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*II Corinthians 9:19-23:*

***“Christians Are Free for the Sake of the Gospel”***

- I. Introduction.*
- II. Christians are free from the condemnation of the Law.*
- III. Christian freedom should not be a stumbling block to others.*
- IV. Christians live through the Gospel.*

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## CHRISTIANS ARE FREE FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL

### I. Introduction.

Freedom. It's a powerful concept, and one on which we Americans place a high value. When we speak of freedom, we are generally referring to the rights guaranteed by our constitution and the freedom from tyranny and foreign oppression. But freedom can take on many forms. The freedom which we have through Christ is of a somewhat different nature, but we will get into that more a little later. The one thing that all forms of freedom have in common is a burden of responsibility. Freedom is not a license to abuse the liberty it affords.

Consider the example that we see in many college students when they realize that they are no longer under 24/7 parental supervision. Many begin to live lives of excess. They stay up all night, party like hedonists, and spend that easy to obtain student loan money frivolously. Eventually, though, reality sets in. If they stay up all night, they won't make it to class. If they don't make it to class, they won't be in college for long. If they don't use that student loan money wisely, they won't be able to afford their books, meal plans, and the essentials of life. Hopefully, the good lessons on responsibility instilled in them by their parents will eventually kick in and they will begin to behave responsibly. This may be one of the most important lessons one learns in college.

So we must be on guard against abusing our freedom in all of its forms. In particular, we must be careful not to abuse the freedom which Christ has won for us on the cross.

### II. Christians are free from the condemnation of the law.

As Christians redeemed by Christ, we are free from the condemnation of the law. Christ paid the penalty for our sins. In exchange, he has given us his righteousness. We are free from the guilt of our sins. Not just our particular sins, but our very sinful nature has been covered by the righteousness of Christ. Thus we have been freed from the chains of the law that would drag us into the depths of hell for eternity. Christ has paid the penalty, but on this side of heaven we must still contend with the reality and consequences of our sin.

Some of our sins are gross, obvious transgression of God's law. Others are more subtle, and some may never find outward expression, but remain within the confines of our hearts and minds. What if those around you could read your thoughts? What would they truly think of you? Consider the expression, "I know what you're thinking." If we are truly honest, in most instances we should respond, "No, you don't. I know you don't truly know what I'm thinking, because you haven't slapped me yet."

So here we have the reality of the Christian life. On the one hand, we are counted as righteous and holy in the sight of God through the merits of Christ, and completely freed

from the fetters of the law. On the other hand, until we reach our eternal heavenly destination, we are still trapped in this wicked world and burdened by the reality of our depraved sinful nature. We're no longer bound by the law, but that does not give us license to abuse that freedom.

### III. Christian freedom should not be a stumbling block to others.

This is particularly true in our relationship with others. We are free from the law. Clothed in the righteousness of Christ, we freely stand before God as redeemed. Our works and conduct have no bearing upon our status as redeemed children of God. The righteousness which we have through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit working in us as we study the Scripture and gather together around Word and Sacrament works in us sanctification, the outward fruit of the righteousness that has been given to us.

But yet as we continue to live in a sinful world, we live in community with others. While we know with certainty that we're redeemed children of God, completely righteous in His sight, we continue to struggle with the reality of our sinful flesh. And we don't do this in a vacuum. We do this as we live our lives among others - all of our fellow believers and those outside of the church. While we know our status before God, the only evidence which they have of this are the words and deeds by which we witness to our faith in Christ. If the fruit of our lives is not in harmony with God's word or how they perceive God's word, our conduct may become a stumbling block to them and their faith.

As an example, there is an old tradition in the Roman church in which the faithful avoid eating meat on Fridays as an act of penance. As Lutherans, we find such things to be legalistic. We know that they have no bearing on the reality of our position before God. But to those who have not been catechized in our understanding of Christian freedom for the Gospel merits of Christ, such acts are a requirement of their understanding of the faith. One might find it necessary to practice restraint in the presence of those who hold to such an understanding so as not to cause offense to them. But we might also consider using such a situation as an opportunity to explain and witness our Biblical understanding of Christian freedom.

### IV. Christians live through the Gospel.

As Christians, particularly as Lutheran Christians, we know that we live our lives through the Gospel. We are no longer bound by the Law and its condemnatory power over us. The Holy Spirit working in us creates and increases our sanctification. But yet sin still reigns in our lives. The devil wages war against us through temptations of the world and our own self-centered fleshly desires. We become focused on the love of ourselves, rather than the love of God and neighbor. Me, myself, and I - my three favorite people! How can I serve you today? But then the Word of God comes in, and shows us our wretched condition, and drives us to repentance. But the Word also comforts us with the sweet message of the Gospel, that our loving Savior has paid the penalty for our sin and freed us from the bondage to it. We live in this tension between law and gospel, sin and grace, God and the devil.

St Paul says in Romans chapter 7, **"So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."** (Romans 7:21-25, ESV)

So our lives are a daily struggle. We are sinners and struggle with the reality of the temptations that bombard us, and the consequence of our wicked deeds. We are saints, freed from our bondage to that sin by the merits of Christ and sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us. We daily live our lives guided by God's Word and in the promise of our Baptism. We drown the old sinful nature, and rise again with Christ. We confess our sin and receive absolution. We are recreated as the holy people of God in anticipation of the reality of our heavenly eternity. We live our lives through the love of God, and thus love our neighbor - taking care that our freedom may not lead to his downfall.

#### V. Conclusion.

We are sinners. We are saints. We are Christians. We live our lives in community, both as the fellowship of believers and with the broader world as well. By the merits of Christ we are freed from the bondage of sin, yet we struggle with its ugly reality on a daily basis. We are ever mindful of our position in this world and take care that our Christian freedom may not cause anyone to stumble in their faith. This is the reality of our daily existence.

But rest assured, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that this reality is temporary and fleeting. The true reality will be seen in the world to come, when our daily struggle with sin will cease and the full measure of our Christian freedom that we possess through the Grace of God will be realized. Until that time we press on, knowing that we are free for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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