

Hy 14:1,4
 Hy 1A
 Ps 19:3,4,5
 Ps 119:12,13
 Ps 85:3; Hy 29:1
 John 8:31-47
 James 1:19-2:13
 Lord's Day 44.114,115

Yarrow, December 19, 2010

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

In days of Prime Ministership of Pierre Trudeau, Canada received Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This statute gives us freedom to live anywhere in Canada we want, marry whoever we want, believe whatever we want, buy whatever we want, have unrestricted access to the nations courts, etc. Freedoms we cherish.

- This Charter also gives Canadians the freedom to be gay, to have an abortion, to wear a burka in public, and (some would say) to be polygamous. Can be/do what you want – freedom. This is Canada.
 - Of course, not freedom to burn down neighbour's house, because that hurts him, and his safety/rights are only limit to your freedoms.

We been busy with the Ten Commandments for some weeks. These commandments are *laws*, ie, tell us what to do and what not to do.

- Clear to us that Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms gives us greater freedom than law of God does.
 - 7th commandment: no adultery, but Charter says OK. No homosexuality, but Charter says OK.
 - 4th commandment: remember Sabbath, but Charter says you free to do what will on Sunday.
 - 1st commandment: no other gods, but Charter says you may choose for self who to serve.
- ∴ Q: given your rights in Canada, do you experience law of God as restrictive?? Does it limit you in a way Canada's Charter does not?? Are you *lesser Canadians* because restricted by law of God?
 - Here touch topic of *freedom*. What does it take to be *free*?
- Answer in James: speaks of "the law that gives freedom" (1:25; 2:12). Ie, obedience to law of God gives you freedom to be happy/fulfilled.

THE LAW OF GOD GIVES FREEDOM.

1. The law does not save,
2. The law shows us how to be free,
3. The law leads Canadians forward

1. The law does not save

Clear theme comes from James' words. But sounds strange to us. Isn't this the heretical doctrine of works?? Don't we receive freedom through Christ's sacrifice on cross?? Indeed we do.

- We have completed a discussion of the Ten Commandments, and so find ourselves in the third part of the Cat, re *Gratitude*.
 - In first part of Cat we made confession of how God created us, ie, bond of love with Him so that we image God, ie, reflect what He like (Lord's Day 3). Pt: God made humanity different from monkeys and donkeys, for we alone of all creatures mandated (and gifted) to show world what God is like.
 - ∴ mandate to multiply (more image-bearers), and mandate to have dominion = care for garden/world as God would. This glorify God. Privilege!!
 - But fall into sin. Ie, broke bond with God, join Satan, image what Satan is like. Cf John 8:44,34 - "slaves to sin". See Romans 6:16. Sin/Satan a cruel master; his 'slaves' are not free! ∴ 1st part of Cat entitled "Sin & Misery"
 - ∴ 2nd part of Cat: Lord God in mercy provides redemption: "Deliverance". See Lord's Day 23:
 - Sends Son for our sins (Christmas!), goes to cross, atones for sin.
 - Result: those chosen to life are delivered from bondage to Satan and restored to God's side – justification = God's declares sinners righteous through Christ's blood. Gospel of free grace!! No longer 'slaves to sin'!
 - But Cat not stop there. Lord's Day 32: those taken back to God's side through blood of Jesus Christ do not continue to act as if still on Satan's side. These people changed/renewed by Holy Spirit – this called Sanctification.
 - Change is: made able again to image God. See Ephesians 4:24; 5:1.
 - So: *how* image God?? How know how God would act??
 - This revealed in Ten Commandments.
 - Why not bear false witness?? God never lie; speaks truth
 - Why not adultery? God never unfaithful to bride; always faithful.
 - Why not steal? God is generous, kind, good.
 - Discussion of Ten Commandments happens in 3rd part of Catechism, re Gratitude. Ie, one *is* redeemed through Jesus' blood, renewed by Jesus' Spirit – now go and *be who you are*. Ie, show gratitude for God's mercy.
 - But: Gratitude looks like something: obedience to Ten Commandments, ie, image God again.
 - True: can't image/obey perfectly.
 - David a man after God's heart, yet affair with Bathsheba.
 - Paul in Romans 7:15,18 ∴ 24. ∴ Lord's Day 44.114a. Need to accept reality of brokenness as long as God leaves us in this life.
 - But do utmost to obey/image God. This what gratitude looks like. See Lord's Day 44.114b.
- All of this sets us up for Q 115: can't keep Ten Commandments perfectly, so why preached so strictly? Ie, why insist on careful obedience to law??
 - Notice: careful obedience not required in order to *get* salvation. This is the 3rd part of Cat; those who are to obey *have* salvation in Jesus Christ.
 - Here is where we struggle. For we say: we're in the part of the Cat called Gratitude, but how is Gratitude shown if the shape of Gratitude is dictated?? Aren't we meant to be spontaneous in showing gratitude, ie, you know your gratitude is sincere when it comes from the heart?? Does a strict preaching of law not make for outward religion??

- That train of thought receives more punch because we're Canadians, ie, our culture tells us we are free = we decide for selves what we want to do.
 - We realise: we have Holy Spirit, so Holy Spirit will show us what to do, ie, speaks to/through our hearts to demonstrate true gratitude. Isn't that *Christian* freedom??
 - ∴ 2nd point:

2. The law shows us how to be free

- Back to Genesis 1: God created people differently than any other creature. Ie, we created for specific purpose, ie, image God. Adam/Eve happy/fulfilled precisely by doing what they were created to do, ie, image God in the way they cared for His world.
 - Fall: not image God, ∴ loose sense of contentment/happiness/fulfillment. Out of Garden was only toil, tears, sweat, death....
 - Redemption: image God again. Ie, conform to our purpose, ∴ receive again sense of contentment/happiness/fulfillment.
 - See Deuteronomy 4:6 ∴ 32:46f. Ie, obedience = life. Psalm 19:7: why law revive soul?? Proverbs 3:7f: why shun evil bring health??
 - Cf fish of sea: by Canada's Charter fish could say: I demand my right to be free of water; want to live in vegetable garden. Thrive?? Garden = freedom??
 - We realize: Lord God created fish for water. To fish water = freedom; out of water is bondage.
 - Ibid people. Lord created us to image Him; here find purpose/fulfillment. As long as we flop on sands of own definition of freedom (eg, "I insist on living in garden"), we can't thrive. To be *free* need to image God.
 - Yet how know how to image God?? He told us: law reveals what God is like, ie, Ten Commandments → how to image Him. So: to be free, obey law!
 - ∴ James 1:25; 2:12: "law that gives freedom"
- Note James 1:1: James writes to 'twelve tribes' = people of God in Jesus Christ, cf 2:1a. These are Christian believers, people who can confess Lord's Day 23.
 - *They* told in 1:22: don't merely listen to Word, but "do what it says". Ie, accept/obey, respect law of God –why?– it's the road of freedom – just as water = freedom for the garden fish.
 - That's why James can write in 1:26 that careful obedience to law re tongue (apparently a problem for his readers, cf James 3) is demonstration of true religion. For God not flap empty words.... Ibid 1:27: God has mercy on weak & outcasts, cf Deuteronomy 24:17-22
 - Ibid 2:1ff: is favouritism such a big thing?? Ie, indicating where one may sit?
 - Cf vs 8: even something so insignificant (*we* think; person against whom we discriminate doesn't think so!) as favouritism makes one a law breaker – and so you lose your freedom. See vs 13: you'll be judged without mercy – and that's no life!
 - If whole law can be summarized in one word –*love*– Christian to make point of loving other. That's to "keep the royal law found in Scripture". Wonderful phrase: "royal law".
- Where this leaves us??

3. The law leads Canadians forward

God has placed us in Canada, culture/society that emphasises personal rights/freedoms, ie, we all get to decide for selves what is good/right, as long as don't hurt neighbour.

- Shall we Christians take this concept but apply it Christianly? Ie, we have different definitions of what hurts neighbour? Eg, no abortion because foetus is human and so are hurting baby?
 - So: give each other space for how to apply law, and don't get too particular in what the other does?? Ie, give each other freedom, no strict preaching of law??
- Lord would have us love one another, as He loved us (cf Christmas). Love for other means: other should enjoy life to full, be happy/fulfilled.
 - How other fulfilled?? Not by following own head – too sinful, even if renewed by Holy Spirit, cf A 114a.
 - Holy Spirit has given Word/law – to show us what imaging God looks like. ∴ encourage self/other: careful obedience to law, for law → freedom.
- Result: look at self for evidence of preferring to beach self on sands of self-styled religion, and resist it – for want to be happy...
 - This is Lord's Day 44.115a: believing law = health leads to becoming increasingly aware of sinful nature and ∴ seeking forgiveness of sins in Jesus' blood.
 - More: constant prayer for grace of Holy Spirit to be renewed more and more to image Lord God better and better, ie, obey law ever more carefully.
 - This growth happens through preaching, ie, show who God actually is – and strict preaching of law does that.
 - This A 115b: keep striving to be renewed more and more after God's image.... And as water is freedom for fish, so imaging God is freedom for humanity.
- This the example/instruction Canada needs. Canadians wish to be free – and understand freedom to be: I can do my own thing. But a fish in a garden is not free.... Canadians need the law of God; that law gives freedom.