**Freedom In Knowing the Truth**

Based on [John 8:31-36](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn8.31-36)

Preached on October 28, 2018

Reformation Day (Observed)

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It is understood today that one of the reasons for such wide swaths of the population being diagnosed with depression and anxiety disorders has to do having too many choices to make. Which school to send my children to? Which investments to make? What should I make for supper? What clothes to wear? Or a popular new option in the last half century…should I stay with my spouse or leave him?

Think about modern medicine, do I get the chemo or live happily without it until the cancer takes me. Do I take this cocktail of meds or that one? Am I content to listen to this doctor, or should I get a second or third opinion. Or end of life decisions…do I continue to let my father live on life support, or pull the plug if it looks like he won’t recover. In simpler times we didn’t have the option to make such decisions, and this is the point. Contrary to modern doctrines of freedom and liberty as having more choices…Wisdom understands that **Humanity was freer when it had fewer options, less power, less control.**  Before the infinite number of medications and treatments, it was much simpler to accept things as they are and be content with your lot, appreciating what you have, rather than chasing after what you don’t.

This is a good analogy for what prompted the Reformation of the Church, as hallmarked by Martin Luther’s fateful decision to post 95 Theses of contention for debate on the Church door in Wittenberg Germany on October 31, 1517. Dr. Luther felt a great burden on his conscience such that he felt he had to find a way that he could please God with his works. He knew he was a sinner, but he felt the weight of God’s holy law beating down on his back. He felt that God was perpetually displeased with him, that God was a parent who was always frowning over his failures. He refrained from gross outward sins, fornication, idolatry, murder, theft, etcetera…but the sins of the heart, covetousness, hatred, evil thoughts apparently plagued him. **But he felt that he had to figure out how he could atone for his sins and win God’s favor, through fastings, and self-abuse, and hours upon hours of confession and penance, and nothing “worked”.** By “worked,” I mean that nothing soothed Luther’s conscience or made him think “God loves me, sin notwithstanding.” He thought, “God will only look upon me with favor once I become righteous through the perfection of obedience from the heart.”

This ever-seeking of new ways to please God is analogous to today’s constant push to find new options and ways to improve ourselves and our condition. It cannot bring peace. **The only thing that can bring peace is knowing that you have found favor in God’s sight, that he is pleased with you, and that your performance, intelligence, or willpower do not earn God’s favor; rather he loves you prior to anything Good that is in you.**

Really this is the difference between certainty and guesswork. Does God love me and will he forgive me**? If you can only answer “maybe” or “probably”, then you can have no rest, and will find no peace.** It’s only if you can answer “certainly” God loves me and “certainly” God will forgive me, that you are truly free to stop worrying about what might be ***the best strategy*** to please God.

This is the doctrine that made the scales fall from a miserable Martin Luther’s eyes and praise and rejoice in God from the heart for the first time. The doctrine that we are justified by faith, apart from works of the law. **The church in Luther’s day was teaching that through faith God infused people with the grace to do what the law required for their salvation.** But whether you have or ever will attain that salvation is never truly known; and presumably if you die trusting in God but before you can do sufficient works, you are not saved.

So like a patient jumping from doctor to doctor to find a cure; or from blister pack to pack trying to find the right treatment; luther tried to find the cure for sin in this life, believing that there is a way to overcome sin prior to salvation. What he had missed, and the church of his day had forgotten, was that salvation was already possessed by all who had simple faith in Jesus Christ. By believing on Him, his sacrifice, his resurrection, his word and commands, this person was 100% righteous and justified in God’s sight. Prior to faith, you were a slave to sin and 100% devoted to destruction; but “**then when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy**” (Titus 3:4-5). All are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith (Romans 3:25).

But the Reformation, had unintended consequences. We celebrate the Reformation for re-aligning the doctrine of the church with the doctrine of justification by faith alone. **But, immediately following this and until the present day, huge swaths of Christians have understood the *central* article of the faith, (that we are justified by faith not works), to be the *only* article of the faith.** That so long as you believe Jesus died for your sins, God’s word has nothing else to say to you with certainty or to command you to obey. They say this in the name of “Chrsitian Liberty”, God set us free to do what we think is best. But it is really a return to slavery, because it claims true freedom is freedom *from* God’s Law, not freedom *to keep it* without fear.

So Jesus says, “**If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free**.” The freedom Jesus is talking about here is the freedom to believe him and keep his word without fear of eternal or earthly consequence. Jesus sets you free, not to do what you desire, but free from your desires to do what pleases him.

Dear God in heaven, is ever the world and the church in need of this teaching today more than ever. Youth are taught today “do what you want” or “do what you think is best” or “be yourself” or “follow your heart”. This type of parenting is child abandonment. **There are parents in Alberta who have been found guilty of failure to provide their child the “necessaries of life” because they didn’t seek speedy treatment of the meningitis that killed him.** So much longer will the jail time be for parents who fail to provide the “necessaries of eternal life” to their children, teaching them to obey God’s commands and punishing their disobedience and rebellion.

If you tell your child, as a rule it is best to do what you feel in your heart over and against any sort of external guidance or commands, **you have just turned over your child to his passions, which are sinful from birth and that is spiritually tantamount to turning your child over to an abuser.** Your child is too young to resist the impulse to do what he wants and too young to understand long term consequences. Don’t tell him to do what he wants, You need to tell him *what to do*; teach him to obey the certain commands of Jesus Christ, and punish him when he doesn’t; so that it will be easy for him to know good from evil.

So too Jesus has set you free from your passions by telling you what to do. “If you abide in my word, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave*3* to sin. **35**The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. **36**So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Imagine two kids walk into a candy store. One kid has no idea what he wants, the other knows what he wants. Which one is truly free? **Is it the kid who has to sample everything in the store and then go with the one that best tickled his tastebuds last…or is it the kid who goes in, gets the right candy and leaves.** Freedom is not having unlimited choices; the freedom of Christ is the freedom that comes from knowing the truth. Cancer is a horrible diagnosis; Who is freer, the man who says “I won’t stop until I find a cure” or the man who says “I am ready to die, Lord Jesus come”.

The singular contribution of the reformation was the certainty found in God’s strong word. Over and against the popes and church councils that so often contradict themselves; the word of God is something you can trust, a foundation of certainty upon which you can build your life and have conviction of eternal life. It does not rest upon the power or approval of men, but upon God who is above all things, and yet came down from heaven to die for our sins and give us the way to eternal life through his son Jesus Christ.