

# Sermon Series – Reformation 500 Themes

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## *The Freedom of the Christian*

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### **Text: Romans 12:9-21**

<sup>9</sup>Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. <sup>10</sup>Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup>Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. <sup>13</sup>Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

<sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup>Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited. <sup>17</sup>Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup>If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup>Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup>To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

### **Theme: Free to Love as Christ Has Loved Us**

In the next two months, I am going to try to take up a Reformation theme each week. I thought that this week's epistle lesson is the perfect chance to take up one of Luther's best writings called, *The Freedom of a Christian*. Luther wrote volumes of works, but at the end of his life, he said that he wished that everything would be destroyed except for a few things, which included this tract. It was written in 1520 to the Pope. It begins with a long letter to Pope Leo X, which is very conciliatory. He even writes, **"I am your friend and your most humble subject."** Then he dedicates this little tract to the pope as **"a token of peace and good hope."** He states that it contains the whole of Christian life in a brief form.

It was written to dispell the notion that the Lutheran teaching that we are saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ means that good works are not necessary in the Christian life. Luther's main point in the tract is, **"A christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."** They seem contradictory, but his point is that we are saved by God's grace alone, not by any of our works. However, as Christians we cannot help, but to serve one another in love as Christ has served us. As Christians we are free to love as Christ has loved us.

I. As Christians Christ has freed us from the curse of the Law.

As Lutherans we distinguish between the Law and the Gospel in the Scriptures. Luther writes about the Law in this tract, **"Although the commandments teach things that are good, the things taught are not done as soon as they are taught, for the commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it. They are intended to teach man to know**

**himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his own ability.”** (Dillenberger, p. 57) The Law shows us our sins. There is a lot of law in our text this morning. How many of us have love that is never for show? Do we always abhor evil and do what is good. Are we always hardworking, hopeful, and patient? Do we pray as much as we should? How do we treat our enemies, with love or with contempt? We all see our sins. But the Gospel frees us from our sins and the condemnation of the Law. It points us to Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away all of our sins. He suffered and died for them on Calvary. He rose and ascended into Heaven where He intercedes for our forgiveness. In baptism He washed our sins away. In Holy Communion He gives us His body and blood which were given and shed for our forgiveness. Christ has fulfilled the commandments in our place. He took our punishment on Himself, and He covers us with His righteousness.

The Gospel calls us to trust in Him for the forgiveness of all of our sins. When we come to know Jesus, it is the most freeing thing in the world. There is no sin that He cannot forgive. The Son has set us free from all of our sins and God’s righteous judgement for sin. Faith in Christ united us with Him. He is ours, and we are His for all of eternity there is nothing that will ever be able to separate us from His love.

II. On the other hand the Christian also become a servant to all.

Both Paul’s letter to the Romans and the Letter to the Galatians are illustrations of this. In both of those letters Paul begins by making it clear that our salvation does not depend on any of works, but alone on God’s grace in Jesus Christ. Paul writes in Romans 3:23, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”* He writes in Romans 8:1, *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* But now in chapter 12 he writes how in view of God’s mercy Christians are bound to love. He writes in 12:1, *“Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.”* In the rest of the book Paul describes how we as Christian are to live in this world.

He does the same thing in the letter to the Galatians. He spends the first 5 ½ chapter telling them that they are saved by grace, not by the law. He writes in 5:1, *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”* But then starting with 5:16 he urges them to live their lives according to their Christian faith. He writes, *“Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”* Luther’s point is the same in the Freedom of a Christian. He writes, **“God works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works.”** (p.69)

In these verses Paul describes such good works. In the beginning he encourages us to love those who are dear to us. In verse 11 Paul writes, *“Love one another with brotherly affection.”* Brotherly love is the deep affection that we have for those who are closest to us. We love our family, friends, and brothers and sisters in Christ. None of these relationships is perfect in this fallen world. There are times when we are selfish and times when we fight and argue. But our hearts are still affectionate toward each other. As Paul writes, we honor each other. We help those who are in need. We show hospitality by inviting each other into our homes. When they are happy, we rejoice. When they cry, we cry with them. This love is not always easy. It involves sacrifice. However, it

is something that we do joyfully for those who are close to us. We like them, so it is natural that our love for them comes right from the heart.

The tougher kind of love is for our enemies. Paul writes a lot about this kind of love in the following verses. In verse 14 he writes, “*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.*” In verse 17 he writes, “*Repay no one evil for evil.*” In verse 19 he writes, “*Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God.*” In verse 20 we read, “*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.*” Finally in verse 21 Paul writes, “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*” Love for our enemies is one of God’s most difficult commandments, but that is what God requires of us. In the Lord’s Prayer, He teaches us to pray, “*And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*” To be honest, none of us is that perfect. We can’t even love our friends from the heart all the time. We especially fail at loving our enemies, praying for them, and forgiving them from the heart. That is why we always need the cross. We see how we have failed, even as Christians. We seek the Lord’s forgiveness, and He strengthens us with His love to love one another as He has loved us.

Thank God that we have been set from from our sins through Christ, and may God strengthen us to love, serve, and forgive each other as Christ has been gracious to us.

Amen.

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