



## Week 6 – Living as Saved People Now

### Week 6, Day 1: Free from What and For What

#### Galatians 5:1, 13-14

*<sup>1</sup> For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. <sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become enslaved to one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

#### Romans 6:15-18

*<sup>15</sup> What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that, if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? <sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God that you who were slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted <sup>18</sup> and that you, having been set free from sin, have become enslaved to righteousness.*

#### Understanding the Passages:

If I were in prison, longing for freedom, I would expect that when I was freed from captivity, I could do whatever I wanted to do. What I might discover when I am discharged is that I am now a captive to a job, to traffic, to payment of my rent, and to so many other things that are required of us in life. Freedom requires an object – it only makes sense when we identify what we are free from, and what we are free to do. Paul's point is that we are free **from** 1) the guilt of sin – being judged unrighteous because we cannot follow the law, and 2) free from the power of sin, as our hearts are changed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Yet, Paul seems more interested in what we are to be freed **for**. He says we are set free from sin so that we might be slaves to something more significant. He uses three different words: 1) we are to become slaves **to** one another (Gal. 5:13), and 2) we are to be slaves **to** obedience, (Rom. 6:16) and 3) we are to be slaves **to** righteousness (Rom. 6:17). In all of these, however, that slavery is not first about following outward rules or commands, but rather about being "obedient from the heart." In

short, we are free from sin (our selfishness and self-centeredness) so that we can be free **for** the work of Christ – loving God and neighbor. (Gal. 5:14)

This demonstrates the key element of Paul's teaching about sin and grace. Living faithfully does not mean believing in Jesus and living my life however I want, knowing that I am forgiven. Nor does it mean that I must scrupulously follow a set of rules that define my covenant with God. Rather, there is a transformation of desire in my heart, and that manifests itself in concrete acts of love for God and neighbor.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. What are some ways we still treat Christianity as slavery to laws and rules to follow?
2. What are some examples of how we can adopt Paul's admonition to have a slavery of the heart, a slave to righteousness, when we aren't simply trying to follow the rules?

### **Week 6, Day 2: Love as the Mark of Salvation**

#### **1 John 4:7-12**

*<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup> God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

#### **John 13:34-35**

*<sup>34</sup> I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

#### **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

*If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. <sup>4</sup> Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup> Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup> For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, <sup>10</sup> but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love.*

### **Understanding the Passages:**

If you see someone with small tassels hanging out beneath his shirt, you know he practices orthodox Judaism. If you see a woman wearing a burka, you know she lives by the laws of fundamentalist Islam. If you see a man wearing a *pagri* (a specific type of turban) on his head, you

will know that he is a Sikh. But how will you know if someone is a disciple of Jesus? Carrying a Bible is not an effective marker, nor is wearing a cross around one's neck. Sporting a T-shirt with a Scripture passage might give you an inclination, but it is no real giveaway. But if you see an act of sacrificial love, you will know that this person is following Jesus.

To be clear, by "following Jesus" I mean that this person is behaving and living as Jesus taught and lived, whether or not they have chosen to speak his name or profess faith in him. Our passages today point us to three things about love: 1) Love is the core identity of God. "God is love." This means that any time you see love happening, there is something divine at work. 2) Love is the true mark of a Christian. One cannot tell if someone is a Christian by a verbal profession of faith, or by the sacrament of baptism or ritual of church attendance, or by any symbol – only by the mark of love. 3) Christians are those who abide in God's love for them. We can love others because God loves us first. The love we have to give is the love we have received from God in Christ. 4) We are to love **as** Jesus loved us. This means the **kind** of love Jesus practiced – unconditional, inclusive, sacrificial, forgiving – is the defining characteristic of his disciples.

### Questions for Reflection:

1. Where have you seen love at work among people who would not claim to be Christians?
2. Do you believe that the world believes that the mark of Christians is love?
3. What does it mean to you to "abide" in God's love?

### Week 6, Day 3: Works as Evidence of Salvation

#### Matthew 25:31-40

*<sup>31</sup> "When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup> and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, <sup>35</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup> And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' <sup>40</sup> And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'*

#### James 2:14-17

*<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? <sup>17</sup> So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*

### Understanding the Passage:

The fastest-growing genre across podcasts, streaming, and books is true crime. Approximately 42% of Americans listen to or read true crime media regularly. This genre has tripled its audience in the last five years. Here is a hint – the husband, or the wife, did it. Sometimes, there is a real "who done it," but most of the time, at least by the middle of the show, the viewer or listener knows the identity

of the perpetrator, but the good guys need to find a way to prove it. There has to be evidence, and since there is no perfect crime, the evidence always shows up.

This concept is helpful when considering the classic salvation by faith versus salvation by works argument. These passages make it clear that the idea of salvation by faith alone, “sola fide” in the Latin, can be misconstrued to imply that works are not involved in our salvation. Instead, the term “plena fides” or “full faith” might express better the truth of salvation. Works are evidence that we have faith. When Jesus says that our willingness to feed the hungry or offer water to the thirsty or welcome the stranger or clothe the naked or care for the sick leads to receiving the kingdom prepared for us, he is saying that these are evidence that faith is alive and at work. And Jesus is clear that our refusal to offer these same works is evidence of a lack of faith, and “these will go away to eternal punishment...” (Matt. 25:46)

To tie this together with our readings from Day 2, works are the tangible expressions of the love that is the mark of a Christian, the love that abides in us and we pass on to others. I once heard a pastor ask the question, “If you were to go on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Evidence would not be that you attend worship or read your Bible or say your prayers; the evidence would be in your works. How do I know if I am abiding in God’s love? How do I know if I am marked with love? I must consider my works – am I doing anything to love my neighbors in tangible ways? These are evidence of a heart that has been transformed by the love of God.

#### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. Where do you see a gap between the faith and love in your heart and the tangible works of loving your neighbor?
2. What evidence would be presented by your attorney to demonstrate your “plena fides,” full faith if you were to go on trial for being a Christian?

#### **Day 4: Living God’s Salvation Process**

##### **Philippians 3:12-16 (NIV)**

*<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. <sup>16</sup> Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*

##### **Understanding the Passage:**

Many years ago, while leading a ski trip with a group of youth, I ended up on a ski lift with a youth director from a different denomination. We spoke about how our group trips were going, and he asked me how many of our young people had been saved on the trip. I fumbled around for a minute and then said, “I have no idea. That is above my pay grade.” He asked me about my own salvation, when and where it had happened. I responded that it was still happening, that I am “being saved,” and that God is not quite finished doing God’s work in me. One of the most important components of the Wesleyan understanding of salvation is that it is a process, as we discussed in week five, moving from the moment God initiates a relationship with us, often signified by our baptism, to a time when by grace through faith we respond to God’s pursuing and wooing, and then finally to the time God changes us completely. **All of it** is the process of salvation. In his hymn, “And Are We Yet

Alive,” Charles Wesley says we are “preserved by power divine to **full salvation** here.” God is moving us forward toward that final goal of being made perfect in love.

On day three of this week, we read the challenging parable in which the master separates the sheep from the goats based on whether they practice tangible acts of love for neighbor. Those who do so inherit the kingdom. Those who do not do so are sent to eternal punishment. But where do I stand? Sometimes I am a sheep, and sometimes I am a goat! That, I believe, is part of the impact of the parable, to point out that I am not all the way there yet, and there is still work to do. And if I am one of Jesus’ sheep, I had better start acting like one. Perhaps each day I can be a little more sheepish and a little less goatish.

In our Philippians passage, Paul asserts that he has not arrived at his goal. Instead, he forgets what is behind – his former self, and he “presses on” toward the goal, and “strains forward to what is ahead.” Living as saved/being saved people does not mean that we have no part to play. On the contrary, we partner with God so that our lives will demonstrate our salvation. And then Paul closes his thought with “let us live up to that which we have already attained.” In Christ Jesus, we have been given the status of righteousness; now we must live out that righteousness each and every day.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. How do you or would you respond to someone who asks if you have been saved?
2. What would “full salvation” look like for you? How would you describe the goal that Paul mentions in Philippians 3?

## **Day 5: The Kingdom of God as Already and Not Yet**

### **Romans 8:18-25**

*<sup>18</sup> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, <sup>20</sup> for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, <sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

### **1 Peter 1:3-9**

*<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In this you rejoice even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup> Although you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

### **Revelation 21:1-5**

*21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals.*

*He will dwell with them;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them and be their God;  
<sup>4</sup> he will wipe every tear from their eyes.*

*Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away."*

*<sup>5</sup> And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.*

### **Understanding the Passages:**

Admiral Jim Stockdale was the highest-ranking United States military officer in the "Hanoi Hilton" prisoner-of-war camp during the height of the Vietnam War. Tortured over twenty times during his eight-year imprisonment from 1965 to 1973, Stockdale lived out the war without any prisoners' rights, no set release date, and no certainty as to whether he would even survive to see his family again. In an interview with Jim Collins, when asked how he survived, he said, "I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade." As he applied that to facing all the difficulties we face in life, he used his experience to articulate what is called "the Stockdale paradox: You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be." Stockdale contrasts this faith in the ultimate outcome with optimism. He said the optimists were those who thought they would be out by Christmas, and then by Easter, and then by next Christmas. These folks did not survive, he said, because they died of a broken heart.

All of these passages – one from Paul, another from Peter, and one from John of Patmos, all are promises of the victory that has already been assured on the cross. When we say that salvation is Christus Victor, the triumph of good over evil, of love over hate, of life over death, we are saying that we know the end of the story. We don't know it because we see the evidence of it – we know it because we "hope for what we do not see," and we "wait for it with patience." (Rom. 8:25) And all the travails we suffer are birth pains for the new thing that God is doing.

In the meantime, we know that the kingdom is already emerging around us, and we do our best to join it already. Just like gestation is a time when God is already at work, God is already at work bringing about the final completion of the work God started. So we begin already to live "as if." We live now by the principles that guide the kingdom, which we know will prevail in the end. We choose to love our neighbor and pray for our enemies. We choose to lay down our lives for others, one hour, one day at a time. We choose to turn the other cheek in conflict, and not let our enemy define who we will be. We do all these things so that when the kingdom is finally fulfilled, we will feel right at home!

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. Do you believe that one day, all of creation will be set right, or is it your view that the promise of God is a spiritual one, in which we experience life in the next world as our victory over death? Or both?
2. Why do you think it is hard to live “as if” when the world operates by such different principles than does the kingdom of God?
3. Why should we work to bring about the triumph of good over evil if victory is already assured?

**Video Discussion Questions:**

1. What is the most significant thing you have learned in the six sessions of the study?
2. In what way do you feel that Jesus has “saved you from your sins?” Is that the guilt of your sin or the power of your sin?
3. **Why** do you think God has saved you from your sins? In other words, what is the “so that” for salvation?
4. Can you describe what it feels like to be enslaved to love, or enslaved to righteousness?
5. What are some ways you think that the coming kingdom of God is like childbirth?
6. Where do you see signs that the kingdom of God is overcoming the kingdom of the world?

**Prayer Requests and Other Notes:**