

According to Luther, the Christian is free from the need to commit good works in order to secure eternal salvation. Luther says that good works only come from good people, and so the aim of every person ought not to be to produce good works, but rather to become a good person. However, the goodness in any person that causes that one to do good works is the result of faith produced by the Holy Spirit. So, Christians ought to do good works as a sign of the inward transformation that has resulted from faith produced by the Holy Spirit. With this view of moral goodness, Luther sees no inherent spiritual value in following laws and precepts because such obedience is not necessarily a sign of an inward change.

For Luther, there are two “kingdoms” of people: The kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. Those living in the kingdom of God have the Holy Spirit in them, guiding them, and are not directly subject to temporal laws. According to Luther, the masses of people are not Christian, in spite of the fact that many people are baptized. For those people who are not guided by the Holy Spirit, Luther says, “God has provided for them a different government beyond the Christian estate and the kingdom of God. [God] has subjected them to the sword so that, even though they would like to, they are unable to practice their wickedness, and if they do practice it they cannot do so without fear or with success and impunity.”<sup>i</sup>

For the Christian and non-Christian, Luther says that the greatest act in this world is to love in a way that resists evil in the form of injustice, suffering, death and destruction. For this reason, Luther calls Christians to be involved, even to the point of becoming executioners, in enforcing the temporal laws of the kingdom of the world. It is necessary, then, for both kingdoms to persist, “the one to produce piety, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds.”<sup>ii</sup>

Luther’s ideas regarding the Christian’s liberty from good works and temporal law resonate with the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian. Many within the Church claim that the Christian need not perform good works because faith is the only means by which we are saved. Indeed, many claim a certain liberty from the Christian obligation to care for the poor and the oppressed that is not supported by Luther’s ideas. Luther says, “I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.”<sup>iii</sup>

In addition, 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians continues to struggle with the identity both as citizens in the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. Luther says, “Because the sword is most beneficial and necessary for the whole world in order to preserve peace, punish sin, and restrain the wicked, the Christian submits most willingly to the rule of the sword, pays his taxes, honors those in authority, serves, helps, and does all [he/she] can to assist the governing authority.”<sup>iv</sup> However, Christians around the world struggle to follow Christ and be obedient to governing authorities when the two are so often at odds. For example, ought the Christian to pay taxes to a government who misappropriates its funds, wages unjust wars and overtly denies the rights of minority citizens of its own nation? In this case, I suggest that Luther’s words must be challenged, and the Christian, equipped with integrity and information, must challenge the moral dubiousness of the governing body. It does ring true that governing bodies are intended to, and often do, protect and serve the people, even when the people bring chaos on themselves. However, when the governing bodies brings chaos and doom on the people, it is the responsibility of the Christian, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to challenge the rulers of the kingdom of the world and the systems they have established with a vision of the love, justice and peace manifest in the kingdom of God.

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<sup>i</sup> J. Philip Wogaman and Douglas M. Strong ed., *Readings in Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993) 129.

<sup>ii</sup> J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 115.

<sup>iii</sup> J. Philip Wogaman and Douglas M. Strong ed., *Readings in Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993) 127.

<sup>iv</sup> J. Philip Wogaman and Douglas M. Strong ed., *Readings in Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993) 130.