

652 We may see the same thing in all handicrafts. A bad or good house does not make a bad or good builder,  
653 but a good or bad builder makes a good or bad house. And in general, no work makes the workman such  
654 as it is itself; but the workman makes the work such as he is himself. Such is the case too with the works  
655 of men. Such as the man himself is, whether [122] in faith or in unbelief, such is his work; good if it be  
656 done in faith, bad if in unbelief. But the converse is not true--that, such as the work is, such the man  
657 becomes in faith or in unbelief For as works do not make a believing man, so neither do they make a  
658 justified man; but faith, as it makes a man a believer and justified, so also it makes his works good.

659 Since, then, works justify no man, but a man must be justified before he can do any good work, it is  
660 most evident that it is faith alone which, by the mere mercy of God through Christ, and by means of His  
661 word, can worthily and sufficiently justify and save the person; and that a Christian man needs no work,  
662 no law, for his salvation; for by faith he is free from all law, and in perfect freedom does gratuitously all  
663 that he does, seeking nothing either of profit or of salvation--since by the grace of God he is already  
664 saved and rich in all things through his faith--but solely that which is well-pleasing to God.



665 So too no good work can profit an unbeliever to justification and salvation; and on the other hand no  
666 evil work makes him an evil and condemned person, but that unbelief, which makes the person and the  
667 tree bad, makes his works evil and condemned. Wherefore, when any man is made good or bad, this  
668 does not arise from his works, but from his faith or unbelief, as the wise man says: "The beginning of sin  
669 is to fall away from God;" that is, not to believe. Paul says : "He that cometh to God must believe " (Heb.  
670 xi. 6); and Christ says the same thing: "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the  
671 tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt." (Matt. xii. 33.) As much as to say: He who wishes to have good fruit,  
672 will begin with the tree, and plant a good one; even so he who wishes to do good works must begin, not  
673 by working, but by believing, since it is this which makes the person good. For nothing makes the person  
674 good but faith, nor bad but unbelief.

675 It is certainly true that, in the sight of men, a man becomes good or evil by his works; but here  
676 'becoming' means that it is thus shown and recognized who is good or evil; as Christ says: "By their  
677 fruits ye shall know them." (Matt.. vii. 20.) But all this stops at appearances and externals; and in this  
678 matter very many deceive themselves, when they presume [123] to write and teach that we are to be  
679 justified by good works, and meanwhile make no mention even of faith, walking in their own ways, ever  
680 deceived and deceiving, going from bad to worse, blind leaders of the blind, wearying themselves with  
681 many works, and yet never attaining to true righteousness; of whom Paul says: "Having a form of  
682 godliness, but denying the power thereof; ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of  
683 the truth." (2 Tim. iii. 5, 7.)

684 He then, who does not wish to go astray with these blind ones, must look further than to the works of  
685 the law or the doctrine of works; nay, must turn away his spirit from works, and look to the person, and  
686 to the manner in which it may be justified. Now it is justified and saved, not by works or laws, but by the  
687 word of God, that is, by the promise of His grace; so that the glory may be to the Divine majesty, which  
688 has saved us who believe, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His  
689 mercy, by the word of His grace.

690 From all this it is easy to perceive on what principle good works are to be cast aside or embraced, and by  
691 what rule all teachings put forth concerning works are to be understood. For if works are brought  
692 forward as grounds of justification, and are done under the false persuasion that we can pretend to be  
693 justified by them, they lay on us the yoke of necessity, and extinguish liberty along with faith, and by this  
694 very addition to their use, they become no longer good, but really worthy of condemnation. For such  
695 works are not free, but blaspheme the grace of God, to which alone it belongs to justify and save  
696 through faith. Works cannot accomplish this, and yet, with impious presumption, through our folly, they  
697 take it on themselves to do so; and thus break in with violence upon the office and glory of grace.

698 We do not then reject good works; nay, we embrace them and teach them in the highest degree. It is  
699 not on their own account that we condemn them, but on account of this impious addition to them, and  
700 the perverse notion of seeking justification by them. These things cause them to be only good in  
701 outward show, but in reality not good; since by them men are deceived and deceive others, like  
702 ravening wolves in sheep's clothing.

703 Now this Leviathan, this perverted notion about works, is invincible, when sincere faith is wanting. For  
704 those sanctified [124] doers of works cannot but hold it, till faith, which destroys it, comes and reigns in  
705 the heart. Nature cannot expel it by her own power; nay, cannot even see it for what it is, but considers  
706 it as a most holy will. And when custom steps in besides, and strengthens this pravity of nature, as has  
707 happened by means of impious teachers, then the evil is incurable, and leads astray multitudes to  
708 irreparable ruin. Therefore, though it is good to preach and write about penitence, confession, and  
709 satisfaction, yet if, we stop there, and do not go on to teach faith, such teaching is without doubt

710 deceitful and devilish. For Christ, speaking by His servant John, not only said : "Repent ye;" but added:  
711 "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. iii. 2.)

712 For not one word of God only, but both, should be preached; new and old things should be brought out  
713 of the treasury, as well the voice of the law, as the word of grace. The voice of the law should be  
714 brought forward, that men may be terrified and brought to a knowledge of their sins, and thence be  
715 converted to penitence and to a better manner of life. But we must not stop here; that would be to  
716 wound only and not to bind up, to strike and not to heal, to kill and not to make alive, to bring down to  
717 hell and not to bring back, to humble and not to exalt. Therefore the word of grace, and of the promised  
718 remission of sin, must also be preached, in order to teach and set up faith; since, without that word,  
719 contrition, penitence, and all other duties, are performed and taught in vain.

720 There still remain, it is true, preachers of repentance and grace, but they do not explain the law and the  
721 promises of God to such an end, and in such a spirit, that men may learn whence repentance and grace  
722 are to come. For repentance comes from the law of God, but faith or grace from the promises of God, as  
723 it is said: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. x. 17.) Whence it comes,  
724 that a man, when humbled and brought to the knowledge of himself by the threatening and terrors of  
725 the law, is consoled and raised up by faith in the Divine promise. Thus "weeping may endure for a night,  
726 but joy cometh in the morning." (Ps. xxx. 5.) Thus much we say concerning works in general, and also  
727 concerning those which the Christian practices with regard to his own body.

728 [125] Lastly, we will speak also of those works which he performs towards his neighbor. For man does  
729 not live for himself alone in this mortal body, in order to work on its account, but also for all men on  
730 earth; nay, he lives only for others and not for himself. For it is to this end that he brings his own body  
731 into subjection, that he may be able to serve others more sincerely and more freely; as Paul says: "None  
732 of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and  
733 whether we die, we die unto the Lord." (Rom. xiv. 7, 8.) Thus it is impossible that he should take his ease  
734 in this life, and not work for the good of his neighbors; since he must needs speak, act, and converse  
735 among men; just as Christ was made in the likeness of men, and found in fashion as a man, and had His  
736 conversation among men.

737 Yet a Christian has need of none of these things for justification and salvation, but in all his works he  
738 ought to entertain this view, and look only to this object, that he may serve and be useful to others in all  
739 that he does; having nothing before his eyes but the necessities and the advantage of his neighbor. Thus  
740 the Apostle commands us to work with our own hands, that we may have to give to those that need. He  
741 might have said, that we may support ourselves; but he tells us to give to those that need. It is the part  
742 of a Christian to take care of his own body for the very purpose that, by its soundness and wellbeing, he  
743 may be enabled to labor, and to acquire and preserve property, for the aid of those who are in want;  
744 that thus the stronger member may serve the weaker member, and we may be children of God,  
745 thoughtful and busy one for another, bearing one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ.

746 Here is the truly Christian life; here is faith really working by love; when a man applies himself with joy  
747 and love to the works of that freest servitude, in which he serves others voluntarily and for nought;  
748 himself abundantly satisfied in the fullness and riches of his own faith.

749 Thus, when Paul had taught the Philippians how they had been made rich by that faith in Christ, in which  
750 they had obtained all things, he teaches them further in these words--"If there be therefore any  
751 consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,  
752 [126] fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.  
753 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better

754 than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."  
755 (Phil. ii. 1-4.)

756 In this we see clearly that the Apostle lays down this rule for a Christian life, that all our works should be  
757 directed to the advantage of others; since every Christian has such abundance through his faith, that all  
758 his other works and his whole life remain over and above, wherewith to serve and benefit his neighbor  
759 of spontaneous good will.

760 To this end he brings forward Christ as an example, saying: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in  
761 Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made  
762 himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of  
763 men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death." (Phil.  
764 ii. 5-8.) This most wholesome saying of the Apostle has been darkened to us by men who, totally  
765 misunderstanding the expressions: "form of God," "form of a servant," "fashion," "likeness of men,"  
766 have transferred them to the natures of Godhead and manhood. Paul's meaning is this: Christ, when He  
767 was full of the form of God, and abounded in all good things, so that He had no need of works or  
768 sufferings to be justified and saved--for all those things He had from the very beginning--yet was not  
769 puffed up with these things, and did not raise Himself above us, and arrogate to Himself power over us,  
770 though He might lawfully have done so, but on the contrary so acted in laboring, working, suffering, and  
771 dying, as to be like the rest of men, and no otherwise than a man in fashion and in conduct, as if he were  
772 in want of all things, and had nothing of the form of God; and yet all this He did for our sakes, that He  
773 might serve us, and that all the works He should do under that form of a servant, might become ours.

774 Thus a Christian, like Christ his head, being full and in abundance through his faith, ought to be content  
775 with this form of God, obtained by faith; except that, as I have said, he ought to increase this faith, till it  
776 be perfected. For this [127] faith is his life, justification, and salvation, preserving his person itself and  
777 making it pleasing to God, and bestowing on him all that Christ has; as I have said above, and as Paul  
778 affirms: "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." (Gal. ii. 20.) Though  
779 he is thus free from all works, yet he ought to empty himself of this liberty, take on him the form of a  
780 servant, be made in the likeness of men, be found in fashion as a man, serve, help, and in every way act  
781 towards his neighbor as he sees that God through Christ has acted and is acting towards him. All this he  
782 should do freely, and with regard to nothing but the good pleasure of God, and he should reason thus:

783 Lo! my God, without merit on my part, of His pure and free mercy, has given to me, an unworthy,  
784 condemned, and contemptible creature, all the riches of justification and salvation in Christ, so that I no  
785 longer am in want of anything, except of faith to believe that this is so. For such a Father then, who has  
786 overwhelmed me with these inestimable riches of His, why should I not freely, cheerfully, and with my  
787 whole heart and from voluntary zeal, do all that I know will be pleasing to Him, and acceptable in His  
788 sight? I will therefore give myself, as a sort of Christ, to my neighbor, as Christ has given Himself to me;  
789 and will do nothing in this life, except what I see will be needful, advantageous, and wholesome for my  
790 neighbor, since by faith I abound in all good things in Christ.

791 Thus from faith flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a cheerful, willing, free spirit, disposed  
792 to serve our neighbor voluntarily, without taking any account of gratitude or ingratitude, praise or  
793 blame, gain or loss. Its object is not to lay men under obligations, nor does it distinguish between friends  
794 and enemies, or look to gratitude or ingratitude, but most freely and willingly spends itself and its goods,  
795 whether it loses them through ingratitude, or gains good will. For thus did its Father, distributing all  
796 things to all men abundantly and freely; making His sun to rise upon the just and the unjust. Thus too  
797 the child does and endures nothing, except from the free joy with which it delights through Christ in  
798 God, the giver of such great gifts.

799 You see then that, if we recognize those great and precious [128] gifts, as Peter says, which have been  
800 given to us, love is quickly diffused in our hearts through the Spirit, and by love we are made free, joyful,  
801 all-powerful, active workers, victors over all our tribulations, servants to our neighbor, and nevertheless  
802 lords of all things. But for those who do not recognize the good things given to them through Christ,  
803 Christ has been born in vain; such persons walk by works, and will never attain the taste and feeling of  
804 these great things. Therefore, just as our neighbor is in want, and has need of our abundance, so we too  
805 in the sight of God were in want, and bad need of His mercy. And as our heavenly Father has freely  
806 helped us in Christ, so ought we freely to help our neighbor by our body and works, and each should  
807 become to other a sort of Christ, so that we may be mutually Christs, and that the same Christ may be in  
808 all of us; that is, that we may be truly Christians.

809 Who then can comprehend the riches and glory of the Christian life? It can do all things, has all things,  
810 and is in want of nothing; is lord over sin, death, and hell, and at the same time is the obedient and  
811 useful servant of all. But alas! it is at this day unknown throughout the world; it is neither preached nor  
812 sought after, so that we are quite ignorant about our own name, why we are and are called Christians.  
813 We are certainly called so from Christ, who is not absent, but dwells among us, provided, that is, that we  
814 believe in Him, and are reciprocally and mutually one the Christ of the other, doing to our neighbor as  
815 Christ does to us. But now, in the doctrine of men, we are taught only to seek after merits, rewards, and  
816 things which are already ours, and we have made of Christ a taskmaster far more severe than Moses.

817 The Blessed Virgin, beyond all others, affords us an example of the same faith, in that she was purified  
818 according to the law of Moses, and like all other women, though she was bound by no such law, and had  
819 no need of purification. Still she submitted to the law voluntarily and of free love, making herself like the  
820 rest of women, that she might not offend or throw contempt on them. She was not justified by doing  
821 this; but, being already justified, she did it freely and gratuitously. Thus ought our works too to be done,  
822 and not in order to be justified by them; for, being first justified by [129] faith, we ought to do all our  
823 works freely and cheerfully for the sake of others.

824 St. Paul circumcised his disciple Timothy, not because he needed circumcision for his justification, but  
825 that he might not offend or contemn those Jews, weak in the faith, who had not yet been able to  
826 comprehend the liberty of faith. On the other hand, when they contemned liberty, and urged that  
827 circumcision was necessary for justification, he resisted them, and would not allow Titus to be  
828 circumcised. For as he would not offend or contemn any one's weakness in faith, but yielded for the  
829 time to their will, so again he would not have the liberty of faith offended or contemned by hardened  
830 self-justifiers, but walked in a middle path, sparing the weak for the time, and always resisting the  
831 hardened, that he might convert all to the liberty of faith. On the same principle we ought to act,  
832 receiving those that are weak in the faith, but boldly resisting these hardened teachers of works, of  
833 whom we shall hereafter speak at more length.

834 Christ also, when His disciples were asked for the tribute money, asked of Peter, whether the children of  
835 a king were not free from taxes. Peter agreed to this; yet Jesus commanded him to go to the sea, saying:  
836 "Lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh  
837 up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take, and give unto  
838 them for me and thee." (Matt. xvii. 27.)

839 This example is very much to our purpose; for here Christ calls Himself and His disciples free men, and  
840 children of a king, in want of nothing; and yet He voluntarily submits and pays the tax. Just as far then as  
841 this work was necessary or useful to Christ for justification or salvation, so far do all His other works or  
842 those of His disciples avail for justification. They are really free and subsequent to justification, and only  
843 done to serve others and set them an example.

844 Such are the works which Paul inculcated; that Christians should be subject to principalities and powers,  
845 and ready to every good work (Tit. iii. 1); not that they may be justified by these things, for they are  
846 already justified by faith, but that in liberty of spirit they may thus be the servants of others, and subject  
847 to powers, obeying their will out of gratuitous love.

848 [130] Such too ought to have been the works of all colleges, monasteries, and priests; every one doing  
849 the works of his own profession and state of life, not in order to be justified by them, but in order to  
850 bring his own body into subjection, as an example to others, who themselves also need to keep under  
851 their bodies; and also in order to accommodate himself to the will of others, out of free love. But we  
852 must always guard most carefully against any vain confidence or presumption of being justified, gaining  
853 merit, or being saved by these works; this being the part of faith alone, as I have so often said.

854 Any man possessing this knowledge may easily keep clear of danger among those innumerable  
855 commands and precepts of the Pope, of bishops, of monasteries, of churches, of princes, and of  
856 magistrates, which some foolish pastors urge on us as being necessary for justification and salvation,  
857 calling them precepts of the Church, when they are not so at all. For the Christian freeman will speak  
858 thus: I will fast, I will pray, I will do this or that, which is commanded me by men, not as having any need  
859 of these things for justification or salvation, but that I may thus comply with the will of the Pope, of the  
860 bishop, of such a community or such a magistrate, or of my neighbor as an example to him; for this  
861 cause I will do and suffer all things, just as Christ did and suffered much more for me, though He needed  
862 not at all to do so on His own account, and made Himself for my sake under the law, when he was not  
863 under the law. And although tyrants may do me violence or wrong in requiring obedience to these  
864 things, yet it will not hurt me to do them, so long as they are not done against God.

865 From all this every man will be able to attain a sure judgment and faithful discrimination between all  
866 works and laws, and to know who are blind and foolish pastors, and who are true and good ones. For  
867 whatsoever work is not directed to the sole end, either of keeping under the body, or of doing service to  
868 our neighbor--provided he require nothing contrary to the will of God--is no good or Christian work.  
869 Hence I greatly fear that at this day few or no colleges, monasteries, altars, or ecclesiastical functions are  
870 Christian ones; and the same may be said of fasts and special prayers to certain Saints. I fear that in all  
871 these nothing is being sought but what is already ours; While we fancy that by these things our sins are  
872 purged [131] away and salvation is attained, and thus utterly do away with Christian liberty. This comes  
873 from ignorance of Christian faith and liberty.

874 This ignorance, and this crushing of liberty, are diligently promoted by the teaching of very many blind  
875 pastors, who stir up and urge the people to a zeal for these things, praising such zeal and puffing up men  
876 with their indulgences, but never teaching faith. Now I would advise you, if you have any wish to pray, to  
877 fast, or to make foundations in churches, as they call it, to take care not to do so with the object of  
878 gaining any advantage, either temporal or eternal. You will thus wrong your faith which alone bestows  
879 all things on you, and the increase of which, either by working or by suffering, is alone to be cared for.  
880 What you give, give freely and without price, that others may prosper and have increase from you and  
881 from your goodness. Thus you will be a truly good man and a Christian. For what do you want with your  
882 goods and your works, which are done over and above for the subjection of the body, since you have  
883 abundance for yourself through your faith, in which God has given you all things?

884 We give this rule: the good things which we have from God ought to flow from one to another, and  
885 become common to all, so that every one of us may, as it were, put on his neighbor, and so behave  
886 towards him as if he were himself in his place. They flowed and do flow from Christ to us; he put us on,  
887 and acted for us as if he himself were what we are. From us they flow to those who have need of them;  
888 so that my faith and righteousness ought to be laid down before God as a covering and intercession for  
889 the sins of my neighbor, which I am to take on myself, and so labor and endure servitude in them, as if

890 they were my own; for thus has Christ done for us. This is true love and the genuine truth of Christian  
891 life. But only there is it true and genuine, where there is true and genuine faith. Hence the Apostle  
892 attributes to Charity this quality, that she seeketh not her own.

893 We conclude therefore that a Christian man does not live in himself, but in Christ, and in his neighbor, or  
894 else is no Christian; in Christ by faith, in his neighbor by love. By faith he is carried upwards above  
895 himself to God, and by love he sinks back below himself to his neighbor, still always [132] abiding in God  
896 and His love, as Christ says: "verily I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of  
897 God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." (John i. 51.)

898 Thus much concerning liberty, which, as you see, is a true and spiritual liberty, making our hearts free  
899 from all sins, laws, and commandments; as Paul says: "The law is not made for a righteous man" (1 Tim.  
900 i. 9); and one which surpasses every other and outward liberty, as far as heaven is above earth. May  
901 Christ make us to understand and preserve this liberty. Amen.

902 Finally, for the sake of those to whom nothing can be stated so well but that they misunderstand and  
903 distort it, we must add a word, in case they can understand even that. There are very many persons,  
904 who, when they hear of this liberty of faith, straightway turn it into an occasion of license. They think  
905 that everything is now lawful for them, and do not choose to show themselves free men and Christians  
906 in any other way than by their contempt and reprehension of ceremonies, of traditions of human laws;  
907 as if they were Christians merely because they refuse to fast on stated days, or eat flesh when others  
908 fast, or omit the customary prayers; scoffing at the precepts of men, but utterly passing over all the rest  
909 that belongs to the Christian religion. On the other hand, they are most pertinaciously resisted by those  
910 who strive after salvation solely by their observance of and reverence for ceremonies; as if they would  
911 be saved merely because they fast on stated days, or abstain from flesh, or make formal prayers talking  
912 loudly of the precepts of the Church and of the Fathers, and not caring a straw about those things which  
913 belong to our genuine faith. Both these parties are plainly culpable, in that, while they neglect matters  
914 which are of weight and necessary for salvation, they contend noisily about such as are without weight  
915 and not necessary.

916 How much more rightly does the Apostle Paul teach us to walk in the middle path, condemning either  
917 extreme, and saying: "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth  
918 not judge him that eateth." (Rom. xiv. 3.) You see here how the Apostle blames those who, not from  
919 religious feeling, but in mere contempt, neglect and rail at ceremonial observances; and teaches them  
920 not to [133] despise, since this "knowledge puffeth up." Again he teaches the pertinacious upholders of  
921 these things not to judge their opponents. For neither party observes towards the other that charity  
922 which edifieth. In this matter we must listen to Scripture, which teaches us to turn aside neither to the  
923 right hand nor to the left, but to follow those right precepts of the Lord which rejoice the heart. For just  
924 as a man is not righteous merely because he serves and devotes himself to works and ceremonial rites,  
925 so neither will be accounted righteous, merely because he neglects and despises them.

926 It is not from works that we are set free by the faith of Christ, but from the belief in works, that is, from  
927 foolishly presuming to seek justification through works. Faith redeems our consciences, makes them  
928 upright and preserves them, since by it we recognize the truth that justification does not depend on our  
929 works, although good works neither can nor ought to be wanting to it; just as we cannot exist without  
930 food and drink and all the functions of this mortal body. Still it is not on them that our justification is  
931 based, but on faith; and yet they ought not on that account to be despised or neglected. Thus in this  
932 world we are compelled by the needs of this bodily life; but we are not thereby justified. "My kingdom is  
933 not hence, nor of this world," says Christ; but He does not say: "My kingdom is not here, nor in this  
934 world." Paul too says "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh" (2 Cor. x. 3); and: "The  
935 life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." (Gal. ii. 20.) Thus our doings, life,

936 and being, in works and ceremonies, are done from the necessities of this life, and with the motive of  
937 governing our bodies; but yet we are not justified by these things, but by the faith of the Son of God.

938 The Christian must therefore walk in the middle path, and meet these two classes of men before his  
939 eyes. He may meet with hardened and obstinate ceremonialists, who, like deaf adders, refuse to listen  
940 to the truth of liberty, and cry up, enjoin, and urge on us their ceremonies, as if they could justify us  
941 without faith. Such were the Jews of old, who would not understand, that they might act well. These  
942 men we must resist, do just the contrary to what they do, and be bold to give them offence; lest by this  
943 impious notion of theirs they should [134] deceive many along with themselves. In the sight of these  
944 men it is expedient to eat flesh, to break fasts, and to do in behalf of the liberty of faith things which  
945 they hold to be the greatest sins. We must say of them: "Let them alone; they be blind leaders of the  
946 blind." (Matt. xv. 14.) In this way Paul also would not have Titus circumcised, though these men urged it;  
947 and Christ defended the Apostles, who had plucked ears of corn on the Sabbath day; and many like  
948 instances.

949 Or else we may meet with simple-minded and ignorant persons, weak in the faith, as the Apostle calls  
950 them, who are as yet unable to apprehend that liberty of faith, even if willing to do so. These we must  
951 spare, lest they should be offended. We must bear with their infirmity, till they shall be more fully  
952 instructed. For since these men do not act thus from hardened malice, but only from weakness of faith,  
953 therefore, in order to avoid giving them offence, we must keep fasts and do other things which they  
954 consider necessary. This is required of us by charity, which injures no one, but serves all men. It is not  
955 the fault of these persons that they are weak, but that of their pastors, who by the snares and weapons  
956 of their own traditions have brought them into bondage, and wounded their souls, when they ought to  
957 have been set free and healed by the teaching of faith and liberty. Thus the Apostle says: "If meat make  
958 my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth." (I Cor. viii. 13.) And again: "I know,  
959 and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth  
960 anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. It is evil for that man who eateth with offence." (Rom. xiv.  
961 14, 20.)

962 Thus, though we ought boldly to resist those teachers of tradition, and though those laws of the  
963 pontiffs, by which they make aggressions on the people of God, deserve sharp reproof, yet we must  
964 spare the timid crowd, who are held captive by the laws of those impious tyrants, till they are set free.  
965 Fight vigorously against the wolves, but on behalf of the sheep, not against the sheep. And this you may  
966 do by inveighing against the laws and lawgivers, and yet at the same time observing these laws with the  
967 weak, lest they be offended; until they shall themselves recognize the tyranny as such, and understand  
968 their own liberty. If you wish to use your liberty, [135] do it secretly, as Paul says: "Hast thou faith? have  
969 it to thyself before God." (Rom. xiv. 22) But take care not to use it in the presence of the weak. On the  
970 other hand, in the presence of tyrants and obstinate opposers, use your liberty in their despite, and with  
971 the utmost pertinacity, that they too may understand that they themselves are tyrants, and their laws  
972 useless for justification; nay, that they had not right to establish such laws.

973 Since, then, we cannot live in this world without ceremonies and works; since the hot and inexperienced  
974 period of youth has need of being restrained and protected by such bonds; and since everyone is bound  
975 to keep under his own body by attention to these things; therefore the minister of Christ must be  
976 prudent and faithful in so ruling and teaching the people of Christ in all these matters that no root of  
977 bitterness may spring up among them, and so many be defiled, as Paul warned the Hebrews; that is,  
978 that they may not lose the faith, and begin to be defiled by a belief in works, as the means of  
979 justification. This is a thing which easily happens, and defiles very many, unless faith be constantly  
980 inculcated along with works. It is impossible to avoid this evil, when faith is passed over in silence, and  
981 only the ordinances of men are taught, as has been done hitherto by the pestilent, impious, and soul-

982 destroying traditions of our pontiffs, and opinions of our theologians. An infinite number of souls have  
983 been drawn down to hell by these snares, so that you may recognize the work of Antichrist.

984 In brief, as poverty is imperiled amid riches, honesty amid business, humility amid honors, abstinence  
985 amid feasting, purity amid pleasures, so is justification by faith imperiled among ceremonies. Solomon  
986 says: "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" (Prov. vi. 27.) And yet, as we  
987 must live among riches, business, honors, pleasures, feasting, so must we among ceremonies, that is,  
988 among perils. Just as infant boys have the greatest need of being cherished in the bosoms and by the  
989 care of girls, that they may not die and yet, when they are grown, there is peril to their salvation in living  
990 among girls; so inexperienced and fervid young men require to be kept in and restrained by the barriers  
991 of ceremonies, even were they of iron, lest their weak mind should [136] rush headlong into vice. And  
992 yet it would be death to them to persevere in believing that they can be justified by these things. They  
993 must rather be taught that they have been thus imprisoned, not with the purpose of their being justified  
994 or gaining merit in this way, but in order that they might avoid wrong doing, and be more easily  
995 instructed in that righteousness which is by faith; a thing which the headlong character of youth would  
996 not bear, unless it were put under restraint.

997 Hence in the Christian life ceremonies are to be no otherwise looked upon than builders and workmen  
998 look upon those preparations for building or working which are not made with any view of being  
999 permanent or anything in themselves, but only because without them there could be no building and no  
1000 work. When the structure is completed, they are laid aside. Here you see that we do not contemn these  
1001 preparations, but set the highest value on them; a belief in them we do contemn, because no one thinks  
1002 that they constitute a real and permanent structure. If any one were so manifestly out of his senses as  
1003 to have no other object in life but that of setting up these preparations with all possible expense,  
1004 diligence, and perseverance, while he never thought of the structure itself, but pleased himself and  
1005 made his boast of these useless preparations and props; should we not all pity his madness, and think  
1006 that, at the cost thus thrown away, some great building might have been raised?

1007 Thus too we do not contemn works and ceremonies; nay, we set the highest value on them; but we  
1008 contemn the belief in works, which no one should consider to constitute true righteousness; as do those  
1009 hypocrites who employ and throw away their whole life in the pursuit of works, and yet never attain to  
1010 that for the sake of which the works are done. As the Apostle says, they are "ever learning, and never  
1011 able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (2 Tim. iii. 7). They appear to wish to build, they make  
1012 preparations, and yet they never do build; and thus they continue in a show of godliness, but never  
1013 attain to its power.

1014 Meanwhile they please themselves with this zealous pursuit, and even dare to judge all others, whom  
1015 they do not see adorned with such a glittering display of works; while, if they had been imbued with  
1016 faith, they might have done great things for their [137] own and others' salvation, at the same cost  
1017 which they now waste in abuse of the gifts of God. But since human nature and natural reason, as they  
1018 call it, are naturally superstitious, and quick to believe that justification can be attained by any laws or  
1019 works proposed to them; and since nature is also exercised and confirmed in the same view by the  
1020 practice of all earthly lawgivers, she can never, of her own power, free herself from this bondage to  
1021 works, and come to a recognition of the liberty of faith.

1022 We have therefore need to pray that God will lead us, and make us taught of God, that is, ready to learn  
1023 from God; and will Himself, as He has promised, write His law in our hearts; otherwise there is no hope  
1024 for us. For unless He himself teach us inwardly this wisdom hidden in a mystery, nature cannot but  
1025 condemn it and judge it to be heretical. She takes offence at it and it seems folly to her; just as we see  
1026 that it happened of old in the case of the prophets and apostles; and just as blind and impious pontiffs,  
1027 with their flatterers, do now in my case and that of those who are like me; upon whom, together with



1028 ourselves, may God at length have mercy, and lift up the light of His countenance upon them, that we  
1029 may know His way upon earth and His saving health among all nations, Who is blessed for evermore.  
1030 Amen. In the year of the Lord MDXX.

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1032 **Source:** <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/luther-freedomchristian.html>

1033 Text from Henry Wace and C. A. Buchheim, *First Principles of the Reformation*, London: John Murray,  
1034 1883.

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1036

1037 Word frequency: Justification (justified, justify) = 31; Salvation = 20; Saved = 14

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