

May I borrow a dollar? (Look at the back at the motto, “In God We Trust.”¹) We as a nation trust God. Did you know that? That motto is on a five dollar bill, and a ten, in fact it is on all Federal Reserve notes up to the hundred dollar bill. It was begun on our coinage at the end of the Civil War because of increased religious conviction. Are you surprised? Then, over the next hundred years at various times it was added to our paper money, until the last one was added in 1966. Actually, in 1956 a joint resolution of the 84th Congress was passed declaring “In God we Trust” as the national motto of the United States. Isn’t that amazing? Do we trust God? Today’s passage is all about trust.

Trust is hard to do.

According to the dictionary, trust² means reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing; confidence. It means to have hope. In Greek the word means not only trust, but also *to believe*. Everything in Galatians radiates from this passage about trust. This is the center and the sum of Paul’s theology. Listen as I read.

READ Galatians 2:15-21 The Message

Listen to some of the phrases I just read:

1. We are not set right with God by rule-keeping
2. It’s faith in Jesus Christ
3. How do we know? We tried it but self-improvement can’t please God
4. It’s faith in Jesus Christ that sets us right before God
5. Have you noticed we are not perfect?
6. If I’m not perfectly virtuous does this mean Christ is an accessory to sin?
7. Heavens no! (Ginger’s paraphrase)
8. It’s not about “trying to be good.”
9. That just rebuilds the same old system that Jesus tore down.
10. I quit being a law man so I could be God’s man. (stop there)

It’s a packed passage isn’t it? We know Paul hung his hat on good religion. But if you read Galatians 1 and 2 in the handout this week, you read this:

READ Galatians 1:13-15.

Did you hear those words? “God had designs on me. He chose me out of sheer generosity. He revealed his Son to me so I might joyfully tell others about him.”

¹ The motto IN GOD WE TRUST was placed on United States coins largely because of the increased religious sentiment existing during the Civil War. Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase received many appeals from devout persons throughout the country, urging that the United States recognize the Deity on United States coins. From Treasury Department records, it appears that the first such appeal came in a letter dated November 13, 1861. It was written to Secretary Chase by Rev. M. R. Watkinson, Minister of the Gospel from Ridleyville, Pennsylvania. <http://www.treas.gov/education/fact-sheets/currency/in-god-we-trust.html>. Accessed 7/10/08.

²<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/trust>, Accessed 7/8/08.

There's a change of tenor in Paul's tone. He now trusts God had plans for him and he's living for doing what God called him to do.

He explains it like this, "I am crucified with Christ and it's not even me who lives but Christ lives in me." Wow, it sounds almost like a marriage vow; like he is bound to him or bonded; like he's given up everything because he trusts Jesus to direct his life. What does that mean, exactly?

He moved from trying to trust.

Wouldn't you think he would believe in the law just a little bit? Don't we believe in the law ourselves? Don't we worry that if we say, "You don't have to follow any of the rules," you just have to trust Jesus, that sin would just abound everywhere?

Here's an illustration of trust that I learned from Pastor Gary Dennis, who I interned with in California. He enjoys rappelling. Do you know anything about rappelling? You wear a harness onto which is attached a strong rope which comes from a device anchored at the top of the cliff. The rope goes through the harness and then extends back to your companions at the top of the cliff. You stand on the precipice of the cliff backwards, heels hanging off the edge. Then, while they hold the rope and slowly let it out, you have to slowly fall backwards, until you are perpendicular to the side of the cliff, trusting your teammates and your equipment. Your body is literally hanging in midair parallel to the ground below, with your feet now on the side of the cliff. **That's trust.**

Then you begin walking down the face of the cliff. Now if you get scared or tense and clutch the rope and lose your perpendicular position, it can be very detrimental to your body, which can be slung against the face of the cliff. **So the work is maintaining that trust.** The walking is easy when you are in the right position.

Trusting God feels like that. Trusting God is believing that Jesus catches us. **His work is all it takes.** Do you trust that? Or do you not quite believe it and cling to other things also?

Trusting God means moment by moment walking down the cliff with your life in his hands, guiding you. Like Paul, it means "living life by faith in Jesus Christ, who loved me and gave himself for me." (v. 20) **A man who makes that kind of statement trusts God.**

What do you hang your life on? Is it faith, plus something else? Is it your family? Or, is it a desire to be financially secure, or a need to prove yourself? Do those things take priority over your trust in God?

When we trust Christ, his power comes alive in us. It isn't simply symbolic; after which we go about being "good." God isn't trying to make a bunch of "good people." In fact, Scripture tells us that he saves us by grace so that none of us can boast. Living for the law creates competition among us, not love. This passage says, *why would God give us Jesus if he only wanted obedience to the law?* **God desires a love relationship with us.**

I'm going to tell you a personal story. It's a testimony of my experience of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ and the church. This story is painful. But the "great times" (and there have been lots of those too) are not what opened my eyes to trusting God. Some may say pain and tragedy are evidence that God is not there or does not care. I don't see it that way. I see that God has brought me lovingly through every hurt. He came alive to me and held me up through it all.

When I was in college I married. Everything about my husband looked good on the outside. He seemed to be strong and to have everything under control. He was cute and had a great personality. He partied hard, but I thought I could tame all that once we were married. Although he appeared strong on the outside, soon afterwards I found that he lived with many inner demons that were not going to be changed by me. Married life with this man was mostly lived on the brink of disaster.

I was a Christian who went to church. He was a Christian. But like many teenagers, I had not been obedient to the Lord. I had done my share of sinning, so I felt unworthy of God's love.

We had a baby and then a year later I became pregnant again. That second pregnancy brought more stress than the relationship could bear and my husband left within days of learning the news. At the time I was involved in a small church in Oak Cliff. It did not have elaborate programs or anything in particular that made it "shine." It was a group of average but faithful people.

I felt like the worst Christian in the world. I had not measured up. My life was a mess. But that church ignored all that and stepped in and literally became my family. The small group I belonged to did not judge me or treat me like my life was a wreck. In fact, they treated me as one of them. We discovered God together, studying the Bible. They said, Jesus loves you and he has hope for you. These people fixed my car when it broke down; babysat when I was overwhelmed; and took me to the hospital when I went into labor. *They loved me.*

Through their love and care, I began to trust Jesus. I began to have hope and I fell in love with Jesus Christ because he loved me, even though my life was a wreck.

Before, I truly thought, *I need to be good and I am failing.* Yet as each need was met, those expressions of love allowed me to lean further and further back into the arms of Jesus who loves me and gave himself for me. I can now say, "He is alive and real, and he caught me on that cliff."

*Why would God give us Jesus if he only wanted obedience to the law? **God desires a love relationship with us. We gain that through trust.***

You can't have it both ways – living by the law and living in Christ. Christian faith is a lifestyle we gain by trust. How's your trust?

Here is a wonderful picture of trust. My little 15-month-old granddaughter loves to go to the park, where there are lots of ups and downs – stairs. Her favorite thing is to climb up the stairs and then jump off them. I have learned if I am there, she is going to jump. She doesn't wait, she doesn't say, "are you really going to catch me?" mostly because she can't talk yet. She just trusts and jumps. Why? She knows me. I am her Nana.

Jesus Christ's commitment to us is lavish and powerful, despite whether we perform perfectly or fail completely. He desires to have a love relationship with us and to then lead us to the calling he has in mind for us.

In God we trust. How about you? Can you trust it?

Let us pray.