

“Living by Law; Living by Grace”

April 17, 2011

Text: Galatians 5:2-6

In the final scene of the film *The Perfect Storm*, a man named Bobby is shown swimming far out at sea.

As the camera widens the picture, you see enormous waves all around him, with neither land nor vessel anywhere in sight.

A huge storm has sunk the fishing boat he was on, all his crewmates have drowned, and he is alone.

He has no life jacket, & there's no hope he'll ever have strength enough to swim safely to shore.

His fate is sealed, & he's left to tread water until he's completely exhausted, then sink beneath the waves.

That for me, is a perfect picture of man trying to save his own soul through exhausting moral efforts to obey God's Law, treading to stay afloat in a sea of man's unrighteousness.

Human moral strength can't achieve such an impossible task, so he can only do his best to obey the Law for a while, then submit to its inevitable judgment of his failure, as his soul succumbs to spiritual death.

Bobby, the character in *The Perfect Storm*, made his fatal mistake by choosing to work on a boat that was doomed, because of its captain's recklessness/bad-judgment.

And those who choose the Law as their means of justification are equally doomed, unless God takes them off that ship, & places them on the good ship of His grace.

Until a person's faith rests entirely/exclusively on God's grace, his soul is headed for disaster, with no hope of his being saved, from the vast ocean of his own sinfulness/unrighteousness [Rom 3:9-18, 23].

Today's text pictures 2 different strategies (“ships” if you like) for seeking justification: One through living by the Law, the other through living by God's grace...

Paul will contrast 4 consequences of each of these 2 strategies.

*** Strategy #1—Living by the Law**

Consequence #1: Seeking justification through the Law is devoid of God's help.

[Galatians 5:2]=> “Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no *benefit* [help] to you.”

Paul was telling His Jewish readers (and the Gentiles who had come under the influence of Judaizers) that X's atoning death cannot benefit anyone who places any trust whatever in his own religious deeds, to save his soul.

That would be totally incompatible with trusting in God's grace.

If the Galatian Gentiles were determined to seek salvation through circumcision & obedience to the Law, they must go it alone, because X wouldn't help them at all.

They had to choose between the ship of human righteousness, & the ship of God's grace, but not both.

And if they tried to simply add their own legalistic efforts to the full/free salvation X offers, He would completely withdraw, & leave them to fail alone, to drown in their own sinful self-righteousness.

The words “Behold I, Paul,” mean he's telling his readers to listen very carefully, because the issues are so critically important.

If they submit to circumcision, thinking that, or any other part, of the Mosaic Law will help save their souls, they're making a mistake, because X won't help them use the Law that way. In fact, their doing so would prevent X from helping them at all, because circumcision was for them the symbol of salvation by works, which X often repudiated. That made it an implicit refusal to trust in God's grace, the only means by which X will save a soul.

God had originally given the Jews the sign of circumcision as a reminder of His gracious covenant promise to Abraham on their behalf.

He also meant it to be an object lesson, teaching the Jews about His desire to cut away the evil from their hearts, so they would be totally devoted to Him.

Deut 30:6=> "*The LORD your God will **circumcise** your **heart** & the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart & with all your soul, in order that you may live.*"

But the Judaizers (like many other Jews) had come to view circumcision as a meritorious act guaranteeing God's favor.

So they didn't believe they needed X's help, to save them.

After all, they already had the sign of His covenant in their flesh, & it was a source of great pride for them.

Consequence #2: Seeking justification thru the Law leads to hopeless unrighteousness.

[Verse 3] (Paul)=> "*And I testify [marturomai—I insist, I protest, I emphatically assert=> Paul urgently wants the Galatians to realize how serious a mistake they're making] again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the **whole** Law.*"

No one could obey the whole Law perfectly, making himself righteous.

The Law would only prove that he's unrighteous;

That he cannot achieve moral perfection.

So justification through the Law is a hopeless pipe dream.

Any attempt to earn justification can only lead to failure, & then the Law would condemn the person for that failure.

Circumcision was the seal of the Law.

Anyone who deliberately underwent circumcision was making a promise to fulfill all the Law's requirements perfectly.

He could no longer plead the grace of X, having chosen/entered a different mode of justification.

He had abandoned the ship of grace, & gone aboard the doomed ship of Law, ignorant of its deadly course/destination.

The Law itself accepts no other terms, but moral perfection.

That's why Paul had quoted the Law in Gal 3:10=> "*For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM [Deut 27:26].'*"

Paul is saying that anyone who takes on the challenge of obeying the Law on its terms, is automatically placing himself under a curse, because he will inevitably fail.

And the Law itself curses all those who fail.

If someone decided at some point in his life to obey the Law, & he actually obeyed it perfectly right up to the moment before his death, then broke 1 commandment, he'd be lost.

But in reality, even if he didn't fail at that last moment, he'd still be lost, because of all the sins he had committed before he even began.

The Law permits no start-overs.

Someone: "Well then, why would anyone even try to save his own soul through obedience to the Law?"

That's exactly the point!

It's a hopeless attempt to make oneself righteous, that ends up in proving oneself to be unrighteous.

In even making such a commitment, he would simply condemn himself, w/ no hope of redemption, because

Ezek 18:20 says=> "*The person who sins will die*" and he has already sinned by breaking God's Law, so he's already condemned even before he commits himself to obeying the Law.

It's a hopeless venture.

The Judaizers hadn't shared all this with the Galatians.

But Gal 6:13 says they didn't keep the Law themselves.

3rd consequence: Seeking justification through the Law severs one from Christ.

[Verse 4]=> "*You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.*"

"Severed" is a difficult word to translate, but ultimately it means to become separated from X, no longer having any spiritual connection with Him at all.

The Galatians tried to add circumcision to their faith in Jesus, thinking that would double their chances for salvation and their soul's security.

But as a result of it, they became lost to X, because this is offensive to God, & drives man away from Him.

Jesus will fully/freely save those who wholeheartedly believe in Him alone, but He will not save anyone who tries to add his own works to X's gracious/atoning death.

Rom 11:6=> "*If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.*"

Legalism is human pride seeking to add man's useless efforts to X's incomparable/Self-sacrificing gift.

4th consequence: Seeking justification through the Law causes one to fall from grace.

Paul says that when a person becomes severed from X like that, he loses/falls-from God's saving grace.

This cannot mean that a person who is saved loses his salvation.

That would contradict the doctrine of God's preservation of the saints, which we find throughout Scripture.

* E.g. Rom 8:39=> "*...nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our [the believer's] Lord.*"

* Rom 11:29 says God's gifts/calling are irrevocable.

* In Jn 10:27, Jesus said=> "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; / and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never [ou me—a double negative meaning under no circumstances] perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand*" (27-28).

Paul is not talking about a saved person becoming unsaved.

He's talking about someone who isn't yet saved, but is examining the claims of X, with a view to possibly giving his/her heart to the Lord by faith.

It's people like this who can be severed from X, if they don't believe in Him, and thus fall away from God's grace.

Scripture repeatedly exhorts such people to continue in the faith so they won't fall away but will become born again.

* E.g. Jesus' words in Jn 8:31=> *"If you **abide** in My word, **then** you are truly **disciples of Mine.**"*

* Jn 15:6 (Jesus)=> *"If anyone does **not abide** in Me, he is **thrown away** as a branch, & dries up; & they gather them, & cast them into the fire, and they are burned."*

* Acts 11:23=> *"When **he** [Barnabas] had come and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to **remain true** to the Lord."*

* Heb 3:14=> *"We have become **partakers** of Christ, **if** we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end."*

Longevity in the faith proves the genuineness of our faith.

* 1 Jn 2:19=> *"They went out from us, but they were **not really of us**; for if they had been of us, they would have **remained** with us."*

The greatest danger to those who procrastinate about making a final commitment to X, is that their procrastination can turn into indifference, and indifference can become hardened unbelief.

That is a state of apostasy from which no one can return (the spiritual equivalent of a "black hole").

Heb 6:4=> *"For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, / and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, / and **then have fallen away**, it is **impossible to renew** them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame" (4-6).*

When someone has experienced firsthand all the blessings of the Xn life w/o committing himself to X, the H.S. can w/draw from him, removing any further possibility of his repenting/believing.

This is the danger of becoming severed from X.

It's the danger of falling from God's grace.

Each of us should carefully examine the foundation of his/her own eternal hopes.

Heb 4:1=> *"Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it."*

Let's be sure we're resting completely in God's grace, & X's atoning death, for our salvation.

That we have forever abandoned any thought of trying to earn our own justification by obedience to any moral law.

Review

Justification through the Law is helpless, hopeless, Christless, and graceless.

* Strategy #2—Living by Grace

Paul now presents the opposite of trying to live by the Law=> living by God's grace.

He signals this change by switching pronouns from "you" (2-4) to "we" (5-6)—including himself/all-true-Xns in that "we."

- * Whereas those living by the Law are devoid of God's help, we who live by grace are enabled/empowered by God the H.S.
- *2. People who live by Law are left hopelessly unrighteous, but we who live by grace are hopeful of perfect righteousness.
- *3. Men/women who try to live out the Law are severed from X, but we are "in Christ," positionally.
- *4. People who seek to live by the Law have fallen from grace, but we are thriving in God's grace.

1st, justification by grace occurs through God's enablement.

[Verse 5]=> "*For we [emphasized—in contrast to those who have fallen from grace] through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting [not working] for the hope of righteousness.*"

While legalists try to justify themselves without God's help, we Xns have the benefit of the H.S.'s enablement.

They cherish the false hope of being justified by their own works, but we have been justified by the H.S., through simple faith.

* 1 Cor 6:11 says we're "*justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.*"

* Rom 8:2 says the law of the "*Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*" has set us free from the law of sin & of death (to which the legalists are still enslaved).

We have already been justified by the H.S., so there's no need for us to work at justifying ourselves.

Paul has taught the Galatians that because we are sons of God, He has sent His Spirit into our hearts (Gal 4:6).

The next verse goes on to say that's why we are no longer slaves of the Law, but sons and heirs of God (4:7).

From here on (in Galatians) Paul will be teaching us to walk by the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, bear the fruit of the Spirit, live by the Spirit, and sow to the Spirit.

The H.S. and His power operating in our hearts/lives is the key difference between us and those who are trying to save their own souls with good deeds & religious activity.

Consequence #2, our grace-strategy gives us hope of ultimate righteousness.

People who are living by the Law are frenetically trying to make themselves righteous by their own moral efforts.

And they're constantly failing.

It's a hopeless/frustrating task, because the Fall of man has left them so morally weak, they're doomed to failure.

People living by grace, have been imputed w/ God's own righteousness, so they're already free from the Law's condemnation.

Moreover, at the time of their regeneration, God's Law was written on their hearts, so that they truly desire to obey it;

And the H.S. has indwelt them to help them do so.

But they still sin at times, which makes them so uncomfortable that Paul says in Rom 7:22-23=>

"I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, / but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, & making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members."

The Xn's great hope/expectation is that someday he will become perfectly righteous, when he has been glorified.

He will have conquered sin, never again to suffer guilt, the lack of assurance that guilt breeds, or questions about whether/not God could still really love a sinner like him.

In 2 Thes 2, Paul says God has chosen us for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit, and by faith.

Then in the next verse, he adds this=> *“It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the **glory** of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (II Thes 2:13-14).

Eph 1:14 says the H.S. was given to us as a pledge that God will indeed do this for us *“to the praise of His glory.”*

We are *“waiting for the hope of [perfect] righteousness”*—that final all-encompassing sense of happiness that will result from the H.S.’s completing His sanctifying work in our hearts, as a final gift of God’s grace, for which we’ve believed/hoped.

Consequence #3: justification by grace means we are positionally “In Christ.”

[Verse 6a]=> *“For **in Christ Jesus** neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith...”*

John 14:20 says God sees us “in X”, X in us, & X in the Father.

We couldn’t be more tightly bound to the entire Godhead.

* Those who try to earn acceptance with God, by living according to the Law, are severed from X, & thus fallen from grace.

* But we, having been baptized into X by the H.S., have been brought into this blessed union with Him.

By contrast, the legalists’ religious deeds are meaningless.

In fact, nothing done in the flesh makes any difference in one’s relationship w/ God;

Only faith in the gospel message that X died for sinners, was raised by God, & lives to redeem His people’s souls from the condemnation of the Law.

Only faith in that truth can justify/save a soul.

Believe that simple truth, and X will transfer you from the sinking ship of the Law, to God’s ship of grace, that is on course for the perfect/glorious righteousness of heaven.

Paul says that both circumcision/uncircumcision mean nothing, as no such religious acts have any spiritual value.

He’s saying that religious form, whether it be formal worship with an ornately robed priest, or the informal worship of a cowboy church & a banjo player, means nothing.

Some people like hymns while others prefer choruses, but none of that makes any real difference either.

The only thing that really matters is the reality of our faith.

4th, those who are justified & live by grace, thrive in grace.

Again [Verse 6]=> *“In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but **faith working through love.**”*

Only genuine faith results in justification, and those who truly believe, thrive in the grace of God.

Paul gives us 2 tests for determining whether our faith is genuine:

* 1st, genuine faith works and produces spiritual fruit, because it has been activated within us, by the Holy Spirit.

Faith that doesn’t do good works, is dead/non-saving faith.

Jms 2:15-17=> *“If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, / and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? / Even so faith, if it has **no works**, is **dead**, being by itself.”*

I.e., it’s not genuine saving faith.

* 2nd, genuine faith works through love.

It serves the Lord out of love for Him, & thrives in the knowledge that it is glorifying His name.

It also loves the people it serves in His name, because God has poured His love into our hearts (Rom 5:5).

Real faith in Jesus X always produces love for Him.

When the Prodigal Son first came to his senses, he said, *“I will get up and go to my father”* (Lk 15:18).

So when faith awakens a soul, realizing the gracious gift God has given, its natural response is also grateful affection, toward God saying, He has saved me from going down to the pit!”

Such a soul loves God for adopting him, for giving him the Holy Spirit, & for granting him an eternal inheritance.

Faith goes on to explore God’s wondrous goodness, constantly finding more about Him that his spirit is compelled to love.

He progressively discovers the depths of God’s love for him, & feels freer to cast his anxieties on the Lord, coming away from prayer w/ his burdens lifted/relieved.

Just as acquaintance over the years causes 2 people to become more alike, the believer’s relationship with X causes him to grow more/more like his beloved Lord/Savior/Friend.

Eph 4:15 says we *“grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.”*

As our faith conforms us to His image, our love is nurtured by our growing likeness to X, in disposition/character.

So a Xn who feels he doesn’t love the Lord enough, should carefully examine his heart to make sure he really believes.

All those who are born of God, love God (1 Jn 5:2).

The heart that lacks love may actually lack real faith, & he will never love the Lord until he truly believes in Him.

Even those who believe with genuine saving faith, can become distracted at times by the demands/pressures of this world.

But love for X will still lie smoldering w/i their hearts, & as their faith grows stronger, their love will burn brightly again.

Paul says that faith works through love, but it’s also true that our faith/love depend on each other.

E.g. we can’t really love Jesus unless we actually believe in Him as Scripture reveals Him to be.

If we doubt the Lord in times of trouble, our love will fade, and we’ll question His love for us.

But as our faith is renewed/strengthened, our love will grow in proportion to it.

Here’s another example of love’s dependence on faith=>

Love longs for the whole world to become saved, but faith knows w/o doubt that its unsaved neighbor with terminal cancer will perish, unless he becomes saved;

And the hell to which he will be consigned is not simply a theological metaphor.

Out of this conviction, it shares the gospel with him.

Love can get misty-eyed as it sings, *O, How I Love Jesus*.

But if not accompanied by real faith, the mist will dry up, some less noble emotion will take over, & that same person may soon be acting in a very unloving, un-X-like way.

So true Xn love is entirely dependent on true Xn faith.

But just as love depends on faith, so faith depends on love.

The arm of faith which reaches out to others for X, is love.

Without love, faith is a handicapped cripple, which is why Paul writes that “faith works through love.”

Without love, faith is just a theologian sitting and think great thoughts all day, but never ministering to others.

Faith believes and resolves, but when it goes into action, it must depend on love for its power/energy.

Faith recognizes its need to be fully committed to Jesus X, but love for X can actually drive it to make great sacrifices.

Faith knows it has a duty to spend time with the Lord in prayer, but love delights in doing so, just as Mary delighted in sitting at Jesus’ feet while Martha worked in the house.

In fact, w/o love, our prayers are sterile, heartless, and ineffective.

Faith knows that it should gather together with other Xns on Sunday to worship the Lord, and may feel that by doing so, it’s making a great/meritorious sacrifice for the Lord.

But love finds its greatest joy in worshiping Him.

Summing Up

Friends, either we can live/thrive on God’s boundless grace;

Or like Bobby in *The Perfect Storm*, we can try to live by the Law, lost on a merciless sea of human unrighteousness, trying to stay afloat until our strength gives out.

Far better to depend on God’s grace and discover the joys of salvation in our own lives.