

***Reformation Day – October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024***  
***DO OR DONE?***

***Prayer***

Lord, we give you thanks that you have preserved your church and your message throughout the centuries. Help us to be faithful to the word that was delivered to us and to pass it along to those who come after us.

AMEN

***Do?***

As we saw last week, the law, broadly understood, are the rules that God the creator laid down for His creation to function optimally. Since we cannot fully know the mind of God, He both placed the law into our hearts (our operating system, so to speak) as well as provided His chosen people with a summary; a summary we know as the Ten Commandments. They include both things we should do – prescribed activities – as well as those we shouldn't do – prohibited activities. Luther's Small Catechism, which can be found on pages 321-330 in the Hymnal, provides a simple explanation of what is meant by each of those Ten Commandments. The first table describes our vertical duties to God and the second table focuses on our duties to our family, friends, coworker, and neighbors.

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In today's Epistle, Paul makes two things very clear. The first is that EVERYONE is accountable under the law, and the second is that obedience to the law does not justify us in God's sight, since we cannot keep the law perfectly.

The law was never meant to restore a right relationship with our Creator; instead, as Paul wrote to the Galatians (Gal 3:24), it was given as our guardian, our tutor, our example for daily life until Christ came. Last week we spoke of how the Old Testament foreshadowed Jesus; here even the law is a foreshadowing of Christ, the Word made flesh, the very embodiment of the law. Our Lord knows what is required to be obedient since He, according to His Divine nature created those rules and according to His human nature kept those rules perfectly.

Even though we know at some level that we can't keep the law, want to believe that we aren't all that bad. We water down the harsh realities and stringent requirements of the law like the Pharisees did, to fool ourselves into thinking that we have kept the law. Or we, like Luther before he understood the Gospel, may try the monastic route, punishing our **bodies**, thinking that a focus on the pain and suffering will somehow

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either be viewed as 'sharing in Christ's punishment' or keep our **mind** from sinning. Neither is accurate.

In the worst case, there are some Christians who truly believe that we not only CAN but MUST stop sinning if we are truly members of the body of Christ. They're wrong, of course, in that they aren't properly distinguishing Law (what we should and shouldn't DO) from Gospel (what Christ has already DONE for us). They don't understand the extent of the fall; Luther, on the other hand, fully understood that we are simultaneously fully saint and fully sinner. He didn't invent this concept, Paul clearly writes about this later in the letter to the church at Rome (Rom 7:15):

*For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*

And so do we.

As I said last week, Christ's taking upon himself the sins of the entire world and His willing sacrifice of His own body and the shedding of His

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precious blood to was to satisfy God's justice and fairness, to pay the penalty of death that was our due,

***Done!***

Verse 21 refers to a better way, without keeping the law, by which our relationship with God is restored, by which we are redeemed. So, what is this better way? In good Lutheran fashion, let me first say what it's NOT.

Since we are dead in our trespasses, and something that is dead can't DO anything, our restoration isn't based on a choice or decision on our part. That's not to say that you may think or remember such a choice, but it was only because God had already reached out to you through Word or Sacrament and given you the gift of faith. Jesus doesn't give us spiritual first aid, He brings the dead to life.

Is it then because of the 'good works' – acts of charity, service, and love – that we have done? NO. Verses 27 and 28, among many others in scripture, make it clear that this redemption is not based on anything we have done. While we as disciples can follow and

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imitate our teacher, Jesus, Him setting an example for us wasn't the primary reason He took on our flesh.

And since this is Reformation Sunday and many of the ninety-five (95) theses were on the topic of indulgences, we need to remember that our contributions cannot buy God's favor.

The better way is this: The restoration is based on faith in the person and work of Jesus; specifically in His promise that your sins, which the law has shown you, have been forgiven. This promise comes without cost to us and is freely offered to ALL who hear the Word of the Lord.

Many of you wore red today, and red is the liturgical color of Reformation Sunday. Red because it represents the Holy Spirit, which is why it is also used on Pentecost. It also reminds us of those who have been martyred for their faith in Jesus, and even of the Christ's own blood that was spilt on our behalf when he was tortured and crucified. Finally, it reminds us that we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and are thereby welcomed into God's family as child.

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There are those, and I've been part of their circles, who would seek to return to the law once they've heard the this good news, this Gospel and received it with joy. They turn good Christian practices, such as prayer, reading scripture, church attendance, and fellowship with other Christians into that which MUST BE DONE. This return to the law, which of course we still can't keep, often leaves God's children feeling worse-off than if they had never believed.

And because faith itself is a gift of God, offered through Word and Sacrament by the working of the Holy Spirit, there is no one who is excluded from this promise – no matter what you've done, no matter how old or young you are, no matter to what extent you even fully understand it, since God has promised through the prophet Isaiah (55:11):

*so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

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It's my prayer for everyone here that, having heard the Word, that the Holy Spirit would enliven and strengthen your faith in Jesus's promise that His finished work, what He has already done, was indeed for you.

AMEN