

November 26

Galatians 1-6

Agreeing to disagree is a tactic that is acceptable and appropriate in some debates that arise in our life within the body of Christ. When the issue is as fundamental as the basic nature of the Gospel, it is time to stand up and be counted, even if it means confrontation with the Apostle Peter himself.

The major argument of the Book of Galatians lies just before chapters 3 and 4 and the gist of it was summarized in verses 15 and 16 of chapter 2.

These issues are alive and “hot” today and have great importance:

- 1) DOING things - keeping rules, meeting expectations, being religious - can never make you 'right' with God. You will never be right with God on the basis of what you have done, only on the basis of what Christ has done - that is the good news - the Gospel.
- 2) Second, Paul says, *"We may be justified by faith in Christ."* Our own imperfect works of righteousness could never be enough to justify us, but Christ's perfect righteousness - His work on our behalf - is enough, if we simply by faith will trust in Him.

Paul insists it is the message that accredits the messenger. You must not believe someone because they have an impressive resume, some formal education and a lot of books on their shelf. The most well educated person could be mistaken and the most eloquent of preachers can twist the truth. Evaluate the messenger in light of the message. Never do it the other way around. YOU have to know the Word of God. That is why this exercise of reading through the Bible – Project 4:4, learning what it says for yourself - is so critically important. If you really 'know the Word' then no one will ever be able to take you captive to false teaching.

In Galatians, Paul sees Peter doing something - not eating with the Gentiles - breaking off fellowship with fellow Christians - because he doesn't want to offend the Judaizing Christians from Jerusalem - and Paul confronts him. He obeys the New Testament injunction to *"admonish one another."* This was an important issue - not simply a matter of culture or taste. We are accountable to one another in the Lord.

Galatians 3 and 4 can be expressed in a couple of ways - by a slogan, "Justification by faith;" the doctrine of salvation. The basic idea is simply this: 'It is faith in what Jesus Christ has done, not the observance of the law - or the keeping of a set of rules - that justifies a person before God.'

Trusting promises can get you to heaven - keeping rules can't! That is the reason Christ had to die. If keeping the law could ever work, then that would have been the way God would have chosen to provide our salvation. But because everyone has

sinned and broken the law, Christ became a curse for us *"so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."*

Okay then, salvation comes by faith - so why did God give the law? What does it do? Why did God give it? Paul says it was added *"because of transgressions."* What he means is that the law was given in addition to the promise, "in order to bring about within man's heart and mind an awakened sense of guilt."

In Chapters 5 and 6, Paul helps us to work out the implications of our theology in the arena of practical everyday life. Paul seeks to teach us how to think clearly about who God is, who we are, and what He has done for us in Christ. Then, when he has finished teaching us how to think, he adds a practical section to the epistle that helps us to understand how we are to live in light of the truths we now believe.

Please understand two things:

First, that theology always has practical implications. What you believe always has an impact upon how you act. If it doesn't, then either you don't understand it, or you don't really believe it!!

Second, it is impossible to live properly if your theology - your understanding - is faulty. Trying to live well without knowing why is like building a house without a foundation - not a very wise or enduring project.

Christianity is not a list of rules and regulations that we keep to make God happy with us. It is a relationship established with God by exercising faith in Christ.

If you have placed your faith in Jesus, then there is nothing else you have to do - you are justified before God and you are free in Christ. The transaction is completed. You have been adopted by God. It really is finished!

Because we are justified by faith, some feel they can do anything they like...indulge the flesh in sexual pleasures, live for ourselves, focus only on our own pleasure and comfort. Why not? If faith alone is the key to salvation, what's to stop us? That's why Paul gives his second piece of instruction.

*"Do not,"* he says, *"use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature. Rather serve one another in love."* Now that Christ has purchased your freedom from law-keeping, use that freedom to serve each other. Remember the great law of love. *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* That is what happens when you have truly understood the freedom of Christ.

I hope you use your freedom to serve one another in love!