

Your Vocation and Christ's Mission

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### **Day 1: Christ's Mission**

Christ's Mission is not only to remove us from the sins of the flesh, but also from our high spiritual aspirations of glory. Christ's mission is to remove us from our obsession with virtue, morality, good works, and the law. Christ has come into this old world, Emmanuel, and remains to *Gospel* sinners who feel they are anything but, or at least not as bad as the next guy. Christ is coming to create faith where there is none, for "The righteous shall live by faith." (Habakkuk 2:4) That is, by faith, not good works; by faith, not the supposed free will, not by virtue, not by the Law. "We are justified by faith alone, not by any deeds of the law." (Romans 3:28) That is to say, he is electing sinners in the here and now for salvation. He is coming to raise sinners from the dead who believe they are alive and doing pretty well; he is giving sight to those who are blinded by the attractiveness of their own achievements; he is coming to give the gift of hearing to those who have been made deaf by listening incessantly to the song of myself on repeat, whether it be the song of despair, or the chest thumping song of pride. He does this by sending you a preacher who proclaims the forgiveness of sins. Yes, it is by the preacher speaking the forgiveness of sins that God actually creates an entirely new creature and new creation, and by

so doing accomplishes his mission. “What about my good works?” “I have no good works of my own.” “What about my progress in achieving my full potential in life?” “It is cut off by Christ who enters this world, enters the ear of the sinner and creates in you a clean heart that trusts Christ alone for all things, in this life and the next.” “But isn’t this a little harsh? Isn’t such talk a denigration of creation?” “Well, no. It is a putting to death the old creation that is bound in sin and raising up a new creation of faith.” As Job confesses, “For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hand heals,” (Job 5:18)

As we take up the incredibly important distinction between Christ’s mission and your vocation, or the distinction between Christ and you, we have to first expose the depth of our trouble, our sin, our bondage of the will, otherwise, we will never hear the truly good news that Emmanuel, and that he has never left, as we continue on the death spiral of trying to rid God from our lives, so that we can be like the petulant 4 year old shouting, “I can do it myself!” Or at least we want to keep Jesus Christ at arms length so that we can imagine that he is the high heavenly goal toward which we hope to ascend by spiritual exercises.

To enter into this unmasking of the depth of trouble we are all in, Luther has a wonderful summary of how in every possible way sinners like us are held completely captive to our delusions about our ability and to get scripture entirely WRONG, which Luther calls the Double Malady, because not only are we sick, we believe we are the picture of health: “Scripture, however, represents man as one who is not only bound wretched, captive, sick and dead, but in addition to his other miseries, is afflicted, through the agency of Satan his prince, with this misery of

blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, unfettered, well and alive.”

(Packer & Johnson p. 162; LW 33:130)

Now, this famous quote comes out of Luther’s book, *The Bondage of the Will*. I mentioned above that what Christ is doing in the world is electing sinners. Now, I recognize there are two reactions to this: the first reaction is universal terror and abhorrence to such an assertion. The reason for this is simple: we do not believe Christ when he comes to us in his word of law that first, kills and the gospel which creates faith in Christ alone.

What about my free will? You are in bondage to sin and cannot free yourself. Or, if you prefer Paul, “You are dead in your sin.” But can’t I at least reject God? You are in bondage to sin and Satan is your prince, so you must reject God. But God created mankind in his image. Yes. But then there was this thing called the Fall. Yes, but there must be a little “spark of divinity” left in me, isn’t there? The belief that there is a so called “spark of divinity” in you comes not from scripture but from Origen of Alexandria who was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 543 over this very heresy. What about my good works? We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags, the stench of which fill the nose of God. But what about the 10 Commandments? Surely God wants us to keep them? Yes, you are to keep them, but you have not kept them, either in letter or in spirit. But what if I can keep most of them most of the time? The law demands perfection. So are you saying God gave us commandments that we can’t even keep? Then why even try? Why not eat, drink, and be merry all the days of my life? The law was given to reveal sins, not to take them away. Well, that doesn’t make sense. I give

up. Who in the world would try to reform her life? (This is the last gasp of the old Adam) Nobody will, as you say, try to reform his life. God has no time for you'r practitioners of self-reform. And the gouty foot laughs at such doctoring. But the electing God who preaches his word, both Law and Gospel, kills the old sinner and raises the new creature of faith. The Good News of the Gospel is that the law is already fulfilled in Christ. The law meets its apocalyptic end in Christ Jesus. "For Christ is the end of the law for all who have faith." (Romans 10:4)

This little dialogue illustrates our first reaction to the doctrine of the Electing God because what the 'free-will' wants is a non-electing God. The death rattle of the old Adam is what we hear toward the end when we fight tooth and nail, to the death in the most real sense possible, against God and his destination to make you his own, to save us. The Father does not want his Son to be set up as a goal that we believe is placed before us to imitate through the effort of a supposed free will rightly applying the law, guiding us on our ascent heavenward. We don't want to have an electing God; we want to be God, electing ourselves, believing we'll escape death. This is why the fall is best described not so much as a fall "downward," but as my teacher Dr. Forde taught us, a fall, "upward." And to be clear, this is not just a fall of moral failing; it is a total and complete fall of the entire person. There is no part of the human, especially the will, that has not fallen totally and completely into the sin of unbelief, death, wrath, bondage to the devil, and hell itself.

In the fall upward, sinners imagine that the law is like a ladder to heaven, or a staircase to God. Next step, find a story in scripture that will accommodate eisogesis of a text like Jacob's dream in Genesis 28, misreading his dream such that rather

than heavenly angels going up and down the ladder set up on earth reaching to heaven and to God who is preaching a flood of promises down to Jacob, we insert ourselves as the active ones on this staircase, that “we are climbing Jacob’s ladder,” every rung goes higher and higher. Next, write a hymn to cement this misreading of the text in peoples memory such that they would rather keep the hymn which promotes false promises of their continuity of will with the law as to ascend to heaven, than for it to be replaced with the actual words of scripture which clearly states, it is God who comes all the way down, as Jacob confesses upon waking, “Surely God is in THIS place!”

Our first response upon the hearing of the doctrine of the electing God results in the death rattle which finally leads to what Luther describes as the “Bigger Death.” This is the death of the old Adam that comes when the external word of God arrives to actual sinners and takes not only our good works from us, but even our most treasured hymns, and exchanges them for himself and alone, since Christ alone “has become our wisdom from God, our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast only in the Lord.’” (1 Cor. 1:31) This is the Bigger Death of the old Adam because we invest our whole lives trying to make something of our selves, so that we have something of ourselves to boast.

But there is a second response to the hearing of the electing God. It is the one that only comes from those who hear and believe they are dead in their sin and cannot save themselves and their response is “Amen! Thanks be to God!” This is the response of faith that trusts in Christ and his promises alone, despite what one sees

in the world or in their life or feels in their own body. When Christ raises a new creature of faith, then the only death that remains is what Luther called the “little death,” a “deathlette,” which is the one when the breathe of Life is taken from your body. Faith does not fear this little death for it clings to Christ who has been crucified and risen from the dead, with death defeated and behind him and in the past forever. Being found in Christ, the new creature revels in the victory and in the spoils of Christ and his benefits: (FS, RFD, EL) forgiveness of sins, the promise of the bodily resurrection from the dead, and eternal life with Christ and all the saints that have gone before.

Luther’s book, *The Bondage of the Will*, is a surpassing comfort to consciences who are under the terror of sin and wrath of God in judgment unto death. Luther encouraged this book be a devotional book to by read not simply because it is an annihilation of the illusion of the flagging “free will,” but also because it is finally a book about Christ and his unthwartable, immutable promises to you and, therefore, is a great help for the strengthening faith.

*When our now 4 ½ year old son was two months old, he was diagnosed by the doctor with torticollis, which is a condition in which the muscles one side of his neck had lengthened, the muscles on the other side of this neck had shortened, resulting in his head being permanently turned to his right. He could not turn his head to the left. No matter what we did, clapped our hands, call his name, or otherwise try to get his attention from his left side, he would not, he could not turn his head to the left, but only bent his neck further around to the right to see us. He was quite literally a stiff-necked baby. The doctor said that, in fact, he was likely already bent in that direction nestled*

*inside my pelvis in utero. In other words, he was born with a proclivity to torticollis; born with a **proclivity to stiff-neckedness**. The doctor sent us to a pediatric physical therapist where for the next 9 months, he underwent the physical therapy exercises. The therapist would gently, patiently, slowly, engage our stiff-neck baby boy to loosen up and strengthen his neck muscles so his head and body could freely turn, tilt, and nod with full range of motion once again. He was unable to free himself from this condition, but someone from the outside, this therapist, entered in with the knowledge and the power to free him from torticollis.*

You might recall from Deuteronomy the description of the Israelites, that although they were stiff-necked in themselves, nevertheless, God from without had not only the will but the power to bestow on them the land he desired to give them in Deuteronomy 9:5-7, ["It is not for your *righteousness* or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the *wickedness* of these nations that the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Know then, it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people."]

Oh, that our stiff-neckedness was only a muscular problem that is easily corrected in a few months time by a physical therapist!! Whether we down play the depth of our sin, death, and bondage to the devil or with theological artifice whittle away at the almighty, immutable will of God to make room for the supposed free will to choose, "The gouty foot laughs at [our] doctoring!" (Packer & Johnston p. 92) Alas,

as Gentiles we are no different from Israel in the wilderness in our full out rebellion against God in our spiritual torticollis.

Luther enters as a great preacher at this point, to preach Christ to those who do not suffer from lack of motivation of the will, or those desiring to move their congregation from maintenance to mission, or even discipleship groups, but from the need to be raised from the dead to new life by the forgiveness of their sins. Peter observes, the Gospel is preached to even to dead people! (1 Peter 4:6) “So what you are saying, Dr. Fritts, is that there is hope?” Answer: “Yes, as long as hope is not placed in the power of the human will to moral transformation that makes faith into a project to be handled and completed by your commitment, but in Christ alone who saves you by bringing the law to fulfillment, and therefore its end, for faith and salvation.

Luther outlines Christ mission categorically in his *The Bondage of the Will* (1525) where we are taught a series of no less than 6 key distinctions of Christ’s mission. Theses six key distinctions are: 1) the bound will (veritable will) and freedom in Christ, 2) God hidden, God revealed, 3) God Not Preached, God Preached (p. 169-70), 4) The Kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God, (p. 150, 312) 5) Freedom of the will in things below, bondage of the will in things above), 6) and the distinction between Christ and the free will. We will take each of these in turn.

**First**, when Luther talks about the bound will, it is not that you have no will or no power, as though you are a puppet on a string, or a block or wood, or that the devil is forcing you at Gunpoint to deny God, believing you are the master of your fate, the captain of your soul. We have a will. The problem is the will is bound; the



will wills what it will; it is bound to your desires, and you can't help yourself. You can say you were born with this proclivity (theological loci of Original Sin), or with the Psalmist confess, "in sin did my mother conceive me," or as with the Lord's preaching to Cain in Genesis 4, "sin is crouching at the door." Sin literally awaits our arrival into this world. Likewise, so does Satan, the baby catcher at your birth into a fallen creation.

It must be that we are born behind the eight ball, that we were doomed before we were born or even had a chance to give our opinion on the matter of our eternal destination. To make things worse, Luther observes, "The will cannot change itself, nor give itself another *bent*, (Luther's word! There is that torticollis of the will!) . . . On the other hand, when God works in us, (from without) the will is changed under the sweet influence of the Spirit. Once more it desires and acts, not of compulsion, but of its own desire and spontaneous inclination. Its bent still cannot be altered by any opposition; it can only be mastered or prevailed upon even by the gates of hell; but it goes on willing, desiring and loving good, just as once it willed, desired, and loved evil . . . In a word: if we are under the god of the world, strangers to the work of God's Spirit, we are led captive by Satan at his will, as Paul said to Timothy (2 Tim. 2:26), so that we cannot will anything but what he wills. For he is a 'strong man armed,' who keeps his palace to such a good effect that those he holds are at peace, and raise no stir or feeling against him—otherwise Satan's kingdom would be against itself, and could not stand; but Christ says it does stand. And we acquiesce in his rule willingly and readily . . . But if a stronger man appears, and overcomes Satan, we are once more servants and captives, *but now* desiring and

willing what HE wills—which is ROYAL FREEDOM. So man's will is like a beast of burden, an ass, standing between two riders. If God rides, it wills and goes where God wills: as the Psalm says, "I became as a beast before thee, and I am ever with thee" (Ps. 73:22-3) But if Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run, or which it will seek; but the riders themselves fight to decide who shall take hold of it." (Packer & Johnston, p. 103-4) Note three things distinguishing the bondage of the will and royal freedom in Christ:

First, There are two Lord's fighting over you, the Lord of Lies and the Lord of Truth and Life. There is no neutral ground in all the universe from which you can choose either Christ or Satan. Unless Satan's palace is ransacked by Christ's absolution, binding up Satan and then leading the captives out of captivity, you will be eternally under the Lord of Lies.

The second thing to note about the bondage of the will and freedom in Christ: the ass does not choose to accept the rider, but rather it is too preoccupied in perfecting its righteous stubbornness, braying and boasting, ungulates dug in, refusing to budge. The Lord of Life elects to cast off Satan or else Satan rides.

Third thing to note: when this happens, when the beast of burden is brought under Christ, something new is revealed: a veritable will, free from the bondage to the law, sin, wrath, death, and Satan, the will is royally free now in Christ. While your will is bound, it can be changed, not from within, but from with out, by Christ and the Holy Spirit binding you at just the right point.

**The second and third distinctions** Luther makes really go together and so we take them together and those are: God hidden and God revealed along with God

not preached and God preached. This discussion of Luther's is a response to a passage in Ezekiel 18 that Erasmus believes is the iron-clad verse for the claim of the free will, "I, the Lord, desire not the death of the sinner, but that he should turn from his wicked ways and live." Now, Erasmus, interprets this section from scripture the same way he interprets all imperatives of scripture: he interprets them as indicatives, and so his understanding is that, well, "certainly, the wicked man straight away does so and can do so." Erasmus suffers from the same problem that all sinners have since the temptation of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, to Humanism, to Kant's Moral Imperative and dictum that "ought implies can," that the law of scripture, in this case, "he *should turn* from his ways and live," presumes that man has the power within to change the will and that "should" implies "can" and "does." Meanwhile, Paul repeats over and over to the point of loathing, "the law was given to reveal sin," and Luther: No one has, is, or will ever turn from their wicked ways, at least not of their own volition. God must turn us from our wicked ways; God repents sinners.

So why does it seem that God chooses some and not others? It is Christ alone who turns the wicked from their old ways. And to get to the point of it, how do I know specifically when it comes to me? Well, for that you are going to need a preacher. So Luther continues with this distinction, "We must discuss God, or the will of God, preached revealed, offered to us, and worshipped by us, in one way, and God not preached, nor revealed, nor offered to us, nor worshipped by us in another way . . . Now God in His own nature and majesty is to be left alone; in this regard, we have nothing to do with Him, nor does he wish us to deal with him. We have to deal

with him as clothed and displayed in His Word, by which he presents himself to us . . . God preached, works to the end that sin and death may be taken away and we may be saved. 'He sent his word and healed them' (Ps. 107:20). But God hidden in Majesty neither deplores nor takes away death, but works life and death, and all in all." Note a couple things from the distinction of God hidden/Not Preached and God revealed/Preached:

First, our eternal salvation then, depends upon whether or not we get a preacher. We are saved when God sends us a preacher who hands over Christ and his benefits for our sakes, not by speculating about whether or not some yet to be discovered tribe in the Amazon forest is then condemned. Now why don't you like this? Because it means you are rendered perfectly passive in waiting on God to send a preacher. Tell me, is it better for you at this point to take the helm and steer the ship of your life off into uncharted waters because waiting on God to send a preacher sounds a bit dodgy, or is it better to trust God's promises—from the God who does not lie, who's will is almighty and immutable, destined to seek out the lost—that if faith is made by hearing that in fact he will send you a preacher, perhaps even now, who absolves you of your sin? After all, where there is the forgiveness of sins there is life and salvation.

Second thing to note about this distinction of God hidden/revealed: we grasp Christ not hidden in majesty, not in our speculating about what God is up to in this world or in your life, but we grasp Christ where he wants to be found: *in* the preaching of the word and in the sacraments. Faith yearns for the preached word that gives life and hope through the forgiveness of sins, groping and grasping after

the flailing arms of the infant Christ who is the Lord of life who has grasped the sinner by the short hairs and will never let go.

**The fourth distinction is Luther's famous two kingdoms distinction.** In this work Luther makes the distinction between the kingdom of Satan and the Kingdom of God: there is not one kingdom, but two, "There are in the world two kingdoms at war with each other. In the one kingdom, Satan reigns which is why Christ calls him, "the prince of this world," (John 12:31), and Paul "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). He (so Paul again tells us) holds captive at his will all that are not wrest from him by the Spirit of Christ; nor does he allow them to be plucked away by any other power but the Spirit of God, as Christ tells us in the parable of the strong man armed keeping his palace in peace. In the other kingdom, Christ reigns, His kingdom continually resists wars against that of Satan; and we are translated to His kingdom, not by our own power, but by the grace of God which delivers us from this present evil world and tears us away from the power of darkness. The knowledge and confession of these two kingdoms ever warring against each other with all their might and power, would suffice by itself to confute the doctrine of the "free will," seeing that we are compelled to serve in Satan's Kingdom if we are not plucked from it by divine power." Note a few things regarding the two kingdoms distinction:

First, there are two kingdoms, not just one eternal kingdom, but both are God's kingdoms, for even devil is God's devil. In Luther's 1523 treatise on *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed*, Luther had already begun to work this distinction out in what he describe as the distinction between the temporal

government and the spiritual government. In the temporal government, we are restrained by the law and the sword from wickedness and maintain an outward peace. The spiritual government is where and when the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ through preaching and the sacraments. In the temporal kingdom, there you find the law, which does not extend to heaven, but is temporary. The spiritual kingdom consists of the gospel which is eternal.

Second thing to note about the two kingdoms/governments: Christians are not made by the law and the sword which can only coerce and outward righteousness and peace, but Christians are made by the Holy Spirit in the preaching of the word of the forgiveness of sins and the administration of the sacraments. To put it in the most vivid way that only Luther could do, “Heresy is a spiritual matter which you cannot hack to pieces with iron, consume with fire, or drown in water,” ... “Here God’s word must do the fighting; if it does not succeed, certainly the temporal power will not succeed either, even if it were to drench the world in blood.”

(*Temporal Authority*, Lull, 447)

The third thing to note regarding the two kingdoms distinction: For the time being, you live in both kingdoms, for you are *simul justis et peccator*: simultaneously saint and sinner; saint in Christ and sinner in yourself, and these are simultaneous, total states. It is not that you are partly sinner and partly saint, slowly and seamlessly becoming more and more saint in yourself. You are dead in sin, totally and completely, but made alive in Christ, totally and completely. *Totus totus*. And even though for the time being the sinner and the saint overlap the same time and

space in your person, they are as far apart from one another as east is from west with no communication or bridge between the two. The thing which separates the 'two yous' your sinner life and your saint life is the grave. "The sinner has one foot in the grave, but the saint has only one foot left in the grave." (Luther's sermon on 1 Corinthians 15)

The temporal government is an old kingdom because it is ruled by the law alone. The spiritual government is a new kingdom because it is ruled by Christ alone *without* the law. It is the distinction between the Left hand rule of God and the Right hand rule of God. In one resides the *peccator*, in the other the *iustus*; in one the old Adam, in the other the new creature of faith; in one kingdom Satan is the prince, in the new kingdom Christ rules; in one kingdom unbelief, the fruit of sin, death, wrath, bondage of the will, active righteousness, and even vocation, and in the other kingdom, faith, peace, eternal life, freedom, passive righteousness, justification.

**The fifth distinction** is between the freedom in things below (*coram hominibus*) and bondage in regard to those things above us (*coram deo*). Luther explains that if you insist on using the term free will, then you should use it only in regard to those things below you. In things below, we pretty much do as we please and it seems as though God does not interfere as such. By things below, Luther means earthly things. You can choose what you wear, where you work, where you go to church, even who you marry. Here we are willing beings, and for the most part, with some significant exceptions, pretty much do as we please. But *you are not free* in those things above you, and by that I mean *someone* above you who is God and the one who alone is working your salvation. Dr. Forde, writes, "For the fact is that

we simply cannot accept an almighty God. We cannot handle the idea of someone “above us” who we fear is controlling our destiny.” (*Captivation of the Will*, p. 50) In this regard you are bound in sin. How so? To reject God when he comes in his word. Forde continues, “When we come up against the Almighty God we are bound, bound to say no. Be it much or be it little, we must claim at least some freedom to control our destiny.” (Ibid.) But you respond, “I just can’t accept the idea of election!” To which I respond, “You are absolutely right, of course! That is what the whole debate and mission of Christ is about! You have not nullified the argument, much less Christ’s mission, you have simply established it! You are bound to say no. You can’t escape it. You can’t help it. And there in, Christ has his mission cut out for him.

**The six and final distinction** I want to take up is the distinction between Christ and the free will. To put it pointedly, the Holy Spirit is not your own inner voice and Christ is not your free will. Luther writes, “Christ is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6) and that categorically, so whatever (whatever!) is not Christ is not the way, but error, not the truth, but untruth, not life, but death, it follows of necessity that ‘free will’ inasmuch as it neither is Christ, nor is in Christ, is fast bound in error, and untruth and death . . . If all the things that are said of Christ and of grace were not said categorically, so that they may be contrasted with their opposites, like this: out of Christ there is nothing but Satan, out of grace nothing but wrath, out of light nothing but darkness, out of the way nothing but error, out of truth nothing but a lie, out of life nothing but death . . . If you grant that the Scriptures speak categorically, you can say nothing of ‘free will’ but that which is the opposite of Christ: that is, that error, death, Satan, and all evils reign in it. If you do



not grant that the Scriptures speak categorically, you so weaken them, that they establish nothing and fail to prove that men need Christ; and thus, in setting up 'free will', you set aside Christ, and make havoc of the entire Scripture." (Packer & Johnston p. 307) This is why faith and salvation rest solely on the promise of Christ's eternal election of you: "However much you may boggle, yet your conscience, and everybody's conscience, is convinced, and bound to confess, that, if God is not mistaken in what he foreknows, then what he foreknows must necessarily come to pass. Otherwise who could believe his promises . . .?" (p. 213) Luther continues, "I frankly confess that for myself, even if it could be, I should not want free-will to be given me, nor anything to be left in my own hands to enable me to endeavor after salvation; not merely because in the face of so many dangers, and adversaries, and assaults of the devil, I could not stand my ground and hold fast my 'free-will' (for the devil is stronger than all men, and on these terms no man could be saved); but because, even were there no dangers, adversaries, or devils, I should still be forced to labor with no guarantee of success, and to beat my fists at the air. If I lived and worked to all eternity, my conscience would never reach comfortable certainty as to how much it must be to satisfy God. Whatever work I had done, there would still be a nagging doubt as to whether it pleased God, or whether He required something more. The experience of all who seek righteousness by works proves that; and I learned it well enough myself over a period of many years, to my own great hurt. BUT NOW, that God has taken my salvation out of the control of my own will, and put it under the control of His and promised to save me, not according to my working or running, but according to His own grace and mercy. I have the

comfortable certainty that He is faithful and will not lie to me, and that His is also great and powerful, so that no devils or opposition can break him.” (Parker & Johnston, p. 313)

## **Day 2: Your Vocation**

To get to the matter of your vocation, I want to take up scripture and one of Luther’s most well known treatises, “The Freedom of a Christian,” 1520. This will then open up the discussion of the three estates of the earthly government, as they are distinct and limited in relation to God’s rule in the spiritual government. In Luther’s, *The Freedom of the Christian*, he makes a shocking assertion, “That one thing and only one thing is necessary for the Christian life, righteousness, and freedom. This is the holy Word of God the Gospel of Christ.” The ONLY thing? What about my response? We rejected him. What about a second chance? What good is a second chance for one who is already dead? What about my commitment in discipleship? It is not necessary for the Christian life, in fact, religious commitment is what got Christ crucified. If God in Christ does everything for me, then there is nothing left for me to do, right? Right. We like to call it being an Evangelical. Then why do anything good? Why not live a life full of sin? How can you? You are dead, which is exactly what Paul preaches.

In Romans chapter 6, The Apostle Paul preaches that baptism is both the beginning and the end of the Christian life, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by

baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self[a] was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set freed[b] from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Baptism is your Bigger Death. You are also guaranteed a resurrection like Christ's, that is the bodily resurrection unto eternal life. All of this means you are made a Christian in baptism, right then and there and now. That is the promise. This is how the new creature is made: by the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, together with the water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with your name on it. This is the iron clad, body, blood, and water clad, unthwartable promise of God made to yellow-bellied, smelly-diapered sinners. Since this promise is made, forgiveness is proclaimed and Christ arrives with his entire kingdom in tow, there is nothing left for you to do. This is what we mean by the Gospel. Do you suppose there is something that God missed in baptism which you must now complete? How about your commitment to “live out” your baptism? No, baptism is God's thing, not yours, “Do you receive the Holy Spirit by your works of the law, or by hearing with faith?

Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal. 2:20) No, perseverance after baptism is the manufactured second yet false gift that was made up by St. Augustine. He had a hard time, like all of us, with the problem of how to deal with sin after baptism. But for dealing with the sin that clings around our neck all the days of our lives, God knows better than to leave this in our hands, and so, for the rest of your life God sends you his preachers to proclaim to you repeatedly the forgiveness of sin in the old flesh through the preaching of the sermon as well as the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

We are all repeat offenders of whatever favorite sins we prefer (gossiping about my neighbor, coveting my neighbor's spouse, house, life, career; killing our neighbor, maybe or maybe not with a gun, but by a murderous tongue, just to list a few) and since none of us ever forgives the same sin 7 times a day without a grudge, day after day, 70 times 7, Christ interrupts our death spiral with the external proclamation of the forgiveness of all your sins through the voice of the preacher and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Once Christ makes the sinner purely passive through this preached word and sacraments, and thus finally and actually creates faith in this way, then the active life, the new creature arises from the ashes and can start to move about freely in this world and finally be of some good use to the neighbor who needs them in vocation. This is typically talked about in the language of love for the neighbor. Love proceeds from faith, as fruit is proceeds from a tree, therefore, vocation follows justification, but is not apart of it.

Having been set free by Christ's forgiveness of sin, the new creature can for the first time see the neighbor in need, not as a burden to avoid or to be minimized, nor as a project for the old Adam to work on. The new creature unwittingly does whatever is needed, freely, spontaneously, without worrying or calculation of what it will cost. This is what Paul means in Romans 12:1, "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your worship." While you present your bodies as a sacrifice, the sacrifice is for your neighbor, not God. The goal of life then is not happiness as Aristotle proposes, nor is it to appease God by morality (law) or some immortality project (works) we offer into the universe. The goal in life is, instead, the death of your body in the most useful way for your neighbor. This begins to open up for us what we mean by vocation and, therefore what life in this old world is for and how this is distinguished from justification and the life to come.

This distinction is probably best laid out for us in the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10: 38-42, ["Now as they went on their way, Jesus[a] entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary.[b] Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."]

Luther is the preacher *par excellence* of this scripture in his treatise, *The Freedom of the Christian*. His famous thesis has two verses:

A Christian is a perfectly free Lord of all, subject to none; we'll call this the Mary Life;

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all; we'll call this the Martha life.

Luther draws out the distinction between the *inner man* (New – Mary Life) and the *outer man* (Old- Martha Life) and shows us the simultaneity of the existence of our old/temporal/Martha life and our new, eternal, Mary life in Christ. Of the Inner/New Man- (the Mary Life): 1) Nothing you do from the outside can make you a Christian, nothing from the outside can make you a slave; 2) The new man receives no help from any work of the body. For the new man/Christian only one thing is necessary that leads to Christian life, righteousness, and freedom: the word of God, the gospel; 3) Therefore, rejecting the hearing of the word and unbelief in Christ make one a condemned servant of sin, this is not caused by any external work or moral act; 4) Faith increases by the hearing of Christ and his benefits, not by doing works of love.

“But what about all those commandments?” How can you say faith justifies alone when there are all those laws? First, faith alone without works of the law justifies, frees, and saves. Second, all of scripture is divided into two parts: commands and promises. Third, the commands teach us what is good. However, the good that is taught is not done. The commands show us what we ought to do, but they do not give us the power to do it. That power comes from the word of the gospel. Fourth, the commands teach us to know our sin.

Roman Catholic theology taught Luther that faith is like an empty chalice that must be filled with works of love or else it is nothing. In other words, the theology that Luther was set free *from* was *that faith alone does not save*. Luther's evangelical discovery in Paul's letter to the Romans that we are justified by faith alone apart from works of love, revealed that not only is faith complete for the Christian life, righteousness and freedom, it is spontaneously productive and has great spiritual powers: "O, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them... Faith is a living daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake life itself on it a thousand times... And this is the work which the Holy Spirit performs in faith. Because of it, without compulsion, a person is ready and glad to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, out of love to God, who has shown this grace. Thus it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light." (LW 35, 370-1, Prefaces to the New Testament.) What Luther is skillfully doing here is distinguishing between Christ's mission and your vocation or faith and works: the source is faith and the fruit is love. And that is why we spend so much of our time as pastors and teachers preaching that which creates the faith that alone saves, and yet is the source of truly good works for the neighbor. "The truth of the gospel is this, that our righteousness comes by faith alone, without works of the law. The falsification of the Gospel is this: that we are justified by faith but not without works of the law." (LW 26, 88)

**Faith, then, has several powers**, but for now I will discuss one of the most poignant powers that teaches the exchange between the sinner and her Christ. Since Christ dwells in the inner/new man (Mary Life) by faith and thus is evangelically obedient in faith, the inner/new man (Mary Life) is united with Christ, “just as a bride is united with her bridegroom...Christ and the soul become one flesh. And if they are one flesh there is a true marriage between them—indeed, the most perfect of marriages, because human marriages are but a shadow of this one true union. Given the marriage between Christ and the soul, it follows that they hold everything in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly, the soul that trusts Christ can boast and glory in him since it regards what he has as its own. And it follows that whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own. Let us look at this exchange in more detail and we shall be able to see its invaluable benefits. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation while the soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith enter the picture and sins, death, and damnation are Christ’s while grace, life, and salvation are the soul’s. For if Christ is a bridegroom he must take upon himself that which are his bride’s and he in turn bestows on her all that is his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers? The result is a most pleasing picture, not only communion but of a wondrous battle (*Mirabelle duellum*) that leads to victory, salvation, and redemption.”

Once and always the Mary Life is seeded, just as the good tree is seeded, nurtured, and grown by the Word (Mary Life), Luther can begin to talk about the outer man, (The Martha life) that is the old being that still hangs around your neck.



Because of the abundance of life and power that is given the inner/new man by faith which truly makes a Christian, "*this old life, then, is surplus!*" It is to be given away, without remainder to those most needful. And this is the place for the second verse of Luther's thesis in "*The Freedom of a Christian*": A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. The distinction is: insofar as a Christian is free, no good works are necessary. Insofar as a Christian is a servant, all kinds of good works are done." Now we see the field of vocation is laid ahead of us in this old world.

In this old world where we remain, *simul*, for a bit longer, our outer man is called into the lives of others through the myriad of vocations in the Luther's organizing of the three main estates: the church, the family, and the state.

In baptism we have been raised to new life in Christ in faith and salvation, then for the first time these estates are opened to us so that we might be made salt and leaven in the old world. Luther takes up the discussion of the outer man in two parts: Restraint of the body and service of neighbor.

First, regarding the outward actions of the body, "While the new Christian has no need of the law and good works, the law is properly regulated to its earthly and temporary location in restraining the body, or, as Luther likes to call it, "the law in my members." "In this life [we] must control [our] body and have dealings with men. Here [in this old world, for the old world, not for salvation] the work begins." Thus your Martha life.

It is important for us as post-modern and enlightened individuals to hear, that when Luther uses terms such as "progress" or "growth" as he does in places like *The Freedom of a Christian*, the explanation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Article to the Creed in the

*Large Catechism* or even in his most famous *Greater Galatians Commentary* (1535), he does not use these terms in the scheme of the ladder that by moral progress and growth we are somehow ascending ever higher to glory and God. God has come down, all the way down in the flesh, in creation which he has never left, not that we should become like God, but that we may finally become truly human here on earth being made of good use for the neighbor. Therefore, the use of terms like progress and growth by Luther (a pre-modern!) is not “up and out” en route to glory attempting to escape death, but “down and in” toward creation, toward the neighbor in vocation, and finally all the way down and into the grave. So the good works you do out of faith do not make you a (adjectival) “good” Christian, but they make you good for the neighbor.

**This brings us to Luther’s second point concerning the outer man:** the service to the neighbor. Here, the old self, “puts on the neighbor;” Since it is not I who lives, but Christ lives in the Christian, then the Christian lives in the neighbor. This is the truly ecstatic life: living outside the self in another. This is where Luther says we become like “little Christ’s” to one another, not that we are their salvation, but that we bear one another up in both joy and suffering and the cross: “May I never boast in any thing except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Gal. 4:16) My Son, my daughter, my husband, my students, do not merely bring me joy, they are my joy; I do not merely love them, they are my heart on the outside. So Luther says, your outer man is your neighbor. While my inner life in Christ is hidden in God (Col. 3:3), wrapped in Christ Jesus my Lord and his righteousness, his grace, his forgiveness and his

resurrection, my old/outer/Martha life is under the law and remains for now in this old groaning creation. Since Christ has been wrapped in your sin, and you wrapped in his righteousness, your outer life wraps your neighbor who needs milk, bacon, pancakes, coffee, a beer, to have their diaper changed, or for you to defend their country's freedom, to have a law-gospel sermon preached to them, a lecture on Christology, clean underwear, the absolution announced, not to be run over by the Family car, a fair price for their gas, milk, and in Nebraska, good price for soy and corn.

In this surplus life, “we should be guided in all our works by this one thought alone—that we may serve and benefit others in everything that is done, having nothing else before our eyes except the need and the advantage of others.” To top it off, listen to this beer guzzling reformer, centuries before there was P-90x, Crossfit, Robert Atkins, the nicotine patch, or Schick Shadle rehab centers, and before Obamace/Trumpcare were on the radar, when he says, “This is why caring for your body is also a Christian work. If the body is healthy and fit, we are able to work and save money that can be used to help those in need.” While I am sure he felt it a joyful sacrifice of the body to sample the beer of his bräu-mistress of a wife, Katherine von Bora, there was more to the freedom of a Christian when he recalled in a sermon drinking beer with fellow reformers, “I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s word; otherwise, I did nothing. And while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it.” (Lull, 287)

It should be clear now, *that vocation is the fruit of justification, but not a part of it*, as works do not make a righteous man, nor do they make him a believer. That is the work of preaching of the gospel of Christ's forgiveness of sins for your sake. But in the various estates, faith is indeed very active, sacrificing the body for the sake of the neighbor until the body becomes food for worms.

Now, Luther is the neologist on vocation, giving a word formerly reserved for the clergy which separated the holy orders from the common orders new meaning to be used across all walks of life, with no ontological hierarchy of being. In fact, for Luther, all God given vocations are sanctifying, not because they are saving, but because they are God given and are beneficial toward the neighbor. Vocations are where God sends us to be served up in this old world and to die, and it is possible that this death is one that we come to enjoy: getting lost in the call of your child to "come play Lego's with me," or caring for the dying parent who spent their life pouring out their life for you, or baptizing the infant brought to the church doorstep, trusting in the power of God's immutable promise to a little baby. Each of these callings draw us out of ourselves, lifts our heads from our navels, call us out of our dens of isolation, be it a man cave, beer shed, or she shed, to serve the neighbor who needs something from you in the ordinary and mundane things of life.

The main trouble we have in our day is that as sinners we prefer self chosen crosses, some kind of discipleship or even a missional community that misunderstands baptism, not as the beginning and end of the Christian life, but the ineffective ritual to which I must add something, and therefore also mistakes vocation as some kind of electoral college to the popular vote: yes, Jesus may have

baptized me as a baby, but clearly I have back slid into the pit of hell and will certainly die if I don't amend my life. The next move is, not to return to the promises of baptism that make a Christian, then the attempt is made to escape the sacrifice of the body to the neighbor, any and every neighbor in the God given vocations of the church, the family, or work, which all are certain death, as though a cross of your own choosing will spare you suffering and death. Gene Edward Veith observes, "Good works...are not the self invented works of private piety, which purport to sever God but which are often insulated from other human beings." (24) Veith continues, "Today even Protestant Christians have often slipped into the assumption that serving God is a matter of 'church work' or spiritual exercises, such as devotions and Bible studies. Churches set up programs that can take up every night of the week. Some Christians are so busy doing church activities, making evangelism calls or going to Bible Studies that they neglect their spouses and children. Some Christians are preoccupied with the 'Lord's work' while letting their marriages fall apart, ignoring the needs of their children, and otherwise sinning against the actual responsibilities to which God has call them. But according to the doctrine of vocation, the church is the place where Christians meet each week to find the forgiveness of Christ, feed on God's Word, and grow in their faith. Whereupon they are sent into their vocations—to their spouses, children, jobs, and culture where that faith bears fruit in acts of love." (29) We are caught in the old way of thinking, that death is still in front of us and we are acutely aware how vocations call us to die, and so we are in a constant frenzy to avoid it, keep it at bay with new, better ways of being religious, creating a new kind of monasticism. Death is not in front of you, it is

behind you, literally in your past, defeated by Christ for you, for you are baptized. This is why we as Christians speak of our existence, not so much as from life to death, but from death to life. In this way, all of creation and the vocations in this world open up to us.

The main vocations God has given in this old world are what Luther calls, **The Three Estates:** *Ecclesia* (The Church), *Oeconomia* (The Household: Marriage and Family, business, education) and the *Politia* (The State: Government, Work, community).

The first estate is the church, because it is given not late at Pentecost, but as Luther observes in his *Commentary on Genesis* (1535), the Church first arrives in the Garden of Eden, to Adam. Since the church is wherever the word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered, there is no better preacher than God himself, giving his very first sermon to Adam, saying, “Eat from every tree of Paradise, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, do not eat.” “Here we have the establishment of the church before there was any government of the home or of the state.” (LW 1: 103)

When Eve is added to Adam, then the family and household is established. The woman is created to be about her husband and he about his wife. This is for the threefold purposes of companionship, fidelity, and procreation. Luther’s own words on this vocation puts him in a league far above Harlequin: “The wife so binds herself to a man that she will be about him and will live together with him as one flesh. If Adam had persisted in the state of innocence, this intimate relationship of husband and wife would have been most delightful. The very work of procreation also would

have been most sacred and would have been held in esteem. There would not have been the shame stemming from sin which there is now, when parents are compelled to hide in darkness to do this. No less respectability would have attached to cohabitation than there is to sleeping, eating, or drinking with one's wife. Therefore was this fall not a terrible thing? For truly in all nature there was no activity more excellent and more admirable than procreation" (LW 1:117-18).

Once children arrive, the vocation of parent commences in such a way that your life before the birth of the child is instantly and forever in the past. The birth of a child is the death of the parent, but then the parent is raised to an entirely new walk of life: putting on the child. Once again, Luther is far ahead of his time in the teaching of child wearing that is presently *en vogue*. This is the sort of death and resurrection to new life in the old world that you take great joy and find yourselves saying things like, "You remember what life was like before we had kids? Yes? No? But we would never have it any other way!" For the Christian, the vocation of raising children is an equation that the world can't reconcile: at the end of everyday, you are completely exhausted, and yet your cup overflows. Luther has a famous quote from his treatise on *The Estate of Marriage* (1522) which captures the sense of the death of the old sinner who is bound to despise the vocations of family and the new creature who receives changing of the poopy diaper as a truly holy and sanctifying deed: "Now, observe that when that clever harlot, our natural reason...takes a look at married life, he turns up his nose and says, "Alas, must I rock the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores, and on top of that care for my wife, provide for her,

labor at my trade, take care or this take care of that, do this and do that, endure this and endure that, and whatever else of bitterness and drudgery married life involves? What, should I make a prisoner of myself? O you poor, wretched fellow, have you taken a wife? Fie, fie, upon such wretchedness and bitterness! It is better to remain a priest or a nun....and compel my children to do likewise! What then does the faith say to this? It opens its eyes and looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit, and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels. It says, "O God, because I am certain that thou hast created me a man and hast from my body begotten this child, I also know for certain that it meets with thy perfect pleasure. I confess to thee that I am not worthy to rock this little babe or wash its diapers, or to be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother. How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am serving thy creature and thy most precious will? O how gladly will I do so, though the duties should be even more insignificant and despised...I am certain that it is pleasing in thy sight." (LW 45:39-40)

The household is the primary and proper place where law rules in this temporal kingdom, as well as the dolling out of the fruits of the new creature. Luther talks about the reality of the sinner and the fruit of the new creature working together in this old kingdom for the sake of the care and preservation of the neighbor. The old Adam in us will take the garbage out by the coercion of the law; the new creature of faith takes the garbage out spontaneously without the law's command and before the law comes. Either way, the care and preservation of the



old creatures is to preserve their life here while they wait in readiness for the hearing of the gospel which alone bears the promise of the eternal life to come.

*Recently, my husband and I were awakened in the night by another round of childhood flu that left the two of us, our son, and our son's bed soaked in gloppy, putrid vomit. As I scooped up our son on the way to the bathtub, through his tears, he cried, "I love you, mom." While the smell of the room nearly triggered my own visceral reaction to join in the spewing, my heart was overflowing with love, gratitude, and awe that God would entrust the care and upbringing of one of his amazing creations to me. My husband often puts it this way, "Can you believe it! After these amazing beautiful little creatures are born, the doctors place them in your arms and say, Congratulations! You have a daughter/son!" And then they actually let you take them home with you!"*

The third estate, *politia*, sometimes referred to as the government, was not yet present at in the beginning of the Garden of Eden but entered because of sin. One of the most helpful places in Luther on the government is, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed*." Beware: if you do not want to become brilliantly political in your thought and practice, better not read it. On the other hand, if you find yourself a political type, memorize this piece. I will leave off this presentation one of his key distinction between the person who has been made a Christian by the spiritual kingdom and how they are then freed from the temporal sword for themselves, yet may serve the temporal sword for the sake of the weak and needy. In so far as the Christian individual is concerned, Luther advises, "Behave in such a way that you bear everything, so that you may not need the governing authority to help you and serve or be beneficial or essential for you, but that you may turn and

help and serve it, being beneficial and essential to it...On the other hand, as regards your help of neighbor and being of benefit to the authorities, "you are under obligation to serve and assist the sword by whatever means you can, with body, goods, honor, and soul... Therefore, if you see that there is lack of hangman, constables, judges, lords, or princes, and you find that you are qualified, you should offer your services and seek the position." (Lull, p. 436)

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