

THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S GRACE SETS US FREE AND KEEPS US FREE

Galatians 5:1-6

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

How would we feel if in the next national election in Afghanistan the people voted to reinstate the Taliban as the ruling party in Afghanistan, voted to provide money and other resources to support Osama bin Laden and his terrorist training camps and voted to expel all U.S. troops and other aid agencies? Especially, how do you think the families whose sons died liberating Afghanistan would feel?

The apostle Paul in the first verse of chapter 5 declares, "At great cost to himself our Lord Christ conquered your oppressors, your slave masters. He did this so that you would live as free people. Therefore, remain free and do not willingly place yourselves under those old tyrants again." Prior to our conversion to Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, we were slaves with no hope and no ability to escape. We were ruled over by tyrants: our own sin and the law which condemns us for our sin and by Satan who deceives us with his propaganda to make us sin and by death, our executioner. All of our labor to make ourselves right with God by obedience to religious and moral and cultural laws yielded only more slavery and gained us no benefits. Just as we in the U.S. would be horrified if the Afghani people elected the Taliban back into power after we just set them free from their tyranny, so Paul is horrified that these professing Christians would even consider returning to the slavery of their former lives by seeking to be made right with God by their own efforts. Christ has set us free and Christ wants us to live as free men and women. What Paul begins to do in today's passage is to tell us how free people live.

STUDY

1. According to vv. 1-4, how would you summarize the false teaching that is being propagated in Galatia that Paul views as a "yoke of slavery", which the Galatians should not put on?

The message of the false teachers agrees with the gospel at many points. They tell the Galatians that they are sinners who are in danger of being condemned by God to hell for their sins. They are in need of justification. They must have their sins forgiven and they must be righteous and therefore worthy of going to heaven. They are telling the churches of Galatia that Jesus is the Savior, the Son of God, the promised Messiah. They are telling these Christians that they must believe in Jesus or they can't be forgiven. However, they are also saying that believing in Jesus is not enough. Yes, Abraham believed God and he was declared righteous by God but then God told him to be circumcised. Yes, God delivered the people of Israel out of their slavery in Egypt and then brought them safely through 40 years of nomadic wandering in the desert but then, just before he permitted them to enter into the promised land he required that they all be circumcised. Therefore, you must believe in Jesus and be circumcised if you are going to belong to God's people and go to heaven. The false teachers are not telling these Galatians that they can go to heaven without Christ. They must believe in Jesus and keep the law.

2. Define and/or describe what it means "to be justified" (v. 4)?

When I was a younger man and foolish I would tell my wife that I would be home from work or from playing basketball with my buddies at a certain time but then I would arrive home an hour or two after I said I would. This would make my wife very unhappy with me as she would be worrying about what happened to me or she would have dinner ready at a certain time and I wouldn't be there. When I finally arrived home I would begin the process of justifying my late arrival. I would seek to set forth evidence that would prove that I wasn't being an irresponsible, insensitive, uncaring, inconsiderate louse who deserved to sleep on the couch that night. What I was doing was seeking to prove my innocence, to remove the guilt and thus escape the just punishment due me for my sins. Justification is being declared innocent and therefore not liable to the punishment due for the transgressions that you have committed. Additionally, it is then being treated as if you have fulfilled your duty, performed the righteousness required of you. For me after arriving home late that would mean that Jane would forgive my tardiness and

treat me as if I'd not sinned by being late but had in fact been a loving and considerate husband.

3. According to vv. 2-4 what is true for every person who is circumcised or does anything for the purpose of being justified before God?

First, Christ is of no value or benefit to you. Paul has said that Christ bore the curse that is due to men who do not do everything that God commands in the law. So if you obey the law in the belief that your obedience earns God's favor, then Christ did not bear the curses of any lawbreaking you do for you. You must bear the consequence of any lawbreaking. Christ, by his death, obtained the promised Holy Spirit. Therefore, if you insist on obeying the law then the Holy Spirit will not dwell in you or help you or be there to comfort you. He is absent from your life and you are entirely on your own. God made all the promises of eternal happiness to Abraham and his Seed, that is, to Christ. Only Jesus and all those who are related to him are heirs of God and of all the wealth that God possesses. Therefore, if you believe that your obedience is necessary for you to be justified before God, then you have been cut out of God's will. You are not an heir of all the promises.

The second thing he says that if you accept circumcision as necessary to be declared not guilty by God, then you have committed yourself to keeping the whole law. What Paul is aiming to demonstrate here is something that every man centered religious system neglects to tell you. The false teachers are not preaching that they must obey every law of God perfectly. They are concentrating on those duties easily performed and then reinterpreting the hard ones so they also can be easily performed. When you perform a religious duty expecting to receive the favor of God in return for your performance you have entered into an agreement with God that requires perfect obedience to every command of God. God doesn't have just one law or just 6 laws. There are over 600 specific commands in the OT law. Everyone who tells you that obedience to God's law is necessary if you are going to make it to heaven must reinterpret God's law and make it doable. No legalist will ever tell you the truth about God's law because it is as plain as the nose on your face that no one is able to keep God's law. God's law is a

landslide of condemnation and destruction, not the means of climbing up to God.

The last two things true of all who seek to enter God's kingdom by obedience to law while also believing in Jesus are that you are cut off from Christ and fallen from grace. Jesus tells us that he is God's true vine and that all who believe in him are the branches in that vine. If you aim to approach God on the basis of your own performance, then you have been cut off from the life that is in the vine. You are a broken off branch that will be gathered up and burned with fire at the end. Also, you are a person who is outside of the unmerited and unearned favor of God. Grace and works are incompatible realities. God is free and he alone is the one who determines who will go to heaven. He is out to glorify himself, not men. Those who claim that their obedience is necessary for going to heaven are planning on standing in front of God at the last judgment and telling God that he is obligated to let them into heaven because of what they have done. They plan on boasting in their own accomplishments, not in the grace of God. You cannot glorify yourself and glorify God at that same time. Either your salvation is due to your work, your wisdom, your will, your power or your salvation is due to the free, sovereign, unmerited favor of God.

4. How does it impact you to know that being justified by God is not based upon anything you have ever done or decided and it never will be?

5. What are some ways you have seen yourself tempted to abandon the freedom you have in Christ for the slavery of seeking to be justified by your performance of some law?

Christ has made us a free people therefore we guard our freedom.

Galatians 5:1 contains the first commands that Paul gives to the Galatians. He is moving from what God has done to what we do in response to what God has done. Why is the first thing he commands that we guard the freedom we have been given in Christ?

He is now turning his attention from the foundational issue of how it is that guilty men and women are justified before God to how those who

are justified live in this world. We cannot, as we begin to talk about the actual lives we live as Christians, forget what Paul has taken such great pains to drive home to us. How we live our lives is not the ground upon which God will decide whether or not he keeps us out of hell and brings us to heaven. The only reason anyone will go to heaven is because Jesus Christ perfectly obeyed God's law in our place and he suffered the death we deserve for our lawbreaking ways. He reminds us that as we begin to think about the lives we live to never forget that the lives we live do not change our status before God. If we are in Christ, then we are justified regardless of our performance. If we are not in Christ, then we are condemned, no matter how we live.

6. What is the first thing that Paul says will characterize the justified person in v. 5? (Literal translation: "For we ourselves, by the Spirit, on the basis of faith wait eagerly the hope of righteousness.")

He says we live a life of eagerly waiting for the hope of righteousness by the power of the Holy Spirit through faith.

7. Why does he say this waiting is "by the Spirit"?

The only reason I have any interest in Christ is because God, out of his free grace and due to nothing in me, no decision or act on my part, sent his Holy Spirit to convince me that I am a sinner and that Christ is a great Savior for sinners. By the Holy Spirit I have been given the very life of God. Just like God caused life to be given to Isaac out of the deadness of Sarah and Abraham's body, so God gave life to me in the deadness of my sin and rebellion. The law did not give me this life; neither did my decision or my wisdom or my performance of some ritual or good deed. I have a new life. I am a new person. I live by and in the Spirit, not by and in the law or by or in my own sinful nature.

8. Why does he say this waiting is "on the basis of faith"?

Paul says that this life I now live is a life of faith in Christ. Jesus Christ is the center of my life. I trust in him for all things. He is my life. He is my Savior. He is my righteousness. He is my sanctification. He is my joy. He is my king. He is my rock of refuge. He is everything to me and for me. All things come to me in him and through him. This is what I

believe. Nothing good comes to me but by him. Outside of him I have nothing. I trust him to perform all that I cannot perform.

9. What does Paul mean by the phrase "hope of righteousness"? What is it we are eagerly waiting for? Why does he make waiting the first fruit he mentions of being a justified person?

Paul is thinking of two things here in this phrase, "the hope of righteousness." First, while we are trusting in Christ to be our righteousness we are not righteous. We are continually confronted with our sinfulness. We don't read the Bible enough. We don't pray as we ought. We get mad at the people we are supposed to love. We enjoy watching TV more than we enjoy coming to church. Yet, because of Jesus Christ's perfect obedience and his sacrificial death, I know, by faith, that God now counts me righteous and one day I will be perfectly righteous. I know that when Jesus Christ returns and resurrects me that I will be just like him. I will never sin again in that day. By the Spirit and by faith in Christ I know that day is coming. Therefore, I wait in eager anticipation for that day. Therefore, I press on towards Christ in spite of the fact that I am beset by sin. I don't despair or lose heart.

The second thing that this phrase, "the hope of righteousness" indicates is the life of blessing that God has promised to all those who are righteous. I believe that God counts me as perfectly righteous through Christ by the Spirit. Therefore, the fruit of that faith is that I am full of hope that one day I will receive the reward that is due to those who perfectly obey his law, not because I have obeyed it but because Christ has obeyed it for me and born the curse for me. Now we are beset by all kinds of afflictions and losses. However, because I know that Christ is faithful to his promises I know that one day he will wipe away all the tears. He will heal all that is injured and sick and broken. He will eliminate all disease and will take away death, that greatest of all curses. We will live in perfect and unbroken fellowship with God and one another.

10. Are you eagerly waiting for the "hope of righteousness"? What difference would it make in your life if you were eagerly waiting for the "hope of righteousness"?

Christ has made us a free people therefore we wait in hope.

11. What's the first thing he says is true for all who are "in Christ"? How can he say this after he just said vv. 2-3?

First he says, whether or not you are circumcised means nothing to whether or not you are in Christ and a beneficiary of all the promises. How can he say that when he has just said that anyone who lets himself be circumcised is cut off from Christ? What Paul wants to make very clear is that it is not the action that matters but the motive behind the action. If you get circumcised in order to be justified of your sins, then circumcision matters. However, no one who is in Christ has been circumcised for that reason because if you are circumcised in order to be justified then you are cut off from Christ, you are not in Christ. Therefore, whether or not you are circumcised means nothing to God. What matters to God and matters to Christian fellowship is, why are you circumcised? If you believe that God loves you and will welcome you into heaven because you are circumcised you are not in Christ and therefore v. 6 does not apply to you. However, if you are in Christ, then you may for other reasons be circumcised or you may remain uncircumcised. The important thing to see here is that with the coming of Christ, the command to be circumcised in the OT, is fulfilled and therefore the act doesn't matter any more. NOTE: You may want to show how Paul lived in light of this by comparing Acts 16:1-4 with Galatians 2:3, 4:6 & 6:15 & 1 Corinthians 7:19.

12. What else is true of all who are in Christ?

The second characteristic of everyone who is justified is that due to their faith in Christ, they actively love others.

13. Why is it that there is an infallible connection between faith in Christ to justify me and active love for others?

We become like those whom we admire, love and respect. Millions of boys and girls participate in athletics because they want to be like their favorite star athlete. Advertisers understand this human urge. Why do they show great athletes wearing their clothes, drinking their soda or sports drink? They do it because they know that humans want to

become like those whom they admire, love and respect. As we grow in our faith in Christ we become more and more amazed at his great love for sinners like us. We grow in our admiration for one so great, so perfect, so holy, so awesome who has brought himself so low as to take on human flesh and submit himself to all the miseries of this life and to willingly suffer that excruciating death in our place. As we grow to admire him and love him our desire to be like him grows. We seek to love our enemies because we admire how Christ loved us, his enemy. We seek to do good to those who hate us because we see how Christ has done good to us who hated him. We are patient with the shortcomings of others and forgive whatever grievances we have against others because we so admire Christ for his patience towards us and his forgiveness of our many sins.

14. Why does Paul say "faith works through love?" Why doesn't he say "faith works" or "faith loves"?

The answer to this is that he is trying to hold together two things that humans are experts at separating. On the one hand, many talk of love for others as if it were merely sentiment, a feeling I have when I feel something I've never felt before. Tom Cruise is a perfect example of this sort of love as he publicly declares his love for a woman he has known and dated for about 2 months. This is the love our culture is addicted to, the good feelings and exciting passions of love. However, Paul says that love and work go hand in glove. Love is not merely sentiment, it is action that works for the good of the one who is loved. It is faithful to the one loved. However, love is not merely work. It is not simply the doing of one's duty. That sort of love is hypocrisy. The husband that treats his wife to a dinner out, not because he is delighted to be with her but because he is trying to impress his friends or fulfill some obligation he was told about at a marriage conference does not love his wife. Acts of love must be motivated by true affection and delight in the beloved and in the good of the beloved in order for the acts to be considered love.

15. How have you seen your faith in Christ work through love?

Christ has made us a free people therefore we live in love.