

GOD'S LIBERATING LOVE—OVERCOMING OUR PERFECTION ADDICTION

Galatians 2:19—3:6

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In his book entitled, *Will Daylight Come?*, Richard Hoefler tells about a little boy who had just received his first slingshot and was trying it out while visiting his grandparents' farm. He practiced in the woods but could never hit his target. As he came back to the backyard, he saw Grandma's pet duck. Since he couldn't hit the broad side of a barn anyway, he let fly. Thud! One dead duck! Panicked, he hid the duck in the woodpile. His sister Sally had seen it all. After lunch, Grandma said, "Sally, why don't you help me with the dishes?" But Sally replied, "No, Johnnie said he wanted to do that today, didn't you?" And she mouthed the words to her brother, "Remember the duck." Later, Grandpa wanted to go fishing. Sally hadn't done her chores, but said, "Johnnie offered to do mine, so I can go fishing."

After several days of this, Johnny couldn't stand it anymore and confessed everything to Grandma. "I know," said Grandma, "I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I was wondering how long you would let Sally make a slave out of you." God's liberating love! We all need it. And this story shows us where healthy guilt (a gift that leads to repentance) separates from enslaving shame (hiding, pretending, seeking perfection to medicate our guilt).

How many of us here this morning are controlled by shame and guilt? By "shoulds" and "oughts"? A shame-based religion. As if we have to score A+ on all of God's assignments! Someone said the definition of a perfectionist is someone who takes great pains...and gives them! We're all guilt-producing factories and it doesn't take much to get the assembly line going. Did you know that in Colonial Connecticut, a law was passed prohibiting kissing your wife or husband on the Sabbath? [*Abba's Child*, by Brennan Manning, p. 62]. It seems we make up rules just to make ourselves miserable. To paraphrase E. Stanley Jones, "Being a Baptist won't keep you from sinning; it will just take all the fun out of it." Paul has the same question for the Galatians. Is our gospel good news or a burden to carry? Paul says in 2:19, "I tried keeping the rules and working my head off and it didn't work." [*The Message*].

That's where the Cross of Christ comes in. The Cross is our judge and our liberator. I knew a circuit judge in a small city who once sentenced a man for writing bad checks. He then suspended the sentence and helped the man with his budgeting! He was the man's judge, but also his liberator. Paul says in the Cross, with Christ, he died (2:20). That doesn't mean he lost his personality and became a robot. It means the destructive, ego-driven self was dethroned. The key is that Paul was then able to move from external oughts to internal wants.

I can think of so many ways today's text applies to real life. *For one*, substituting church attendance or church activity for spiritual growth. In our frenzy to earn our salvation, are we producing church activities or disciples, followers of Jesus? Paul asks serious questions in 3:3-4. Having begun with the Holy Spirit's power, are you going to finish the Christian life on your own? You depended on God to start out and now you're going to tell God, "I can take it from here"?

A second application to our lives: the search for significance. A teen, feeling low self-image; an adult feeling like a work or personal relationship leaves you without validation; a retiree, wondering who you are when you aren't working; a senior adult, feeling invisible. We know from historical sources that the

Galatian region was a place Caesar deposited retired Roman soldiers and senators [*Paul, A Biography*, by N.T. Wright, p. 117]. The Roman Emperor did this because Rome was getting too crowded. For those retired soldiers and politicians who were coming to Christ but were no longer looked to as “important,” what do they do? Where was their significance? It was in Christ. At Jesus’ baptism, did the voice of God say, “Now, you work hard in the carpenter’s shop and I’ll love you”? Or, “memorize the Torah and I will bless your life.” No. He simply said, “This my beloved, my Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). And Paul says we are in Christ. We have the identical standing with God that Christ has. We are significant, period.

I once heard about a brave teenage girl who had battled self-esteem issues, the “I don’t like myself” tyranny. With God’s help, she began concentrating on the word “enough.” Who she was in Christ was enough. She didn’t have to add anything.

God’s love liberates us. Christ frees us from: self-salvation schemes, self-righteousness, guilt, shame, fear, destructive lifestyles and addictions, the urge to please everybody, perfectionism addiction, obsession with appearances, seeking significance through work, possessions or social status. In Christ, we are free. Remember Paul’s questions. in 3:3-4. Enough. The Cross of Christ is enough!