

6. Grace that doesn't cause us to sin

December 6, 2012

My wife Karen is an excellent handgun shooter. One time we were at an indoor shooting range in Tucson, I handed her a 357 magnum revolver and told her to shoot the target that was 21 feet away from her. With the first shot, she made a hole in the middle of its head. Since then I haven't argued with her much.

I'd prefer not to do the things that would upset her or make her feel sad, not because I was scared for my life, rather because I love her. If you are in love with your spouse, you don't go out and commit adultery, or get into pornography, or irritate her. OK, I take that one back. I do that time to time. That is when I get that look from Karen. Husbands, do you know that look I am talking about? Oh, you've got that, too, huh?!?!?

In the same way, when we become born-again Christians, we do things that please the Lord, not to manipulate Him so that we can get what we want from Him. As we walk with the Lord, we learn about His abounding grace, unlimited mercy, and unconditional love for us. Yet we also must learn about God's unwavering holiness and righteousness.

We should not think that just because we received the grace and mercy from God, we can sin however we feel like as the Judaizers insinuated and convinced the gullible believers of the churches of Galatia.

By exposing Peter's hypocrisy, Paul confirmed the truth of the Gospel and affirmed his apostolic authority. But it's obvious that Paul anticipates further objections from his readers. So he answers these potential objections and shows once again that the Gospel is superior to the Law – not only for entering the Christian life but for living it.

A. JUSTIFIED BY FAITH ALONE

Galatians 2:15-16 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16 knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Hebrew language does not have the same types of punctuations like English. Though the editors of many different versions of the Bibles added quotation marks before "if" in the middle of v14, they are not absolutely positive that the rest of chapter 2 is the continuation of Paul's comment to Peter while he was confronting this big former fisherman Peter, or simply he stopped at the end of v14 and started a new phrase to explain why he confronted Peter in that matter.

This is the first time the word 'justify' appears in this letter as well as from all of Paul's epistles since this Book of Galatians was his first epistle. Of course, this word became the marching word of the Reformation movement that was started by Martin Luther.

You may remember the question that was thrown by Job in chapter 9:

Job 9:2 "Truly I know it is so, But how can a man be righteous before God?"

God answered it in Habakkuk 2:

Habakkuk 2:4 "Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith."

Last Sunday, we dealt with 'Sanctification', but here we will learn about 'Justification.' What is 'Justification'? It is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Jesus Christ. Justification is an act and not a process like sanctification. No Christian is "more justified" than another Christian by accomplishment or depth of individual sins.

Justification is NOT "pardon". Though for the inmate who was pardoned by the President or the Governor, may no longer be in prison, but he still has the record of his arrest and incarceration. When the sinner is justified by faith in Christ Jesus, his past sins are remembered against him no more, and God no longer keeps his sins on record.

Another important fact that is often ignored by the most, God justifies sinners, not "good people." Paul declares that God justifies "the ungodly". The reason most sinners are not justified is because they will not admit they are sinners. And sinners are the only kind of people Jesus Christ can save.

Romans 4:5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

B. DOES GRACE OF GOD MAKE CHRIST A MINISTER OF SIN?

Galatians 2:17-18 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

Paul knew what and how the Judaizers would argue. He had been there because he once was one of them. As a matter of fact, he was leading this pack of wolves before he came to face the grace of Jesus Christ.

The Judaizers would argue, "The doctrine of justification through faith in Christ only, apart from the works of the law, is a highly dangerous doctrine. It fatally weakens a man's sense of moral responsibility. If he can be accepted through trusting in Christ, without any necessity to do good works, you are actually encouraging him to break the law."

Time hasn't changed people very much. People still argue like this today: "If God justifies bad people, what is the point of being good? Can't we do as we like and live as we please?"

Their argument would be, "Since Christ is the One who supplies this grace that leads to lawlessness, He is actually enabling a sinful lifestyle – He is a "minister of sin."

I love the way Paul puts his foot down at the end of v17. NKJV says, "Certainly not "; NIV "Absolutely not!"; NASB "May it never be!" In Greek, it is "Me ginomai." Paul uses this emphatic statement fourteen times in the New Testament, usually to express his "abhorrence of an inference which he fears may be falsely drawn from his argument," according to the Bible Dictionary.

Some commentators are too brilliant in my opinion. Because they have a tendency to make everything too complicated. They say that v18 is hard to explain.

Obviously, I am not smart enough to see the complication they talk about. Paul pretty much says, "Because if I go back to the OT sacrificial laws and regulations that once I tried to abolish with the simple faith in Jesus Christ, I am guilty as charged."

C. DEAD TO THE LAW, ALIVE TO GOD

Galatians 2:19-21 For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

What a statement made by a one-time Pharisee to make! Paul once thought that keeping the Law was the way to life and that the Gospel was actually leading people away from God. But he found out he was wrong. The Law was actually the agent that showed him his sin and led him to the Gospel. As a new creation in Christ, Paul stopped trying to please God by keeping the Law. He exchanged his never-ending and damning pursuit of self-righteousness for the life-giving grace of Jesus Christ. He was a totally new person.

V20 happens to be one of my favorite verses in the Bible. It reminds me what to do in Christ, how I should live in Him, and how much He loves me in spite of who I was and who I am.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross – literally, we also died – figuratively to the old way of living, that is, trying to be righteous by keeping the Law or living in fear of its condemnation.

People sometimes will use the expression, "We all have our cross to bear." But our cross to bear is not whatever we find difficult in life. The cross to bear, so to speak, is the same for everyone: it is dying to selfish desires and wants.

Dying to self means resisting the temptation to do what everyone else is doing when you know it is wrong. Dying to self means forgiving instead of harboring a grudge. Dying to self means putting down the remote control and picking up the Bible. Dying to self means praying when you would rather be sleeping. Dying to self means swallowing your pride and telling someone about Jesus Christ. Dying to self means doing what God wants you to do rather than doing what you want to do. Dying to self means being obedient to the Lord in giving tithe instead of holding on to it.

Luke 14:33 So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

This does not mean you and I must take a vow of poverty and give every possession away to be a disciple of Jesus. "Forsake all" literally could be translated, "Surrender your claim to, say good-bye to." This means that true disciples of Jesus are not possessed by their possessions.

When we die to ourselves and take up the cross, we will experience joy and an overflowing life in Christ in spite of what circumstances we are in.

Now listen to me carefully. As much as we honor and practice what the OT Scripture tells us, we no longer practice the sacrificial systems that they had to observe because the final and the perfect sacrifice has been made by Jesus, the Great High Priest Himself. We no longer have to bring bulls and lambs to altar.

V21 is a powerful statement. Everyone should take notice of it. By seeking to obtain righteousness by human effort, the Judaizers reject the grace of God. That is a total prideful statement from their part.

Matthew 26:39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus pleaded with the Father if there was any other way. Being a 100% human and 100% God, He didn't want to go through the torture and crucifixion. God the Father would not have sent His only begotten Son to the cross if there is any other way like observing the rules and regulations of the Law. Obviously, there was no other way except the death of Christ on the cross for our sacrifice.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) The basic of the basics of Christian faith: There is no other way to get to heaven other than through a complete faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. All of the other ways only lead to hell, period.

2) If you want to be a disciple, then you must love God more than anyone or anything else. You must deny yourself. And you must take up the cross and follow Jesus.