

The Doctrine of Vocation – Lesson 6

Freedom of the Christian

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. These two theses seem to contradict each other. If, however, they should be found to fit together they would serve our purpose beautifully. Both are Paul's own statements, who says in 1 Cor. 9[:19], "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all," and in Rom. 13[:8], "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." Love by its very nature is ready to serve and be subject to him who is loved. So Christ, although he was Lord of all, was "born of woman, born under the law" [Gal. 4:4], and therefore was at the same time a free man and a servant, "in the form of God" and "of a servant" [Phil. 2:6–7]. Martin Luther, AE 31:344

Luther points out the paradoxical nature of the Christian life: Christians are both lords and servants, freemen and slaves. Luther admits that these two ideas seem to contradict each other, but he assures us that both are based upon the clear teaching of Scripture.



56. Having Jesus by our side, are we free to do whatever we want, such as running red lights? Why or why not? How does the distinction of the two kingdoms help us understand the freedom we enjoy as Christians?

Slaves unto Righteousness

57. Read Galatians 5:1–6. From what has Christ freed us? Why is it detrimental to our faith to believe, even in part, that our salvation and our relationship with God is based upon our performance?

58. Read Galatians 5:13–15. Though Christians have been set free by Christ, what does this freedom *not* entail?

59. Read Galatians 5:16–18. The flesh, our corrupt sinful nature, fights against the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us. How does our twofold nature as sinner and saint affect the freedom we have in Christ?

60. Read 1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1. Christians have been set free by Christ, but under some circumstances they may choose not to exercise their freedom. What are such circumstances, and how is this willing service different from the yoke of slavery Paul speaks about in Galatians 5?

61. Read Romans 6:15–23. In one Epistle, Paul boldly asserts that Christians are freed by Christ. In another, he declares that Christians are slaves to righteousness. How is this possible?

62. How does the fact that we as Christians are slaves to righteousness shape our understanding of the doctrine of Christian vocation?

Freed to Serve

The forgiveness that Christ so freely gives has set us free to serve our neighbor. All concerns that we may have about our own salvation have been alleviated by the Words and work of our Savior, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2). Indeed, it is for freedom that Christ has set us free!

63. Read Matthew 18:21–35. How has Christ's forgiveness set us free from our sins? What has this forgiveness freed us to do?

64. How does the understanding of salvation as God forgiving our sins for Christ's sake not only generate our desire to evangelize but also give shape to our methods of evangelism?

The Reality of Sin

Good works are not necessary for salvation, but they are necessary (see Augsburg Confession VI; Apology of the Augsburg Confession XIIb 77). Though Christians daily battle the sinful flesh, we rejoice with Paul, who wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

65. Read Romans 7:14–25. What are some examples of how we Christians struggle to keep the Law? Should these struggles concern us?

66. Read Romans 8:1–4. Should we be concerned if we don't struggle against the sinful flesh? Why? How is Christ our only hope and the source not only of forgiveness of sins but also for living the Christian life?

Spiritual Exercises

- During the coming week, meditate each day on the hymn "Salvation unto Us Has Come" (*LSB* 555; *ELH* 227; *CW* 390; *LW* 355; *LBW* 297; *TLH* 377). Note how Law and Gospel are distinguished, how Christ's work for us is exalted, and how the fruit of good works is portrayed as evidence of a living faith.
- In consideration of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1, analyze your attitude and actions this past week to see if your exercise of your Christian freedom has caused offense to your neighbor. With the Holy Spirit's guidance, confess where you have sinned, and look for ways to serve that person in love. Rejoice that God has forgiven your sins for Christ's sake.
- If you have not already done so, commit to memory Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Creed.

Point to Remember

But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. Romans 6:17–18