

Lesson 12

Reformation Day

The Holy Gospel: John 8:31–36

This familiar pericope is part of a section in which Jesus was interacting with Pharisees who were questioning the validity of His teaching. Many, however, believed Jesus as He said, “I do nothing on My own authority, but speak just as the Father has taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me. He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him” (vv. 28–29).

It was for these neophyte believers that Jesus had instruction and encouragement. To truly be His disciples, they were to _____. Then they would know the _____, and it would set them _____. First steps need to be followed by additional steps. Hearing the Word of Jesus must be followed by abiding in His Word.

182. What does abiding in the Word of Jesus involve us in as His disciples?

183. What will a growing realization of the truth bring to effect in us? What kind of freedom was Jesus promising here? How is that freedom to be expressed in the lives of Jesus’ disciples? (See Galatians 5:13; Romans 6:15–18.)

Jesus’ antagonists interrupted with “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone.” They were not talking about political freedom; the Jews had long suffered subjugation under powerful conquerors. Jesus responded with one of His “truly, truly, I say to you” statements.

184. How did Jesus’ “Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” expose the falseness of their taking security in “We are offspring of Abraham”?

185. What is the point of Jesus’ comparison of “a slave” and “a son”?

It is the Son, whose Word is the embodiment of truth, who is able to set us free indeed. And Jesus’ words make it clear that He is that Son—and that in Him we are truly free! The Greek is *eleutheroi*, “free men”—far more than liberated slaves who have become “freedmen.” By grace,

through faith, we become sons and daughters in the family of God, brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, and will belong to the family of God forever.

The First Lesson: Revelation 14:6–7

186. What is the significance of the messenger's flying "in mid-heaven," as the Greek puts it? Why is his message called "an eternal gospel"? To whom does the messenger proclaim this eternal Gospel?

This lesson is appropriate for Reformation Day. Since the time of the Reformation, Luther and other reformers have been seen in these angel messengers in Revelation. They returned the Church to a focus on the Gospel truth—the Good News that assures God's children of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus' completed work of redemption, and not by religiosity and its works. (See Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:15–16, 21.)

187. Are the pastors and teachers of the Church of today represented by this angel messenger in Revelation?

188. How may we all see ourselves as this angel with the Gospel to be Good-Newsed to all?

189. How does the angel messenger's announcing that "the hour of [God's] judgment has come" relate to the eternal Gospel he proclaims?

190. How does this First Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 3:19–28

Paul had quoted from Old Testament Scriptures at some length. With phrases like "None is righteous, no, not one" (v. 10), "All have turned aside" (v. 12), "The way of peace they have not known" (v. 17), and "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (v. 18), he pointed to the universality of human sinfulness and its depravity. Now he turned to God's solution.

It begins with seeing that the human predicament is beyond our ability to rectify. Paul asserted that the demands of the Law are placed on all, Jew and Gentile alike. No one is exempt; arguing is futile; all are accountable to God. Instead of the Law being a way to life for those who try hard to be

obedient, it only makes them conscious of their sin. And that is especially true for those who take the Law very seriously. As a result, “by ___ no human being will be ___ in [God’s] sight.”

“But now . . . ” said Paul. God has another answer to this dreadful human condition: “the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law.” This, too, Paul said, was attested to by the Old Testament Scriptures, “the Law and the Prophets,” in their emphasis on faith. It is a righteousness of God that is through ___ for all who ___.

191. How did Paul point out that this new answer from God is universally needed and applicable? What motivated God to provide this righteousness apart from the Law? How was this righteousness of God apart from the Law brought into effect?

“Justified by His grace as a gift” is a key phrase. The *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (p. 1721) says,

Paul uses [justify] 22 times. . . . The term describes what happens when someone believes in Christ as his Savior: From the negative viewpoint, God declares the person to be not guilty; from the positive viewpoint, he declares him to be righteous. He cancels the guilt of a person’s sin and credits righteousness to him. . . . This legal declaration is valid because Christ died to pay the penalty for our sin and lived a life of perfect righteousness that can in turn be imputed to us. (See 2 Corinthians 5:21.)

“Redemption” is a related key word, a word taken from the slave market. It was the ransom paid to free a slave. Paul referred to our release from guilt and the sentence of death because Christ, in His death, became the ransom for us.

“A propitiation by His blood” referred to the Old Testament’s Day of Atonement. Having offered sacrifice for his own sins, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place with blood of the animal sacrificed for the sins of the people and sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat, the cover of the ark of the covenant. The Septuagint called the Mercy Seat the *hilasterion*. In this text, “propitiation by His blood” is *hilasterion*. In effect, Paul was saying that Jesus is our Mercy Seat, the “place” where we receive atonement.

192. The result of redemption through Christ’s blood is that all human ___ is excluded. How would the law (principle) of works itself exclude boasting? How is boasting excluded even more by the law (principle) of faith?

Paul’s Letter to the Romans formulates the Christian doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ more fully than any other New Testament book. Luther referred to this Epistle as the chief part of the New Testament and the purest Gospel. Paul proclaimed justification by faith against all legalistic works-righteousness. Luther interpreted the sense of Paul’s words and added “alone” in his translation, and *sola fide*, “by faith alone,” became a cardinal principle of the Reformation. In closing this study on Reformation Day, let’s speak together a paraphrase of Paul’s great assurance:

“God’s Word has convinced us that we are justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone—and our obedience to the Law or our disobedience does not even enter into the consideration of our being right with God.”