

The Perfect Law of Liberty

by John Schaadt

[This essay was published in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, April 1957.]

James 1:25: *But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*

This single verse from the first chapter of the Epistle of James may well be taken as a summary of the entire Epistle. The Apostle James is urging his readers to live the Christian life, to come to a full enjoyment of the Gospel. They are to do more than just take a casual look at the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They are to look at it again and again. They are to live in it. He promises that they will then be blessed by it. He shows them the Gospel as

The Perfect Law of Liberty

and urges them to LOOK AT IT.

I

Many persons have been disturbed by the word “law” in this expression. Dr. Martin Luther had difficulty with the entire Epistle of James partly because he took the word “law” in this verse to mean the Commandments of God. He was disturbed because he thought James was telling people to find freedom in and through the Ten Commandments whereas Paul and other inspired writers tell us the Commandments of God pronounce a curse and a doom because we have not kept them.

Actually the word “law” here means simply principle. We have the term used that way in the expression, the law of gravity. As far as I know, no legislature has passed a law that if you slip off a branch of a tree you are necessarily obligated to fall to the ground. And still it is a law; it is a principle, that that is just what you will do.

We speak of the law of supply and demand. Again, I know of no legislature that has drawn up this law. In fact, some are trying to legislate it out of existence. But the law or principle still stands: The price of a product will be determined by the amount that is available as related to the number of people who are interested in obtaining it.

The word “law” is used in the sense of principle also in Scripture. Romans 3:27 speaks of the “law of faith” or principle of faith. This principle informs us that “A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law,” and that therefore all boasting of man’s own goodness is excluded.

In Romans 7:21, Paul says, “I find a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” Again, law is used in the sense of principle or truth. He says, this is true, that when I try to do what is good, I still continue to do evil.

Romans 8:2 speaks of the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” which has brought freedom. Again we have here the principle of life in Christ Jesus.

The Gospel, then, is the law of liberty, or the principle of liberty. Jesus expressed this same idea in the words, John 8:31,32, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” The Word of God, the good news regarding Jesus Christ, makes us free; it is the principle of liberty, the law of liberty.

We need something to restore to us the liberty God gave at creation to the first man and woman. Adam and Eve were sinless, holy persons. They were free. They might have lived a life without any sin. If they had, they would have remained completely free from any death. In their freedom they lived in close fellowship with God. We are told the Lord spoke with them and that “they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the

garden in the cool of the day,” Genesis 3:8. Since the fall into sin there is a certain barrier between man and God. God still talks with man, but now the barrier of man’s sin restricts the fellowship between God and man. And the saddest part of it is that man does not always realize what has been lost. The Second Psalm tells us that the leaders of the world plan against the Lord saying, “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.” The wise men of the world think that freedom is to be found in being free from God, in being separated from God. They do not recognize that separation from God is the greatest slavery.

Left to ourselves we are and always will be slaves of sin, slaves of death, slaves of the devil. But God brings us freedom. There is a law of liberty and this is a perfect law of liberty. It is perfect because it is God’s.

God planned it. The way of salvation is not something man would have planned. In fact, the way of salvation “is to them that perish, foolishness,” I Corinthians 1:18. It is not a logical plan according to man’s logic, nor a reasonable plan according to man’s reason. But then God’s logic and reason are far superior to ours. Already before the creation of the world God knew that man would sin. He knew that man would be doomed to an eternal destruction from which he could not possibly free himself. If man was to be set free, God must set him free. God made His plans for doing this.

God announced the plan as soon as our first parents fell into sin. “The Seed of Woman” would save them. Some One to be born into the world would be the Savior of the world. God elaborated on this plan during the coming centuries. Sometimes He spoke in words: “Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,” Isaiah 7:14; “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace,” Isaiah 9:6. He shall be born at Bethlehem, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting,” Micah 5:2. “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: ... He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed,” Isaiah 53:3,5.

Sometimes God spoke in pictures. The sacrifices in the temple pictured the One who would save as the Lamb without spot or blemish, whose blood was to be shed for the guilty. The brazen serpent pictured the One who would save as one who would be lifted up on a cross in order to save all who would look at Him.

Through word and picture God announced His plan of salvation. Many centuries passed before God fulfilled the promise of a Savior. But God was not sleeping during this time. He was busy setting the stage for this wonderful deed. The history of the people of God in the Old Testament is the history of God’s preparation of salvation. The Savior would be born of the Jews in the land of the Jews. Accordingly, God led the family of Jacob into Egypt and kept it there until it numbered 600,000 adult males besides women and children. When the 70 had grown into a nation God brought them out of Egypt and gave them the land of Canaan. Though He permitted them to be chastised by their enemy neighbors because they frequently turned from Him to worship idols, He did not permit the tribe of Judah to be destroyed, for He had promised the Savior from that tribe.

In the fullness of time, when God in His wisdom knew that all things were now ready, He sent His only Son into the world as a tiny infant. This infant grew day-by-day and year-by-year. Most of the years of His life were quiet and seemingly unimportant. But they were extremely important. Also during these years Jesus was gaining our liberty for us. God had given commandments. Humans had failed to keep them. Jesus kept them for us. When we read that the twelve-year-old Jesus returned to Nazareth and was subject to Mary and Joseph, we are to be aware of the fact that Jesus is here gaining liberty for us. He is keeping the law that we have so often failed to keep, “Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother.” When Jesus heals and comforts the sick, He is in a positive way keeping the Fifth Commandment that we have also failed to keep. For as Luther points out, this Law that says, “Thou shalt not kill” includes the command that we help and befriend our neighbor in every bodily need. During all the years of His life Jesus lived a life of perfect righteousness, of perfect obedience to the Law. Part of our salvation is the fact that this righteousness is then credited to us. “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ,” Galatians 3:27. The righteousness of Christ covers us even

more perfectly than our suits of clothes cover us. When the Judge looks at us poor wretched sinners, He does not see poor wretched sinners; He sees the perfect righteousness of His Son Jesus Christ.

But Jesus' work of saving us was not limited to living a sinless life; it included dying a sinless death. After having experienced the cheers of the crowds who witnessed His miracles, He also endured the opposition of the people when they came to learn that His kingdom was not of this world. People turned against Jesus and even tried to kill Him. One of His own disciples went to the enemies of Jesus and offered to betray Him if they would but give him thirty pieces of silver. On the last Thursday of His life Jesus led His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane where He prayed fervently that if it were possible this cup of terrible suffering might pass from Him. His heavenly Father answered His prayer by sending an angel, from heaven to strengthen Him.

Judas the betrayer approached with a large group of men to take Jesus captive. Before permitting Himself to be taken, Jesus demonstrated the truth that no one could take His life from Him—that He would decide how and when He would lay down His life for us.

He permitted Himself to be taken before various men for trial. Here He suffered physical abuse and mental agony. Early the next morning He heard the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, give the people their choice; he would release unto them Jesus, called the King of the Jews, or Barabbas, the criminal. He heard the crowd cry out, "Give us Barabbas!" Again He heard them say regarding Himself, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him."

He was led from Jerusalem to the place of execution carrying His own cross part of the way. There outside the city He was fastened to a cross, cruel nails driven through His hands and feet. He was not alone in His death. Two recognized criminals were crucified together with Him. Throughout the morning and part of the afternoon He suffered the torture of this barbaric means of execution. He suffered the ridicule of those standing beneath the cross who declared, "He saved others; himself he cannot save," Mark 15:31. He suffered the ridicule of one of the criminals crucified with Him.

He suffered the greatest agony when He called out, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani!*" that is to say, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). In this moment Jesus was suffering the full penalty of man's sin. The load of sin that Jesus was carrying was so great that it actually separated Him from His heavenly Father. Separation from the Heavenly Father is the real penalty of sin, and Jesus was here experiencing it in all its terror.

Shortly after this He declared triumphantly, "It is finished," John 19:30. The work of redeeming the world was finished. Jesus had kept the law of God perfectly. He was now suffering death to make full payment for the sins of the whole world.

Certain of His followers received permission to take His body down from the cross and place it in a tomb nearby. The disciples were downcast. Their Lord was dead. But what His friends forgot His enemies remembered. Before His death Jesus had said, "After three days I will rise again," Matthew 27:63. His enemies did not believe He would rise. But then, His disciples might steal His body and then say that He had risen. This must not happen! And so the grave is sealed and guards are stationed to watch it.

The guards could keep away anyone who might wish to get into the tomb; they could do nothing about the resurrected Lord, who decided to leave the grave. They could not prevent the angel from coming down and rolling away the stone to show that the Lord had indeed risen as He had promised.

The risen Savior appeared to His disciples during the next forty days, demonstrating the fact of His resurrection and instructing them in matters pertaining to the kingdom of God. After that He led them out to a mountain from which He ascended into heaven, taking His rightful place at the right hand of the Father.

These are historic facts. And the facts add up to this truth that by His life and death the Lord Jesus earned our salvation for us.

There you have the law of liberty, the perfect law of liberty. It is complete. Man need add nothing, nor dare to. Who of us would dare to touch up and thus "improve" a painting by Leonardo da Vinci? Who would change some note and thus "make better" a cantata by Bach? And who would be so presumptuous as to tell God, "I have figured out some ways of improving your law of liberty"? The fool who tries to improve God's way of salvation only succeeds in producing a new religion that cannot possibly save.

The salvation earned for us by our Lord Jesus is perfect. On the cross Jesus said, "It is finished." My work is completed; nothing need be done to make it better. The Scriptures tell us, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," Romans 8:1. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin," I John 1:7. Any attempt to add to this work of Jesus will only contaminate this perfect law of liberty. Any trust in the good person you think you are or the good works you think you have done constitutes a denial of the salvation purchased by our Lord at so great a price.

Luther finds no room for any goodness on his part when he confesses his faith in his explanation of the Second Article of our Creed. He says, "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord; who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent sufferings and death." Not a word of Luther's own righteousness; the Lord has done it all.

II

The Apostle James is not satisfied with just a casual glance at the perfect law of liberty. In verses 23 and 24 of the first chapter he brings a comparison. He speaks of a person who takes a quick look in a mirror, perhaps to see whether his face is clean or his hair combed. He looks for a moment and then goes his way, quickly forgetting what he saw. In fact, he would have a difficult time sketching on paper what he has seen of himself.

James says that our look at the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not to be something that hurried. We are not simply to glance at the perfect law of liberty once in a while; we are to CONTINUE IN IT. It is open to debate whether by the words "continueth therein" James means simply continues looking or whether he means continues looking and keeps on living by what he has seen. No matter how we understand these two words our understanding of the entire verse will be the same, for later in the verse James makes it very plain that he does want us also to live a life under the influence of that Gospel.

He wants us to remain in close contact with the Word. "For the word of God is living and active," (Hebrews 4:12, RSV). It is the "power of God unto salvation," Romans 1:16. It is the bread of life; it is the water of life. As our bodies, though they may be strong, need food and water every day in order to remain alive and strong, so our souls, though they may be strong in the Christian faith, need to be nourished continually if they are to retain their vigor.

We have countless opportunities for receiving this Word of God. In church, in parochial school, in Sunday school, in vacation bible school, in bible class, in meetings of various organizations of the congregation, the perfect law of liberty is proclaimed. That same law of liberty is in our homes in Bibles that we can read and understand and enjoy. The Gospel is proclaimed in our hymnals, our prayer books, our church papers, and our devotional material. The proclamation of liberty is contained in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The perfect law of liberty lives in our hearts and minds so that even when we do not have a Bible in our hands we have the Word of God with us and can profit by thinking about it and pondering its greatness. Stay in close contact with the perfect law of liberty so that you may benefit from it.

Continuing in the perfect law of liberty will also mean keeping it pure and undefiled. It will mean accepting and keeping the entire Bible. Recognizing Jesus as our Lord God who has set us free, we shall eagerly hear what He has to say to us. We shall read the gospels in order to be able to read the words and sermons of our Lord and to read the great things He has done for our salvation. But we shall not limit ourselves to the gospels nor even to the New Testament. Our Lord Jesus often referred people to the Old Testament and indicated that the things written there are also to be believed. He indicated that He believed the account of Jonah and the big fish, Matthew 12:40. He said He believed that God had created the first man and woman as we are told in the first chapters of Genesis. He put His stamp of approval on the Old Testament Scriptures particularly when He told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. You will recall that the rich man, living a life without God, died, and went to hell. There he thought of his brothers who were living the same kind of life and were

therefore headed for the same place. He begged that Lazarus be sent back from the dead to warn his brothers of their terrible fate. He thought that if they saw someone from beyond the grave they would believe. He was told, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them... If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead," Luke 16:29,31. By this parable Jesus informs us that the Scriptures—and at that time only the Old Testament had been written—are a more forceful testimony to the truth of God than even the raising of someone from the dead—that people who will not believe the words of God in the Scripture would not become followers of God by witnessing a resurrection.

If our Lord Jesus had so great an opinion of the Holy Scriptures, certainly we mortals who have placed our entire hope for salvation in Him shall have the same opinion of this Holy Book. We shall accept all of it; we shall believe every word of it.

History has shown that in order to keep the words of Scripture we also need creeds drawn up by men. People may ask, "What do you believe?" and you may answer, "I believe everything that is in the Bible." They may ask, "What does the Bible tell you?" You answer, "It tells me about Jesus." "What does it tell you about Jesus?" As soon as you start to answer that question you are starting to propound your creed. We need creeds. We need statements of beliefs. I recently saw a book written by a man who opposed creeds. He said, in effect, "We do not need any creeds. All we need is the Bible." He then continued to point out in one hundred or more pages what he believed to be contained in the Bible. Thus the man who opposed the adoption of the Apostles' Creed or any other statement of belief unwittingly presented his own creed, and that filling a book.

We need creeds as tools for teaching Christianity. We are to instruct the children of our family and the children of our church. What shall we teach them? We shall teach the Bible, of course. But where are we to start? Would you insist on having your children work through the entire Old Testament before bringing them the truth of the birth of Jesus as it is recorded in the Gospels? Of course not! You will pick from the Bible those things that you consider the chief parts of Christian doctrine and teach them. When you have formulated these parts you have a creed.

We need creeds that we can show to adults who may be interested in becoming members of one of our congregations.

We need creeds in order to maintain for ourselves and for our children the truths of the Bible. When many religious leaders are claiming to teach the Bible and are at the same time denying the virgin birth of Christ, denying the miracles of Christ, denying the atoning value of the death of Christ, denying the resurrection and ascension of Christ, then we need creeds which state positively and plainly the things which we believe on the basis of Scripture.

Together with other Christians we subscribe to the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed. Besides, we declare that we believe the statements of Luther's Small Catechism and Large Catechism. We wholeheartedly accept the Augsburg Confession, the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, and the other symbols that make up the Book of Concord. In addition, we may from time to time find it necessary to draw up and adopt additional creeds or statements of belief in order to make clear what we believe, teach, and confess. Creeds should be drawn up carefully. They should state the truth revealed in God's Bible and they should state it as clearly as possible.

But it is not enough that our church has adopted certain creeds and confessions of faith. It is not enough that our pastors have pledged themselves to all the teachings of the Book of Concord. It is not enough that the members of our congregations have memorized and claimed to believe Luther's Small Catechism. For after all, Christianity is not merely a matter of the mind. It is not merely a matter of memorizing something like two times two equals four, two times three equals six, or Boise is the capitol of Idaho. Christianity is also a matter of the heart and of the will. To memorize creeds and then bury them in a corner of the mind where they will not affect the lives of ourselves and others will benefit no one. To bury a creed in the corner of our minds is just as sinful as it was for the man in the parable to bury his one talent in the ground until his master would return and call for it. Our creeds are to be used. They are to be read and studied. They are to be proclaimed to the world. At our synod convention in August, 1955, Essayist Professor Werner Franzmann used a slightly different picture in telling us that the Word of God need not be kept in a deep freeze in order to keep it pure and

undefiled. Yes, we want the Word of God kept pure even as we want our food kept pure. But even as pure food does not benefit anyone until it is distributed and eaten, so also the pure Gospel does not benefit any one until it is distributed and received.

So then, see that the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity. See that it is taught first of all in your congregation. Use every legitimate means of distributing the Word to the members of the church as effectively as possible. Show them the perfect law of liberty.

See to it that the Word of God is taught in the community. Use an aggressive campaign to reach the unchurched people near your church. Personal contact still remains the most effective means of influencing an individual. The pastor, busy though he is, must find time to speak to the unchurched people in his area in order to bring the truths of Christianity to them. The members of the congregation can also do this. You do not have to be a graduate of the Seminary or a learned theologian, in order to invite your neighbor to your church. You do not have to have a college education to tell people that Jesus is their Savior, too. The mission hymn speaks the truth when it says,

If you cannot speak like angels, if you cannot preach like Paul,
 You can tell the love of Jesus, you can say He died for all.
 If you cannot rouse the wicked with the judgment's dread alarms,
 You can lead the little children to the Savior's waiting arms.

You need not be prepared to answer all the arguments you will receive. Indeed, you ought not argue at all. Simply speak of our Savior. You may be surprised at the results.

Local conditions will determine how valuable the newspaper and radio may be in bringing the Word of God to your community. I personally have found the newspaper to be quite useful and effective. In any case, consider carefully every legitimate means of broadcasting the news of the Savior. After all, He did tell His disciples, "What ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops," Matt. 10:27.

And do not adopt the attitude that it's no use, or that people do not want to listen to the Gospel, that they want something else. The preaching of the Cross has always been foolishness to them that perish. You must expect that many will refuse to follow the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The world persecuted Jesus and His disciples; do not be surprised if it refuses to listen to you. But do not become discouraged. After all, the Lord did succeed in converting you to Christianity. He can, through the Word that you speak, convert others.

See to it also that the perfect law of liberty is declared throughout the world. Our synod has missionaries in Africa, Asia, and Europe. In some instances the reports tell us not to expect sudden growth but to wait for future results of hard work now being done. In other instances our efforts have been blessed far beyond the hopes of those who planned the work. One of the greatest thrills at our last Convention was experienced when we heard Asibong Okon, a native of Nigeria, Africa speak to us. Mr. Okon was in this country studying for his doctor's degree at the University of Wisconsin. He spoke of himself as "one of your kids." He said he was one of four kids because Missionary William Schweppe had baptized him in Nigeria. He was later instructed and confirmed by this same missionary. He brought us the thanks of his people for having given to them the whole truth of the Scripture. He urged us to continue our work even though other Christian churches are at work in his country. For, he told us, these other churches do not teach the entire Bible. He mentioned specifically, "They tell us that baptism is not for the little kids." As he continued he made a most remarkable confession of his Christian faith, a faith we helped bring him. When he had finished, President Oscar Naumann arose and said, "I wish one hundred thousand of our people could have heard this." Yes, our mission work does bring results. The knowledge of these results is strong inducement to continue to support with prayers and gifts the workers who are proclaiming liberty in Christ in various parts of the world.

The creeds we adopt are to be living things. They are to affect our minds and hearts and wills. They are to result in genuine good works. Why inject good works into a paper on the liberty of a Christian? ...Good works belong there. As Luther says in his introduction to the Epistle to the Romans, "O, faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, so that it cannot help doing good without ceasing. It does not ask whether good works are

to be done, but before one asks, it has already done them and is always doing them.” Perhaps this can be illustrated by the oft-told tale of the slave girl who was put on the auction block some years ago. A kind man continued to bid until he had purchased her. The slave girl planned to go with him to his home as his slave. He told her, “You need not come with me; I have bought you to set you free. Go wherever you wish.” The girl could hardly believe her ears. Free after having been a slave all her life. This man was just too good. After a bit of thought she told him, “Then I shall go with you and serve you in order to thank you for my freedom.” Still serving, but not now as the slave serving out of fear of the whip, but as the free person serving out of love and gratitude. Similarly, the Christian who has been set free from the Law, the Christian who need not fear the curse of the Ten Commandments, willingly tries to keep these laws of God. He does this, not out of fear, but out of love.

Another illustration may help. Most states have laws requiring a man to support his wife and children. If he refuses to do so, he may be thrown into jail. There you have a law with a real threat behind it. And yet I am confident that every man in this room is free from that law. He is free from it because he willingly supports his wife and children. His conduct toward his family would be the same even though the law were repealed, for his service to his family is not something forced by a threat of a jail sentence but something which comes from love for wife and children.

Apply this truth to the Ten Commandments of God. As Christians we are free from these Commandments. Even though we have disobeyed every one of them, the Lord God will treat us as though we had kept them all. At the same time we try to live up to these Commandments out of gratitude for the salvation given us by our Lord.

The Epistle of James lists a number of ways in which Christians will continue in the perfect law of liberty, in the free life of the Gospel. He tells us the Christian will learn patience. Recognizing that Jesus has set him free from sin, death, and the devil; realizing that he is now God’s beloved child, he will be able to endure affliction that may come to him (James 1).

Living a life of service to Him who has first served, the Christian will be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath,” 1:19. Knowing that he is a wretched sinner, who but for God’s grace would certainly be on the road to hell, he will not be quick to point out the failings of others, but will be slow to speak—speaking critically of others only when it is really necessary, and then after carefully weighing his words; speaking not in wrath, but in love that he may help the person who needs correction. The hymn writer has stated the matter well when he has prayed:

Oh, let me never speak, what bounds of truth exceedeth;
Grant that no idle word, from out my mouth proceedeth;
And then, when in my place, I must and ought to speak,
My words grant power and grace, lest I offend the weak.

The person who has continued in the perfect law of liberty will also “visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,” 1:27. We have many opportunities to do this. We can do it directly for those who live near us; we can work through institutions of the Church to reach others. Certainly our Lord has given us a wonderful incentive for such deeds of kindness in His picture of the Last Judgment. “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” And when the Christian will ask, “When did we ever do all these things for you?” He will answer, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me,” Matthew 25:24, 35, 36, 40.

The Christian will also “keep himself unspotted from the world,” 1:27. Recognizing that he has been cleansed from the filth of his sin, appreciating that cleansing, he will not deliberately return to wallow in the mire.

The Christian will not be a respecter of persons, giving the rich the place of honor in the church and relegating the poor to the least desirable place, if indeed he welcomes him to the building at all, 2:1–9. He will realize that the soul of each person has value before the Lord, that “joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that *repenteth*,” Luke 15:7, whether that sinner be millionaire or pauper.

The Christian will not be a brawler, or a fighter, 4:1. Being happy in the peace that has been established between him and his God he will earnestly desire peace with his fellowmen.

He will put away pride, James 4:6, knowing that he is a wretched sinner who has nothing of which to boast, knowing that he can only plead, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” Luke 18:13.

He may have earthly treasures and he may enjoy earthly treasures. But he will seek first those treasures which are in heaven “where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal,” Matthew 6:19, cf. James 5:1–11.

He will not swear unnecessarily nor falsely, for he does not wish to take in vain the name of the gracious Lord who has saved him, James 5:12.

He will earnestly offer his prayers in time of tribulation and his praises to God in time of joy, James 5:15.

He will pray in behalf of the sick, imploring the merciful God that He might comfort and help the ailing, James 5:14, 15.

He will confess his faults to those whom he has wronged, James 5:16, and earnestly work for the conversion of those who have gone astray, James 5:20.

These and more he will do, not because it is his painful duty, but because he earnestly desires to please the Lord who has been so good to him. He will count it his greatest privilege to be of service to the Lord who humbled Himself so that the sinner might be saved. The Christian will continue in the perfect law of liberty, not because this has been demanded of him, but because he wishes to do so.

III

James promises, “This man shall be blessed in his deed.” This implies a verdict on the part of James, the same verdict given by our Lord when He says, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,” Matthew 25:34. Come, ye blessed—you people who are well off because your heavenly Father has prepared a kingdom for you, you people who ENJOY THE BLESSINGS OF THE PERFECT LAW OF LIBERTY; or as Jesus says on another occasion, “Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven,” Luke 10:20. There is your blessedness, your names are written in heaven. You have the certainty of eternal life. The deeds to your heavenly mansions are properly filled out and recorded. And this certainty can bring you joy and comfort already now. The basis of that comfort is that God is your Friend; more, He is your heavenly Father. You are a child of God, an heir of God. We may consider people blessed because they are of royal parentage. We are more fortunate; our Father is God. What need we then fear?

We are free! We are free from the Commandments with their “Thou shalt” and their “Thou shalt not.” We will not be judged on the basis of the Commandments, we will not be charged with the many times we have broken God’s laws. When we stand in the final judgment, we shall be judged as persons who have been clothed with the righteousness of Christ, the perfect righteousness of Him who could challenge His enemies, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (John 8:46)

We are free! Once our master, we are now free from the devil. Though he continues to tempt us to sin, we have the perfect weapon to overcome him. With Jesus we can say, “It is written,” Luke 4:4. With Luther we can rejoice,

Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill; they shall not overpower us.
This world’s prince may still, scowl fierce as he will
He can harm us none, he’s judged; the deed is done;

One little word can fell him.

Our joy in the law of liberty can give us the strength to say in the face of temptation, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against the loving God who has set me free?”

We are free! We are free from death, which terrifies so many. “Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die,” John 11:26. “Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise,” Luke 23:43. “Even death now cannot part from its Lord the trusting heart.”¹ For the person who does not know the perfect law of liberty death is a most terrible thing. It is plunging into the great unknown, never to return. Death in the family of an unbeliever is a very severe thing, for it separates loved ones without giving any reason to believe that there will ever be a reunion. The unbeliever is left to search vainly for comfort in the words, “What can’t be cured must be endured.” Death brings suffering and sorrow also to the Christian and to the Christian mourner. But in this suffering there is comfort. We will be reunited with our loved ones who precede us in death. Our own death is but a sleep from which our bodies will awaken on the great day when our Lord Jesus returns visibly to earth. This assurance brings freedom from death. This freedom from death is illustrated in the many Christians who have chosen to suffer martyrdom rather than deny the perfect law of liberty. The unbelieving world can never understand, but it must always marvel at a religion that frees men from death to such an extent that they will rather die than give up the faith that has set them free.

We are free! Armed with this freedom we can go through life with a certain calm peace. “If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, ‘For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,” Romans 8:31–39.

* * *

A word particularly to the pastors present: This is the message you are to proclaim to your people. Preach it! Do not be ashamed of it. Do not add to it or take away from it. Proclaim in all its truth and beauty and simplicity the precious liberty of each Christian.

And do not take away that liberty when you begin to preach sanctification. Do not club the people with “you must” and “you ought” and “you should.” For as C.O. Rosenius says in “The Believer Free From The Law,” page 73, “Before His (God’s) eyes all that piety and godliness is repugnant and rejected which is practiced only because we “shall,” we “ought,” we “must,” that is, practiced only from a legalistic motive, and which does not flow forth from a liberated, blessed, and graceful spirit,” and page 75, “If it be only a question of salvation, you may very well spare yourself the trouble of doing good and instead give yourself to a free life in sin, you will lose nothing by this; you will at any event not be saved by such holiness as springs from a legalistic motive.” Only as much as you do because you are undeservedly pardoned and free from the Law—only so much true sanctification do you have.

We desire genuine sanctification and genuine good works on the part of the members of our church. Let us preach the love of Christ. Let us preach the perfect law of liberty. If we continue to do that, good works will follow on the part of the hearers.

* * *

¹ Lutheran Hymnal, 206, verse 3.

And a word particularly to the members of the congregations: Do not tire of your pastor's preaching of the perfect law of liberty. Apparently many persons are tiring of the Gospel. It is as Luther warned the Germans of his day when he compared the Word of God and the preaching of that Word to a rainstorm that stops some place for a while and then goes on. He warned, "And you Germans must not think you will have it for ever; for ingratitude and contempt will not permit it to remain."² Professor August Pieper more than twenty years ago showed how that warning has been fulfilled; how the German nation, so richly blessed with the preaching of the Word of God at the time of Luther, has practically lost the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus. Professor Pieper warns that America faces the same danger if it despises the Word of God. In fact, many churches operating under the name of Christian have already lost the Gospel. In various telecasts originating in St. Paul, Minnesota, during the past few years a pastor who claims to represent one of the leading Protestant denominations has made the following comments:

He raises the question, "Does the Bible really contradict itself?" and answers, "Yes, there are many contradictions in the Bible. I cannot mention them all."

He speaks about the value of the death of Christ and says, "I cannot go along and say that Christ died for our sins ... I do not believe that Jesus Christ was an expiation as it were for our sins, a sort of scapegoat on whom we put our sins and have freedom of sins in that way."

He speaks of the Biblical account of the resurrection of Christ and says that he does not believe in the physical resurrection of Christ.

We ask, "How much Christianity is preached to his congregation which regularly goes through the motions of confessing the Apostles' Creed?" The pastor denies the infallibility of Scripture even though Jesus has said, "The Scripture cannot be broken," John 10:35.

Its pastor denies the value of the death of Christ even though the Scriptures tell us, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sins," I John 1:7. Its pastor denies that Jesus rose from the dead even though the gospels record this wonderful event and the epistles are full of references to it.

Perhaps more important is the question, How does a man get away with such a denial of Christianity and still stay as pastor of a Protestant denomination? Certainly part of the answer must be indifference on the part of the members. For where people love the perfect law of liberty, where they love the Gospel of Jesus Christ, where they love the good news that Christ "was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification," Romans 4:25, there they will not long tolerate a man who tramples these glorious truths under foot and denies the Lord that bought him.

Don't say, it can't happen here. It can happen wherever the truths of the Gospel are not appreciated.

So when your pastor on Christmas Day preaches the same old thing that Jesus, the very Son of God, was born for us at Bethlehem; when your pastor on Good Friday preaches the same old thing that Jesus, the very Son of God, died for our sins on Calvary; when your pastor on Easter Sunday preaches the same old thing that Jesus rose from the dead, giving us assurance that we shall rise also—do not *yawn*, "We've heard all that before." Rejoice that by God's grace you are privileged to hear these wonderful truths again and again.

* * *

For the next few days we will be busy discussing and acting on various resolutions to be brought before this Convention. I cannot tell you what resolutions will be presented to you for action. I can tell you some that will not be. You will not be asked to vote on universal military training, labor laws, farm laws, the United Nations, or any related items which will take up a great deal of time at many church conventions this summer. Some people would criticize us for ignoring these problems which are facing the country. They would speak of us as Dr. Blake, President of the National Council of Churches, spoke of another Protestant denomination in a

² Quoted in *Quartalschrift*, October, 1955, page 258.

telecast interview this past Easter Sunday. He said that they were “otherworldly” and indicated that he did not approve of their “otherworldliness.”

Do not object to the “otherworldliness” of your church body but rather rejoice in it. Rejoice in the fact that in all our business here during this week we will be concerned about one thing, THE PERFECT LAW OF LIBERTY. In all our deliberations we shall be concerned about the best means of increasing our own appreciation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the best ways of bringing the joy of the Gospel to those who do not yet have it. Join in the work of the Convention in that spirit. During these days and all the days of your life look into the perfect law of liberty and continue therein, being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, and you will be blessed in your deed.