

The unknown freedom

Galatians 5:24

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In the state of Texas, in the United States, there is a holiday called “Juneteenth.” It commemorates the date in 1865 when the slaves in Texas heard that they had been set free. The interesting details are that they had been legally free for two months, but it took that long for the news to arrive and be declared in Galveston, Texas.

Until this date, since they had not heard, the slaves still acted like slaves and their masters still acted masters. Externally nothing had changed, but unbeknownst to them, everything had changed. Whether they believed it or not, all slaves were free. All that they lacked was the knowledge and belief that they were free. Their position was secure, they just needed to know it, believe it, and walk in it.

This may not be that different from many Christians who have been forgiven and freed from the slavery of sin, but practically continue to live as if they are slaves to sin. They have not clearly heard of their freedom, believed it and walked in it.

As we look to Galatians 5:24 it brings us to a similar thought:

“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

In this verse Paul continues his writings about the “civil war” that wages in the heart of each follower of Christ. On one side we have our old sinful nature that Paul calls the flesh. On the other side is our new nature that leads us into righteousness as we walk by the Spirit. The outcomes are drastically different. Walking by the Spirit brings freedom and holiness. Walking in the flesh brings wickedness and judgment. In reality, this war between flesh and Spirit is not a battle between equals. In Christ, the sinful flesh has been stripped of its power and the Spirit now has dominion.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus are those who have turned from their sin and have believed in Jesus Christ. Because of Christ's death on the cross the penalty for sin has been paid. They are now children of God and have at their disposal all the resources that are found in Jesus Christ. Salvation does not depend on who we are and what we have done. It depends solely on who Jesus is and what He has done. He has paid the death penalty for our lives and it is only when we put our trust in Him that His death covers our sin.

These who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh. The flesh is Paul's word for the old, sinful nature of every person. It is the beginning condition of every person's heart. Flesh is described in scripture as being dead in sin, wicked, evil, darkness, weak, cannot please God, and hostile to God. Flesh is the source of our sinful passions and evil desires. This is what has been crucified when a person trusts in Jesus Christ.

Galatians 5:24 says, *"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh."* It is past tense. It is done. It is complete. It is finished. It does not say he is gradually putting to death the old, sinful person that we used to be. Paul is saying that it is done.

In Galatians 2:19-20 we read, *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul writes, *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."*

"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." Romans 6:6-14

"So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions." Romans 1:11-12

"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." Romans 6:14

Our flesh, our old sinful self has been "crucified". This is wonderful news for us, but to be honest, this phrase "crucified" has always been somewhat confusing to me. I understood the literal idea, but here it is meant to be figurative, so I could not quite understand what it meant in the everyday practical part of my Christian life. In recent days the concept has become clearer to me, so let me see if I can share this truth in a clear manner.

Romans 6:23 tells us that *"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* On the cross Jesus paid the death penalty for our sin that we owed. This free gift of God is *"eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"*. He died so that we would receive the benefit. That we would be treated as if we were innocent. That we could be forgiven and reconciled to God.

Our sinful nature has been put away and we have now been returned to the relationship that man had with God before the Fall. We no longer have to be bombarded by a conscience that condemns us. Our sin nature has been replaced with a new nature and desires and affections for God.

Our sin emerged from our sin nature that has ruled over mankind since the first sins of Adam and Eve. Sin is our godless attempt to meet our own needs and be the god of our own lives, but for one who has turned from their sin and believed in Jesus Christ they have been given a new nature. A new natural. The sinful nature was put to death by the death of Christ on the cross. In that instance righteousness was now restored and the holiness of God rushed in once more. Our sinful nature lost dominion, and the sin that came from it no longer has the power to enslave us.

Sin has been brought to nothing. Like the slave masters of the freed slaves, it no longer poses a threat. But then why do we still struggle with sin? Because we still remember the past. We think of those days that it had dominion over us and the fear that it stirred in our hearts. At times we wander from God and lust for the counterfeit pleasures that it provided. We desire to be in control.

Let's think of the freed slaves to help us understand the power sin has over us.

The tyrannical slave masters were only in power because of the debt that the slaves owed. They had no right to sovereign rule over these precious people. In the midst of this horror a slave likely developed methods of survival just to make it through the day. Maybe they fought, stole, hoarded (scarcity mentality), hardened their hearts against emotions, hated, and feared. But one day one arrives who has money to buy their freedom. They are happy. They are free. They watch the one pay the money and buy their freedom. They load the vans and they leave their place of slavery, forever. The only problem is they don't know how to live as free people. Although they now have a new place to stay, they don't know how to live without fear, without worry, without hate. They don't know how to live peaceably. They still hoard. Their hearts still don't know how to feel.

That isn't that different than many of our Christian lives. In Christ we are freed from our old sinful nature, but when life gets difficult, instead of trusting in God we return to those old methods of survival that we used before we became followers of Christ.

We must go back to the truth and believe what is real. We are now righteous in the sight of God. We have been reconciled to God. All of our needs are met in Christ. As we dwell on these truths they take root in our hearts. As they prove themselves to be true time and again we stand more strongly in the reality of the Gospel. Sin, the old slave master, loses its perceived dominion over our lives, and we begin to consistently live in freedom and holiness.

Remember Galatians 5:24, *"And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."*

Romans 6:7 tells us that *"one who has died has been set free from sin and its penalty."* The only reason death has dominion over us was because sin had dominion over us. *"For the wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6:23). But now our wage of sin has been paid and thus our sins have been forgiven. Nothing now stands between us and God. We have been reconciled. Because of this, death has no dominion over us. Yes, our hearts may stop beating one day in the future, but in that moment we will be transferred from life to life, from earth to heaven. Because of Christ, sin and death have lost their sting.

Each of us had an old, sinful nature. This was who we were as we sought to meet our needs in our own ways and continued living as if we were god of our own lives. Just like some terminally ill persons rely on medical life-support to survive, our sin relied on our sin nature and our separation from God to survive. But now our sins have been forgiven, we have a new nature, and Christ is the one who meets our needs. Sin no longer has any support by which it can continue to thrive in our lives. Oh, it seems real, but it is based on lies and deception. The power that sin has over our lives is a “smoke screen”, an illusion. It is the remnants of our past and the lies of our present that draw us back into a false reality that seeks to convince us that we are still helpless before sin, but that is not true.

This leads us back to the idea of “crucified.” As those of us who belong to Christ look back to the death of Christ we now see this reality. When Christ was crucified, the price for sin was paid. At the moment that we put our trust in Christ, Christ’s death was applied to our sin and we were forgiven, we became new creations with a new nature and our flesh, our old sin nature died. So figuratively one can say, when Christ died, my flesh (sinful, old nature) died. When Christ was crucified, my flesh was crucified.

Through salvation all believers have crucified the flesh, so why are many Christians still enslaved to sin? For most it can be found in one of two areas. Ignorance or unbelief. The first merely means to not know God and the truths of God’s Word. As we read God’s Word we come face to face with the truths about ourselves, our world, temptation, sin, God, His character, His promises, His grace and so much more. Until we are aware of the truth and its resources we will be susceptible to temptation.

Unbelief describes those who are aware of the truth, but are yet to believe it as true. When faced with decisions they choose to trust in their own understanding of the situation and their own resources instead of trusting God. This causes one to be vulnerable to various forms of temptation and sin that could have been avoided. If you lack faith, ask God for it. Christ is the Author and Perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:2).

If you are a believer and in bondage to sin, you are enslaved by a lie. I am not belittling your struggle, because I am familiar with being enslaved by a lie. I am giving you hope. The truth of the matter is that your flesh has been crucified, and as we learn God’s truth and believe in it we will be set free (John 8:32).