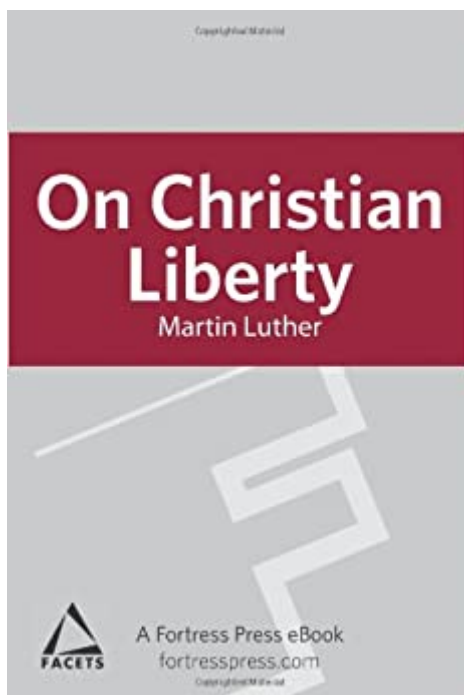


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# On Christian Liberty (Facets)



## Synopsis

The subject of freedom is both timely and poignantly relevant today. For the Christian, this freedom is liberty from sin and death, and the opportunity to serve one's neighbor. Written in a simple style, "Christian Liberty" conveys significant spiritual insight into the grace of God and liberating faith in Christ Jesus.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This timeless little classic communicates essential teachings of Martin Luther

Martin Luther was the founder of the Protestant Reformation. He remains a pivotal figure in Western history.

I believe this is a book that every Christian needs to read. It has been life-changing for me, and for everyone with whom I have shared it. There are older free translations available online, but this edition by Fortress Press is much more readable and clear. It can be read in a day, and I don't know of any short book that could be more impactful than this one. In it, Luther clearly addresses "grace and works" in the life of the Christian. He consistently references Scripture throughout, and he also uses poignant illustrations to clarify his meaning. I cannot recommend this book highly enough!

On Christian Liberty by Martin Luther. Easy to read, historically important, theologically significant.

Luther's words to Pope Leo X and his accompanying treatise 'on Christian liberty' are very bold, especially given their historical and cultural content; his words, at times, border on being brash. This book is worth reading, especially given its historical significance and the fact that it succinctly summarizes Luther's thoughts on justification. Why read about Luther's thoughts from either his detractors or defenders, when you easily can read his translated works? In this short work on Liberty, Luther sets forth the whole of the Christian life in two theses: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." Other notably quotes, for me, that also represent major streams within this book are: 1) "One thing, and only one thing, is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ." 2) The "wedding ring of faith" unites believers to Christ. 3) "So let him who wishes to do good works begin not with the doing of works, but with believing, which makes the person good, for nothing makes a man good except faith, or evil except unbelief."

Martin Luther, *On Christian Liberty (The Freedom of a Christian)*, Translated by W. A. Lambert, revised by Harold J. Grimm (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2003) Luther's works translated into English comprise 55 thick volumes. Looking at the editions of his works in German and in Latin, I can believe that even those 55 volumes are not complete. So where does one start with this vast volume of writing? This little book is about as good a starting point as one could wish for. It may not be Luther's best statement of his position. For that, one may need to go to the far more difficult *The Bondage of the Will*, but this little work, written in the heat of the opening battles of the Reformation, in 1520, may be one of the most concise statements of Reformation theology you will find anywhere. It is an especially good balance to *The Bondage of the Will*, which may leave one in a pessimistic mood, after reading the long argument against free will and the complete inability of a person to affect their own salvation. Following Paul's epistles, especially Romans and Galatians, Luther spells out the Reformation doctrine of sola fide, faith alone. That's the easy part. Luther does at least two additional things which illuminate that doctrine and show us where it takes us. I'm particularly taken by Luther's opening sentence: 'Many people have considered Christian faith an easy thing, and not a few have given it a place among the virtues'. This statement is reassuring to those who may like to think they have a Christian faith, but have doubts. As those who have read a biography or two of Luther will attest, he is not being clever or cute when he says that he himself has '...no wealth of faith to boast of...'. He was beset by doubt well into his term as an Augustinian monk. Appropriate to much of Luther's thinking, the cornerstone of this little book is an antinomy, a

lovely little word denoting two statements which appear to contradict one another. The statements are: A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. Both are from statements by Paul. The first means that the true Christian is no longer bound by the law. Obeying the law serves him no purpose. But the reason for that freedom is his faith in the saving power of and love of Christ. Love and faith implies trust, and trust in the will of Christ means that we are ready, willing, and as much as we are able, dedicated to serving others. One direction where Luther goes beyond Paul is in explaining how all of this works. It is based on man's twofold nature, '...a spiritual and a bodily one.' The law is designed primarily to govern our bodily nature while faith, and salvation addresses our spiritual nature. Apparent contradictions regarding human nature arise when we match statements regarding our human nature with our spiritual nature. An inference which Luther draws from this is that all those things which people do to discipline their body, such as contemplation, meditation, fasting, and what have you, has no effect on one's spiritual salvation. A further inference is that as ineffective as these things are, that is exactly how important and efficacious we find the word of God. We can experience nothing worse than to be cut off from the word of God, as Amos reports at 8:11 The time is surely coming, says the Lord GOD, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.' Luther interjects here a clarification which answers the question one may have. If there is so many 'words', after all, the Bible is a very long book, what is it that we must attend to. As Paul says in Romans 1, 'the Word is the gospel of God concerning his Son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the spirit...' This is why Luther had little interest in books such as James, where there is but one reference to Christ. With all this talk of 'freedom', Luther takes great pains to address the fact that this doctrine does not license one to do whatever they please. There are two 'controls'. The first is that 'Christians should be subject to the governing authorities and be ready to do every good work'. Lutherans are all about giving unto Caesar what is Caesar's. Taken to extreme, this meant that the German Lutherans did not object to Hitler's Nazi extremes when they had the chance. The more important conclusion regarding how one lives is that '...a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian.' Our Christian freedom is a freedom of the spirit and not of the flesh. For our own part, it is more Christian to serve others rather than ourselves. But at the same time, according to Paul at Romans 14:3, 'Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them.' Paul seems to draw a fine line between permitting the practices of ethnic Jews who cherish their dietary laws, and preventing those same Jews from insisting that 'Christians' be circumcised. Paul would criticize

the intolerant, just as Luther would criticize as un-Christian the kinds of policy or practices which abstain from helping our fellow humans. This little book is worth a month of Sunday sermons.

This is the foundational truth that the protestant reformation was built on. This is a must read for every protestant Christian. This explains Luther's ideas of justification that was at the heart of his issues with the Catholic church.

This powerful little book is a solid, one-two punch from Luther about the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church at the time. It is an excellent synopsis of grace and the freedom of Christians. Where we were once enslaved by sin and could do nothing good, when saved by Grace, God is able to work good through us. That is, when saved, we are then truly free. The second punch, if you will, is the letter Luther sent to Pope Leo X wherein he tells the pope that Luther is a friend of the church but speaks out against the sacreligious and sinful Indulgences being sold to masses by those around the Pope. Luther debunks the notion that we can buy our own salvation. I'd recommend that you read the introduction, then the letter, then the actual essay, and THEN reread the letter to the Pope because it will speak so much louder.

I purchased this for less than half of what the University book store was asking for it. It was in perfect condition, I was able to qualify for free shipping after purchasing all of my books. This was a great read by the way, I was forced to read it for school however, once I started reading it I had a hard time putting it down. It was very informative and I loved the stories that I read, I had no idea that Martin Luther was such an amazing man.

Are you good for doing good things or must you also need to "think good" to make your doings be really good? This book gives us Martin Luthers perspective, of a key theological difference within Catholics and Protestants.

Thank you!

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