

Lesson Nine: Galatians 5:1-15

Christian Freedom

Standing for freedom (5:1-6)

At the end of last week's lesson, we took a sneak peek at the very first verse of chapter five. Here Paul begins by stating, "For freedom Christ has set us free". In Q#1 the LC authors describe this opening phrase as being "almost too obvious to require saying", but sometimes the most obvious things are the toughest to understand. What is Paul's point? (Q#1 on pg.97) Let's start with what we know for certain.

1. We know for certain that human freedom is an essential part of our nature as children of God. We were created free. Our fall from grace was a result of that freedom. Yes, God gives us absolute freedom, even the freedom to reject God.
2. After the Fall, our free will remained, but we became slaves to sin and death. Only Christ could set us free from those bonds.

So then, what is Christian freedom? For starters, Christian freedom does not mean that we are free to do whatever we want. (As Catholics, we should know that better than most!) Christian freedom means that we have been freed from sin and death. That does not mean that we will never sin again or that our bodies will never die, but that sin and death are not the last words. We are not free from God's law; we are free from the punishment of not being able to keep God's law perfectly.

As Paul continues he writes, "...stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery." What was your response to Q#2? What pressures do we have to resist to "stand firm"?

Read 5:1-6. We aren't used to this kind of tough, straightforward talk anymore, are we? Especially when it's regarding practices of faith. We've become more accustomed to a "whatever works for you" kind of attitude when it comes to religion. Not Paul. In effect, he's saying, "What's it going to be? Do you have faith in the salvation of Christ or not?" You know what the Galatians are doing, don't you? They're hedging their bets. Sure, maybe faith in Christ is the way to go, but how can it hurt to have a Plan B? What's the problem with that kind of thinking? Why must Christ and the practice of Judaic Law be mutually exclusive? See Q#3.

Galatians 5:5-6 might be two of the most important verses in this letter regarding the clarification of Paul's entire defense of the superior nature of the New Covenant—the New Law—compared with the Covenant and Law of the OT. **"For through the Spirit"—God's grace working through each of us—"by faith"—we have to trust and believe that this is so—"we wait"—we don't make it happen—"for the hope of righteousness"—not wish for, but anticipate and trust that God will make us right. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but [and here's the important part] *faith working through love.*"** What was your response to Q#4?

When one asks if someone is good, one does not check to see what he believes or what he hopes for, but what it is he loves. For someone who loves rightly certainly also believes and hopes rightly; but he who does not love believes in vain, even if what he believes is true...Therefore, this is the faith in Christ, which the Apostle extols—'faith which works through love.'

St. Augustine

And as we've discussed many times in the past, this kind of love is not a gushy romantic feeling, but a love like Christ's where we can deny ourselves for others—even to death, where we can desire the best for others—even those, and maybe most especially those, who are most

difficult to love.

Repudiating error (5:7-12)

Read 5:7-12. Paul isn't exactly softening up here, is he? Share your responses to Q#5-6. As an FYI for vs. 11: Apparently, Paul had been accused of relaxing the requirements of Judaic Law when he preached to the Galatians in order to make it easier for them to convert to Christianity. This false accusation is probably why Paul writes with such an aggravated tone here. You can't blame him; he really was in a damned if you do, damned if you don't situation.

Using freedom (5:13-15)

Read 5:13-15. Q#7 brings us back to this notion of freedom. How do you define freedom? Discuss your responses to Q#8-10.

Another chart! What are some of the right and wrong uses of freedom that you came up with for Q#11? In last Sunday's gospel reading (Feb 20), we heard Christ say, "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." That can sound so out of reach, but God will never demand anything of us that is impossible. I think the intent of this teaching is paraphrased nicely in the notation for 5:13 in our ICSB on pg.26, "Christian liberty is not a license to indulge in sin and selfishness. We are free, rather, to mature in grace and become the saints we are called to be." We are free to become perfect.

USCC for Adults Chapter 7 The Good News: God Has Sent His Son

1. The brief biography at the beginning of our catechism chapter quite literally demonstrates what Christian freedom means. Toussaint could have just as easily become a bitter man because of his enslavement to the Berard family. What made him a better man? What made him a prime example of Christian freedom?
2. What are the three major heresies described in this chapter? Can you think of any modern day heresy? Why is it so important to uphold the doctrine that Jesus was fully Man and fully God?
3. At the very end of this chapter, there is a quote by Pope Paul VI. It reminds me of Archbishop Sheen's statement that if what Jesus says is true, it's true for everyone or it's not true at all. How do we respect the diversity of others in our culture while we maintain our belief that Christianity is true?

3/3/2011

Note! It will be three weeks before we meet again. Our next meeting will be on March 24 when we will discuss:

Lesson 10: Living by the Spirit LifeChange

Chapter 8: The Saving Death and Resurrection of Christ USCC for Adults