

The Third Sunday after Pentecost - May 28, 31 & June 1 2008
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

IT'S ONE WAY. IT CAN'T BE BOTH GALATIANS 3:10-13

The longer you live and the more experiences you have, you soon learn that certain things in life can be done more than one way. Often we assume that our way of doing things is the only correct way and everyone else's way is wrong. It may be the route you drive to the store or it can be a certain brand of car you purchase or the way you fold towels. Whatever it is, just because you prefer it one way or do it a certain way does not mean that everyone else's preferences and ways of doing something are wrong.

However, when it comes to the way that people are right with God and get to heaven; there is only one way. Unfortunately because we have become accustomed in everything else to assume that there is more than one way, we begin to think that in our relationship with God and in the way to heaven, there is more than one way. In our reading for today the Apostle Paul addresses this whole issue.

Paul had founded the congregations in the province of Galatia during his first missionary journey. Galatia today would be found in central Turkey. The congregations that were founded by Paul in that area were in Antioch, Lystra, Iconium and Derbe. Many of those who were converted to trust in Jesus as their Savior by the Holy Spirit were Gentiles and a good number of Jews. However Paul and Barnabas found a great deal of opposition to the Gospel and faced persecution from the Jewish community who rejected their message. Paul returned to this area a second time after the church Council in Jerusalem in 49/50 AD to deliver to the churches the decisions that had been agreed upon regarding the observing of Old Testament laws and regulations. It seems that shortly after Paul's departure the congregation was troubled by a group of people named Judaizers. These were Jews who had been converted to Christianity and trusted that Jesus was the promised Messiah and Savior of the world. However, they taught that just trusting in Jesus as your Savior was not enough. You also had to follow the Old Testament laws and regulations. They told these Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians that they would have to follow the Jewish dietary laws. They couldn't eat pork or shellfish. They would have to be circumcised. They would have to worship on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath day. When this news got to Paul he wrote his letter to the Galatians towards the end of his second missionary journey, about 52 AD and probably from the city of Corinth, Greece. In this portion of God's Word before us today Paul is dealing with this whole issue of whether the way of salvation is through Jesus alone or is it Jesus plus a person's following of certain laws and regulations. As we consider God's Word to us we are impressed with this truth **IT'S ONE WAY. IT CAN'T BE BOTH.** Paul sets before us very carefully **I) The Way of the Law.** He then beautifully describes for us **II) The Way of the Promise**

THE WAY OF THE LAW

The Judaizers who were plaguing the Gentile Christians in Galatia did not deny that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah of the world. They confessed that Jesus was their Savior. However, they told the Gentile Galatians that Jesus was not enough. They would also have to follow the Old Testament laws and regulations that these Jewish Christians had been raised with and followed before the coming of the Messiah. They had to be circumcised. They had to follow all the dietary rules that these Jews had. They had to worship on the seventh day of the week, Saturday. In other words, they were telling these new believers that to be truly Christians you have to do all these things. Paul had just left these congregations telling them that they were not bound by these Old Testament rules and regulations because they had pointed to Christ. Now that Christ had come and fulfilled them they were no longer bound by them.

Paul begins by saying, "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." (v. 10) God will curse that is damn everyone who does not continually keep all of the commands of the law. You can't pick and choose

which laws you like and will obey and which you don't like. Every single law needs to be observed and it must be observed and kept perfectly. As Paul also writes in this section, "The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, 'the man who does these things will live by them.'" There is another way to heaven. That is keeping the law perfectly. However, every one of us is incapable of doing this because since the moment of our conception we have been infected with the disease of sin. That is why Paul concludes, "Certainly no one is justified before God by the law." (v.11a) There is no way that any of us can get right with God by following the law. Why not? Because we can't keep it perfectly. Oh, we may keep one law or two but there are numerous others that we break everyday without even knowing it. As a result we are under a curse. We are cursed because we are not perfect. Is that fair? It certainly is. For our holy God says, "Be holy because I, the Lord your God am holy." (Leviticus 19:2) It is God the Almighty Creator and Judge of the world who sets the rules. We don't.

Just as the Galatians were plagued by this idea that they had to do something to be right with God in addition to relying on Jesus for what he had done for them, so we also can fall into that type of thinking. We begin trusting in the fact that we have lived pretty decent lives, we have gone to church, we have not robbed a bank, we haven't murdered anyone and we conclude, "God should accept me because I have tried to live an upright and moral life." God demands perfection not our best shot. Or we look down on others who have stumbled on their way through life who have been entrapped by certain sins and consider ourselves better than such people. We may also begin to think that such people do not deserve God's pardon and mercy because they have lived such immoral and corrupt lives. No one is better than anyone else when it comes to being under the law. For the Bible says, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:22c-23) So if we want to be right with God by observing the law, we are under a curse. But there is good news. There is the good news of the promise.

THE WAY OF THE PROMISE

There is a way that we are justified, declared forgiven and right with God. Listen to what Paul writes, "The righteous will live by faith. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." (Vv. 11b-13) If you want to get right with God by trying to keep the law, you can try, but it doesn't work. The other way is the way of the promise. Jesus did keep the law for us. Since we can't keep it, Jesus placed himself under the law and was totally obedient all the time for the entire human race. Then to rescue us from the curse of the law, since we could not keep it; Jesus was cursed, that is damned, for us. He became a curse so that we don't have to be cursed. Paul then quotes from the Old Testament, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." The way of capital punishment in the Old Testament was to stone someone to death. If a person was hung on a tree he was considered cursed. When Jesus was nailed to the tree of the cross, he was cursed. God did damn him. He punished him with the torments of hell, the cursing that we should receive.

Because Jesus was cursed we have been set free. The law can no longer hurl its curses at us. For we are not under the law. We are under grace. We are right before God because God has declared us right and holy in his sight. What comfort and peace that gives to each of us. It's not dependent on me and what I do. It has all been done for me in Jesus Christ. He was cursed so that I might never experience the curse of hell.

We also have a secure future. Today many worry about their future on this earth. They have done much to try and make their retirement years safe and secure. They have saved and been wise managers of the resources that God has entrusted to them. Now with the economy in turmoil and the cost of things changing daily, their security is not so safe. Will their savings see them through their retirement? Will a stay in the nursing home wipe them out financially? Will an illness and a hospital stay wipe out their savings and their hope for a stable and secure future? Who knows? Fortunately, our eternal future is not dependent on what we have saved, how well we have managed our earthly resources. Our eternal future is safe and secure because it is all on what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us.

We are people of the promise. We trust the Lord Jesus Christ for our pardon. We rely on our Savior who has set us free from the curse of the law and has secured for us an eternal home in heaven.
Amen.