

Title: "The Music and the Dance: Christ-centered Christianity"

Text: Galatians 5:4-10

June 5, 2005 Larry T. Kirk

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www.cccdaytona.org

THE MUSIC AND THE DANCE: CHRIST-CENTERED CHRISTIANITY

For some time now I've used an illustration that some people in our church have found very helpful. I am beginning this morning a series of messages based on an important truth at the heart of this illustration, or analogy. The title for the series is "The Music and the Dance: Christ-Centered Christianity."

Here's the analogy: Imagine a large house in which both deaf and hearing people are living together. As you look into this house, you see a man sitting in a room with a stereo. He's tapping his foot rhythmically, snapping his fingers, and his body is swaying. You know what's happening. He's listening to music and obviously enjoying himself. His whole body wants to respond to the music he is hearing.

A deaf man opens the door and enters the room. He sees this man, walks over to him, and begins watching. He thinks, He seems to be enjoying himself. I think I'll try that too. So the deaf man sits down and begins to imitate him. Awkwardly and haltingly at first, he tries to snap his fingers, tap his feet, and move like the man next to him. After a little practice, the deaf man can snap and sway much in time with the first man, just from watching and trying. But even though he gets fairly good at keeping time, he shrugs and says to himself, It's not as much fun as it looks.

Someone seeing these two might think both are doing the same thing and not notice subtle differences. But is there a difference? Absolutely! The first man hears the music, and all his actions are in response to and expressive of the music that he hears. The deaf man is only imitating the outward actions. As a result he doesn't enjoy the routine much, might not keep at it very long, and will not do it very well.

The analogy illustrates a right way and a wrong way to live the Christian life. It's an illustration of the point that Paul makes in Galatians 5:6. That Scripture says, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." The analogy illustrates the biblical truth that we shall be developing throughout the series, "The Music and the Dance."

The dance, the movement, is the Christian life. Galatians 5:6 sums it up with one word: love. Jesus said the whole law of God can be summed up as love for God and love for others. The Christian life of love for God and love for others is the dance. What is the music that inspires the dance?

The music is the reality of God's love expressed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Sometimes people approach the Christian life as if all that matters is getting the moves right. They think there are certain steps that you have to learn, there are rules and rituals to master. But that is not all that matters. The truth is that you cannot dance the dance well unless you are listening to the music.

Faith is receiving the music. Faith is listening to the music and letting its rhythm, beauty, and power move you so that you live a life of love. That's why faith is crucial, not just at the beginning but all through the Christian life. Galatians 5:6 says that it is faith that expresses itself in love. Faith is listening to the music of the love of God in Christ and then allowing the response of your whole self to become the dance, the life of love for God and others to which He calls you. Faith is listening to the music, and love is dancing the dance.

Faith is crucial because . . .

It Is Faith in Christ That Receives

the Grace of god

You see that in Galatians 5, verse 4: "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace." Some people hear that and misunderstand it. They trip on that phrase "fallen away from grace." They think it means that you can receive God's saving grace through faith in Christ and then, if you don't try hard enough to live like a Christian, you can fall away from that saving grace and lose your salvation. But the Bible never teaches that. It teaches the opposite. In John 6:37-39, Jesus says all that the Father gives Him will come to Him and "of all that come to me I will lose none but will raise them up on the last day." A true Christian can't lose Christ because he is kept by Christ.

Besides, in verse 4 the people who fall away from grace are not people who aren't trying. They are people who are trying. They are trying to be justified, to be righteous in the eyes of God, by obeying God's law. The problem is that there's only one way to be made righteous in the eyes of God. That is to admit that you do not deserve salvation and to receive it as a gift through faith in Jesus Christ. It's the nature of God's grace that if you

try to add to it or go beyond it, you end up subtracting from it and falling short of it.

There are two ways one can fall away from grace.

If You Never Trust in Christ Alone as Your Lord and Savior,

You Fall Short of Ever Receiving the Grace of God

Scripture makes this point very clearly. "A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified" (Galatians 2:16). You receive the gift of salvation when you believe that Christ died and rose again for your sins and you place your faith in Him as your Savior. Faith means that you let go of any idea that your life could earn God's acceptance or approval and choose Christ as your righteousness and salvation.

A story is told of wealthy Roman who had a son who broke his heart and a slave who had earned his admiration. On his deathbed he decided to disinherit his son and leave all of his wealth to his slave, Marcellus. He drew up a will and called in his son to tell him what he had done. He said, "I have given everything to Marcellus. However, you may choose one thing, one gift from me, for yourself." The son said, "I'll take Marcellus."

The son knew that by choosing Marcellus he would get not what he had earned but what Marcellus had earned. Everything that Marcellus had earned would be his because he chose Marcellus. The story of God's grace and love is like that but better. In the Bible, the choice that you are given is to stand before God on the basis of your own life and goodness or to choose Christ and receive with Him, because of Him, all the love and the gifts of grace and goodness that Christ has earned. God wants us to choose Christ so that we can receive His grace. So choose Christ, trust Him.

Be sure you have done that, for if you don't trust Christ alone as your Lord and Savior, you fall short of ever receiving God's amazing grace.

If You Receive Christ as Your Savior but Then Try to Earn God's Love by Your Life, You Fall Away from the Empowering Influence of God's Grace

Sometimes, after receiving God's grace, you may start thinking that you have to add your efforts to God's grace in order to keep connected to His love. You start feeling the pressure to prove yourself. You start feeling that

you have to earn, by the life you live, the love that the Bible says you can receive only as a free gift through faith in Christ. When that happens, you fall away from the power of grace.

God's grace remains the same, but you are no longer experiencing the life-changing power of His unconditional love. Maybe you are still trying live the life, to dance the dance, but you've stopped listening to the music that inspires and empowers the dance. The music, the grace and love of God and the message that communicates it, goes on playing, but you are no longer listening.

It Is Faith in Christ That Enables Us to Express

the Love of Christ in Our Lives

The reason faith expresses itself in love is not because there is any miraculous power in faith but because faith is a window through which we receive God's love in Christ. And God's love is life-changing when received.

The Bible Often Refers to This Dynamic of God's Love for Us,

Known and Felt by Faith, Producing a Life of Love in Us

“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:1-2).

“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Martin Luther said, “Even a stone lying in the sun will grow warm.” What he meant was that if your heart is cold, if you are bitter or angry or depressed, stop thinking about what you've been thinking about and fill your mind with the realization of the great love that God has for you. The stone is your heart. The light and warmth of the sun are the grace of God.

How do you get your sometimes cold and stony heart into the warmth and light of God's grace? You think about His love and forgiveness for you through Christ, and you believe in it. Faith in God's love warms your heart. You find yourself saying, “How can I hold a grudge against this other person when God has loved me, given Christ for me, and forgiven all my sins? How can I be so selfish, angry, or discouraged, when I know that God has made me His own son or daughter? I have His amazing grace, His unconditional love, and His promise to care for and provide for me for my good and His glory.”

What both illustrations, the sun and the stone and the music and the dance, capture from Scripture is that living the life of a Christian is not just about trying to do all that you are supposed to do. It is about continually exposing your heart to the light that warms and the music that inspires the life we are called to live for Christ.

Why is this so important? Because the Scripture says . . .

It Is Possible to Get Our Approach and Understanding
of the Christian Life Completely Wrong

In Galatians 5:6 when Paul writes, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value, the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love," he is saying, "Don't get this wrong."

Whenever you are struggling in the Christian life, don't just look at what you are supposed to do but also at what you are supposed to believe to enable you to do what you are supposed to do. We need to get this right for ourselves and others.

If you lead a growth group, if you are a room leader, if you are a disciple leader for a campus fellowship, be careful that in your ministry you are not just pointing out the right steps to the dance but are continually helping those to whom you minister to hear the music of the love of God in Christ, which alone can inspire and enable them to dance well.

When you do your Bible reading and prepare your Bible studies, don't just ask, "What does this tell us to do?" but also, "What do we need to believe about the love God has shown us in Christ so that we can live this way?"

If you minister to children through Sunday school or child evangelism, make sure that you teach not only the right dance steps but you impart a love and heartfelt appreciation for the beautiful music that inspires the dance.

Friends who want to help each other live the Christian life need to encourage them to hear the music and understand how hearing the music can help them dance the dance. Husbands and wives need to help each other to hear the music of God's love in Christ and not just point out the many ways in which they do not dance as well as they should. Parents need to give their children the music and not just demand the moves.

So how do you help people do the right thing, follow Christ, and live the

Christian life with joyful commitment, love of God and others, peace in the heart, and patience in hardships? You show them what the Scripture teaches. There's no question that there are certain steps to the dance. There are things that are right, and things that are wrong. There are moves that God wants to be a part of the dance. In that last part of Galatians 5, Paul tell us that things such as love, joy, peace, patience, and self-control are the fruit of the Spirit and are all part of the dance. Anger, envy, bitterness, and immorality, and greed are works of the flesh and are not part of the dance, the life God wants us to live. We need to be clear about this.

But we also need to be just as clear about the fact that the power of the love and grace of Christ is so great and rich that, when it is believed and deeply received, that it moves the heart and changes the life.

Hans Christian Anderson's story "The Snow Queen" tells of a boy named Kay who had a bad attitude. He was as mean as he could be. In the story he had a particle of glass in his heart that turned his heart cold, and a particle of glass in his eye that distorted the way everything looked. It was "ugly glass which made everything great and good appear small and ugly, while all that was wicked and bad became more visible, and every little fault could be plainly seen." Part of the evil of this glass particle is that he thought it was showing him the way things really were.

Well, it turned Kay's heart to ice and made him wicked. He could see only the worst side of everything and everyone he looked at. One little freckle on a person's face would appear so huge and disfigured that the person didn't really look like who he was at all.

The boy kept getting worse and worse, but a little girl named Gerda loved him. When he was blue with cold, and everything he saw was warped and ugly, Gerda found him and threw her arms around him. She cried warm tears that fell onto his chest and penetrated his heart. Her tears of love begin to melt the ice and wash away the ugly glass particle in his eye. Then she kissed his cheeks, and they became like her cheeks, glowing and warm. She kissed his eyes, and they shone like hers. She kissed his hands and feet until they became healthy. The warmth of her love thawed him into resurrection.

This is a children's story, but it's also a picture of the greater story that God reveals in the Bible. We have a warped way of looking at the world and living our lives. But God's love comes and finds us. God the Father pours out His love as He gives us His Son. God the Son, who wept tears of love for lost people, pours out His love on the cross as He offers Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. God the Holy Spirit pours the love of

God into our hearts and draws us to Christ and faith. This deep love and amazing grace that He gives us not only forgives our sins but also changes our hearts and enables us to live a new life.

Are you receiving His love, listening to the music, living out of the inspiration and empowerment of His love for you? Galatians 5:6 says faith expresses itself in love.

Whenever you are struggling in the Christian life, don't look just at what you are supposed to do but also at what you are supposed to believe to enable you to do what you are supposed to do. Are you trying to get yourself, your children, your spouse, your friends, your disciples, your growth group to dance better by just pointing out missed steps and the wrong moves? Or are you helping yourself and others develop the faith that hears, appreciates, and feels the beauty and the power of the music of the love of God in Christ?

It is God who choreographed the dance we call the Christian life, but God also composed the music that inspires the dance. He wants us to hear it and be moved by it.