

Dead To the Law, but Alive Through Christ

Galatians 2:17-21, Oculi Sunday

March 7, 2010

Beloved of the Lord....Have you ever done a bad thing that makes you feel terrible, and then tried to do something good so you don't feel so bad? Have you ever done a bad thing, and then tried to punish or deprive yourself of something so you would feel better? When we do good because we have done evil it is our sinful flesh trying to save itself by its works. By doing this "kind" of good because we feel guilty, we actually do more evil. But let me now straightly ask you dear Christian, when you sin, when you do that which is bad, what should you do? Faith here responds, "Repent and turn to Christ for forgiveness." But faith does not answer "Do good to counterbalance the evil." Thus the theme for our sermon today is this: DEAD TO THE LAW, BUT ALIVE THROUGH CHRIST. The knowledge of the law by way of sin brings with it the knowledge of our death, but the knowledge of the Gospel brings with it the knowledge of our eternal life through Christ, "that I might live unto God." "I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

In order to understand today's lesson we need a little background information. There was a time when Peter went to visit the Gentile Antioch congregation. Though Peter was a Jew he always ate with the Gentiles, for the Gospel freed Peter of the ceremonial law which prohibited Jews from eating with Gentiles. However, when certain strict Jews came from Jerusalem to visit Antioch, Peter fearing their judgment, stopped eating with the Gentiles and moved to the table of the Jews. By doing so Peter unintentionally taught the Gentiles that they too must keep Jewish law if they were to be saved.

With that background Paul now writes, "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid." This means we, like Peter and Paul, know we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone. We know "that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ." But if when we seek to be justified by Him alone we are found to be attempting to save ourselves by works to make up for the evil, is Christ in us going to be used to serve sin? God forbid! In a nutshell this verse teaches salvation by the Gospel through Christ has nothing to do with salvation by the law through works. Thus if we as Christians know we are justified by Christ alone yet at the same time we live as if our good works can counterbalance our evil,

aren't we contradicting Christ in us. That is exactly what Peter did when he sat down to eat with the Jews. He contradicted his own Gospel faith. Peter rightly taught the Gentiles they were free from Jewish ceremonial laws because Jesus abolished them, yet when Peter switched tables, he by practice taught Christians must keep Jewish law if he were to be saved. Paul therefore writes Christ is not the servant of sin. You Peter have sinned against Christ, who teaches Jews and Gentiles alike are justified by grace alone, given through Christ alone, who is received by faith alone!

The Bible makes it more than clear that no man is able to save himself by the law because in the law demands perfection. Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Likewise when God says "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not", God is not saying "Do the best you can and cross your fingers". He is saying, "Do it, and do it perfectly with pure love of heart". These are commandments, not suggestions or recommendations. Thus if the question is asked, "Does God demand and command of sinners something which is impossible for them to do?".... the answer is YES, ABSOLUTELY, and those who do not fall under the curse of the law and will receive damnation except Christ come and save them. Galatians 3 says, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Hence the law way of salvation provides no salvation for man. "By the deeds of the law shall not flesh be justified in His sight.

Hence Paul writes, "For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." What does this mean? If we make the keeping of the law into the picture of a perfectly built house, by way of sin we are like the arsonist who burns the whole house down to the ground. Then out of guilt we go back to the site of our crime and try to rebuild it. By the mere attempt to rebuild the very thing we destroyed, we show and reveal our own guilt. Why would those who have been freed by the Gospel through Christ turn back and again try to be saved by the law? This is a warning to all Christians not to fall from the Gospel way which is the only way. But let us also understand that often enough we are like Peter in his moment of weakness. Instead of repenting, we try to make up for the bad by doing good. Perhaps we unjustly yell at our children in anger, and then feeling bad we buy them an ice cream cone. Perhaps we unjustly snap at our wives, and then feeling guilty we buy them flowers. In both cases shouldn't we ask

forgiveness of the one we sinned against, repent and turn to Christ for mercy?

Thus Paul writes, "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." Every Christian knows in God's Ten Commandments there is nothing but death and damnation for me. "I know I cannot keep them, and whenever I try I miserably fail. I am dead to that law. Thanks be to God Jesus removed this curse of the law from me by way of the cross. Jesus came to save me from my own sins. Through Christ the law has no dominion over me, and I through Jesus live in a state of grace." Thus while the law brings us only death, Christ brings us only life saying, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Hence "The just shall live by faith." We are dead in trespasses and sins yet through Him we live and heaven is our home.

Truly Christ brings life to broken sinners. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things are passed away and all things become new." Through Christ we are free from the curse of the law, free from death and damnation, free from the devil and his power of sin, YEA we are given a NEW LIEF, SPIRITUA LIFE, EVEN EVERLSTING LIFE IN HEAVEN. Hence the Bible says, "The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Having conquered our sin Jesus rose from the dead as He said He would. We too shall rise!

Hence "I am crucified with Christ nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." Ah what joyful and uplifting words these are! The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me!... FOR ME FOR ME FOR ME! Though it hurts us to know and understand that it was our sins which hurt Jesus and caused Him the most bitter pain on the cross, when we consider His great and infinite love which moved Him to do so, our cold and stony hearts finally melt and are broken. We can resist His grace no longer. We now know why He came. We know why He suffered. Faith is kindled the moment we understand "Jesus died for me." Though I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live and Christ now lives in me. Old things pass away, behold all things become new.

Knowing Him who loves us, our faith in Him causes us to live by Him, for Him. It is a new life, a spiritual life by faith in Christ. Now through Christ we have a beginning of good works, which are nothing more than our THANK YOU to God. "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath

before ordained that we should walk in them." Now when we sin against our family or neighbor, we confess our sin to our family, neighbor, and to God. Works by guilt cannot prosper by works by faith are always fruitful and "faith worketh by love." When we walk by faith and not by sight, we amend our sinful ways. "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace". Though we are often like Peter and our old man within will always try to save himself by works: the new man within us, Christ in us, knows Christ alone is our salvation, and through Christ our salvation is secure. Thus we are dead to the law but alive through Christ. All these sins are forgiven, not by gold or silver, but by His holy precious blood. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us."

Therefore let us "not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." We should never do any works which are contrary to the Gospel but our works must always agree with the Gospel. We keep the Ten Commandments out of love for God, not guilt, "by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." Concerning those works God neither commands nor forbids we are free. If it furthers the cause of the Gospel we do them, but if it is contrary we do not. But regarding the Ten Commandments where God's Word is perfectly clear, obey with love in our heart, but do not despair if you fail. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, hence we are dead to the law but alive through Christ.

Finally dear Christian, since righteousness does not come by the law, but Christ alone, do not let His death be in vain. God's grace is freely given therefore freely receive it in faith. Knowing Him who loved us, daily put away your dead works by repentance, and daily clothe yourself by faith in the garment of Christ righteousness. The Gospel of Jesus Christ does not make us righteous, but the Gospel counts us as righteous through Christ. Therefore "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Amen.