

Week 5 – Power Over Sin (Handout)

For the past several weeks we have looked carefully at Romans 6-8 where Paul describes a dramatic change in the righteous persons approach to living a holy life. In that section of Romans Paul declares that our relationship with God has been restored via the faithful actions of Christ bringing about a reconciliation and taking away sin. God considers everyone who has Abraham-like faith righteous. This declaration of righteousness is not the result of obedience and is declared independent of the law. Paul then goes on to describe how the law, while providing a good definition of sin, was powerless to help it's followers fulfill the [purpose] of the law. In addition, the law created an opportunity for sin to tempt would-be law followers using the law itself thus creating a wretched situation for those who desire to follow the law but discover that it is impossible. This contradiction is resolved through the sacrifice of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit who empowers trusting followers to fulfill the purpose of the law and defeat sin. The “defeat” of sin comes about through the power of the Spirit diligently applied to transform the minds and actions of those in Christ. This is not a passive defeat of sin but rather a deliberate and confident cooperative reliance upon the power of God to defeat the forces of darkness that wage war on the battlefield of human desire.

This week we will extend the discussion of Power Over Sin by looking at Paul's presentation of the same idea in the letter to the churches in Galatia. The letter is written early in the Paul's ministry to Christians in a series of churches in the Galatian region comprising both Jews and Gentiles. The main point we will look at comes in chapter 5, but before we examine chapter 5 we need to trace the main elements of Paul's argument leading to that point. To trace the development of Paul's sermon we can look at some key passages.

Gal 1:6f

- The issue in Galatia concerns the essence of the gospel. The matter at hand is something central to a proper understanding of the gospel message and some within the church are teaching things that “pervert” the message of Christ.

Gal 2:11-16

- The dispute concerns the practice of Christianity that conforms to the truth of the gospel message. The central conflict concerns the role of the Law as a means for righteousness. In other words, the central issue is about grace.

Gal 3:1-18

- Paul uses rhetorical questions to assert that the Spirit is given on the basis of faith and not on the basis of obedience to the law. (vv. 1-5)
- Uses Abraham as the example, “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” (v.6)
- The promise of the Spirit comes by Faith (vv. 13-14)
- The Law came 430 years after the promise to Abraham and the Law does not “set aside” the promise to Abraham (v. 17-18)

Gal 3:19-4:7

- The purpose of the Law was to serve as a temporary moral guide until the coming of Christ (and the granting of the Spirit)
- The function / role of the Law is equated to a “nanny” and the followers equated to children or slaves (vv. 3:23-24; 4:1-5)

- The law is equated to a set of “basic principles” commonly used by societies (4:3)
- The Spirit came to replace the role of law and basic principles (4:4-7)

Gal 4:8-20

- Warns the Gentiles about returning to use of “basic principles” as a means of seeking righteousness (4:8-11)

Gal 4:21-5:1

- Contrasts two ways. The ordinary way which uses “basic principles” and human pragmatics (laws/rules). The other way relies upon the promise and the power of the Spirit.

Gal 5:2-15

- Forces a decision between using Law or Spirit saying that they are mutually exclusive choices. (5:2-6)
- Churches that rely upon rules/law/basic-principles as the means to righteousness will promote controversy and destroy each other (5:15)

Gal 5:16-26

- Describes how the Spirit is the power to overcome the sinful desires of the flesh (5:16-18)
- Churches that rely upon the Spirit as the means to righteousness will create communities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control.
- Encourages the Galatians to “keep in step” with the Spirit (5:25)

Gal 6:1-10

- Paul extends the presentation saying that the community of Christians helps to keep the whole community living in righteousness by helping, rescuing, and serving one another.

Discussion

- How does Paul describe the struggle in 5:16f?
- In what ways does the Spirit counter desire?
- What is the difference between spiritual and Spirit-led?
- How does 5:18 fit into the flow of letter?
- What is the connection between 5:16-18 and the two sections that follow in 5:19-21 and 5:22-24?
- How does this presentation in Galatians compare to the presentation in Romans 3-8?

- “Against such things there is no law”

“And a citizen is one who shares in governing and being governed. He differs under different forms of government, but in the best state he is one who is able and willing to be governed and to govern with a view to the life of virtue. If, however, there be some one person, or more than one, although not enough to make up the full complement of a state, whose virtue is so pre-eminent that the virtues or the political capacity of all the rest admit of no comparison with his or theirs, he or they can be no longer regarded as part of a state; for justice will not be done to the superior, if he is reckoned only as the equal of those who are so far inferior to him in virtue and in political capacity. Such an one may truly be deemed a God among men. Hence we see that legislation is necessarily concerned only with those who are equal in birth and in capacity; and that for men of pre-eminent virtue there is no law- they are themselves a law...” (Aristotle, Politic 3.13.1284a)