

Christ Reformation Church

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Breathing the Fresh Air of Liberty in Jesus Christ

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

“Faith Working Through Love”

March 2, 2014

Sermon Text: Galatians 5

Scripture Reading: James 2

Introduction-

Rom 3:26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Christ is our righteousness. I am justified fully and completely before God by faith alone in Christ alone. I am righteous because Christ’s righteousness has been credited to me. Justice has been served, and God remains just. This is the good news of the gospel.

I read a quote somewhere last week, perhaps by Michael Horton, that said “the Law is our default setting.” This is why the grace of God in Christ is foolishness to the natural man’s thinking. Until God, by His Spirit, re-wires our minds and hearts, we simply cannot believe the gospel. Sin has “hard-wired” us to an innate programming of works-righteousness.

Herman Bavinck, a Reformed Theologian (1854-1921), wrote about this under the heading, *Forgiveness is Not Natural*:

“Pagans pictured the gods as human, endowing them with such passions as jealousy, spite, and vengeance, and therefore could not grasp the sublime

idea of a free and gracious forgiveness....This pagan notion witnesses to a greater seriousness and sense of truth than the shallow idea that forgiving is natural for God, just as sinning is normal for humans.

People who know themselves somewhat also know how terribly difficult true and complete forgiveness is, and how it can only be granted after a serious struggle with oneself. Certainly an assortment of sinful attributes such as envy, hatred, and vindictiveness, which cannot be part of God's character, play a large role here. *But there are also countless cases in which forgiveness is simply impossible and impermissible.* When our honor and good name, our office and our dignity, have been publicly assaulted, no one is prepared to forgive without public redress, merely on the basis of a private apology and confession of wrongdoing. And when actionable crimes have been committed, the civil government is called, not to forgive but to punish, since as God's servant it has to uphold justice and does not bear the sword in vain (Romans 13).

Opposition to the expiatory sacrifice of Christ [i.e., people who say that the Cross of Christ is a horrid thing that only a wicked god would require],

usually supported by an appeal to the parable of the prodigal son [i.e., the father "simply" forgave him with no punishment], *accordingly arises from a total denial of the value of justice as well as of the very idea of forgiveness, for forgiveness in the true sense of the word precisely presupposes justice and stands or falls with it.*" [Reformed Dogmatics, Vol 4]

Understand? The cross was absolutely necessary if God were to forgive our sins. Justice, the demands of the Law, had to be met. ONLY then could there be forgiveness.

NOTE: In our relationships with our children and with one another, we would do well to carefully consider this. How often do we tell people that they "must forgive" someone, yet we make no efforts to see that justice is effected for them against the wrongdoer? This provokes bitterness in relationships, it hinders real forgiveness, and it provokes our children to wrath.

But God's justice was met at the cross. In Christ, OUR sins received the just wrath of God. It is finished.

Therefore, if anyone here this morning is still thinking that it is by their performance that they will be accepted by God, then they are still approaching

God by the Law, and the only result of the Law is condemnation, death, and hell. Christ justified the UN-godly. Christ came into this world to save SINNERS. God's love is such that it is not a matter of US loving Him first, but of HIM loving us while we were still sinners. If you would be just before God and be forgiven your sins, then you must cease all efforts from trying to make yourself "holy" enough so that God is somehow put into your debt and owes you that forgiveness. It won't work.

And then we might mention a word here to anyone who might think that they are so miserable of a sinner that God would never forgive and accept them. Hear Christ's own words:

Mar 2:15-17 And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. (16) And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (17) And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

And here is the Apostle Paul saying the same thing, reminding us that there never was a greater sinner than him! -

1Ti 1:15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Joseph Hart, the author of this hymn, obviously saw all of this clearly--

Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, love and pow'r.

Come, ye thirsty, come, and
welcome,
God's free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings you nigh.

Come, ye weary, heavy-laden,
Lost and ruined by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all.

Let not conscience make you linger,
Not of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requires
Is to feel your need of Him.

Thoughts About Faith

One of the definitive differences between Reformed and Arminian theology concerns *faith*. Specifically, *the origin of saving faith*. Does it

originate in the sinner, though perhaps given “a little help” from God’s enabling grace, or is its origin entirely outside the sinner so that this faith through which we are justified is said to be a gift from God? We, of course, hold that it is the latter:

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, (9) not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

With some reflection you will necessarily understand that all five of the main points of TULIP are so interrelated that the other 4 all follow if one is true. For instance, if the sinner is entirely unable to exercise saving faith, then this means that he is dead in sin. That every part of his being is fallen, and that is the T – total depravity. Therefore, if such a being is to come to faith in Christ, the enabling grace that grants that faith must be *irresistible*, the “I” in TULIP. In fact, this saving work of God in the dead sinner is nothing less than a *making alive* – a resurrection from the dead:

Eph 2:1-5 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- (3) among

whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (4) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--

Not sick. Dead, you see. Made alive by God’s gracious act of raising us up as new creations in Christ, enabling us to believe.

Listen to the London Confession on this:

Chapter 9: Of Free Will

1. _____ God has endued the will of man with that natural liberty and power of acting upon choice, that it is neither forced, nor by any necessity of nature determined to do good or evil.

(Matthew 17:12; James 1:14; Deuteronomy 30:19)

2. _____ Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good and well-pleasing to God, but yet was unstable, so that he might fall from it.

(Ecclesiastes 7:29; Genesis 3:6)

3. _____ Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has wholly lost all ability of will to

any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, **and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.**

(Romans 5:6; Romans 8:7; Ephesians 2:1, 5; Titus 3:3-5; John 6:44)

4. _____ When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he frees him from his natural bondage under sin, and by his grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so as that by reason of his remaining corruptions, he does not perfectly, nor only will, that which is good, but does also will that which is evil.

(Colossians 1:13; John 8:36; Philippians 2:13; Romans 7:15, 18, 19, 21, 23)

5. _____ This will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to good alone in the state of glory only.

(Ephesians 4:13)

Now, listen to the LCF once again as it speaks on the subject of saving faith:

Chapter 14: Of Saving Faith

1. _____ The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought [ie, “worked”] by the ministry of the Word; by which

also, and by the administration of baptism and the Lord's supper, prayer, and other means appointed of God, it is increased and strengthened. (2 Corinthians 4:13; Ephesians 2:8; Romans 10:14, 17; Luke 17:5; 1 Peter 2:2; Acts 20:32)

2. _____ By this faith a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word for the authority of God himself, and also apprehends an excellency therein above all other writings and all things in the world, as it bears forth the glory of God in his attributes, the excellency of Christ in his nature and offices, and the power and fullness of the Holy Spirit in his workings and operations: and so is enabled to cast his soul upon the truth thus believed; and also acts differently upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come; but the principal acts of saving faith have immediate relation to Christ, accepting, receiving, and resting upon him alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

(Acts 24:14; Psalms 27:7-10; Psalms 119:72; 2 Timothy 1:12; John 14:14; Isaiah 66:2; Hebrews 11:13; John 1:12; Acts 16:31; Galatians 2:20; Acts 15:11)

3. _____ **This faith, although it be different in degrees, and may be weak or strong, yet it is in the least degree of it different in the kind or nature of it, as is all other saving grace, from the faith and common grace of temporary believers;** and therefore, though it may be many times assailed and weakened, yet it gets the victory, growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.

(Hebrews 5:13, 14; Matthew 6:30; Romans 4:19, 20; 2 Peter 1:1; Ephesians 6:16; 1 John 5:4, 5; Hebrews 6:11, 12; Colossians 2:2; Hebrews 12:2)

Let me emphasize that statement about the weakness or strength of faith. *Believing in Christ is not about the quantity of our faith, but the quality of our faith.* What I mean by that is that some people think that faith in Christ has to be “worked up” somehow to a large enough amount, to a certain level of strength – *if I just believe hard enough* – before the Lord will save us. Not so. First of all, no human being can “work up faith.” It is a gift of God. Second, Christ has made it plain that the littlest genuine faith, the weakest true belief and trust in Him, is in spite of its littleness or weakness, saving faith—

Mat 21:21-22 And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. (22) And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

Faith Working Through Love

That this is true – that the faith through which we receive Christ and are justified is a gift from God and not something that originates in us – is demonstrated by the very nature of that faith, as we see described here in Galatians 5. The Apostle Paul is showing us in very practical terms how it is that this faith *works through love*, as he has already told us back in 5:6 –

Gal 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

After his somewhat parenthetical comments in 5:7-15, Paul elaborates on this matter of faith working through love. Listen once more:

Gal 5:16-26 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (17) For the desires of the flesh are against the

Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

(19) Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, (21) envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

(22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

(24) And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (25) If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (26) Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

We will examine these verses in more detail next time, but for this morning I want us to focus our attention on the nature of this faith that works through love. Let's do this by first asking a question:

Of these two lists, 1) the works of the flesh, and 2) the fruit of the Spirit, is the sinner capable of performing?

Look at mankind. What do you see? Lawful or lawless deeds? The answer is obvious. Man, in his natural state, dead in his sin, condemned by the law of God, naturally does the works of the flesh.

I submit to you that verses 22-23 are a listing of Galatians 5:6, namely, *faith working through love*. This listing is that of the fruit of the Spirit, but can you see that here Paul virtually equates the Spirit and this faith that works through love? It is faith that produces this fruit, yet it is the Spirit whose fruit this is.

Now, if indeed as I propose, the fruit of the Spirit is *faith working through love*, then can you see that apart from the Spirit's presence and leading in us, this faith is necessarily absent? Someone says, well, man still has the ability to believe the gospel. He might need a bit of help from God, some dose of enabling grace you might call it, but nevertheless he has the ability to believe. Well, if that be so, then that means that the sinner, dead in his sins, because he allegedly still possesses this faith-ability, has the ability to produce this fruit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness...and so on. But is that the picture we have of man apart

from Christ that is given us in Scripture? Of course not:

And again –

Rom 1:16-23 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (17) For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (19) For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (20) For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (21) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Rom 3:10-18 as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; (11) no one understands; no one seeks for God. (12) All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (13) "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." (14) "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." (15) "Their feet are swift to shed blood; (16) in their paths are ruin and misery, (17) and the way of peace they have not known." (18) "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

These are the works of the flesh. We do not see the fruit of the Spirit, which is faith working through love, evidenced in man apart from Christ. There are charades of this fruit, but it is plastic. The flesh can only produce bad fruit. This is affirmed by Paul in Romans 8. Listen to this familiar Scripture again –

Rom 8:1-8 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (3) For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his

own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, (4) in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

(5) For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

(6) For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. (7) For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. (8) Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Do you clearly see the import of that last sentence? *Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* Why? Because to be in the flesh is to be unregenerate. It is to be devoid of the Holy Spirit, apart from Christ.

Now, let's think about this. Consider carefully what Paul says here about the nature of the person who lives according to the flesh – a person who is not saved:

- He lives according to the flesh. The flesh – that power in him that produces those works of the

flesh we have here in Galatians 5 – is the governing principle of his life.

- His mind, his thoughts, his nature is one of hostility to and hatred for God.
- His mind and his nature are rebellious to God, refusing to submit to God, AND HE CANNOT do otherwise.
- Therefore, such a person cannot please God. He hates God. He hates God's Law. He rebels against everything God is and says. THIS is his nature. It is his mentality. This is what defines who the sinner is.

Now, to come back to our subject – that this faith that works through love, this faith that produces love, joy, peace, and so on – CANNOT ORIGINATE IN MAN. It necessarily MUST be a gift from God. Because this faith *works through love*. It is a working thing. It is an active, Spirit empowered, righteousness producing thing. But the Spirit who works this faith in us is NOT present in the sinner.

Therefore, it is my thesis that this faith which is so well described in Galatians 5, cannot be anything other than a gift

of God sovereignly bestowed upon His people.

But God Must Give Us Our Freedom!

The primary objection to Reformed doctrine – to the great Bible doctrines of election, predestination, the total depravity of man, perseverance in faith – is this: *that it is not right for God to deny man his freedom to choose.* Man must be free to choose or reject Christ. Otherwise he is a mere robot.

Let's remind ourselves of what we have just seen in Romans 8. What is the nature and condition of the sinner? He cannot please God. He hates God. He hates God's law. He hates the gospel – it is total foolishness to him.

Now, how, I ask, can such a being *choose Christ*? Does the sinner *desire Christ*? Well, no. Not at all. Paul tells us what a person who is dominated by the flesh desires:

Gal 5:17-21 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (19) Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity,

sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, (21) envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

And we have learned that what we choose – our choice – is motivated by our *desire*. We choose what we desire. We choose what we want. And it is impossible to choose against our desire.

What sin has done then to man is to *radically corrupt* him. That is to say, man is corrupted by sin at the very root of his being. In his heart and in his thoughts it is the flesh, it is sin – that controls and enslaves. Man the sinner IS free to choose, BUT he can only choose what he desires. And what he desires is always evil.

Therefore, and get a firm hold on this, *if man is going to have the ability to choose Christ, in other words, to believe the gospel, then he must be radically and totally changed at the deepest root of his being.* Only then will he be set free to choose Christ. This is the thing that Martin Luther dealt with in his work, *The Bondage of the Will*. Man's very WILL is in slavery to sin. He cannot WILL to do righteousness.

And so we see then here in Galatians 5 that because this faith is a faith that *works through love*, because it is a faith that impels the Christian to love, joy, peace, and so on, it is a faith that must necessarily be a gift from God, originating from outside ourselves, effected in us by a power outside ourselves that overcomes our slavery, and sets us free to believe.

THAT is what God has done in you if you are a Christian, and Paul's instruction to you here in Galatians 5 is that you realize that YOU are a new creation who now desires what the Spirit desires in you. So walk in those things.

And if you are not a Christian, then THIS is what absolutely MUST happen to you if you are to be saved. It is something that only God can do in you, and therefore you must turn all of your efforts upon asking Him to show you mercy and make you a new being.

The glorious thing that God announces to us in Scripture is – *he is willing. He is willing to save you. In fact, He promises that everyone who calls on Him for salvation in Christ will be saved. No exceptions.*