

The Scriptural Foundation for our Christian Freedom

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On Sunday, July 29, 2001, George strolled into our church building about twenty minutes before the worship service was to begin. He'd driven the twelve miles or so to our church because he'd received a flier in the mail about a Vacation Bible School we were holding in a city park on the other side of town -- part of what we were doing in connection with an exploratory mission effort in our city. His eyes were a little misty already as he came in the door, and in short order the two of us ended up in my office. He spoke of the glorious sixty years of marriage he'd been given and of how those years had come to an end a couple months earlier upon the death of his wife. After managing to collect himself, he made some allusions to his Baptist background and proceeded to ask about our worship service. George was convinced that what he had experienced of contemporary worship was weak at best. He was looking for a traditional type of service where you sing some good old hymns out of the hymnal, not, as he put it, "...something with keyboards and drums that somebody had just written last week and all you do is repeat the same line over and over again."

Taking George to be either an angel whom I didn't wish to entertain unawares or a WELS worship administrator or professor in disguise, I chose my words carefully. Shooting a glance at the hymn board and recalling that we were going to be singing "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus" as the opening hymn, I felt confident in assuring him that we regularly conducted an orderly, liturgical worship service and that he would be right at home with any number of our hymns.

After the first three days of the '01-'02 school year, our new middle grade teacher asked to have a word with me in the parking lot during recess. It seems that a few parents were questioning her choice of a Harry Potter book for reading class. She began to tell me, as far as literary quality was concerned, that the series was very well written. She went on to explain her thinking that, due to the series' sweeping popularity across the country, she wished to let the book be read and explained in the context of our Christian faith, since children have already or will most likely be exposed to it on their own anyway. Imagine my delight, though, when she cited 1 Corinthians 8 to me and said words to the effect that, after consultation with the concerned parents, we will never read Harry Potter books again if we should find that doing so would become an occasion for those parents to fall into sin.

The temptation certainly exists to turn a paper on the topic of Christian freedom into a detailed and lengthy codebook of "can's" and "cannot's" for WELS Lutherans living in the 21st Century. The two simple examples above seem to be the kinds of things we come across on almost a daily basis, the kinds of ordinary, everyday things that really have everything to do with Christian freedom. It stands to reason that the categories under which issues of adiaphora and giving offense might arise have no real limits. We could undoubtedly make our libraries look like bookshelves from a lawyer's office if we started compiling the material that would fill the volumes that would contain the rules for Christian living as far as areas where the scriptures neither command nor forbid. How many "neutral things" could we come up with under the categories of worship, church and ministry, man and woman roles, evangelism, cross-cultural ministry, church planting in both home and world mission fields, youth discipleship, and that enormous, catch-all category of personal life? For anyone blunt or bold enough to want to do it so much after the fact, we could probably use amalgamation of ministerial education schools or the publication of a new hymnal as the basis for a discussion of Christian freedom. Or were we to slip into the contemporary scene, we could bat around every conceivable neutral thing regarding the three choices available to people as they designate their Forward in Christ offerings. If we wanted to write about adiaphora alone, we might even find ourselves having to address the person who holds an absolutely simplistic view of Christian freedom when he somewhat indignantly asks, "Who's going to tell me I can't have a cigarette or a beer?"

To lay a foundation on which two other essays and your extra-conference discussions can be solidly based, it will be necessary to write about the whole of Christian freedom. In the same way that sanctification is commonly defined both broadly and narrowly, Christian freedom has its broad and narrow definitions. Matters of adiaphora and giving offense and the identification of those things that we are truly free to do and the discussion of when and in whose company we are actually free to do them all fall under Christian freedom narrowly defined. Christian freedom broadly defined includes the actual establishment of Christian freedom that took place in the sphere of justification and the profound blessings that belong to those who are of the faith of Abraham. We blunder seriously if we study the former apart from the latter.

Determining how a particular teaching relates to justification and sanctification is common practice among us. Bearing those distinctions in mind will also position us well for a profitable study of Christian freedom. The freedom we have in Christ originates in justification and finds expression in sanctification. Another common way to speak of the two basic teachings of Christian freedom is to address the things from which we have been set free (justification and its results) and the things for which we have been set free (sanctification, predominantly in its narrow definition). Yet another take on Christian freedom is what might be called the “image of God cycle.” Adam and Eve, created in the image of God, were perfectly free. When the image of God was lost at the fall, so was freedom. The image of God is restored upon conversion. So also freedom is restored, but these restorations of both the image and the freedom are partial and imperfect, due to a sinful nature that still clings to the Christian. As the image of God is completely restored to the triumphant saint in heaven, so also freedom is full and complete once again in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Finally, an essayist’s two coordinate thoughts under the theme of Christian freedom could be that every Christian is “lord of all” and “slave to all,” in line with Luther’s use of 1 Corinthians 9:19 in his *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*.¹ But Luther’s outline, too, is nothing more than a take-off on justification and sanctification.

Our approach will be simple and our presentation hopefully succinct, albeit not necessarily short. Christ has set us free from a number of terribly depressing and totally damning slaveries. He has set us free for service to his God and Father and to our neighbor, service that is carried out in genuine Christian love.

I. Christian Freedom in Terms of Justification

A. Being Declared Innocent Means Being Set Free

The scriptures pack a pretty powerful punch. For example, when God’s law says what it says about the guilt of every human being before God, every mouth (πᾶν στόμα) is stopped and the whole world (πᾶς ὁ κόσμος) becomes culpable (ὑποδικος) with reference to God. All flesh (πᾶσα σὰρξ) will not be justified before him by law works; law will only deliver a thorough knowledge (ἐπίγνωσις) of sin.² Paul’s words to the Galatians carry things a step further when they say that the scripture has imprisoned (συνέκλεισεν) not only all people but also all created things (τὰ πάντα) beneath sin’s power (ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν).³

That reference to being hemmed in and enclosed and imprisoned by scripture under sin comes from the premier NT letter on Christian freedom (Galatians, Luther’s Catherine von Bora). That would make it as good a place as any to begin to see how the scriptures link justification and freedom. If all people and all things (cf. also Romans 8:19-21) were imprisoned by scripture under sin, then justification, the declaration that every soul

¹ *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 31, pp. 333-377 (hereafter LW 31, 333-337).

² Romans 3:19-20.

³ Galatians 3:22 - But the scripture imprisoned all things under sin (scripture doesn’t tell us all that we’ve kept the law for eternal life, it has imprisoned us under God’s judgment that we are sinners - this message however has a purpose) in order that that which is promised (forgiveness, righteousness and eternal life) by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to the believing ones (not the doing ones, the believing ones).

of all time has been declared innocent in connection with Christ, can easily be seen as liberation. Sin no longer imprisons the soul that has been declared innocent of it. Thus, in naming himself the fulfillment of Isaiah 61, Jesus told his fellow Nazarenes that he had been sent by the Father “to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”⁴

Sin’s powerful, scripture-backed judgment that we are all condemned originated with the Fall. One man’s disobedience made sinners of everyone. But through the obedience of the one man, the many will be made (κατασταθήσονται - logical future) righteous.⁵ Jesus Christ’s perfect compliance with the law, in that God credited his obedience to all people (Romans 3:23-24 – πάντες ... δικαιούμενοι) has left every human being a saint, a fully holy person in the sight of God, whether he believes it or not.

This justification centers in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. Because of our trespasses he was handed over and because of our acquittal he was raised.⁶ The resurrection of the Son was the visible proof that, on the heels of Jesus’ cry, “it is finished,” on the heels of the death of the God-man, the Father had dropped all charges against all people, having exacted on the Son with whom he was well-pleased the penalty due to all humanity (cf. 1 Peter 2:24). By the sacrifice of Christ, all people have been set free from eternal obligation to pay the unpayable debt of sin (Matthew 18:27 – ἀπελυσεν).

Faith allows an individual who has heard of the Lord’s justification of all people to answer the questions of Romans 8 as follows: Who will bring charges against those chosen of God? No one can bring any charge against me. I have been set free from condemnation. God himself is the one who is declaring me innocent (θεὸς ὁ δικαιῶν). Who is the one that condemns me? No one. Christ Jesus is incessantly appealing in our behalf (ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν). Hymnwriter Hans Brorson hit the nail of subjective justification squarely on the head when he personalized John 8:36 - *Guds Søn har gjort mig fri* (God’s Son has made *me* free).

When the brothers gathered in Jerusalem to discuss the burdening of Gentiles and the scandalizing of Jews, Peter laid a firm foundation for a critical discussion of Christian freedom, implying objective and expressing subjective justification when he said, with regard to Jew and Gentile alike, “...through the grace of the Lord Jesus we believe that we are saved.”⁷

Knowing for a fact that a person is not being justified by law works but through faith in Jesus Christ, Paul placed himself and his readers among those who had appropriated the blessings of universal justification as their own by writing, “and we believed in Christ Jesus, in order that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by law works.”⁸

When perfect freedom is described as being in harmony with God’s will, it’s not difficult to see an historical progression of how freedom came and went and comes again and finally comes completely. Our first parents once enjoyed the marvelous freedom of loving God and his will with all their hearts and each other as themselves. That freedom of loving all that God loved went away upon the occasion of the events recorded in Genesis 3. Restored in them very quickly (Genesis 3:15) and in their spiritual descendants subsequently was the partial freedom of loving and desiring all that God loved and desired, while still being enslaved in part by a love for sin and all that God hated. Such (partial) has been the freedom of every true believer in the Lord who has ever breathed air. A return to being fully in harmony with God’s will awaits every believer who through faith in Christ will enter heaven. That glorious freedom (Romans 8:21) will include freedom from all evil and sin, freedom from temptation, trials and persecution, and freedom from the consequences of sin. The absence of all such things will certainly bring on a freedom that defies description.

⁴ Luke 4:18,19.

⁵ Romans 5:19.

⁶ Romans 4:25.

⁷ Acts 15:11 - On the contrary, through the grace of the Lord Jesus we believe that we are saved (aorist), in line with which way (which is exactly how) they also are saved.

⁸ Galatians 2:16.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's dogmatics notes, still holding to Professor John Meyer's systematic theology outline, place the establishment of Christian freedom under Christ's priestly work. With specific reference to this freedom Christ gained for us by serving as both priest and sacrificial victim, the notes include a simple, future indicative, declarative sentence: "Christians will guard this treasure carefully." As our freedom in Christ is unfolded on the next few pages, that description of Christian freedom as a treasure to be carefully guarded will be fully justified.

B. Christian Freedom Flows from the Gospel

In 1983 our church body met in convention under the theme "In His Word - Made Free." Organizers of the convention obviously had John 8 in mind as they set the theme, and since it was the 500th anniversary of the reformer's birth, Luther's devotional tract to Leo, "Concerning the Freedom of the Christian," was quoted heavily in the convention essay. Quotes from that tract will appear hereafter.

There is some debate about the perfect passive participle *πεπιστευκότας* in John 8:31. Whether or not it should have a pluperfect shading in context (Were these Jews believers at this time or had they already lapsed?), Jesus point remains clear. The truth to which he came into the world to testify (John 18:37 – *ἵνα μαρτυρήσω τῇ ἀληθείᾳ*) resides in his word.

While it makes for great teaching in a Bible Information Class lesson on church fellowship, the NIV's, "if you hold to my teaching" in John 8 is a translation that leans more toward the interpretive than the literal. Woodenly rendered, verses 31 and 32 say: "Then Jesus spoke to the Jews who had believed in him: If you remain in my word, truly my disciples you are and you will experientially know for yourself the truth, and the truth will set you free." Users of the ILCW-C gospel pericope this year will have a grand opportunity to preach Christian freedom on the Festival of the Reformation.

The freedom of the Christian is a freedom that has come to him through the truth of the gospel - Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Luther to that point (full quote below,⁹ including citation of John 8): "One thing and one thing only is necessary for Christian life, righteousness and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ. If it [the soul] has the Word of God it is rich and lacks nothing since it is the Word of life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory, and of every incalculable blessing."

With this gospel, the Holy Spirit does miraculous work. The unbeliever can only conceive that right standing with God comes through being kind, through not having a filthy mouth and through whatever other moral works his conscience tells him he should be doing. The veil over his heart has him thinking that there could be no other way into God's favor than by doing an average or maybe a little better than average job of commandment keeping. But when the Holy Spirit has gone to work with the gospel and the unbeliever believes, the veil is removed from the heart, law-keeping as the only way of salvation leaves the scene, having been dispelled by the gospel, and, in a word (thus the Greek – *οὗ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου, ἐλευθερία*), the result for the one who has turned to the Lord by the Spirit's work is freedom. For those who may have seen it, Sir William Wallace's single word cry of "Freedom!" as the guillotine ended his life (Mel Gibson - *Braveheart*) was a rather moving scene. Aren't the emotions stirred many times more as we contemplate the treasure the Spirit has given us in Christ - freedom?

⁹ It is evident that no external thing has any influence in producing Christian righteousness or freedom, or in producing unrighteousness or servitude.... One thing and one thing only is necessary for Christian life, righteousness and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ, as Christ says, John 11 [:25], "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live"; and John 8 [:36], "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed"; and Matt. 4 [:4], "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." ... If it [the soul] has the Word of God it is rich and lacks nothing since it is the Word of life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory, and of every incalculable blessing (LW 31, 344-345).

Astute scholars scanning electronic bibles for every conceivable use of the term *freedom* will undoubtedly want at least a brief explanation of the two James passages where the NIV translates, “the perfect law that gives freedom” (James 1:25) and, “the law that gives freedom” (James 2:12). That explanation fits in this section on the gospel as the source of our freedom. The three contextual passages in James (1:23-25) translate as follows: “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he, with lasting effect, has become like a man who takes note of his natural face in a mirror, for he observes himself carefully and goes away and immediately forgets of what sort he was. But the one who looks into a law that’s complete (a perfect principle), namely, the principle that’s characterized by freedom (νόμον τέλειον τὸς τῆς ἐλευθερίας; cf. also John 8:32; Romans 3:27), and remains (remains there looking into it, doesn’t walk away and forget it), not becoming a hearer of forgetfulness but becoming (from having gazed into the gospel!) a doer of work, this one will be blessed in his deed.”

The James 2:12 passage has a similar thought as far as the terms in question: “In this way speak and in this way act, as ones about to be judged through a law characterized by freedom (διὰ νόμου ἐλευθερίας).”

See Romans 3:27 for an example of the flexible term νόμος used to refer to a principle. In James (1:27) it is the perfect principle of gospel freedom that makes the person who looks and keeps looking into it a doer of the word. Similarly, that he’ll be judged in line with the gospel is what makes a Christian want to “so speak and so act” (2:12). While literal, the NIV in these two instances may leave the reader confused.

By means of the gospel, God keeps drawing back the curtain (Romans 1:17, present tense – ἀποκαλύπτεται) to reveal that the righteousness we need originates with him. The righteousness he provides in Christ sets the sinner free from the curse and control of sin, from the fear of death, from the devil’s power, and from having to keep the law’s demands to merit God’s favor, as we’ll see in the next sections.

C. Freedom from Sin and its Curse

In a sanctification section that is speaking predominantly about no longer being under the controlling power of sin (Romans 6), Paul includes several forthright statements about the consequences of sin. “... You are slaves to the one whom you obey -- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death...”¹⁰ “What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!”¹¹ “For the wages of sin is death...”¹²

But grace of all graces, the one not knowing sin by experience God made sin in our place.¹³ In Christ our sins have been sent away as far as the east is from the west.¹⁴ A sampling of God’s Word on that core biblical truth is below.¹⁵

Sin derives its power to curse and ultimately to kill from the law (1 Corinthians 15:56). Accordingly, sin is seen to have a ruling control (νόμος - Romans 8:2) over people, a “take charge attitude,” if you will, because it

¹⁰ Romans 6:16.

¹¹ Romans 6:21.

¹² Romans 6:23.

¹³ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

¹⁴ Psalm 103:12.

¹⁵ Matthew 1:21- “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 9:2 - Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” Mark 2:5 - When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” 1 John 1:7 - ...and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 3:5 - But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. Luke 23:42,43 - Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 24:47 ...and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Acts 13:38 - “Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.” 1 Peter 2:24 - He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree. John 19:30 - When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

brings death. Sin's ruling control, however, is no match for that of the Holy Spirit. Through Christ Jesus the law (ruling control) of the Spirit of life set me free (*ἠλευθέρωσεν*) from the law (ruling control) of sin and death.¹⁶ To be ruled and governed by a controlling force that tells me that eternal death is all I have earned for myself is to have a wretched lot in life. To be set free from that and to be governed instead by the principle that the Holy Spirit has given me everlasting life in Christ is very good news and a distinctly glorious freedom.

The curse of sin imprisons the sinner. That curse is hell itself and it led Luther to say that sin was his torment night and day (*Mein' Sünd mich quälte Nacht and Tag*). If the curse of death and hell is truly attached to sin, we don't have any business taking sin lightly. Praising Jesus Christ is only fitting when we consider what he has done: "To the one who loves us and releases (*λύσαντι*) us from our sins by his blood be glory and might forever. Amen."¹⁷ A detailed version of the reason for John's doxology in Revelation 1 is found in Galatians 3:14-17, where Paul lays out how Christ bought us out (*ἐξήγγόρασεν*) from the curse of the law by becoming a curse in place of us.¹⁸

There were those to whom Jesus addressed himself who could not fathom that they were enslaved by and stuck beneath the curse of sin. John 8:31-36 reads:

Then Jesus spoke to the Jews who had believed in him: "If you remain in my word, truly my disciples you are and you will experientially know for yourself the truth, and the truth will set you free." They replied to him, "Seed of Abraham are we and to no one have we ever been enslaved! How are you saying, 'You will become free!'" Jesus replied to them, "Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who is doing the sin is a slave of the sin. Now as it is the slave does not stay in the house forever - the son stays forever. If then the Son should set you free, truly (*ὄντως*) free you will be."

I submit that the slavery to sin spoken of with these words is not the slavery of being controlled by sin (so that the enslaved one keeps sinning) but the slavery of being in bondage to the consequences of sin. "You've been brought into God's house through your connection with Abraham," Jesus was saying to the Jews who had believed in him, "but since you are unrepentant sinners, you are still only slaves in the household - temporary, no permanent place, no lasting claim. Since contrition and faith are absent, sin's curse still hangs over you. If the Son sets you free from sin (its consequences), then you are truly free, not slaves who could be dismissed at any time but family, with a permanent place in God's household." And we might well add that by these words Jesus was calling out to his listeners; "Be reconciled to God through the Son who sets you free."

D. Freedom from Death and its Fear

¹⁶ Romans 8:2.

¹⁷ Revelation 1:5,6.

¹⁸ Galatians 3:7-14 reads: Know consequently - those of faith, they are sons of Abraham. And the scripture, having foreseen that God justifies (would justify, i.e., declare innocent) the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the gospel in advance to Abraham, namely: "Blessed in the sphere of you shall be all the nations." So then those of faith are being blessed along with the believing Abraham. For (explanatory) as many as are of law works, under a curse they exist, for it stands written (perfect): Accursed is every person who is not remaining in (who does not abide by) all things that have been written (perfect) in the book of the law (moral, ceremonial and civil), to carry them out (Deuteronomy 27:26). [The fact] that no one is being declared innocent before God by law (anarthrous - qualitative stress) is plain, for "the righteous one will live by faith." But the law is not of faith, something else completely - "The one who carries these things out will live by them." Christ bought us out from the curse of the law by becoming (circumstantial manner) in place of us a curse...—because it has been written: Cursed every person who is being hung on a tree. -- (The next *ἵνα* picks up the thought left off at *κατάρρα* in the middle of 13) ...in order that the blessing of Abraham might be [extended] to the Gentiles in the sphere of Christ Jesus, so that we might receive through faith the promise of the Spirit (appositional - the promise which is the Spirit himself - Acts 2:33, Eph 1:13).

John told his late first century readers that fear has to do with punishment¹⁹ (ὁ φόβος κόλασιν ἔχει). Death was the punishment that the Lord attached to disobedience of his command not to eat forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve surely feared that punishment of death; their hiding testified to it. Isaiah (6:5) gave expression to his fear of death when he, the sinner, felt completely undone in the presence of the holy God. Peter was expressing the same kind of fear when he told Jesus, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”²⁰ Because we recognize (Psalm 90:3,5; Isaiah 40:7) that death is still an expression of the Lord’s anger against sin, we fear it.

And Satan is happy to help that fear along. Death is an arrow in his quiver and Romans 6:23a is one of his favorite passages. He makes millions cringe with fear at the thought of death. “Sinner, you must die! Death is the wage you’ve earned.” Conspicuous by its absence, because Satan leaves it out, is Romans 6:23b.

But as Jesus became a curse in our place, he also suffered death in our place. He thereby destroyed death, rendering it inoperative (καταργήσαντος - 2 Timothy 1:10). It can no longer hurt us (John 11:26), so there need no longer be any fear of it. The writer to the Hebrews could say that we are seeing Jesus, on account of the suffering of the death (because he suffered death), having been crowned (perfect, still crowned) with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God he might taste death in place of every person. With the crucifixion before his eyes, he could go on to say that by his death Christ rendered Satan inoperative (καταργήσῃ), put him in a position of no longer being able to enslave people with a fear of death.²¹

Set free from what sadly remains for many a life-long slavery to their fear of death; the Christian can say with Paul, “I desire to depart and be with Christ,”²² “to die is gain,”²³ “I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”²⁴ The perfect love that Christ showed us by living and dying in our place drives out fear. His resurrection means sins forgiven, death conquered, fear done away with.

E. Freedom from the Devil and his Power

It doesn’t take a great deal of diligence to notice how many times in the gospels Jesus demonstrated his power over Satan. The casting out of demons was a regular part of Jesus’ work. That, after all, was why he appeared in the flesh (1 John 3:8). But John reminds us in that same passage that it is not only the demon-possessed who belong to the devil. The one who keeps doing that which is sinful is of the devil. With temptations to continue in sin and accusations levied against us for sinning, Satan tries to kill us coming and going.

Temptations to curse, swear, cheat, lust and hate abound (sins of commission). Temptations to let the hungry go hungry and the imprisoned unvisited and the needy unassisted and the good thing undone also abound (sins of omission). Temptations to violate the holiness of God by breaking the first commandment, to sin by despairing of God’s goodness and by failing to trust in him are also powerful temptations in which we are easily caught.

Freedom from the power of Satan’s temptations begins with the active obedience of Christ, with a trip into the desert where Jesus withstood untold numbers of powerful temptations, three of which have been recorded, for our learning. As we see Jesus still sinless on the fortieth day, we are invited to believe, “Where I have fallen to temptations, Jesus did not. He is my substitute and Savior.” “Jesus resisted temptation, I should, too,” falls woefully short. Our freedom from Satan’s temptations begins with the knowledge and faith that: “Christ’s perfect record of withstanding temptation has been counted as mine.” Our freedom from Satan’s temptations becomes clearer as we recognize and trust: “Christ’s strength will be powerfully at work within

¹⁹ 1 John 4:18.

²⁰ Luke 5:8.

²¹ Hebrews 2:9,14.

²² Philippians 1:23.

²³ Philippians 1:21.

²⁴ Acts 21:13.

me,²⁵ and my Savior is worlds stronger than the devil.”²⁶ In addition, spiritual armor has been promised and given to me to withstand the evil day.”²⁷ This is followed by a vigorous use of the Word of God. This, in turn, is coupled with the divine promise that the devil will flee when we resist him.²⁸ Christ has rendered Satan inoperative (Cf. *καταργέω* above). If we are to act in line with that truth in the face of Satan’s temptations, we would do well to hear the message repeatedly.

If there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,²⁹ then Satan’s accusations must all be lies. Yet he incessantly levies them against us. Our own guilty consciences, recalling recent or long past sins, can leave us believing his lying accusations. Freedom from the accusations of the devil can be found in the passive obedience of Christ.

A man exiled to Patmos was once allowed to see a war in the sky - the forces of Satan battling against the forces of Christ. Satan was hurled down from the sky in defeat, no longer able to accuse believers before God. There is only one battle, the result of which is that Satan can no longer accuse the believer the battle Jesus fought and won at Calvary. Revelation 12:7ff speak of our freedom from Satan’s accusations by virtue of Christ’s victory over the devil, won at the cross, proven by the resurrection. It’s no wonder that we echo the loud voice that was heard in heaven (Revelation 12:10) just before receiving the sacrament which brings this freedom from Satan’s accusations into our very mouths and hearts: Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ.

F. Freedom from Sin and its Control

Paul had to admit to Titus that, “We ourselves were also at one time ...being slaves to (*δουλεύοντες*) desires and all kinds of hedonistic things.”³⁰ Immediately after that admission comes the passage you have likely memorized, that when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us because of his mercy through baptism. We have been set free from the curse of sin, having been redeemed from all guilt by the blood of Christ. The hymn verse written by A.M. Toplady is, to this day, an excellent teacher of the faith when it reminds us that the double cure we need is to be cleansed from sin’s guilt and power.

I don’t know of a more concentrated, single section of scripture on our freedom from sin’s power than Romans 6. With members who have struggled with their own inability to discontinue a certain sin I have gone through this section again and again. Note, by way of summary, the truths it holds forth in the area of sanctification and being free from the control of sin (6:1-14 below³¹). If sin served as our master in that it

²⁵ Colossians 1:29.

²⁶ 1 John 4:4.

²⁷ Ephesians 6:10-18.

²⁸ James 4:7.

²⁹ Romans 8:1.

³⁰ Titus 3:3.

³¹ Consequently, what shall we say (in response to grace superabounding where sin abounds)? Shall we continue (future deliberative) in sin, so that this superabundant grace might increase? May it never be! God forbid. Since we are such as died, to the disadvantage of sin, how shall we live in the sphere of it any longer? Or are you ignorant (no, you’re not; you know full well) that as many of us as were baptized in connection with Christ Jesus were baptized in his death? Consequently we were buried (really dead) with him through baptism in his specific death, so that, just as Christ was raised from death by the Father’s glory, thus also we might live in the sphere of a new sanctified life. For since we have been effectively united with him in respect to the likeness of his death (baptism), we will certainly (*ἀλλά* in the apodosis of a conditional) be united with him in respect to the likeness of his resurrection (our sanctified lives). For we’re experientially knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, so that the body which sin possesses might be rendered ineffective, so that we are no longer slaves to the advantage of sin. For whoever dies has been effectively set free (*ἠεδικαίωται*) from this domineering ruler called sin. Since we died with Christ, we are believing that we also will live with him (sanctification - new man!) since we know that Christ, having been raised from death, won’t die any more; death does not rule over him any longer. For the death he died he died to the disadvantage of sin once for all; now the life he lives he lives in service to God. In this way you also—consider yourselves dead to the disadvantage of sin but living in service to God, which takes place in the sphere of all that Christ Jesus

bossed us around and told us what to do, what sway can it now hold over us if, to its great disadvantage, we died? Sin lost its domineering control over us, its power to tell us what to do, when we died with Christ in our baptism. We have a new boss whom we love and are blessed to serve - the Lord Jesus. This new life free from sin's control is as certain as our baptism into Christ's death. It is a matter of faith, and so like any matter of faith, hearing will be believing. How often are we in need of hearing not only the gospel of forgiveness but the gospel of freedom from sin's domineering control through our baptism into Christ's death? An indicative statement of truth is set forth to be appropriated by faith - sin will not reign over you. It is also true that faith in our freedom from sin's power comes from hearing the message.

Were we to perfectly trust the indicative gospel promise of Romans 6, Romans 7 wouldn't have been written. But with our faith in the truths of Romans 6 being far from perfect, we know from experience the truth of Romans 7:23: "But I see another principle in my members, one that is constantly going to battle against the principle of my mind and one that keeps holding me as a prisoner in connection with the principle of that sinfulness that exists in my members." To a degree, sin always has a grip on us so that we do what it says.

So faith in our freedom from sin's control over our thinking, speaking and doing must be nurtured. Following the drowning of the old man by contrition and the rising up of the new by faith, there is this aorist tense, indicative statement from God, on which our faith is invited to lay hold: "Now those of Christ Jesus crucified the [sinful] flesh along with its passions and desires."³² That happened. Let it be believed. Those passions and desires of the flesh cannot be controlling forces in my life when I believe that by the Spirit I have separated myself from them as from a rotting corpse hanging on a tree.

A redeemed, restored and forgiven Peter reminds us that through God's very great and precious promises, we may actually participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.³³ One such great and precious promise is that sin is no longer our master. We are free from its control as we trust in what the Lord has accomplished for us in baptism.

G. Freedom from the Law's Demands

Jesus reminded a certain teacher of the law that there are no greater commandments than to love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself.³⁴ He also had to remind his disciples that everything that fell beneath those two commandments was more than enough of a task without also having to observe what men have handed down (the traditions – *παράδοσιν*).³⁵

Instead of setting aside the requirements of the law, Jesus came to fulfill them.³⁶ This he did perfectly from the day of his birth (circumcised on the eighth day - Luke 2:21) to the day of his death (the care of his mother - John 19:26-27). God's own righteousness, imputed to us through faith in Christ, would certainly be a topic that would have to be covered not by another essay but by a book or a shelf of books. Suffice it here to say that we maintain that a man is justified by faith, apart from law works.³⁷ The main point of comparison to be gleaned from Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard is "Wages Not Based on Work Done."³⁸

If qualifying for God's favor and a place in God's heaven depends on carrying out every word that's written in the book of the law, then we have been sentenced to hard labor for life, and death will only turn out to be the press release telling how miserably we failed. When the Jerusalem Council was held to work out matters

has done for you. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires, and don't put your members at sin's disposal as tools of unrighteousness; rather offer yourselves to God as living from dead and put your members at God's disposal as tools of righteousness. For sin will not reign over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

³² Galatians 5:24.

³³ 2 Peter 1:4.

³⁴ Mark 12:29-31.

³⁵ Mark 7:8.

³⁶ Matthew 5:17.

³⁷ Romans 3:28.

³⁸ *Bible History for Christian Schools*, p. 246.

of Christian freedom, it was clearly recognized that keeping every word of the Mosaic law code was a yoke too heavy to bear, one that no Jew or, for that matter, no human being had ever successfully borne.³⁹

That's not much of a surprise when one considers how heavy was the yoke of the old covenant. Among other things, it included fasting (Matthew 9:14-17; Acts 14:23), Sabbath regulations (Matthew 12:1-8; John 5:9), all the cleanliness regulations (Matthew 15:1-9; John 3:25), where, when and how to worship (John 4:24; Galatians 4:10), diet regulations (Acts 10:9ff), cross-ethnic associations (Acts 10:28), circumcision (Acts 11:3,19), and whatever other miscellaneous things might fall under the category of basic principles (do not handle, taste or touch). All told, the law was an unbearably heavy yoke, and even today, the ceremonial law having been set aside, it still is.

Accordingly, the English word *relief* seems somewhat inadequate for expressing just what it was that Christ came to bring in this regard. The well-known words of Matthew 11:28 were spoken to this point. Jesus invited to himself all those involved in ongoing, incessant toiling (οἱ κοπιῶντες), those who with lasting negative effect had been loaded up with a burden (πεφορτισμένοι - perfect), and he offered them rest. What kind of rest? In context (all the language about yokes and burdens in vss. 29-30) it doesn't appear to be rest only or even predominantly from the burden of sin's guilt but rest from the yoke of the law's demands. This would have been especially true in view of the extra weight given to that yoke by the traditions of the elders. Note especially Luke 11:46 where Jesus, making use of the same root word (φορτίζω), pronounced woe on the experts of the law because of how they constantly loaded people up with an extraordinarily oppressive burden (φορτίζετε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους φορτία δυσβάστακτα).

That we have been set free from having to keep the law for salvation is most clearly the point in Galatians 5. The allegory of Galatians 4 ends with what could interpretively be stated as: "Send off the Judaizers like Sarah sent off Hagar and Ishmael, for the Judaizers, through adding law-keeping to the gospel, will never gain the blessed inheritance that is yours as sons of Isaac, sons of the promise, sons having righteousness by God's promise through faith in Jesus." Paul then continued (5:1-3):

For the freedom Christ freed us (aorist - happened). Therefore keep standing firm and do not again be loaded down with (be subject to) a yoke of slavery (the slavery that says, as the Judaizers are saying, ceremonial law keeping will save you). Behold, I Paul am saying to you that if you are circumcised, Christ will do you no good at all. Again, now, I am testifying to every man who is being circumcised that he is obligated to carry out the whole law (every word of Moses).

Because the ceremonial law was temporary (Galatians 3:23-25) and no longer necessary when the reality of what it foreshadowed arrived (Colossians 2:17), Christ's accomplished work has set all people free from any obligation to observe the ceremonial law. But more than that, faith in Christ sets the believer free from viewing the moral law as that which must be kept for salvation. Luther:

That which is impossible for you to accomplish by trying to fulfill all the works of the law—many and useless as they all are—you will accomplish quickly and easily through faith (LW 31, 349).

It is clear, then, that a Christian has all that he needs in faith and needs no works to justify him; and if he has no need of works, he has no need of the law; and if he has no need of the law, surely he is free from the law. It is true that "the law is not laid down for the just" [1 Tim. 1:9]. This is that Christian liberty, our faith, which ... makes the law and works unnecessary for any man's righteousness and salvation (LW 31, 349-350).

³⁹ Acts 15:10.

A Christian has no need of any work or law in order to be saved since through faith he is free from every law and does everything out of pure liberty and freely (LW 31, 361).

If I don't have to keep the law to save my skin, the pressure's off! In Christ I have already kept God's law flawlessly. In him I can now keep it simply to thank and glorify God. That drastically changes the Christian's view of the law and is a marvelous freedom.

Either way you look at it, both the slavery created by the law's pronouncement that I must be punished for my guilty sins and the slavery created under the knowledge that I must keep every word of the law for salvation turn my life into what Richard Massie interpretively translated Luther as calling a living hell (CW 377:2). Literally, Luther was describing this slavery as always falling deeper into sin (*Ich fiel auch immer tiefer drein*) and as having absolutely no good thing to speak of in his life (*Es war kein Gut's am Leben mein*). When we know this to be a true and accurate description of the bondage we were in, then Christian freedom is a priceless blessing. No wonder that when the dogmatics notes say that Scripture draws a vivid picture of a justified sinner's happiness, the first term in the list of pictures is freedom.

H. Free Lord of All

Being free from sin's curse, death's fear, Satan's power, sin's control and the law's demands, I am fully free. No person or thing on this earth owns me. The opposite is true. I own all things. That truth has staggering impact when it's extrapolated:

So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.⁴⁰

The power of which we speak is spiritual. It rules in the midst of enemies and is powerful in the midst of oppression. This means nothing else than that "power is made perfect in weakness" [2 Cor. 12:9] and that in all things I can find profit toward salvation [Rom. 8:28], so that the cross and death itself are compelled to serve me and to work together with me for my salvation. This is a splendid privilege and hard to attain, a truly omnipotent power, a spiritual dominion in which there is nothing so good and nothing so evil but that it shall work together for good to me, if only I believe. Yes, since faith alone suffices for salvation, I need nothing except faith exercising the power and dominion of its own liberty. Lo, this is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians (LW 31, 355).

Thus Luther encapsulated the justification half of Christian freedom by restating 1 Corinthians 9:19 in this way: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none."⁴¹

Transition to Part II

As in marriage, when a woman's husband dies and she can marry another, so in dying to the law, we are free to be united to another, to Christ. The intended result of our liberation is that, belonging to Christ, we might bear fruit for God.

Therefore, my brothers, you also were put to death (aorist - happened) with respect to the law (that decree from God that promises punishment for sin and holds everyone under its curse)

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:21-23.

⁴¹ LW 31, 344.

through the body of Christ, that (εἰς for purpose) you might belong to another, to the one who was raised from the dead, so that (result) we might bear fruit for God.⁴²

We have been set free for service to God and our neighbor.

II. Christian Freedom in Terms of Sanctification

A. Free to Serve God

The clearest manifestation of slavery to sin is the absence of love for God. When we know that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all our being and we know as well that the mindset of the [sinful] flesh is enmity toward God,⁴³ then complete enslavement to sin eliminates even the possibility of loving God. Conversely, liberation from sin and the creation of the new self engender love for God. One could even go so far as to say that it is impossible for the regenerate Christian to not love God. If I know that I was lost and condemned and deserved to be damned into the deepest level of hell, and the Lord Jesus was damned in my place so that in him there is now no condemnation for me, how could I possibly not love him who loved me and gave himself for me?

Freedom from sin, transfer of ownership from Satan to Christ, and the love I have for the Lord who has graciously done this for me will all lead toward serving him. This is not only the result of redemption; it is its purpose. As the catechism teaches, Christ redeemed me that, belonging to him, I might serve him. Romans 6:22 has the most common terms for freedom (ἐλευθερώω) and service (δουλόω) side by side as aorist passive participles as Paul writes: But now as it is, since you've been set free from the sin and (since you've) been enslaved to God... This, as the *καὶ* δέ indicates, is how it is. (Romans 6:18 is very similar.) When Peter told those of the Diaspora to live as free men, he equated their liberty with being servants of God (ὡς ἐλεύθεροι ... ὡς θεοῦ δοῦλοι). Set free from sin by Jesus' blood, Jesus himself has made us priests with reference to God.⁴⁴ Paul could hardly have been more succinct on this point as he addressed his shipmates and spoke of the Lord "whose I am and whom I serve."⁴⁵

As the liberated Christian seeks to serve God, the pendulum can swing to one of two extremes - licentiousness or legalism.

"What does it matter what I do - it's forgiven anyway." This blasphemous attitude of licentiousness surfaced almost immediately when repentance and forgiveness of sins began to be preached in Jesus' name. But let's not think that it's so scripturally untenable that it would never be a temptation to us. Perhaps the "sin more so that we can get more grace" of Romans 6 is something we can understand clearly enough so that we would not go out and intentionally sin so as to stockpile grace for ourselves. Certainly Paul anticipated what he did in the first verses of Romans 6 from a hypothetical point of view (Τὶ οὐκ ἐροῦμεν), from the viewpoint that said, "Now because of what I just said, someone may say." But there was nothing hypothetical about Paul's words to the Galatians: "For you were called for freedom, brothers; only [don't turn] your freedom into an opportunity (ἀφορμὴν literally, the starting-point or base of operations for an expedition; pretext, occasion) for the flesh"⁴⁶ Peter's words to his readers echo Paul's: "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up

⁴² Romans 7:4.

⁴³ Romans 8:7.

⁴⁴ Revelation 1:5,6.

⁴⁵ Acts 27:23.

⁴⁶ Galatians 5:13

(ἐπικαλυμμα - cover; veil) for evil.”⁴⁷ You can’t quietly premeditate a sin for the coming evening just because you believe that the Lord’s mercies are new every morning. As Paul wrote, μὴ γένοιτο (May it never be!).

Jude⁴⁸ and Peter⁴⁹ both wrote vehemently against the lie that full forgiveness turns the life of the Christian into a do-as-you-please free-for-all. Obvious from what they wrote is that there were not only those who fell into the snare of licentiousness but those as well who were outspoken proponents of it.

Licentiousness is an alluring thing - an enticement to sinful pleasure with impunity, all under the guise of religious freedom. Obviously the Corinthians had come into one or another version of this false teaching with their pet phrase, “Everything is permissible for me (Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν).” As is the case with so many of Satan’s temptations, licentiousness is a mixture of truth and falsehood.

In addition to Paul’s treatment of the matter in Romans 6, John seems to have had to address the matter of licentiousness as he combated gnosticism. Briefly, gnosticism taught in this regard that since matter and not the breaking of the law was evil, there should be no real consequences for law-breaking. As John addressed the resulting licentiousness, he also provided us with a correct understanding of the new self view toward sin. He wrote that everyone who is remaining in him [Christ] does not keep on sinning.⁵⁰ The only conclusion that can be drawn concerning one who throws himself headlong into sin is that he no longer has faith or the new self. When faith and the new self are present, there’s an inner compulsion to struggle against sin, not give oneself over to it. “The image of God, restored through justification, will impel a renewing in the manner of living.”⁵¹

A sentence of Luther, cited earlier in part, reads in full: “This is that Christian liberty, our faith, which does not induce us to live in idleness or wickedness but makes the law and works unnecessary for any man’s righteousness and salvation” (LW 31, 350).

If a coin had licentiousness on one side, its other side would be legalism. In his essay *Gesetzlich Wesen Unter Uns*, J. P. Koehler spoke of legalism as he contrasted law-motivation and gospel-motivation. While we recognize, in line with what Koehler wrote, that comparisons between a legalistic approach and an evangelical approach could yield a great deal of material for study and discussion, for the specific purposes of this essay, we are going to be using the term legalism in a somewhat specialized way to refer to making laws where God has not, such as, “You can’t be a Christian unless you drive a Ford,” or “Packer fans shall not be considered as candidates for the WELS parish ministry.”

Opponents of our Savior whom we would have to regard as legalists came up with many laws that God never gave. The Pharisees seemed especially bent on enforcing the Sabbath laws they had added to the Mosaic law, so they accosted Jesus repeatedly for healing on the Sabbath.⁵² They had gone overboard on cleanliness laws so they assailed Jesus and his disciples for not observing their hand washing regulations.⁵³

This kind of legalism, then or now, neither merits salvation nor pleases God. Jesus quoted Isaiah 29 to declare that what the legalists of his day considered worship was no worship at all. “To no purpose are they worshiping me since they keep teaching as doctrines the commandments of human beings.”⁵⁴

The perfect *πεπισευκότες* in Acts 15:5, except for case, is identical to that in John 8:31. The same debate may well be had here in Acts as to whether those from the sect of the Pharisees had at one time believed and

⁴⁷ 1 Peter 2:16.

⁴⁸ For certain men slipped in stealthily, men who were written about in advance long ago for this judgment, ungodly ones, changing the grace of our God into licentiousness and denying our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 1:4).

⁴⁹ These are waterless springs and mists being pushed along by a whirlwind, for whom (disadvantage) the deep gloom of the darkness has been kept (perfect). For uttering haughty things of emptiness, by carnal desires, by licentiousness, they lure those who are just barely escaping the ones who behave with deception, promising freedom to them, while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for (explanatory γάρ) by the thing by which someone has been (and remains) defeated, by that very thing has he been enslaved (2 Peter 2:17-19).

⁵⁰ 1 John 3:6.

⁵¹ Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary dogmatics notes - Sanctification.

⁵² Luke 13:10ff; Luke 14:3ff; John 7:21ff; John 9:14ff.

⁵³ Mark 7:1ff; Luke 11:38ff.

⁵⁴ Matthew 15:9.

now didn't or still believed while suffering from ignorance or holding to an error. The error they espoused and Paul's description of them in Galatians 2:4 as infiltrators and false brothers would favor the understanding that they had believed but had fallen from grace. Since, however, we don't know every last detail about them (did they stay or did they go), we could, with a rather sizeable amount of uncertainty, hold out the hope that they were corrected and reclaimed in view of the fact that the voice of the church was unanimous (Acts 15:22,25) as it sent out by the hands of Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas its letter regarding adiaphora.

The reason for pursuing this somewhat picky, debatable point is that legalism easily rears its head in the visible Christian church. While we needn't play God in trying to figure out if legalists are believers or not, we do need to learn to address them, for their spiritual welfare, and we need to have our heads up regarding the distress that their legalism can create. Correctly addressing them would involve not yielding (by way of subjection) to them for a moment.⁵⁵ We would want to correct them, lovingly seek to win them to repentance, and take whatever steps would be necessary to preserve the gospel. We should also be aware of the distress their legalism can create in the hearts of their victims. "We heard that some went out from us and stirred you up (*ἐτάραξαν*), unsettling (*ἀνασκευάζοντες*) your souls with words which we didn't order..."⁵⁶ Legalism is an unsettling affront to freedom. Its victims need to have their souls resettled by the gospel.

Peter's brief lapse into legalism, prompted by pressure he felt from the Judaizers, could have had a devastating effect. By no longer keeping company with Gentiles and by reverting to eating only kosher foods, he influenced Jews around him to do the same, ultimately sending the message to Gentiles that keeping Jewish customs somehow played a part in their salvation. This legalism obviously affected the truth of the gospel and put souls at risk. Paul pointed out Peter's error, won him back to repentance, and clarified again for all involved the truth that a person is not being justified by law works but through faith in Jesus Christ.⁵⁷

For those legalists who are not brothers acting in weakness, the mild-mannered reformer offered the following advice: "Use your freedom constantly in the sight of and despite the tyrants and the stubborn so that they also may learn that they are impious, that their laws are of no avail for righteousness, and that they had no right to set them up."⁵⁸

B. Set Free to Serve Others by Showing Love

The conclusion of this essayist's study of NT Christian freedom is this: on the sanctification side of things, you will find that the greatest amount of scriptural material on Christian freedom is geared toward rendering loving service to one's neighbor. This is not at all to rob the Lord of any glory we are to bring him; we have been liberated to serve him and obviously he is to come first. In saying that so many NT references to freedom point toward serving the neighbor, we need only recall that to observe the second table of the law is to observe the first. The Savior's reminder is that what we have done for the least of his brothers we have done for him. Luther's way of defining a Christian in this regard is: "We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love."⁵⁹

Part II of Luther's devotional tract, again based on 1 Corinthians 9:19, reads: "A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."⁶⁰ The passage itself reads:

⁵⁵ Galatians 2:5.

⁵⁶ Acts 15:24.

⁵⁷ Galatians 2:16.

⁵⁸ LW 31, 374.

⁵⁹ LW 31, 371.

⁶⁰ LW 31, 344.

For (as proof of the foregoing) although I am free from (ἐκ - separation, connection to be severed) all men (by not taking a salary and from all men in any such circumstances of ownership over me), to all men myself I enslaved (aorist - happened).

The exact moment when Paul enslaved himself is about as identifiable as the exact moment of presence in the sacrament of the altar. But he says that he did so and we would have to say that it happened in connection with his conversion, as a result of the restoration in him of the image of God. The chiasmic construction of the verse could conceivably summarize this entire essay.

Free from all,

X

to all enslaved.

In the section in Galatians 5 where Paul zeroes in on Christian freedom, we hear these words (v. 6):

For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision means anything nor uncircumcision (it had become an adiaphoron), on the contrary (here's what means something), faith continuously operating through love.

We have all we need for salvation in Christ, and we know that along with Christ God will graciously give us all things (Romans 8:32). We're covered. Our time's been freed up to serve others. "I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ."⁶¹

A brief sampling of the dozens upon dozens of scriptural examples of faith expressing itself through love can be found in the footnote below.⁶² Paul says that the call to faith as a Christian is based on freedom. Rather than using that freedom as an opportunity to indulge the sinful flesh, he wrote (Galatians 5:13), "...be constantly serving one another through the love." With a connective (γάρ) that links his new sentence to the freedom he was previously talking about, Paul goes on to write (5:14), "For the whole law has found its full expression in one word, to wit, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

While my reading of 1 Corinthians 8:1 has been forever marred by a classmate who read straight from his jimmy, "Knowledge puffeth up," causing even President Toppe to laugh out loud, its point has hit home again and again in the parish ministry. You can know it all and have it all right, but if it's knowledge without love, it's only inflating your ego, not building the other person up. We've been set free to serve others in love. All our knowledge is to be geared toward loving service. (Fortunately, the classmate did not continue by saying, "...but charity edifieth.")

The reader will please reference a worthwhile but fairly lengthy Luther quote below for another concise statement that, since works done for our neighbor have nothing to do with gaining the salvation Christ has already gained for us, benefiting others in all we do is what our freedom is all about.⁶³

⁶¹ LW 31, 367.

⁶² Matthew 8:15; 25:34ff; 26:6; Luke 7:43ff; 9:48; 19:8; John 4:9; 13:34; Acts 7:60; Romans 12:1-16; 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13:16:14; 2 Corinthians 12:19; Ephesians 4:29; Philippians 2:3,5ff; James 2:8; 1 Peter 3:8,9; 4:10; 1 John 3:23.

⁶³ A man does not live for himself alone in this mortal body to work for it alone, but he lives also for all men on earth; rather he lives only for others and not for himself. To this end he brings his body into subjection that he may the more sincerely and freely serve others, as Paul says in Rom 14. [:7-8], "None of us lives to himself alone, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord." He cannot ever in this life be idle and without works toward his neighbors, for he will necessarily speak, deal with, and exchange views with men, as Christ also, being made in the likeness of men [Phil. 2:7], was found in form as a man and conversed with men... Man, however, needs none of these things for his righteousness and salvation Therefore he should be guided in all his works by this thought and contemplate this one thing

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus noted that when a believer loves his enemies, he aligns himself with his Father in heaven, who pours out his blessings unconditionally on the good and on the evil, regardless of what kind of response they might return (thankfulness, thanklessness, or otherwise). If we are to love our neighbor unconditionally (not even to mention loving our enemies), we must be set free from sin's control that drives us toward self-centeredness, self-service, self-gratification and every other self-compound in the book. Paul directed the Romans (15:3) to look to Christ, who pleased his neighbor (including us), even those who were hostile toward him (including us), so that we can please our neighbor in what we do.

Expending ourselves to the ⁿth degree to serve our neighbor in love will frequently go unrewarded. It will often appear that what we do is a colossal waste of time and effort on the thankless. Nonetheless, one of the primary reasons we have been set free from sin's control is that we might serve one another in love. We are no longer slaves but true sons, with a permanent place in the Father's household. It is for freedom that Christ set us free. Perhaps you've heard that one way to phrase strong, gospel-based preaching of sanctification is to say, "Be the child of God that Christ has made you." If I am to believe that I have been set free to unconditionally serve my neighbor in love, then freedom needs to be preached to me in just that way. "Christ has set you free from sin's control that you might serve your neighbor in love. Be the free child of God that God says you are!" Christian freedom is part of the gospel message, if not the gospel message itself. Faith comes from hearing it. The sanctification that consists in serving my neighbor in love will follow as a fruit of the faith that believes, "God's Son has made me free!"

You're going to notice that Part II, C of this essay is entitled "Adiaphora." Before you start thinking, "Ahh, we're finally getting to the meat of this paper" (no 1 Corinthians 8 pun intended), do the essayist a favor by following this guideline: Do not divorce Christian freedom narrowly defined from Christian freedom broadly defined. Christian freedom narrowly defined is not a standalone product. Without the broad (justification; Christ has set us free from sin, death, etc.), the narrow (adiaphora and specific applications of how we are to put our freedom into practice) will be exercised neither to God's glory nor to the edification of the neighbor. The car won't go down the highway without gas. Sanctification without justification driving it isn't sanctification at all.

C. Adiaphora

I almost laughed when I revisited the dogmatics notes (now conveniently available in LogosTM - format) and read the statement on adiaphora. The statement reads, "There is a wide neutral zone of ethically indifferent acts (adiaphora)." Thinking of things I have experienced in the parish, I was forced to regard the sentence as an understatement. There are a million things that fall into that wide neutral zone.

The historical introduction to the Confessions has a solid definition of adiaphora (#139): "Ceremonies which God has neither commanded nor prohibited are adiaphora (*res mediae*; *Mitteldinge*) and *ceteris paribus* (other things being equal), may be observed or omitted, adopted or rejected:"

When it comes to defining what an adiaphoron is, there's much to be learned in Romans 14:1 (exegetical notes below).⁶⁴ Early first century Christians could likely have forever discussed things like foods that could be eaten or not eaten or festival days that the church might observe or not observe. These are the very things that Paul uses as examples of *διαλογισμῶν* in the verses that follow Romans 14:1.

The Thorough Declaration of the Formula of Concord (X, 5) adds the following: "Namely, when under the title and pretext of external adiaphora such things are proposed as are in principle contrary to God's Word (although painted another color), these are not to be regarded as adiaphora, in which one is free to act as he will,

alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and advantage of his neighbor (LW 31, 364-365).

⁶⁴ (Addressed to the one strong in faith) Now accept the one who is weak with respect to the faith, not [accepting him, though] with a view toward (telic εἰς) quarrels (*διακρίσεις* -NASB: passing judgment) about opinions (*διαλογισμῶν* from *διαλογίζομαι* to ponder or discuss, thus, things that can be discussed without necessarily conclusively closing the discussion, without coming to a definitive conclusion that says that one person is right and the other wrong; NIV in Philippians 2:14 "arguing" - here "things that can be argued"; 1 Timothy 2:8 "disputing"; Luke 24:38 "doubts"; Kittel - "trifles").

but must be avoided as things prohibited by God.” Examples of these would be sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:12ff) and taking part in idol feasts (1 Corinthians 10). It appears in both of these cases that the Corinthians illegitimately broadened the definition of an adiaphoron by springboarding from that which was free to that which wasn’t (food to satisfy the appetite to sex to satisfy the sexual appetite; freedom to eat any kind of food to freedom to participate in idol feasts). “If I can do this, then I can do that,” rarely holds true.

The Formula again (X, 8): “But as regards genuine adiaphora, or matters of indifference (as explained before), we believe, teach, and confess that such ceremonies, in and of themselves, are no worship of God, nor any part of it, but must be properly distinguished from such as are, as it is written: In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, Matt. 15, 9.”

A critical issue for determining what are and what are not adiaphora is the matter of conscience. (Dogmatics notes: In his own conscience he must be absolutely free.) This matter becomes extremely critical when we recognize from the beginning that what one Christian under God may be perfectly free to do, another under God may not, and vice versa. This is not a wishy-washy cop-out as far as being clear on God’s will. This is not turning everything gray. For a variety of reasons, consciences can be either very sensitive or very insensitive. If the matter at hand is truly neutral, this range of sensitivity allows for a wide diversity of practice in matters of adiaphora. Perhaps it goes without saying, but in our dealings with our neighbors, we do well to always bear this in mind. The scriptural basis for these initial statements on conscience is found in Romans 14. “Fully achieving certainty” and “not being at odds with oneself” are ways that Paul talks about having a conscience that is absolutely free.⁶⁵

Only the individual can determine whether or not he is at odds with himself by what he thinks, says or does in ethically neutral matters. Thus we hear Paul’s directive to not judge others. We can’t read hearts nor can we profess to know consciences. At the same time, cavalierly saying, “Yeah, I’m ok with that; my conscience doesn’t bother me at all,” can be a way of either not listening to one’s own conscience or it may be a revelation of a person’s unwillingness to have his conscience “re-sensitized” by the Word of God.

The words above, of course, also direct us away from judging the weak who may be conscience-stricken about things over which they shouldn’t be. We know as well that these words remind us to never go against conscience, in matters of adiaphora or otherwise, since everything that does not proceed from the conviction of faith is sin.

In seeking to put our finger on a comprehensive scriptural definition of adiaphora, we need to bear three things in mind. Is this thing that I am free to do or not do 1) beneficial? 2) addictive? 3) edifying?

Beneficial

⁶⁵ (μὲν δέ, another example following that of eating or not eating certain foods) On the one hand, one person regards a day as more [important] than (παρά used in a comparison) another day; on the other hand another person regards every day equally - let each one fully achieve certainty (πληροφορείσθω - same use re Abraham in Romans 4:21 (NIV - being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. “Fully achieve certainty” is the equivalent of not in the least way going against conscience.) in his own mind. The one who is intent on (ὁ φρονῶν) the day is intent on that day for the Lord, and he who eats for the Lord, for (as proof of foregoing) he gives thanks to God; and the one who does not eat does not eat for the Lord and he gives thanks to God. (Whatever the reader may be thinking of in this regard [smoking, drinking, how far can romance go apart from marriage, etc.], ask yourself, “Can I set my mind on and be intent about (φρονέω) doing this for the Lord and give thanks to God for it?” See “at odds with himself” below in 14:23.) I know for a fact and am persuaded in the sphere of the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean of itself (as the strong ones know so well), except (be aware of this, strong ones) for the one who is reckoning (considering, whether his conscience is perfectly aligned with God’s will or not) something to be unclean, for that one it is unclean. But the one who is at odds with himself (battles of conscience), if he eats he has been condemned (his own conscience tells him he is sinning), because it is not out of faith (and by conscience he knows it); everything that is not from faith is sin (Romans 14:5,6,14,23).

Formula (X, 7): “Likewise, when there are useless, foolish displays, that are profitable neither for good order nor Christian discipline, nor evangelical propriety in the Church, these also are not genuine adiaphora, or matters of indifference.”

The scriptural basis for “beneficial” is 1 Corinthians 6:12. “All things to me are permitted, nevertheless, all things do not confer a benefit.”⁶⁶ Whether or not something confers a benefit is an area where judgment calls will be made. Accordingly, it will be crucial for faith to express itself through love. If I’m free to do it but it does no one (including myself) any good, why am I doing it? totally for self? time better spent doing something else? The Confessions help us come to a good understanding of “beneficial” (Formula X, 9; italics are mine).

Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has, according to its circumstances, the good right, power, and authority [in matters truly adiaphora] to change, to diminish, and to increase them, without thoughtlessness and offense, in an orderly and becoming way, as at any time *it may be regarded* most profitable, most beneficial, and best for [preserving] good order, [maintaining] Christian discipline [and for *εὐταξία* things in good order) worthy of the profession of the Gospel], and the edification of the Church. Moreover, how we can yield and give way with a good conscience to the weak in faith in such external adiaphora, Paul teaches Rom. 14, and proves it by his example, Acts 16, 3; 21, 26; 1 Corinthians 9, 19.

I am likely venturing onto thin ice if I autonomously decide that one or another free thing is absolutely, positively beneficial. The “it may be regarded” phrase above is begging for a dative of agent - as at any time it may be regarded by fellow Christians who would naturally be concerned with, who would be affected by, or who would have expertise in evaluating my use or disuse of the free thing. Are those in the position of regarding the use or disuse of this free thing saying that it will preserve good order, that it is truly worthy of the profession of the gospel, that it will edify the Church? Does my use or disuse honor the experience of the Church or am I going off on my own? Determining benefit is no small task as the believer works with adiaphora.

Addictive

I don’t know of an English translation that brings out Paul’s play on words in 1 Corinthians 6:12b. He writes:

πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐγὼ ἐξουσιασθήσομαι ὑπό τινος

The play is on *ἔξεστι*. While the Corinthians quipped off their favorite freedom phrase, “All things are permissible,” Paul quipped back, with a variation of the vocable they were using, that we are not to be authoritatively mastered by anything.

Typical things by which one might be authoritatively mastered are caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, various other drugs, pornography, gambling, the internet - the reader is familiar with the list and can add to it. In addition to determining whether or not all of the above are truly free, in addition to consideration given to what my conscience tells me regarding all such things, I must also ask, “Can I take it or leave it? Am I in control of this free thing or is it in control of me?” If it controls me, no matter how confident I am that scripture neither

⁶⁶ “All things to me are permitted [*ἔξεστιν*] nevertheless all things do not confer a benefit (Kittel – *συμφέρω* means “to bring together” only in Acts 19:19. It means “to profit” in 1 Corinthians 6:12; 2 Corinthians 8:10; Matthew 15:29; 19:10; John 18:14, etc.; BAG - help, confer a benefit, be advantageous or profitable or useful) (1 Corinthians 6:12).

commands it nor forbids it, for me its neutrality has been lost. It may indeed still be for someone else, but for me it is no longer an adiaphoron.

The complete sentence from the dogmatics notes gives us more to consider (*italics are mine*). “In his own conscience he must be absolutely free (i.e., able to use or leave them, *as the situation may demand*).” Not only must I be able to take something or leave it on a strictly individual, personal or private level, I must also be able to take it or leave it as the situation may demand. For example, if there is some free thing that has authoritatively mastered me and there comes along a situation where, with regard to being able to take it or leave it, I should be leaving it, my inability to leave it may jeopardize the faith of another. In matters of adiaphora, I don’t want to be authoritatively mastered by anything, as a matter of conscience, as a matter of divine principle, but also so that I can always exercise Christian freedom for the good of my neighbor. This consideration of my neighbor leads into the last main consideration that must be given to adiaphora.

Edifying

Paul’s word in 1 Corinthians 10, as he expands on teachings laid out in 1 Corinthians 6, is οἰκοδομεῖ. All things do not necessarily build the house. Not everything that I am free to do edifies my neighbor. Not everything I am free to do is necessarily constructive. The last main section of the essay will seek to explore Christian freedom and matters of adiaphora with a view toward the edification of my neighbor. Before taking up that last main section, we’ll cover two other matters related to adiaphora.

D. Adiaphora Practiced for “The Putting Down Of The Flesh” and “In Casu Confessionis”

For a man who knew firsthand the rigors of monastic life, you’d think that a return to asceticism would be the last thing on his mind. Along with a clear understanding of justification by faith, Luther had undoubtedly come to see the light of Christian liberty, especially with regard to submitting to ordinances that had their origin in the “basic principles of the world,” such as harsh treatment of the body (Colossians 2:20-23). Yet, in his Christian Liberty tract to Leo, the reformer writes at some length about adiaphoristic practices (fastings, watchings, labors and other reasonable discipline) related to putting the body under control and keeping the sinful nature in checks.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Although, as I have said, a man is abundantly and sufficiently justified by faith inwardly, in his spirit, and so has all that he needs, except insofar as this faith and these riches must grow from day to day even to the future life; yet he remains in this mortal life on earth. In this life he must control his own body and have dealings with men. Here the works begin; here a man cannot enjoy leisure; here he must indeed take care to discipline his body by fastings, watchings, labors, and other reasonable discipline and to subject it to the Spirit so that it will obey and conform to the inner man and faith and not revolt against faith, as it is the nature of the body to do if it is not held in check. The inner man, who by faith is created in the image of God, is both joyful and happy because of Christ in whom so many benefits are conferred upon him; and therefore it is his one occupation to serve God joyfully and without thought of gain, in love that is not constrained. While he is doing this, behold, he meets a contrary will in his own flesh which strives to serve the world and seeks its own advantage. This the spirit of faith cannot tolerate, but with joyful zeal it attempts to put the body under control and hold it in check, as Paul says in Romans 7 [22-23], “For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin,” and in another place, “But I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” [1 Corinthians 9:27], and in Galatians [5:24], “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

In doing these works, however, we must not think that a man is justified before God by them, for faith, which alone is righteousness before God, cannot endure that erroneous opinion. We must, however, realize that these works reduce the body to subjection and purify it of evil lusts, and our whole purpose is to be directed only toward the driving out of lusts. Since by faith the soul is cleansed and made to love God, it desires that all things, and especially its own body, shall be purified so that all things may join with it in loving and praising God. Hence a man cannot be idle, for the need of his body drives him and he is compelled to do many good works to reduce it to subjection. Nevertheless the works themselves do not justify him before God, but he does the works out of spontaneous love in obedience to God, whom he would most scrupulously obey in all things. In this way everyone will easily be able to learn for himself the limit and discretion, as they say, of his bodily

A primary source for these words of Luther was the last part of 1 Corinthians 9 (vss. 24-27),⁶⁸ where Paul used analogies from running and boxing to speak about how he “beat down his body,” both so that he could be an effective minister and one who himself remained strong in the Christian faith. It would appear that we could here remember Luther’s phrase, “Fasting and other bodily preparations may serve a good purpose.” Whatever particular free things we’re talking about, apart from any thinking that they justify, they may serve a good purpose in giving one’s own body a knockout punch, so that the desires of the flesh will not have their way, so that the believer (especially the public minister of the gospel) will not be unapproved (*ἀδόκιμος*), i.e., not the genuine article as far as being a Christian through faith that Jesus is his substitute (NIV - disqualified, like a counterfeit coin, shown to be such by biting on it), not the herald of a message that he has not appropriated for himself. Having made himself a servant to all, to save as many as possible, he still forces his unwilling and rebellious body to do his will,⁶⁹ so that, being sure to appropriate what he preaches, he does not lose out on the prize of eternal life.

The practice of certain things that are neither commanded nor forbidden as a way of facilitating this subjection of the body falls into the category of Christian liberty. Whether we’re referring to daily contrition and repentance that drown the sinful nature, or free practices that externally assist in keeping outbursts of the sinful nature in check, we will want to continually practice self-mortification (Mark 9:42-48) and put to death the things that belong to our sinful nature (Colossians 3:5) both so that we can concentrate on serving our neighbor and so that we do not fall into crass hypocrisy.

Luther: “Any work that is not done solely for the purpose of keeping the body under control or of serving one’s neighbor ... is not good or Christian.”⁷⁰ “A man does not live for himself alone in this mortal body to work for it alone, but he lives also for all men on earth; rather he lives only for others and not for himself. To this end he brings his body into subjection that he may the more sincerely and freely serve others, as Paul says in Romans 14 [7-8], ‘None of us lives to himself alone, and none of us dies to himself. if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord.’”⁷¹

It was mentioned earlier that adiaphora may lose their neutrality if a person’s conscience reckons something as sinful. Adiaphora may also lose their neutrality if they are being required or demanded by those who hold to false doctrine. A key scriptural example of this was Paul’s refusal to allow Titus to be circumcised.⁷² Even though circumcision had become something that could be freely taken or left, to give in to the Judaizers who were demanding it would have been equal to affirming that observance of the ceremonial law was necessary for salvation. The Confessions (Formula - X, 6, 4) explain the matter this way:

castigations, for he will fast, watch, and labor as much as he finds sufficient to repress the lasciviousness and lust of his body (LW 31, 358-359).

⁶⁸ Don’t you know for a fact [when it comes to] the ones running on a racecourse, that on the one hand all of them run, but on the other hand only one receives the prize? In this way run: that you (plural) might receive it (might be that one). Now [along that line] everyone who is engaging in a contest (not struggle per se since we’re in sports) exercises self-control with respect to all things (this is not in the sphere of salvation but in the sphere of service); they (sports contestants) on the one hand in order that they might receive a perishable crown (laurel wreath), we, on the other hand, that we might receive an imperishable crown. Hence [accordingly] I run in this way as not unclearly (not aimlessly, i.e., not as one who has no fixed goal), in this way I am boxing as not thrashing air (throwing punches that never land), on the contrary, I am giving my body a knockout punch (the right punch landed in the right place to completely knock out cold the other boxer, in this case himself) and leading it into subjection (constant ongoing process: This rare word means “to cause to live the life of a slave.” Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 9:27 to show that he subordinates his soma to his office and will not allow it to be a hindrance to him in discharging this office), lest somehow, to others having preached, I myself should become disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

⁶⁹ C. Toppe, *People’s Bible - 1 Corinthians*. p. 88.

⁷⁰ LW 31, 370.

⁷¹ LW 31, 364-365.

⁷² But not even Titus, who was with me, although a Greek, was compelled (aorist - didn’t happen) to be circumcised. Now [this was a concern or issue] on account of the secretly brought in false brothers who came alongside us to spy out our freedom, that which we are having (enjoy) in Christ Jesus, in order that they might enslave us, to whom not even for a moment did we yield by subjection (to them), in order that the truth of the gospel remain continually with you (Galatians 2:3-5).

We believe, teach, and confess that in time of persecution, when a plain [and steadfast] confession is required of us, we should not yield to the enemies in regard to such adiaphora, as the apostle has written Gal. 5,1: *Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage.* Also 2 Corinthians 6, 14: Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, etc. For what concord hath light with darkness? Also Gal. 2, 5: *To whom we gave place, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might remain with you.* For in such a case it is no longer a question concerning adiaphora, but concerning the truth of the Gospel, concerning [preserving] Christian liberty, and concerning sanctioning open idolatry, as also concerning the prevention of offense to the weak in the faith [how care should be taken lest idolatry be openly sanctioned and the weak in faith be offended]; in which we have nothing to concede, but should plainly confess and suffer on that account what God sends, and what He allows the enemies of His Word to inflict upon us.

Flacius defended the Lutheran position during the Adiaphoristic Controversy and made the statement: “Nothing is an adiaphoron when confession and offense are involved.” Giving in to an errorist’s insistence that adiaphora must be observed will have the same negative results today as in the days of the Reformation: confused consciences, weak Christians offended, enemies strengthened in their error and emboldened in their attacks, further demands made upon those who have given in,⁷³ and the gospel itself placed in jeopardy.

E. Adiaphora and My Neighbor

If I can be all things to all men a million times better than St. Paul ever was, if I can never in all my days look down on the weak in faith who have so little knowledge and never despise the strong for doing those bothersome things they do, if in suit and tie I can sing “Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light” in the morning service and in jeans and a polo shirt at a youth event that afternoon can sway back and forth with arms uplifted and sing, “Lord, I Lift Your Name on High,” if my grasp on both the doctrines and the million and three applications of Christian freedom is firmer than that of any man, woman or child in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, but I have not love, I am nothing.⁷⁴

From the pen of Martin Luther (The first paragraph summarizes a number of things said to this point concerning adiaphora and Christian freedom; the second charts the course for what remains.):

The [Christian] will meet first the unyielding, stubborn ceremonialists who like deaf adders are not willing to hear the truth of liberty [Ps 58:4] but, having no faith, boast of, prescribe, and insist upon their ceremonies as means of justification. Such were the Jews of old, who were unwilling to learn how to do good. These he must resist, do the very opposite, and offend them boldly lest by their impious views they drag many with them into error. In the presence of such men it is good to eat meat, break the fasts, and for the sake of liberty of faith do other things which they regard as the greatest of sins.

The other class of men whom a Christian will meet are the simple-minded, ignorant men, weak in the faith, as the apostle calls them, who cannot yet grasp the liberty of faith, even if they were willing to do so [Rom 14:1]. These he must take care not to offend. He must yield to their weakness until they are more fully instructed. Since they do and think as they do, not because they are stubbornly wicked, but only because their faith is weak, the fasts and other things which they consider necessary must be observed to avoid giving them offense. This is the command of love, which would harm no one but would serve all men. It is not by their fault that they are

⁷³ Triglot, Historical Introduction, #139.

⁷⁴ M. Schultz, 10:00 P.M., September 10, 2001.

weak, but by that of their pastors who have taken them captive with the snares of their traditions and have wickedly used these traditions as rods with which to beat them. They should have been delivered from these pastors by the teachings of faith and freedom.⁷⁵

Doing what is proper in the area of adiaphora is not as simple as foregoing some things I am legally free to do and doing some things I am not legally required to do. A comparison of circumstances in Galatia and Rome will bear that out. In Galatia, Judaizers were insisting on ceremonies as necessary for salvation. Paul told his readers that to observe such ceremonies under those circumstances would be to insult Christ. He told them that standing firm in the freedom they had meant that they would by no means observe the ceremonies since doing so would militate against the chief article of the Christian faith and would destroy their own faith. In Rome, Judaizers were not insisting on observance or nonobservance of free ceremonies. The Italian Christian Church had many who were weak in the faith, people who still needed a great deal of instruction. Christian freedom for those strong in the faith meant doing or not doing certain things based on the company they were keeping at the time. For the welfare of fellow Christians and to glorify God, they were to adapt. Simultaneously, the weak in faith were not to condemn the strong for their actions.

The matter of adiaphora with reference to one's neighbor is not simply a matter of use vs. non-use or observance vs. non-observance, but why and under what circumstances you would or would not do something. Under certain circumstances you should, under certain circumstances you shouldn't, and since the matter is free, you can rightly go both ways without being accused of practicing situation ethics. The issue is not, "What can or can't I do?" but, "How can I show loving concern to my neighbors, all of whom are at different places on the spectrum when it comes to strength of faith and levels of knowledge?" At this point we must return to the three points Paul made to the Corinthians in chapters six and ten of his first letter to them: 1) Does it confer a benefit? 2) Has it become addictive? And most importantly for us at this point, 3) Does it edify? Always taking my neighbor into consideration, will the exercise of my freedom build his house (οἰκοδομεῖ)? Will my action spiritually build him up or tear him down?

In the context of Christian freedom, προσκόπτω⁷⁶ and σκανδαλίζω⁷⁷ are not Greek vocables that refer to merely upsetting someone or ticking them off. The first has to do with a wound received after having stumbled or having been knocked down. The second is an activity that causes someone to be caught or trapped. That's why "an offense is that which causes one to become weak or to fall from faith, or hinders one from coming to faith."⁷⁸ From what the Lord has told us, messing up or even messing with someone's faith in Christ is a heinous sin. The millstone⁷⁹ for anyone who "scandalizes" one of the little ones who believe in Jesus should be enough to convince anyone of that.

⁷⁵ LW 31, 373-374.

⁷⁶ (a) Humans may be the cause of falling by others. Thus the valid freedom of the strong at Rome and Corinth (Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 8:9) can be a stumbling block to the weak, who see in it a compromise with the pagan world. Love, then, demands renunciation of the freedom lest it cause others to fall. (b) It is a principle for all Christians (1 Cor. 10:32) that they should not give offense either to believers or to those outside. This does not mean simply that they should be pleasant to others. It means that they should do nothing to weaken their faith or to keep them from faith. For himself Paul puts no obstacle in the way of others (2 Cor. 6:3). He tries not to do anything that will bring reproach on the apostolic ministry. His concern is again for the salvation of those among whom he works. - Kittel.

⁷⁷ *The Danger of Falling*. Tensions in the churches are the occasion of *skándalon* (cf. the debates between the strong and the weak in Rom. 14-15 and 1 Cor. 8: lff.; 10:23ff.). The freedom of those who have fully cast off the past causes offense to those who have not, but it also creates the danger that these will act against their consciences or with wavering faith. In this case the danger is the serious one of an ultimate eschatological fall (Rom. 14:15, 23). The strong with their freedom may destroy the weak and therefore overturn God's work in Christ. Paul, then, sides with the weak even though he shares the faith of the strong (Rom. 15:1). - Kittel.

⁷⁸ WLS Dogmatics Notes.

⁷⁹ Matthew 18:6,7.

In Corinth,⁸⁰ the eating of certain meats gave rise to an opportunity for such offense to be given. In Rome,⁸¹ both diet and day of worship issues were matters that could harm a believer's faith if handled insensitively. Granted, for us the issue isn't always food, but using that as an example of any other freedom that might be important to us... Would I become a vegetarian (1 Corinthians 8:13) when the reason to do so is actually someone else's ignorance and weakness? Food is not a means of grace (1 Corinthians 8:8), but our freedom to eat what we want is a freedom near and dear to our hearts, or perhaps more accurately, our stomachs. Before our eyes the Holy Spirit puts in the scales what we want to eat weighed against our brother's soul going to hell. What if we changed what's in that scale from food to alcohol? What if we changed food to paycheck (1 Corinthians 9)?

What if we brought into the conversation not only those free things we need to forego for the brother's welfare but also those free things that we need to undergo for his welfare? How would we fare with fasting? For obvious reasons, one hesitates to mention circumcision. For an adult male, that's quite a step to take, especially when it could be rightly argued that the weak brother should know better. Can the reader sense the importance of growing in his own Christian freedom (justification) so as to be willing to go the extra mile or hundred miles for the weak brother (sanctification)?

We are to be inoffensive to all people (1 Corinthians 10:32), pleasing everybody in every way, and not seeking our own benefit. Due to that other principle we see at work in our members (old self, Romans 7:23), pleasing everybody else gets old fast. Sometimes pleasing everybody else dies without ever having lived. And still, as was the case in 1 Corinthians 8, 1 Corinthians 10 (v. 33) sets our fellow Christian's eternal soul before us. President Toppe spoke of this matter in terms of respecting the sanctity and eternal worth of the brother's conscience. Amazingly, even that is not always enough to direct our behavior and lead us to exercise our freedom for the spiritual welfare of the other person. This is exactly why we cannot divorce Christian freedom in terms of justification from Christian freedom in terms of sanctification. That Christ has set me free from the law's demands, sin, death and a very real and very much deserved hell is the only message that will empower me to selflessly live for my neighbor to the degree mentioned above.

⁸⁰ But as it is, food [of itself] (vocabulary meaning) will not stand us near to God; we are neither lacking anything if we don't eat [it] nor are we gaining anything if we do eat [it]. But be constantly seeing to it (KEY POINT) lest somehow (even in the most remotely possible way - with regard to the next verse, the question is not will someone see me, the question is might anyone with a weak conscience possibly see me) this right of yours should become an occasion for stumbling [into sin] for those who are weak. For if someone should see you, the one having knowledge, reclining for a meal in an idol's temple, since his conscience is weak, he'll be built up (like a house going up) to eat foods sacrificed to idols, won't he (expects "yes" answer)? Certainly then (inferential γάρ) this weak one is utterly destroyed by your knowledge, this brother for whose sake Christ died. (How dare we exercise our freedom thus when it cost Jesus his life to save this person!) Now as it is by sinning in this way against the brothers and by wounding their weak conscience, against Christ you are sinning. For this very reason (that we do not become guilty of what is shown here to be a heinous sin) if food scandalizes (cause one to fall into sin, builds a person up and emboldens him to go against his conscience - cf. Mk 9:42-48) my brother, I will never eat (strongest future negation) meat (different word, anarthrous, generic, any meat at all, associated with idol sacrifice or not) forever, in order that I not scandalize my brother (1 Corinthians 8:8-13).

⁸¹ THEREFORE (conclusion to all that precedes), let us no longer judge (κρίνωμεν - find fault with) one another, (what follows goes mainly to the strong...) on the contrary, decide (κρίνατε again - BAG - 13a (a play on words, with κρίνειν used with two different meanings in the same vs.) this instead (if you're going to judge something, judge this instead): to not be placing any (anarthrous indefinite) hindrance to faith (πρόσκομμα) for the brother or any (anarthrous indefinite) temptation (σκάνδαλον - something that will influence him to action) to sin. I know for a fact and am persuaded in the sphere of the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean of itself (as the strong ones know so well), except (be aware of this, strong ones) for the one who is reckoning something to be unclean, for that one it is unclean. For if on account of food your brother is distressed (λυπεῖται - grieved because in weakness he thinks you're sinning by eating it and that he would be sinning if he did) [not just ticked off], you are no longer walking in line with love (obviously in this example the strong one is continuing to do something in plain view of the weak one with no regard for his weak conscience); do not with your food destroy (ἀπόλλυε) that one in whose behalf (or in whose place) Christ died (Romans 14:13-15).

Having referred to a longer section of 1 Corinthians 8 just above, we can take a moment to note two statements made in that chapter. Paul could write (v. 4), “We know for a fact that an idol is nothing” (οἶδαμεν ὅτι οὐδὲν εἶδωλον). Four verses later, immediately following a powerfully adversative ἀλλ’, he adds, “This knowledge is not in all people.” We miss the boat if we acknowledge the differences between weak and strong but fail to take the next step of educating as much as we can. The follow-up to the Jerusalem council⁸² shows us that the apostles and elders took significant pains to get the word out and to educate the involved parties on the critical issues. They not only sent the letter, they sent men along to explain it. These men spoke a great deal and spent a fair amount of time there. Time not wasted is all the time we can give toward educating people in specific areas of adiaphora and in how to view and treat each other in matters of Christian liberty.

There will be times when we are of the impression that our actions are not, in the strict sense, giving offense, i.e., causing someone to sin or keeping them from coming to faith. At times people will just plain not like what it is that we’re doing, even though it really isn’t any kind of “building them up to go against their conscience” or “putting an obstacle in their way which is a hindrance to faith.” There will be times, as Jesus mentioned,⁸³ when people condemn us for whatever we do, even when we have completely adapted ourselves to their sensitivities. At those times, strengthened in our new selves by the love of Christ, we will want to say with Paul, “We put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.”⁸⁴

How far Paul went in adapting his behavior for the sake of the other person is perhaps most clearly expressed by his words in 1 Corinthians 9, “all things to all men.”⁸⁵ He went to the lengths that he did on account of the gospel, recognizing that through adaptability, he would win more. “On account of the gospel is διὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον. δια with the accusative could mean either that Paul was doing all these things for the sake of the gospel, that it might get a hearing and win people for Christ, or that he was doing all these things on account of the gospel, because of how it had impacted him. The first interpretation would look back on how adaptable Paul sought to be to win people for Christ, the second would look forward to his own recognition that because of its impact on him, he both shares it with others and has a share in it himself. Perhaps it’s not an “either ...or” interpretation since both are true.

To expand on the first interpretation, because of Mormon belief and practice, it might not be the wisest thing for me to invite my Mormon neighbor over for coffee on a Monday evening. The gospel may well not get

⁸² Acts 15:30-34.

⁸³ Luke 7:31-35.

⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:12.

⁸⁵ For (as proof of the foregoing) although I am free from (separation - connection to be severed) all men (by not taking a salary and from all men in any such circumstances of ownership over me), to all men myself I enslaved (aorist - happened) (Chiasm: free to all, to all enslaved), in order that I might gain (κερδαίνω - same as Matthew 18:15 - win someone to repentance, win someone for the kingdom of God) the more (to repentance / into Christ’s kingdom, more than I would gain by pursuing some other course) and so (to introduce a result, which comes from what precedes: and then, and so) I became (historical present or ongoing present - ongoing present might give the appearance of “as each case presents itself”; truly chameleon) to the Jews (specific race) as a Jewish person, in order that I might win Jews (anyone Jewish); to those under (under the power, rule or sovereignty of) law (which law - since this is some who are as compared to some who aren’t, it has to be ceremonial law) as under law [myself], while I myself am not existing as one under law (I became someone one I am not -which is being a Christ to people), in order that I might win those under law (specific or previous reference); to those apart from law (ceremonial - not just lawless but those apart from the ceremonial law, lawless as to how a Jew might define the term) I became as one apart from law, while I am not apart from God’s law (moral), on the contrary in the sphere of the law of Christ (keeping the moral law for all the right Christian reasons), in order that I might gain those apart from law. I became to the weak (of a weakness in faith, which, through lack of advanced knowledge, considers externals of the greatest importance -those already spoken of in chapter 8) weak, in order that I might win the weak (according to my old self I’d much rather be strong and arrogantly consider my own knowledge as above that of the common riffraff, but no) -- to all people I have become (perfect happened and still has ongoing effects - some force acted on me to turn me into something I wasn’t - this all happened at conversion and grows to be more of a force the more of the gospel freedom I get for myself) all things, in order that I might by all possible means save some. Now (summation) all these things (emphatic position) I keep on doing on account of the gospel (for its sake or because of how it has impacted me), (intended result) that a sharer of it I might be (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

a hearing. But there will be a much better chance for gospel proclamation if we have lemonade over lunch on Tuesday. A passion for getting the gospel out and winning souls for Christ will guide my behavior.

To expand on the second interpretation, I can tire quickly of adapting to where people are at, because they're at a hundred different places, and a part of me wishes they were all a lot more like me, for then, of course, they would be very likeable, I could get along well with them, I wouldn't have to change much of anything about how I conduct myself, we could all worship, do the work of ministry and socialize without so much as a hint of spiritually harming each other. The truth is, however, that they are all different, and I'm always going to have to adapt my behavior to their level of understanding and set my conscience to the sensitivity level at which theirs operates. And I'm going to need to be doing this till I die. But I'll do all this because God became man in the person of Jesus Christ and rescued my soul from hell. I want to have a share in the gospel message that I'm sharing.

To be sure, because of the expressed goal of winning people for Christ, the most natural application of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 is toward the adaptability necessary in evangelism. With the multi-culturalism that is virtually knocking down our doors and overrunning so many of our home and world mission settings, what better study material could there be on a God-pleasing exercise of our Christian freedom in matters of adiaphora than words which were written primarily to address how a missionary adapted himself to both Jew and Gentile alike? We have great need of knowing these principles well and we have great need of the willingness to put them into practice as we come to grips with all that is entailed in a serious 21st Century consideration of the Great Commission.

At the same time, how many times do we not make reference to the words "all things to all men" for virtually every other aspect of ministry work? We do that because they speak not only about evangelism but also about an overall approach to people, an approach that loves everyone and wants to win everyone for and keep everyone safely in the kingdom of Christ.

These matters don't always get easier when they reach the corporate level. The Jerusalem council in Acts 15 is a study on practicing Christian freedom in a group setting. When circumcision was demanded of the Gentiles who were starting to stream into the church, a convocation was held. The judgment of James was in line with the truth of the gospel. Gentiles didn't need to become Jewish to be among those saved by faith in Christ. Any such ordinance (like circumcision) would stand in the way of their conversion. For the spiritual welfare of the incoming Gentiles, circumcision as a requirement had to be rejected. At the same time, the gathering of believers into which the Gentiles were entering had plenty of Jews, Jews who were extremely sensitive to the ceremonial law. For the spiritual welfare of their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ, Gentiles would want to refrain from certain things that would curdle the blood of their new Jewish fellow Christians. The NIV "requirements" in Acts 15:28 should read "necessary things" (τούτων τῶν ἐπιβάλλειν). It would be necessary to refrain not because of any legal requirement but in order to show charity toward extremely sensitive fellow Christians.

After all (and this was the case in every city where such Jew/Gentile matters arose), Gentiles had lived free of dietary restrictions all their natural lives, while Jews had been under divine command to observe dietary restrictions for six times longer than the United States of America has been a nation. Jewish consciences weren't going to get over these things overnight. Gentiles would "do well" (εὖ πράξετε - Acts 15:29) to be sensitive to this and to practice their freedom accordingly by refraining from certain things which in and of themselves were neutral. How long it may have taken the Jews to transition into a full understanding of the freedom they had in Christ is something parish pastors will want to remember. Seldom will a new member fully understand the freedom we have in Christ after 16 lessons of the Bible Information Class.

In the practice of Christian freedom, something has run terribly amok if ill is spoken of me for thankfully carrying out some neutral act to the glory of God. Paul added that to his treatment of Christian freedom in 1 Corinthians 10 (see footnote below⁸⁶). One way of speaking about his words there would be to

⁸⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:28-30 - But if someone should say to you (plural), "This is meat sacrificed to an idol," don't eat it, for the sake of that person who revealed this [to you] and for the sake of conscience—I don't mean your own conscience but that of the

remind ourselves that the practice of Christian freedom ought to extend all the way back into our planning for various events (not just meals), that we think ahead and think of others as we plan. This, also, is not asking too much if we are led by Christ to assign priceless value to the soul of our Christian brother. Again, the point of discussion was food (for our discussion, let's say it was meat).

When invited to an unbeliever's house, you would likely have given thanks to God privately, you would expect that the menu would not be an issue, and you would anticipate eating whatever you chose. As things turn out, apart from anything you could have planned for, a fellow Christian with a weak conscience is in attendance at the meal and you are made aware of his weakness. You needn't be denounced for eating something you've thanked God for, and, if at all possible, so far as you can see to it, you shouldn't end up having your freedom unfavorably judged because of a fellow Christian's weakness. So, in that setting, when made aware of your brother's sensitivity, pass the questionable meat (then you won't be denounced) and quietly eat vegetables. You can certainly still be thankful to God for everything served without necessarily eating everything served. At an event where there will be public giving of thanks, a meal over which you have primary control and you know the guest list, love people enough to serve only what they can eat without problems, and give thanks for it all. If you're heading to a wedding reception, where you can't control much of anything, pray before you go that you'll be seated next to Christians with strong consciences. Finally, when you're home alone, grill a 32 ounce T-bone, don't say a word to anyone, and enjoy the daylight out of it.

Context is a remarkable thing. One wonders how many times 1 Corinthians 10:31 has been ripped out of its context for devotions and sermonettes and the like that speak of eating and drinking to the glory of God only in terms of giving thanks for the food or not arguing with little brother during dinner or doing your best on the athletic field (whatever you do) so that all we do is done to the glory of God. The text for such devotions might more accurately be Colossians 3:17. In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul is telling us that we do all things to the glory of God when we always give consideration to the impact that our words or actions will have on the other person. Again, in the realm of Christian freedom, don't divorce justification from sanctification. The sinless life of Christ, his cross and his empty grave are the only power source for such a selfless mode of living.

Two more points, based on Romans 14:19-22,⁸⁷ are worth making. I take 1 Corinthians 7:1 not as Paul quoting what the Corinthians wrote but responding to what they wrote when he used the word *καλόν* and said, "It's an ok thing, it's just fine to not marry. There isn't anything wrong with the unmarried state." Similarly Paul in Romans 14:21 (rather freely): "It's an ok thing (*καλόν*), it's just fine, it shouldn't trouble you at all to not do that free thing that your neighbor feels is objectionable." Foregoing what you are free to do is not sacrificing Christian liberty; it is practicing it. When you have a strong desire to exercise your freedom in some particular area, if you're certain it is not sinful, if your conscience is both well-informed and truly free, then just remember that some things are better done in basements or in backyards that have tall fences (Romans 14:22).

Still today, there are places where I'd have to admit that the King James Version can turn quite a phrase. Romans 14:3 (KJV) - "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not

other man. For why is my freedom (*ἐλευθερία*) to be unfavorably judged by another's conscience (BAG and RSV -scruples)? (I'm not eating for his sake. This is not that his weakness of conscience is determining what I am free or not free to do.) (Toppe - Paul does not want the strong Christian to come under the judgment of his weak brother, even if the strong Christian has every right to eat the meat. "There are times when we must waive our rights rather than to have a legitimate action condemned by a fellow Christian.") If I, for my part, am partaking [of this meal] with thanksgiving, why am I being blasphemed on account of that for which I, for my part, am giving thanks?

⁸⁷ So then let us be pursuing things that have to do with this peace (article of previous reference; things that have to do with the peace we have with God are things that build others up), namely (epexegetical), the things that have to do with the edifying of one another (instead of berating one another - see next verse). Don't be demolishing the work of God on account of food. All things are clean, but it is wrong for the person eating (all these clean, perfectly fine foods to do so) with offense (obstacle, hindrance to faith). It's an ok thing, it's just fine to not eat flesh and to not drink wine and to not engage (be) in that thing which your brother feels repugnance for (BAG). As for you, keep whatever faith that you have to yourself in the sight of God; happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves (freely eating, not causing others to fall) (Romans 14:19-22).

judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.” The Lord has accepted (προσελάβετο) both and both are doing what they’re doing for the Lord (κυρίῳ).

What must it have been like for Christians in Rome to hear these words of Paul (Romans 14:1 - 15:13), read perhaps from makeshift lecterns in some of the house churches that made up the “congregation” in Rome? When I saw myself as the weak one about whom Paul wrote, would I begrudge him for saying what he said and perhaps feel even more at odds with the strong ones? When I saw myself as the strong one about whom Paul wrote, would my swelled head still fit in the room and would my nose become the length of a playground slide as I looked down it at those pitiable weak ones? One dares to say that there is room in our church body for the exhortation of Romans 14:3, especially in consideration of the diversity we have in terms of strong and weak ministers and members, knowledgeable and not-so-knowledgeable ministers and members, and, in all matters ministerial, strong and weak congregations.

Whether we’re talking about the *Una Sancta* or the WELS, we are a diverse communion of saints. “For this reason (that you might bring praise to God in this area of accepting each other that we have been discussing) be accepting one another, just as Christ accepted you (dead as you were, weak as you are), to the glory of God.”⁸⁸ Accepting one another brings glory to God. Accepting one another brings glory to God. Luther:

Who then can comprehend the riches and the glory of the Christian life? It can do all things and has all things and lacks nothing. It is lord over sin, death and hell, and yet at the same time it serves, ministers to, and benefits all men. But alas in our day this life is unknown throughout the world; it is neither preached about nor sought after; we are altogether ignorant of our own name and do not know why we are Christians or bear the name of Christians.⁸⁹

After a brief illustration about two debtors who both had their debt erased,⁹⁰ one a much larger debt than the other, Jesus asked Simon, “Which of the two will love him more?” When the obvious answer was given, Jesus moved on to explain that the woman who was anointing his feet was showing him much more love than Simon, based on the fact that she realized, much more than Simon did about himself, how much she had been forgiven. “Her sins, many as they are, have been forgiven (perfect), for (as evidence of it) she loved much.” As we see and know and believe all there is to see, know and believe in the little word ὄντως (“If the Son sets you free, you will *really* be free.”⁹¹), then, even as matters of Christian freedom keep coming at us from the left and from the right, we will love much.

This is the scriptural foundation for our Christian freedom.

Respectfully submitted,

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24 September 2001

⁸⁸ Romans 15:7.

⁸⁹ LW 31, 368.

⁹⁰ The complete account is in Luke 7:36-50.

⁹¹ John 8:36.