

Live Free!

✠ in faithfulness (vv.31,32)

✠ in knowledge (vv.33-34a)

✠ in forgiveness (v.34b)

In the name of Jesus Christ, whose truth sets us free, dear fellow heirs of the Reformation:

Family is at the heart and core of the Reformation. For centuries the Medieval Church of Rome taught that the best way to be holy in God's sight was to forsake family ties for the seclusion of a cloister as a monk or nun. Deserting the real world was promised as a way to be free from guilt and sin. Not a single soul was cleansed by trying to be a good person or buying merits from the Church. Tender consciences know why Martin Luther wrote, "Yea, deep and deeper still I fell. Life had become a living hell. So nearly sin possessed me." Luther's father was indignant to hear of Martin selling his law books to enter the Augustinian Order of poverty. "Who will care for your mother and me?" Hans Luther demanded. Years later, Martin would see his sin against the 4th Commandment. God wants us to repay our parents' loving care from youth by caring for them with honor in old age. What is the price of freedom?

✠ in faithfulness (vv.31,32)

God wanted his family to **Live Free!** He created us male and female, established marriage in the Garden of Eden as the intimate union of one man and one woman for life. But by listening to the family destroyer instead of the family Creator, they made a fatal error. Imagine if one of your children felt sorry for your gold fish. So you poured out the tank on the yard to let him go free. That's not freedom, is it? That's death. Freedom comes from living God's way as God's family. **Live Free! – in faithfulness.**

Family was so much on God's mind through the Old Testament that He considered their idolatry as spiritual adultery. When Israel worshiped other gods besides the LORD, He said they were worse than prostitutes. And there they were at Mount Sinai worshiping the golden calf. The hurt of unfaithfulness stabbed God's heart as in broken marriage, broken friendships, rejection – it all hurts.

If you've ever hit rock bottom in a relationship, you can really appreciate how powerful God's love is when He gives this solution to our unfaithfulness: *Yes, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. They broke, that covenant of mine, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.*

Why not just walk away from them? Why not crumble up that evil nation and start over? We ask such questions without realizing how our own sins put us there with faithless Israel. How often don't our possessions or relationships try to crowd God out of our hearts? That's spiritual adultery too. How often don't we fail to give the love and respect we swear before God's altar "until death parts us." Refusing to abandon His family, God promises a *new covenant* for us to **Live Free! in faithfulness** and...

✠ in knowledge (vv.33-34a)

But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD. I will put my law in their minds, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will each one teach his neighbor, or each one teach his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD....

Knowing the LORD means you know God's tender heart. If you were blessed to be baptized as a

baby according to God's command, you've known Jesus as your best and truest friend from earliest memories. And Jesus promises: ***"If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*** (John 8:31f EHV)

Teaching our children God's Word is vital as the LORD told His Israelites under Moses: ***"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."*** (Deuteronomy 6:6f NIV84) Driving to and from school can be the greatest enlightenment for parents to learn little concerns and to share God's **knowledge** that sets is free from so many heartaches in life. Time away from tiny screens gives little hearts God's love. Love was at the heart of the Luther home.

When Martin married Katherine von Bora, it was against the advice of his fellow professor Melancthon. Other advice convinced Luther that getting married "would please his father, rile the pope, cause the angels to laugh, and the devils to weep." Luther had helped Katherine and eleven fellow nuns to escape their convent in empty fish barrels. He tried to find her a husband, but she wanted only Luther. after their marriage, June 13, 1525, Luther wrote how he loved waking up to her pigtailed on the pillow. He admired her intellect, calling her "Doctora Lutherin." She helped instruct their six children in God's Word and must have taught many others too as she used their home, a former monastery, as a boarding house for students. Luther trusted her far beyond most women in those days, with family finances, his publishers, their household and brewing his beer. Luther preferred wine; Katherine knew beer would help his gallstones. She suffered deeply when Luther died. She was critically injured in a wagon accident six years later.¹ But they had taught their children: "The Lord God is with you wherever you go."

Guarding God's **knowledge** helped Luther arrange a prayer service in 1541. Muslim invaders had conquered Budapest, Hungary, and were soon to be at the gates of Vienna. Apparently, Luther also composed the children's hymn which is still one of their favorites. From youth to old age we sing our fervent prayer to **Live Free! in knowledge**: "Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word." Now **Live Free!** ...

† in forgiveness (v.34b)

"I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more." Some people grow up with parents who do not love them enough to teach them that they are sinners. Sinful pride feeds on the sugar of humanistic "self-esteem," eating holes in the soul of a child. No matter how much parents or psychologists try to deny it, guilt remains. But God's new covenant is the only cure in Christ alone. **Live Free! in forgiveness.** God speaks: ***"I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more."***

So we train our children by modeling God's forgiveness each time we gather at the Lord's Table for Holy Communion. The blood of Christ washes away any sin that divides us. Luther was so concerned about souls having God's comfort that he did not begin giving both bread and wine, the body and blood of our Lord, until God's people were instructed in the God's Word. He modeled Christian freedom by instructing first and then making the change. In Christian freedom we have long used individual cups with the understanding that when members requested the common cup, we could provide it. The chalice does picture beautifully the unity of faith **in forgiveness** which unites us in Holy Communion.

And yet we also want to **Live Free! in forgiveness** as we come away from Lord's Table. Christ's body and blood can do great damage if we do not take them worthily. That means despairing of our own righteousness and trusting only in Jesus. But we fear great damage too if we fail to change, to grow in our love and faithfulness as God's family together. God adopted us in baptism and loves us in spite of our faults all through life until His heavenly banquet above. On the way together as God's family in church, God wants us to show that same kind of Christlike love of a healthy family. He wants us to love each other in spite of faults. The LORD wants us to meet rejection and hurt feelings as He did when He made His new covenant of pure grace. Brothers and sisters, **Live Free! in forgiveness** like Jesus. Amen.

¹ <https://www.visit-luther.com/reformation-heroes/katharina-von-bora/>