

## ***THE MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN***

### ***Galatians 5:1-6***

What are the marks of a true Christian? This question would have brought about a warm debate between Paul and the visiting teachers in Galatia. It can still engender some pretty war discussions. The issue between Paul and the Judaizers revolved around whether or not true Christians were marked by their relationship to the law of Moses. The Judaizers contended that a Christian man should be marked by circumcision, observance of days, and his allowing his life to be regulated by the dietary rules of the Hebrew people. If these marks were absent, he could not justly call himself a child of God. Today some will insist on a certain style of dress, the observance of certain ordinances, worship on a certain day, belonging to a certain church, or a dozen different things.

The reaction of Paul to the attempt to make circumcision and law keeping the essential mark is stern. He warns that if men were circumcized in order to gain the favor of God, then Christ is of no profit to them. He contends that Christ must be everything with reference to salvation, or he is nothing.

After his words of warning, the Apostle comes to his affirmation. "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." "For we" draws the true Christian into contrast with those who are depending upon their obedience to the law. In these two verses Paul sets before us the three primary marks to a true Christian. They provide you with a standard by which you can check your own life, and by which you can measure others. Simply put, the Christian is marked by faith, love, and hope. This familiar trinity is brought together by the Apostle in our text to emphasize this. Let us look at them separately so that we might understand them better.

### ***I. THE CHRISTIAN IS MARKED BY HIS FAITH.***

It might be better to say that the mark of a true Christian is the object of his faith. There is a sense in which all men are men of faith. The difference between them is in the object of their faith. The Judaizers and their followers had their works as the object of their faith. They were trusting in themselves and their works to make them acceptable before holy God. In the first verses of this practical chapter Paul warns that those who make circumcision or law-works the object of their faith make a tragic mistake. He contends that you cannot trust in Christ and the works of the law at the same time. He makes three statements which emphasize this.

"If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." They must have taught something like this---"You take care of about fifty percent of your salvation by your obedience to the law, and then you trust Christ for the other fifty percent."

Or maybe they said, "Some men can take care of ninety percent of their salvation, and then Christ will take care of the ten percent." The contention of the Apostle is that Jesus Christ does not go in for percentages. You trust Him alone, or you do not trust Him at all. You must trust Him with one hundred percent. True Christians have their whole trust in Him alone for salvation.

We are also reminded that if you seek salvation by keeping the law, then you must keep the whole law. The Judaizers were being selective in which parts of the law they applied to Gentile believers. Such selectivity is not acceptable. "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law."

His third contention is that if you trust in your own law works for a part of salvation, you have fallen from grace. This little clause has been used to teach a strange doctrine of conditional salvation. It is usually applied like this, "If you fall into sin after you become a Christian, then you have fallen from grace." Actually in the context it is speaking just to the opposite situation. The Apostle is saying, "If you attempt to keep yourself saved by your good works, you have fallen from grace." He means that they have foolishly substituted the law for grace.

So to put it simply, an essential mark of every true Christian is his trust in Christ alone for salvation. When you ask him about his hope of eternal life, he affirms that his faith is in the grace and faithfulness of the God of glory. He has Jesus Christ as the object of His faith. "By faith" is the basic thing. In simple terms this means that we are trusting Christ Jesus with everything that relates to our salvation. We are not assuming responsibility for any part of it--He is the Saviour!

## ***II. THE CHRISTIAN IS MARKED BY HIS HOPE.***

"For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." Whenever the Apostle speaks of faith, he usually will have something to say about hope. "Hope" is used in two ways in the Bible. Sometimes it is used in the sense we often use it, of an inner emotion of hope. It is that inner, optimistic feeling about things, an inner confidence. At other times the word is used in the objective sense, the thing hoped for. In this verse it could really be taken either way although most scholars prefer to see it in the objective sense. Both of these are marks of a true Christian.

In this verse the Apostle is referring to the thing which the true Christian is expecting. "Wait" is the word for an eager expectation. It is a very intense word. What is the thing which the Christian is eagerly awaiting, expectantly looking for? It is the thing hoped for, righteousness. While it is true that the Christian has

been declared righteous by God on the basis of faith, he is still expectantly looking forward to the manifestation of this righteousness.

What is the meaning of this in simple terms? By the strength which the Holy Spirit provides the Christian is eagerly awaiting that awesome day of the Lord in which he will receive the righteousness of God before the whole universe. The thing he hopes for, the substance of his hope is, that in the presence of holy God he will be dressed up in the beautiful garments of righteousness which God has given to him, and that it will prove to be utterly adequate to make him acceptable to God, and to make him fit to walk in communion with God for all eternity. So we can say that another mark of a true Christian is His confident expectation that he will be accepted into the presence of God on the basis of the righteousness of God. Obviously this is directly related to his faith. His faith in God produces in him this confident expectation.

### ***III. THE CHRISTIAN IS MARKED BY HIS LOVE.***

You rarely ever find a mention of faith and hope without some reference to love. These three belong together when you are discussing the Christian life. Foul brings in love here. "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." This simple statement summarizes so many things about the Christian life.

This statement is probably a response to a criticism of salvation by grace through faith. The age old criticism is that "If you are trusting Christ alone for your salvation, and it is apart from works, then you are discouraging good works and encouraging sin." This reveals a serious misunderstanding of "faith". The faith that trusts in Christ alone for salvation "works". "Worketh" is a present tense verb which points to its continuous activity. The word itself is the word from which our word energy comes, so it is a reference to energetic activity.

However the distinguishing mark of the activities produced by faith is that they are "By love". This is important! The Christian is marked by a faith that works, but works are love-works. What does this mean?

It means that the Christian man may be very diligent in keeping the moral precepts of the law of Moses. He will be careful in his daily walk to walk according to the word of the Lord, but not because he is seeking to earn salvation by his obedience. Rather his obedience will be an expression of the love that is in his heart for the Lord God. The works which his faith produces toward God will be love works. These are the only kind of works that will satisfy and please our God. When you find a true Christian involved in activities directed toward God, they will be an expression of his love for God. When you find him at the baptismal waters, you may ask him, "Why are you being baptized?" His reply will be, "Because I love the Lord and want to obey him in all things." When you find

him at the Lord's Supper, you may ask him, "Why are you partaking in the Lord's supper?" His reply will be, "The Lord God has given to me eternal life, and I love Him, and want to obey Him in all things." You may stop him as he enters the house of worship at the appointed time, and ask him, "Why are you so regular in your attendance at worship?" He will acknowledge, "Because God has been good to me, and I want to show my gratitude and love." This is the mark of the works toward God that love produces. They will be an expression of true love. This is the reason the Lord Jesus checked on the love of Simon Peter before He gave to him his assignment in the kingdom.

But we must not limit these love-works to our devotion toward God. Faith of the right kind will produce love works that are directed toward our fellow man. This is the point that James was making in that famous "faith without works is dead" passage. Many have found contradictions between Paul and James, but obviously James could have written this statement. It would fit very snugly into his little letter. A little later Paul will come back to this as he writes, "But by love serve one another." A serving love is the mark of the Christian. You can tell the Christian by the way his life turns out toward others in compassionate service and deeds of kindness.

When works are out of an expression of love, they are so different from those that grow out of legalism. All of us have heard the old story of the man who met the boy with another boy on his back one morning. They were on their way to school, and the larger boy was carrying the smaller brother who could not walk. The man asked, "Do you carry him like this often?" The lad replied "Every day." The man asked, "But does that not get to be a burden, does he not get heavy?" The boy replied, "O he is no burden. He is my brother." This is what love does. It takes the burden out of obedience.

Beware of a type of faith that does not produce works --- works of devotion toward God and works of service toward one's fellowman. However, if they are produced by the right kind of faith, they will be marked by love.

***Conclusion:***

Let's see if we can summarize what Paul is saying to us in this paragraph. He calls for us to understand the nature of the Christian life. The Christian life is one of liberty in Christ Jesus. As such it is marked by our reliance upon Christ alone for salvation, that is our faith. It is marked by our confident expectation of righteousness, that is hope. It is marked by activities of devotion, that is love.

Are there works in your life that express a genuine love for God, and a love for your fellowman? Then you can confidently say, "I am a Christian." These are the inner and outer marks of the Christian.