

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Galatians 4:21–23, 31; 5:1**

**Sermon: Reformation 2017 (Slave or Free)**

***Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. . . . So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.***  
(Gal 4:21–23, 31; 5:1)

If a child grows up with an angry father who is always threatening him, shouting and swearing at him, even often beating him, what kind of adult will that child likely be when he grows up?

A child who doesn't receive love and words of encouragement from his parents is likely to be a very problematic adult.

A child needs limits, and each couple knows and decides what kind of limits they will set for their child.

Everyone is shaped by the world that surrounds him or her, especially while growing up. The example and attitudes of parents, relatives, teachers, and neighbors influence one's character and attitude. Consciously or unconsciously, we will imitate or avoid some ways of behavior we have experienced during our life. We grow up to be much more like those who influenced us than we might realize.

In our text for this 500th Reformation Day, St. Paul wishes to shape us, by the power of the Word, into the kind of children God has in fact made us to be. He wants us to understand that we are free and beloved children of God.

Martin Luther was certainly shaped by the world into which he was born more than five hundred years ago.

Education was very strict on all levels. Parents and teachers used to discipline children strongly. Luther recounted several bad experiences when he was caned even till blood ran from his skin.

And it was not different in the church. The young Luther grew up with a very bad image of God. Jesus was always shown to him as a judge with a sword in his hand, ready to punish everything he did. Luther was truly scared of God, trying to do his best according to the rules of the church, but he never had peace, because he was conscious that he was not perfect and that he sinned every day. This image of God led him to desperation, and once he confessed: "I hate this God!"

The church of that time had fallen far away from the truth of the Bible, and was following the ordinary way of all human religion, the way of the law: *You have to please God by obeying him; you have to pay for your sins; you have to make satisfaction for your failures.*

You can search in all human-based religions and you will find the same common points. The human-based religions focus on obedience and sacrifice, some practicing very strict ways of sacrifices, lashing their bodies and even offering children to their gods.

Others are under a different sort of guise, as it happened in Luther's time and as many churches do it nowadays, extorting money from their members to receive forgiveness and special favors.

The apostle Paul struggled with many Christians from Jewish backgrounds in his time who wanted to go back to the traditional Jewish way of salvation: obeying the Law, not just the Ten Commandments, but all the ritual laws of the church.

Paul argues in our text that we are free children of God, children of the promise through Jesus Christ, and not children of the slave woman: ***“For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. . . . So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman”*** (4:21–23, 31).

Luther was burdened by the yoke of slavery imposed by his church, and he suffered a lot in his conscience and in his body during his childhood and as a young adult.

But God was gracious to him. He led Luther first to a monastery, where his desperation became even bigger. But in the monastery, Luther had the opportunity to read the Bible and have a good and compassionate mentor: Johannes von Staupitz.

Staupitz counseled Luther to look to Christ rather than to himself and to his sins. Staupitz played a very important role in Luther's spiritual life, and Luther acknowledged it later, thanking his confessor for showing him a God of love, and not just a God of justice. And reading the Psalms brought to Luther the notion that God comes to the aid of his suffering people.

After receiving his doctorate in theology, Luther was appointed professor at the University of Wittenberg, where he had to read and study the Bible even more to prepare for his classes. Thus, God was working through his living Word in Luther's life.

The Reformation did not begin on October 31, 1517. It had begun some time earlier in the heart of Luther. As Luther was struggling with the term "**the righteousness of God**" in the Book of Romans, God, in his grace, showed Luther that he is not just a God of justice, but he is also a God of love, who sent his Son, Jesus, to accomplish all justice required from man. Jesus even offered the highest sacrifice ever: his own body and blood on the cross. There is nothing more that man must or can do for his salvation.

Everything was done by Jesus: our sins were paid, we were reconciled with the Father, and a new life is offered to all who cling to Jesus by faith. From enemies, we have been transformed into children of God, free and beloved children of God, to **“live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness”** (explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed).

***“For freedom Christ has set us free,” our text says. “Stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (5:1).***

When Luther realized that salvation is a free gift of God by faith in Jesus, he felt that he was born anew. A new life began for Luther; not a life under threats and fear as a slave anymore, but a life of a free and beloved child of God.



He was free from sin and hell by the atonement worked by Jesus on the cross, and now he was free to live a new life under God's grace in the presence of the resurrected and living Christ. Now Luther began to teach and to preach this new life in Christ, ***"the way, and the truth, and the life"*** (John 14:6).

Many do not understand this Christian freedom. Some think they can do everything they want, and God will just forgive them—as Paul questioned the attitude of some Christians in Rome: ***"Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!"*** (Romans 6:1–2 NIV).

Many Christians abuse their freedom, and their behavior is not a good testimony to the outsiders. On the other hand, some Christians think that, besides what Jesus did for us, they have to obey the laws of the church to be saved.

It seems for them that what Jesus did was not enough; they have to supplement their own salvation by doing good deeds, maybe even some sacrifices and paying some money to please God.

Luther wrote about Christian freedom: **“A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all”** (AE 31:344).

As free and beloved children of God, we are heirs of what belongs to God and we have the freedom to approach God in confidence and to walk in his ways. ***“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”***

(Hebrews 4:16).

No one is our master but Jesus. The devil, the world, and our old self threaten to master over us, and this is our daily struggle. God had warned Cain: ***“Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it”***

(Genesis 4:7 NIV). Cain did not listen to the Lord and fell into temptation. Jesus is still speaking to us in his living Word and warning us against our enemies, giving us strength in this battle and fighting for us, as Luther wrote in “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”: “With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected” (LSB 656:2).

On the other hand, “for us fights the valiant One, Whom God Himself elected. Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, Of Sabaoth Lord, And there’s none other God; He holds the field forever” (LSB 656:2).

Therefore, as free and beloved children of God, we want to do his will and we will serve one another with love and humbleness. We don't consider ourselves as free in a selfish manner, but as Paul wrote: ***“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others”*** (Philippians 2:3–4).

It is a new way of life that God gives to his free and beloved children. We are free because we are saved; but at the same time, we are servants of one another because this is God's will. We live for the sake of others.

And this is the work of the Holy Spirit in us, who guides us through the paths of righteousness, as the psalmist prays:

***“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!”*** (Psalm 143:10).

Children who grow up with a good balance of love and discipline will usually love and respect their parents when they mature. Love produces love. God’s love in us produces love to him and love to our fellows. ***“We love because he first loved us”*** (1 John 4:19).

Even though Luther did not have a happy childhood and had bad experiences in his early church life, God had mercy on him and transformed his life by the words of the living Scripture. Although Luther suffered from depression and anxiety due to his childhood and youth education, God’s mercy helped him to revalue his earlier experiences. He was not perfect, and he is not our “Lutheran saint.”

But Luther's experience of a gracious God and his work in proclaiming the Good News of Jesus inspires us even now, five hundred years later, to live a new life, a life as free and beloved children of God.

By faith in our Lord Jesus, we witness throughout the world by this 500th anniversary celebration and by our personal lives. We declare that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, and that this celebration is not about Luther, but it is all about Jesus and his love for us.

Amen