

A STUDY IN GALATIANS
Part 16 – “The Marks of a Christian”
Galatians 5:1-6

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In November of 1970, a twelve year old boy made this pledge: “I declare I will establish peace in this world.” These were the words of Guru Maharaj Ji. In three short years he had formed a massive organization dedicated to bringing peace in the world; in their words, “removing forever war and suffering from the face of the earth.” On November 8th, 9th, and 10th, of 1973, at the Astrodome in Houston, Texas, Guru Maharaj Ji set forth his program for world peace. This gathering was more than just a large festival. It was supposedly a world assembly to save humanity. It was billed as the “Dawn of the New Age.” It was called “Millennium ’73.”

In the last fifty years there have been over 1,100 religious leaders in different parts of the world who have claimed to be Christ and Savior of the world. Most of these have risen in third world countries and have spread their messages worldwide.

We know better! There is only one Christ and only one message of salvation. This is the message of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians. So, in our text today, Paul draws a contrast concerning religion and true Christianity. These are the *Marks of a Christian*.

TAKE YOUR BIBLES, PLEASE...

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. (Galatians 5:1-6 ESV).

So, what are the marks of a true Christian? Certainly this question has brought many answers through the centuries, and would have brought a heated debate between Paul and the visiting teachers in Galatia! It can still elicit strong discussion today! Remember the issue between Paul and the Judaizers revolved around whether or not true Christians were marked by their relationship to the Law of Moses. They contended that a Christian man should be marked by circumcision, observance of days, and his life being regulated by the dietary laws of the Hebrew people. If these marks were absent, they contended he could not justly call himself a child of God. Today some still insist on a certain style of dress, the observance of certain ordinances, worship on certain days, belonging to a certain church, or many other things. The reaction of Paul was stern and serious. He warns them that any attempt to change the basis of our redemption, which is only in Christ and His work on the Cross, is to say that Christ is no profit to them. He contends Christ must be everything with reverence to salvation, or He is nothing.

After his words of warning Paul comes to a great affirmation (verse 5-6) in which he outlines three marks of a Christian. They provide us with a standard by which we can check ourselves and others. **Simply put, the Christian's life is marked by faith, love, and hope.**

The First Mark of a Christian Is Freedom Based in Genuine Faith.

Verse 5 is so telling: *For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.*

When Hudson Taylor, great missionary to China, first went to that land from America, it was in a "tall ship." That was the typical sailing ship of his day. Very close to the shore of cannibal islands the ship was becalmed, slowly drifting shoreward unable to go about. The savages on shore were eagerly waiting, anticipating a great feast! The captain of the ship came to Taylor and begged him to pray for God's help. "I will," replied this man of faith, "if you will unfurl your sails now to catch the wind." The captain declined to make himself the laughing stock of the crew and rest of the passengers with the issuing such an order. Hudson Taylor said, "Then, I cannot pray. You must unfurl the sails if I am to pray."

Ultimately, as the ship drifted closer and closer to the peril of the islands, he issued to order to let the sails down. Taylor began to pray. Not long after he began to pray, he heard another frantic knocking at his cabin door. It was the captain. When asked why he was there, the captain asked, "Are you still praying for wind?" Taylor answered, "Yes." "Well," the captain replied, "you'd better stop praying. We've got more wind than we can manage!"

Real faith acts before it sees. **SINCE THIS IS TRUE WE CAN BETTER SAY THAT THE MARK OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN IS NOT IN THE FAITH ITSELF, BUT THE OBJECT OF FAITH.**

There is a sense that we all have faith of some kind. We all believe in something or someone. The Judaizers believed in their ability to keep the law. Others have believed in charismatic leaders, or systems of government. All of those will fail. They can only lead to disappointment or worse, destruction. The Christian only trusts in Jesus. **Paul makes some interesting observations concerning faith in Jesus:**

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

I have often heard people talk about redemptive faith in terms of a choice between heaven and hell, salvation and damnation, or slavery and freedom. The truth is that's not quite correct. We tend to think in terms of bondage to the law and freedom of Christ. However, Paul is revealing something a bit different in these verses.

To understand this principle, let me tell you a story. Tullian Tchividjian relates his early teen years in his testimony. At 16 he began to show signs of serious rebellion in his behavior toward all authority. As a result he was suspended from school and ran away from home. He relates how he thought he was finally free. No more rules to obey, no more assignments to complete, no more authority in his life meant he was truly free! Or, so he thought. He spent two years living on the street until he was truly confronted with the Gospel. His life was miserable and

God gave him a chance to experience real freedom. You see, while there were rules and authority figures in his life, running away did not give him freedom. It only led to more bondage.

So far, this seems pretty typical of most Christians' testimony. We were not saved and then we were. We were in bondage to sinful ways and then we were not. Or, at least so it seems. Tchividjian says he was truly redeemed, but in reality only moved from one bondage to another. He moved from no law to the all law. Both produced bondage. He had thought in order to be a true Christian there were certain things he had to do. He insisted that he and his wife pray for 60 minutes every day; not 59... 60! Fortunately he learned the lesson of true faith. It is centered on what Christ has already done, not what we do. The Apostle Paul says it like this: *you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.*

There cannot be any conditional salvation in our lives. If we place conditions of our actions on our redemption we simply are not resting in his grace.

The Second Mark of the Christian Is His Genuine Hope.

John Jasper was born on July 4, 1812. He was a slave, and worked on the Peachy plantation. John Jasper was the twenty-fourth child in his family. His mother was a Christian, and worked hard to instill Christian principles in her children. John began his slave duties when he was eight. He was first a cart boy, then, he waited on his masters table, and thirdly a gardener. When he was fifteen he was put to work in the tobacco shed. At the age of twenty-two, John married a girl from a plantation nearby. He spent a night with her, was found missing from his place and was accused of running away. He implored them to understand that he was only getting married. He had no plans to run away. No one would listen, and he was separated from his wife. He never saw her again. He was married three other times, but was separated from his second wife, and the other two died. He had no children. He became deeply rebellious after the incident over his first wife. He drank heavily, and lashed out at everything in his life.

In 1839, another slave taught him to read. During this year, he was also saved. He struggled against God for six weeks, but finally surrendered. At this time he was working as a tobacco stemmer, taking the stems from the leaves. He was the fastest stemmer there, but during those six weeks, he just could not get the stems out right. He knew he was a horrible sinner and figured he was the worst of them all. Just when he thought he would die he begged God to have mercy on him. "Before I knowed it, a light broke in my heart, I was as light as a feather. I felt like I would just knock the factory roof off with my shouts." Samuel Hardgrove, his master at that time, was a good master. He was a fervent Christian, and was worried about John Jasper's wildness. He had been praying that John would get saved. He gave him the rest of the day off so he could tell his relatives and friends about God. John Jasper became known as a great preacher through his preaching at slave funerals. He was a preacher that could not hold still.

One of his sermons was particularly telling. He was trying to describe the joys that await on the other side. He tried to describe the fullness of the glory, when he was caught up in his vivid imagination and his emotions literally left him speechless. He tried to speak several times, but unable to, he motioned for that great crowd to be dismissed. They remained seated, waiting for him to continue. They saw the tears roll down his cheeks. Finally, when he saw they would not leave, he composed himself and leaning on the pulpit said the following:

Brothers and sisters, when I think of the glory which shall be revealed in us, I can visualize that day when old John Jasper's last battle has been fought and the last burden has been borne. I can visualize that day when this old tired servant of God shall lay down his burdens and walk up to the battlements of the City of God. Then as I stand outside the beautiful gate, I can almost hear the Mighty Angel on guard say, "John Jasper, do you want your shoes?" I'se gonna say, "Course I wants ma shoes, ma golden slippers to walk the gold-paved streets of the City of God; but, not now." Then I can hear the Mighty Angel as he says, "John Jasper, don't you want your robe?" I'se gonna say, "Course I wants ma robe, that robe of linen clean and white which am the righteousness of the saints, but not now." Then the Mighty Angel would say, "John Jasper, don't you want your crown?" I shall say, "I wants all the reward comin' to me, this poor black servant of the Lamb. But, not now." Then the Mighty Angel would say, "John Jasper, wouldn't you like to see Elijah, the great prophet, who called down fire from heaven; wouldn't you like to shake hands with John the beloved disciple, who leaned on his Master's heart at the Last Supper? Wouldn't you like to shake hands with Paul, the great apostle to the Gentile, the greatest establisher of churches and soul-winner of all time?" I'll say, "Course Mighty Angel, I wants to know and shake hands and to commune with those saints of God who have won the incorruptible crown. Yes, I have some loved ones over here I wants to see, too, but not now. Fust, I wants to see Massa Jesus... I wants to see Him fust of all!"

IT IS NEVER HOPE IN OUR DELIVERANCE... THAT WILL HAPPEN... IT IS HOPE IN SEEING OUR DELIVERER!

The Third Mark of the Christian Is His Love.

You rarely find faith and hope mentioned in the New Testament without love. These three belong together when you are talking about the Christian life. Look again at verse 6: *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*

That's it! Love does it! When works are out of an expression of love, they are so different than those that grow out of a sense of duty or moralism. We should be wary of any so called faith that does not produce good works. Works are a means of expressing our devotion to God. However, real works that minister the Gospel to others are marked by love.