

## 1 ☐ THE FREEDOM OF A CHRISTIAN 1520

Session #11

Free to Serve

Paragraphs #92-114

## 2 ☐ INTRODUCTION

- 1 ☐ • Up to this point Luther's analysis of Christian freedom has been focused solely on the individual and their experience of themselves, of God and of their body.
  - If we were to leave it at that, we would end up with a seriously distorted understanding of what the life of a Christian is all about.
- 2 ☐ • For Luther, Christians ought to imitate Christ by using their freedom to become free, willing and joyful servants of the well-being of the neighbor, just as Christ used his freedom to take the form of a servant/slave ("doulos" Gk) for the sake of our liberation.

## 3 ☐ CONCERNING WORKS FOR THE NEIGHBOR (PARAGRAPH #92)

- 1 ☐ • "Up to now we have spoken about works in general and, at the same time, about those specific things that a Christian must do to train his or her own body."
  - "Finally, we will discuss those things done for one's neighbor."
  - "Indeed, more to the point, each person lives only for others and not for himself or herself."
- 2 ☐ • "We do not live to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord." (Rom 14:7-8)
  - "Thus, it can never happen that in this life a person is idle and without works toward one's neighbors."

## 4 ☐ SERVING ALL PEOPLE (PARAGRAPH #93)

- "Nevertheless, no one needs even one of these works to attain righteousness and salvation."
- "In all of one's works a person should in this context be shaped by and contemplate this thought alone: to serve and benefit others in everything that may be done, having nothing else in view except the need and advantage of the neighbor."

## 5 ☐ WHY THE BODY MUST BE TAKEN CARE OF (PARAGRAPH #94)

- "...under these circumstances, it is also Christian to care for the body."
- "Look here! This is truly the Christian life; here truly 'faith is effective through love.'"
- "...with joy and love [faith] reveals itself in work of freest servitude, as one person, abundantly filled with the completeness and richness of his or her own faith, serves another freely and willingly."

## 6 ☐ THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (PARAGRAPH #95)

- Read Philippians 2:1-8 for an understanding of Luther's view on the Christian life.
- Emanating from our faith, we are to be of the same mind as Christ who emptied himself in service to others.

## 7 ☐ PERVERTERS OF APOSTOLIC TEACHING (PARAGRAPH #96)

- Basis of this paragraph is still Phil. 2 and how Luther feels the early church has misunderstood its meaning.
- From the time of the ancient church, Phil 2 was applied to the Christological interpretation of Christ's two natures; Luther felt that its relation to the life of faith had been lost.

## 8 ☐ LET THE CHRISTIAN BE CONFORMED TO CHRIST (PARAGRAPH #97)

- "Although individual Christians are...free from all works, they should nevertheless once again 'humble themselves' in this freedom, take on 'the form of a servant,' 'be made in human form and found in human vesture,' and serve, help and do everything for their neighbor, just as they see God has done and does with them through Christ."

9 ☐ **CHRISTIAN TRUST (PARAGRAPH #98)**

- 1 ☐ • "Moreover, a Christian should think as follows: 'Although I am unworthy and condemned, in Christ my God devotes to my insignificant person, without any merit and by sheer gracious mercy, all the riches of righteousness and salvation, so that I need absolutely nothing else further except faith, which believes that it is so.'"
- 2 ☐ • "Therefore, I will give myself as a kind of Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me."
- "I will do nothing in this life except what I see will be necessary, advantageous, and salutary for my neighbor, because through faith I am overflowing with all good things in Christ."

10 ☐ **THE FRUITS OF FAITH (SEE, MY READER, HOW WORTHILY LUTHER IS CONDEMNED!)  
PARAGRAPH #99**

- 1 ☐ • "Look at what love and joy in the Lord flow from faith! Moreover, from love proceeds a joyful, gladsome, and free soul, prepared for willing service to the neighbor, which takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, praise or blame, profit or loss."
- 2 ☐ • "For such a soul does not do this so that people may be obligated to it, nor does it distinguish between friends and enemies, nor does it anticipate thankfulness or ingratitude."

11 ☐ **RECOGNIZING HOW GREAT THE THINGS GIVEN TO US ARE (PARAGRAPH #100)**

- If we recognize "those great and precious things that have been given to us," then "love...is poured out in our hearts through the...Spirit." (Rom 5:5)
- "But for all who do not recognize what has been given to them through Christ, Christ was born in vain...."

12 ☐ **THE GLORY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (PARAGRAPH #101)**

- 1 ☐ • "Therefore, who can comprehend the riches and glory of the Christian life? It can do all things and has all things and lacks nothing. It is lord of sin, death, and hell but, at the same time, is servant and obedient and beneficial to all."
- 2 ☐ • "And yet how terrible it is that in our day this life is unknown! It is neither preached about nor sought after."

13 ☐ **WHY WE ARE CALLED CHRISTIANS (PARAGRAPH #102)**

- 1 ☐ • "What is more, we are also completely ignorant of our very name, why we are Christians and bear that name."
- "Without a doubt we are named after Christ—not absent from us but dwelling in us; in other words: provided that we believe in him and that, in turn and mutually, we are a second Christ to one another, doing for our neighbors as Christ does for us."
- 2 ☐ • "But nowadays, using human doctrines, we are taught to seek nothing but merits, rewards, and the things that are ours, and we have made out of Christ nothing but a slave driver far harsher than Moses."

14 ☐ **THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD AS AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH (PARAGRAPH #103)**

- 1 ☐ • "The blessed Virgin provides a preeminent example of this very faith, when she was purified 'according to the Law of Moses (Lk 2:22),' as was the custom of all women."
- 2 ☐ • "Although she was not bound by such a law and had no need of purification, nevertheless, she

subjected herself to the law out of free and voluntary love, doing just as other women did, so that she did not offend or disdain them."

- "She was therefore not justified by this work, but as one already righteous, she did it freely and spontaneously."

15 ☐ **PAUL TEACHES WORKS (PARAGRAPH #104)**

- Example of circumcision of Timothy but not Titus.
- "Our actions also sought to be done with the same devotion, so that we support the weak in faith (as Rom 14:1 teaches) but resist boldly the hardened "masters" of works...."

16 ☐ **THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST THE LORD (PARAGRAPH #105)**

- Read Mt. 17:24-27
- Luther uses the example of Jesus willingly paying a tax he doesn't need to pay to illustrate how works are not needed for salvation but are done to benefit the neighbor.

17 ☐ **LET ALL THE RELIGIOUS UNDERSTAND AND LET LUTHER BE YOUR TEACHER (PARAGRAPH #106)**

- "The works of all clerical institutions, monasteries, and priests should...only do works of his own profession and walk of life, in order to work not toward righteousness but:
  - 1) subjection of his own body,
  - 2) out of spontaneous love.
- Caution: don't presume works justify!

18 ☐ **A TRUE CHRISTIAN'S KNOWLEDGE (PARAGRAPH #107)**

- 1 • "Therefore, whoever has this knowledge can easily and without danger manage those countless rules and commands of the pope, bishops, monasteries, churches, princes and magistrates."
  - 2 • "Some foolish shepherds insist that these things are all necessary for righteousness and salvation, calling them 'commands of the church,' although they are nothing of the kind."
- A free Christian can fast, pray, etc. and freely suffer as Christ did

19 ☐ **DISTINGUISHING GOOD SHEPHERDS FROM EVIL ONES (PARAGRAPH #108, 109)**

- 1 • "For any work not directed toward the purpose of either disciplining the body or serving the neighbor ... is neither good nor Christian."
  - 2 • "...I greatly fear that nowadays few if any clerical institutions...are Christian, along with special fasts and prayers for certain saints."
- 2 • "Many completely blind shepherds zealously support such ignorance and suppression of freedom, while at the same time inciting and encouraging the people in their devotion by praising these things and inflating them with indulgences, and yet never teaching faith at all."

20 ☐ **ADVICE (PARAGRAPH #110)**

- "Instead, I desire each of you to consider that if you really want to pray, fast, or establish a foundation in churches (as they say), pay attention to whether you are doing it for the purpose of obtaining some temporal or eternal reward!"

21 ☐ **THE RULE FOR "BROTHERLY LOVE" (PARAGRAPH #112)**

- "Look here! This should be the rule: that the good things we have from God may flow from one person to the other and become common property."
- "In this way each person may "put on" his or her neighbor and conduct oneself toward him or her as if in the neighbor's place."

22 ☐ **THE CHRISTIAN LIVES IN CHRIST AND THE NEIGHBOR (PARAGRAPHS #113-114)**

- "Therefore, we conclude that Christian individuals do not live in themselves but in Christ and their neighbor, or else they are not Christian."
- "They live in Christ through faith and in the neighbor through love."

23 ☐ **SUMMARY...**

- Freedom through service to neighbor is addressed to each of us individually, not as a mandate for us to force upon others.
- I am the one called to joyfully and freely put everything I have and everything I am at the service of the common good of my neighbors and of God's good creation.
- This binding ourselves in loving service to the neighbor is the culmination of the process by which God makes us free and fulfilled by Christ through the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. Generosity, compassion, loving kindness, humility, etc. are what the freedom of a Christian looks like.

24 ☐ **SUMMARY (CONT)...**

- There is a curious transformation that happens here. The more we transcend ourselves and give ourselves in service to the neighbor, the more fully we become ourselves and the more fulfilled we feel.
- We find our true selves in loving service to the neighbor. But the true self that one discovers is the self of Christ!
- That is the freedom of a Christian. The freedom to love ourselves as God loves us. The freedom to dedicate our lives to the well being of our neighbors. The freedom to collaborate with God in the work of bringing healing, beauty, justice and wholeness to the world. It is the freedom to love.

25 ☐ **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What are examples of times when someone was Christ to you and came to your service, especially in a time of need? Reflect on a time when you transcended yourself in service to your neighbor and felt the joy and freedom that Luther talks about.
2. In your specific setting, who are the neighbors you are called to serve? What are their needs? How can you find out? In what concrete ways can you serve your neighbors?

26 ☐ **HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK....**

- Session #12—Appendix: Against the Freedom of the Flesh
- Read paragraphs 115-125 in "The Freedom of a Christian"