

## Reformation Day (10/31/10 – True Freedom in the Eternal Gospel of Christ)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

The sinful flesh – yours and mine – is proud and arrogant ... yet so very naïve. We see both its arrogance and naïveté in the *Holy Gospel* appointed for this **Reformation Day**. Of all things, the sinful flesh is offended by our Savior's words: **and the truth will set you free** [JN 8.32]. Even our sinful flesh recognizes that it can be ignorant sometimes – that there is always something to learn. The **Jews who had believed in** Jesus do not take offense at our Lord's promise that they **will know the truth** by abiding in Christ's Word. But the flesh **cannot** stand the accusation that it **needs** to be **set free**. That is because the flesh – your flesh and mine – wishes to be its own lord and master ... always. The flesh always wants to “play God” – be like God, make its **own** decisions, calls its **own** shots, decide for **itself** what is good or evil. It simply will **not** recognize that in its natural state – since the Fall in the Garden – it is **not** free ... but remains a **slave** to sin, death, and devil.

The sinful flesh – yours and mine – in its proud naïveté claims to be free and righteous by its own right. **We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that You say, “You will become free”?** [8.33] “Do you not recognize your slavery?” Jesus would ask. Then understand this: **Truly, truly, I say to you, EVERYONE who commits sin is a SLAVE to sin.** [8.35] **You** commit sin! Therefore, **you** are a **slave** to sin. And where there is sin, there also at hand is the devil ... and death.

Are you free of external sins? Have you been able to refrain from dishonoring your parents? Murder? Adultery? Theft? Lying about your neighbor? You do well! But the Pharisees also were able to refrain from such outward sins – at least, so they thought, for we know that they failed in this regard now and again as well. But, as our Lord says elsewhere: **You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, “You fool!” will be liable to the hell of fire. ... You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with**

*her in his heart.* [MT 5.21-22, 27-28]

Your flesh may think that it keeps the Commandments outwardly – and therefore is free ... and righteous before God. But it is forced to admit that you have sinned inwardly – in your thoughts ... in your heart. You may have kept the letter of the Law ... but you have not kept its spirit. And do not forget the last two Commandments. Lest your sinful flesh become too boastful, God has commanded also that you not even covet *anything that is your neighbor's* [EXO 20.17]. God added this precisely to ensure that even the most arrogant flesh know that it is *under the Law* and its condemnation ... that you have *sinned and fall short of the glory of God* [ROM 3.19, 23].

Have you been jealous of what the Lord has given another? Have you used the legal code to your advantage to deprive your sister or brother of his rightful possessions or earnings? Have you desired the spouse or house, the goods or gold of your neighbor? Have you wished that you had a spouse or children, parents or siblings like “so-and-so’s”? Yearned and ached for what God has not provided? Lamented that God has brought you to this place and time and vocation? That is coveting. It is failing to be content with what God has given. It is sin ... against God, the good and gracious Giver. And *everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin*, says our Lord. You are **not** the free lord of your life that you might claim – or at least desire – to be. You are a slave by nature. And even despite your freedom now in Christ, you keep on enslaving yourself – re-shackling yourself to sin – anew.

*Fear God and give Him glory* – as the angel declared in mid-heaven [REV 14.7]. Own your sin. Recognize your slavery to sin. Repent of your sin. That the Son may set you free – by God’s *grace alone* ... through *faith alone* ... for the sake of *Christ alone* ... as revealed in *Scripture alone*. He will surely do it – indeed, already has. Receive the **external** righteousness that comes by God’s grace in Jesus Christ our Lord (apart from any supposed merit or worthiness in you)! Then you shall be free indeed!

For the righteousness of God comes apart from the Law – in Christ and His Gospel-work. The Son of God Himself works that Godly righteousness. The Father reveals it from the Cross, as the Son shed His holy, innocent Blood to make just we who are by nature **unjust**. *For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law*, as St. Paul says by holy

inspiration [ROM 3.28].

*Now the slave does not abide in the house forever; the son abides forever. Therefore, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!* [JN 8.35-36] Here is the blessed, eternal Gospel, dear Christian friends! Christ the Son of God dwells, remains, and abides in His Father's House forever. Even when He *came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made Man*, the Son ever remained in the Father's House. For, Christ is the only-begotten Son of the Father ... and the perfect image of the Father – which is to say that Christ **is the glory of God** [ROM 3.23]. The Son is able to abide forever because He has been perfectly obedient to the Father's eternal will. The Son is able to abide forever because He has been perfectly righteous in all His ways. Also in His flesh the Son was holy and sinless. The Son – Who is the eternal Author of the Law – kept that Law perfectly ... for us and for our salvation. The Son is able to abide forever because He has made Himself the propitiation – the atoning sacrifice – for the sins of the whole world. The Son is able to abide forever because He has been a faithful Son in all His ways ... throughout all His days. Christ your Lord and Savior has earned His eternal place in the Father's House by His enduring faithfulness. He is the true Son.

Moreover, ***the Son sets you free!*** He has done so by making Himself your ***redemption***. To *redeem* something means to *buy it back*. It is a term used especially of buying back a slave. That Christ is your **Redeemer** means that He has bought you back from your slavery to sin, death, and devil. Christ has *purchased and won you from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious Blood and with His innocent suffering and death*. Christ has redeemed you so that you *may be His own, live under Him in His Kingdom* – rather than under the eternal condemnation of the Law – and *serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness*. [SC II.2]

The ***Son sets you free*** by making you sons (and daughters) in the Father's House and Kingdom – through the gift of Holy Baptism. You are adopted sons (and daughters) by virtue of your Baptism. In your Baptism, you were buried with Christ in the likeness of His death ... and raised again in the likeness of His glorious resurrection from the grave [ROM 6]. And as

ROMANS 6.5 promises: *if we have been united with the Son in a death like His, we will certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His*. Or to say it as our Lord puts it: *In My Father's House are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am you may be also*. [JN 14.2-3]

Our Lord Jesus Christ – the Son of God ... Who abides in the Father's House forever – has prepared a place **for you** in His Father's House. He has made Himself your Brother. You are free, beloved children of the heavenly Father. You have been made free **in** Christ ... **by** Christ. You are free from your sin, since Christ your Brother was made your sin; and are instead united to His righteousness. You are unshackled from the father of lies; and are instead bound to Him Who is very Truth Itself. You are liberated from death; and are instead connected to that true life which is found in Christ Who is the Life of the world. As Jesus says earlier in the chapter before us: *I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of Life*. [JN 8.12]

Moreover, the Son **keeps you free** by continually returning you to your Baptism into the family through repentance and faith. The first of Luther's 95 Theses was this: *When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Mt 4:17), He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance*. To accomplish this in you, the Son sends the Holy Spirit **to convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment**, as He says later in John's Gospel [JN 16.8]. Through the Holy Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit works in you repentance and faith – continually. Every time you re-shackle yourself to sin, death, and devil, the Holy Spirit comes to you and works through the Word to convict **you** concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. Through the Word of the Law, the Spirit convicts you of your sin. Through the Word of the eternal Gospel, the Spirit reveals to you afresh the righteousness of Christ – which He accounts to you by grace through faith. And through the Word, the Spirit reminds you that the devil has been judged – once-and-for-all – by Christ the Son's righteous work for you on the Cross. *If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*. He has. You are.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]