

**October 30, 2011
Reformation Sunday**

"Stand Firm in the Freedom You Have in Christ"

GALATIANS 5:1-6

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. 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 the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith 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.

A young American soldier recently lost her life in Afghanistan. An improvised explosive device blew up the truck in which she was traveling. She gave her life so that people like you and me do not have to fear the terrorists. They use a country like Afghanistan to plot and plan how they might blow up airplanes, or detonate dirty bombs in our cities or put poison into our drinking waters or blow up large buildings as they did on September 11, 2001. Think of the money spent and the lives lost just so we can have the freedom of living without fear of another major terrorist attack.

Terrorists were attacking the early Christians, not with improvised explosive devices, but with the false teaching. They said it was not good enough to have Jesus give his life on the cross for your sins. These false teachers said you needed to add Old Testament laws and regulations to what Jesus did for you to be truly forgiven and loved by God. Paul pleads with the Christians in Galatia to stand fast in the freedom they had in Christ even if it meant dying to preserve this freedom.

On this Reformation Sunday, we think of how Martin Luther was willing to give up his life to stand up for the freedom from sin, death, and hell that only Jesus can offer us. 500 years ago enemies in the church were saying it was not enough to have Jesus to forgive you of your sins. To be a true believer you had to pay money to see relics of the saints, or travel to the holy city of Rome, or show loyalty to the church. In his 95 Theses Luther wrote that the whole life of a Christian is one of repentance. That means turning away from trusting yourself for salvation and turning to Christ alone.

Satan is the ultimate terrorist. He is always planting the seeds of doubt in our minds. He suggests ever so subtly: There must be something you need to add to what Jesus has done for you to give you greater peace, greater certainty and greater hope. This morning God's Word calls on us to stand fast in the freedom we have in Christ Jesus our Lord. Christ plus nothing equals everything. Christ plus anything equals nothing.

Stand firm: The past has been forgiven

Thank God you are free this morning from the sins of your past life that should be held

against you. "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." It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they were afraid of God, because they knew that could not escape the punishment they deserved for their sin. God promised a Savior who would set them free, a Savior who would crush the devil's power to accuse us before our God.

Only Jesus can set me free. I cannot escape the sins of my past life on my own. They must be forgiven before God can accept me and love me. Romans 6:23 tells us "the wages of sin is death." Even my best moments in the game of life fall short. When I step up to the plate and hit a walk off homerun to win the game, I still fall short of God's glory. My shining moments are totally inadequate to remove one thing I have done wrong. Jesus came to this earth to set us free. Here is how a Paul described this freedom in Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed me from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." Martin Luther wrote of this amazing freedom in his *Small Catechism* "Christ has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sin, from death and the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death..." Jesus' death on the cross and his perfect life made the full satisfaction and payment for every sin of your past and mine. That's the ultimate freedom. Every Sunday morning we gather together in worship to celebrate this freedom we have in Christ and the Heavenly Father's personal love that comes with his freedom.

We cannot take this freedom for granted. We have to fight for it. Paul warns Christians of every age: "Do not let yourself be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." I think back to the scene from the movie *Roots*. The slave traders took the people out of their villages in Africa, tied them to poles, put them in chains, put them on ships and then sold them as slaves. They lost their freedom. We are born into this life slaves to our own belief system that says, "I will do my best to be a good person and God will reward me." Martin Luther experienced such slavery until he came to see the freedom he had in Christ. As he wrote in his hymn, "Yea deeper and deeper still I fell, Life had become a living hell, So firmly sing possessed me." Then he was led to the words, "The just shall live by faith." By God's grace he was led to believe the past was completely forgiven in Christ. He stood firm in that freedom.

Why is it so destructive to add anything to what Jesus has done? It removes the certainty of knowing the past has been forgiven. Listen to the urgency in the words of Paul. "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 you that every man who lets himself be circumcised is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ." Some of the early Christians were saying that it would help their faith and forgiveness and freedom if they added Old Testaments laws such as circumcision to believing in Jesus. If you try to add what you to what Jesus has done, you ultimately destroy what Jesus has done because you are putting your faith in yourself rather than in Jesus. Remember this important formula and say it with me. "Christ plus nothing equals everything. Christ plus anything equals nothing."

If you try to add something to what Jesus has done you are actually obligating yourself to obey the whole law. Maybe I can illustrate this with the large patio door you have in your living room. It is probably made of special glass that will shatter in thousands of small

pieces when it is struck with force. The same happens with the windshield of your car. I cannot imagine someone taking super glue and trying to put the pieces back together again. Even if you could put it all together after hundreds of hours of work, it would be worthless. You need to go out and get a new windshield or a new patio door with new glass. Jesus does it all for you. Your heavenly Father purchased a whole new life for you with the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus. He forgives you of your past sin. He gives you his perfect life. He declares you not guilty before your God. Satan will work overtime in your life and mine to try and get us to do something to add to what Jesus has done. That leaves us hopelessly trying to put the pieces of our salvation together on our own because we are obligated to obey the whole law.

Picture yourself driving across the country. You are carefully following the speed limit on the freeways and whatever towns you stop along the way. In some small town in Missouri you fail to see that the speed limit has changed from 55 to 35. You are stopped by the local police. You plead your case with the words, "I have obeyed every speed law for the past three days of driving, why are you giving me a ticket?" He doesn't listen to pitiful cries for mercy based on your own feeble performance. He writes you out a ticket for breaking the law in his town. If you want to make yourself acceptable to God by your own performance, your own feelings and your own good deeds, you are obligated to keeping the whole law. You completely lose the freedom you have in Christ. Stand firm the freedom you have in Christ. Your past has been forgiven in Jesus. Don't let anything take that peace and comfort away from you.

Stand firm: Your future is guaranteed

Because of the freedom you have in Jesus, the past is not only forgiven, the future is also guaranteed. Paul writes, "By faith we eagerly wait through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope." Because of Jesus we live in the hope that tomorrow will be another day to live with the righteousness we have in him. In the previous chapter of Galatians it says, "All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ." Through your baptism you have Jesus and you are clothed with his righteousness. Tomorrow when you wake up in the morning, you have the Holy Spirit working through your baptism to remind you that you are wearing a beautiful robe of righteousness that Jesus has won for you. That gives you the freedom that comes from knowing you are loved by your God because of Jesus, not because of your feeble attempts to make yourself acceptable to God.

Perhaps you have heard people say "There is nothing sure in life except death and taxes." Because of the freedom you have in Jesus, there is something very certain and real for you. You get to wear Jesus robe of righteousness tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that. Listen to how Paul rejoiced in that righteousness while he was a prisoner in Rome. "That I might be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." He was not afraid to die as he wrote in 2 Timothy "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearing." Are you ready to meet Jesus if he comes in the clouds this week? Sure you are because you know the future is guaranteed by the freedom he has given you.

The present is exciting

This freedom you have in Christ with its message of forgiveness and peace also prepares you to live each day of your life to his glory. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." The freedom you have in Christ fills your life. It creates a dynamic power that enables you to love your God and love the people around you with the kind of love that Jesus has for you. When the wind blows it fills the sails and propels the sailing vessel forward. Every day of life on this earth is exciting for you, because the freedom you have in Christ fills the sails of your life and leads you to new levels of joy in serving your Lord. As citizens of our country we love our freedom. We will fight for it and die for it. As citizens of God's kingdom we cherish the freedom we have in Jesus. Stand firm in the freedom you have in Christ. With this freedom the past is forgiven. The future is guaranteed. The present is exciting. Stand firm in the freedom you have in Christ. Amen.