

Law and Faith 6-19-16

Lord Jesus, teach us to walk in Your ways. Help us not to condemn ourselves, but to lean on You for power to choose the way of the Spirit. You call us to walk in freedom. Forgive us when we choose to ignore you, to go our own way in spite of Your Word. Father, let Your love flow. Amen.

As Lutherans, we all know one thing – we are saved by grace through faith. It isn't about works – things we can do to earn salvation. Yes, we do good works, but those works flow out of a love relationship w/the Lord. We hear things like “we are no longer under the law,” but my guess is there is a lot of confusion in the minds of many people as to what that means. Surely we are to obey the ten commandments – even though we find we can't obey them perfectly- esp. since Jesus upped the ante – it's no longer “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill.” It becomes a heart issue, “He who has committed lust in their heart is guilty; he who has called someone, “You fool” has broken the commandment. It's hard to believe that we don't have to pay for our sins in some way – if we break the law, shouldn't we have to pay? But our sins are forgiven because of Jesus. In order to even try to keep the law, we have to convince ourselves (& others) that we are good people – we could do it if we tried really really hard! Then we fall into legalism – which is defined as *dependence on moral law rather than on personal religious faith*. Moral law is not bad. It is about having high principles for proper conduct, right & wrong behavior. It's not bad; it's a good thing. But if one thinks their salvation is about following a moral code, they become a

legalist. A legalistic person quickly becomes a liar – maybe “a pretender” is a kinder word. They aren’t authentic anymore. They can’t be genuine because hard as one may try, they cannot keep the law - so they hide.

Many people live under the law – sometimes in some pretty strange ways. One needs to pay attention to their thoughts & actions. Some people think they have to clean up their language in front of the pastor. There’s certain behaviors they’d never do in front of the pastor. That’s legalistic! If the language or behavior is wrong, why say it or do it anytime? Doesn’t God see? Sometimes their idea of what is actually sin is skewed. Some people think using the word *hell* is swearing. It may be crude, but it’s not swearing. Some people would never admit to having an alcoholic beverage – that’s legalism. Drunkenness is sin. My dad used to play solitaire a lot. One day, Astrid Hansen from the evangelism committee from church pulled up in front of our house. My dad collected his playing cards & hid them behind a picture on the buffet. Gambling may get you in trouble, but solitaire? Legalism!

Worse than erroneous beliefs about what constitutes sin are the thoughts that we have about ourselves. If you have thoughts about you never being good enough, defective, not pleasing to God, those are not thoughts from God. If you have a list of “should’s” that go through your head – you should be more loving, you should do more good things for your neighbor, you should work harder around church – be

careful. The Lord will not over-burden you. Let Him lead you & your work will be a Joy! The devil likes to guilt you!

The huge issue in the Book of Galatians is circumcision! The Apostle Paul is writing to the church of Galatia because he is very upset because they're paying attention to false teachers – teachers who are trying to get the Gentiles to obey Jewish law & be circumcised. Paul sees it as turning back to the law – legalism! False teachers minimize the promise of salvation in Christ alone. They say, “If you want to be set free from sin & death, & obtain righteousness & life, keep the law; be circumcised; observe days, months, seasons, & years; offer sacrifices Then this obedience to the Law will justify & save you.” False! Jesus saves!

Is the Law bad? No, Paul compares the law to a child having a tutor. The word in Greek is “paidagogos,” from which we get our word “pedagogue”– means “someone who leads or guides a child.” In the ancient world, a rich man would assign one of his slaves to serve as a pedagogue for his son. That slave would be the boy’s guardian, his escort, to make sure he got to school safely. So the law acted as our “paidagogue,” to make sure we got to where we needed to go. But the goal was not to leave us with the paidagogue. That is, the goal was not to leave us under the law. The goal was to get us to Christ. The law shows us our need. By exposing our lack of righteousness, the law helps to direct us to where we need to go, which is to Jesus, for salvation. The law cannot save, but Jesus can, & does. We need to know our need for him.

Martin Luther struggled as a monk. He tried diligently to live according to the requirements of monastic rule. He made a practice of confessing & reciting His sins. He went to confession often, performed the assigned penances. But he could not get free. His conscience would tell him, “you have not done this correctly. You weren’t remorseful enough. You omitted this in confession.” Luther said, “the more I tried to heal my uncertain, weak, & troubled conscience w/ human traditions, the more uncertain, weak, and troubled I made it.” If you are determined to try to make yourself righteous, you will only dig yourself into a deeper hole because you see your inability to keep the law, to be good – then you have all the more reason to condemn yourself!

If you’ve ever talked w/a Unitarian & asked about their religion, they’d tell you it’s 7 principles about being kind & good, helping others, etc. Now, that sounds good, doesn’t it? But how do they know when they’ve done enough? “Well,” he said, you just do your best.” “How do you know when you’ve done your best?” That is a good question, isn’t it? It seems to me that as long as you’ve got a nickel in your pocket, couldn’t you go one step further? Would that buy peace & serenity? No, it would bring you to an end, but not peace.

The enemy, the devil, does not want us free! He will war against you. He will try to convince you that the Gospel of Jesus is too simple – too unreal! You just have to add

this one little work. Our flesh doesn't want to accept the fact that it's powerless over sin. Our flesh hangs on to the idea that if we just tried harder, we could succeed & be good. Listen to what you say to the Lord when you are discouraged by your behavior. If you promise the Lord, "I will never do that again, I promise!" what are you basing that promise on? What power do you have available to yourself that you didn't have when you made the bad decision? **Our only hope is that God helps us live a life pleasing to Him.**

Freedom comes when we know that the Lord has promised to lead us, promised to love us, promised to care for us. He is our Father leading on a path that leads to good. The good news is you are baptized into Christ Jesus. You are sons & daughters of God through faith in Jesus. We are **adopted** into the family of God. We have all the rights of a son – no longer slaves to the law!

Why would anyone adopt? It certainly doesn't improve your finances! It doesn't guarantee a good night's sleep – it most likely assures you that you will lose sleep & it costs \$. Caring for children of any age has its challenges. But it's a natural human desire to have children. When couples don't have them naturally, they go through the long process of interviews, home-evaluations, going to meetings to meet children, social worker visits, etc. They end up adopting because they want a child to have a family. They want to care for one who needs care. They hope for good, close relationship that lasts a life-time.

Why did God adopt you? He likes you – He's crazy about you, actually. He knew there'd be a certain amount of trouble, but He also knew He'd never give up on you. The Father wants to love & care 4 you – protect you from evil. He longs to be in relationship w/you! God is good, kind, just. God the Father is love & you are the apple of His eye! Therefore, Happy Father's Day!