

Dear Heirs of the Freedom that comes from Christ's righteousness,

How important is freedom to you? I believe that we would answer that the freedoms that we enjoy as American citizens are very important to us. We don't have a King telling us where we live or what we can and cannot do.

How important is your spiritual freedom? I believe we would say it is important, but perhaps we struggle to understand exactly what that freedom is. The Apostle Paul will help us.

The apostle Paul is writing to Christians in Galatia who are in danger of giving up their spiritual freedom. He starts out by saying that we should not be **YOKED** to the law. What is he talking about?

I have on the screen a picture of a yoke of oxen. Even in our modern world, in some places the ancient methods of farming are still used. Here is a drawing of oxen in a yoke. See the wooden beam across their necks and how it is harnessed so it doesn't fall off. Next, is a drawing of a simple yoke.

What Paul is saying is that all who follow laws or rules to earn salvation with God are like oxen who slave under the yoke. Paul will tell us it is a heavy burden that cannot be removed except in Christ.

Martin Luther was such a person. The church of his day put a heavy burden on the people. They were told that Jesus had died for their sins. However, Jesus only made it possible for them to work to earn their own righteousness or good standing before God. To be saved, you had to follow the rules of God's law and the church law. Martin Luther knew he was a slave to the law and he was not happy.

A boss and friend of Luther's sent him to the Bible. There he learned that Christ had set him free from the burden of law. Luther rejoiced, and he did everything to share the Good News of freedom in Christ with those around him. The church of his day did not want him to speak. He stood firm. So today as we celebrate the 500th Anniversary of the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation, I encourage you, **Like Luther Stand Firm in Your Gospel Freedom.**

1. You are not yoked to the law.

St. Paul had great Christian love for the Galatians. He had brought them God's word of salvation. He was alarmed that some of them wanted to go

back to slavery. You and I would be alarmed if one of our children wanted to go into slavery. He had said it earlier in this letter, now he warns them again, **“You are not yoked to the law.”**

A. What was their spiritual standing before God? Paul tells them, *“Christ has set you free.”*

1. He puts it in these words, **“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”** (1a) How did Jesus set us free? In chapter 4:4,5 he states, **“But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.”**

The Lord God, our Creator, places us under his rules or laws from the moment we are born. They are good rules. Love God and love your fellow humans. If we keep these laws, we have a good standing with God. When we review God’s rules and know that we are to keep them in thought, word and deed, we are in trouble. As Paul writes in Romans 3, **“We fall short of the glory of God.”** Paul tells us **“Cursed is everyone who doesn’t continue to do everything in the Book of the Law.”** (Gal 3:10)

Jesus Christ, God’s Son, was born under the law. He was perfect in his life and in his sufferings and death. He paid our sins, but he also fulfilled all righteousness. God shows us his love in Jesus and creates faith in us. We receive the adoption as sons and daughters of God.

2. Paul is alarmed. The Galatians are about to move away from freedom to slavery. He calls for them to stand firm in Christ.

Every once in a while, a person will tell me, *“Pastor, I am moving away and there are no WELS churches where I am going. Can I just go ANY Lutheran church?”* The answer is, “no.” Today some Lutherans have watered down salvation to be: “As long as you believe that Jesus died for your sins you are saved.” We were reminded at Pastor’s conference this past week, that even the Roman Catholic church says that Jesus died for your sins. However, you still must earn your own righteousness.

What Paul is telling us is that Jesus’ made us perfectly right with God. Christ is our righteousness. Luther found this teaching and he hung to it for dear life. We need to stand firm in this that Jesus not only died for us, but he is our righteousness.

B. St. Paul continues his thought by asking, **“Why go back to slavery?”**

1. The Galatian Christians were going back to slavery, by having themselves circumcised and going back under the Jewish ceremonial laws. We make

ourselves slaves when we go back to the Commandments and the laws God has put us under and try to earn our righteousness through these laws. Slavery comes to the Christian by placing themselves under the law.

When we substitute Jesus' work for our own works under law, we push Christ out of the picture. Paul concludes then Christ is of no value.

2. Someone might ask, "Can't I give obedience my best effort and have God be satisfied with that?" Once we start using law as our tool to win salvation, St. Paul tells us we are "**obligated to obey the whole law.**" (3) We can't do that because we aren't perfect! Our efforts only result in us being alienated from Christ and being in a state where we have fallen away from grace.

Paul's message is, "Don't go there." "Stand firm in the freedom Christ has won for you!"

This is why we celebrate today the 500th Anniversary of Martin Luther nailing the 95 Theses to the Castle church door. Through the Word of God, the Lord led Martin Luther to freedom in Christ. Through that Word of God handed down to us, we have been led to freedom in Christ. Celebrating helps us remember what we have. It also helps us to hand down the Word to the next generation, so they can be free in Christ too!

2. You are yoked to the gospel.

Once Martin Luther was yoked to the gospel, it changed his life and his world. He lived using his new-found freedom to help others. We can too.

A. Martin Luther did a lot of writing and preaching. The reason is that people had a lot of questions.

1. For example people would ask about heaven. Luther could point people to what St. Paul says here, "**we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.**" We are not living in heaven right now. People in Luther's day were taught you had to go to an in between place called purgatory to work off your sins. Luther was happy to preach what Paul teaches that we are eagerly waiting to go from here to Heaven. There we will live in a perfect world. We won't be sick. We won't die. God's people will live in perfect joy and happiness forever.

2. Luther also taught what the Apostle says, "**We wait by faith.**" We can't see heaven, but we live trusting that God will keep his word. What supports our faith is God's Word and Sacraments. Martin Luther advocated that people of all ages be in the Bible learning about God, Jesus, salvation, heaven, etc.

B. One of the accusations leveled at the reformers was that they didn't believe in good works. They fired back that good works are an important part of the Christians life. However, it isn't necessary to have the church prescribe a long list of rules and duties. What is important is faith expressing itself in Christian love. That is what St. Paul says in verse 6. What you do isn't as important as doing something that expresses your faith in Christian love.

Martin Luther is famous for his teaching, preaching and letter writing that came after his famous "*Here I stand!*" He did not engage in this ministry because he wanted to "stick it" to his former employer. He appreciated God's grace in Christ and this moved him to share God's love with his countrymen and the world. Martin Luther's stand was first and foremost a reaction to God's love for him.

Conclusion: The Jewish church goes of Jesus day thought they were free because of their heritage and their good works. Jesus told them in John 8, "**Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.**" (34) He also told them, "**the truth will set you free.**" (32) What was that truth? Jesus told them the truth, "**if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**" (36)

Dear friends, all of us were born into the world slaves to sin. Having a heritage of parents and grand-parents who were Lutheran will not free us. Regular attendance in a Lutheran church and observing church rules will not save us.

If Martin Luther were here today he would not point us to himself, but to St. Paul's inspired words. "**Christ has set us free.**" Jesus not only died for us, he made us righteous before God. There is nothing that we do for our salvation.

Faith needs to live and express itself. We live by hearing the word, bringing our children to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and receiving the Sacrament of Holy Communion. We live by showing Christian love to others. In this way we are saying, "Here we stand!" Amen.