

Johann Tetzel, Grace for Sale Through Indulgences

Source: <http://biblelight.net/tetzel.htm>

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Source: Martin Luther, *Wider Hans Worst*, 1541. (WA 51, 538.)

It happened in 1517 that a Dominican monk named Johann Tetzel, a braggart, caused a great stir. Maximilian once sentenced him to drowning in the River Inn - presumably because of his great virtue - but Duke Frederick rescued him in Innsbruck from the punishment of being drowned. Duke Frederick reminded him of this incident when he began to denounce us Wittenbergers. Actually, he admitted it quite openly. This same Tetzel now began to peddle indulgences. With might and main he sold grace for money as dearly or as cheaply as he could. At the time I was preacher here in the cloister and was filled as a new doctor with an ardent love for the scriptures.

When many people from Wittenberg ran after indulgences... I did not know - as surely as my Lord Christ has redeemed me - what indulgences were, but no one else knew either. I carefully began to preach that one could do something better and more certain than to purchase indulgences. On an earlier occasion I had already preached here in the castle against indulgences, but was not very graciously received by Duke Frederick, who was fond of his collegiate church. Now, to speak about the real cause for the 'Lutheran scandal', at first I let everything continue its course. Then it was reported to me, however, that Tetzel was preaching some cruel and terrible propositions, such as the following:

He had grace and power from the Pope to offer forgiveness even if someone had slept with the Holy Virgin Mother of God, as long as a contribution would be put into the coffer.

Furthermore, the red Cross of indulgences and the papal coat of arms on the flag of the churches was as powerful as the Cross of Christ.

Moreover, even if St. Peter were here now he would have no greater grace or power than he had.

Furthermore, he would not want to trade places in heaven with St. Peter, for he had redeemed more souls with his indulgences than Peter with his sermons.

Furthermore, if anyone put money into the coffer for a soul in purgatory, the soul would leave purgatory for heaven in the moment one could hear the penny hit the bottom.

Also the grace of indulgences is the grace by which man is reconciled with God.

Furthermore, it is not necessary to show remorse or sorrow or do penance for sins when purchasing indulgences or a letter of indulgence. He even sold indulgences for future sins. Such abominable things he did abundantly. He was merely interested in money...

Source: *Luthers Schriften*, herausg. von Walch. XV, 446.

After Tetzel had received a substantial amount of money at Leipzig, a nobleman asked him if it were possible to receive a letter of indulgence for a future sin. Tetzel quickly answered in the affirmative, insisting, however, that the payment had to be made at once. This the nobleman did, receiving thereupon letter and seal from Tetzel. When Tetzel left Leipzig the nobleman attacked him along the way, gave him a thorough beating, and sent him back empty-handed to Leipzig with the comment that this was the future sin which he had in mind. Duke George at first was quite furious about this incident, but when he heard the whole story he let it go without punishing the nobleman.

Source: Friedrich Myconius, *Historia reformationis*, p. 14.

At the time a Dominican monk named Johann Tetzel was the great mouthpiece, commissioner, and preacher of indulgences in Germany. His preaching raised enormous amounts of money which were sent to Rome. This was particularly the case in the new mining town St. Annaberg, where I, Friedrich Myconius, listened to him for over two years. The claims of this uneducated and shameful monk were unbelievable. Thus he said that even if someone had slept with Christ's dear Mother, the Pope had power in heaven and on earth to forgive as long as the money was put into the indulgences coffer. And if the Pope would forgive, God also had to forgive. He furthermore said if they would put money quickly into the coffer to obtain grace and indulgence, all the mountains near St. Annaberg would turn into pure silver. He claimed that in the very moment the coin rang in the coffer, the soul rose up to heaven. Such a marvellous thing was his indulgence. In sum and substance: God was no longer God, as he had bestowed all divine power to the Pope: "Tu es Petrus, tibi dabo claves, quodcunque." And then there were the masters of the Inquisition, who banished and burned those saying conflicting words.

Source: The Text of a Sermon on Indulgences by Johann Tetzel

What are you thinking about? Why do you hesitate to convert yourself? Why don't you have fears about your sins? Why don't you confess now to the vicars of our Most Holy Pope? Don't you have the example of Lawrence, who, compelled by the love of God, gave away his inheritance and suffered his body to be burned? Why do you not take the example of Bartholomew, Stephen, and of other saints who gladly suffered the most gruesome deaths for the sake and salvation of their souls? You, however, do not give up great treasures; indeed you give not even moderate alms. They gave their bodies to be martyred, but you delight in living well and joyfully. You priest, nobleman, merchant, wife, virgin, you married people, young person, old man, enter into your church which is for you, as I have said, St. Peter's, and visit the most holy Cross. It has been placed there for you, and it always cries and calls for you. Are you perhaps ashamed to visit the Cross with a candle and yet not ashamed to visit a tavern? Are you ashamed to go to the apostolic confessors, but not ashamed to go to a dance? Behold, you are on the raging sea of the world in storm and danger, not knowing if you will safely reach the harbor of salvation...

You should know that all who confess and in penance put alms into the coffer... will obtain complete remission of all their sins. If they visit, after confession and after the Jubilee, the Cross and the altar every day they will receive that indulgence which would be theirs upon visiting in St. Peter's the seven altars, where complete indulgence is offered. Why are you then standing there? Run for the salvation of your souls! Be as careful and concerned for the salvation of your souls as you are for your temporal goods, which you seek both day and night. Seek the Lord while he may be found and while he is near...

Don't you hear the voices of your wailing dead parents and others who say, 'Have mercy upon me, have mercy upon me, because we are in severe punishment and pain [in Purgatory]. From this you could redeem us with a small alms and yet you do not want to do so.' Open your ears as the father says to the son and the mother to the daughter . . ., 'We have created you, fed you, cared for you, and left you our temporal goods. Why then are you so cruel and harsh that you do not want to save us, though it only takes a little? You let us lie in flames so that we only slowly come to the promised glory.' You may have letters which let you have, once in life and in the hour of death . . . full remission of the punishment which belongs to sin. Oh, those of you with vows, you usurers, robbers, murderers, and criminals - Now is the time to hear the voice of God. He does not want the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live...

Source: W. Köhler, *Dokumente zum Ablassstreit*, pp. 125-26.

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