

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
October 30, 2011
Reformation Sunday**

Galatians 5:1-6

For Freedom Christ Has Set You Free!

What this fact:

- 1. Meant to the Galatians***
- 2. Meant to the Lutheran reformers***
- 3. Means to us***

**Hymns: 200 – 199 – Distribution: 207, 220
– 293**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Galatians 5:1-6 –

¹ It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. ² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

In the past year, we have seen nations struggle for FREEDOM. Last winter Egypt was forefront in the news, as crowds gathered and rallied for freedom. The rule of President Hosni Mubarak was protested and thrown off after almost 30 years of his presidency. People wanted to be free from what they deemed to be an unjust ruler.

This fall we have seen the country of Libya fight for freedom. Dictator Omar Qadafi ruled that nation for 42 years before

his reign was overthrown by people who wanted their freedom.

I'm not here today to debate or defend political philosophies of those citizens or rulers. But I bring it up because there is an inherent feeling inside every human being to be FREE. Even more important than political freedom is spiritual freedom. People feel this need to know what their status with the Almighty is, and by their own natural conscience they know that they would not fare well if they meet their Maker. How can they know they are free?

How fitting it is that we come across this sermon text on Reformation Sunday from Galatians. Through the Apostle Paul, God will teach us about FREEDOM. **“For Freedom Christ Has Set You Free!” Today we will see what this fact:**

- 1. Meant to the Galatians**
- 2. Meant to the Lutheran reformers**
- 3. Means to us**

1 – We read in Galatians 6: *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”*

We need much background information to know what the situation was in Galatia. Galatia was not a city, but rather a region that lay in Asia Minor. Most likely it refers to the cities where the Apostle Paul traveled in the middle of Asia Minor on his first missionary journey as he founded Christian congregations. Perhaps some of the names of these cities are familiar to you: Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe.

Paul's approach as he entered a town for the first time was to go to the synagogue and talk with people who were very familiar with the OT. With the OT prophecies about the Messiah as his background, Paul could teach them how Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of God's plan in the OT. Jesus had come as the Savior and had returned to heaven after his resurrection and ascension. As these congregations were established and grew, their make-up was often originally a number of Jews who became Christians, along with some Gentile converts.

Then trouble arose. After Paul would leave a city, people called "Judaizers" would arrive. These Judaizers were Jews who had believed that Jesus had come in fulfillment of God's plan to serve as the Savior, but that Paul had it just a bit wrong. They claimed that a person still had to follow the laws of Moses that were given in the OT in order to be saved. You probably remember a number of those laws:

- Clean and unclean foods
- Laws for dress
- Laws about social customs
- Laws about the Sabbath and worship
- And most notably, the law about circumcision

Herein lay the controversy that was running through the region of Galatia: **Was the way to salvation by Jesus alone, or by Jesus plus obedience to the OT laws of Moses?**

Can you see why this teaching about complete FREEDOM and salvation in Christ would have been difficult for a Jew in Paul's day? Some of those Jewish people had lived under those laws all their lives. Also, the nation of Israel had followed those laws (or were supposed to) for about 1500 years, since God had given them through Moses. They could not eat pork. They had laws about being clean and unclean. They had celebrated festivals at certain times each year. They had had to have their males circumcised on the 8th day. It had been engrained in their lives! Now, suddenly, things had changed.

Why would they want to go back to the Mosaic law? There would be a familiarity and security in doing so. We can almost hear them saying, "We've always done it that way." Keeping laws for salvation also makes sense to our human minds. You get what you earn!

What were God's answers through the Apostle Paul? Concerning OT laws, Colossians 2 says, "*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross... Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ*" Those laws had been a shadow of the coming Messiah. He had now come and done away with those Mosaic laws.

What was the way to salvation? Jesus said in Mark 16, "*Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*" John 3:16, the gospel

in a nutshell says, “*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*”

They were FREE from the OT law! In the new era of the NT Christian Church, faith did not need to show itself in the Mosaic code that was intended for a specific time period.

Paul even had warnings for teachers who taught that they must go back to obeying Moses’ laws to be saved. He told them:

- 1) Requiring obedience to those OT laws negated Christ’s sacrifice on the cross
- 2) Requiring males to be circumcised obligated that person to keep the whole law
- 3) Requiring obedience to the OT laws put you on a different plan for salvation. No longer would they be on the “grace plan,” but on the “works plan” as they would have to earn their salvation.

They should not go back. They had been set FREE!

2 — Martin Luther had an interesting nickname for the book of Galatians. He called it his “Kate.” What did he mean by that? Katharina von Bora was his wife, called Katie, or Kate. So he affectionately was calling this book of the Bible his wife. Can you guess why?

A controversy about the rules and role of good works had resurfaced at the time of Luther, who lived in the 1500’s. Luther had become a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. As time went on, he became troubled about his church’s teachings about the way of salvation and the role of good works. On a trip to Rome he became disenchanted firsthand with the

teaching that venerating relics and paying money to pray on the steps of St. Peter’s Cathedral merited forgiveness. As he became a university professor who lectured on the book of Romans, he discovered the way of salvation in clear passages hidden in the Latin language, which the common man did not speak in Germany. Most notably was Romans 1:17, “*The righteous will live by faith.*”

In 1517 a Catholic representative selling indulgences came to a village near Luther’s and was selling them to his church members. Indulgences were contracts sold for money that supposedly shortened a person’s stay in purgatory before entering heaven. The whole philosophy of the Roman Catholic Church on the way of salvation became thrust in the forefront. It was a situation very similar to the controversy in the Galatian churches. Was the life and sacrifice of Jesus enough for a person to be saved? Or did you have to contribute to it by:

- Buying indulgences
- Doing penance after confessing your sins to a priest
- Saying your rosary, not just as prayer but as an act to receive grace
- Giving offerings
- Attending mass as a sacrifice for sins not covered by the cross
- Paying money for a mass to be said for a dead relative to spring them from purgatory sooner
- The whole notion of purgatory as a place to suffer before entering heaven, if you had died without doing enough to earn your salvation

After Luther posted his 95 Theses on his church door for discussion, things went from there. It soon led to the discussion of whether popes and councils could establish teachings like this that were to be considered divinely given and inspired. Three and a half years later, the confrontation came to a head at the city of Worms as Luther had to appear before the Holy Roman Emperor and Catholic representatives. When asked to take back his books and sermons on salvation by God's free grace, he made the famous statement, "Unless I am shown by the Word of God and plain reason that I am wrong, I cannot and will not recant. Here I stand. God help me. Amen."

As a result, Luther was excommunicated and the Lutheran Church was born. Starting in Germany, it soon spread throughout Europe and into Asia, based on the teaching that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone.

3 — What will you take from this message from Galatians today? We must remember the same lessons that Paul conveyed to the Galatians and that the reformers of Luther's day rediscovered. I'd submit that you should remember three things:

- 1) Before you recognize anything else about yourself, you must accept the fact that you are a slave.**

Jesus said in John 8, "*Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.*" I was reminded of that when I accidentally came across an Internet page listing death notices for the Seattle area. It listed people who died in 1918 on the page that came up. It was a sobering list. A few were:

- Samuel Mackie, 26 years old. Died Jan. 2, 1918. Cause of death, pneumonia. Was a

ship riveter. Buried in Lake View Cemetery, Seattle.

- Lydia Henricson, 23 years old. Died Jan. 11, 1918. Cause of death, tuberculosis. Was a widow. Buried at Harford, WA.
- Mary Kronquist, 37 years old. Died Feb. 11, 1918 at Swedish Hospital, Seattle. Cause of death, cancer of liver and stomach.
- Lempi Burke, 31 years old. Died March 11, 1918. Cause of death, strep infection. Buried March 13, 1918 at Lake View Cemetery, Seattle.

And on and on. It's a reminder that the human race, you included, are a slave to sin and death. And if this world goes on and on, one day you will be reported on as well. For you can do nothing to save yourself, no laws you can keep, no good works you can do, no salvation you can win.

- 2) When a repentant believer has recognized that fact, he can take comfort in the complete freedom Christ has won.**

Jesus said in John 8, "*I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*" Free indeed! Jesus Christ has lived your perfect life of good works for you and has died for your sins. Hebrews 7 talks about the completeness of his sacrifice: "*He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.*" And as far as our enemy

death is concerned he says, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”*

3) Reject the notion that NT church laws should be made.

Would you want to go back to laws, now that you have the gospel? Never! Yet how can a church today go back to the law?

Perhaps your thoughts drift to a congregation in reformed circles who make laws for daily living for people who want to consider themselves to be upstanding Christians: No card playing, no dancing, no alcohol, no jewelry for females or short hair, dress codes (not school dress codes, “life” dress codes!).

But are there ways a Lutheran church could wrongly be under law? Sometimes when a change is suggested in a church, protest is heard for only one reason: “We’ve never done it that way before.” The implication is... So don’t do it. Laws are then made for things in church life, with church groups, or especially in our day and age, worship life. When new NT ceremonial laws are made to look like “God’s laws,” gospel freedom is lost. **It is for freedom that Christ has set us free! Today on Reformation Sunday, may we rejoice in this freedom.**

As we close our look at Galatians 5, perhaps a last word about good works is in order. After all Paul ends these verses with a comment about our works: *“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”* Good works have a part in this

picture. May we never downplay good works! They are the evidence that genuine faith exists. Faith expresses itself in acts of Christian love.

May we remember that our true freedom has been completely won by Christ. And may we show our gratitude and thanks to God by expressing our faith in good works! Amen.