

I.N.I.

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 24, 2011
Gal. 5:1-13

In Christ Jesus, who has set us free, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This morning we begin our fifth sermon on Paul's letter to the Galatian Christians. We are also beginning the third major part of his letter. In the first part (chapters 1-2), Paul reviewed the historical background of the Gospel that he had preached to the Galatians. It had come from God, not man. It was not theirs, nor his, it was and is God's. In the second part (chapters 3-4), Paul clearly showed from Scripture that salvation is completely based on God's grace in Christ, nothing we can do will save us in the least. Now in this third part of his letter (chapters 5-6), Paul applies what he has taught to the lives of these Christians and to all of us. Since Christ has done everything for our salvation, we are freed from a slavish obedience to the Old Testament laws, freed from the condemnation of the Law and freed for a life of service to our Savior.

Freedom is a very dear word to Americans. Hundreds of thousands of individuals over the years have given their lives for our freedom. The freedoms we enjoy in this blessed country are many, and for those freedoms we should daily give thanks to our God. The freedom we enjoy through Christ, however, is far, far greater. Freedom from political tyranny and oppression by a dictator is far surpassed by freedom from the spiritual tyranny and oppression of Satan. Freedom from a guilty conscience is a far greater blessing than freedom of speech. The freedom to bear arms and protect ourselves is nothing compared to the freedom we have in Christ from all of our spiritual enemies.

Paul begins our text by saying that Christ has set us **FREE!**

Vs. 1 STAND FAST THEREFORE IN THE LIBERTY (FREEDOM) BY WHICH CHRIST HAS MADE US FREE, AND DO NOT BE ENTANGLED AGAIN WITH A YOKE OF BONDAGE.

Both the word **liberty** and **free** in our text come from the same Greek word. It implies deliverance, rescue. Christ's redeeming sacrifice for us has rescued us and delivered us from the guilt and punishment of sin; has set us free from the power of sin; has delivered us from an accusing conscience; has rescued us from the wrath and condemnation of God; has set us free from the bondage of Satan.

But Paul in our text is thinking of yet another freedom, rescue and deliverance. We have been set free from the Law and its curse--rescued from the Law which demands perfect obedient love and pronounces death and damnation upon the sinner. We have been set free from fear. Fear that arises in the heart when we realize that we have not kept God's Law as He demands it to be kept. Fear when we realize that God does not change His commands and that we are totally, utterly incapable of meeting those demands. What a blessing that we have been set free from the demands and the condemnation of the Law!

Now **STAND FAST, STAND FIRM!** Paul says. The Galatians had been doing well, living in that freedom, basking in the love of their Savior, but now they had in fact turned around, and were again being enslaved. The term here is like that of a tree firmly rooted in the midst of a raging storm, or of a soldier on the field of battle not fleeing in the face of the enemy but standing his ground. Continue to stand firm, don't be entangled, loaded down again with a yoke of bondage, of slavery--the slavery and bondage of rules and regulations, of laws and ordinances, of ceremonies and rituals, of have to's and must's. We are free!

Paul continues with his second point. We read vs. 2-3 **INDEED I, PAUL, SAY TO YOU THAT IF YOU BECOME CIRCUMCISED, CHRIST WILL PROFIT YOU NOTHING. AND**

I TESTIFY AGAIN TO EVERY MAN WHO BECOMES CIRCUMCISED THAT HE IS A DEBTOR TO KEEP THE WHOLE LAW. From his apostolic office Paul lays on their hearts this terrifying truth. If they believe that they **HAVE TO, MUST BE** circumcised, then they have lost Christ. Then all that Christ has done for them is destroyed. If they accept circumcision, thinking that doing this is necessary for salvation, or at least necessary to complete and fulfill their salvation, then Christ has become useless to them.

And more than that, Paul says, everyone who believes this way and is circumcised, places himself under the whole Mosaic Law. You are now obligated to keep all of it. Man cannot just pick and choose what regulations and ordinances he must keep and observe. If you believe that keeping this ordinance is necessary to salvation, if you believe that living under the slavery of the Law is what saves you, then you must live under and be obligated to **ALL OF IT**. Not just circumcision but the Sabbath, the sacrifices, the ceremonies, and then the whole Law of God also. Then it is that a person falls victim to the Law's condemning curse of death---**FOR WHOEVER SHALL KEEP THE WHOLE LAW, AND YET STUMBLE IN ONE POINT, HE IS GUILTY OF ALL...and THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH!**

Paul goes on in vs. 4-6 **YOU HAVE BECOME ESTRANGED FROM CHRIST, YOU WHO ATTEMPT TO BE JUSTIFIED BY LAW; YOU HAVE FALLEN FROM GRACE. FOR WE THROUGH THE SPIRIT EAGERLY WAIT FOR THE HOPE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH. FOR IN CHRIST JESUS NEITHER CIRCUMCISION NOR UNCIRCUMCISION AVAILS ANYTHING, BUT FAITH WORKING THROUGH LOVE.**

Earlier Paul had said, **O FOOLISH GALATIANS, WHO HAS BEWITCHED YOU!** You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated, estranged, separated from Christ. You have fallen away from Grace. These are awfully strong words. And they need to be. For combining grace (God's undeserved gift of forgiveness, life and salvation through Christ's life, death and resurrection) with the Law (observing and keeping the commands of God and ordinances of men) destroys all that Christ has done, and therefore leads only to eternal destruction.

The only thing that counts is Christ, and faith in Christ. We, Paul says, don't spend our time trying to earn salvation by our works, rather we spend our time serving our Lord by eagerly waiting for the hope of righteousness by faith. But don't we already have this righteousness in Christ? Yes, the declaration has already been made. We have been declared righteous by God through faith in Christ. His righteousness is ours, so that even now the peace of God fills our hearts. But one day, at Christ's glorious return, our righteousness will be declared publicly, before all the world. That is when Christ will say to us who live in Him through faith, **COME BLESSED OF MY FATHER AND INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.** Paul spoke of this blessed hope in his letter to Titus cha. 2:13 **LOOKING FOR THE BLESSED HOPE AND GLORIOUS APPEARING OF OUR GREAT GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST.**

Paul says, **YOU RAN WELL.** They had started out great, they were running the proper course set out for them by God Himself. But now someone **HINDERED THEM**, lit. **CUT IN ON THEM** and diverted them away, turned them away from the truth that leads to the finish line of eternal life to follow a course that leads to eternal death. They were no longer listening to the Lord who had called them to faith; no longer listening to the obedience of the Gospel message of salvation but now were following the persuasion of those certain Jewish Christians who proclaimed that keeping the ordinances of Moses were necessary to salvation. This teaching, like yeast, was beginning to spread throughout the whole batch of dough, this false doctrine was spreading throughout Galatia.

Even though Paul's deep concern shows again and again in this letter, he is confident that the

Holy Spirit working through these words will produce the desired effect. We read in vs. 10 **I HAVE CONFIDENCE IN YOU, IN THE LORD, THAT YOU WILL HAVE NO OTHER MIND.** Paul was assured that the Holy Spirit would use the Word of Truth to bring them back, restore them to the one and only way of salvation; **GRACE ALONE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST!**

Those who do not listen, who are leading the Galatians astray will pay the penalty, will suffer the condemnation their teachings deserve. Paul writes, **BUT HE WHO TROUBLES YOU SHALL BEAR HIS JUDGMENT, WHOEVER HE IS...I COULD WISH THAT THOSE WHO TROUBLE YOU WOULD EVEN CUT THEMSELVES OFF!** In his righteous anger and indignation over against these false teachers who are destroying souls, Paul berates them and in a little bit of mockery says; "if they believe a little physical mutilation and cutting is of spiritual value, let them be consistent and go all the way, cut it all off. Emasculate yourself." If keeping the Law is what is demanded to be saved, then we better do it all and do it completely.

Finally, Paul concludes our section of his letter this morning with a warning. Freedom from the Law does not mean license, but love. vs. 13 **FOR YOU, BRETHREN, HAVE BEEN CALLED TO LIBERTY; ONLY DO NOT USE LIBERTY AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE FLESH, BUT THROUGH LOVE SERVE ONE ANOTHER.** Yes, we are free from the demands and condemnation of the Law, but not from the Law itself. We walk by faith, but that faith works through love, which is the fulfillment of the Law.

Paul proclaimed liberty, freedom through the Gospel. Don't be entangled, weighed down in the slavery of work-righteous legalism, that makes a law out of the Gospel message; that believes Christ's sacrifice was not quite complete and sufficient and that we must do something; we must add our own pitiful works.

But there is another side to that ditch of false teaching. Using our freedom as a license to do whatever one desires----when liberty or freedom from the curse of the law is interpreted to mean, **THE RIGHT AND FREEDOM TO DO OUR OWN THING WHETHER IT IS GOD-PLEASING OR NOT.** Paul again puts it this way, **DO NOT USE YOUR LIBERTY AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE FLESH.**

Examples. We as adults have the Christian liberty to use or not use alcoholic beverages. But many misuse that liberty, that freedom and instead of using it to moderation become a slave to it and sin by drunkenness. We have the Christian liberty and freedom to watch T.V., go to movies, read books and magazines, listen to music; but once again many use that liberty as a license to watch, listen to and read vulgar, immoral, pornographic, ungodly forms of entertainment. We have the Christian liberty to work and earn money, we are not bound by any law that says we should live as monks or hermits in perpetual poverty. But again how often doesn't our sinful flesh then turn that liberty into license to work 7 days a week, piling up more and more for ourselves, often times neglecting our family, our own physical health and the public worship of our Lord. We have the Christian freedom to use our gifts and talents, but how often don't we use them as a license to become self serving and stingy rather than doing for and serving others and our Lord.

Christian freedom means being a slave to Christ and serving one another. Sounds illogical, and it is to the sinful flesh. Christian freedom means being a slave and serving one another. We have been set free from the demands and condemnation of the Law in order to become willing servants to Christ and our fellow man. Christ's perfect sacrifice for us, His fulfillment of the Law and payment for our sins gives us freedom which in turn moves our hearts to deep gratitude and affection, self-sacrificing tenderness, genuine sympathy, spontaneous giving and forgiving of one another.

One man wrote that they had just installed an underground sprinkler system in their yard. He said it was fascinating to watch as the workers mapped out the path it would take, laid the piping and sprinkler

heads, then rigged up a pump and hose combination to draw water from their pond. There were many different components that went into the system. When they turned it on for the first time, they held their breath as the pump drew the water from the pond through the hose and sent it through the underground pipes where the water pressure forced the sprinkler heads out of the ground with a glorious spray of water.

When we are connected to the Source, our Savior, with all the components working together, we are (all of us) the Holy Spirit's glorious system for distributing the Water of Life to this barren and dry world.

The Holy Spirit changes us and then uses us in this glorious freedom we have in Christ to serve others. We see love where there was anger and spite; joy where there was bitterness; peace where there was anxiety and worry; kindness where there was meanness; goodness where there was evil; faithfulness where there was betrayal; gentleness where there was harshness; self-control where there was self-indulgence; freedom where there was slavery; and a willing serving where there was selfishness.

May our Christian freedom lead us to daily give thanks to our Lord and Savior who made the payment for our sins by His suffering and death, and out of thankful love move us to use our freedom to become slaves, willing selfless slaves to Christ in service to each other.

Amen.