

03 - 95 Theses - 2017-10-15

Call to Worship: Psalm 5:1-3

Scripture Reading: Psalm 5:4-11

Sermon: "500 Years of the 95 Theses: Part 3" John 5:39-47

Benediction: Psalm 5:12

TEXT

John 5:39-47 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. (40) But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. (41) "I do not receive honor from men. (42) But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. **(43) I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.** (44) How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? (45) Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you--Moses, in whom you trust. (46) For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. (47) But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus was living among people who

- studied the scriptures, which tell of Jesus Christ (verse 39a, c)
- thought that in reading the bible they had eternal life (verse 39b)
- but actually were unwilling to come to Jesus Christ for eternal life (40)

This unwillingness to come to Him for eternal life, our Lord Jesus described this way (43)

- they were unwilling to receive Him on divine authority, but
- they were perfectly willing to receive other preachers on mere human authority.

To put that another way,

- they did not receive the preaching of the Son of God, even though He came as from God
- they did receive the preaching of other preachers, even though they came only as from men

Our Lord analyzed this, and declared why they could believe in preachers who were mere men, but could not believe in Him (44)

- they sought to receive honor, or glory, or praise from men
- they did not seek the honor, or glory, or praise that comes from the only God

Our Lord Jesus explained what this meant about their bible study (46-47)

- no matter how much they studied the bible, they did not really believe the scriptures
- so they did not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ either

Martin Luther, living 500 years ago, recognized that the words of the Lord Jesus in this place in John applied also to the people of his place and time. In explaining some of his 95 Theses, he quoted the Lord Jesus from this place in John chapter 5. It seems the thinking in several of his 95 Theses is based on these words of the Lord.

The people of Martin Luther's Germany

- had a religion originally based on the scriptures, which tell of Jesus Christ (verse 39a, c)
- thought that in that religion they had eternal life (verse 39b)
- but actually were unwilling to come to Jesus Christ for eternal life (40)
- were unwilling to receive preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ on divine authority, but
- were perfectly willing to receive the indulgence preachers on mere human authority.
- did not receive the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, even though it came as from God
- did receive the preaching of the indulgence preachers, even though they came only as from the pope

This revealed that

- they sought to receive honor, or glory, or praise from men
- they did not seek the honor, or glory, or praise that comes from the only God

This showed that

- no matter how much they named Jesus Christ in their religion; no matter how many times they said phrases from the bible (in Latin), they did not really believe in Him as revealed in the scriptures

I urge you to accept our Lord Jesus's evaluation of what was going on with the people of Judah 2000 years ago, as also echoed by Martin Luther regarding the people of Saxony 500 years ago, so as to admit it as a possibility for yourself. Are you like this? Are you like this, even though your family or church are not, but you just haven't realized it until now? Or, maybe are you like this, because your whole family or whole church is like this, and you just didn't think about it until now?

Is it that you

- study the scriptures
- know that the scriptures teach you how to have eternal life
- are missing what the bible really means about Jesus Christ
- and so have not actually been willing to come to Jesus Christ for eternal life?

My paraphrase of the truth observed by our Lord Jesus Christ, referred to by Luther

People are tempted to have some regard for the bible, and to think themselves Christians, while not actually receiving the Lord Jesus Christ on the authority of God the Father, but instead very readily receiving mere men on merely human authority.

BODY

This truth applied in Theses 39 and 44

- I. (Thesis 39) It is very difficult, even for the most learned theologians, to commend these two things at the same time: salvation for all who perform certain acts preached by men, and the need for true repentance.
 - A. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, on the authority of God the Father, says that for a sinner to be forgiven his sins, and so saved from the wrath of God, there must be true repentance in the sinner
 1. Recall from the first few theses what Luther reminded us about this:
When the Lord Jesus preached, “Repent,” He did not mean any one-time religious act administered by the church. He meant life-long repentance.
 2. Recall that the Lord’s commission to the church, as found in the gospel of Luke, says that “repentance and remission of sins” is to be preached in His name.
 - a) according to the gospel!
 3. But sinners are tempted by the devil, the world, and their own flesh, not to receive that truth from the Lord Jesus
 - B. There are plenty of preachers who preach differently from how Jesus preaches; they say that there is salvation for everyone who performs certain acts
 1. examples
 - a) buy an indulgence
 - b) walk down front during the invitation and say a certain prayer
 - c) go to church regularly
 - d) give up certain vices
 2. zeal: Luther: They are taught these matters with more zeal than they are taught to love the gospel.
 3. Sinners very readily receive men who say such things, even though they are saying them on mere human authority
 - C. Therefore, in the presence of some preachers preaching such salvation for everyone who performs certain acts, it is very difficult for all pastors to maintain the need for true repentance
 1. in their own doctrine
 2. in the minds of their hearers
 3. in the way the church worships
 4. in the church’s program

- a) instead of faithful instruction in the Word of God
- b) gimmicks to try to get people to do the certain things they are supposed to do to be saved

D. Luther: It is very difficult, even for the most learned theologians, to commend these two things at the same time: salvation for all who perform certain acts preached by men, and the need for true repentance.

E. You see there an example of Jesus' words

1. John 5:43 I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.
2. People are tempted to have some regard for the bible, and to think themselves Christians, while not actually receiving the Lord Jesus Christ on the authority of God the Father, but instead very readily receiving mere men on merely human authority.

II. (Thesis 44) The Christian does not grow strong in the Lord by means of performing certain works required by men on mere human authority; instead, the Christian grows strong in the Lord as he exercises himself in the good works of love commanded by the Lord ---OR--- We Are Sanctified Not Through Works Commanded By Men, But Through Works of Love Commanded By God

A. Many times human preachers, on mere human authority, command people to do certain things, which things do not actually make us better

1. Examples

a) 500 years ago

- (1) buy indulgences,
- (2) go on pilgrimage,
- (3) pray at a shrine,
- (4) take a vow to be a monk or nun

b) today

- (1) Observe that just as people are told to get saved by walking down to the front during the invitation and praying the required prayer, they are then told to get other people to do that same thing, especially young children.
- (2) you should go visit the Holy Land
- (3) everyone should go on a mission trip
- (4) you should stop people everywhere you go and ask them, "If you died tonight, do you know without a doubt that you'd go to heaven?"
- (5) put on a carnival
- (6) take teenagers to Six Flags
- (7) set up a scary drama called Judgment House
- (8) bring presents for a Christmas gift exchange
- (9) bring Easter eggs filled with candy and hide them for the children

- (10) ask money from all your friends so you can go on a mission trip
- 2. People are tempted to receive such men and their doctrine even though they come and teach in mere human authority
 - a) we recognize this in other areas
 - (1) is something a movie star says about politics necessarily true? no, but we are tempted to heed their words because they have a platform from which to say it
 - (2) is something a football star says about race relations necessarily true? not, but we are tempted to heed their words because they have a platform from which to say it
 - (3) this is easily enough seen
 - b) it is true also in religion
 - (1) is something a preachers says, even about religion, necessarily true? no, a hundred times no, proven by thousands of years' worth of false prophets and antichrists and deceiving spirits
 - (2) yet people are tempted to heed the words of a preacher, even if he is not speaking the word of God, the bible, because he has a platform from which to speak
 - c) so people are tempted to receive preachers who teach God's people to do things that are not from the bible, but just from human authority
- 3. But people are not "made better" by doing such things
 - a) "made better" is Luther's phrase
 - (1) strengthened in the faith
 - (2) brought from childhood to maturity
 - (3) progressively sanctified
 - (4) helped in putting the flesh to death
 - b) man does not become better by means of fulfilling man-made religious requirements
- B. But the Lord Jesus Christ, on the authority of God the Father, commands us to do true works of love; in doing them, He sanctifies us by His Holy Spirit; in the doing of these things, which are true works of love, He makes us better
 - 1. what the bible teaches them to do is to repent, and to walk in love. That walking in love is described, not in terms of getting other people to pray a certain prayer, but in terms of daily living in submission to authority and in diligence in normal, mundane work.
 - a) listen as I read the bible aloud
 - b) let us pray
 - c) sing with me these psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs
 - d) let the people say, "Amen"
 - e) listen to the Word preached

- f) take the Lord's Supper remembering His body and His blood
 - g) repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ
 - h) submit to those in authority over you
 - i) let all manner of uncleanness not have any part in Christ's church
 - j) do not lie to one another
 - k) mortify sin in your flesh; walk by the Spirit
 - l) be sober and reverent
 - m) avoid gossip and foolish chatter
 - n) take good care of your own family
 - o) care for widows and the fatherless in the church if they truly are in need
- 2. in these things, Christ truly makes us better by His Spirit; how better?
 - a) more patient
 - b) more kind
 - c) more self-controlled
 - d) more loving
 - e) more submissive
 - f) more meek
 - 3. yet all around us are people not doing much of these things the Lord actually commanded
- C. You see there an example of Jesus' words
- 1. John 5:43 I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.
 - 2. People are tempted to have some regard for the bible, and to think themselves Christians, while not actually receiving the Lord Jesus Christ on the authority of God the Father, but instead very readily receiving mere men on merely human authority.

CONCLUSION

Recognize this temptation: to have some regard for the bible, and to think yourself a Christian, while not actually receiving the Lord Jesus Christ on the authority of God the Father, but instead very readily receiving mere men on merely human authority.

Is that what you have been doing? Is that how you have been living?

Is it so bad in your case that you really have not repented of sin and you do not really believe in Jesus Christ?

- you received the human doctrine of doing some certain acts to be saved
- you walked down front, you said a prayer, you are avoiding certain vices
- up until now you thought that in these things you had eternal life
- the words of the Savior are still there in the bible, ready to be rightly understood
 - Repent! There is forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ for all who repent.
 - Believe! There is life eternal in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

Or is it not so bad as that in your case? You truly are repentant, and you truly are believing. But how you have been living the Christian life, how you have been seeking sanctification, how you have been trying to serve the Lord, how you have been trying to grow in the faith, has been mostly by a rejection of what our Lord instructed us in the name of the Father, and an acceptance of man's instructions by human authority. If that is the case, brothers and sisters,

- be free, be at liberty! You are under no obligation to obey the commandments of men, and are free to obey what you are truly commanded by God.
- grow! You have not been receiving proper nourishment, but now you can!
 - trees that have stayed as spindly saplings
 - put your roots down in the scriptures; turn your leaves to the sun; and grow! become a strong, tall oak planted by streams of water
 - adopted sons of God, who have remained weak little children
 - crave the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby
 - begin to exercise yourself with the meat of the Word of God, that you may come to maturity in the faith

III. (Thesis 47) Christians are to be taught that religious acts preached by men are matters of free choice, not commandments required by the Lord ---OR--- Works That Are Actually Up to the Christian's Free Choice Should Not Be Commanded As Requirements from God

A. Examples

1. 500 years ago
 - a) buying indulgences,
 - b) going on pilgrimage,
 - c) praying at a shrine,
2. today
 - a) raise your hand,
 - b) stand up,
 - c) walk down here,
 - d) say this prayer
 - e) kneel down here at the front of the church
 - f) go on a mission trip
 - g) use essential oils
 - h) eat organic food
 - i) work in VBS
 - j) go to See-You-at-the-Pole

IV. (Thesis 49) People are to be taught that religious acts preached by men are useful only if they do not put their trust in them, but very harmful if they lose their fear of God because of them.

- A. Luther: Consider the danger of ~~indulgences~~ man-made works of religion. They are preached to people directly contrary to the truth of the cross and the fear of God. . . people run after them eagerly, accept them, and even look upon them as that holy gospel of God

- B. (Thesis 52) It is vain to trust in salvation by certain acts commanded by men just because those acts come from important or impressive preachers
1. even
 - a) those of impressive academic achievement and credentials
 - b) those whose way of speaking is excellent
 - c) those eminent for holiness of living
 2. banish this thought: There must be salvation in doing these works because a very impressive person said so.
 3. embrace this thought from Luther: May every single sermon be forever damned which persuades a person to find security and trust in or through anything whatever except the pure mercy of God, which is Christ.

39 It is very difficult, even for the most learned theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the bounty of indulgences and the need of true contrition.

Luther:

They are taught these matters with more zeal than they are taught to love the gospel.

JRY:

As soon as you introduce things physically to do in order to be saved, the task of maintaining the truth of repentance and remission of sins becomes exceedingly difficult.

When pastors teach people that there is spiritual growth to be had and gospel service to be done in things not actually taught in the Word of God, they make it very hard for the church to maintain the doctrines of repentance and true works of love.

e.g.

you should go visit the Holy Land

you should go on a mission trip

you should teach Sunday School

44 Because love grows by works of love, man thereby becomes better. Man does not, however, become better by means of indulgences but is merely freed from penalties.

JRY:

Observe that people are told to get saved by walking down to the front during the invitation and praying the required prayer. Then they are told to get other people to do that same thing, especially young children.

Yet what the bible teaches them to do is to repent, and to walk in love. That walking in love is described, not in terms of getting other people to pray a certain prayer, but in terms of daily living in submission to authority and in diligence in normal, mundane work.

46 Christians are to be taught that, unless they have more than they need, they must reserve enough for their family needs and by no means squander it on indulgences.

Luther: 1 Timothy 5:8 But there are many who have neither bread nor proper clothing and yet, led astray by the din and noise of the preachers of indulgences, rob themselves and bring about their own poverty in order to increase the wealth of the indulgence sellers.

JRY: including time and energy and attention

47 Christians are to be taught that the buying of indulgences is a matter of free choice, not commanded.

e.g. Essential oils, organic food, VBS, See-You-At-the-Pole, home school, public school

49 Christians are to be taught that papal indulgences are useful only if they do not put their trust in them, but very harmful if they lose their fear of God because of them.

Luther:

John 5:39-47 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. (40) But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. (41) "I do not receive honor from men. (42) But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. **(43) I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.** (44) How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? (45) Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you--Moses, in whom you trust. (46) For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. (47) But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

Luther:

Consider the danger of indulgences. They are preached to people directly contrary to the truth of the cross and the fear of God. . . people run after them eagerly, accept them, and even look upon them as that holy gospel of God see John 5:43

Even the one who does works of love fervently cannot put his trust in those works or feel sure of his salvation because he does them.

50 Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that the basilica of St. Peter were burned to ashes than built up with the skin, flesh, and bones of his sheep.

Luther:

After our “mighty hunters” have imposed a fixed sum of money upon every Christian according to his economic status, they even teach wives to go out and beg, and that against the will of the husbands. Mendicant friars are taught to scrape money together anywhere, even against the will of their superiors. This goes on until there is no one who has a penny left in his pocket which he might contribute to this cause. Matters were carried so far, it is said, that people were exhorted even to sell their clothes or borrow anywhere.

In my opinion indulgences are the most worthless of all possessions of the church and ought to be granted only to its most worthless members. Furthermore, they are neither meritorious nor useful but, what is worse, extremely harmful if they who receive them have no sense of fear. Therefore I feel that such teaching deserves to be cursed and is contrary to the commands of God. For a wife should live under the authority of her husband and do nothing contrary to his will, even if it were meritorious to do so. Even less should she go begging for indulgences she probably does not need.

Has it been the pope’s desire that men who are committed to his care be stripped to the very skin for the sake of sticks and stones? Or has it been his desire that by the pestilential doctrines of these “thieves and robbers,” as Christ calls them [John 10:1], they should be slaughtered and destroyed? It was better to have him as emperor who said, “A good shepherd shears but does not skin his sheep.” 82 The indulgence sellers not only skin the people, but devour them in body and soul. “Their throat is an open se pulchre, they flatter with their tongues, etc.” [Ps. 5:9].

51 Christians are to be taught that the pope would and should wish to give of his own money, even though he had to sell the basilica of St. Peter, to many of those from whom certain hawkers of indulgences cajole money.

52 It is vain to trust in salvation by indulgence letters, even though the indulgence commissary, or even the pope, were to offer his soul as security.

Luther:

May every single sermon be forever damned which persuades a person to find security and trust in or through anything whatever except the pure mercy of God, which is Christ.

Luke 11:37-44 And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. (38) When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner. (39) Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. (40) Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? (41) But **rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you.** (42) "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. (43) Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. (44) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them."

Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

JRY:

The doctrines actually commanded in the Word of God are to be believed (trusted in), and obeyed. Issuing other doctrines may be harmless theoretically, but in fact makes it very difficult for preachers to maintain the true biblical doctrines, as people's flesh runs much more readily to the man-made doctrines (such as works instead of repentance and man-made works rather than true biblical works of love).

Prelude: Trinity 207 "Christ Jesus Lay In Death's Strong Bands"

Camille: flute

Noah: trumpet

Anna: piano

Trinity 26 "O God, Our Help In Ages Past"

Camille: flute

Noah: trumpet

Anna: piano

Trinity 166 "From Heaven High I Come to You"

Camille: piano

Noah: trumpet

Anna: clarinet

Hymns of Grace 195 "You Are My All in All"

Camille: sing

Noah: sing

Anna: Piano

Trinity 717 "My Anchor Holds"

Camille: piano

Noah: trumpet

Anna: sing