**WORSHIP**

**Reformation Sunday**

FIRST READING

Revelation 14:6-7

*The Three Angels*

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**6﻿ Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. ﻿7﻿ He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”**

**14:6–13**† The three angels. A message of comfort after the warning (13:11–18) against false teachings. The vision assures the church that false teachers will never silence the preaching of the gospel. (CSB)

Three angels in succession (14:6, 8, 9) now announce the judgment of God on the two beasts conjured up by the dragon. Each angel is introduced as “another [ἄλλον] angel.” This indicates that they are not from among the seven trumpet-angels. They are among the many angels who appear throughout Revelation who are not part of the seven (e.g., the angels in 5:2; 7:1, 2; 10:1; 18:1; 19:17). (CC)

**14:6** *eternal gospel.*† The content of this “good news” is not found in v. 7, which is a summary of the purpose for which the gospel is proclaimed. The gospel is the good news of our redemption through the blood of the Lamb. It is eternal in that it will be preached to the end of time (Mt 24:14). (CSB)

Not a new Gospel, since there is only one (Gal 1:6–8). The messenger proclaims the enduring message of deliverance from evil, just as the new song (v 3) proclaims redemption anew. (TLSB)

The first angel, “flying in mid-heaven” has “the eternal Gospel to proclaim” to all the inhabitants of the earth (14:6). At first glance “Gospel” (εὑαγγέλιον) and the verb “to proclaim [Good News, the Gospel]” (εὑαγγελίζω) seem to be incongruous in this context, for they usually involve “Good News” that brings joy, specifically the forgiveness of sins through faith in the work of Christ (e.g., Rom 1:16–17). But here they include somber news of judgment, for the angel’s loud cry calls for all to “fear God … because the moment of his judgment has come” (Rev 14:7). However, since this “eternal Gospel” includes also the purpose of moving people to “worship” God as the Creator of all life, this eternal news includes then not only the announcement of judgment (Law) but also the gracious call and invitation to such worship (the Gospel). The surrounding context is explicitly Christological, with 14:1–5 depicting the victorious Lamb and the victory song of the saints. In particular John most likely had in mind the concluding content of the “eternal Gospel”: the announcement of the judgment in view of the Lord Christ’s second coming at the End. For this return of the Lord would also be the final deliverance of God’s people from the dragon, his two beasts, and their hosts (19:1–16). This aspect of the “eternal Gospel” is pointedly suggested in 14:13 when a *blessing* is pronounced upon those who have died and are dying “in the Lord.” In addition, even when the “eternal Gospel” is proclaimed to all the nations for the initial purpose of moving people to “fear God” (14:7) because of their sins and his coming judgment, such proclamation has as its *goal* the repentance and salvation of all through the announcement of Christ’s forgiveness (See Mt. 28:19-20; Lk. 24:44-48; cf. Rev. 15:3-4; 16:8-11). Thus the “eternal Gospel” is the eternal message of God—of both judgment and grace—based on the person and saving work of Jesus Christ. And this eternal message has as a reference point (its end point, the τέλος, Mk 13:7, 13) the second coming of Christ, when he will both judge the unbelievers and deliver his believing followers. (CC)

**14:7** GIVE HIM GLORY – The stated purpose of proclaiming the “eternal Gospel” is to move people to “fear God” and “give to him glory” and “worship him,” all in view of his coming judgment (14:7). Here is a clear definition of the purpose of proclaiming the eternal message of God. The “fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps 111:10; cf. Job 28:28). Such fear comes from learning about God through hearing his Word (Deut 4:10). Fear of God is an essential part of contrition over sin and repentance (Acts 2:37) and is also a part of one’s faithfulness to God (Acts 9:31; Rev 11:18). Glory (δόξα) is given to God in and through Jesus Christ (Jn 17:5, 22–24; cf. 13:31–32). In particular, God is glorified (δοξάζω) when people come to him in Jesus’ name (Jn 14:13–14; 15:7–8) and when they thank him for what has been done to them by Jesus (Acts 4:21–22; 11:17–18). And it is God’s purpose that he himself thus be glorified through Jesus Christ (1 Pet 4:11), for his Son in exaltation is God’s glory (Acts 7:55). To worship God as the Creator is the end result of fearful repentance and giving glory to God through the redemption wrought by Christ. The heavenly hosts worship God as their Creator (Rev 4:8–11). The saints now join in this worship of God because of the victory of the Lamb on their behalf (5:9–14), the Lamb who by his blood has restored God’s people to their rightful place in worship of him as their Creator and Lord (1:5–6; 4:11). For the end purpose of God’s redemption is the restoration of his creatures so that they recognize and worship him as their God and Creator (Rev. 3:14; 11:15; 21:1, 5-7; cf. Rom. 8:18-25). (CC)

At first blush, this announcement does not sound much like the Gospel. However, it is indeed good news for the faithful, since the saints are repeatedly depicted as suffering at the hand of evildoers in Rv. (TLSB)

 *him who made the heavens.* See Ex 20:11; Ps 146:6. (CSB)

EPISTLE

Romans 3:19-28

**19﻿ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ﻿20﻿ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.**

**3:19** *we know.* See note on 2:2. (CSB)

 *law.* The OT (as in Jn 10:34; 15:25; 1Co 14:21). (CSB)

God’s voice, recorded in the Law. (TLSB)

This verse contains the picture of a defendant in a court of law who given the opportunity to speak in hos own defense, is speechless because of the weight of evidence that has been brought against him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 13, Part 4)

 *those who are under the law.* Jews. (CSB)

Those subject to the Law; in this case, the Jews. Scripture proved their guilt. (TLSB)

“Those who are under the law” refers to “both Jews and Greeks [that is, Gentiles]” (3:9), in other words, all mankind. All mankind is under the damning burden and curse of sin. Everyone is guilty in God’s sight. God’s Law does all the talking in condemning mankind’s disobedience against him. Mankind has nothing to say in defense of our sin against God and his Law and must be silent before God, to whom we are subject (*hupodikos*, “accountable”). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

After hearing the devastating testimony of 3:10-18, it would be impossible for anybody – even a Jew – to say: “But that doesn’t apply to me.” Just in case “the Jew” is tempted to say such a thing, Paul makes it explicit that the things spoken in the OT are a message for those to whom it was given.

In the previous passage the apostle had spoken of men in general, both Jews and Gentiles, giving a full and detailed description of their natural condition. He now applies the thought to the Jews in particular, to those that were under the Law in a special sense. Sow we know, it is a fact generally conceded, it is a statement which may be assumed at once, without further proof. Whatever things, all the things which the Law tells, it speaks with reference to the Lawgiver and to the purpose of His will, to them that are under the Law, who made their boast of the Mosaic Law, whose entire life, down to the minutest details, was regulated by its provisions. (Kretzmann)

 *every mouth … whole world.* Jews as well as Gentiles are guilty. (CSB)

While some proclaim innocence, the evidence of sinfulness is clear. (TLSB)

This is used literally of lion’s mouths in Hebrews 11:33, metaphorically of “silencing” here. One recalls Job, who undertook to maintain his own righteousness but eventually put his hand over his mouth, in dread of God speaking out of the whirlwind. (Job 38:1-40:5)

That the heathen are guilty before God and deserve punishment because of their glaring abominations is evident. But the Jew, whose vices were hidden by a certain outward righteousness or appearance of piety, are no better than the heathen. The Law, which they had in preference to the heathen serves to silence them also before God when He judges them and to make them appear worthy of punishment. (Stoeckhardt)

But the purpose of the Law and of all instruction in the Law is that every mouth should be silenced, and that the entire world should become guilty before God. In the case of the heathen the deeds of their depravity were evidently culpable. But the Jews, in whose case the vices and transgressions were often covered with a certain external righteousness and show of sanctity, were equally guilty before the Law of God. (Kretzmann)

 HELD ACCOUNTABLE – That the world be made liable to punishment, when the Law code is explicitly promulgated.

It amounts to this that every mouth is stopped, that the whole world, Jew and Gentiles, deserve punishment. (Stoeckhardt)

hoopodeekos – To be under the sentence of the judge and be found condemned and guilty.

Not one mouth can be opened in a plea of innocence and righteousness, but the whole world, regardless of race and nationality, should stand convicted of guilt, be liable to punishment on account of sin. And why will all the world become guilty before God? Because by the deeds of the Law will no flesh be justified before Him. (Kretzmann)

**3:20** *declared righteous.* See notes on v. 24; 2:13. (CSB)

Conclusion shows that statements of 2:7, 10, 13 were hypothetical. Works cannot earn salvation. (TLSB)

Here the purpose for God giving His Law is that it would show us our sin. The Law was never intended by God to serve as the basis for one to prove his own righteousness standing before God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 13, Part 4)

“By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight.” Man cannot manipulate God or make God change the truth of his condemning Law, thus to favor one person over another or to distinguish one person over another. If this were possible, it would actually serve the opposite purpose of revealing how much the same we are in our sin before God, the only true judge before whom all mankind actually stands. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

A trial scene is suggested. “Be declared in a right relationship” is equivalent to the verdict “innocent.”

This is a continuation of verse 19 to hammer the point home that the Law by itself can only condemn. In this verse it serves to show us our sinfulness.

It is impossible for any person, by means of the works which are demanded by the Law, to stand before God, to be accepted by Him, as a just person; no sinner can fulfill the Law in its real requirements, actually keep all its demands in regard to omission and commission. For through the Law, by the Law, is the knowledge of sin. The Law convicts us of sin; it shows us our manifold transgressions; it condemns us by bringing home the fact that our sin deserves the wrath of God; and this knowledge is full and accurate. “Through the Law my conscience grows and fills me with wrath against the Law and against God that has given the Law, the sin thus becoming exceedingly sinful through the commandment.” (Luther.) To justify a sinner, to pronounce him just in the sight of God, that is not the purpose of the Law; for that it was never intended. Note: This purpose of the Law is utilized by the Christians every day in examining their lives; for, as in a mirror, it reveals the sins and shortcomings of man, it convinces him of his guilt and damnation. (Kretzmann)

 *through the law comes knowledge of sin*. The Law serves as a mirror. When we hear its commands, it clearly shows us that we have sinned and are guilty. (TLSB)

It is a relationship in which the claim of the Creator’s will is understood to obligate man to a fulfilling response. Whenever men think of the relationship of God and man that way – regardless of whether it is done as a result of possessing the revealed Torah or by virtue of being “Law to themselves” – they are made liable to God for punishment and are to recognize their sin.

Sin is not just a matter of one or more misdeeds, but of the totally skewed posture and position of man in the entire relationship to God; a recognition of man’s sinfulness, rebellion, and self-chosen bondage to Sin, the power that opposes God.

Psalm 130:3 “If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?”

Ecclesiastes 7:20 “There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.”

**3:9–20** While we are tempted to think that obedience to the Law can save, Paul shows the Law’s diagnosis: we are sinners incapable of saving ourselves (v 20). Only when we see this are we prepared for the Good News of what Christ has done for us. • Lord, I know that I am a sinner. Forgive me. Help me see Jesus and trust in Him alone. Amen. (TLSB)

*Righteousness Through Faith*

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**21﻿ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ﻿22﻿ This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ﻿23﻿ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ﻿24﻿ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ﻿25﻿ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,﻿a﻿ through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— ﻿26﻿ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. ﻿27﻿ Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. ﻿28﻿ For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.**

**3:21–5:21** Having shown that all (both Gentiles and Jews) are unrighteous (1:18–3:20), Paul now shows that God has provided a righteousness for mankind. (CSB)

**3:21-24** But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, . . . through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” Drastically different from God’s Law, wherein all mankind is revealed to be the same in its sin, is God’s Gospel of the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, which we have through faith. This distinguishes us before God from unbelievers because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection (*apolutrōseōs*, “redemption”). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

**3:21** *But now.* There are two possible meanings: (1) temporal—all of time is divided into two periods, and in the “now” period the righteousness from God has been made known; (2) logical—the contrast is between the righteousness gained by observing the law (which is impossible, v. 20) and the righteousness provided by God. (CSB)

Paul revealed our unrighteousness; now he reveals the righteousness of God, which is Christ Jesus. (TLSB)

These words are small but mighty! They introduce the transition between our total inability to keep the Law and the good news that grace is the sole basis for our righteousness before God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 13, Part 4)

These words tell of a transition that is taking place or in this case and significant change of emphasis. Having strongly made the point that the Law cannot save, Paul now switches to the good news of what can save them.

“Having proved that justification, on the ground of legal obedience or personal merits, is for all men impossible, Paul proceeds to unfold the method of salvation presented in the Gospel.” (Hodge.) In v.20 the sentence of condemnation concerning them all has been declared. And only he that has this knowledge of sin will incidentally comprehend, understand, what is really meant with the righteousness which is valid before God. The apostle places his statements as an expression of logical consequence: ”But now.” Although, then, all men are under the sentence of condemnation, there is still hope for them, there is a way of justification, of salvation, open for all of them. Without the Law the righteousness of God is revealed, manifested. (Kretzmann)

 APART FROM THE LAW – Jesus’ sacrifice fulfills the OT Law. Paul now defines righteousness and the righteous community, functions formally held by the Torah in Israel. God’s righteousness is not earned by our works. (TLSB)

This manifestation is in a place and manner – the person and way of Jesus – that is not part of the post-fall relationship of Law that has determined sinful humanity’s experience of God’s will. The sense of law here is broad; it refers to that relationship of sinners to God and to the claim of His will in which they know that they are answerable and have failed. It is the ‘Law” by which is knowledge of sin (3:20) – which Jewish sinners have in Torah and Gentile sinners “are…to themselves (2:14). Jesus is without sin outside of the darkness which sin brings. He is “apart from” the relationship in which Law is perceived as a demand on failing sinners. This focus on the relationship aspect of “Law” means that the manifestation of the righteousness of God “apart from Law” includes the idea of righteousness apart from the “works of the Law.”

The law does not speak in the Gospel. God demands nothing of man in the preaching of the Gospel but only promises, gives and presents, namely, the NT blessing of righteousness. (Stoeckhardt)

The Law has nothing to do with this revelation; the righteousness which is here spoken of is not that of the Law. It is God’s method of justification which is here presented, as in chap. 1, 17. It is the righteousness of which God is the Source and Author, which comes from Him alone, which He alone can give, and which therefore is acceptable in His sight. It is the righteousness which is imputed to us by God for the sake of Jesus Christ, of which Luther confesses: “Therefore this is a majestic preaching and heavenly wisdom that we believe: our righteousness, salvation, and consolation are outside of us, that we should be righteous, acceptable, holy, and wise before God, and still there is in us only sin, unrighteousness, and foolishness. In my conscience there is nothing but the feeling and the memory of sin and of the terrors of death, and yet I should look elsewhere and believe that sin and death is not there.” 7) Justification does not designate a moral change in man, but signifies a forensic act on the part of God, by which He imputes to us, makes us possessors of, a righteousness which was not ours, which we did not merit: But whom God justifies, declares to be righteous, he is righteous, although all the world and all devils unite in condemning him, though even his own conscience blames and condemns him. This righteousness has been manifested, it has been made plain, placed in the light. The sentence of God according to which the sinner is declared righteous was spoken and existed in Christ before the foundation of the world. (Kretzmann)

 RIGHTEOSNESS FROM GOD...MADE KNOWN – It is a revelation of God’s righteousness when His eschatological wrath is poured out over sinners, for God surely has “promised” (or “threatened”) to punish sin. But He has promised more than that. The fulfillment of His promise to send a Savior – and simultaneously to punish sin – is the event which has been recently made manifest: the ministry of Jesus and His death and resurrection. Thus the righteousness of God is His faithfulness to His Word both to punish sin and to send a Savior from sin. This Savior both is faithful to His mission and gives to sinners, through their trust in Him, the gracious gift of a new and right relationship to God.

This righteousness of God, that counteracts sin, guilt and wrath, is truly not our own righteousness, not something good in us, but a righteousness that rests outside of us in God, in God’s judgment, and so is as firm and immovable as God Himself. What God says, judges, decrees, is valid in time and in eternity. He whom God declares righteous is righteous, even though all the world and all devils condemn him, even though his own conscience pronounces him guilty and judges him. (Stoeckhardt)

 *the Law and the Prophets testify.* See Ge 15:6; Ps 32:1–2; Hab 2:4. (CSB)

Entire OT bears witness to Christ (Lk 24:27). (TLSB)

This present passive participle means that this righteousness of God which is apart from the Law-sinner nexus and relationship of man and God has always been and still is being testified to in the OT writings. This witness of the OT continues in the new aeon, with the preaching of the Gospel.

And this is now made known to sinners through the Gospel, by the witness of the Law and the prophets, the two principal parts of the Old Testament Scriptures, in both of which parts the Gospel-message was plainly contained; for the prophecies of Christ proclaimed the salvation in and through Christ. (Kretzmann)

**3:22–23** *There is no difference … glory of God.* A parenthetical thought: All who believe are “justified freely” (v. 24), not “all have sinned … and are justified freely” (vv. 23–24). (CSB)

**No Difference?**

There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
       (Romans 3:22–24 KJV)

We humans are different in many ways. We differ in appearance, in physical strength, and in skills. We have different fingerprints and different voices. We have different feelings and emotions and more. In short, we are individuals, and it can truly be said: "There is nobody just like you."

In a very special way, we also must say of the human race that there is no difference. This refers to our sinful condition and the means God used for our common redemption. In plain and simple language, the apostle Paul tells us that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There are no exceptions, not even one (Romans 3:12). St. John is just as explicit: "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8 KJV).

No one can buy or earn the way into heaven. It can be obtained only as a free gift by the grace of God through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ through His death on the cross. In dispensing His grace, God does not recognize any difference between Jew or Greek, between white or black, between male or female. We are all one in Christ Jesus.

*Lord, I confess my sins and rely only on Your free grace. Amen.*

Author: William A. Lauterbach/Oct. 17, 1984

**3:22** RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD – dikahyosoonay – Christian justification. Being right in God’s sight can only come from God.

This thought is again taken up in the next verse for further explanation: The righteousness; namely, before God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and upon all that believe. That is the righteousness to which the apostle refers, the righteousness which is valid before, acceptable to. God, and which becomes the possession of all those that believe in Jesus Christ, the God-man, the Messiah, and thus accept the salvation which has made justification possible. The Gospel-message works faith in the hearts of men, and this faith does not earn or merit righteousness before God, but accepts, receives, and appropriates the imputed righteousness. (Kretzmann)

The righteousness bestowed by God. (Bauer)

The righteousness of God is God’s alone; man is taken up into it and set in it. (subjunctive genitive) It is a conjunction of judgment and grace which He enjoys and demonstrates by showing righteousness, by imparting it as His pardoning sentence. (Kittel)

Psalm 48:10 “Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with righteousness.”

Jeremiah 23:6 “In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.”

 COMES THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS – Paul uses forms of this expression often (Gal 2:16; Php 3:9; 1Tm 1:14; 2Tm 1:13; 3:15). Grammatically, the expression may speak of our faith, which trusts in Christ and His work. It may also indicate Christ’s faithfulness in completing the work of salvation. Both explanations teach true doctrine: Christ earned our salvation by His faithfulness and gives us the benefits of His work through the gift of faith. (TLSB)

Most likely means “through divine covenant faithfulness.” It is true that righteousness is the gift of a right relationship to God, given and received through faith in Christ.

But what is the relation of faith to righteousness? According to the apostle the righteousness which avails before God existed before it was revealed, before preaching and faith. The preaching of the Gospel, which reveals and offers this righteousness, renders possible and first awakens faith. Righteousness is received through faith. Faith is merely the medium of acceptance. (bag) Through faith we take the righteousness Christ prepared. (Stoeckhardt)

This contains an objective genitive which has Jesus Christ as its object. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 13, Part 4)

Faith is the trustful acceptance of the mercy of salvation. By believing the Gospel, the believer accepts and appropriates his Savior, Jesus Christ, and therefore also the righteousness which Jesus has prepared. (Kretzmann)

 *no difference.* Between Jews and Gentiles (see 10:12). (CSB)

The righteousness of God is intended for all those that believe, and therefore it also is poured forth like a stream upon all those that believe. Whoever believes, no matter what his antecedents and his history, by his faith receives what God offers, and thus becomes the possessor of this great blessing of the New Testament. (Kretzmann)

**3:23** ALL...FALL SHORT – Every human, aside from Christ. (TLSB)

Some may seem to come closer than others, but no one can live a holy life. “Scripture shouts everywhere that we are far away from the perfection that the Law requires” (Ap XIIB 45). (TLSB)

hoostereho - Everything short of what God expects is inferior and falls short or is found lacking. Isaiah 6:3 describes the glory of God which he wants to us to reflect like the moon reflects the sun. When we don’t do that we are found lacking.

The persons spoken of are they that believe. Therefore, all who believe have, before they became believers, sinned and so fallen short of the glory of God. (Stoeckhardt)

Usterew means “lack.” When we sin the glory of God is lacking in us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 13, Part 4)

Isaiah 53:6 – “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Isaiah 64:6 – “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”

Romans 3:12 – “All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

1 John 1:8 – “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

This “collective historical aroist” sums up “the aggregate of the evil deeds of men,” which “extends even to the moment of speaking…It is impossible to think of an interval between the fact stated and this statement of it.

 *glory of God.* What God intended man to be. The glory that man had before the fall (see Ge 1:26–28; Ps 8:5–6; cf. Eph 4:24; Col 3:10) the believer will again have through Christ (see Heb 2:5–9). (CSB)

Glory is a visible manifestation of the holiness of God. Glory emanates from His presence (Is. 6:3). Like the moon reflects the sun’s light, we are to reflect God’s “light.” In Romans 1:21-23 wicked humanity exchanged the glory of God the Creator for the glory of created things. This deadly exchange results in the perverse worship of “things.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 13, Part 4)

This glory of God, is not the future glorification of God, in which the believers will finally share, or the original image of God which man had. All who believe have sinned and are, therefore, without all glory, all honor, and all esteem before God, since all without exception become righteous in this way: that they in the knowledge of their sinfulness and complete unworthiness before lay hold of Jesus Christ in faith. (Stoeckhardt)

The sin of Adam resulted in his loss of the “image” and “glory” of God, and all his sinful progeny continue in that state. Correspondingly, the bestowal of righteousness as a gift reverses the fall and restores the conditions of paradise and the glory.

That there can be neither the merit of a natural excellency nor even that of the act of believing in the believers, is evident from the nest words of the apostle: For there is no difference, no distinction among men as to their relation toward God, for they all, also the believers, have sinned and are lacking the glory of God; they have no standing before God by nature, they have nothing that they can boast of before Him. It is because they are conscious of their own sinfulness and of their moral destitution before the omniscient and holy God that they cling to their Savior in faith and accept His righteousness, which makes them acceptable and just before God. (Kretzmann)

**3:24** *justified.*† Paul uses this verb 22 times, mostly in 2:13–5:1; Gal 2–3. It is translated “justify” in all cases except two (2:13; 3:20, where it is translated “declared righteous”). 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 the person’s sin and credits righteousness to him. Paul emphasizes two points in this regard: 1. No one lives a perfectly good, holy, righteous life. On the contrary, “there is no one righteous” (v. 10), and “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (v. 23). “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his [God’s] sight by observing the law” (v. 20). 2. But even though all are sinners and not sons, God declares everyone who puts his trust in Jesus not guilty but righteous. 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. This is the central theme of Romans and is stated in the theme verse, 1:17 (“a righteousness from God”). Christ’s righteousness (his obedience to God’s law and his sacrificial death) is credited to believers as their own. Paul uses the word “credited” nine times in ch. 4 alone. (CSB)

dikahyoo – To declare some righteous or free from judgment. This does not mean that the person is truly innocent, but he/she does not carry with them the burden or consequence of that sin. In this verse the explanation for such freedom is the free and undeserved grace of God.

Legal justice can recognize the fact that man is righteous; it cannot make him righteous. God makes man a gift of His acquittal, gives him, effectively, the status of righteousness, lets him stand and count as righteous in His eyes. The acquitting and restoring grace is lavish, generous, without reserve. It is in the last analysis wholly inexplicable, being hidden deep in the abysses of the love of God. But it is neither sentimental nor arbitrary, it does not drown sin in tears, neither does it simply ignore sin. The God of grace deals with sin effectually and at a fearful cost to Himself. (Franzmann)

Ephesians 2:8-9 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Grace cannot be earned; it must be given by God. (TLSB)

 *freely by his grace.*† The central thought in justification is that, although man clearly and totally deserves to be declared guilty (vv. 9–19), God declares him righteous because of the redemption through Christ. This is stated in several ways here: (1) “freely” (as a gift, for nothing), (2) “by his grace,” (3) “through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” and (4) “through faith” (v. 25). (CSB)

Justification is thus, as the apostle states, transmitted freely, as a gift, through the grace of God, which alone can be the source of mercy. And it is made possible through the redemption, literally, through the deliverance by the paying of ransom, of Jesus Christ. Jesus had redeemed us from all our sins and from the wrath of God by staking a price, a ransom, for our souls, Matt. 20. 28; Mark 10, 45; 1 Tim. 2, 6; Titus 2, 14. And this price of ransom was none other than His own precious blood. Eph. 1, 7; Col. 1, 14; 1 Pet. 1, 18. 19. (Kretzmann)

 *redemption.* A word taken from the slave market—the basic idea is that of obtaining release by payment of a ransom. Paul uses this word to refer to release from guilt, with its liability for judgment, and to deliverance from slavery to sin, because Christ in his death paid the ransom for us. (CSB)

Gk *apolytrosis*, the buying back of a slave or captive, to set the person free. Christ gave His life to set all people free when He died on the cross. “We receive the mercy promised in Him by faith and set it against God’s wrath and judgment” (Ap IV 82). (TLSB)

And the manner in which He paid this wonderful price is fully described. God has set Him forth as a mercy seat through faith in His blood; that was the purpose, the intention! of God as put into practice in the sacrifice of Calvary, John 3, 14. Jesus is the true Mercy-seat, of whom the cover of the ark in the Most Holy Place was but a feeble type. Just as the high priest of the Old Testament, on the great Day of Atonement, sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice against the lid of the ark, thereby making reconciliation for the sins of the entire people. Lev. 16, 30, thus Jesus is the perfect Mercy seat in His own blood. High Priest, Sacrifice, and Mercy-seat in one person, Jesus has fulfilled all types of Old Testament sacrifices by the shedding of His holy blood as a ransom for the sins of the world. Thus He became the true Mediator between God and men, covering all our sin, guilt, shame, and nakedness before the eyes of God, and obtaining a perfect redemption for all men. And the reconciliation thus obtained becomes our possession and property by faith in His blood: God looks upon the precious blood of His Son, through which the sins of the whole world are expiated, through which all sinners are delivered from sin, guilt, wrath, and damnation: and for the sake of this bloody sacrifice and perfect merit of Christ He pronounces the sinners just and holy. (Kretzmann)

**3:25-26** God distinguishes Christ Jesus as the righteous and just justifier, by the atoning sacrifice of his sin-free lifeblood on the cross. By faith in his atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sin, we are in his righteousness and have been justified, distinguished. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

**3:25** GOD PRESENTED HIM – Three aspects of the range of the use of this word are appropriate here:

1. God “proposed (to Himself)” Christ Jesus as propitiator as the divine plan of salvation from all eternity;
2. God “presented” Christ Jesus as propitiator in a cultic sense of presenting a sacrifice or offering;
3. God “set forth publicly” Christ Jesus as propitiator.

None of these excludes the other: in accord with His eternal purpose, God presented Jesus as the atoning sacrifice when He sent Him to the public execution on the cross – all of which is continuing to be set forth publicly now in the preaching of the word of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18).

Having set forth the nature and ground of the Gospel method of justification. Paul now states its object: For the declaration of His righteousness. God has set forth Jesus, His Son, the Redeemer, as the true Mercy-seat, is still setting Him forth before the eyes of the entire world of sinners, Gal. 3, 1, in order to show forth His righteousness. It was an act of the righteousness of God that He condemned His Son, the Substitute for all sinners, to the violent death of the cross; by setting forth Christ in His wounds and blood before the eyes of all men, He declared His righteousness before the whole world. The avenging righteousness and holiness of God could not be satisfied with less, it must demand the supreme sacrifice. (Kretzmann)

 *sacrifice of atonement.* The Greek for this phrase speaks of a sacrifice that satisfies the righteous wrath of God. Without this appeasement (“propitiation”) all people are justly destined for eternal punishment. See NIV text note here; see also note on 1Jn 2:2. (CSB)

Gk *hilasterion*, in the LXX, the ark of the covenant’s cover, where the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices. See note, Ex 25:17. As the propitiation covered the ark of the covenant, Christ’s righteousness covers the sinner. He is the sacrifice for sin. (TLSB)

Propitiation – In the OT used in connection with sacrifice, when in some way blood covered sine and effected atonement. Jesus by His blood exercised propitiative function and effected atonement between God and men. Concordia Dictionary)

This word carries with it the image of the OT mercy seat and recalls the blood sacrifices of the old covenant (Lev. 17:11). The grace of God permitted for the life of the slain victim to be substituted for the life of the sinner. Christ is the one who pays for the guilt of sin and also performs the sacrifice. This is reflected in our hymnody: “himself the victim and himself the priest” (LSB – 637) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 13, Part 4)

Propitiation, in the original Hebrew “Kapporeth,” is taken from the sacrificial ritual of Israel. Kapporeth was the name of the golden cover over the Ark of the Covenant, therefore, the mercy-seat. Thus Christ is compared to and appears as the Antitype of the OT mercy-seat. (Stoeckhardt)

The atoning power and efficacy of the mercy-seat rested in the blood of a sacrificial animal with which it was sprinkled every year. The significance of the OT offering was the following: If an Israelite had sinned against a commandment of God, according to the precepts of the law he took an animal from his heard, without fault or blemish and brought it to the tabernacle, later to the temple. In the court of the sanctuary he laid his hand upon the animal’s head. Thus he substituted the animal himself and symbolically transferred to it his sins and guilt (Lev. 16:21). Thereupon the Israelite killed the animal for offering. By his sin the Israelite had forfeited his life and merited death. However, in his stead the guiltless life of an animal was given into death and its blood shed. The animal, to which the sins of the Israelite were imputed, atone for the punishment of the sinner. (Stoeckhardt)

First then did the functioning priest take part in the sacrificial act. He took the blood of the animal and spread it on the horns of the altar of burnt-offering, or waved it to and fro on the side wall of the altar, or poured it out on the ground around the altar, thereby bringing it into the presence of God. For the altar was the place where God came together with His people (Ex. 29:42). The blood of the animal came between the sinner and the holy God and so covered or atoned for man’s sin. The blood-offering, applied to the altar of God, covered the sins or the sinner before God, so that God no longer saw his sins, no longer regarded them, no longer reckoned them to his account. The blood served as atonement for sins, while in and with the blood the life, the soul, of the animal gushed forth, and thereby the punishment of the sins was atoned. Lev. 17:11: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.” The blood of the animal did not in itself have the power to atone or the sins, but only inasmuch as it prophesied of the better Offering of the NT. The basic idea of the offering, therefore, was vicarious satisfaction. (Stoeckhardt)

The significance of the offering is the foundation for the right understanding of the sprinkling of blood by the high priests upon the Ark of the Covenant on the great Day of Atonement. The sacrificial act of this day, culminating in the sprinkling of blood, was the OT highest and most perfect act of atonement. On this day all the sins of Israel during the past year were atoned. Lev. 16:30: “For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord. (Stoeckhardt)

The essential characteristics of this great act of atonement are the following: The priest took a young bullock as sin-offering for himself and for the priesthood and two he-goats as sin-offering for the people and placed them before the Lord, before the door of the tabernacle, later before the door of the temple. Hereupon he slew the bullock of the sin-offering for himself and the priesthood. The he filled the pastil burners with coals from the altar of burnt-offering and his hands with holy frankincense; and carrying both into the holy of holies, he caused a cloud of smoke to arise by laying the frankincense upon the burning coals. Thus the mercy-seat over the Ark, the place of God’s presence, was covered so that he could safely approach it. While the holy of holies became filled with smoke of the incense, the high priest returned to the court for the blood of the bullock. Re-entering the holy of holies for the second time, he sprinkled first the front side of the Ark’s covering, then seven times on the ground before the Ark. By this act he atoned for his own sins and for those of the priesthood. The sprinkling upon the Ark served as atonement for the persons of the high priest and the priests, the sprinkling before the Ark as atonement and cleansing of the holy of holies, which became unclean through the sins of the priesthood. (Stoeckhardt)

After the atonement of the priesthood was completed, the high priest left the sanctuary for the second time, returned to the court, and there killed the ram, selected by lot as sin-o offering for the congregation. With its blood he went into the holy of holies for the third time and sprinkled the blood in the same manner as before. The significance of the double sprinkling of blood was identical in both instances. The sins of the congregation and then the impurity of the holy of holies resulting from these sins were atoned. In similar ways, by means of blood, the holy place and the court, especially the altar of burn-offering, were cleansed from all impurity of the children of Israel. And so the service which the congregation provided through the priesthood is and at the sanctuary was a divine, God-pleasing service. (Stoeckhardt)

The most characteristic thing at the offering of the Day of Atonement was that the blood of atonement was brought into the holy of holies and sprinkled upon the covering of the Ark or the mercy-seat. The vessels of the holy of holies formed the throne of the God of Israel. The Ark of the Covenant, wherein was concealed both tables of the law, was the base, the golden plate over the Ark the footstool of the throne. On this plate stood two golden cherubim’s, whose wings spread over it. Between the cherubims, over their outstretched wings, moved the cloud, that is, the cloud of divine glory, in which Jehovah manifested His presence in the holy of holies over the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 40:34; 25:22; Lev. 16:2). By applying the blood of the offering to the Kapporeth, the priest brought it into the immediate presence of God. Thus the blood of atonement was really and truly valid before God. However, between the tables of the law in the Ark and the holy God, enthroned over the cherubins, was the mercy-seat, sprinkled with blood. The mercy-seat, sprinkled with blood, covered the tables of the law, covered the transgressions of Israel before the eyes of God, so that God no longer saw and regarded them. The mercy-seat with its blood, however, changed God’s wrath over sin into grace and good pleasure. Accordingly the thought of atonement and reconciliation found its strongest and most concrete expression in the offering of the Great Day of Atonement. (Stoeckhardt)

What happened to the second he-goat or the scapegoat was to symbolize through an outward act how God now considered all the sins and impurities of Israel of the past year. To this end the high priest placed both his hands upon the head of the live goat, confessed all the sins and transgression of Israel, thus putting them upon the heat of the goat. Thereupon the goat was led far out into the wilderness and left there in order to show the people that they were completely and forever free from their sins. To be sure, the atonement occurred with the application of the blood of the first goat. But since it was physically impossible to use the dead goat, therefore, another goat had to take its place in order to symbolize to the people how they were released from their sins as a result of the atonement. In this respect both goats formed the one act of atonement. (Stoeckhardt)

Christ appears as the Antitype of the OT Kapporeth and the Counterpoint of the OT offering. For He is a “propitiation in His blood,” by virtue of His blood. In one person He is the Offering as well as the Priest and the Mercy-seat. Christ Jesus stepped into the sinner’s place and took upon Himself the guilt of the whole world. Men did not offer this substitution or themselves, for they continued and delighted in their sins. They desired no Redeemer, no offering for their sins. Unasked, of His own accord and out of free grace, God ordained and gave His Son to men as their Mediator and Atoner. God Christ’s a propitiation. The Lord put all our sins upon Him and imputed them to Him (Is. 53:6). God made Him to be sins for us who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). And Christ of His free will took out sins upon Himself (Is. 53:4; 1 Peter 2:24). And thus He offered Himself for us. (Stoeckhardt)

He is at one and the same time Offering and Priest. He gave His life into death; He shed His own blood in the stead of sinful men, who were worthy of death. With His holy, precious blood He appeared before God Himself. He is our Mediator in the highest throne. He pleaded His blood before God and once and for all atoned for the sins and the guilt of the whole world. He turned God’s wrath into pleasure. Marked and covered with His own blood, He stands as the NT Kapporeth between sinful men, the transgressors, and the great holy God and covers all our sins, guilt, shame and weakness before God, so that He no longer reckons them to our account. Therefore, men are completely and forever free from their sins, rid of all their transgressions and impurities. That is what propitiation in His blood includes. (Stoeckhardt)

Christ is a “propitiation through faith.” His atonement is perfect and needs only to be accepted in faith. Faith it is that applies to itself, that claims for its own, Christ’s atonement and redemption and the righteousness which avails before God offered through it. The distressed sinner takes refuge in Christ through faith and there finds protection from God’s wrath and judgment. (Stoeckhardt)

The nearest object of faith is the Word. God set forth His Son, Jesus Christ, whom He made to be sin and the Atoner for sin, openly before the eyes of whole sinful world through the preaching of the Gospel. In the Gospel the crucified Christ is set forth before the eyes of men (Gal. 3:1). Sinners hear the Gospel of Christ, of His atonement and redemption and the righteousness which avails before God. They thus become righteous before God. (Stoeckhardt)

1 John 2:2 “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

1 John 4:10 “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

The expiation of sin is never an end in itself; the goal is always the restoration of a right relationship to God, which was broken by sin. Jesus’ death on the cross is the sacrifice for sin which accomplishes reconciliation to God.

 *faith in his blood.* Saving faith looks to Jesus Christ in his sacrificial death for us. (CSB)

Faith does not earn anything; it receives God’s gift. (TLSB)

 TO DEMOSTRATE HIS JUSTICE – Christ’s work shows that God both justly punishes sin and graciously forgives sinners. (TLSB)

The goal and the result of God’s setting forth of Jesus is a demonstration of God’s righteousness. This includes the manifestation of His truthfulness, His saving power, and His gracious gift of a right relationship to Himself. But the proof of His truthfulness is the dominant thought at this point.

 LEFT SINS COMMITTED BEFOREHAND UNPUNISHED – Patience with sinners. (TLSB)

God did not ignore sin. He delayed the punishment until Christ paid it. Some thoughtless modern theologians have likened Paul’s teaching on the atonement to child abuse because the Father sent the Son as a sacrifice. This assertion ignores Christ’s willingness to make full satisfaction for sins. Christ is true God “reconciling the world to Himself” (2Co 5:19). The Father sent the Son the way a patriotic father sends his son to war for the good of his nation. A father does not send a son cheerfully, but sincerely, anticipating sacrifice, victory, and reunion. (TLSB)

This explains why it was necessary that God set forth a proof of His righteousness: God had threatened to punish sin, but had been “passing by” sins in former days. Despite the similarity to the word “Passover,” this is not the “forgiveness” of sins anticipated in the blood of the Passover Lamb, but God’s forbearing to punish with full punishment the sins of humankind until they be punished fully and atonement be accomplished in the death of Jesus. These two aspects of this passing by are explained in the next two phrases.

And such an open declaration and demonstration of the essential righteousness of God was all the more necessary because of the passing over of the sins committed before in the forbearance of God. On account of the great patience and forbearance of God in the period before Christ the sins of men had remained unpunished, apart from a few extraordinary manifestations of God's avenging justice, Acts 14, 16; 17, 30. (Kretzmann)

**3:25b–26** The sins of God’s people, punished symbolically in the animal sacrifices of the OT period, would be totally punished in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross. (CSB)

**3:26** HE DID IT TO DEMONSTRATE HIS JUSTICE – God’s righteousness in Christ is still effective. (TLSB)

dikahyos – To be equitable and right. God is fair and impartial.

By His bloody offerings Christ satisfied God’s righteousness. Divine righteousness demanded punishment. And in Christ the sins of all men of all generations until the end of the world, are punished. The punishment of sin is death and damnation. (Stoeckhardt)

It was an altogether free impulse of divine love, which we call grace, that moved God to redeem lost mankind. But surely since God planned and carried out the work of redemption and salvation, He did not deny His righteousness. He could not, for He would have denied Himself. He rather yielded completely to His righteousness and just wrath. That Christ, men’s substitute, who took men’s sins upon Himself, had to give His life and blood was a demonstration of divine righteousness. Where sin, there also punishment, even though the sin lay on Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

Deuteronomy 32:4 “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he”

Anocha – forbearance of God – This is God’s forbearance, delay. In His kindness and forbearance, He provides sinners an opportunity to repent (Rom 2:4). He does not bring His threatened punishment (Gen 2:17) on them without first letting childbirth proceed (Gen 4:1-2, 25, connected to the promise of the Seed of the woman, 3:15) and seedtime and harvest to continue (Gen 8:20-22) so that the plan of salvation can be prophesied, accomplished, and preached, and sinners can repent and be saved. Precisely God’s setting forth Jesus as propitiator now is the demonstration that His forbearance – and not His unfaithfulness to His threat to punish sin – is the reason He passed by (left unpunished, as regards the full punishment) sins in former time.

 DEMONSTRATE AT PRESENT TIME – Paul is explaining that God’s passing by of former sins had its basis in God’s forbearance and was done with a view to the goal of “that every demonstration [now revealed] in the present time.” God forebore to punish because He knew He had the plan to punish on Calvary on Good Friday.

Even though death, the wages of sin, reigned from Adam to Christ, yet it was a time of comparative impunity, and it was a demonstration of the forbearance of God that sinful people could live years and generations in their sins before they were called away by death. But now, at the present time, in the new dispensation. God demonstrated His righteousness. The very act of overlooking the sins in the time before the advent of Christ had been done in view of this demonstration of His righteousness in the present time. During all the centuries before the coming of Christ, the divine justice, on account of the righteousness of God, had demanded the punishment of sinners. And the full punishment had been meted out to Christ, the Substitute for all sinners of all times. (Kretzmann)

 JUSTICE – The issue here is whether God is just (true to His Word) when (or if or as or in that) He justifies (declares in right relationship to Himself) believers in Jesus – as Paul preaches that He does.

 WHO HAVE FAITH IN JESUS – The one who is of faith in Jesus, or the one who belongs to the group of those who have faith in Jesus.

 “The death of Christ vindicated the justice of God in forgiving sin in all ages of the world, since those sins were by the righteous God punished in Christ.” The punishment of the sinners which was taken over by Christ is full expiation for all sins; by His suffering and death He has paid the debt in full, He has exhausted wrath and judgment. And the setting forth of Christ as the true Mercy-seat was done finally for the purpose, in order to be Himself just and to justify him who is of the faith of Jesus, in demanding from Christ, the Substitute of sinners, the full payment of the guilt of sin, God proved Himself to be the Just One. And in sending forth Christ to make this vicarious sacrifice, and in being in Christ for the reconciliation of the world, God justified the sinners, pronounced them pure and righteous, the justification actually becoming the possession of him that accepts it by faith in Jesus, in whom this faith is characteristic, whose entire religious and moral nature has its source in his faith in Jesus. (Kretzmann)

**3:27-28** We are distinguished (passively) by faith. That is why we have nothing to boast of that would distinguish us (active). Christ Jesus fulfilled the Law of God for us (active). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

**3:27** WHERE, THEN, IS BOASTING? – kowkhaysis – To glorify or rejoice in one’s success. Neither of these can be done where it concerns our salvation.

By nature all men have a proud heart and the inclination to glory in themselves and in their own accomplishments. (Stoeckhardt)

It is the feeling and celebrating one’s self-worth – for either vain or valid reasons. The context here, however, establishes the sense of “boasting” (or “having a basis for boasting”) “in the presence of God on the basis of works of Law.”

 IT IS EXCLUDED – In Gal 4:17, the only other NT occurrence, this means to shut out from fellowship. This has the sense of “shut out from being a possibility.”

Here the apostle offers the conclusion of the glorious plan of salvation as he has just unfolded it. Since this is the case, where, then, is the act of glorying? What reason for indulging in boasting have men? All men by nature, not only the Jews, have a proud heart, which delights in boasting every one’s own virtues and deeds. But now boasting is absolutely, once and for all, shut out, it is not admissible. (Kretzmann)

 ON WHAT PRINCIPLE – The principle of faith is an exclusive principle, intolerant of compromise. No compromise is possible between faith and works of law. We hear the echoes of the battle Paul once fought for the churches of Galatia (cf. Gal 2:16; 3:2) (Franzmann)

Through what law, by what rule or order, speaking generally? By the rule which requires works? The rule of works is identical with the Law of God. Here, indeed, there would be some chance of glorying, since carnal-minded persons are addicted to self-approbation and self-congratulation on account of an outward, literal fulfillment of the Law’s demands. All boasting is, however, effectually excluded by the rule or norm of faith, by the order of salvation as it is presented in the Gospel and includes faith. The Gospel continually speaks of the necessity of faith, not in the sense of demanding faith, as a meritorious work, but in the sense of an invitation extended to all men to accept the promise of God. (Kretzmann)

**3:28** WE MAINTAIN – “Think,” “consider” is no weak word for Paul; it represents a conviction held as a result of studying Scripture in the light of the Gospel hermeneutic. The object is a theological position, a position in a debate – but it is not negotiable.

 *by faith.*† When Luther translated this passage, he added the word “alone,” which, though not in the Greek, accurately reflects the meaning (see note on Jas 2:14–26). An alternate translation might be “through faith,” as Paul generally employs two prepositions: *dia*, “through,” and *ek*, “as a result of ” e.g., 1:17; 3:22, 25 and several manuscripts at 3:28)—indicating that faith is not man’s contribution or decision, but a gift of God (cf. Eph 2:8–9). (CSB)

Justifying faith can in no way be construed or understood as an act by which the salvation of Jesus is merited, no more than a beggar can be said to earn the slice of bread or the coin for which he has extended his hand. So far as the Gospel, therefore, is concerned, all boasting is excluded, eliminated, for (v.28) we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without, apart from, the deeds of the Law. That is the conclusion which every true Christian must reach with Paul. Justification, the forensic act of God by which He pronounces a sinner righteous, pure, holy, acceptable before Him, is received by faith, the sinner simply believing the fact of Christ’s redemption and applying it to himself. (Kretzmann)

 JUSTIFIED APART FROM - khorece – To be separated from to without. Luther says it means by grace alone.

Works of man, works of the Law, any personal merits are excluded. The ground of our justification is placed entirely outside of ourselves. The contrast, as one commentator remarks, is between what is done by us, whether in a state of nature or in a state of grace, and what Christ has done for us. By faith, and by faith alone, which is altogether and alone a gift of God, do we enter into that relation to God that we are acceptable before Him and become His dear children. (Kretzmann)

GOSPEL

John 8:31-36

*The Children of Abraham*

﻿

**31﻿ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ﻿32﻿ Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” ﻿33﻿ They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants﻿ and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” ﻿34﻿ Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ﻿35﻿ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ﻿36﻿ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ﻿**

When editors of the text and commentators make a paragraph at verse 30 or 31, this does not imply that we are to insert an interval, either of hours or of a day, between the paragraphs, as is generally done. John connects verse 30 with what precedes by means of tauto and genitive absolute, “while he was saying these things,” and verse 31 with verse 30 by means of oun, “accordingly, Jesus was saying” to these believers. Any interval is shut out. John’s remark in verse 30 and in the preamble of verse 31 are merely explanatory of the words which Jesus how utters, for they are words intended only for believers, and we must be told that and how such believers were present. John’ explanatory remark is exactly like the one he inserted a moment ago in verse 27 in order to make plain to us why Jesus turned to prophecy in verse 28. (Lenski)

From verse 21 to the end of the chapter is one uninterrupted narration. The persons participating are the same throughout, Jesus and a crowd of Jews. At first all are hostile to Jesus, but by the time we reach verse 29, a goodly number are actually won to believe in Him not through miracles, but through the words of warning coupled with grace which these men had just head. In the same way or other, not indicated by John, these believers manifest their change of heart. At once Jesus has a word for them in particular. No sooner does He utter it than the hostile crowd of Jews raises further objection. They act just as they did from the start: they pick at some point to which to object (compare verse 22 and verse 25; also verse 13 and 19). John does not need to say in verse 33 who these objectors are, for we have heard the from very start, and their objection is of the same type as before. Jesus answers then in verse 34, etc. But they go on. The clash becomes more and more intense until these Jews take up stone and Jesus leaves them. (Lenski)

**8:31-36** Verse 30 concludes: “Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.” He had been speaking of his faithful imparting of the Word of the Father in word and deed. Against this background the Lord goes on to address these (and all) adherents to the faith, warning against any “faith” unwilling to be formed and reformed by the faith revealed in Christ. Jesus’ summons to the truth stands in stark contrast to the lie and the father of lies, which have enslaved Christ’s believing opponents (cf v 44). As with other such bold contrasts (e.g., light/darkness, 1:5; life/death, 5:24; blind/seeing, 9:41), John’s Gospel delineates the unmistakable difference between the truth and the lie, and between the disciple who remains in Jesus’ word and the “disciple” who will not. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

Jesus is speaking within the context of the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7:2–8:59), which commemorated Israel’s sojourn in the wilderness after having been freed from the slavery of Egypt. During this sojourn, God gave to Israel the way of the Law. This section continues the theme of John’s Gospel that Jesus is himself the true Torah of God, the Word of God who is the way of discipleship that leads to the Father. Jesus has just indicated that he does nothing “on [his] own” but does only that which the Father teaches him, and so he pleases the Father “always” (Jn 8:28–29). The Jews understand their identity as grounded in Abraham and in their loyalty to Moses (cf. Jn 9:28). True discipleship, however, is found in Jesus, who is the way to the Father. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 4)

This chapter is something of a heavyweight in John’s Gospel. First, Jesus is challenged to render judgment in the case of the adulterous woman; the accusers obviously expected Jesus to fail and be embarrassed regarding that situation. Then Jesus’ “light of the world” message beats the Pharisees with their own words regarding proper application of the Law. Thereafter the Savior uncovers sin and works faith in the hearts of some of the listeners. The verses following our text explicate the question not of religious liberty but of spiritual freedom. This is followed by Jesus’ charge that some of his hearers are beholden to Satan—no sweet little Jesus here! And finally, we hear one of the great dogmatic statements of the New Testament: “If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death. . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (8:51, 58). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

**8:31-32** John’s language is suggestive. *ean humeis meinēte en tōi logōi tōi emōi*, “If you abide in my word” (ESV). But Jesus is himself “the Word” (*ho logos*, Jn 1:14). “You are truly [*alēthōs*] my disciples” (ESV). In the next verse, Jesus says that “the truth [*hē alētheia*] will set you free.” But Jesus is himself “the truth” (Jn 14:6). *alēthōs* has the meaning of “authentically,” “truly,” “not only in appearance.” To be truly the disciple of Jesus is to be to Jesus as Jesus, who is the truth, is to the Father (8:28–29). As the truth, Jesus is the perfect expression of the Father’s will. Those who are truly the disciples of Jesus are those who follow the way, which is Jesus himself. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 4)

John 8:31–36 is simple and straightforward, part of an extended conversation Jesus has with the Jewish people and leaders beginning with his announcement, “I am the light of the world” (8:12). Back and forth they go until v 30, “As he was saying these things, many believed in him.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**8:31** *believed.*† Here seems to be imperfect and transitory. Their words show that these people were not true believers (see vv. 33, 37). (CSB)

Within the context of John’s *Gospel*, it could well be that Jesus’ dialog is with Jewish disciples who had, at one time, believed him but had fallen away and become hostile. In v 37, he acknowledges that he knows they [seek to](http://seek.to/) kill him. He labels them children of the devil (v 44) and a heated discussion follows. Hardly rabbi-disciple talk! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 4)

*tous pepisteukotas autōi*, “who had believed him.” The perfect tense here is puzzling. It would normally convey true and enduring faith, but that goes against the sense of what follows. Does v 30 refer to one group and v 31 to another? Or are they the same, and a different group is designated by the “they” of v 33? In fact, nothing in the text indicates such a change of subjects. It seems best to understand Jesus’ words as addressed to one and the same group (hence a strong warning against any self-confident “discipleship”). This requires understanding “believed” to mean that their “faith” was for now at best shallow, perhaps an acknowledgment that Jesus speaks the truth but an unwillingness to trust in that truth. The NIV does not convey it, but the text has a “therefore” that may be a significant bridge connecting v 31 to v 30, and a witness to this understanding: “Jesus *therefore* said to the Jews who had believed him.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

“*Jews who believed.”* What kind of faith did they have? The Jesus-is-an-interesting-fellow kind of faith? Well, saving faith is “abiding” faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

Looking at verses 30, 33 and 37, it seems at least a portion of the group who Jesus was addressing did not really believe or were very tentative.

Jesus spoke to those who believed while, apparently the unbelieving Jews were listening too. The tender faith of those new believers needed strengthening. Others whose new faith wavered already had left Him (6:66). (PBC)

It is a disappointing price that Christ asks of those who were beginning to believe in Him and were saying: “We will remain loyal to You even at the risk of life and limb.” Christ looks askance at them and says: “Yes indeed, if your faith in Me were only genuine and sincere! But it seems to Me that you will not remain faithful to Me.” And now Christ begins to speak about the true and the false disciples of the divine Word: “Many hear the Gospel and remain with it for utilitarian reasons. They reap money, goods, and honor from it. My dear friends, who would not like that! (Luther)

Many of the Jews had indeed come to faith, but their minds were still held in the bondage of a carnal understanding. Their idea of discipleship was that of an external adherence to Christ, of professing allegiance to Him as their Leader. (Kretzmann)

 IF YOU HOLD – meno – Continue, stay, remain, endure or stand.

This encounter with those “Jews who had [once upon a time?] believed him” takes us beyond the Reformation reality of how we are justified into the realm of how we live out that relationship daily. God has declared us righteous. Now what? Live it out! Jesus says, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples” (v 31)—and you will know a liberating truth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 4)

*meinēte* indicates perseverance, steadfastness, and immovability in purpose. As Jesus remains in the Father, we are to remain in his Word. *gnōsesthe*, “you will know,” is not to know cognitively with the mind but experientially with the will and the heart. *To have faith* is a close synonym of *to know*. The language of *truth* occurs frequently in John’s Gospel; the language of *freedom* only in this context. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 4)

After faith has been kindled in the hearts of a goodly number of the present audience of Jesus, the great need is that they continue in the blessed course upon which they have entered. The pronoun humeis (tou) is emphatic, “If you on your part remain,” etc., i.e., “you” having come to faith. This singles them out from the rest of the Jews. We must not overlooks the implication in the verb, “remain” in my word. Jesus acknowledges that these men are now in His word; in other words, they now embrace His word by faith. He uses the aroist subjunctive “continue,” actually and definitely remain, be fixed and established in His word. The opposite would be to drop the word they have taken up, definitely to leave it again, namely by a return to unbelief. It indicates that these Jews now believed in what Jesus had told time; to believe “him” = to believe what He says. Theirs was the genuine type of faith, resting on the word. All they needed was to become permanently fixed in that faith. (Lenski)

Then Jesus speaks directly to those “Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you abide in my word.’ ” *Abide* means “to remain in, to live in, to dwell in.” “In my word” is where the true disciple of Jesus needs to remain. How do you remain in the faith? You remain in Jesus’ Word. The Word of God is faith’s bread and butter, faith’s fuel, and the air faith breathes. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

To draw close to Jesus, the Word, they literally needed to remain in (here, “hold to”) His Word (here “teaching”). Jesus had power t still storms. He fed hungry crowds and healed illnesses. That all had an impact and drew people to listen to Him. But how did He keep disciples? He held by His Word. (PBC)

Speaking to those whose belief in Him was superficial, Jesus explained that discipleship meant accepting all of His teaching and remaining faithful to it. (TLSB)

Abiding is a major theme in John, defining the relationship not only persons in the Trinity (1:32-33; 14:10; 15:10), but also between believers and Christ. (5:31; 15:7, 9-10). “I wish to follow with all my strength the lowly Jesus; I wish Him, who loved me and gave Himself for me, to embrace me with the arms of His love, which suffered in my stead; but I must also feed on the Paschal Lamb, for unless I eat His Flesh and drink His Blood I have not life in me. It is one thing to follow Jesus, another to hold Him, another to feed on Him. To follow Him is a live-giving purpose; to hold and embrace Him a solemn joy; to feed on Him a blissful life.” (Note on John 6:56 and quoting St Bernard of Clairvaux – (TLSB)

John 15:10 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

1 John 2:28 “And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.”

2 John 9 “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.”

 MY TEACHING – logos - God’s Word, the Scriptures. Words that would have the substance of doctrine from God but not necessarily always direct quotes.

The continuing or remaining in the Word of Christ is the characteristic of the true disciples of Christ, the adhering strictly to the Word which He has left for our instruction in the gospels and epistles. There we find Jesus revealed, and through the under standing of Jesus as the Christ we have true knowledge, the knowledge of the truth; and that knowledge is the only factor which will give Us true liberty. Without Christ, all men are servants, slaves of sin, Rom. 6, 17-20. But in Christ there is deliverance from sin, true freedom. Only those men are truly free that have accepted the salvation of Jesus; only they have a will which is interested in good works and able to perform them. (Kretzmann)

We still have Jesus’ Word today. His Word leads us to Him and keeps us with Him. The mark of true followers of Jesus is that they remain true to His Word, where they learn the truth, and the makes them free. (PBC)

Jeremiah 9:24 “but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD.”

John 7:16-17 “Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. ﻿17﻿ If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”

John 17:3 “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

 YOU ARE REALLY MY DISCIPLES – mathaytes It denotes the men who have attached themselves to Jesus as their Master. Unlike the people of Jesus’ day, they did not choose him but he chose them (John 15:16). Disciple always implies the existence of a personal attachment which shapes the whole life of the disciple. The basic meaning of the English noun “disciple” and is “learner.” Essentially a disciple is one who accepts, learns from, and follows a teacher and his instruction.

While these beginners in the faith must learn more and more of the precious word of Jesus and while further portions of the word such as the potion they already posses, will tend to hold them in the faith for the them to remain in the word of Jesus means primarily what Paul puts in the admonition in 1 Cor. 15:58, “Be ye steadfast, unmovable.” (see also Ephesians 4:13-14) (Lenski)

The Word is the vehicle of Jesus bringing Him to us and us to Him. To remain is not only a mark of discipleship but its very essence. (Lenski)

John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Acts 2:42, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

Matthew 16:24, “Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (self-denial)

Luke 14:24-26, “Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ﻿25﻿ For whoever wants to save his life﻿a﻿ will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. 26﻿ What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Self denial, cross bearing – renunciation)

Luke 14:33, “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” (Leaving it all)

John 15:8, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (Fruitfulness)

**8:32** KNOW – Of course, intellectual apprehension is included, but much more is involved (7:17), namely the knowledge derived from a living experience with the blessed power of the truth. “Shall know” does not refer to a remote future but to one that begins at once and continues and grows. (Lenski)

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” This verse is often quoted out of context and even given a worldly connotation. What is the truth that sets you free? The truth of Jesus, the light of the world. The truth that Jesus has come from the Father to speak as the Father taught him (v 28). Jesus contrasts his truth with the lies of the devil, that “murderer from the beginning” (v 44). Ch 8 will finish with Jesus saying, “Before Abraham was, I am” (v 58). Those who refuse to believe consider this blasphemy (v 59), but for those who believe, this truth sets them free. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

 *the truth.* Closely connected with Jesus (v. 36; 14:6), it is not philosophical truth but the truth that leads to salvation. (CSB)

The One who is the truth (14:6) necessarily speaks the truth. To know him and his saving work is to be freed from bondage to sin and to the lie. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

“What is truth?” So Pilate asked later on (18:38). Truth is not theological theory, but a person (see 1:17 and 14:6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

By “truth,” “reality,” is meant, and the Greek article here indicates the specific reality and actuality that exists in God and in Jesus, and all that they give to us and do for us by divine grace. Compare the term in 1:14. It is not in any sense philosophic, so that the language of philosophy should define it. It is not an abstraction formed by operations of the intellect but divine and everlasting fact, which remains such whether men know it, acknowledge it, realize it no not. It is a unit” “the truth,” although it consists of many united and unified parts. Thus also Jesus speaks of His “Word” and of His “words.” It centers and circles about Jesus who, therefore, also calls Himself “the truth,” (14:6). In His own person and His life Jesus embodies, incorporates the saving realities of God. (Lenski)

Only in Jesus and His teaching will anyone be free from sin, death and Satan’s rule, and thus free to serve God with a pure heart. In contrast, Judaism taught that study of God’s Law made a person free. (TLSB)

John 1:14 “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:17 “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

John 14:6 “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ﻿7﻿ If you really knew me, you would know﻿ my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

John 18:37 “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ﻿7﻿ If you really knew me, you would know﻿ my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

John 17:17, “Sanctifythem by the truth; your word is truth.”

 *free.* Freedom from sin, not from ignorance (see v. 36). (CSB)

Cf. 14:6. Only in Jesus and His teaching will anyone be free from sin, death, and Satan’s rule, and thus free to serve God with a pure heart. In contrast, Judaism taught that study of God’s Law made a person free. (TLSB)

For by realizing we are set free; hence the more we realize, the more we are set free. The one action grows immediately out of the other. Any measure of inner penetration on the part of the truth produces a corresponding measure of freedom. Moreover, these results have already begun in the believers Jesus addresses; for to believe the word of Jesus ever so little means to realize the truth to that extent and to be set free correspondingly. (Lenski)

This liberating effect implies that here “the truth” is viewed as an inward and spiritual power, one that conquers an opposing, an enslaving power. The implication is also that only “the truth,” or the Word of Jesus, is able to crush that opposing power and to set men free. Hence, all who bar out from their souls this liberating power of necessity remain under the enslaving power. (Lenski)

A glorious prospect is held out to the believing Jews by Jesus, one to inspire them to ever greater faith in order to be free from all delusion and spiritual bondage. Liberty! (Lenski)

What do we learn for Jesus? We learn that He is God sent from God to save us from sin. We learn that we have forgiveness with Jesus. We learn that Jesus leads us to our heavenly Father. Those truths set us free – free from the curse of sin, free from death, free for eternal life. (PBC)

Romans 6:22 “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.”

1 Peter 2:16 “Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.”

He stirs their thoughts with this. They were subject to the Romans and greatly oppressed by them. They had no kingdom of their own. They yearned to be free and have their own king again. Now Christ tells them: “If you want to be free, to have your own king, to be rid of all tribute, and to shake off your yoke and bondage, you must believe in the Son. My kingdom is not of the world, nor is it that of the emperor. It is a kingdom of truth; it is the genuine kingdom, in which there is real life. Its life is different from this temporal life. In it truth will really make you free. But this does not exempt you from paying taxes, revenue, and tribute.” Even today the peasants would like to see the time when they would not have to submit to or obey anyone, when there would be neither prince nor emperor, neither count nor lord, when the servants would be lords, and a maid would be the mistress, when a subject could be the ruler. This the Jews would have liked, and this prompts Christ to say here: “I am not speaking now of an earthly kingdom. I am not concerned now with earthly kings. If they are tyrants, let them remain tyrants, and let them answer for it. If they fleece and flay their poor people, what is that to Me? In the end they will suffer for it. But I want to lead you into a kingdom where you will be truly free, where you will be kings, princes, and lords. If you remain faithful to My Word and believe My message, then you can rest assured that you will become kings. All you must do is to believe the Word.” (Luther)

**8:33** THEY ANSWERED HIM – John here writes “against him,” affording us this hint that these objectors are the unbelieving Jews who again seize on one certain expression. Those who assume that the believing Jew here speak against Jesus must assume that the believing Jews in one instant, they lose their faith in the next and in a moment become more vicious than ever. (Lenski)

 ABRAHAM’S DESCENDANTS – The name “Abraham” here broached runs on through the remainder of the conflict to the very end. It constitutes the acme of Jewish assurance and pride – does so to this day. The emphatic su (you) gets its force from the feeling of outrage that Jesus should presume to say anything against Abraham’s seed. (Lenski)

Of course, the Jews insist that they are “offspring of Abraham [belonging to the covenant] and have never been enslaved to anyone.” How ironic, since they were at that moment subject to Roman occupation! But that’s not the half of it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

From a position of pride as descendants of Abraham, they are unable even to face the truth of their *political* servitude, much less that which Christ will now address, their bondage to sin and to the lie. The “you” is emphatic: “How can *you* say?” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

The irony is that the salvation we so earnestly desire can become a scandal to us. Jesus promises these Jews a relationship with him (discipleship), the ability to “know the truth,” and ultimately freedom. But what they hear is condemnation. “What do you mean?” they snap at Jesus. “Are you implying we’re not free? Check our pedigree. We’re children of Abraham!” And then, to make matters worse, “We’ve never been slaves to anyone,” which, by the way, is a very selective reading and memory of the history of Israel. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 4)

 *have never been slaves.* An amazing disregard of their Roman overlords. (CSB)

That the promise of freedom in Jesus’ Word would be heard by the Jews as condemnation can only be viewed as testimony to the power of their (and our) sinful self-deception. Sin blinds. It compels us to create a false world for ourselves in which we are self-justified, self-glorified, and self-righteous. For the Jews, their status as children of Israel provided an alleged freedom. What might it be for us, we wonder. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 4)

The Jews’ pride in descending from Abraham makes them blind. Really, never enslaved? Jewish history indicates otherwise: slavery in Egypt to begin, then in Babylon, and currently under Rome, to name just a few. And what about being captive to sin and guilt? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

This shuts out the notion that theses Jews refer to political liberty, which also would contradict most flagrantly the facts of history, the domination of the Jews by the Babylonians, the Persians, the Seleucidae, and the Romans. Lenski)

They say, as it were: “Your words disgrace and humiliate us. You say that he who believes in You is to be free. As a matter of fact, we are not slaves; we are masters of the world. We have never been serfs and servants. We are Abraham’s seed, and to him the words were addressed (Gen. 22:18): ‘By your descendants shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.’ ” This promise filled the Jews with conceit. “Abraham,” they say, “is called a lord over the whole world; and since we are his seed, we shall, ere long, rule in the entire world. And You say that we must first be made free by You. Do You regard us as bondsmen?” Thus you see how the Jews are given to carnal thoughts. Christ says: “You shall be kings and lords. You shall be free, not only beyond but also here. But you shall be beggar kings and beggar princes; for the world will have honor, money, goods, and power. Yet you, too, shall reign—to be sure, not over the body, goods, and fields but over consciences, informing them that they must either obey the Word or die. Their hearts will either comply with your message or go to the devil.” The Jews here interpret these words carnally. (Luther)

Thought presently subject to Rome and the Herodians, these proud leaders asserted their independence by appealing to the heritage of Abraham, a free man. (TLSB)

That is the wonderful liberty of the Christian of which Luther wrote in such powerful words. But the Jews thought the Lord spoke of the liberty of the body from the tyranny of an earthly despot. They resented the inference as though they had ever been in bondage: Children of Abraham we are, and to no man have we ever been in bondage, in slavery. They forgot, for the moment, that they were subject to the Romans; they forgot also that their fathers had been in the power of the Egyptian, Babylonian, Syrian, and Roman conquerors. Since Abraham had received the promise of a descendant that should rule all nations, the Jews proudly called themselves children of kings. They resented even the idea as though they needed to be emancipated, to be set free. This answer of the Jews shows that they had quickly extinguished the small flame of faith which had been kindled in their hearts. Their Jewish pride would not accept such a statement from Jesus. The pride of the human heart has driven many a person away from the church to which he professed allegiance, because he resented the plain talk of the Bible regarding the depravity of the human heart. (Kretzmann)

Jewish texts could say that the Torah brings freedom from worldly cares or from the slavery in the coming world (Genesis Rabbah 92.1; Numbers Rabbah 10:8). The Mishnah (R. Akiba) says: “Even the poorest in Israel are looked upon as freemen who have lost their possessions, for they are the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Adolf von Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Johannes* [Stuttgart: Calwer, 1975], 212; used by permission). The Jews understand the identity of Israel in terms of their sonship to the patriarchs. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 4)

**8:34-35** Even when a slave does not wear handcuffs, he is still captive when sin rules his life. As such, he is not fully part of the family. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

**8:34** I TELL YOU THE TRUTH – Jesus once again stressed the solemn truth of His message – amen, amen. (PBC)

*amēn amēn legō humin*, “I tell you the truth.” This marks what follows as a solemn truth, ignored at one’s own peril. *pas ho poiōn tēn hamartian*, “everyone who sins.” This points to a continuing state, “the one practicing sin.” This is significant: Jesus does not *argue* our bondage under sin; he simply *assumes* it. Our problem is not merely individual sins (plural), but sin (singular), the power, the slave owner that controls us. To this bondage our sins (plural) bear witness. Each of us is “sold as a slave to sin” (Rom 7:14). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

Amen, Amen – KJV – The double “amen” is the seal of truth for what Jesus says (compare on the term 1:51); “I say to you” is the voice of authority based on absolute knowledge and truth. (Lenski)

Jesus moves to the heart of the matter: “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.” Has anyone ever stopped sinning? No? Then we are slaves of sin. By saying “Truly, truly,” Jesus sets this off as an inescapable fact no one can avoid. It’s not just them, but us as well. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

 *a slave to sin.* Because the sinner cannot break free by his own strength. (CSB)

Jesus defines the reality of slavery and freedom in terms of spiritual status (condition). To be a slave is to have a lord who governs and directs. Those who sin have sin as their lord. Here it is not so much a question of sinful acts as it is of the condition of will and heart, which is sinful and therefore sins. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 4)

The man so characterized, who dies what is sin, obeys the dictates of sin, cannot break away from them – he is beyond question a slave to sin the spiritual soul-slavery of the worst kind. This is true of men everywhere, at all times. The effect of sinning is as certain as the mathematical law that two and two make four. (Lenski)

Since the fall, all people are sinners and enslaved to sin, bond to self-centeredness, doomed to death, and blind to their slavery. (TLSB)

This was proven by what Jesus says in verse 37 “you are ready to kill me.”

In a very solemn manner, Jesus here proceeds to explain His statement regarding slavery or bondage. Every doer of sin is a slave of sin. He that commits a sin thereby places himself in its power, is bound and held captive absolutely. And therefore these Jews are servants, slaves, in the spiritual sense. (Kretzmann)

**8:35-36** A slave can never be sure of present or future status. Only the Son, Jesus Christ, can bring genuine freedom and make us children of God through faith. (TLSB)

Their claimed place in the family of Abraham (and thus, of God) now comes into question. A slave is property and has no rights and no permanent place in the household, nor has he any power to change his status. He is a slave. A son, on the other hand, has permanent status within the family and full rights of sonship. With this analogy, Jesus contrasts their *real* status with the one they *imagine* for themselves. The analogy, however, is pregnant, pointing beyond a son, *any* son, to *the* Son who will set them free from this bondage to sin. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 12, Part 4)

The slave will not continue (remain! abide!) in the master’s house forever, but “the son remains forever.” Only the son can change our status. “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” This is our most basic need: to be set free from slavery to sin, from sin’s power to destroy us and separate us from God. For the believer, sin, though present, is constantly forgiven. In Jesus, we are no longer under sin’s dominion, but Jesus’ lordship. We are sons who live in the house forever. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**8:35** SLAVE HAS NOT PERMANENT PLACE IN THE FAMILY – doolos. A slave didn’t even earn wages. He was the property of his master and was completely bound to his master’s will. Since the slave received no wages, all he had to look forward to after a hard day’s work was rest under the shade tree or in a shelter and even that wasn’t a certainty. There were no guarantees for him to depend on.

Although slaves were regarded as members of a household, they were not necessarily permanent, for they could be sold or otherwise separated from the household. Sons, on the other hand, were the permanent recipients of the father’s inheritance. They stood to receive the inheritance because of their filial relationship with the father. One’s status determined one’s destiny. “The Son,” v 36, must refer primarily to Christ and not generally to any son. Elsewhere in John’s Gospel, the term *son* refers only to Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 4)

But such a slave has no part and right in the house, he has only duties to per form; he is not his own master and cannot speak of freedom. The servants of sin may now be outward members of the Kingdom, of the Church, but they will in the end be obliged to leave, they will be thrust out from the place where they have usurped the rights of children. (Kretzmann)

Slaves become part of a household and even experience benefits from the household. But their connection is tentative. They remain slaves and can be sent away because they have no lasting claims there. (PBC)

 SON BELONGS TO IT FOREVER – A son is a son forever. He belongs in the household and the household belongs to him. He is family. (PBC)

**8:36** SON SETS YOU FREE – It is only the Son of God that is able to bring freedom, emancipation from sin and its service. He has earned freedom from sin for all men by paying the price, the redemption for their sin, His holy blood. That is the only true freedom, which the Son has thus earned and is offering to the whole world, which He wants also these Jews to accept. (Kretzmann)

Jesus cuts through the self-deception by observing that their actions and status are connected: “everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (v 34). Sin is not an occasional “oops.” It is the ongoing manifestation of our mortal (as in *mortis*, i.e., death-bound) state. Hence the classical term “original sin,” the sin of our origins, our roots. “Slaves come and go,” Jesus tells them, “but the child has a home forever. So when the Son makes you free, you’re really free!” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 4)

And that’s what it’s all about: that we become truly free (see v 32). What seemed to begin as a cordial conversation—Was Jesus not talking to those who “believed”?—has become a shockingly sharp exchange (8:37; compare 7:19–25). Behind it all is the Jews’ rejection of the reality that Jesus comes directly from the heavenly Father (8:38). How stern, then, is his charge against those who have made this a debate with him (8:42, 44). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

Note that the believing Jews were already set free, needing only to be fully established in their liberty. We are ourselves turned into sons adopted into the household of God, children of the Father, joint heirs with Christ. (Lenski)

“As Christ says, [baptized people] have been made free again. Therefore, they are able not only to hear the Word, but also to agree with it and accept it, although in great weakness.” (FC SD II 67) (TLSB)

Jesus is here implicitly referring to his own Sonship with the Father as the basis of his authority to free from sin. Freedom from sin does not come from one’s natural attachments, but from the Son, who is himself the free gift of the Father’s love for the world (cf. Jn 3:16). Important is the idea that it is the Son who frees. He is the instrument of the Father’s grace and love. The Father works only in and through the Son. Important, too, is the implicit allusion to Baptism, through which we are made to be sons of God in him who is the Son of the Father. In the Son, the Father of the Son becomes and is also our Father. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 4)