

from which this excerpt is taken, was published in 1827.

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Spot the Fallacy
OVERSPECIFICATION PART II OR WHAT OR WHO DO YOU HAVE EYES FOR?
.....(Mike L Anderson)

* Feature article *
CONCERNING CHRISTIAN LIBERTY
.....(Martin Luther)

"Christian faith has appeared to many an easy thing; nay, not a few even reckon it among the social virtues, as it were; and this they do because they have not made proof of it experimentally, and have never tasted of what efficacy it is. For it is not possible for any man to write well about it, or to understand well what is rightly written, who has not at some time tasted of its spirit, under the pressure of tribulation; while he who has tasted of it, even to a very small extent, can never write, speak, think, or hear about it sufficiently. For it is a living fountain, springing up into eternal life, as Christ calls it in John iv"

Martin Luther, (Th.D. Wittenberg, 1483-1546), the great German religious reformer, needs no introduction. The excerpt is taken from his "Concerning Christian Liberty" published in 1520. The text is in the public domain.

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Wisdom from the Past
ASCENSION DAY

by John Keble

Why stand ye gazing up into Heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven. Acts i. 11

Soft cloud, that while the breeze of May
Chants her glad matins in the leafy arch,
Draw'st thy bright veil across the heavenly way
Meet pavement for an angel's glorious march:

My soul is envious of mine eye,

That it should soar and glide with thee so fast,
The while my grovelling thoughts half buried lie,
Or lawless roam around this earthly waste.

Chains of my heart, avaunt I say -
I will arise, and in the strength of love
Pursue the bright track ere it fade away,
My Saviour's pathway to His home above.

Sure, when I reach the point where earth
Melts into nothing from th' uncumbered sight,
Heaven will o'ercome th' attraction of my birth.
And I shall sink in yonder sea of light:

Till resting by th' incarnate LORD,
Once bleeding, now triumphant for my sake,
I mark Him, how by seraph hosts adored,
He to earth's lowest cares is still awake.

The sun and every vassal star,
All space, beyond the soar of angel wings,
Wait on His word: and yet He stays His car
For every sigh a contrite suppliant brings.

He listens to the silent tear
For all the anthems of the boundless sky -
And shall our dreams of music bar our ear
To His soul-piercing voice for ever nigh?

Nay, gracious Saviour--but as now
Our thoughts have traced Thee to Thy glory-throne
So help us evermore with thee to bow
Where human sorrow breathes her lowly moan.

We must not stand to gaze too long,
Though on unfolding Heaven our gaze we bend
Where lost behind the bright angelic throng
We see CHRIST'S entering triumph slow ascend.

No fear but we shall soon behold,
Faster than now it fades, that gleam revive,
When issuing from his cloud of fiery gold
Our wasted frames feel the true sun, and live.

Then shall we see Thee as Thou art,
For ever fixed in no unfruitful gaze,
But such as lifts the new-created heart,
Age after age, in worthier love and praise.

Humour from the web (From the Internet)

THE STAND UP SKEPTIC

Just curious - Is the number of the beast in Australia 999?

I'm lying on my belly in hospital because my cousin takes things
just
a little too literally. She told me she was working as a
sculptor's model and I asked if he sculpted gargoyles?

She said, "if you're going to dish it out you should be able to take it too."

I said, "of course, hit me with your best shot."

She discharged a shotgun at my backside.

There would be many more atheists in this world if people would only use their god-given intelligence!

An aromatherapist's car engine seized on the freeway last week. Now she knows the real meaning of essential oil!

I asked a homeopath if it was easy to learn homeopathy. He said, "Sure, there's nothing to it!"

Did you read where a psychic investigator has been missing for over a week? Other psychics say if they don't locate him soon they may call in a police officer to help with their investigations.

I attended a lecture on lycanthropy. The speaker had no trouble convincing me that people can turn themselves into animals - he made a complete ass of himself!

NEWS BRIEFS (From the Internet)

* The worlds largest fungus discovered

At 10 square kilometres *Armillaria ostoyae* is the size of a suburb! Canadian researchers have discovered that the entire growth of this tree-killing fungus is a single individual between 2000 and 8500 years old. Research co-ordinator Dr. Catherine Parks says that "From a broad scientific view, it challenges what we think of as an individual organism." Source: USDA Forest Service

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2003/03/030327074535.htm>

* Seeing gravity waves from the edge of the universe

Within just two years researchers believe they will begin detecting the first signs of gravity waves from the edge of the universe. Powerful supercomputing techniques are promising researchers a new look at the universe. Gravity waves were predicted by Einstein's general theory of relativity, but until now, were too weak to be visible to humans. Apart from shedding light on the collapse of neutron stars and collisions between black holes, researchers are unsure what mysteries in the universe might be uncovered. Source: Washington University In St. Louis

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2002/10/021029070349.htm>

* Adaptive solution to the puzzle of the partial wing

How can proto-wings be adaptive before birds learnt to fly? The answer, says Kenneth Dial of the University of Montana, is that they acted like spoilers on a racing car. In "wing-assisted incline running" modern-day hatchlings that cannot fly use wing flapping to keep themselves sure-footed as they negotiate a 50 degree incline. Older birds could even climb a 90-degree incline.

The mistake we often make in evolution is to assume that intermediate structures were used for the same function as advanced structures. The puzzles frequently evaporate when one looks for different functions for the intermediate stages.
Source: National Science Foundation
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2003/01/030117081305.htm>

* Mystery of the moon impact solved

Fifty years ago Dr. Leon Stuart photographed what he believed to be the flash of a massive fireball resulting from the impact of an asteroid-sized body on the moon. Skeptics dismissed the photograph as inconclusive, contending instead that the flash was from a meteorite entering the earth's atmosphere. It seems that Stuart was right after all. Working backwards from the photograph, scientists have discovered a recently formed crater that matches the dimensions they had predicted. An impact of that size (the energy released was 0.5 megatons) occurs only once every 50 years. Source: NASA/Jet Propulsion Laboratory
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2003/02/030225070912.htm>

* Closest relative to land plants discovered

It is a group of green algae that have branching threads, live in fresh-water, reproduce with egg and sperm and is called Charales. And it is the closest relative to the land plants. About 470 million years ago something very similar to Charales branched out onto land. The find promises better understanding of how the first land plants evolved and came to flourish on terra firma.
Source:
National Science Foundation
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2001/12/011214080951.htm>

* First look at antimatter

Antimatter has been created before, but now reasearchers led by Gerald Gabrielse have been able to keep it intact long enough to study. The antihydrogen atom that was made has negatively charged antiprotons and positively charged positrons (or antielectrons). So far, as expected, antihydrogen has the same properties as hydrogen. But if any differences are found Gabrielse says it will be "the biggest discovery in physics in decades" that would "require scientists to reformulate the most basic laws of physics". Source: National Science Foundation
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2002/10/021030073823.htm>

* Monster croc fossil discovered

A crocodile 10 meters long that ate dinosaurs and 4 metre long fish has been found in 110 million-year-old Cretaceous rock in Niger. *Sarcosuchus imperator* was a hefty 7 000kg and had a lifespan of at least 50 years. *S. imperator* was not an ancestor of modern crocodiles but is closely related. It most closely resembles the endangered Gharial crocodiles of India. Source: Yale University
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2001/11/011101060724.htm>

* Brain chemical linked to alcoholism

Researchers have found that mice bred for alcohol-craving have higher levels of a peptide called urocortin than normal mice. The peptide was traced to a region in the midbrain called the Edinger-Westphal nucleus. The finding is significant because it is the first that establishes the importance of the brain in alcohol abuse and may suggest ways to combat alcoholism. Source: Oregon Health & Science University
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2003/03/030326073831.htm>

* Small asteroids are less of a threat

Ten years ago scientists suggested that asteroids as small as 100 metres in diameter can cause devastating tsunamis that reach for kilometres inland. Since on a celestial scale these impacts occur fairly frequently at every 250 years, the concern prompted several research projects at taxpayers expense. Several independent studies reveal that the threat was greatly exaggerated. Dutch scientists have a geological record going back 10 000 years that revealed only one tsunami - and it had a terrestrial origin. Experimental research on waves generated by explosions up to 500kg of TNT showed that most of the energy would be dissipated before reaching the shoreline. Source: University Of Arizona
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2003/03/030318074036.htm>

* Pioneer 10 says its last good-bye

Pioneer 10 was launched on 2nd March 1972. At 50 000km/hr it was the fastest craft to leave the earth. It took 11 hours to reach the moon, 12 weeks to cross the orbit of Mars, 18 weeks to reach the asteroid belt and 10 months to reach Jupiter having accelerated to 130 000km/hr. It took twenty years to reach the orbit of Pluto. After 30 years it is 12 billion kilometres from home and has sent its last detectable signal earlier this year. The rich data sent by Pioneer 10 has given scientists a vastly improved understanding of Jupiter, the solar wind and cosmic rays entering our portion of the Milky Way. Its next milestone is the star Aldebaran 68 light years away in the constellation Taurus. Pioneer 10 will take 2 million years to reach it. Bon voyage!
Source: NASA/Ames Research Center
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2003/02/030226073614.htm>

Spot the Fallacy
OVERSPECIFICATION PART II OR WHAT OR WHO DO YOU HAVE EYES FOR?

by Mike L Anderson

In a Wizard of Id cartoon Gwen sidles up to Rodney.

Gwen: "look into my eyes, Rodney ... tell me what you see."

Rodney: "the conjunctiva, the cornea, the iris, the sclerotic, the anterior aqueous chamber, the ..."

Gwen: "Forget it."

Rodney is extracting more from Gwen's eyes than she intended to

convey. She signalled romance; he observed anatomy. For her it was about the who; for him it was about the what. He has read more into her non-verbal cues than was there. And by taking more he ends up with less. Rodney has fallen into a fallacy called overspecification (1). I wrote about this fallacy in the last issue for the column. I thought, then, that I had discovered such a clanger, that it would be hard to find a better one. I was wrong. So, I am going to break with the tradition of a new fallacy for a new column.

In a recent article entitled "Glimpses of Christ the Creator" physician Demick (2) provides a commentary on these words of Jesus: "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (3).

He correctly recognises that these verses are a warning against selfishness and greed, but then says that this moral instruction depends on a natural phenomenon. "... the higher truth has no meaning unless the natural truth is also sound. Jesus' words specifically mention light in the eyes "filling" the whole body, implying a systemic physiologic effect for light perceived through the eyes." He goes on to say "... developments in neurophysiology have shown that light sensation in the eye is indeed important for the healthy functioning of the entire body." Demick may be well intentioned, but do you see overtones of Rodney's overspecification here? Demick does not merely see the simple words of a humble carpenter; he sees the discourse of a physician-scientist. The sermon of the Nazarene becomes the lecture of a professor.

And by taking more, he ends up with less. The words of Jesus are no longer allowed to stand alone, independent. Instead, they must be undergirded by neurophysiology. He distracts the eyes of faith from a focus on Jesus towards a focus on a contemporary scientific field. Neurophysiology is a fascinating and successful field, but what a benighted (opaque?) place to find light for the soul!

It's worse than this. Demick goes so far as to make Jesus into a type of Rodney: "Jesus Christ with the all-seeing eyes of the Creator, knew centuries in advance of modern science the incredible microtechnology that is involved in the mere opening of a flower, and the formation and coloring of its petals. Thus, he was able to say with truth and confidence concerning the flowers that "even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." He thinks that one needs biology to properly appreciate the beauty of a flower, that one needs scientific know-how to pronounce on aesthetics with authority, but that fortunately, Jesus, being omniscient, had oodles of it.

Actually, Demick has glimpsed less of Jesus the Creator and more of a projection onto Jesus of contemporary pedantic foibles. What I find remarkable about Jesus, is how unlike Rodney He is. Jesus owned up when He was ignorant (4). Indeed, He "... did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing" (5). Christologists find this self-emptying of God-incarnate so important that they have a formal term for it, kenosis, from the Greek (6). Jesus is extraordinary in how He did not parade His knowledge about. He spoke "in parables, so

that, though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand" thus reserving the secrets of the kingdom of God for His disciples (7) and He was cautious to keep things from His disciples when they were not yet ready to bear it (8).

Rodney's missed a great opportunity to tell Gwen that he only has eyes for her. And let us hope and pray that all Christians will only have eyes of faith for Jesus.

NOTES

1. Sire, J.W. (1980) Scripture Twisting. InterVarsity Press, Downers Gove, Illinois. pp. 63-64.
2. Demick, D. (2003) Glimpses of Christ the Creator. Impact No. 355: i-iv.
3. Matthew 6:22-23.
4. Matthew 24:36.
5. Phillipians 2:6-7
6. O'Collins, G. (1995) Christology. A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus. Oxford University Press, pp 248-249.
7. Luke 8:9-10
8. John 16:12

* Feature article *
Extracts from CONCERNING CHRISTIAN LIBERTY
by Martin Luther

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

... But you will ask, What is this word, and by what means is it to be used, since there are so many words of God? I answer, The Apostle Paul (Rom. i.) explains what it is, namely the Gospel of God, concerning His Son, incarnate, suffering, risen, and glorified, through the Spirit, the Sanctifier. To preach Christ is to feed the soul, to justify it, to set it free, and to save it, if it believes the preaching. For faith alone and the efficacious use of the word of God, bring salvation. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. x. 9); and again, "Christ is the end of the law for

righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. x. 4), and "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. i. 17). For the word of God cannot be received and honoured by any works, but by faith alone. Hence it is clear that as the soul needs the word alone for life and justification, so it is justified by faith alone, and not by any works. For if it could be justified by any other means, it would have no need of the word, nor consequently of faith.

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

Since then this faith can reign only in the inward man, as it is said, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. x. 10); and since it alone justifies, it is evident that by no outward work or labour can the inward man be at all justified, made free, and saved; and that no works whatever have any relation to him. And so, on the other hand, it is solely by impiety and incredulity of heart that he becomes guilty and a slave of sin, deserving condemnation, not by any outward sin or work. Therefore the first care of every Christian ought to be to lay aside all reliance on works, and strengthen his faith alone more and more, and by it grow in the knowledge, not of works, but of Christ Jesus, who has suffered and risen again for him, as Peter teaches (1 Peter v.) when he makes no other work to be a Christian one. Thus Christ, when the Jews asked Him what they should do that they might work the works of God, rejected the multitude of works, with which He saw that they were puffed up, and commanded them one thing only, saying, "This is the work of God: that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent, for Him hath God the Father sealed" (John vi. 27, 29).

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

But you ask how it can be the fact that faith alone justifies, and affords without works so great a treasure of good things,

when so many works, ceremonies, and laws are prescribed to us in the Scriptures? I answer, Before all things bear in mind what I have said: that faith alone without works justifies, sets free, and saves, as I shall show more clearly below.

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

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

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

Then comes in that other part of Scripture, the promises of God, which declare the glory of God, and say, "If you wish to fulfil the law, and, as the law requires, not to covet, lo! believe in Christ, in whom are promised to you grace, justification, peace, and liberty. All these things you shall have, if you believe, and shall be without them if you do not believe. For what is impossible for you by all the works of the law, which are many and yet useless, you shall fulfil in an easy and summary way through faith, because God the Father has made everything to depend on faith, so that whosoever has it has all things, and he who has it not has nothing. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all" (Rom. xi. 32). Thus the promises of God give that which the precepts exact, and fulfil what the law commands; so that all is of God alone, both the precepts and their fulfilment. He alone commands; He alone also fulfils. Hence the promises of God belong to the New Testament; nay, are the New Testament.

Now, since these promises of God are words of holiness, truth, righteousness, liberty, and peace, and are full of universal goodness, the soul, which cleaves to them with a firm faith, is so united to them, nay, thoroughly absorbed by them, that it not only partakes in, but is penetrated and saturated by, all their virtues. For if the touch of Christ was healing, how much more does that most tender spiritual touch, nay, absorption of the word, communicate to the soul all that belongs to the word! In this way therefore the soul, through faith alone, without works, is from the word of God justified, sanctified, endued with truth, peace, and liberty, and filled full with every good thing, and is

truly made the child of God, as it is said, "To them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John i. 12).

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

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

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

On the other hand, what greater rebellion, impiety, or insult to God can there be, than not to believe His promises? What else is this, than either to make God a liar, or to doubt His truth—that is, to attribute truth to ourselves, but to God falsehood and levity? In doing this, is not a man denying God and setting himself up as an idol in his own heart? What then can works, done in such a state of impiety, profit us, were they even angelic or apostolic works? Rightly hath God shut up all, not in wrath nor in lust, but in unbelief, in order that those who pretend that they are fulfilling the law by works of purity and benevolence (which are social and human virtues) may not presume that they will therefore be saved, but, being included in the sin of unbelief, may either seek mercy, or be justly condemned.

But when God sees that truth is ascribed to Him, and that in the faith of our hearts He is honoured with all the honour of which He is worthy, then in return He honours us on account of that faith, attributing to us truth and righteousness. For faith does truth and righteousness in rendering to God what is His; and therefore in return God gives glory to our righteousness. It is true and righteous that God is true and righteous; and to confess this and ascribe these attributes to Him, this it is to be true and righteous. Thus He says, "Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. ii. 30). And so Paul says that Abrahams faith was imputed to him for righteousness, because by it he gave glory to God; and that to us also, for the same reason, it shall be imputed for righteousness, if we believe (Rom. iv.).

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

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

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

Thus the believing soul, by the pledge of its faith in Christ, becomes free from all sin, fearless of death, safe from hell, and endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of its Husband Christ. Thus He presents to Himself a glorious bride, without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word; that is, by faith in the word of life,

righteousness, and salvation. Thus He betrothes her unto Himself in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies (Hosea ii. 19, 20).

Who then can value highly enough these royal nuptials? Who can comprehend the riches of the glory of this grace? Christ, that rich and pious Husband, takes as a wife a needy and impious harlot, redeeming her from all her evils and supplying her with all His good things. It is impossible now that her sins should destroy her, since they have been laid upon Christ and swallowed up in Him, and since she has in her Husband Christ a righteousness which she may claim as her own, and which she can set up with confidence against all her sins, against death and hell, saying, "If I have sinned, my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned; all mine is His, and all His is mine, as it is written, My beloved is mine, and I am His" (Cant. ii. 16). This is what Paul says: "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, victory over sin and death, as he says, The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. xv. 56, 57).

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

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

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

Under this figure was foreshown Christ, the true and only First-born of God the Father and of the Virgin Mary, and a true King and Priest, not in a fleshly and earthly sense. For His kingdom is not of this world; it is in heavenly and spiritual things that He reigns and acts as Priest; and these are righteousness, truth, wisdom, peace, salvation, etc. Not but that

all things, even those of earth and hell, are subject to Him-for otherwise how could He defend and save us from them? -but it is not in these, nor by these, that His kingdom stands.

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

As Christ by His birthright has obtained these two dignities, so He imparts and communicates them to every believer in Him, under that law of matrimony of which we have spoken above, by which all that is the husbands is also the wives. Hence all we who believe on Christ are kings and priests in Christ, as it is said, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter ii. 9).

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Luther, M. (1520) Extracts from "Concerning Christian Liberty.'
The text was published in the same year as Pope Leo X's papal bull that called Luther to recant. The text is unedited except for the addition of quotation marks (eds.)