

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
November 5, 2017
Reformation Sunday 2

Scripture Lessons: Revelation 14:6-7; Matthew 23:1-12
Hymns: 23, 778; 373:1-5; 377:10

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Galatians 5:1-6

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. ²Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. ³And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. ⁴You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. ⁵For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Freedom --

Freedom is a most precious American value! We are a free society. We are a free people We have wondrous liberties not known in totalitarian countries where even one's own children might be duped or tricked into betraying one's parents for saying the wrong thing, or watching the wrong TV news program, or in some

countries today a woman going for walk, or attempting to drive a car. It is hard to imagine living under such tyranny, much less choosing to do so after one has experienced the joy of freedom!

And yet that has been the pattern of behavior in things spiritual for all generations. Given the choice between tyranny, a far more severe tyranny than I just described, and liberty and the joys of being a member of the Master's household endowed with great freedom and every kindness, people choose slavery, tyranny, spiritual destitution. People are duped into believing that something better, something more glorious can be theirs if they do it themselves, going their own way.

It is so tragic because it is the difference between life and death that is eternal life and eternal death. It all comes down to the right answer to that most important of all questions, "*What must I do to be saved?*" (Acts 16:30) When asked that question by the jailor in Philippi Paul answered, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.*" (Acts 16:31) But that seems too simple. There has to be something more? There must be something *I* can do, that *I* can contribute to the situation. And that is when people get in trouble, and start choosing tyranny in place of spiritual liberty. That was what Paul was addressing in his epistle to the Christians in the region of Galatia where false apostles not sent by God had followed behind Paul. As Paul journeyed from city to city proclaiming the gospel, they would come in behind Paul, seeking to reinstate the Old Testament ceremonial law as way to achieve greater righteousness than what Paul offered them in the gospel. Paul's message from the Lord is clear and straightforward:

THEME: We Are Saved by Grace through Faith.

This was the marvelous truth that was so deeply shrouded in darkness for so long in the Christian church of the Middle Ages. In Europe there was a young Martin Luther who was terrified of God because young Martin Luther did not know and he could not understand that we are --

I. Saved Not by Works of the Law, but Grace Alone.

Luther lived under a great burden, what our text calls “*the yoke of bondage*” (v.1), the bondage of the law. Luther was convinced not by his imaginings alone, but by the instruction of the Roman Church, that it was necessary to demonstrate worthiness of God’s grace before any grace could be received. He was taught that it was necessary for the sinner to endure some sufferings, and to fulfill some works in order to be delivered from death and hell. While this terrifies the soul it also appeals so to the sinful flesh, to the pride of man.

From earliest childhood we are inclined to point at our accomplishments and say, “Look what I did.” Yes, a little child is very apt to point with pride and excitement into the toilet to show his smelly accomplishment, and we as parents are quick to praise, but in fact it is no prize we would desire to share with anyone, much less God. It is worthy only to be flushed down the toilet. So it is with our good works. Yes, the truth that Isaiah taught regarding our works is important for us to remember: “*You are indeed angry, for we have sinned—In these ways we continue; And we need to be saved. ⁶ But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.*” (Isaiah 64:5-6).

This remains true for us if we think that anything we do can in any way contribute to the certainty of our salvation, or advance us in righteousness before God. It is by grace and not of works. Paul addressed this in his epistle to the Christians in Rome as well, writing to them: “*If by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.*” (Romans 11:6).

We are saved by grace. Paul’s point is very important. Grace means that something is given that is in no way earned or deserved. That is grace. If something is deserved, if it has been earned, than the reward is due, it is wages. So the two cannot coexist. It must be one or the other. If it is by works, even a little bit, even slightly as a supplemental assurance, than what Paul teaches us is that “*Christ will profit you nothing.*” (v.2) **Nothing!** If one is to be saved by observing the works of the law, one must fulfill the **entire** law, and fulfill it **perfectly** without a **single** fault. Only Christ Jesus has done that, and if you think you can come closer to Christ by your

merits than by trusting His merits alone you couldn't be more wrong. **“You who attempt to be justified by the law have fallen from grace.”** (v.4) You do not draw closer to Christ but rather **“You have become estranged from Christ.”** (v.4)

This is the bondage the tyranny of the law that brings death, and yet as horrible as it is, Christians slip into this way of thinking so easily. That is why we need to stay in the Word, and hear the gospel proclaimed clearly, correctly, regularly, lest we too start to think we shall enter heaven by trying hard to be good. We daren't say to God when we stand before the judgment seat, “I did my best, and that should be good enough.” We need to claim the perfect righteousness of Christ that is ours by grace and grace alone!

However, Paul's lesson on salvation does not end with grace. This gospel grace enters our hearts and --

II. Righteousness Is Credited to Us through Faith Alone.

Paul continued:

Galatians 5:5-6 “For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

Faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ. Faith, worked in our hearts through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit instills within us the hope of righteousness. Hope isn't a simple wish. There are so many words that we diminish in our American English and “hope” is among them. Hope is a reasonable expectation. The Spirit leads us to comprehend the hope of the righteousness of Christ by opening our hearts to believe. We lay hold of the wonder of salvation through faith, Paul wrote of this wonder in his epistle to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:1,4-9 “You He has made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins. ... ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His*

kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast.

When one is dead one cannot do anything. One cannot revive oneself. One cannot believe. One cannot hope. But God made us alive together with Christ. Even as Jesus was raised to life and exalted to glory so we too shall rise to glory. We have this hope not by our merits, but by grace and it comes to us through faith, and so it is certain! From beginning to end it is all grace through faith, and so Paul also wrote to the Romans “*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.*” (Romans 3:28) And then Paul also wrote

Romans 5:1-2 “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

Faith, worked in our hearts by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit through the hearing of the gospel, lays hold of the blessings of God’s gift of salvation. Through faith we have been justified. God who has declared the whole world to be reconciled by the death of His Son, has brought us near to Him in peace through faith in that proclamation of righteousness. Now we know the righteousness of God in Christ. Now we know peace, the peace of sins forgiven. Now we rejoice, even in tribulation, because we do not rejoice in the vanity of this world which is passing away, but we rejoice in the hope of that which is to come and that endures forevermore. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

In this 500th anniversary year of the beginning of the Reformation we thank our God for the blessings of salvation which He has revealed to us in Holy Scripture. We thank God for the same blessings which Martin Luther came to know and celebrate in his life. We are saved by grace ALONE, through faith ALONE, as it is revealed to us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Scripture ALONE!

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)