

## “Spiritual Liberty” Matthew 5:20-26 Trinity 6 2021

Grace and peace in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As I have started planning confirmation for the fall, I’ve been reflecting on the Reformation, when Dr. Martin Luther reaffirmed the most important teachings of the Bible in a world that had almost forgotten them. As I looked at our readings for today, I ended up looking at a picture I have on my computer of the three solas, the three “alones”: I am saved by faith alone. Through grace alone. As revealed by scripture alone.

Scripture alone is our source of doctrine. At that time, the church taught doctrines not found in the Bible and, indeed, which were contrary to the Bible. Luther reaffirmed that the ministers of the church can only preach what is in the Bible.

Grace alone. Grace has the same root as gratis. If something is free for you, you do not need to pay anything. We are not afraid to pay the price for our sins, eternal death, because Christ paid it for us. This is the grace of God. We are saved by grace alone.

If we trust in the grace of God in Jesus Christ, we are saved by faith. We cannot do anything to earn salvation. The Roman church said, yes, we are saved by faith in Christ, but only from original sin. To earn the forgiveness of actual sins, we must do penance. Acts of penance are to compensate God and others for our sins. If we can not make up for them in this life, we must do penance in purgatory before entrance into heaven after physical death.

This is a false doctrine. As our epistle (Romans 6.3-11) says, "For having died, He died unto sin once; in that He lives, He lives to God. So you also reckon yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. "

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Our text answers a question in this regard. If we do not do anything to be saved, if Christ has done all, why we should do good works? We can not be justified by our own works, but God will always forgive us for Christ's sake. So, why we do not live as we want and then ask God's forgiveness?

Our Lord says in the text, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." The scribes and Pharisees thought they were good, pious men who did not need a Savior. They trusted in the justice of their outward acts, in a way very similar to the Roman church to this day. The Roman concept consists of external acts we can do. Not the biblical concept of penance.

Luther noted that the church at that time used only the Latin translation of the Bible in which the word for repentance is penance, which is a legal term that deals with external acts. However, in Greek, the original language of the Bible, the word for repentance is μετάνοια (metanoia), which literally means "change of mind". Repentance is not doing good deeds, but a complete change of our mind and heart. We must begin a new life.

Paul says, "Do you not know that all who are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? For we are buried with Him by baptism into death; so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. "

Holy Baptism is not an external act. Rather it is a sacrament by which we receive the Holy Spirit to change our minds, our hearts, our lives. Baptism is our new birth in the Spirit. Baptism frees us spiritually.

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The spiritual freedom of which we speak is the freedom to live as children of God. In Christ we are free from the power of sin, from the condemnation of God and eternal death. Without the grace of baptism in Christ, we are judged on our own merits before God, so we deserve condemnation. Therefore, we need a Savior, and the Spirit of God within us to live according to the will of God.

God's will for our lives is the law. The law does not save us, because we can not keep it perfectly. But, it has three uses as our students learn the catechism.

First, the law is a curb, to restrict to a point, the evil deeds of men. This is the purpose of civil government: to punish the criminals, protect the people and maintain order. But this is not the whole purpose of the law. In our text for today, the Lord speaks of the Fifth Commandment. "You have heard that it was said to the ancients: Thou shalt not kill; but whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; and whoever says to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. "

In the eyes of God, obedience to the Fifth Commandment is not just about external acts, but also our thoughts and desires of the heart. The scribes and Pharisees thought that they because did not take a knife and kill anyone, they were innocent. But that was not the truth. God knows the innermost secrets of the heart and from there come evil deeds. The government has no authority to judge the hearts of men, only to protect the people from thieves and murderers. The first three commandments which deal with our relationship with God are not the business of the government. This is the basis of religious freedom.

Second, the law is like a mirror. It shows us our sins and our need for a Savior. The law touches the heart to call people to repentance.

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The third use of the law is as a rule. This is only for believers, those who have heard the gospel. When we decide something in our lives, we use the law written in the Bible to make a decision according to the will of God. We also believe that good works are the fruit of faith. Is our faith bearing fruit? The law as a measuring-stick tells us.

We have the love and mercy of God in Christ, apart from our works. If we fall into sin, we may confess our sin and receive God's forgiveness. To what purpose? To return to the right path and walk in good conscience. This is the spiritual freedom that we have the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Amen.