

"Lord and Servant"

Text: 1 Corinthians 9:15-23

"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 5:10-11)

Dear Fellow Servants:

The following quote is credited to Martin Luther, writing in his great treatise entitled Concerning Christian Liberty: *"A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone."*

Contemplate the quote for a bit, for it represents one of the great paradoxical truths of the Christian faith. A paradox, by way of reminder, is a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that, when investigated or explained, may prove to be true. ("Deep down, he's really very shallow." Or as when a pathological liar says, "I always lie.")

In fact some have argued that the paradox that Christians are both "subject to none and subject to all" represents one of the key tenets that separates Christianity from all other religions. That's not to say that other faiths, other religions, do not advocate love of any kind, or that those who practice other religions are incapable of what most in the world understand by "love." It means that only the Christian faith advocates a selfless, self-sacrificing love – rooted in, and exemplified by, the self-sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.

That is, in fact, the only way Luther's statement makes any sense – which is, as we will soon see, not Luther's statement at all but God's. How can Christians be both lords of all and servants of all? How can we be both subject to none and subject to everyone?

This morning we are going to explore that great paradox on the basis of our text. That text is found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, the 9th Chapter:

^{ESV} 1 Corinthians 9:16-23 For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge,

so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. ¹⁹ ¶ For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

So far the pure, holy, inspired Words of our Heavenly Father. We acknowledge, O Holy Spirit, that you have promised to work in our hearts through these your words. We pray then that you would do just that – work powerfully in our hearts this morning as we hear and study these your words. To this end we pray, "Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!" Amen.

Certain topics seem to appear again and again throughout our Synod as the subject of discussions, conference papers, and convention essays. This ought to tell us that these questions, these challenges, will always be with us. Experience tells us that the temptation is always present to look at what has been written and taught before, and to accept all such as our answers today. Certainly the past helps us to gain direction for the future, but each generation needs to rediscover God's truth for itself.

Some confuse the Christian's position that each generation must rediscover God's truth for itself with what secular humanists tell the youth of our society. They too hold that young people must discover truth for themselves, but they go on to tell them that that truth must come not from an outside source but from within the individuals themselves – and they then spend years persuading young minds of just what their own truth is. Institutions that once championed learning through the free flow of thoughts and ideas have now become the exact opposite. Students are allowed to hear and speak only that which is allowed by their masters. Ideas that contradict their groupthink are no longer voiced and discussed; they are shouted down and bullied into silence.

The obvious problem in the current non-search for truth is that God's Word (the Bible) is now excluded as source material. That means that when an idea is voiced that has its source or foundation in God's Word,

it is immediately discarded as invalid. Clearly when those are the rules, the process is doomed from the very start. If "truth" must come from within, mankind will simply never find it. Our present society is the perfect example of what happens when man removes God from the decision-making process and replaces his will with man's emotions, feelings, inclinations, and tendencies. Then you get a society that quite literally shakes with indignation and rage when an animal of any kind is killed for food, but yawns apathetically when a seven-month-old human baby is taken from his mother's womb, dismembered, and discarded.

Clearly then it is more important now than ever before that each generation turn to God's Word to rediscover God's truth for themselves, and to themselves wrestle with the questions of past generations. One of those oft-recurring topics that needs to be studied and restudied by every generation is the understanding and balance between legalism and antinomianism. Don't let the terms intimidate you. Legalism carries a variety of definitions, but it refers, in general, to using the law in ways that God never intended it to be used – especially as a club to correct behavior in Christians. Antinomianism literally means "against or opposed to the law." In other words, legalism is misusing the law among Christians while antinomianism is the belief that among Christians the law has no use or benefit of any kind. Make sure you have these definitions straight in your mind before you go on. They are critical to rightly understanding this whole topic.

This study is worthy of our time, in part because it is essential to a correct understanding of the gospel and the Christian faith. It shouldn't surprise us that the devil struggles mightily to steer God's Church into one ditch or the other. In fact a timeline of Church History reveals something of a pendulum of error in each generation. Some generations demonstrate a greater tendency toward legalism, others to antinomianism. Where do you think we are today?

While legalism is certainly also a clear and present danger today, our society (together with an appalling number of professing Christians) is awash in antinomianism – in lawlessness. A growing number of Christians today feel perfectly justified in tossing out what God says and following a course of their own choosing – which is probably as clear a definition of antinomianism as you will find. Solomon spoke of this subtle yet diabolic wickedness in Proverbs 14:12: ***"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."***

How else could a church find itself condoning lesbian pastors, openly homosexual bishops, pre-marital cohabitation, same sex marriage, and

the view that all religions are equal, if that church did not first discard God's law and substitute man's emotion, compassion, or natural inclination?

Nor are the problems that result from dismissing God's law restricted to such high-profile sins. Pastors create countless spiritual problems whenever they fail to label sin as sin. They most often do so because they fear offending or alienating members caught up in those sins. Church members add to the problem when they no longer lovingly admonish one another because they don't want to meddle, ***because they*** want to be seen as tolerant and enlightened, or because they worry that hard feelings may result if they follow God's plan (as if eternity in hell is preferable to potential hard feelings here on earth). Churches add to the problem when they no longer discipline obviously impenitent members, and opt instead to do additional harm by creating and perpetuating the illusion that all is well, and that sin is of no real consequence.

Clearly the greater danger in our society ***today*** is lawlessness, but what exactly does our text for this morning have to say about any of this?

Paul is here telling us that Christians, in a way, are both above the law and under that law. We are above the law in the sense that we have been freed from the condemnation of the law. In other words, since we know that we are saved not by works, but by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, the demands of the law no longer threaten or terrify us. We are above the law in the sense that we stand outside of the condemnation of the law through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus suffered the punishment for our lawlessness as our substitute. In that way the Christian has an incredible freedom that no other human being can enjoy. That's what it means that ***"a*** Christian is the most free lord of all, and subject to none." Jesus Christ, when he paid the full debt for all sins, provided every Christian with an ***otherwise unattainable*** freedom.

But Paul then goes on to tell how he routinely reaches out to others by placing himself under the demands of the Law. He did this by adopting the non-sinful ceremonial laws or customs of those he was trying to reach with the gospel: For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I

became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law."

The "law" referred to here by Paul is the ceremonial law, which means that Paul would adapt his behavior so as not to prevent the Jews from truly hearing the message of the gospel. That means, for example, that Paul would routinely make sure that he was ceremonially clean before he entered the temple, he would make it known that he was circumcised, and he would not eat ceremonially unclean food in their presence. He was not under obligation to do these things, but he observed them for the sake of the gospel and out of love for human souls.

Yet note well here that Paul nowhere says that the moral law is either optional or obsolete. The moral law is that part of God's will that extends to all people of every generation, both Old and New Testament. In other words, it was God's will in the day of Moses that human beings should not worship other gods, lie, steal, murder, commit adultery, dishonor the Word, covet, and so forth. That is still God's will for us today. We know this to be true because Jesus repeated the moral law in the New Testament, therefore when it comes to God's moral laws, man is never free to pick and choose which he will obey

To this the lawless of our day cry foul. "How," they ask, "can you say that Christians are free from the threats of the law (any laws, all laws) but are still obligated to obey the moral law? If Christians are truly free, they ought to be free to do whatever they please." Obviously anyone who makes such a claim does not understand the Christian faith. The law no longer threatens or terrifies Christians because Christ has already paid for all lawlessness. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." (Galatians 3:13) They also don't understand that a new man is created in the heart of every Christian, and that the will of this new man is in perfect agreement with God's will. That means that God never has to force his will upon that new man within every Christian. When the Christian has "put on" the new man, he willingly ransacks the Scriptures because the greatest delight of that new man is to walk in harmony with the will of his God. True Christians keep God's law not in fear, but in loving obedience.

How extraordinarily evil then for anyone who calls himself a Christians today to pretend that the new man could ever or would ever choose any course of action that he knows to be contrary to God's will, revealed in the moral law. Why would any Christian want to do away with God's revealed will for our lives? His law holds no terror or condemnation for us, for we are saved by grace through faith. Jesus has freed us from the curse of any

and every law, having become a curse for us. That moral law, on the contrary, is a precious and holy guide throughout all generations.

Yet just here is where we find the paradox, or apparent contradiction. Though we have perfect freedom in Christ, we are also here taught that God's will is that we demonstrate that freedom by willingly serving all. That means that if denying myself a freedom that is mine will help my neighbor, I will deny myself. It means that I will, as Paul put it, "become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some."

God grant us the grace to rejoice in the freedom that is ours through faith in Jesus Christ, and the wisdom to know how and when to set aside that freedom out of love for my neighbor. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Isaiah 40:21-31** Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ²² It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; ²³ who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. ²⁴ Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. ²⁵ To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing. ²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? ²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹ He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. ³⁰ Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; ³¹ but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

^{ESV} **Mark 1:29-35** And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. ³¹ And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them. ³² ¶ That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. ³³ And the whole city was gathered together at the door. ³⁴ And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. ³⁵ ¶ And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

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The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – February 7, 2021

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 744 (Stanzas 1 & 3) (Brown Hymnal)

"How Great Thou Art"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Epistle Lesson: (Isaiah 40:21-31) Our first reading emphasizes the greatness of our God, especially in comparison to the fragile nature of mortal men. It is foolishness therefore to imagine that anything we think, say, or do can ever be hidden from our great God. Yet our reading ends with a word of encouragement for all Christians. Though our God is unimaginably great, and to resist him is futile, those that are on God's side can know without question that their powerful God can be trusted to protect and provide for them no matter what the challenges or obstacles.

Psalm 118 (Supplement page 29) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Mark 1:29-35) Many Christians have wondered – often aloud – why God does not seem to perform obvious, visible miracles today like He did in Jesus' day. Yet we are reminded that miracles were not an end in themselves. While they demonstrated God's love, they served to verify that Jesus was who and what He said He was. Note also how Jesus recognized the need for prayer – even if it required rising early to make time.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 295 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"The Law of God Is Good and Wise"

The Sermon – 1 Corinthians 9:16-23 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Lord...and Servant"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 295 (Stanzas 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"The Law of God Is Good and Wise"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 744 (Stanza 4) (Brown Hymnal)

"How Great Thou Art"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (23) Average (30)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School (No Bible Class)
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	–Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Mark Tiefel has returned the call to Redeemer of Cheyenne. Faith of Markesan has called Teacher Ross Kok. Pastor David Schaller is considering the call to ILC. Grace of Sleepy Eye has called Teacher Andrew Roehl.

Pastor Out of Town – Pastor Roehl is attending CLC Board of Trustees meetings in Mankato this week. He is scheduled to return on Tuesday. Our thanks to the faithful laymen who are conducting the Sunday service this morning in the Pastor's absence.

Pastor Emeritus Warren Fanning – The Lord called Warren Fanning home to himself last Sunday. Pastor Fanning was the first shepherd of St Paul Lutheran Church. Please remember his wife Janet in your prayers, as we thank our God for his grace and mercy, and for the gifts he gave to our congregation through Pastor Fanning. No plans have been announced for the memorial service, but the intention at this time is to share it online.

Also in our Prayers – The 15 year old grandson of Pastor John and Kris Klatt was called home suddenly this week. Details are not yet known. Please remember the Klatt's in your prayers.