



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

May 14, 2017

Discussion Guide

A COMMUNITY CALLED FREEDOM

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- DO YOU BELIEVE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO EXPERIENCE A LIFE MARKED BY TRUE FREEDOM? COULD YOU ELABORATE?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- USING THE NOTES, DISCUSS THE PRACTICE OF BAPTISM

AND HOW PAUL USES IT AS A METAPHOR IN ROMANS 6.

- READ ROMANS 6.1-14 ALOUD. PAUSE AND READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE.
- IN WHAT WAYS HAS JESUS' WORK ON THE CROSS MADE FREEDOM FROM SIN POSSIBLE?
- WHAT IMPLICATIONS, IF ANY, MIGHT THE POSSIBILITY OF THIS FREEDOM BRING ABOUT IN THE LIVES OF BELIEVERS? DO YOU SEE THESE IMPLICATIONS IN THEIR LIVES? WHY MIGHT THIS BE?
- ACCORDING TO PAUL, ATONEMENT MAKES A LIFE OF FREEDOM FROM SIN THE ONLY LIFE POSSIBLE (ROMANS 6.1-2, 7). WHAT STRUGGLES, IF ANY, MIGHT YOU HAVE WITH THIS CLAIM? COULD YOU EXPLAIN?
- IN ROMANS 7-8, PAUL DISCUSSES THE DIFFICULTY IN LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE FREEDOM ATONEMENT MAKES POSSIBLE AND GOD'S RESPONSE TO THIS DIFFICULTY. PAUL ARGUES THAT THE MOVEMENT TOWARD FREEDOM IS SLOW BUT IT DOES HAPPEN. IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DOES THIS MODIFY YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF PAUL'S CLAIM THAT ATONEMENT MAKES A LIFE OF FREEDOM THE ONLY LIFE POSSIBLE?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE MOVE TOWARD THE FREEDOM WHICH ATONEMENT HAS MADE POSSIBLE? WHAT STEPS MIGHT YOU BE WILLING TO TAKE TO ALLOW GOD TO MAKE THIS FREEDOM A REALITY IN YOUR EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE?
- CONSIDER CLOSING AS A GROUP BY ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER WITH THE GOSPEL TRUTH THAT ATONEMENT MEANS A LIFE OF FREEDOM IS THE ONLY POSSIBLE LIFE WE CAN LIVE AND WE ARE MOVING TOWARD THAT LIFE AND WILL ONE DAY FULLY EXPERIENCE IT.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

BAPTISM

Literally, baptism is the practice of immersing someone in water. Within Christendom, baptism is an initiation rite, a spiritual practice which represents the union of the believer with the life of the Triune God (Matthew 28.20), made possible through union with Jesus by his atoning work upon the cross (Romans 6.3-4).

Baptism is a spiritual practice with a rich tradition, a tradition which has its roots in the worship of God by the people of Israel. The Jews practiced a form of baptism as part of a process of repentance and cleansing from sin or uncleanness. When a person wished to demonstrate that they were acknowledging before God their need for his cleansing and forgiveness, the immersion of that person in water was often a part of that process. In the Essene community—those who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls—there were actual pools designed for this very practice. John the Baptist carried on this tradition, calling his fellow Jews to prepare themselves for the coming Kingdom of God by repenting and being baptized (Matthew 3.1-6). When people were baptized by John, they were stating publicly that they wished to be part of what God was about to do, and that they were offering their lives to God for his cleansing in preparation of that movement. It is in this vein that Jesus himself was baptized by John (Matthew 3.13-17). In his baptism, Jesus was making a public statement that he was part of what God was about to do.

When Jesus began his ministry, he made baptism an integral part of his ministry (John 3.26; 4.1-2), with baptism serving a very similar function as it did in the ministry of John the Baptist. In Jesus' ministry, baptism was a spiritual practice which showed the one undergoing baptism was aligning himself or herself with what God was doing, by now clearly, through Jesus. Before Jesus ascended to Heaven, he charged his disciples to continue the practice of baptism, commanding them to baptize all future disciples in the three-fold name of God: Father, Son, and Spirit (Matthew 28.19-20). That phrase means that Jesus understood baptism to

be the formal indication that the one baptized was uniting his or her life with God.

The earliest practice of baptism within the Church is seen in the book of Acts. In Acts, from the beginning, the Church understood baptism to represent the uniting of one's life with God's life by uniting one with Jesus (Acts 2.38-41; 8.12, 36-37; 10.44-48). In addition, the Church understood baptism to represent the uniting with Jesus as the act which made Jesus' work of atonement effective in one's life (Acts 2.38-41; 16.31-33).

Within the first few decades of the Church, divergent means of baptism were developed based upon the accessibility of water for immersion, means which certainly stand behind the divergent forms of baptism across the various streams of Christian traditions today.

Now concerning baptism, thus baptize ye: having first uttered all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit in running water. But if thou hast not running water, baptize in other water; and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, pour water upon the head thrice, into the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit. (Didache, 139-145)

While this early Christian document makes room for divergent forms of baptism, it retains the foundation of baptism, that of representing the uniting of the life of the believer with the life of God. Because this is the understanding of the early Church concerning baptism, baptism could be used as a metaphor to refer to the entire conversion experience because the practice itself pointed to the deeper realities of salvation, the uniting of one's life with God (Romans 6.3-4).

THE TEXT

ROMANS 6.1-14: ATONEMENT AND NEW LIFE

Paul's letter to the Church in Rome has often been identified as Paul's systematic explanation of the gospel. While Paul certainly does delve deeply into the redemptive work of God through Christ, this letter is not what we might refer to as systematic theology. Rather, this letter is task theology; that is, Paul is describing the gospel from a specific angle for

the purpose of addressing a specific issue within the Roman Church, that of unifying the Roman Church (Romans 14-16). Paul used the gospel to unify the Roman congregation by explaining that the gospel made it plain that no person was above another, but that due to the common problem of Sin and the general need for redemption, all believers were equal and therefore should be unified; that is, the gospel makes it plain that all people have the same predicament for which there is but one solution made available in Christ (Romans 3.21-31). Justification (God's action to make people right) was available through the work of Christ to those who turned to God in faith (Romans 1.16-17). This is God's pattern in extending justification to those who respond to him in faith. There is no other path to having one's life righted.

Paul uses the life of Abraham to underscore this point. For this he turns to the covenant through which God extended the promise of redemption, God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12.1-3; 15.1-6). As God made this covenant with Abraham, he extended justification to Abraham as Abraham turned to God in faith (Genesis 15.6; Romans 4.1-17), a faith which took the form of hope (Romans 4.18-22). Because Abraham's covenantal response to God was faith which took the form of hope, so too should the believer's covenantal response to God be that of faith which takes the form of hope (Romans 4.23-5.11). When the believer responds to God with this kind of faith, like Abraham, they experience the righting (atoning) work of God in their lives.

Those who have experienced this righting of their lives are part of God's larger work to "start over" with humanity by providing a new Adam (Romans 5.12-21). The first Adam had chosen to sin which created a trajectory of sin for those who were members of his family; that is, the descendants of Adam were bent toward a life of sin because the one from whom they were descended had marked the path all after him would follow with his choice. A new way of life, a life without sin, was needed. For this, God provided a new "Adam" in the person of Jesus, a man who lived without sin. With this life, Jesus made a new way of life possible, a life

fully connected to God without sin (Romans 5.18-19). According to Paul, the Law of Moses was given so that people would recognize that the life they were living as descendants of Adam was not the life they were created to live. However, the grace (effective power) of God was greater than the hold sin had on the lives of those descended from Adam. Through his covenantal faithfulness, he made it possible for people to experience a fully connected life with him marked by his character (eternal life) through the atoning work of Jesus (Romans 5.20-21).

With this, Paul turns to address his critics, some of whom may be within the Roman Church. Paul was regularly criticized that his constant proclamation of God's grace expressed through Jesus as the sole means of taking care of sin and restoring one's relationship with God gave people a free pass to sin. Since God's grace increased so that it could overcome the powerful grip sin had on the lives of people, freeing them to a new way of life, it made sense to continue to sin so that an ever-increasing amount of God's grace could be witnessed and experienced. Paul argued that this was a silly way of thinking because those who had experienced God's gracious work of atonement in Christ were moved from the family of Adam to the family of Christ. Therefore, they could only take up the life of this new family, a life marked by a freedom from sin.

Paul turns to the rite of baptism to illustrate his point. Here, Paul uses baptism to refer to the entirety of the conversion experience, the full work of the gospel in one's life (1 Corinthians 15.3-4). In baptism, one was claiming that they had united their life with Christ thereby experiencing Christ's vicarious death, burial, and resurrection as their own. Here Paul returns to the atonement metaphor of substitution (2 Corinthians 5.14-15). Paul argues that the purpose of this union with Christ was to have Christ's death be a person's death, that was brought about by sin, and for Christ's life to be their life, a new life free from sin.

Paul elaborates on this idea in verses 5-10. He begins by reasoning that to be united with Jesus in his death means that one is also united with Jesus in his resurrection. If one is united in one, she must be united also with the other. In one's union with

CHRIST IN HIS DEATH, JESUS DIED THE DEATH BROUGHT ABOUT BY SIN SO THAT A PERSON COULD BE FREED FROM SIN. THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED SIN'S CONSEQUENCE OF DEATH NO LONGER ARE BOUND TO SIN. THE PENALTY HAS BEEN PAID. IF ONE NOT ONLY EXPERIENCES THE FREEDOM BROUGHT ABOUT BY CHRIST'S DEATH BUT ALSO IS UNITED IN RESURRECTION, THEN A PERSON IS ABLE TO LIVE THE LIFE JESUS NOW LIVES, A LIFE FREE FROM SIN AND DEATH. WHILE ALIVE IN HIS MINISTRY, JESUS WAS SUBJECT TO THE EXPERIENCE OF DEATH, A CONSEQUENCE OF HIS CHOICE TO TAKE ON THE FULL EXPERIENCE OF HUMANITY. HOWEVER, IN HIS RESURRECTION HE DEFEATED DEATH SO THAT NOW THE ONLY LIFE WHICH IS POSSIBLE IS A LIFE FULLY CONNECTED WITH GOD THE FATHER. THIS MEANS, PAUL ARGUES, THAT THE ONLY LIFE POSSIBLE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED THE ATONING WORK OF CHRIST IS A LIFE FULLY CONNECTED WITH GOD, FREE FROM SIN.

THEREFORE, BELIEVERS WERE TO LIVE THEIR LIVES AS THOSE WHO WERE FREE FROM SIN AND FULLY CONNECTED TO GOD THROUGH THE ATONING WORK OF JESUS. SIN WAS NOT TO MARK THEIR EARTHLY LIVES, BUT RATHER IN THEIR DAILY LIFE, BELIEVERS WERE TO OFFER THEMSELVES TO GOD AS INSTRUMENTS OF HIS COVENANTAL RIGHTEOUSNESS. SIN NO LONGER WAS THE MASTER OF THOSE WHO HAD EXPERIENCED ATONEMENT. RATHER, GOD'S GRACE HAD CHARTED A NEW WAY OF LIVING.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

ATONEMENT MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN OUR LIVES. ATONEMENT MEANS I HAVE FAMILY AND MY LIFE MATTERS. ATONEMENT GIVES ME HOPE. AND, ATONEMENT GRANTS ME FREEDOM, FREEDOM FROM A LIFE OF SIN. ATONEMENT MEANS THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO LIVE THE LIFE I WAS MADE TO LIVE, A LIFE FULLY CONNECTED TO GOD, LIVING ON HIS TERMS. THAT IS A WONDERFUL MESSAGE OF HOPE, FOR IT MEANS THAT I AM NOT TRAPPED OR BOUND TO OLD WAYS OF BEING. I CAN BE FREE FROM THE FAMILY DYSFUNCTIONS WHICH I INHERITED, FREE FROM THE PRIDE AND ARROGANCE WITH WHICH I STRUGGLE, FREE FROM THE DEPRESSION WHICH COMES UPON ME AND DOESN'T WANT TO LEAVE. ATONEMENT MAKES ALL OF THIS POSSIBLE AND MORE BECAUSE ATONEMENT GRANTS ME FREEDOM.

THIS IS AN ENCOURAGING MESSAGE UNTIL I REALLY READ WHAT PAUL SAYS ABOUT ATONEMENT AND FREEDOM. PAUL CLAIMS THAT ATONEMENT DOESN'T JUST MAKE FREEDOM AVAILABLE TO PEOPLE LIKE ME. ATONEMENT MAKES A LIFE OF FREEDOM THE ONLY LIFE POSSIBLE FOR PEOPLE LIKE ME. THAT IS LESS THAN ENCOURAGING BECAUSE I DON'T LIVE FREE IN SO MANY AREAS. DOES THIS MEAN I HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED ATONEMENT? HARDLY. I HAVE EXPERIENCED ATONEMENT AND IT REALLY HAS MADE ONLY ONE WAY OF LIFE POSSIBLE, A LIFE OF FREEDOM. I AM JUST MOVING TOWARD THAT LIFE IN A GRADUAL WAY, A WAY THAT BEGINS ON THE INSIDE AND WORKS ITS WAY OUT (ROMANS

12.1-2). HOWEVER, I AM MOVING IN THE DIRECTION OF FREEDOM, FULL FREEDOM. THIS IS THE ONLY WAY I CAN GO. I DO NOT NEED TO BE ANXIOUS THAT I MIGHT MOVE BACKWARD OR THAT I MIGHT GET STUCK AND STAY STUCK. NO. ATONEMENT MEANS THAT ONLY ONE LIFE IS POSSIBLE FOR ME NOW AND I AM MOVING TO THAT LIFE AND ONLY THAT LIFE. THAT IS ENCOURAGING, NO MATTER HOW LONG IT TAKES.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

ATONEMENT MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN OUR LIVES, OUR EVERYDAY LIVES. ONE OF THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCES ATONEMENT MAKES IS THAT IT FREES US FROM A LIFE OF SIN; FREES US TO EXPERIENCE THE LIFE WE WERE MEANT TO HAVE, A LIFE WHICH SHARES GOD'S OWN LIFE. ATONEMENT DOESN'T JUST MAKE THIS POSSIBLE BUT ATONEMENT MAKES THIS LIFE THE ONLY POSSIBILITY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED ATONEMENT. HOWEVER, WHEN WE ARE HONEST ABOUT OUR LIVES IT CAN BE HARD TO OBSERVE THIS REALITY BECAUSE OUR LIVES ARE OFTEN ANYTHING BUT FREE FROM SIN. WHAT WE MUST REALIZE IS THAT ATONEMENT HAS MADE ONLY ONE LIFE POSSIBLE FOR US AND WE ARE MOVING TOWARD THAT LIFE AT THE PACE GOD DETERMINES AS HE DOES A TRANSFORMING WORK FROM THE INSIDE OUT (ROMANS 12.1-2). HOWEVER, WE ARE MOVING IN A SINGULAR DIRECTION. GOD WILL NOT ALLOW US TO BE SIDETRACKED OR SHORT-CIRCUITED. BECAUSE OF ATONEMENT THERE IS NOW ONLY ONE WAY FOR US TO LIVE, A WAY KNOWN AS FREEDOM, AND ATONEMENT MEANS THAT WE WILL MOVE TOWARD AND EXPERIENCE ONLY THIS LIFE.

THIS WEEK, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO CONSIDER YOUR LIFE AS YOU ARE NOW LIVING IT. ARE THERE AREAS WHERE YOU SEE YOURSELF LIVING AND EXPERIENCING THE FREEDOM TO LIVE AS GOD INTENDED? IF SO, GIVE THANKS TO GOD BECAUSE YOU ARE EXPERIENCING THE TRANSFORMING WORK OF ATONEMENT. ARE THERE AREAS WHERE YOU SEE THE NEED TO EXPERIENCE THE FREEDOM TO LIVE AS GOD INTENDED? IF SO, OFFER THESE AREAS TO GOD AND ASK HIM TO DO THE WORK WHICH ONLY HE CAN DO TO GRANT FREEDOM IN THESE AREAS. AND, GIVE THANKS TO GOD BECAUSE THIS FREEDOM WILL COME AND YOU WILL EXPERIENCE THE LIFE HE INTENDS FOR YOU, BECAUSE, IN LIGHT OF ATONEMENT, THIS IS THE ONLY LIFE WE CAN LIVE.



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