

3rd Sunday after Pentecost June 13, 2010

Galatians 2:15-21; 3:10-14 ðPaid in Fullö

No one likes debt, except the one being paid back, but debt is a fact of life for most people. Often the first debt anyone has in life is the result of purchasing an automobile or from a school loan. People can accumulate debt from credit cards, making a pledge, or by financing a home improvement project. The largest debt most of us will ever have in our lives is a home mortgage. Whatever kind of debt we might accumulate in life, we look forward to the day when we will receive the notice from the debt holder that the debt is ðpaid in full.ö

There are two debts in life that we will never be able to pay off. In one case the payments on the debt will never end, while in the other case the payments on the debt never begin. The one debt that will never end for us is ðthe continuing debt to love one another.ö Paul wrote about this briefly in Romans 13 where he encourages the pay off of any debts that we accumulate in life, but where he also emphasizes the attitude we are to take toward others in life in fulfillment of the law's demand that we ðlove one another.ö We see an example of the in the Gospel reading today where Jesus was having a meal at one of the Pharisee's homes. It's interesting that as critical that Jesus and the Pharisees could be of each other, they did sometimes share meals together. Anyway, in the Gospel reading we learn about the love that the sinful woman showed toward Jesus:

37When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

It was customary for the host to provide a servant to wash the feet of the guests, but the host did not. So Jesus affirmed the love that the woman showed Jesus who washed Jesus's feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and then poured perfume on his feet. Jesus taught his disciples about service and love for others when he washed their feet in the Upper Room before his death, and he told them that they should serve one another in similar acts of loving service. So this debt of love toward one another never ends. It is a lifelong attitude ó a debt that can never be repaid.

There is a second debt we have where payment on it never begins so that we can pay off the debt. Jesus Christ paid the debt for our sins when he shed his blood at the cross for us, and the result is that we amassed a lifelong debt of gratitude to Christ that we can never repay. We can't even begin to pay God back. We ought to pay Christ back, and we might think that we would like to, but you can never out give God. In fact, when Jesus died and rose from the dead, our heavenly Father stamped our debt, ðpaid in full.ö But even though we can never pay God back, we don't have to. That's God's amazing grace.

So read Christ's Lips ó your spiritual debt due to sin is ðPaid in full!ö However, this is not the conclusion that the world comes to when it considers its spiritual condition. Human reason leads us to conclude that there is a certain standard of behavior we must attain in order to find an open door to heaven. Outside of the church, people tend to set the standards for themselves that they must attain to in order satisfy their understanding of God. Whether they follow the 10 Commandments or something similar, they are limited in their understanding that the true God that can only be confessed as the Holy Trinity has a higher standard than we can even imagine. ðThe Sad Realityö is that no one can keep the letter of the law that God requires. We might want to lift up someone like Mother Theresa or another real life person that seems to have met the standard, but even she would admit that she didn't achieve perfection. The reality is that we are all sinners before God each day. Even Mary Poppins wasn't perfect in the movie by her own reckoning when she reads the measuring tape for herself, ðAs I expected, öMary Poppins, practically perfect in every way.ö Did you get that? ðPractically perfect.ö Well, the sad reality is that none of us is perfect before God, and people in the world need to understand this and be taught to know about God's plan of salvation for the world in Jesus Christ.

So we have ðThe Happy Substituteö in Jesus Christ. Our spiritual debt has been paid off entirely by Christ. Paul states in Galatians something that we all know: ðthat a person is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.ö It took the God-man substitute for us at the cross ó our Lord Jesus Christ ó to release us from our sins and from the wrath of God because of our fallen condition. Jesus willingly obeyed the law perfectly for us as a substitute. He obediently went to the cross and took our sins upon himself, and he received the full wrath for our sins that we deserve. He completed his sacrifice, was buried, and rose again from the dead. Our faith in Jesus puts its trust in Jesus's atoning work, and we receive the entire forgiveness of our sins. Jesus has paid our spiritual debt.

Furthermore, we now have ðGod's Glorious Undeserved Graceö ó We are now justified by faith in Jesus Christ. God does not count our sins against us when we look to Jesus to be our substitute. God declares us not guilty of sin. We can be confident that we can stand before God without sin, even though we do not deserve this gracious attitude toward us. It is pure gift. So while perfect obedience of the 10 Commandments is required of us, and perfection can guarantee us heaven, we can never keep the commandments of God. Therefore, we can never measure up before God. But Christ has as our substitute, so we can stand confident in God's Glorious Undeserved Grace.

There is another Sad Fact. Many people choose to live their lives on their own terms rather than live for God. That is, instead of using the 10 Commandments as their standard of living, they make up their own standards. They set spiritual goals that reflect their idea of what is right, wrong, and acceptable. If they stay within their boundaries, then they measure up to their own standards. After a while, they become spiritually comfortable with their spiritual goals, or the spiritual rut into which they have trapped themselves. And "trapped" is the right word for it. Because such self-centered standards are like a trap that springs up from the earth and keeps the caught object locked-in until released from the hold on it. If left in the trap, we will eventually die.

So what is the end result of this? Obedience to the natural law's demands, however we come to understand life's standards, becomes a person's hope. When you begin to use the law as the standard to satisfy God, then you must also live by ALL of God's laws, too, against which you will be judged, and in order to be found acceptable to God. This is the very wall that Christ knocked down by his life, death and resurrection. So if a person chooses to be judged by the law, instead of by putting their confidence in Jesus Christ, ultimately Jesus becomes unnecessary. Even his death at the cross is meaningless. Obedience to the law becomes his or her hope.

So which shall it be? Shall we put our confidence in the Law or the Gospel? If we will put our confidence in the law, then we will find ourselves under a curse. God's Word makes it clear that Hell is the destination where people find themselves in the end when they have not done everything that the law requires, and if that is the only standard or hope by which they are living in this life.

On the other hand, if we put our confidence in Christ, then we will find the curse is lifted and placed on Christ. Paul writes that Jesus Christ "redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." When Jesus was hung on the cross, he was judged accursed by the Jewish community. But on an even greater level he became accursed because of our sins that hung on the cross with him. That is why God turned his back on his Son at the cross "because of the curse due to our sins." When we put our hope in Jesus Christ, then we find true freedom and release from our sins, along with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

I choose to put my confidence always in Christ, because in him I find these words, "Paid in Full!!!" Which do you choose?

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