

# Present Truth

A magazine dedicated  
to the restoration  
of New Testament Christianity  
in this generation

*Sola Gratia*      Solely by Grace  
*Solo Christo*     Solely by Christ  
*Sola Fide*        Solely by Faith

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## Justification by Faith—Law and Gospel

Editorial—The Crux of Theology—page 3

Law and Gospel—page 5

The Third Use of Law—page 14

Law and Gospel in the Lutheran  
Confessions—page 17

Law and the Christian—page 19

A Youth Pastor Speaks Out on  
the Playboy Theology—page 25

The Candy-Coated Gospel—page 27

Quotable Quotes on Law  
and Gospel—page 30



# Present Truth

**Present Truth** is a magazine dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity in this generation. It is especially committed to upholding the great Pauline and Reformation truth of *justification by faith* in this time when that truth is being threatened by humanism, Pentecostalism and ecumenism. Seeing a need for a nonsectarian magazine based upon the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, the editors and sponsors have united to produce a publication which has as its standard the Bible and the Bible only as the rule of faith and practice. The purpose of this magazine is to give the gospel trumpet a certain sound (1 Cor. 14:7-9), that through words easy to be understood men may "be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12). *Present Truth* is published on an irregular basis as funds and material permit.

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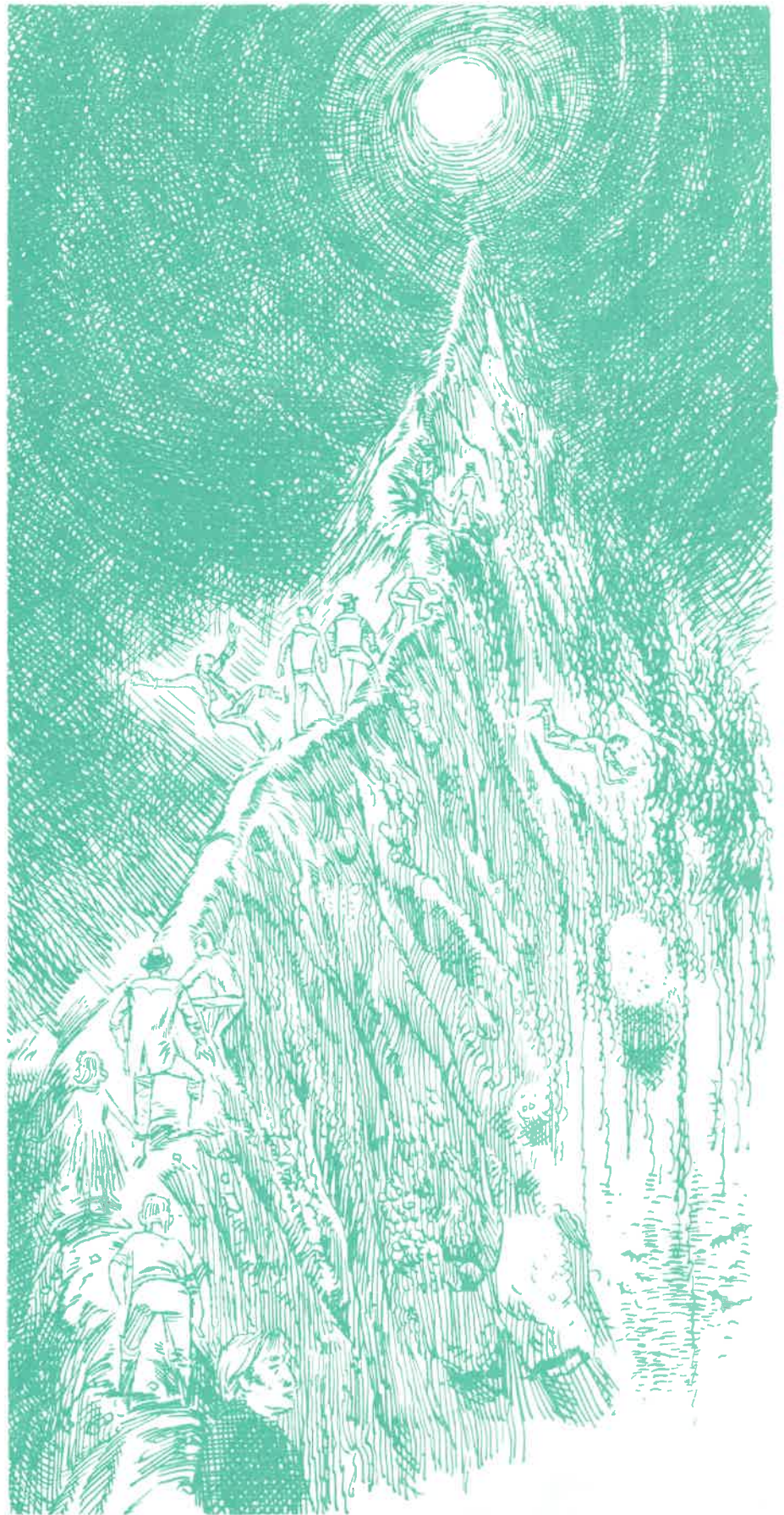
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# Editorial

## THE CRUX OF THEOLOGY

Many Australian cities have annual agricultural exhibitions. The main event is the grand display of primary products. The side events are the merry-go-rounds, big dippers, boxing, magicians, clowns and sundry entertainments. These are lumped together on one section of the grounds and called "side shows."

As a boy about fourteen years of age, this writer clearly remembers how he spent a day at the exhibition. Being a member of an agricultural family, I was expected to show a keen interest in the latest developments in the industry. On entering the grounds, however, my attention was captured by the noise and razzle-dazzle of "side-show alley." Before I realized it, the day was spent and it was time to catch the bus for home. With feelings of remorse, I reflected that I had missed the main event. Imagine my embarrassment when I faced my father's question, "Well, son, what did you see and learn at the exhibition today?" I had not even seen the exhibition!

There never was a time when more theological books and religious magazines were rolling off the press. But most theological discussions are like the distractions of side show alley. Very few are occupied with the main event.

In his *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Melancthon says, "All Scripture ought to be distributed into these two principal topics, the Law and the promises [gospel]."—*Book of Concord* (St. Louis:

Concordia Publishing House, 1957), p. 32. Law and gospel compass the whole Bible. Here is the hub of the Christian message, the crux of theology.

By *law* we mean all that God commands us to do or to be. For example, "Love thy neighbour," "Be kindly affectioned one to another," "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," are statements of law. In the law God asks for our service, our time and our affections. The gospel, on the other hand, does not command us to do anything. "Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee," "Christ died for our sins," "God . . . hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings . . . in Christ," are all statements of the gospel. In the gospel God does not ask anything at our hand but draws nigh to give us from His own hand the blessings of forgiveness and eternal life.

### Justification by Faith

Most if not all deviations from Bible truth, begin with a faulty view of the relationship between law and gospel. Church history may be seen as a struggle to keep law and gospel in proper tension. When the law is emphasized so as to eclipse the glory of the gospel, the church falls under the bondage of **legalism**. When the gospel is preached so as to undermine the author-



ity of the law, the church falls into the heresy of antinomianism.

Only in the great truth of justification by faith do we find law and gospel preserved in proper tension. This is the *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*—the article of faith that decides whether the church is standing or falling. We may liken the truth of justification by faith to the straight and narrow path, high and lifted up above the dark valleys of error. There are two ways to fall off the path. On one side is the precipice of legalism; on the other side is the chasm of antinomianism.

The most remarkable feature about the Reformation was the complete unanimity with which all the evangelicals held to the doctrine of justification by faith. The Reformers had their differences. They were not always consistent. But with one voice they confessed that the sinner's acceptance with God is by grace alone, on account of Christ's obedience alone, and received by faith alone (see Rom. 3:24, 25).

Whenever the church is awake and on the march, she is found fighting on two fronts. Never was this more clearly demonstrated than in the time of the great Reformation. Luther's conflict with Rome was a conflict against legalism. His conflict with John Agricola and kindred spirits was a conflict against antinomianism. The same war against legalism and antinomianism is exhibited in all the great confessions of the Reformation—the Augsburg Confession, the Scottish, Belgic and Helvetic Confessions, the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, etc.

### Relevance Today

The church today is being drowned in an unprecedented flood of "evangelical" legalism.

For years, revivalists have stumped around the country, urging people to become Christians by a decision for Christ, an act of surrender or an act of faith. People who would laugh at a man who tried to become a Christian by obeying the laws of the Old Testament, urge others to become Christians by obeying the "evangelical laws" of the New Testament. In principle, what is the difference?

Charismatic teachers are filling the world with "foolproof" formulas about how men may get the Holy Spirit. It reminds us of what Luther said about Carlstadt: "He wants to teach you not how the Spirit comes to you but how you come to the Spirit."—*Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), Vol. XXXX, p. 147.

Evangelists urge upon the rising generation the idea that salvation consists of an experience (usually a very intense and rapturous experience) of having Christ come into the heart—and then confirm that by massive doses of affirmation about the raptures of being "saved." This is certainly a far cry from the Pauline message of righteousness by faith and the Reformation principle that salvation is found in the objective and external rather than in the subjective and internal.

If this avalanche of "evangelical" legalism seems bad enough, consider that it is being outdone by a tidal wave of "evangelical" antinomianism.

Students hear their preacher declare that the Christian is no longer bound by the old law of Ten Commandments, but walks at liberty in the law of love. They read Fletcher's *Situation Ethics*, which says the same thing a little more specifically, and then they are ready to "cover the multitude of sins" with that beautiful whitewash called "love."

The "Spirit-filled" enthusiast declares: "When you are baptized with the Holy Spirit, He will set all the restrictions you need. You don't need law when you are filled with the Spirit." Multitudes are thereby prepared to carry out their own impulses and impressions, thinking that they are being moved by the Holy Ghost.

When liberalism and humanism take over, men think they no longer need the law of God to define sin, but rely on "Christian" insight and their own innate sense of justice. Just to illustrate how far this can lead, in June of 1972 the San Carlos United Church of Christ voted to ordain a self-confessed homosexual to the sacred ministry. *The Christian Century* (June 28, 1972) thinks this is quite an achievement, when "persons will be judged by the whole context of their lives rather than prejudged by one stereotyped impression."

It would be interesting to know how much of the popular current of lawlessness has been encouraged by a misuse of Paul's dictum, "not under the law, but under grace." This is an age when all forms of authority are under fire; and behind it all stands the authority of the Scriptures, the law of God, and God Himself.

The time is come for a new Reformation, for the true church of Jesus Christ to awake and be on the march. It is time for God's people to take up the two-edged sword (law and gospel) and fight on two fronts "for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

R.D.B.



# Law and Gospel

Robert D. Brinsmead

## Part I

### Legalism and the Truth of Justification by Faith

Are you a legalist? "Absolutely not!" most of us may fiercely reply. For anyone even casually acquainted with the Christian message knows the Bible teaching that salvation is by grace, through faith, rather than by human efforts to keep the law (see Eph. 2:8, 10; Rom. 3:28). How could anyone who takes the Bible seriously be a legalist?

Yet we are legalists—all of us. Ever since Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness, we have all been legalists by nature through and through. We might just as well confess, "I have no sin," as to confess, "I am not a legalist." Luther vehemently fought against the heresy of legalism; yet he frankly confessed that it was like an oil in his bones.

The heresy of legalism derives its strength from human nature. As long as human beings comprise the church here on earth, there must be constant war against legalism. The gospel of God's saving grace in Christ cannot be learned too well. The disposition to contribute to our salvation is like a desert fox—if it is chased from one hole, it hides in another. The heart of man, being deceitful and desperately wicked, can dress up salvation by human works in the most evangelical garb.

#### Types of Legalism in Church History

1. **Medieval.** Classical medieval theology had plenty to say about justification by grace. Yet it worked out to be the most frightful system of legalism in the history of the church. Why? It was a theology skillfully devised by human nature. The prophet Daniel depicts the system as having "the eyes of man" (Dan. 7:8). St. Paul calls it the "man of sin" (2 Thess. 2:3). St. John says it has "the number of a man" (Rev. 13:18). Which is to say, the church was corrupted by man's perverse understanding. *Grace* ceased to mean the mercy and favor of God to poor, undeserving sinners, and came to mean a quality which God infused into the hearts of men. Instead of grace being in reality a quality in God's heart, it came to signify a quality in the believer's heart. Whereas Paul taught that sinners are justified by God's work for us in Christ, the church came to teach that saints are justified by God's work in them by the Holy Spirit. Worshipers were thus led to look to the condition of their own hearts and to the state of their religious experience for acceptance with God, instead of trusting alone in what Christ did for them on the cross.

The essence of Rome's error was to confuse the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in the heart with justification by the **imputed** righteousness of Christ; or to put it another way, to propose that the new birth is the basis of acceptance with God. (The same confusion is widespread in the Protestant movement today.) In striking contrast, the gospel sets forth Jesus as the believer's only righteousness before God (Jer. 23:6). The sinner is accepted because Jesus is accepted in his stead; he is declared righteous solely because his Substitute is righteous. Nothing, absolutely nothing within him, makes him acceptable to God. He is "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6).

The philosophy of medieval legalism is not dead by any means. In recent years it has found its rebirth in popular revivalism and the mad pursuit after exciting religious experiences. Whenever the internal experience of the believer becomes the main focus in religious teaching, the subjective medieval philosophy triumphs. No matter how the charismatics dress up their preoccupation with their religious emotions, it is the essence of medieval legalism. The remarkable similarity between the Pentecostal experience and medieval mysticism is well documented.<sup>1</sup>

**2. Synergism.** "Do your best to serve God, Christ will make up for the deficiency, and by this you will be justified." This is how many think they should combine law and grace. John Bunyan had to meet this error in his day, so he personified this type of legalism as Ignorance in his *Pilgrim's Progress*:

"**Christian:** How doest thou believe?"

"**Ignorance:** I believe that Christ died for sinners, and that I shall be justified before God from the curse, through his gracious acceptance of my obedience to his Law. Or thus, Christ makes my Duties that are Religious acceptable to his Father by virtue of his Merits; and so shall I be justified."

Ignorance's formula for salvation may be expressed as follows:

My obedience + Christ's merit = Salvation.

In theology, this is called synergism. It reminds us of the story of the man who was condemned to death for embezzlement. But there was pity in the heart of the royal family. The king gave \$2,000 from the treasury to make good the debt, the queen gave \$1,000, and the crown prince gave \$980. Then the people in the public gallery passed around the hat and gathered in \$19.90. But it was of no avail, for the

<sup>1</sup>See *Present Truth*, Sept.—Oct., 1972, special issue, "Justification by Faith and the Charismatic Movement."





poor man owed \$4,000. "It is no use," said the judge. "The man must be executed." In desperation the fellow searched his pockets and, to the applause of the spectators, produced the last vital dime from his own trouser pocket. Admittedly the last dime was not a great amount compared with the gifts of the royal family, but it was that dime which secured his reprieve. Even if we think that the contribution which we must make toward our salvation is as small as that dime, it is inevitable that it will seem more important and precious to us than the merit of Jesus Christ.

**3. Galatianism.** In certain systems of thought, justification by faith is regarded merely as the initiating step in the Christian life rather than the whole Christian life (see Rom. 1:17). This leads to two legalistic propositions:

(a) It is said that justification is initially received by faith but is then sustained by human efforts to keep the law. This is Galatianism—it begins in the Spirit and then seeks to be made perfect by the flesh (Gal. 3:1-3). But the apostle Paul declares that the Christian life is maintained by the same grace and in the same way as it was initiated (Col. 2:6). It begins in faith and ends in faith, and all along the way the just live by faith (Rom. 1:17). God would have His people commit their souls to Him as unto a faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19). He is able to keep them from falling (Jude 24). "Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand." Rom. 14:4. The Lord declares, ". . . they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." John 10:28. They "are kept by the power of God through faith" (1 Peter 1:5).

(b) It is also said that final salvation rests on works. Those who make this claim will point to the Bible teaching that every man will finally be judged by his works (Rom. 2:6-8; Gal. 6:7-9; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:23-25; 1 Cor. 3:13; Eccl. 12:14; etc.). Of course, the Scriptures are full of the call to action and a life of good works. As G.C. Berkouwer points out, "Christian activity is certainly not to be excluded, or belittled, or condemned; but if this activity is to be sound it must never be severed from its relation to the mercy of God."—G.C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. 27. In the judgment, God's people will be judged with mercy (2 Tim. 1:18); otherwise none of their works could endure the severity of judgment. In this life (as John Calvin would say), "the best work that can be brought forward from them [the saints] is still always spotted and corrupted with some

impurity of the flesh"<sup>2</sup> (see Eccl. 7:20; Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:23). In the judgment, the saints are not worthy but are "counted worthy of the kingdom of God" and "accounted worthy to obtain that world" (2 Thess. 1:5; Luke 20:35). The Christian stands in need of as much forgiving grace at the end of his life as at the beginning—only he is more conscious of his need at the end than at the beginning.

**4. Some Types of Arminianism.** Human nature persists in making some contribution toward salvation. As a last resort, it tries to "innocently" smuggle in faith. Does not Paul say that faith is counted for righteousness (Rom. 4:5)? Therefore some have claimed that God counts men righteous on account of their faith, or "evangelical obedience."<sup>3</sup>

The expression "justification by faith" can be misunderstood. It does not mean that we can be justified **on account of** our faith any more than we can be justified on account of regeneration, sanctification, good works, love or any other subjective quality. There is no merit in faith itself. But when faith lays hold on Christ, His perfect obedience is credited to the sinner (Rom. 4:4, 6; 5:18, 19). The saving virtue is not in the faith but in the Object of faith. Faith is merely the **instrumental** cause of salvation.

As a final thrust against the tendency to glory in human achievement, the apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, proceeds from faith to predestination (see Rom. 9). He shows that we may believe because we have been predestined and called by God's grace. To turn this around and say that God gives grace in response to faith or that we are predestined because we believe, is to base our salvation on a quality within ourselves—and hence on legal grounds.

**5. Orthodoxy.** We cannot close our discussion on legalism without a comment on the most subtle type of legalism—the legalism of trusting in our sound orthodoxy. We need to remember that we are saved by trusting God's mercy and not by our theology. The truth about justification by grace alone, through faith, calls everything that we do and everything that we are into question. It calls our sanctification into question, and it calls even our understanding of the truth into question. In everything, including our statements

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), Bk. III, Sec. IX.

<sup>3</sup> This was the position taken by the immediate followers and apologists for Arminius, a Dutch theologian who tried to find an alternative for Calvin's unsatisfactory synthesis of predestination and human responsibility. It would be unfair to classify all Arminians as subscribing to the legalistic view of faith described here.



about justification, we fall short; so where can we find refuge save in divine mercy?

The disposition to denounce those who err from correct doctrine as cut off from salvation, is contrary to the spirit of the gospel. Like the proud Pharisees of old, we are so prone to pass judgment upon the ignorant—"This people who knoweth not the law are cursed." John 7:49. The cold, cruel and intolerant spirit which has often accompanied orthodoxy, reveals a very legalistic heart. We need to look no further for the reason why orthodoxy has generally produced a dead church. History is stained with the crimes of the Lutheran and Reformed churches against pious Anabaptists, American Puritans against Quakers, and established churches against the sects. Jesus' parable about the unforgiving servant is re-enacted again and again. Our relationship with God is always mirrored by the way we treat our fellow men. After all, we may yet be surprised at how many saints in heaven had queer ideas on earth; but somehow, somewhere, God taught them to submit to His mercy in spite of their erroneous traditions.

It would be better if every Christian took stock of his own poor heart and confessed (if we may borrow the words of St. Paul and the dialectic thought of Karl Barth): "O wretched legalist that I am, who shall deliver me . . . I thank God through Jesus Christ I am not the wretched legalist that I know I am."

### Legalism Springs from Sinful Ignorance

Legalism has its roots in sinful ignorance—ignorance of the exalted holiness of God's law on the one hand, and ignorance of the defiled and radical corruption of human nature on the other hand. Only the obedience of Him who was filled with all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9) could satisfy the demands of God's holy law. The life of Jesus was the embodiment of divine perfection, infinite purity and inexhaustible love. All this was required, and nothing less than this, to fulfill all righteousness. In the person of His Son, the eternal God endured infinite suffering and humiliation to pay the human debt to divine justice. This was the price paid for our salvation. Nothing satisfies the law but the doing and dying of Christ. In the light of this inestimable price, the best we could ever offer the law would be "rotten stubble and straw" (Luther).

I did not know the stain of sin was so deep  
Until I saw Him shed His blood.  
I did not know my pride was so high



Until I saw His infinite humiliation.  
I had no idea how deep my pit of sin  
Until I beheld the length of the chain  
let down to save me.

God will have all the glory of our salvation or none at all. Partners with God we may be in other areas, but not in this. Human nature would rather work its fingers to the bone than humbly accept the truth that

*grace* means to be accepted in spite of being unacceptable. We have no claim on God's love. We can never put Him in debt to us.

"Who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?  
For of Him, and through Him, and to Him,  
are all things:  
To whom be glory for ever. Amen."  
Rom. 11:35, 36.

## Part II

### Antinomianism and Justification by Faith

After Luther had preached in the castle chapel at Dresden, Duke George inquired of Madam de la Sale, "How did you like the sermon?" She replied, "Could I again hear such a discourse, I could die in peace." "And I," replied George angrily, "would give a good sum not to have heard it. Such discourses are good only to make people sin with confidence."

From that day to this, Luther's enemies have tried to pin the charge of **antinomianism** on the great Reformer in particular or on Protestantism in general. Antinomianism is the doctrine which says that the gospel releases men from the obligation to obey the law of God—a sort of "believe and live as you please" philosophy. Anyone who seriously considers the Reformation, knows that the Reformer fought against antinomianism as much as against legalism.

Yet we must admit that Protestantism has always been seriously tempted toward antinomianism. This is not because there is anything inherently amiss in the doctrine of justification by faith; it is because there is something inherently wrong with human nature. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Rom. 8:7. An antinomian is simply a sinner—a man in rebellion against divine law (1 John 3:4). And every man, regenerate or unregenerate, is a sinner (antinomian) by nature (1 John 1:8).

The crude forms of antinomianism, like the crude forms of legalism, are generally recognized for what they are by people who have a knowledge of the Bible. Yet antinomianism, like its opposite error, is able to dress itself up in the best evangelical attire.

For instance, Paul emphatically declares that we are justified by faith "without works," or "without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 4:5, 6; 3:28). Many will therefore declare, "Good works are not necessary for salvation," or, "Obedience to God's law is not neces-

sary for justification." But such statements are clearly contrary to the Bible and to the great doctrine of justification by faith. They undermine the authority of God's law and turn the gospel into a sentimental platitude.

God's Word must first come to man in the law before it comes in the gospel. Apart from the law, no one can understand or appreciate what Christ did for us. At the outset of his epistle to the Romans, the apostle declares, ". . . the doers of the law shall be justified." Rom. 2:13. No man, absolutely no man, will be justified unless he brings to God an obedience which satisfies the law. When the rich young ruler inquired of Jesus, "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Jesus pointed him first to the law: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:16-20). And all through the Bible there are statements which promise life to the obedient, to the overcomers, to the commandment keepers, to those who do the will of God (Isa. 1:19; Rev. 3:21; 22:14; 1 John 2:17).

#### How Faith Honors the Law

After a man hears the conditions of acceptance with God and eternal life, and is made sensible of his inability to meet those conditions, the Word of God comes to him in the gospel. He hears that Christ stood in his place and kept the law of God for him. By dying on the cross, Christ satisfied all the law's demands. The Holy Spirit gives the sinner faith to accept the righteousness of Jesus. Standing now before the law which says, "I demand a life of perfect conformity to the commandments," the believing sinner cries in triumph, "Mine are Christ's living, doing, and speaking, His suffering and dying; mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, and suffered, and died as He did . . ." (Luther).<sup>4</sup> The law is well pleased with Jesus' doing and dying, which the sinner brings in the hand of faith. Justice is fully satisfied, and God can truly say: "This man has fulfilled the law. He is justified."

We say again, **Only those are justified who bring to God a life of perfect obedience to the law of God.** This is what faith does—it brings to God the obedience of Jesus Christ. By faith the law is fulfilled and the sinner is justified.

On the other hand, the law is dishonored by the man who presumes to bring to it his own life of obedience. The fact that he thinks the law will be

<sup>4</sup>Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), Vol. XXXI, pp. 297, 298.



satisfied with his “rotten stubble and straw” (Luther) shows what a low estimate he has of the holiness of God and what a high estimate he has of his own righteousness. Only in Jesus Christ is there an obedience with which the law is well pleased. Because faith brings only what Jesus has done, it is the highest honor that can be paid to the law (Rom. 3:31).

The doctrine of justification by Christ’s perfect obedience to the law, strikes at the very foundation of antinomianism.<sup>5</sup> **Since faith brings to God that Life of perfect obedience to the law, no man can exercise faith which is unto salvation and at the same time despise or make light of the law.** Moreover, faith not only justifies, but it also brings the renewing power of the Holy Spirit into the heart (Eph. 1:13; John 1:12; 1 John 5:1; Rom. 5:5; Titus 3:5, 6). By the Spirit, the law is written in the heart and mind (Heb. 8:10) so that the believer’s “new obedience” is the same kind of obedience that God imputes to him for justification. As Melancthon writes in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, “. . . love follows faith, because the regenerate receive the Holy Ghost, and accordingly begin [to become friendly to the Law and] to do the works of the Law.”—Article XII, Pt. V (*Book of Concord*, p. 85). The spirit of the justified man is in harmony with the spirit of Psalm 119. The will of God is his delight, and the law, which is the expression of that will, becomes his meditation day and night. Any other sort of justification is mere fiction, and any other faith is a figment of the imagination, that “flits across the top of the brain” (Calvin).

In this age of lawlessness, the church is often found aiding and abetting the spirit of permissiveness by preaching a doctrine of justification that does not take the law of God seriously. And it is certain that those who listen to a “gospel” that does not take the law seriously, will not be moved to take the law

seriously themselves.

When the cross of Christ is preached as it should be, it magnifies the gravity of disobedience; but all too often the offer of “cheap grace” encourages people to carouse on the mercy of God. We agree with Dr. Adolf Koberle, who chides Barth for a one-sided attack on legalism; for while legalism is killing its thousands, antinomianism is killing its tens of thousands (see Adolf Koberle, *The Quest for Holiness* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964]), pp. 254, 255. The only hope for the church today is to return to the two-edged sword of the Word—the law and gospel as seen in the great Reformation message of justification by faith.

## Part III

### The Judgment and Justification by Faith

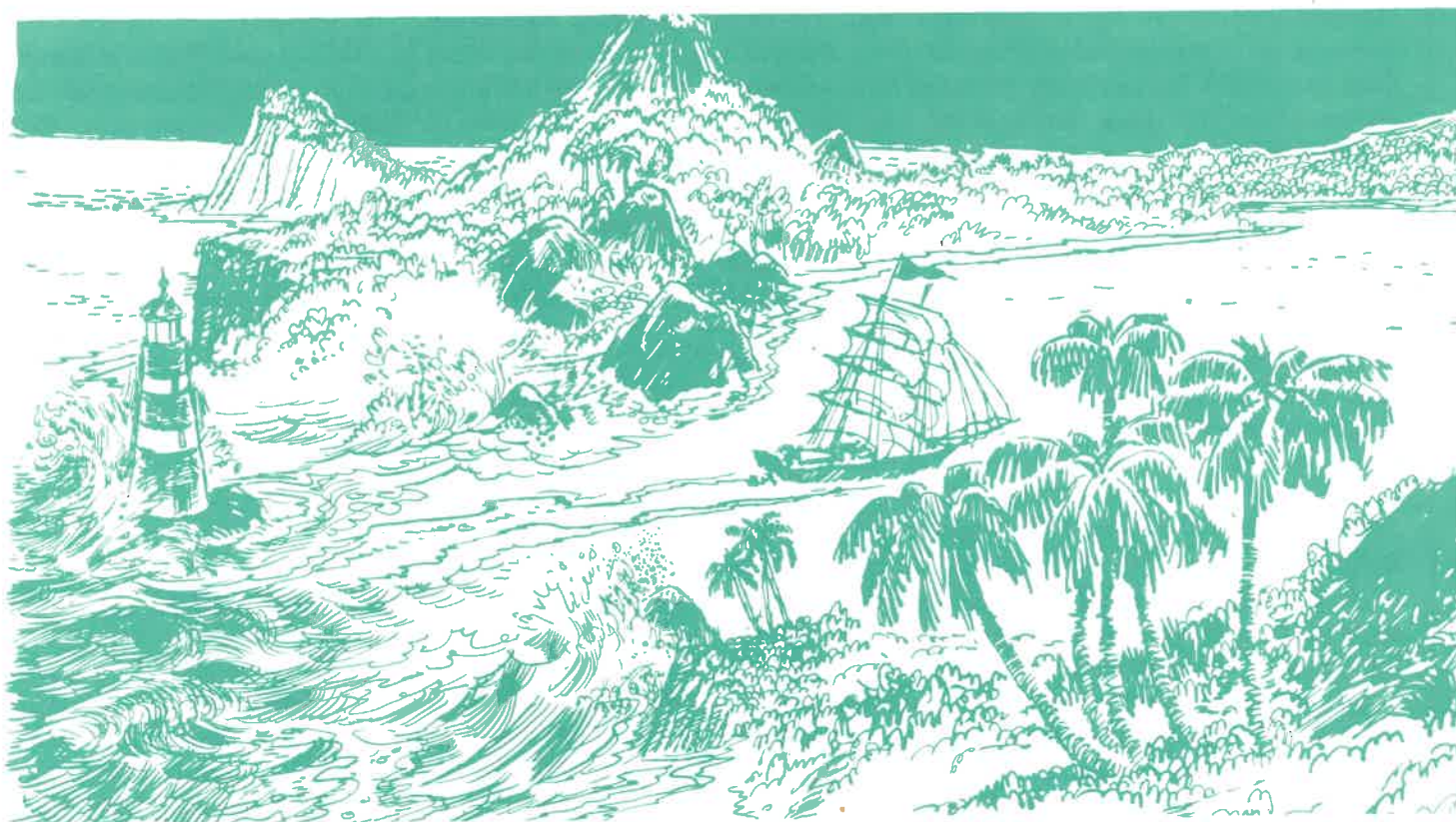
The judgment of all men at the end of the world was proclaimed by the apostles as part and parcel of the gospel (Acts 17:31). But the Catholic Church’s preoccupation with Plato’s idea of the immortal soul rather than the Biblical resurrection of the dead, caused a decided loss of real eschatological hope in Christian thinking. With the Reformation, especially with Luther, eschatological hope was revived and the doctrine of a final judgment upon all men was seen to belong with the great message of justification by faith.

In his book, *The Last Judgment in Protestant Theology from Orthodoxy to Ritschl* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), James Perry Martin traces the history of the judgment doctrine in Protestantism. He shows that since the time of the Reformers, the importance of a final judgment has been receding from Protestant thinking. Instead of justification by faith being seen in such a light as to make the judgment necessary, he points out that the tendency is to teach justification by faith in such a way as to make a final judgment almost totally irrelevant. The Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, as well as the old Platonic idea of natural immortality, are also implicated as undermining the real Biblical emphasis on the final judgment.

This is very unfortunate for Protestantism, for the message of the judgment has a definite place in the proclamation of the gospel. Prior to the coming of Christ, the everlasting gospel is represented as announcing the judgment hour to the world:

“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on

<sup>5</sup>In his great English classic on *The Doctrine of Justification* (reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), James Buchanan points out that antinomians acknowledge no place for the life of Christ in the sinner’s justification. The antinomians try to extol Christ’s death, but they fail to acknowledge the truth that it is the life of Jesus which is imputed to the believer (Rom. 5:9, 18, 19). And because they see no great value in Jesus’ life of obedience to the law, they themselves see no value in obeying the law of God. The true Pauline and Reformation doctrine of justification is related to both the life and death of Christ—as the Scottish theologians would say, both His active and passive obedience. While the merit of Christ’s death removes the guilt and condemnation of sin, the merit of Christ’s life is imputed to the believer. Justification must not only be seen negatively (as absence from sin), but positively (as credited with a life full of good works and holy deeds). Those who appreciate the value of Christ’s life of obedience to the law, will reflect it in their own lives.



As the church nears her eternal harbor, she will be threatened with destruction on the rocks of legalism and the reef of antinomianism. In order for her to steer safely into port, she not only needs the light of justification by faith behind her, but the light of the judgment before her.

the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Rev. 14:6, 7.

As the church nears her eternal harbor, Satan will be permitted to work with all power, signs and lying wonders (2 Thess. 2:9). The church will be threatened with destruction on the rocks of legalism and the reef of antinomianism. God knows that in order for her to steer safely into port, she not only needs the light of justification by faith behind her, but the light of the judgment before her. It is this light, shining from the judgment bar of God, that will expose the dangerous rocks of legalism and the treacherous reef of antinomianism.

### Antinomianism Exposed by the Light of the Judgment

The Bible repeatedly speaks of a judgment, not for some men, but for all men (Eccl. 3:17; 12:13, 14; Acts 17:31). Especially will those comprising the church be judged (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). The

Judge will have no favorites. He will not gloss over the evidence. He will not be afraid to have the lives of His people examined. Every man will be judged by his works (Rom. 2:6-8; Gal. 6:7-9; Col. 3:23-25; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5; 1 Peter 1:17; Ps. 62:12; Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; 12:37).

Someone may then ask, "How can this be harmonized with Paul's insistence on justification by faith alone?" We must be careful to note that Paul can just as fervently appeal to judgment according to works. In his epistles, he calls for concrete acts of love and lives rich in good works. The apostle knows that the only work which will abide that day will be the work of faith and the toil of love (1 Thess. 1:3). Everything will hinge on whether the works have been done in faith. Without faith, the best deeds will only be glittering sins (Rom. 14:23). No wonder Paul insists on faith!

A man may be a Christian or he may be lazy, but he cannot be both. Present-day Protestantism needs to hear the judgment-hour message and be confronted with the reality of God's tribunal. Then men will clearly see that there is no room for presumptuous ideas about being saved no matter what they do, nor will there be a place for such sentimental





twaddle as God being too merciful (or indulgent) to judge His people.

Lutheran scholar, Adolf Koberle, has expressed this beautifully in his *The Quest for Holiness*:

“It is impossible to restrict the statements of the New Testament concerning the final judgment to the ungodly or to self-righteous zealots for the Law, to say nothing of trying to explain them as remnants of Jewish ideas in the theology of St. Paul. The Son of Man will require a special reckoning from those who have been engaged in His service and have been endowed with His gifts. That the returning Judge would reward every man according to his works was told to the disciples. Every idle word spoken by man must be accounted for at the last day. St. Paul regards every earthly tribunal and every earthly self-judgment as unimportant, whether it be approval or disapproval, for that day shall declare it; the day in which the Lord will judge. Then will man’s work first be revealed, of what sort it is. Each one will reap what he has sowed. All must appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the final judgment on this earthly life. Whoever in the earthly congregation continues to serve evil shall not inherit the Kingdom.

“All these declarations that could so easily be multiplied are so unanimous and overwhelming that the evasion of the older orthodoxy, according to which all this is to be understood hypothetically and cannot be applied to the one who is justified, is no longer permissible. At the end of days the judgment will actually be passed on the works of the sinner and of the righteous, and so the fear of displeasing God must accompany even the life of the believer as a holy fear and as an aid in overcoming temptation. Insincere life, an unbridled

tongue or body, impure passions, implacable enmity which faith that possessed the Spirit might have restrained or turned aside, will go with us and accuse us before God. But when the idea of judgment on the entire attitude of the one who is justified has been maintained, there will be no room for the ancient antinomian misunderstanding which has always accompanied Paulinism and Lutheranism like a dark shadow; the question whether the Christian cannot continue in sin because the working of grace would thus become so much more mightily evident (Rom. 6:1 seq.). If even the justified sinner must face the judgment it is no longer a matter of indifference as to the degree in which he has allowed himself to be purified by the Spirit from the ‘defilement and evil of the flesh.’”—Pages 165, 166 (1938 ed.).

### Legalism Exposed by the Light of the Judgment

While God’s people must be careful to maintain good works, they must be just as careful not to trust in them. When the believer faces the prospect of standing before the judgment seat of the Almighty, how can he find confidence in anything within his own experience? As Calvin would say, “For if the stars, which seem so very bright at night, lose their brilliance in the sight of the sun, what do we think will happen even to the rarest innocence of man when it is compared with God’s purity?” When Isaiah and Daniel beheld the perfect glory of the Holy One of Israel, they were astonished and humiliated by the sense of their own radical sinfulness. Let a man scale the alpine heights of holy living; yet his holiest duties could not abide the severity of God’s judgment.

Well might the greatest saint flee from the judgment bar of God in terror if there were no Lamb, as it had been slain, in the midst of the throne (Rev. 5:6). But the righteousness of Jesus will go with the believer to judgment and plead his abundant entrance into the kingdom of glory. All that falls short of God’s glory is sin (Rom. 3:23), and in this sense “every good work of the saints while pilgrims in this world is sin” (Luther). But the works of God’s people are appraised, not on the basis of their intrinsic worth, but as they appear fragrant with the merits of Christ’s intercession. Thus the saints shall be judged in mercy (2 Tim. 1:18) and shall be counted worthy to sit with Him on His throne (2 Thess. 1:5). There is no place for legalism in view of the judgment.

To summarize, two great facts of judgment confront us: the fact of an actual examination of works cuts off all possibility of antinomianism; the fact of Christ’s needed final intercession cuts off all possibility of legalism. The Christian shall finally triumph in the same way as he began—by grace, by Christ and by faith.



# The Third Use of Law

John Warwick Montgomery

In 1528—only a decade after the posting of the Ninety-five Theses—Erasmus asserted that “the Lutherans seek two things only—wealth and wives (*censum et uxorem*)” and that to them the Gospel meant “the right to live as they please” (letter of March 20, 1528, to W. Pirckheimer, a fellow humanist). From that day to this Protestants have been suspected of antinomianism, and their Gospel of “salvation by grace through faith, apart from the works of the Law” has again and again been understood as a spiritual insurance policy which removes the fear of hell and allows a man to “live as he pleases.”

## Sanctification Twice Desanctified

The claim that Protestantism is essentially antinomian seemed to have an especially strong basis in fact in the nineteenth century. Industrialization and urbanization brought about social evils which were overlooked and rationalized by many professing Protestants. Inevitably a reaction occurred, and in the social-gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries one encounters a textbook illustration of what Hegel called the antithesis. In its fear that Protestantism had become ethically indifferent, the social-gospel movement of Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch identified the Christian message with social ethics. From an apparent justification without sanctification, the pendulum swung to a “sanctification” which swallowed up justification. In their eagerness to bring in the kingdom of God

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through social action and the amelioration of the ills of the industrial proletariat, the social gospelers generally lost track of the central insight of the Reformation: that the love of Christ must constrain the Christian, and that we can experience and manifest this love only if we have personally come into a saving relationship with the Christ who "first loved us" (1 John 4:19) and gave himself on the cross for us (1 Peter 2:24).

World War I burst the optimistic bubble of the social gospel; no longer did there seem to be much assurance that human beings had the capacity to establish a sanctified society on earth. But the reductionist biblical criticism with which the social-gospel movement had allied itself did not die as easily. So loud had been the voices of modernism against a perspicuous, fully reliable Scripture that in the most influential Protestant circles it was believed that a return to a propositional biblical ethic could never take place. The result was (and is, for the movement is by no means dead) an existential ethic.

The Protestant existentialists do not of course go to the length of the atheist Jean-Paul Sartre, who says in *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, "There are no omens in the world." But when Sartre follows this assertion with the qualification that even if there were omens (as the Christian believes), "I myself choose the meaning they have," he comes very close to the approach of the contemporary Protestant existentialist. The latter, unable to rely (he thinks) on a biblical revelation which is objectively and eternally definitive in matters ethical, must himself "choose the meaning" of Scripture for his unique existential situation. In practice he agrees with Simone de Beauvoir when she says that man "has no need of any outside guarantee to be sure of his goals" (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*). Right or wrong is never determined absolutely in advance; the Bible is not a source of ethical absolutes—it is rather the record of how believers of former times made ethical decisions in the crises of their experience. What distinguishes the Christian ethic from the non-Christian, in this view? Only the motivation of love. The Christian has experienced God's love, and so is in a position to bring that love to bear upon the unique existential decisions he faces. This existential approach, at root highly individualistic, has in recent years been given a "group discussion" orientation by such writers as A.T. Rasmussen, who, in his *Christian Social Ethics* (1956), asserts that existential decision should take place in "the higher community of God," where "Christian discussion" serves as "the channel through which the

Holy Spirit moves in the dialectic or give-and-take of genuine spiritual intercourse to provide ethical guidance."

The contemporary existential ethic in Protestantism is a second instance of desanctifying sanctification, for it inevitably devolves into ethical relativism. Sartre, when asked advice by a young man who, during World War II, was torn between a desire to join the Free French Forces and a feeling that he should stay in France to take care of his mother, could only say, "You're free, choose, that is, invent." Likewise, the Protestant existentialist can never appeal to absolute law; he can only say, "You're free, choose to love." But what does this mean in concrete terms? Theoretically it can mean "anything goes"—an antinomianism indeed—for each existential decision is unique and without precedent. Thus the housemother in *Tea and Sympathy* who committed adultery out of self-giving (*agape*?) love in order to prove to a student that he was not incapable of heterosexual relationships, cannot be condemned for her decision. As for Rasmussen's ethic of social existentialism, one can see that it merely compounds the problem on the group level. George Forell has well characterized this approach as "inspiration by bladder control," for the person who stays longest in the group discussion is frequently the one whose "responsible participation" determines the "contextual and concrete" ethic of the moment. The absence of an eternal ethical standard either in individualistic or in social existentialism totally incapacitates it for promoting Christian holiness.

### Answer of Classical Protestantism

In the Protestantism of the Reformation, antinomianism is excluded on the basis of a clear-cut doctrine of the Law and a carefully worked-out relation between the Law and the Gospel. The Reformers assert, first of all, that no man is saved on the basis of Law. As the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* puts it: *Lex semper accusat* ("The Law always indicts"). Whenever a man puts himself before the standard of the Law—whether God's eternally revealed Law in the Bible or the standard of Law written on his own heart—he finds that he is condemned. Only the atoning sacrifice of Christ, who perfectly fulfilled the demands of the Law, can save; thus, in the words of the Apostle, "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

But God's Law as set forth in Scripture, remains

valid. Indeed, the Law has three functions (*usus*): the political (as a restraint for the wicked), the theological (as “a *paidagogos* to bring us to Christ”—Gal. 3:24), and the didactic (as a guide for the regenerate, or, in Bonhoeffer’s words, “as God’s merciful help in the performance of the works which are commanded”). Few Protestants today dispute the first and second uses of the Law; but what about the third or didactic use? Do Christians, filled with the love of Christ and empowered by His Holy Spirit, need the Law to teach them? Are not the Christian existentialists right that love is enough? Indeed, is it not correct that Luther himself taught only the first two uses of the Law and not the *tertius usus legis*?

Whether or not the formulation of a didactic use of the Law first appeared in Melanchthon (Helmut Thielicke [*Theologische Ethik*] and others have eloquently argued for its existence in Luther’s own teaching; cf. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*), there is no doubt that it became an established doctrine both in Reformation Lutheranism and in Reformation Calvinism. One finds it clearly set out in the Lutheran *Formula of Concord* (Art. VI) and in Calvin’s *Institutes* (II, vii, 12 ff.). It is true that for Luther the pedagogic use of the Law was primary, while for Calvin this third or didactic use was the principal one; yet both the Lutheran and the Reformed traditions maintain the threefold conceptualization.

### An Essential Doctrine

The Third Use is an essential Christian doctrine for two reasons. First, because love—even the love of Christ—though it serves as the most powerful impetus to ethical action, does not inform the Christian as to the proper **content** of that action. Nowhere has this been put as well as by the beloved writer of such hymns “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say” and “I Lay My Sins on Jesus”; in his book, *God’s Way of Holiness*, Horatius Bonar wrote:

But will they tell us what is to regulate service, if not law? **Love**, they say. This is a pure fallacy. Love is not a **rule**, but a  **motive**. Love does not tell me  **what** to do; it tells me  **how** to do it. Love constrains me to do the will of the beloved one; but to know what the will is, I must go elsewhere. The law of our God is the  **will** of the beloved one, and were that expression of his will withdrawn, love would be utterly in the dark; it would not know what to do. It might say, I love my Master, and I love his service, and I want to do his bidding, but I must know  **the rules of his house**, that I may know  **how** to serve him. Love without law to guide its impulses would be the parent of will-worship and confusion, as surely as terror and self-righteousness, unless upon the supposition of an inward

miraculous illumination, as an equivalent for law. Love goes to the law to learn the divine  **will**, and love delights in the law, as the exponent of that will; and he who says that a believing man has nothing more to do with law, save to shun it as an old enemy, might as well say that he has nothing to do with the will of God. For the divine law and the divine will are substantially one, the former the outward manifestation of the latter. And it is “the  **will** of our Father which is in heaven” that we are to do (Matt. 7:21); so proving by loving obedience what is that “good and acceptable, and perfect  **will of God**” (Rom. 12:2). Yes, it is he that doeth “the  **will of God** that abideth forever” (1 John 2:17); it is to “the  **will of God**” that we are to live (1 Peter 4:2); “made perfect in every good work  **to do his will**” (Heb. 13:21); and “fruitfulness in every good work,” springs from being “filled with the knowledge of  **his will**” (Col. 1:9, 10).

Secondly, the doctrine of the Third Use is an essential preservative for the entire doctrine of sanctification. The Third Use claims that as a result of justification, it is a nomological fact that “if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:17). A man in Christ has received a new spirit—the Spirit of the living God—and therefore his relation to the Law is changed. True, in this life he will always remain a sinner (I John 1:8), and therefore the Law will always accuse him, but now he sees the biblical Law in another light—as the manifestation of God’s loving will. Now he can say with the psalmist: “I delight in Thy Law” and “O how I love Thy Law!” (Ps. 119; cf. Ps. 1 and 19). Only by taking the Third Use of the Law—the “law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2)—seriously do we take regeneration seriously; and only when we come to love God’s revealed Law has sanctification become a reality in our lives. Ludwig Ihmels made a sound confession of faith when he wrote in *Die Religionswissenschaft der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*: “I am convinced as was Luther that the Gospel can only be understood where the Law has done its work in men. And I am equally convinced that just the humble Christian, however much he desires to live in enlarging measure in the spirit, would never wish to do without the holy discipline of the *tertius usus legis*.” The answer to antinomianism, social-gospel legalism, and existential relativism lies not only in the proper  **distinction** between Law and Gospel, as C.F.W. Walther so effectively stressed, but also in the proper  **harmony** of Law and Gospel, as set forth in the classic doctrine of the Third Use of the Law.



# Law and Gospel in the Lutheran Confessions

John A. Slade



There are three great confessions of the Lutheran Reformation: the Augsburg Confession, the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* and the Formula of Concord. Each gives a clear testimony to the righteousness which is of faith and the place of law and gospel in Christian doctrine.

The Augsburg Confession is the first and greatest of all the confessions of the Reformation. It was drawn up by Philip Melancthon and unanimously accepted by all the German evangelicals of the sixteenth century.

#### “Article IV: Of Justification

“Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4.”

The Reformers were already being accused of antinomianism, so Article XX vigorously refutes the charge:

“Our teachers are falsely accused of forbidding **Good Works**. For their published writings on the Ten Commandments, and others of like import, bear witness that they have taught

to good purpose concerning all estates and duties of life, as to what estates of life and what works in every calling be pleasing to God.”

In his *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Melancthon carefully elaborates on the doctrine of justification by faith alone and defends it against the papal adversaries. After citing a great number of scriptures and evangelical arguments, he says:

“Therefore Christ was given, that we may believe that for His sake we are justified. He plainly denies justification to the Law. Hence, for Christ’s sake we are accounted righteous when we believe that God, for His sake, has been reconciled to us . . .

“Truly, it is amazing that the adversaries are in no way moved by so many passages of Scripture, which clearly ascribe justification to faith, and, indeed, deny it to works. Do they think that the same is repeated so often for no purpose? Do they think that these words fell inconsiderately from the Holy Ghost? But they have also devised sophistry whereby they elude them. They say that these passages of Scripture, (which speak of faith,) ought to be received as referring to a *fides formata*, i.e., they do not ascribe justification to faith except on account of love. Yea, they do not, in any way, ascribe justification to faith, but only to love, because they dream that faith can coexist with mortal sin. Whither does this tend, unless that they again abolish the promise and return to the Law? If faith receive the remission of sins on account of love, the remission of sins will always be uncertain, because we never love as much as we ought; yea, we do not love unless our hearts are firmly convinced that the remission of sins has been granted us. Thus the adversaries, while they require in the remission of sins and justification confidence in one’s own love, altogether abolish the Gospel concerning the free remission of sins; although, at the same time, they neither render this love nor understand it, unless they believe that the remission of sins is freely received.”—*Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), pp. 40, 41.

On the other hand, Melancthon is very sensitive to the charge of antinomianism, and reasons from Scripture to show the relationship of regenerate men to the law of God:

“Here the adversaries urge against us: **If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments**, Matt. 19:17; likewise: **The doers of the Law shall be justified**, Rom. 2:13, and many other like things concerning the Law and works. Before we reply to this, we must first declare **what we believe concerning love and the fulfilling of the Law**.

“It is written in the prophet, Jer. 31:33: ‘I will put My

Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.' And in Rom. 3:31, Paul says: 'Do we, then, make void the Law through faith? God forbid! Yea, we establish the Law.' And Christ says, Matt. 19:17: 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments,' Likewise, 1 Cor. 13:3: 'If I have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.' These and similar sentences testify that the Law ought to be begun in us, and be kept by us more and more [that we are to keep the Law when we have been justified by faith, and thus increase more and more in the Spirit]. Moreover, we speak not of ceremonies, but of that Law which gives commandment concerning the movements of the heart, namely, the Decalog. Because, indeed, faith brings the Holy Ghost, and produces in hearts a new life, it is necessary that it should produce spiritual movements in hearts. And what these movements are, the prophet, Jer. 31:33, shows, when he says: 'I will put My Law into their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.'"—*Ibid.*, pp. 41, 42.

Having said this, Melancthon goes on to show that in this life the believer is never wholly without sin and is "far distant from the perfection of the Law" (*Ibid.*, p. 46). For this reason, he must continue to live by faith in the forgiving mercy of God. He is never accounted righteous on the grounds of his new obedience.

The Formula of Concord refutes legalism by confessing:

"We believe, teach, and confess that, although the contrition that precedes, and the good works that follow, do not belong to the article of justification before God, yet one is not to imagine a faith of such a kind as can exist and abide with, and alongside of, a wicked intention to sin and to act against the conscience. But after man has been justified by faith, then a true living faith worketh by love, Gal. 5:6, so that thus good works always follow justifying faith, and are surely found with it, if it be true and living; for it never is alone, but always has with it love and hope."—*Ibid.*, p. 220.

In its "Thorough Declaration," the Formula of Concord devotes a large section to explaining the proper relationship of the law and the gospel. The proper distinction between law and gospel is called "a special brilliant light." It also declares:

"Therefore the two doctrines belong together, and should also be urged by the side of each other, but in a definite order and with a proper distinction; and the Antinomians or assailants of the Law are justly condemned, who abolish the preaching of the Law from the Church, and wish sins to be removed, and repentance and sorrow to be taught, not from the Law, but from the Gospel . . .

"These two doctrines, we believe and confess, should ever and ever be diligently inculcated in the Church of God even to the end of the world, although with the proper distinction of which we have heard, in order that, through the preaching of the Law and its threats in the ministry of the New Testament the hearts of impenitent men may be terrified, and brought to a knowledge of their sins and to repentance; but not in such a way that they lose heart and despair in this process, but that (since the Law is a schoolmaster unto Christ that we might be

justified by faith, Gal. 3:24, and thus points and leads us not from Christ, but to Christ, who is the end of the Law, Rom. 10:4) they be comforted and strengthened again by the preaching of the holy Gospel concerning Christ, our Lord, namely, that to those who believe the Gospel, God forgives all their sins through Christ, adopts them as children for His sake, and out of pure grace, without any merit on their part, justifies and saves them, however, not in such a way that they may abuse the grace of God, and sin hoping for grace, as Paul, 2 Cor. 3:7 ff., thoroughly and forcibly shows the distinction between the Law and the Gospel."—*Ibid.*, pp. 260, 261.

Under the heading, "Of the Third Use of God's Law," the Formula of Concord then goes on to discuss the place of the law in the life of a Christian:

"Since the Law of God is useful, 1. not only to the end that external discipline and decency are maintained by it against wild, disobedient men; 2. likewise, that through it men are brought to a knowledge of their sins; 3. but also that, when they have been born anew by the Spirit of God, converted to the Lord, and thus the veil of Moses has been lifted from them, they live and walk in the Law . . .

" . . . we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that although the truly believing and truly converted to God and justified Christians are liberated and made free from the curse of the Law, yet they should daily exercise themselves in the Law of the Lord, as it is written, Ps. 1:2; 119:1: 'Blessed is the man whose delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in His Law doth he meditate day and night.' For the Law is a mirror in which the will of God, and what pleases Him, are exactly portrayed, and which should [therefore] be constantly held up to the believers and be diligently urged upon them without ceasing.

"For although 'the Law is not made for a righteous man,' as the apostle testifies 1 Tim. 1:9, but for the unrighteous, yet this is not to be understood in the bare meaning, that the justified are to live without Law. For the Law of God has been written in their heart, and also to the first man immediately after his creation a law was given according to which he was to conduct himself. But the meaning of St. Paul is that the Law cannot burden with its curse those who have been reconciled to God through Christ; nor must it vex the regenerate with its coercion, because they have pleasure in God's Law after the inner man.

"For the Law says indeed that it is God's will and command that we should walk in a new life, but it does not give the power and ability to begin and do it; but the Holy Ghost, who is given and received, not through the Law, but through the preaching of the Gospel, Gal. 3:14, renews the heart. Thereafter the Holy Ghost employs the Law so as to teach the regenerate from it, and to point out and show them in the Ten Commandments what is the [good and] acceptable will of God, Rom. 12:2, in what 'good works God hath before ordained that they should walk,' Eph. 2:10."—*Ibid.*, pp. 261, 262.

"Accordingly, we reject and condemn as an error pernicious and detrimental to Christian discipline, as also to true godliness, the teaching that the Law, in the above-mentioned way and degree, should not be urged upon Christians and the true believers, but only upon the unbelieving, unchristians, and impenitent."—*Ibid.*, pp. 263, 264.



# Law and the Christian

Geoffrey J. Paxton

## Part I The Reformed and Anglican Confessions

In our investigation into the Reformed and Anglican confessions, we shall limit ourselves to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Canons of Dort (1618-19) and the Thirty-nine Articles (1563), which we shall term "Anglican Articles."

### We Are Not God's Children by the Keeping of the Law

All these great confessions join in a harmonious praise to the exclusiveness and majesty of grace. We are God's children because of His unearned kindness and favor.

Article XI of the Westminster Confession declares:

"Those whom God effectually calleth he also **freely** justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness, but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

"Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love."—Sections 1, 2.

Article XXII of the Belgic Confession is no less emphatic in its insistence upon faith alone:

"We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him . . . "

The faith by which we embrace Christ as our salvation is here attributed to the Holy Spirit. The object of faith is said to be "Jesus Christ with all His merits . . . and . . . nothing more besides Him."

In Lord's Days 23 and 24, the Heidelberg Catechism proposes some important questions and supplies some appropriate answers:

"Q. 59. 'But how does it help you now that you believe . . . ?'

"A. 'That I am righteous in Christ before God, and an heir of eternal life.'

"Q. 60. 'How are you righteous before God?'

"A. 'Only by true faith in Jesus Christ . . . God, without any merit of my own, out of pure grace, grants me the benefits of the perfect expiation of Christ, imputing to me his righteousness and holiness as if I had never committed a single sin or had ever been sinful, having fulfilled myself all the obedience which Christ has carried out for me . . . '

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Question 61, Lord's Day 23, stresses that faith is not a work:

"Q. 61. 'Why do you say that you are righteous by faith alone?'

"A. 'Not because I please God by virtue of the worthiness of my faith, but because the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ alone are my righteousness before God . . .'"

In stating that works of any sort have no merit in obtaining acceptance with God, all the confessions go out of their way to represent the Scripture correctly. The law does not save a person, indeed cannot save a person, because of the weakness and depravity of the human heart. Notice the emphasis upon this in Question 62, Lord's Day 24, of the Heidelberg Catechism:

"Q. 62. 'But why cannot our good works be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of it?'

"A. 'Because the righteousness which can stand before the judgment of God must be absolutely perfect and wholly in conformity with the divine Law. But even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.' "

Nothing save utter conformity to the law makes a man acceptable before God, and such is not possible except as a free gift in Jesus Christ Himself. Notice the stress here on the complete honoring of the law. Christ has done that for those who believe.

The Canons of Dort are as decided on these matters as are the other confessions.

Article I, under the "Second Head of Doctrine (Of the Death of Christ, and the Redemption of Men thereby)," stresses the justice of God as well as His mercy. "God is not only supremely merciful, but also supremely just. And His justice requires . . . that our sins committed against His infinite majesty should be punished . . ."

Article II says "we are unable to make that satisfaction in our own persons, or to deliver ourselves from the wrath of God."

Article III succinctly states that "The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin; is of infinite worth and value . . ."

Article V draws attention to "whosoever believeth."

God is just and requires full and complete satisfaction to the law. We are unable to make that satisfaction or save ourselves from the wrath of God, but Christ is able and has delivered us from the justice

of God by complete conformity to the law. All are called upon to place trust in Christ.

Article XIV, under the "Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine," says that "Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God." The article repudiates the notion that faith is "only an act of man" and not a gift, and refers to such scriptures as Jeremiah 31:33, Isaiah 44:3, Rom. 5:5 and Jeremiah 31:18.

The Anglican Articles, to which every member of the clergy in the Anglican Church is supposed to subscribe, is not wanting in clear, unequivocal teaching on the failure of the works of the law to make us right with God. Article XI declares:

"We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings . . ."

As if this were not clear and straightforward enough, Article XIII says:

"Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ; neither do they make men meet to receive grace . . ."

Article XVIII, "Of obtaining eternal Salvation only by the Name of Christ," says:

"They also are to be had accursed that presume to say, That every man shall be saved by the Law or Sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that Law, and the light of Nature. For Holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved."

It is clear that in all these confessions there is a harmony of praise to the exclusiveness and majesty of grace. We are not God's children by the keeping of the law. The law is not able (because of our sin) to bring us into a right relation with God. This is the work of Christ and Christ alone. He made complete satisfaction to the decrees of the law. Yet all that He did for us becomes ours through the instrumentality of faith, the gift of God.

### We Are Now God's Children for the Keeping of the Law

If the confessions are unanimous in their rejection of salvation by the law, they are also at one in their insistence on the fact that we are saved for the keeping of the law.



Article XII of the Anglican Articles deals with good works. It declares that good works are "the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification." They cannot put away sins and endure the severity of God's judgment, yet

" . . . are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit."

Such good works are not meritorious in the slightest, for "when ye have done all that are commanded to you, say, We are unprofitable servants" (cf. Article XIV, "Of Works of Supererogation").

Notice that Article XII says that such good works "spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith." This, of course, is the emphasis of Paul and James, and indeed of the whole Scriptural testimony. Those who suggest that faith does not have to perform good works, neither understand the nature of true faith nor the Bible. Such good works are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ.

The Canons of Dort are also instructive on this point. Article XI, under the "Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine," says:

"But when God accomplishes His good pleasure in the elect . . . He pervades the inmost recesses of the man . . . He quickens [the will]; from being evil, **disobedient**, and refractory, He renders it good, **obedient**, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that, like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions."

In the last paragraph of Article XXIV of the Belgic Confession, we read:

"In the meantime we do not deny that God rewards good works, but it is through His grace that He crowns His gifts. Moreover, **though we do good works**, we do not found our salvation upon them . . ."

In Article XXV of the Belgic Confession, we are informed "Of the Abolishing of the Ceremonial Law." According to M. Eugene Osterhaven, the relation of the law to the gospel and the place which the law has in the life of the Christian are the two matters with which this article of faith deals. Osterhaven says: "By 'law' here is meant primarily the ceremonial elements in the law which God gave Israel. These were temporary and transitory, intended to regulate the religious life of the covenant people during the time of preparation for the coming of the Messiah . . . The inner character of the laws, however, was of abiding significance and this, the Confession states, is useful

to confirm us in the doctrine of the Gospel, and to regulate our life in all honesty, to the glory of God, according to his will."—M. Eugene Osterhaven, *Our Confession of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), p. 137.

In the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 63, Lord's Day 24, tests the understanding on the concept of rewards in a nonmerit framework. The understanding is good because the answer comes back that the reward is one of grace. Grace does not do away with reward; it does away with merit. Question 64 then is:

"Q. 64. 'But does not this teaching make people careless and sinful?'

"A. 'No, for it is impossible for those who are ingrafted into Christ by true faith not to bring forth the fruit of gratitude.' "

Similarly, in Lord's Day 33, in answer to the question, "What is the birth of the new man?" we are told:

"Complete joy in God through Christ and a strong desire to live according to the will of God in all good works."

Question and Answer 91 continue:

"Q. 91. 'But what are good works?'

"A. 'Only those which are done out of true faith, in accordance with the Law of God, and for His glory, and not those based on our own opinion or on the traditions of men.' "

It ought to be clear, even from such a brief sampling as we have given here, that the Reformed and Anglican confessions are one in this twofold affirmation: we are not the children of God through the law; but now that we are the children of God, we praise God by living in accordance with His law.

The law of God defines sin. Through the law, we know what sin is (Rom. 3:20). The law not only defines sin, but it also defines love (Rom. 13:8 f.). Love is a concrete expression, not a romanticized concept. The commandments of God make plain what love means in respect to our neighbor, our enemies and indeed for all mankind (cf. Matt. 5:17-48).

It therefore stands to reason that if love is expressed by fulfillment of the concrete commandments of God, and if faith works through love (Gal. 5:6), then those who live by faith through love, must keep the law. If faith is going to work (and it cannot work except through love) and love is fulfilling the law, then faith(ful) people cannot but honor God's law in their day-to-day existence. The great Reformed and Anglican confessions are Biblical.

## Part II

### The Harmony of Law and Grace

Legalism is the enemy of grace because of a faulty view of the law, and antinomianism is the enemy of law because of its false view of grace. Legalism neglects the "grace basis" of law, and antinomianism neglects the "law basis" of grace. We must now expound what these expressions signify.

Law has a "grace basis." Law, as that authority under which man has his existence, is a loving provision of God. As far as the Bible is concerned, man is free when he is under God's authority. The law of God is the order of man's existence, and man is free when he lives in conformity to that order. One of the first steps to good health is to be in tune with reality. The prodigal illustrates this point. He thought he would be free once he was outside the authority of his father, so he set out on his "trip of emancipation." However, he came to himself when he started to reflect upon the condition of his father's servants. He made his way back to request that he become a servant, for he knew that freedom consisted in being committed to his father. The law of God is not a harsh, alien law which destroys man's personhood, as some have wrongly imagined. It is that law which allows man to be his "true" self. Man was created free because man was created **subject** to the authority (law) of God.

It is not surprising, therefore, to see grace as the basis of the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt . . ." (R.S.V.). This statement of fact prefaces the demands which Jehovah makes upon His people. They are to behave in a certain way because Jehovah has rescued them. In terms of concrete realities, the Ten Commands expound what being rescued means.

The situation is not different when we come to the New Testament. Let Romans 12:1 act as a typical text: "Therefore, my brothers, I implore you by God's mercy . . ." (N.E.B.). The "therefore" and the "by God's mercy" root and ground the demand in the unmerited and undeserved rescue activity of God in saving His people from the pigpen.

The legalist misses this order and therefore fails to understand the true nature of law. He seeks to make the kindness and favor of God dependent upon his keeping the law, instead of seeing that the obligation to keep the law rests upon the favor of God. Law is based on grace.

What is meant when we say that grace has a law basis? Let us seek to answer the question by asking another: On what basis does God accept the believer? Two quite wrong answers have been given to this question: first, the legalist's answer, which puts the emphasis upon the obedience of man; and second, the antinomian's answer, which says that the angry judge (God) was placated (or won over) by the merciful mediator, Jesus Christ.

The only answer which will do justice to the Bible is that the love of God was demonstrated in His saving activity in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ met the demands of the law of God by that perfect and perpetual obedience seen in His life and death. The incarnation of the Son of God honored the law of God. Such honoring of God's law (obedience, active and passive) is the ground on which God accepts us. This is what we mean when we speak of the "legal basis" of grace.

The antinomian fails to see the true harmony between law and grace, and conceives grace as the negation of the law. He not only dishonors the law, but grace also.

The failure to perceive this harmony of law and grace has led to a sad misrepresentation of the character of God. When the love of God is spoken of apart from the law, then God is seen as One who does not care for justice. This is not the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. When the justice of God is spoken of apart from His loving activity in Christ, then God is seen as an angry judge mercilessly exacting payment for the failures of men and women. The God and Father of Jesus Christ our Rescuer, is neither unjust (for He has honored the law) nor unloving (for He has honored the law for us). He is the Just and Loving One.

In summary: We must guard grace from distortion by a wrong view of the law. We must also guard law from a misconception of grace. The legalist expresses a misconception of law and thereby degrades grace, and the antinomian voices a false view of grace and thereby does damage to law. The law must be viewed in the light of grace (the grace basis of law), and grace must be seen in the light of law (the law basis of grace).

## Part III

### "Not Under the Law"

When we come to Paul's teaching on the law, we note the following points:



1. The law not only exposes sin, but restrains the outward expression of it (Rom. 2:14, 25).

2. The law discloses the glory of Christ (Rom. 5:18, 19; cf. Matt. 5:17-48).

3. The law exposes sin (Rom. 7:7) and teaches men their need of a Rescuer (Gal. 3:19 f.; Rom. 10:4).

4. The law is the only infallible rule of practice for the believer (Rom. 13:9; Eph. 6:2; etc.).

5. The believer delights in the law of God (Rom. 7:22). (Notice that James calls the law the "law of liberty" [James 1:25]).

Our particular point of interest is Paul's teaching on the place of the law in the existence of the believer. It is often pointed out that Paul says Christians are "not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). Some assume this means that Christians are free from all obligation to keep the law. There are several reasons why this interpretation cannot be accepted:

1. This interpretation takes no notice (apparently) of the context in which the statement of Paul comes:

(a) Romans 6:15, from which the fourteenth verse is detached, repudiates in the most emphatic manner any suggestion that grace gives license to laxity of life. Grace delivers us from the dominion of sin and therefore establishes and promotes the opposite of sin (for man is not left in a vacuum), namely, righteousness. Deliverance from sin means deliverance to righteousness. We have become "slaves" of righteousness (Rom. 6:18, R.S.V.; cf. v. 22). Sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). **Righteousness, therefore, must be seen as conformity to the law.**

(b) The wider context of chapter 6 makes it clear that Paul is here concerned with deliverance from the practice of sin (vv. 1-23). Paul's great affirmation is that grace has set us free from being bound to transgress the law (i.e., sin), which is another way of saying, Grace sets us free to keep the law (vv. 2, 7, 14, 22).

(c) "Under the law," in this context, means "to live under the terms or conditions of the law." Every person born into the world is under obligation to keep God's law perfectly as **the condition of life with God**. The Christian has met this requirement in Jesus Christ. As we said previously, Christ has fulfilled the law on our behalf. As Christians, we are not "under [the obligation to keep] the law" for our acceptance with God. Christ has already done this for us, and we have received it as a free gift (i.e., we are living "under [the conditions of] grace"). It is a grave blunder to interpret Paul's "not under the law" to mean that the Christian may now live lawlessly.

2. Those who deprecate the law fail to notice the wider context of Paul's thought:

(a) If Paul thought of himself as released from obligation to the law of God, how could he, as a believer, confess, ". . . I consent unto the law that it is good . . . I delight in the law of God after the inward man . . ." Rom. 7:16, 22; cf. v. 25. Paul pronounces himself wretched (Rom. 7:24), not because he is obligated to keep the law, but because he falls so far short of reaching its standard.

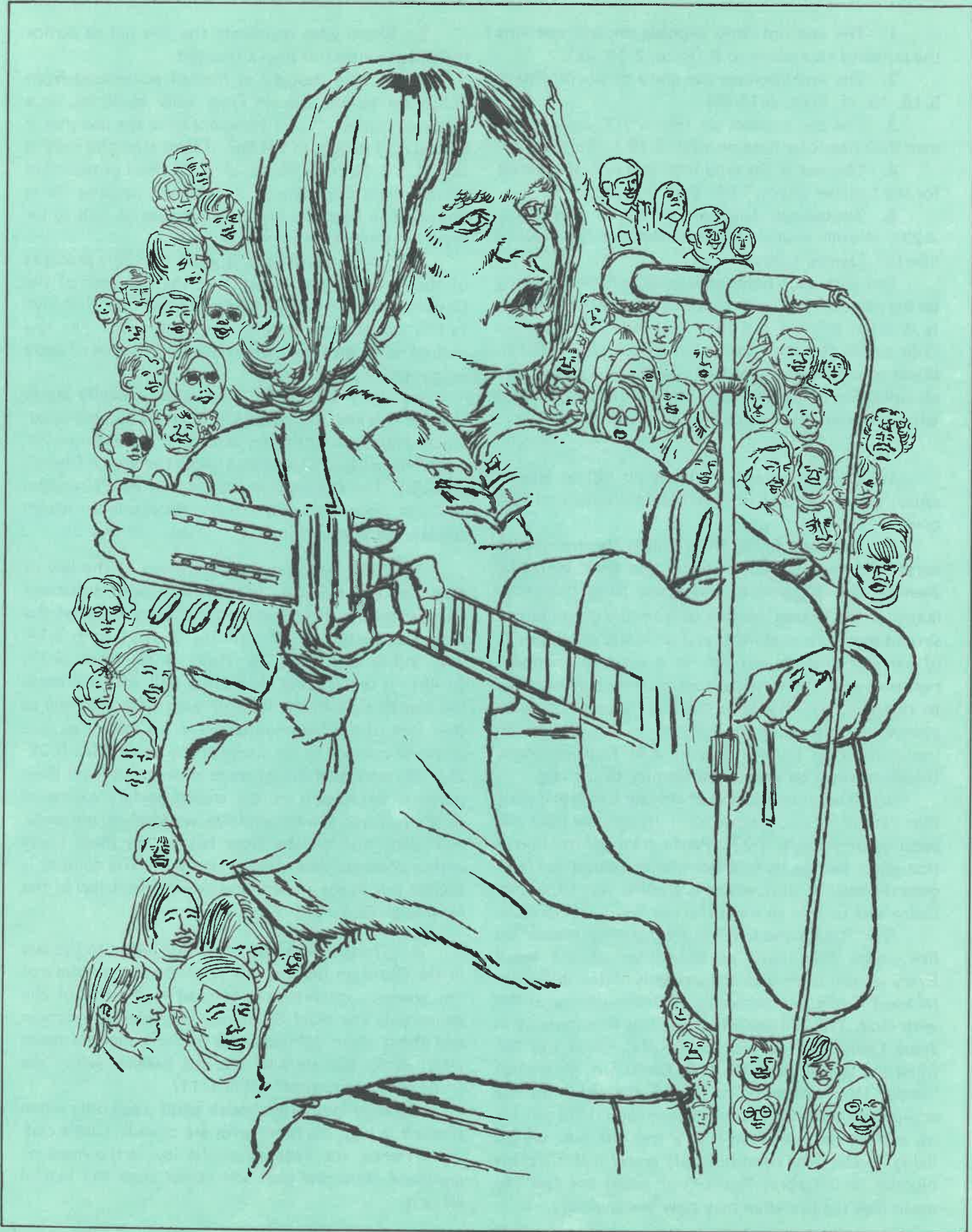
(b) In Romans 13:8, 9, Paul cites five precepts of the Decalogue as relevant to the behavior of the Christian. The emphasis falls upon the fact that love fulfills rather than negates these precepts. The law defines what love is in the rough and tumble of daily existence.

(c) In 1 Cor. 9:21, Paul unequivocally states that he is under the law in the sense of humble obedience. Paul, the Christian, asserts, ". . . I am not in truth outside God's law, being under the law of Christ" (N.E.B.). The implication here is that Paul's relation to Christ places him inside God's law as one for whom the law has application.

3. Those who see no application of the law of God for the believer, fail to take with sufficient seriousness the clear testimony of other parts of the New Testament (see John 14:15; 15:10; 1 John 3:18; 4:7; 2:3-5; 3:21, 22, 24; Rom. 3:31; Matt. 5:19, 21-48). It is amazing that some will still deprecate the law of God in the light of such clear teaching as this. One of the common errors is the failure to give concrete content to the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25). We tend to think of these as removed from their practical expression in the trench-warfare existence of the believer. We romanticize, we idealize, we sentimentalize, and all the time fail to see these fruits with a concrete and practical content! The content is spelled out in the ancient and ever-relevant law of the Most High God.

4. Those who speak of no obligation to the law in the Christian life, do not understand the nature of the gracious intervention of God in the life of the converted. The Holy Spirit not only creates a hunger and thirst after righteousness in the believer's heart (Matt. 5:6), but He also fills the believer with "the fruits of righteousness" (Phil. 1:11).

Genuine (nonselfish) work takes place only when the law is kept by those who are already God's children. Hence, the keeping of the law is the mark of gratitude from the glad son rather than the fearful servant.



Bruce Winter

# A Youth Pastor Speaks Out on the Playboy Theology

It is an enormous responsibility to direct a youth group or to supervise the direction of such a group. As well as the clear directives of the Word of God, we need a proper understanding of those significant influences which contemporary society brings to bear on young people. It is possible, in fact quite probable, that your young people's group has adopted the standards of contemporary society rather than those of the Word of God.

The purpose of this article is (1) to look carefully at what is perhaps the most significant influence

upon young people in the second half of the twentieth century, and (2) to then ascertain the extent to which this has affected our youth evangelism and youth work in the church. To this writer, it appears that it is this influence that is at the root of problems in youth work.

## The Playboy Philosophy

The present generation of young people is firmly committed to the "playboy" philosophy, with its goal of pleasure. This is not a new philosophy. The

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ancient Greek philosopher, Epicurus, enunciated the ethical philosophy called "hedonism" (the word is the transliteration of the Greek word for *pleasure*). Hedonism commits its followers to the goal of pleasure. It believes that pleasure is the sole good. Pursuit of pleasure is the guiding star for most young people in the Western world—freedom to pursue the doing of "one's own thing." Our affluent society affords this opportunity to larger numbers of young people than ever before in the history of Western civilization.

This philosophy has two forms: psychological and ethical hedonism. The former states that men really pursue pleasure and only pleasure in their lives. The latter argues that not only do men seek pleasure, but they ought to do so since pleasure alone is good. Most young people are committed to both of these forms.

The revival of this ancient philosophy came with the production of John Millington Synge's play, "The Playboy of the Western World," in 1907. Hugh M. Hefner is the philosophy's most popular contemporary exponent in the latter half of this century. Hefner is the editor of *Playboy* magazine, which has seen an astronomical increase in circulation, reaching almost twenty million readers each month. While many people may not have read *Playboy* or even heard of the editor's name, their lives tend to confirm that they themselves are committed to the playboy philosophy.

### The Playboy Theology

But how does all this affect the local church's youth group? Surely our young people in the church do not espouse the playboy philosophy as the guiding star in their choices and attitudes!

Firstly, let us look at the young people who, having been committed to the playboy philosophy, espouse Christianity. Much contemporary evangelism is done in the atmosphere of a "Christian" rock concert, with all its accompanying beat and emotionalism. The music and general excitement make the hearers feel absolutely at home in the evangelistic meeting. The presentation of the gospel is often accompanied with hedonistic promises such as "Come to Christ so that you may experience life with a capital 'L'" or "Be released from the past so that you will be free to really do your own thing." These young people hear the evangelist inviting them to transfer their playboy values into the Christian church or youth group. Undoubtedly the evangelist does not intend this, but that is how it comes across to young people.

The proof that becoming a "Christian" means transferring from playboy philosophy to playboy

theology, is shown in the expectation that the program of the youth group will be "exciting"—reflecting the mood of the evangelistic meeting—and that all the young people will have a "tremendous" time. There is enormous pressure on the pastor and youth leader to produce an exciting program—with something new every time.

Secondly, let us look at the young people who have been brought up in the church. Surely they do not espouse the playboy philosophy! These young people see their contemporaries outside the church having a "tremendous" time, and they therefore seek to reproduce this in their own group. It can be done on the pretext of attracting young people or holding young people. The latter argument is often used by anxious parents who plead for a more "interesting" program—which often means "heavy" on entertainment and "light" on Bible study. If large numbers of young people turn up at an activity of the group, it is judged by church officials and even pastors as successful (i.e., "because it works, it must be right"—which is sheer pragmatism).

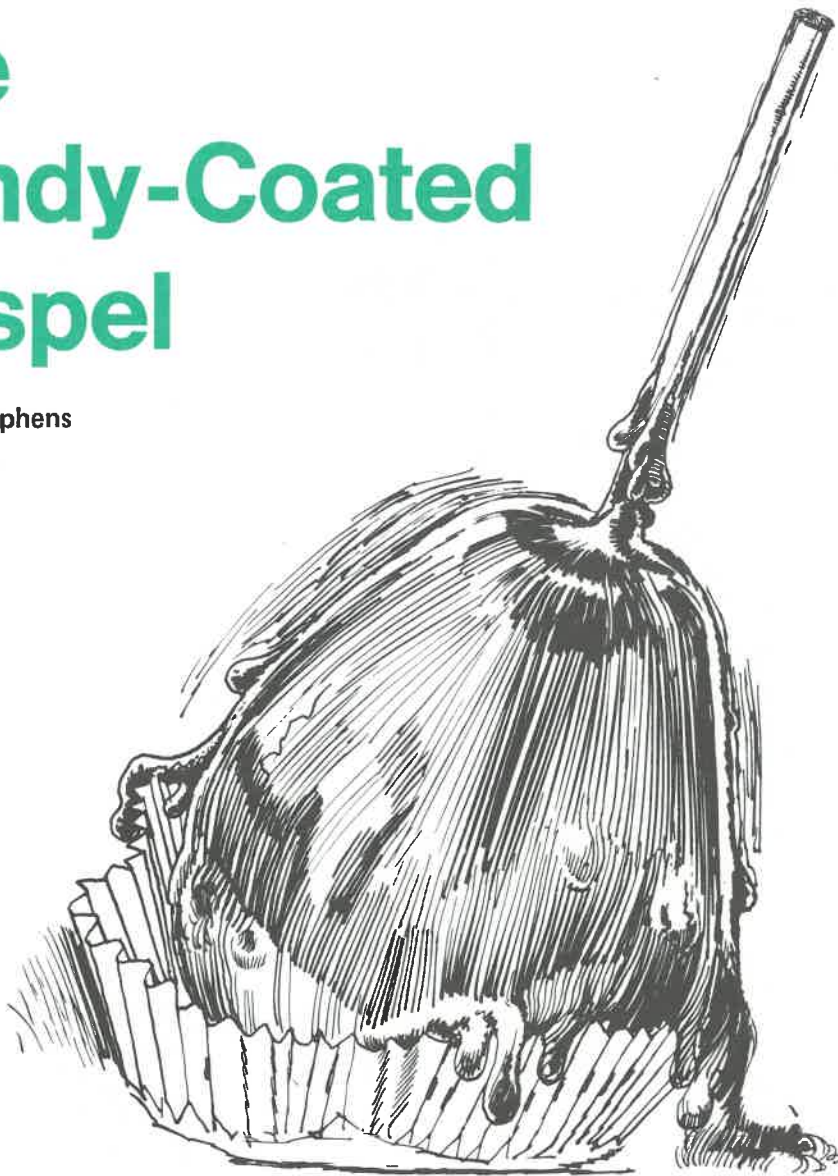
This writer has seen Christian youth groups exhibit an almost allergic reaction to the New Testament teaching on discipleship and to Christian ethical evaluations of young people's decisions in relationship to the family, the opposite sex and the teacher or boss. The interesting point is that, while the youth might be able to very well articulate their subjective experience with Christ, they show a total failure to adjust their behavior according to the norms of New Testament Christianity. Their basic theology is not that of the New Testament but of the playboy. When challenged about their conduct, they manifest a wholehearted adoption of antinomianism, finding support from the statement of Augustine of Hippo—"Love God and do as you like"—surely a misguided understanding of Christian freedom.

As pastors and youth leaders, we would do well to evaluate our youth programs and the activities of our young people who belong to them. Is the playboy theology at the heart of the problems of the youth group? A sure sign that it is will be the manifestation of antinomianism and the resulting rejection of the conditions of discipleship enunciated by the Lord Jesus in Luke 9:23:

"And He said to them all, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

# The Candy-Coated Gospel

M. Dean Stephens



Looking around at the efforts of evangelical Christians to preach the Gospel today, one might be struck with the almost heretical thought that maybe, just maybe, what passes for the Gospel of Christ in the twentieth century is not an exact reproduction of the original article. Perhaps somewhere along the line something has been lost. What with "pack the pew night," "transportation Sunday" (the one who gets to church in the oddest way wins a prize), big-name athletes and movie stars appearing at the local church to give their testimonies, and other novelties, one may suspect that evangelical churches have begun

to let gimmicks and glamour overshadow the Gospel.

We think of the early Church as the ideal example of church power and normalcy. Somehow those early believers turned the world upside down in a very few years without resorting to the use of gimmicks.

Why do our churches produce so little in lasting results? Why have we so little power? I want to suggest one thing that seems to me to be a great part of the problem: the dearth of the preaching of God's law from our pulpits.

At this point many will decide that I have been reading too many Puritan classics and spending too much time in the damp basement of Calvinism. But the fact remains that the Gospel being preached in many churches today is a candy-coated Gospel. "Three easy steps to salvation" seems to be the order

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of the day. To hear many pastors and evangelists preach, you are not sure whether they are offering a crucified and risen Lord or a no-down-payment, twelve-easy-installments way to heaven. Evangelical preaching seems to have been influenced by the shallow, neon society in which we live. We make it easy to become a Christian; after all, we might lose converts and church members if we preached too many "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not."

After the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-21 asks how he can gain eternal life, Jesus says:

Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto Him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest; go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

And of course we know the rest: "he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved; for he had great possessions."

Note that Jesus didn't make a general statement about the sinfulness of all men as a first step to leading this young man to faith. The young ruler didn't think he had sinned. Most men don't really believe they are sinners, at least not bad enough for God to keep them out of heaven. Our Lord didn't just condemn sin in general; he condemned it in the particular. The rich young man was an idolator. He loved money more than he loved God. Jesus' implication was clear and convicting.

Christ used the law in dealing with sinners. Why do we shy away from it? We go on our way singing, "free from the law, O blessed condition," forgetting that without the law there is no basis for identifying sin: "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). Without this divine yardstick, men have no way to measure their lives against God's righteous demands.

No wonder sinners are bored by our proclamation, and we make very little impact on the world. It is when we get down to particulars that sinners begin to get restless and look for the nearest exit.

As an Episcopal priest, I am called upon to instruct potential church members in the tenets of the faith in confirmation classes. I have had people threaten not to return to the class because as we studied the commandments they felt God was getting too personal in saying "thou shalt" or "thou shalt not." When we get down to particulars, men quickly see that they are sinners in need of divine grace.

In *Today's Gospel—Authentic or Synthetic*, Walter J. Chantry says:

Normal evangelical practice is swiftly to run to the cross of Christ. But the cross means nothing apart from the law. Our Lord's wretched suffering must be tragic and senseless in the eyes of any who have no reverent esteem for the perfect commandments. On the cross Jesus was satisfying the just demands of the law against sinners. If sinners are unaware of the decalogue's requirements for themselves, they will see no personal significance in Christ's broken body and shed blood. . . . Christ was set forth to be a propitiation (Rom. 3:25), i.e., the substitutionary object of God's wrath poured out against a violated law [Banner of Truth Trust, 1970, p. 37].

Not until the law is applied in the condemnation of particular sins will sinners flee to Christ for mercy. The woman at the well must have had the seventh commandment applied to her condition. Paul confesses that the law was the schoolmaster that brought him to Christ: "I had not known sin but by the law" (Rom. 7:7). When we have been wounded by the law, then the oil of the Gospel can be poured on our diseased souls.

It's time to do away with the gimmicks and tricks. Let's quit trying to attract men to Christ by giving them a candy-coated Gospel, and let us restore the law to its rightful place in the preaching of salvation by grace through faith. To do this will take us a big step toward reproducing the original article.

# Quotable Quotes on Law and Gospel

## MARTIN LUTHER

### Faith Fulfills the Whole Decalogue

“It is faith alone that achieves this that all sins are remitted to us and that the whole Decalogue is fulfilled by faith, because faith alone gives me Christ, who is the fulfillment and the end of the law. What else does faith give? It imparts and brings with it the Holy Spirit, from whom all good works flow.”—*D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Kuitische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar, 1883-), Vol. XXXIX, Pt. I, p. 482.

### Law Must Be Fulfilled—Gospel Shows How

“Now when a man has learned through the commandments to recognize his helplessness and is distressed about how he might satisfy the law—since the law must be fulfilled so that not a jot or tittle shall be lost, otherwise man will be condemned without hope—then, being truly humbled and reduced to nothing in his own eyes, he finds in himself nothing whereby he may be justified and saved. Here the second part of Scripture comes to our aid, namely, the promises of God which declare the glory of God, saying . . . ‘If you believe, you shall have all things; if you do not believe, you shall lack all things . . .’ God our Father has made all things depend on faith so that whoever has faith will have everything, and whoever does not have faith will have nothing . . .”  
—*Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), Vol. XXXI, pp. 348, 349.

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