

LUTHERS WERKE  
AUSFÜHRLICHE AUSLEGUNG ÜBER DIE EPISTEL AN DIE  
GALATER A. D. 1535

**Law and gospel in the distress of the conscience**  
**Gesetz und Evangelium in der Not des Gewissens**



If we could believe that God Himself speaks to us in the (Holy) Scripture, we would diligently read in it and consider it our blessed workshop.

2 Tim. 3.  
Alle Schrift von Gott eingepoben, ist nitze zur  
lese, zur pfaffe, zur bekehrung, zur zucht-  
gung etc  
Wenn wir glauben könnten, das Gott selbst  
mit uns in der Schrift redet, so würden  
wir mit fleiß darinnen lesen, und sie  
für unser selige Werkstatt halten  
1540  
Martinus Luther D.

1. Tim. 3

Wenn wir glauben könnten, dass Gott selbst mit uns in der Schrift redete, so würden wir mit Fleiß darin lesen und sie für unsere selige Werkstatt halten.

1540 Martinus Luther D.

For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto  
God.

Galatians 2:19

Ich bin aber durchs Gesetz dem Gesetz gestorben auf dass ich  
Gott lebe.

Galater 2,19

Lutheran Theological Conference from 19 - 21 October 2018 in Steeden

***Ich bin aber durchs Gesetz dem Gesetz gestorben auf daß ich Gott lebe.***

***For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.***

German: Luthers sämtliche Schriften Ausgabe Walch<sup>2</sup> 9,210 (272) - 222 (309)<sup>1</sup>

English: LUTHER'S WORKS VOLUME 26 | LECTURES ON GALATIANS 1535<sup>2</sup>

**272.** Therefore we conclude with Paul that we are justified solely by faith in Christ, without the Law and works. But after a man is justified by faith, now possesses Christ by faith, and knows that He is his righteousness and life, he will certainly not be idle but, like a sound tree, will bear good fruit (Matt. 7:17). For the believer has the Holy Spirit; and where He is, He does not permit a man to be idle but drives him to all the exercises of devotion, to the love of God, to patience in affliction, to prayer, to thanksgiving, and to the practice of love toward all men.

**273.** Therefore we, too, say that faith without works is worthless and useless. The papists and the fanatics take this to mean that faith without works does not justify, or that if faith does not have works, it is of no avail, no matter how true it is. That is false. But faith without works—that is, a fantastic idea and mere vanity and a dream of the heart—is a false faith and does not justify.

**274.** Thus far we have discussed the first argument, in which Paul maintains: “Either we cannot be justified by the Law, or Christ is necessarily an agent of sin.” But this latter is impossible. Therefore it must not be conceded on any score that we are justified by the Law. We have discussed this topic carefully and at length, as it deserves, although it cannot be inculcated and believed too much.

***For I through the Law died to the Law, that I might live to God.***

**275.** This is amazing language and unheard-of speech which human reason simply cannot understand. It is spoken briefly but very emphatically. Paul seems to be speaking from a fervent and ardent spirit, with great zeal, as though he were indignant. It is as though he were saying: “Why do you boast so much about the Law, about which I do not want to know anything? Why do you din this into me so often? But if there must be a Law, I have a Law of my own.”

**276.** As though he were speaking by the indignation of the Holy Spirit, he calls grace itself “Law.” He stamps the content of grace with a new name, as an expression of contempt for the Law of Moses and for the false apostles, who claimed that it was necessary for justification. Thus he opposes the Law to the Law.

**277.** This is most delicious language. In Scripture, especially in Paul, Law is often opposed to Law, sin to sin, death to death, captivity to captivity, the devil to the devil, hell to hell, altar to altar, lamb to lamb, Passover to Passover. Rom. 8:3: “For sin He condemned sin”; Ps. 68:18 and Eph. 4:8: “He led captivity captive”; Hos. 14:14: “O death, I will be your death. O hell, I will be your destruction.” Thus he says here that through the Law he has died to the Law. It is as though he were saying: “The Law of Moses accuses and damns me. But against that accusing and damning Law I have another Law, which is grace and freedom. This Law accuses the accusing Law and damns the damning Law.”

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1 D. Martin Luthers sämtliche Schriften (hrsg. von Joh. Georg Walch) Nachdruck von CPH St. Louis 1880-1910 Verlag der lutherischen Buchhandlung Heinrich Harms, Groß-Oesingen 1987

2 CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE ® SAINT LOUIS Copyright 1963 by CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE Saint Louis, Missouri | Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 55-9898 ISBN 0-570-06426-0

**278.** Thus death killed death, but this death which kills death is life itself. But it is called the death of death, by an exuberant indignation of the spirit against death. So also righteousness takes the name “sin,” because it damns sin; and this damning sin is true righteousness.

**279.** Here Paul is the most heretical of heretics; and his heresy is unheard-of, because he says that, having died to the Law, he lives to God. The false apostles taught: “Unless you live to the Law, you do not live to God. That is, unless you live according to the Law, you are dead in the sight of God.” But Paul teaches the opposite: “Unless you are dead to the Law, you do not live to God.” The doctrine of the fanatics today is the same as that of the false apostles at that time. “If you want to live to God,” they say, “that is, to be alive in the sight of God, then live to the Law, or according to the Law.” But we say in opposition: “If you want to live to God, you must completely die to the Law.” Human reason and wisdom do not understand this doctrine. Therefore they always teach the opposite: “If you want to live to God, you must observe the Law; for it is written (Matt. 19:17): ‘If you would enter life, keep the Commandments.’ ” This is a principle and maxim of all the theologians: “He who lives according to the Law lives to God.”

**280.** Paul says the exact opposite, namely, that we cannot live to God unless we have died to the Law. Therefore we must climb up to this heavenly altitude, in order that we may establish for certain that we are far above the Law, in fact, that we are completely dead to the Law. Now if we are dead to the Law, then the Law has no jurisdiction over us, just as it has no jurisdiction over Christ, who has liberated us from the Law in order that in this way we may live to God. This supports the declaration that the Law does not justify, but that only faith in Christ justifies.

**281.** Paul is not speaking about the Ceremonial Law here. He sacrificed in the temple, circumcised Timothy, and cut his hair at Cenchreae.<sup>75</sup> He would not have done these things if he had died to the Ceremonial Law. But he is speaking about the entire Law. For the Christian, therefore, the entire Law has been completely abrogated—whether it be the Ceremonial Law or the Decalog—because he has died to it. This does not mean that the Law is destroyed; for it remains, lives, and rules in the wicked. But the godly man is dead to the Law as he is dead to sin, the devil, death, and hell, all of which still remain, and all of which the world and the wicked will inherit.

**282.** Therefore when the sophist takes Paul to mean that only the Ceremonial Law is abrogated, you understand that for Paul and for every Christian the entire Law is abrogated, and yet that the Law still remains. For example, when Christ arises from the dead, He is free from the grave; and yet the grave remains. Peter is liberated from prison, the paralytic from his bed, the young man from his coffin, the girl from her couch; nevertheless, the prison, the bed, the coffin, and the couch remain. So also the Law is abrogated when I am freed from it, and the Law dies when I have died to it; and yet the Law still remains. But because I die to it, it also dies to me. Thus Christ’s grave, Peter’s prison, the girl’s couch—all remain. But by His resurrection Christ dies to the grave; by his deliverance Peter is freed from the prison; by her restoration to life the girl is delivered from the couch.

**283.** Therefore the words “I have died to the Law” are very emphatic. He does not say: “I am free of, or liberated from, the Law for a while” or “I am the lord of the Law.” All he says is: “I have died to the Law,” that is, “I have no business with the Law.” No one could have said anything more forceful against justification by the Law than what Paul says: “I have died to the Law,” that is, “I do not care anything about the Law at all; therefore I am not justified by it.”

**284.** To die to the Law means not to be bound by the Law but to be free from the Law and not to know the Law. Therefore let anyone who wants to be alive in the sight of God strive to be found outside the Law, and let him come out of the grave with Christ. The soldiers were

astounded when Christ had arisen from the grave. Similarly, those who saw the girl raised from the dead were astounded. Thus human reason and wisdom are astounded and dazed when they hear that we are not justified unless we are dead to the Law, for reason cannot grasp this. But let us teach that when by faith we consciously<sup>76</sup> take hold of Christ Himself, we enter into a kind of new Law which devours the other Law that held us captive. Just as the grave in which Christ lay dead opened and was seen to be empty after He had risen, and Christ disappeared, so when I believe in Christ, I rise with Him and die to my grave, that is, to the Law that held me captive. Hence the Law is now empty; and I have escaped from my prison and grave, that is, from the Law. Therefore the Law has no further right to accuse me or to hold me, for I have risen again.

**285.** Consciences should be carefully taught to understand the doctrine of the distinction between the righteousness of the Law and that of grace.

**286.** The righteousness of grace simply does not pertain to the flesh. For the flesh must not be free but must stay in the grave, in the prison, and on the couch. It must be subjected to the Law and be disciplined by the Egyptians. But the Christian conscience must be dead to the Law, that is, free from the Law, and must have no business with it. This important and basic doctrine does much to comfort afflicted consciences.

**287.** Therefore when you see a man terrified and saddened by a consciousness<sup>77</sup> of sin, say: "Brother, you are not distinguishing properly. Into your conscience you are putting the Law, which belongs in the flesh. Wake up, get up, and remember that you believe in Christ, the Victor over the Law and sin. With this faith you will transcend the Law and enter into grace, where there is neither Law nor sin. And although the Law and sins still exist, they have nothing to do with you; for you are dead to the Law and to sins."

**288.** This is easy enough to say. But blessed is the man who knows this properly amid a conflict of conscience, who, when sin attacks him and the Law accuses and terrifies him, can say: "Law, what is it to me if you make me guilty and convict me of having committed many sins? In fact, I am still committing many sins every day. This does not affect me; I am deaf and do not hear you. Therefore you are telling your story to a deaf man,<sup>78</sup> for I am deaf to you. But if you really want to argue with me about sins, then go over to my flesh and my limbs, which are my servants. Teach them; discipline and crucify them. But do not trouble my conscience, which is lord and king; for I have nothing to do with you. For I am dead to you; I now live to Christ, where I am under another Law, namely, the Law of grace, which rules over sin and the Law." By what means? Through faith in Christ, as Paul will explain below.

**289.** But this is a strange and unheard-of definition, that to live to the Law is to die to God and that to die to the Law is to live to God. These two propositions are utterly contrary to reason; therefore no sophist or legalist understands them. But you must learn to understand them correctly. Anyone who strives to live to the Law, that is, wants to act in such a way that he is justified through the Law, is a sinner and remains a sinner; therefore he is dead and damned. For the law cannot justify and save him; but because it rightly accuses him, it kills him. To live to the Law, therefore, is to die to God; on the other hand, to die to the Law is to live to God. And to live to God is to be justified through grace or through faith for the sake of Christ, without the Law and works. Therefore if you want to live to God, you must die to the Law. But if you live to the Law, then you are dead to God.

**290.** If a Christian is defined properly and accurately, therefore, he is a child of grace and of the forgiveness of sins. He has no Law at all, but he is above the Law, sin, death, and hell. Just as Christ is free of the grave and as Peter is free of the prison, so the Christian is free of the Law. The relation between Christ raised from the grave and the grave, or the relation between

Peter delivered from prison and the prison—such is the relation between the justified conscience and the Law. And just as Christ by His death and resurrection dies to the grave, so that it has no jurisdiction over Him and cannot hold Him, and He rises and goes away freely, now that the stone and the seals have been broken, and the guards have been terrified; and just as Peter dies to his prison through his deliverance and goes where he pleases—so by grace the conscience is liberated from the Law.

**291.** “So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). But the flesh does not know whence this comes or whither it goes, for it cannot judge except according to the Law. But the spirit says: “Let the Law accuse me; let sin and death terrify me. I do not despair on their account; for I have a law against the Law, sin against sin, and death against death.”

**292.** Whenever I feel remorse in my conscience on account of sin, therefore, I look at the bronze serpent, Christ on the cross (John 3:14–15). Against my sin, which accuses and devours me, I find there another sin. But this other sin, namely, that which is in the flesh of Christ, takes away the sin of the world. It is omnipotent, and it damns and devours my sin. Lest my sin accuse and damn me, it is itself damned by sin, that is, by Christ the crucified, “who for our sake was made to be sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Thus in my flesh I find a death that afflicts and kills me; but I also have a contrary death, which is the death of my death and which crucifies and devours my death.

**293.** All these things happen, not through the Law or works but through Christ the crucified, on whose shoulders lie all the evils of the human race—the Law, sin, death, the devil, and hell—all of which die in Him, because by His death He kills them. But we must accept this blessing of Christ with a firm faith. For just as what is offered to us is neither the Law nor any of its works but Christ alone, so what is required of us is nothing but faith, which takes hold of Christ and believes that my sin and death are damned and abolished in the sin and death of Christ.

**294.** Thus we always have the surest kinds of argument from which to draw the necessary conclusion that faith alone justifies. How could the Law and works contribute to justification, since Paul contends against the Law and works and says expressly that we must be dead to the Law if we want to live to God? But if we are dead to the Law and it is dead to us, then it surely has no business with us. Then how could it contribute to justification? Therefore it is necessary to say that we are pronounced righteous solely by grace or by faith in Christ, without the Law and works.

**295.** The blind sophists do not understand this. Therefore they dream that faith does not justify unless it does the works of love. In this way the faith that believes in Christ becomes idle and useless, for it is deprived of the power to justify unless it has been “formed by love.”<sup>79</sup>

**296.** But you set the Law and love aside until another place and time; and you direct your attention to the point at issue here, namely, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, dies on the cross and bears my sin, the Law, death, the devil, and hell in His body. These enemies and unconquerable tyrants press in upon me and now create trouble for me; therefore I am anxious to be delivered from them, justified, and saved. Here I find neither Law nor work nor any love that can deliver me from them. Only Christ takes away the Law, kills my sin, destroys my death in His body, and in this way empties hell, judges the devil, crucifies him, and throws him down into hell. In other words, everything that once used to torment and oppress me Christ has set aside; He has disarmed it and made a public example of it, triumphing over it in Himself (Col. 2:14–15), so that it cannot dominate any longer but is compelled to serve me.

**297.** From this it can be sufficiently understood that there is nothing to be done here but to hear that this has been done in this way, and to take hold of it with an undoubted faith. This really is a “formed faith.” Afterwards, when Christ has thus been grasped by faith and I am

dead to the Law, justified from sin, and delivered from death, the devil, and hell through Christ—then I do good works, love God, give thanks, and practice love toward my neighbor. But this love or the works that follow faith do not form or adorn my faith, but my faith forms and adorns love. This is our theology; and when it is said that I am not only blind and deaf to the Law and free from it but completely dead to it, these are paradoxes strange to reason and absurd.

**298.** And this statement of Paul's, "I through the Law died to the Law," is full of comfort. If it could come to a person's mind at the opportune time and cling firmly to his mind with genuine understanding, he would stand bravely against all the dangers of death and the terrors of conscience and of sin, no matter how much they attacked him, accused him, and wanted to drive him to despair. Of course, everyone is tempted, if not during his life, then at his death. Then, when the Law accuses and manifests his sin, his conscience immediately says: "You have sinned."

**299.** If now you hold to what Paul, the apostle of Christ, teaches here, you will reply: "It is true. I have sinned." "Then God will punish and damn you." "No." "But that is what the Law of God says." "I have nothing to do with this Law." "Why is that?" "Because I have another Law, one that strikes this Law dumb. I am referring to liberty." "What liberty?" "That of Christ, for through Christ I am liberated from the Law." Therefore the Law which is and remains a Law for the wicked is liberty for me, and it binds the Law that damns me. Thus the Law that once bound me and held me captive is now bound and held captive by grace or liberty, which is now my Law. The accusing Law now hears this Law say: "You shall not bind this man, hold him captive, or make him guilty. But I will hold you captive and tie your hands, lest you hurt him who now lives to Christ and is dead to you."

**300.** This knocks out the teeth of the Law, blunts its sting and all its weapons, and utterly disables it. Yet it remains a Law for the wicked and unbelieving; it remains also for us who are weak, to the extent that we do not believe. Here it still has its sharpness and its teeth. But if I believe in Christ, regardless of how sin may trouble me to the point of despair, I shall rely on the liberty I have in Christ and say: "I admit that I have sinned. But my sin (which is a sin that is damned) is in Christ (who is a sin that damns). This sin that damns is stronger than the sin that is damned; for it is justifying grace, righteousness, life, and salvation."

**301.** And so when I feel the terrors of death, I say: "Death, you have nothing on me. For I have another death, one that kills you, my death. And the death that kills is stronger than the death that is killed."

**302.** Thus the believer can raise himself up through faith alone and gain a comfort that is sure and firm; and he need not grow pale at the sight of sin, death, the devil, or any evil. The more the devil attacks him with all his force and tries to overwhelm him with all the terrors of the world, the more hope he acquires in the very midst of all these terrors and says: "Mr. Devil,<sup>80</sup> do not rage so. Just take it easy! For there is One who is called Christ. In Him I believe. He has abrogated the Law, damned sin, abolished death, and destroyed hell. And He is your devil, you devil, because He has captured and conquered you, so that you cannot harm me any longer or anyone else who believes in Him." The devil cannot overcome this faith, but he is overcome by it. For "this," says John (1 John 5:4-5), "is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

**303.** With exceeding zeal and indignation of spirit, therefore, Paul calls grace itself "Law," even though in reality it is nothing else than the very great and boundless liberty of the grace that we have in Christ Jesus. Then he also assigns this most shameful name to the Law for our

comfort, to let us know that it has now been baptized with a new name, because it is no longer alive but is dead and damned. It is a very pleasing sight as he sets forth and produces the Law as a thief or a robber who has already been condemned and sentenced to death. For by personification<sup>81</sup> he represents the Law as being held captive, with its hands and its feet bound and shorn of all power, so that it cannot exert its tyranny, that is, accuse and condemn. With this most pleasing picture he makes it contemptible to the conscience, so that the believer in Christ now has the courage to insult the Law with a certain holy pride and to say: "I am a sinner. If you can do anything against me, Law, go ahead and do it!" That is how far the Law now is from frightening the believer.

**304.** Now that Christ has risen from death, why should He be afraid of the grave? Now that Peter has been liberated from prison, why should he still be afraid of it? When the girl was about to die, the couch could frighten her. But now that she has been raised, why should she be afraid of it? Thus why should the Christian, who truly possesses Christ by faith, be afraid of the Law?

**305.** To be sure, he feels the terrors of the Law; but he is not conquered by them. Relying on the liberty that he has in Christ, he says: "Law, I hear you muttering that you want to accuse and condemn me. But this does not move me at all. To me you are as the empty tomb was to Christ. For I see that you are captive and bound, hand and foot; and this is what my Law has done to you." "What Law is that?" "Liberty, which is called Law, not because it binds me, but because it binds my Law." The Law of the Decalog used to bind me; but against it I now have another Law, that of grace. This is not a Law to me. Nor does it bind me; it liberates me. It is a Law in opposition to the Law that damns. It binds this Law in such a way that it can no longer bind me.

**306.** Thus against my death, which binds me, I have another death, that is, life, which makes me alive in Christ. It releases and frees me from the bonds of my death, and it ties up my death with the same bonds. Thus death, which bound me, is now bound itself; death, which killed me, is now killed itself through death, that is, through life itself.

**307.** Thus with the sweetest names Christ is called my Law, my sin, and my death, in opposition to the Law, sin, and death, even though in fact He is nothing but sheer liberty, righteousness, life, and eternal salvation. Therefore He became Law to the Law, sin to sin, and death to death, in order that He might redeem me from the curse of the Law, justify me, and make me alive. And so Christ is both: While He is the Law, He is liberty; while He is sin, He is righteousness; and while He is death, He is life. For by the very fact that He permitted the Law to accuse Him, sin to damn Him, and death to devour Him He abrogated the Law, damned sin, destroyed death, and justified and saved me. Thus Christ is a poison against the Law, sin, and death, and simultaneously a remedy to regain liberty, righteousness, and eternal life.

**308.** This particular Pauline way of thinking and speaking is very pleasing and comforting. Similarly in Romans (7:23) he opposes the Law of the Spirit to the law in his members. Because this way of speaking is so new and strange, it enters more easily into the heart and remains more firmly in the memory. Besides, it sounds sweeter when he says: "I through the Law died to the Law" than if he were to say: "I through liberty died to the Law." For he is drawing a picture, as though Law were battling against Law. It is as though he were saying: "Law, if you are able to bite me, bind me, and plague me, I will put another Law above you, that is, another tyrant and tormentor, who will accuse you, bind you, and oppress you in turn. You are indeed my tormentor. But I have another tormentor, namely, Christ. He will torment you all the way. When you have been tormented all the way by Him, then I am free." Likewise, if the devil whips me, I have a stronger devil, who will whip him in turn. And when the more powerful devil

battles and conquers the powerful one, I am set free. Thus grace is a Law—not to me, because it does not bind me, but to my Law; this it binds in such a way that it cannot bind me any longer.

**309.** Therefore Paul would like to draw us away completely from looking at the Law, sin, death, and other evil things, and to transfer us to Christ, in order that there we might see this very joyous duel:<sup>82</sup> the Law battling against the Law, in order to become liberty to me; sin battling against sin, in order to become righteousness to me; death battling against death, in order that I might have life. For Christ is my devil against the devil, that I might be a son of God; He destroys hell, that I might have the kingdom of heaven.

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