

May 13, 2007

“Two Ways”
Galatians 3:10-14

FCF: The need to see clearly the starkness of the choice before us.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because Christ alone can save us,
(magnet) we must trust not in the law but in Him.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

You may have heard the news last week of an accident on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. The collision took place about 4:30 in the afternoon and cleared after midnight. What a great way to spend an evening! It reminded me of a wreck I saw a few years ago outside of Norfolk. A car had collided head-on into the wedge of a lane divider on the interstate. Going neither right nor left, the driver failed to see the reality and necessity of making a choice for there was clearly no middle way. All with disastrous results.

The gospel of Christ presents the same thing – a stark choice, no middle way.

SCRIPTURE READING: Galatians 3:10-14

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

There are two alternatives, two possibilities, two paths, two choices set before us. Which is it going to be? We're heading into the season of summer blockbusters at the movies. Here's one from a few years ago – “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade.” The great climactic scene towards the end. The two rival treasure seekers have found the Holy Grail, mysteriously guarded by a knight from centuries ago. “*You must choose,*” he says. Before them is a table filled with chalices and cups of various kinds. The question is which one is the grail. Which one will they choose? Indy's rival takes one he calls “the cup of a king,” dips it in the water and drinks. And he dies what we could call an ugly death. And the knight proclaims, “*He chose poorly.*” There are two alternatives, two possibilities, two paths, two choices set before us. Which is it going to be?

It's been a while since we were in our study of Galatians, so let me remind you of where we are. After the introduction, in chapters 1 and 2, Paul took pains to remind his readers of his authority as an apostle of Jesus. Then in chapter 3, he reminds them of the message of the gospel of Jesus – that we are justified, declared righteous by God, by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In verses 1 through 5, he has argued for this from their own experience. It has been by grace through and through. Now, in verses 6 through 18, he argues for this from Scripture. It has been by grace all along.

Here, in verses 10 through 14, acknowledging our need of being justified, of being in right relationship with God, he sets before us two ways, two paths one can walk. One promises life to the believer, the other to the doer. One makes faith the way of salvation, the other, works. One says only God can justify, the other says we can manage on our own. Two ways, two paths are set before his readers. And they needed to choose.

Now, remember who this letter is written to – the churches of Galatia. This choice is being set before people who professed to be followers of Jesus. This gauntlet is being thrown down before people striving to say and do all the right things for God. And Paul is saying that is no guarantee of where you are with God, no guarantee at all. This is an intense call to self-examination. For Christ alone can save. All these other things are fine and good but Christ alone can save. And so we dare not trust in anything but Him.

I. BY WORKS OF THE LAW

Certainly not in this first way, this first path that proves to be in the deepest sense such a dead end (READ Galatians 3:10-12). What features do we see of this path?

A) *What It Looks Like*

What does it look like? This way is that of relying on “works of the law,” on our obedience, on our efforts, on our record, on our righteousness. Paul quotes here from Leviticus 18:5 ([READ Galatians 3:12b](#)). A statement true in its context of a life of faith and obedience but apparently having been ripped from its context and misapplied.

1. What it demands

And so Paul then pushes his readers to live this out in a consistent way. “*Okay. You want to find your life, your security before God, in the law? Fine. Then know what the law demands.*” Perfect obedience. Perfect obedience to the fullest extent.

2. What it includes

What does that include? All things, all aspects of your life, at all times.

B) *Where It Takes You*

And where does that take you? To the curse of God ([READ Galatians 3:10a](#)).

1. Significance

Now consider the significance of this. “All those” – not some – “who rely on works of the law” are under a curse, an execration, an imprecation. Though we are, we ought not to be embarrassed by this. We ought to be sobered by this. Of whom is Paul speaking? God. That same voice that spoke all things into being, that same voice described as being like a violent thundering, is being spoken against those who go their own way.

2. Offensiveness

Now that strikes us as a bit offensive. Not surprisingly. People who think of themselves as good and moral always react this way. Paul is quoting in verse 10 from Deuteronomy 27, a text found in the synagogue manuals of the time to be read when someone was being whipped for blasphemy. Paul may well have heard these words uttered over his own lacerated body during one of the beatings he received for preaching the gospel.

C) *How You Got There*

The point is the offense the self-righteous take in hearing of God’s curse upon them. But it’s not their offense they should be concerned about ([READ Galatians 3:10](#)).

1. The problem with the law

There’s a problem with the law. We think it’s there to make us right. But that’s not it at all. The law was never intended to make us right but to show us what’s gone wrong. For as we strive to live by it, we see that we can’t and that there’s something gone wrong inside us. To use it to make ourselves right with God is a perversion of its purpose.

2. The problem with us

It’s a perversion of its purpose. And a delusion of our ability. The Westminster Shorter Catechism sums up the Scripture’s teaching here so well ([READ WSC Q:82](#)):

WSC Q:82. Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?

A. No mere man since the Fall is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed.

The point is that to rely on our obedience to God’s law to make us right with Him is a dead end. For none of us can obey it as we should. So, knowing that, why go that way?

Illustration:

A friend of my dad grew up in East St. Louis and as he was driving through that part of the country late one night, he thought he’d swing through. The problem was he had no idea of how crime ridden it has become. He hadn’t been back in years. He came to a traffic light and was waiting for the light to turn when a car pulled up beside him. It

was a police officer. Hearing the man's story, the officer said, "Sir, you do not belong here. I want you to drive through any red lights you see and get back on the interstate."

Now, I tell you that story not to vilify the inner city in any way but to illustrate that there are some places you don't want to go, some paths you do not want to take.

Application:

And "relying on works of the law" is one of them – the worst dead end of all. Think of it this way. Make a list. What are your "works of the law"? Reading and studying your Bible, time in prayer? Striving to grow in patience, forgiveness, and generosity? Serving others, giving to their needs? Great! Now why are you doing all that? If you are doing it to earn God's blessing, you are, in reality, earning His curse.

(**READ Galatians 2:21**) If I am relying on works of the law to make me right with God or to keep me right with God, after all He has done through the cross to accomplish that already, I am spitting on that cross. Now you say, "*But I would never do such a thing!*" No? If you are so crass to think yourself so immune, you're doing it right now. What on your list, if you failed to do, would cause you to question and doubt your standing with God? Case in point, we all should be in the habit of daily reading in the Bible. We need it, every one of us here. That said, if you miss a day, will God then love you less? If you don't forget, will He then love you more? Do you see? What on your list, in doing, makes you feel more sure, more confident before Him? That's spitting on the cross. Christ alone can save us. We must trust not in works of the law but in Him.

II. BY FAITH

Which brings us to the second point, the second way – by faith.

A) What It Looks Like

What does this way look like? (**READ Galatians 3:11**) Paul is quoting from Habakkuk 2. Here the LORD is condemning the pride of the Babylonians, their self-sufficiency and self-reliance. Clearly, He wants us to trust not in ourselves but in Him.

1. Humility towards ourselves

We are called not to a pride towards ourselves but a profound humility.

2. Trust in Christ

A profound humility towards ourselves and, with that, an abiding trust in Christ.

B) Where It Takes You

And where does this take you? (**READ Galatians 3:13-14**)

1. Redeemed from the curse

Just the opposite of the other way – rather than being condemned by the curse, we are redeemed from it. The language of "redemption" conjures up imagery of the slave market and emancipation, our freedom purchased by another at a price. Set free from slavery and set free to a new life, receiving "the promised Spirit through faith."

2. The blessing of Abraham

Redemption – a beautiful image. And "the blessing of Abraham" – if you read what Paul has already said in chapter 3, it's clear he's referring here to justification, God's declaring us righteous in His sight by imputing to us the righteousness of Christ. And such describes those who rely not upon the works of the law but the work of Christ, not upon doing but faith in what He has done – by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

C) How You Got There

Such is where the gospel takes you. And how did you get there?

1. Redeemed by Christ

Not just “redemption” in general terms but redeemed from the curse of the law by Christ. Indeed, Paul goes so far to say Christ “became a curse for us.” Shocking words. We wouldn’t think of expressing it this way if it were not recorded here. And certainly this was not what was expected – a slain Messiah, the roaring Lion a sacrificial Lamb.

2. Loved by Christ

Shocking words and a shocking love. We would not say it. Nor would we believe it if it were not spelled out so explicitly here. Christ died for sinners like you and me.

Illustration:

- Martin Luther story
 - o Ryken, pp.111-112

Application:

Luther’s story grabs me. And I don’t doubt it grabs you as well. Now, here’s the thing. This is how this all ties together. To the extent you know how great is your sin, how profound is your wretched condition and need, is the extent to which you will know and appreciate His grace to you. And the extent to which you know His grace to you is the extent to which you will then know His love for you. To that extent, you will know and identify with Luther’s words and experience. Christ alone can save us. Christ alone can save us. We must not at any time and in any way trust in the law. Only in Him.

CONCLUSION:

We have a choice to make. There are two ways, two roads before us. There are two and only two. The first road is called “the law.” Those who travel by it are “those who rely on works of the law.” And they are under a curse. The second road is called “faith.” Those who travel by it are “people of faith.” And they are blessed. The first group trusts in their own works. The second group trusts in the finished work of Christ.

So what’s it going to be? Remember this is a message to a church. Which can only mean there is a tendency within us to drift away from this. And with that tendency to drift comes the necessity of hearing this again and again. I mentioned a story from Martin Luther’s life. Let me relay another. The gospel was the theme of his life and his preaching. After a season, his parishioners came to him asking, “*Dr. Luther, why, week after week, do you continue to preach this same message to us?*” – implying perhaps they were ready for something else. And Luther said in reply, “*Because week after week, you forget it. Because you look like a people who do not believe the gospel. And until you walk in looking like a people truly liberated by the gospel, I’m going to continue to preach it to you.*” Preach it, brother Martin. Because I need to hear it. And so do you – every single person in this room. The law cannot save us in any way. How can it? We may think it can but it can’t. But Jesus can. So let us trust, depend, and delight in Him.

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