

The very first thing that I asked myself in looking over this text is – what does this have to do with the Reformation? It's much easier to connect the dots from the Revelation or Romans reading. Frankly, it's easier to see it in the alternative Gospel text from John.

So what is the connection? It is simply this – the kingdom of heaven cannot just be accepted by this sinful world. Whether it is the preaching of the law embodied in John the Baptist or whether it is the preaching of the Gospel, embodied in Christ, the world will never find peace with the Kingdom of God. It can only seek to destroy God's kingdom.

“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.”

The call to repent is like a demonic scourge that must be ended. The proclamation of forgiveness is pure gluttony that should not be so liberally given out – at least to others.

That is how the world thinks and it's how we think because we are of the world. From the Pharisees of Jesus' day to the priests and pontiffs of Luther's time to us today, the Kingdom of heaven does not come to us easily.

That is why we need the Reformation, not just of Luther's time but of Jesus as well and others also. Any time a prophet proclaimed “Repent” was a call to reform. Every time a pastor preaches “forgive” is a call to reform too. It is only through the Word of God that reformation happens and the Kingdom of Heaven is established.

I.

The first thesis of the 95 that Luther posted was this dirgeful cry: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’, He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” You can't pilgrimage, or relic, or indulge yourself out of the demands of the Law. The Law accuses, and the world hates it for it.

Better to loosen the shackles and give us some wiggle room. That's often how we think about the law – the chains it puts us in must be some magicians' sham and if we can just find the trick lock or the loose strap, we'll be set free soon enough. We think that because such a notion leaves us in control.

But the heartfelt cry “Repent” shuts that down. It makes us mourn – mourn our own helplessness.

When we look at ourselves, apart from Christ, we don't see ourselves as dead as dead can be. We're not *that* sinful. That's the world talking. We must hear the Words of Scripture and now the truth. In your sin, you *are* powerless and pathetic. Mourn this truth and Repent.

II.

And freely receive the forgiveness God would give you.

We hate this promise just as much if not more than the call to repent. Not for ourselves of course but that God would give it to others – to that liar, that thief, that murderer. That He would give His salvation to me and to the person who mocked me, shamed me or hurt me. We don't want God to love our enemies.

But God is a glutton when it comes to forgiveness! He gives it to the unworthy and we are all unworthy – equally condemned and in His grace from cross equally saved.

So, freely receive Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. Freely receive His coming to you in the waters of His Baptism, where He made you His own. Freely receive His body and blood for forgiveness, life and salvation. Freely receive and dance for joy at what God has done for you in Christ.

And because of all this freely given grace we receive from Christ, we can get over our anger at our enemy and not begrudge them receiving it too.

For wisdom is justified by her deeds, and the wisdom of God is revealed in the cross. In that wisdom, let us repent and be forgiven, in that wisdom, may we once again, be generously, even gluttonously, forgiven and freed in the body and blood of Christ. The table is ready and rejoicing we eat. Amen.