

Introduction

If you go to any home improvement store you can find rolls of yellow caution tape. Law enforcement officers use it to mark off and protect crime scenes. It will sometimes say, "Police Line: Do Not Cross." If you watch many detective shows, it is that tape across a door or in front of a yard that is regularly disregarded as a reporter or private investigator or a criminal presses across the line to find that one piece of critical evidence.

This morning as we continue to move forward in our study of Galatians, it might help us grasp what Paul is saying in this text if we imagine him at the beginning of Galatians 5 to be laying down a strip of caution tape that says "Do not cross." In verse 1 he warns his readers, "do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." To turn back to such a yoke is not only senseless, it is catastrophic. So Paul is showing his readers why they must not cross the line.

[Read text and Pray]

I hope you can see from this reading this morning that Paul is giving a sobering warning not to cross the line. The line he is talking about is the line where a person departs from genuine biblical Christianity. It has a little bit of Jesus and a lot of works of the mosaic law. It is the understanding that my law-keeping must supplement the work of Christ to make me acceptable to God—to render me justified. It stands in stark opposition to justification through faith in Christ alone.

At this point in his letter, Paul has drawn a line in the sand so-to-speak. And he is saying, if you cross this line the consequences are catastrophic. We can divide these catastrophic consequences into three categories. We will look at each of them and see that whoever crosses the line to revert to a yoke of slavery by submitting to a works salvation—even if it is religious works—will find themselves separated from the Savior, faked out by a forgery, and persuaded by an enemy.

So the first aspect of the calamity is they would be ...

I. Separated from the Savior.

Like the bright yellow color of caution tape, Paul uses his words to seize the attention of his readers. "Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, you are crossing a line that dare not be crossed." Remember circumcision was not the only matter of Judaism that the Judaizers were promoting. However, it was the matter into which a man probably would not simply fall in of a moment of weakness. Serious commitment was at issue. And so if one went so far as to be circumcised, they had crossed the line. They would be manifesting not only an instance of legalism but the embrace of it. They would be stepping across a critical line of decision. And there would be consequences.

Most graphically and alarmingly, says Paul, they would be separated from the Savior. Separation is the opposite of union. In union, one is joined together with another. But in separation there is no union. Union with Christ is one of the most glorious truths of the Bible for those who believe in Christ. Union with Christ means his death is ours; his life is ours; his power is ours; his atonement is ours; and our sins are his. But Paul's clear and present warning is that if one turns away from faith alone in Christ alone for justification, then there is no union with Christ but separation from him.

Actually these are his words. He says, "if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you." In verse 4, he starkly says accepting circumcision puts one in the position of being SEVERED from Christ. Then he goes further to use this phrase that is filled with gravity: "you have fallen away from grace." If a person is trusting in his works to be accepted with God to obtain right standing with God, Christ is no benefit for him. Christ will be no advantage for those whose confidence rests in anything other than or in addition to Jesus. On Christ the solid rock I stand; ALL other ground is sinking sand. ALL OTHER ground is sinking sand. Christ will not share the accomplishments of his life and death and resurrection with those whose hope is not grounded exclusively in him. So Paul says, if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you."

Moreover, you are in the position of being severed from Christ. This language reflects being cutoff. By having outwardly associated with believers there was the appearance of being in union with Christ. Now from an outward perspective this one is severed. He is cut off from Christ and cut off from the faithful people who rest in Christ alone. In fact he has fallen from grace. Now that is an interesting phrase, "fallen from grace." And it has produced an enormous amount of theological conflict. The core question of untold debates is this one: Can a person fall from grace?

The intent of that question is to ask whether one can be truly saved and then lose that salvation. And if you have been around here a while then you know this church agrees with what we see as the biblical truth that if a person is truly saved, then they will not lose that salvation. We affirm the point of grace called "perseverance of the saints." Romans 8:29-30 puts it in a nutshell. "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." The salvation of God has a number of distinct aspects, but if you have one, you have them all. If you are truly saved then you cannot lose that salvation because the reason you are saved is that God is the one doing the saving from beginning to end. It all started with the predestinating determination of God and it then all depends on God. He fore-loved; these he also predestined; these he also called; these he also justified; these he also glorified. The very nature of God's work in salvation is what assures us that one cannot lose one's salvation.

What Paul is speaking of with the phrase, "you have fallen from grace," is the fact that folks will seek salvation on either one of two levels. It will be either the level of grace through faith alone or merit through works of the law. If anyone for a time embraces the gospel of grace but later turns to try to satisfy God through their works, they have fallen from grace. They have abandoned the idea of being saved by grace. The implication from a biblical perspective would be that their failure to persevere demonstrated not that they were saved once and now are lost. Rather the implication is that they were never truly saved at all. John through his first epistle is well-known for declaring of those who left the church that "they went out from us because they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would not have gone out from us."

What describes the Christian who has been saved as he awaits Christ's return? What describes the nature of the Christian life as regards our works then? Paul states it in verse 5. "For through the Spirit by faith we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness." It is not that we are righteous already, but to be fully righteous is something future. In Christ we are declared righteous; we are CONSIDERED by God to be righteous. But the fullness of righteousness is still to come. It is what we expectantly and enthusiastically await. How do we wait? By doing good works, hoping that they help convince God to really save us? No. It is not by attempting to produce perfect

righteousness by our own good works. Rather, we wait through the Spirit by faith. And that is not to say that we are idle, but our good works are the fruit of the Spirit at work in us.

But what we most need to see in this section is the absolute and complete dichotomy that exists here. There is a division between two mutually exclusive ways of approach to be right with God, and there is no middle ground. On the one hand, there is works which seek to merit the favor of God. On the other hand, there is faith which operates according to grace and receives the favor of God as a gift. Paul's point is that if a person ever crosses the line even by trying to add works of the law to faith, it can no longer be a matter of grace because whenever works are added in, it is no longer a gift but what is owed. Grace is not when you get a little more than you deserve. Grace is when you receive good as the opposite of the punishment that you deserve. Paul put it this way in Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

A person never goes to heaven for trying really hard to keep the law of God. Christ is of NO advantage to that person. A person who is trying really hard is severed from Christ and has fallen from grace to the level of merit. Those are frightening consequences! I hope they do not pertain to any of you. But if they do, all hope is not lost. You can repent right now. You can forsake your hope in works righteousness. You can turn and trust exclusively in Christ right this moment.

So one stinging consequence of crossing the line is being separated from the savior. Another is being

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II. Faked Out by a Forgery

One of the tactics athletes use in competition is deception. They pretend to be doing one thing and then suddenly do another. Wide receivers blast down the field like they are going all the way; but then suddenly they plant their foot and make a sharp turn in the hope to get open for a pass. The defensive back that is not on his toes may be easily faked out.

A forgery is of course an imitation of something valuable that turns out to be worthless. When people turn away from faith alone in Christ alone to put confidence in their works, they have in effect been faked out. They wrongly believe their works are valuable, but these are no better than filthy rags. They have no merit with God. So, to turn one's confidence in that direction is to be faked out by a forgery. They miss the real thing for a worthless substitute. This is the point Paul is making in verse 6. Here is a second consequence of reverting to a yoke of slavery. What does Paul say here? He says that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love."

The thing that matters in Christ is FAITH working by the means of love; everything else is a fake-out. People who go after other approaches go after forgeries of what really matters. Now Satan is a liar and the father of lies. And his specialty is forgeries. He offers things that appeal to human flesh with the promise they will bring the same or better ultimate result than what God has promised. Satan is the ultimate faker. If you ever take the bait, you will miss the real thing. If we know the real thing, then we will clearly see when there is a forgery or a fake. So here is the real thing. This is what matters in Christ—only faith working through love.

Faith is the root and love is the fruit. It is by faith we are united with Jesus. And so rooted in Christ what will flow through our lives is love. And this is what matters. Here is the life that pleases God. Here is what really matters. It is not whether one has been circumcised. Rather it is that one trusts in God and Christ. Out of true, saving faith will flow love. I will love him whom I trust and I will love

others by the power of God at work in me through the Holy Spirit. That love will also keep God's commandments. That is even how we know what it is to love our neighbor and to love God. We see that love is not what justifies us. Love growing as a fruit in our lives just demonstrates that we truly do belong to God. It does not make us right with God, yet it demonstrates that we ARE right with God. The opposite is true as well. If what matters is faith working through love, then if I don't have love, then I don't have saving faith.

Brothers and sisters, here is what truly matters in the life of a Christ-follower—love. If you are trusting Christ you must love Him. And if you love Him then you want to obey him. And you will want to love others. Therefore, you will act in loving ways to them. Love is a command of God to obey. It is not a ceremony to fulfill. It is an act to carry out. And that's what matters. Do a quick review of your life in terms of love. What can you change in your life to excel more fully in the fruit of love? Would you pray that God will grant you the power of the Spirit to love in a more exemplary way? And will you strive in His power toward this very wonderful fruit?

And so we come to the third category of consequence for those who cross the line. Separated from the savior, faked out by a forgery and now ...

III. Persuaded by an Enemy

It was big news this week that Tucker Carlson went to Moscow to interview Vladimir Putin. It was rather funny to me because in past times it was the mainline liberal journalists who had interviewed Putin and the world of media stood in awe, but this time it seemed like the left-leaning world had nothing but hostile comments concerning Tucker. He was after-all going to talk with the face of evil in our day. But sometimes I am not really sure in this day and time who are enemies and who are friends. The Galatians had not come to a place of clear discernment of who their enemies were and so Paul was going to help them out on this account. You see it is a dangerous thing when the one who has your ear, the one to whom you are listening, the one who is in your inner circle of counsel, is your enemy. He can destroy you in an instant. After all that's what your enemy wants to do to you. So being able to identify our enemies is a crucial matter. It is highly important to know that the counsel to which we listen is coming from one who is our friend—someone who has our best interest at heart.

With this matter in mind, we turn to verses 7-12. Paul is concerned with those who have had such an impact on the Galatians. And he has some choice words concerning them. These are the people who hindered what had seemed like such good progress the Galatians were making in the gospel. They had broken in and had HINDERED them from obeying the truth. These individuals did not come from God, the one who had called the Gentiles to salvation. These were like leaven. They were false teachers whose impact will quickly bring about further consequences in the church. They are trouble-makers who will bear the penalty. They will not be spared in the day of the Lord. They falsely assert that Paul preaches circumcision. And last, they were unsettling the Galatians. It was a disturbing effect they were causing.

The Galatians were young in the faith—they were "little ones"—and here were these false teachers who were shaking them up. Paul is filled with righteous indignation at this point. And he says something that is ... shocking. "I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves." It sounds like Paul had just had it and was wishing bodily injury upon these individuals. However, it appears a little differently if we consider Deuteronomy 23:1 in the mosaic law. That verse says, "No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord." The reference is to the mutilation of the male organs that was performed as an act of devotion and worship to pagan gods. Paul uses the very same term here in his letter that the Greek version of the

Old Testament used here in Deuteronomy 23. So his point is to say that he wishes they would just go the whole way and own up to the fact that what they are doing is no better than a pagan rite, which, instead of bringing them into the people of God, excludes them from it.

These people were enemies not only to Paul and the Galatians but to Christ and to the cross itself. Paul would never preach circumcision because then the stumbling block of the cross would be eliminated. Here again we come to the core of what is wrong with works righteousness. Human beings by our sinful nature have an affinity for works righteousness. It is because we are prideful. We like to think highly of ourselves. We love to celebrate the goodness of human works. This is why the cross is a scandalous offense to human beings. We would rather think we are good people or that we are not that bad of people or that our religious efforts can make up for our shortcomings. The cross says, "No." The cross says the shame and guilt of the human condition is such that abandoning oneself and depending on Jesus's offering of himself is the only way to be reconciled with God. The cross demonstrates the insufficiency of every human attempt to be right with God.

So to give in to the false teachers would be to become persuaded by the enemy himself. This is not the message of Paul. It is not the message of Jesus. It is not the message of any of the other apostles. It is not the message of God. It does not lead to reconciliation. It leads to death.

In the midst of this warning, Paul articulates his hope in verse 10. He says, "I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view." You know if you have been around long enough there will be people you know who will have come and gone. One day they seemingly embraced the gospel with enthusiasm. Some time later they turned away. They went after one of the various works gospels or just turned away. One day your faith will probably be tested by one of these various works gospels and the appeal it has to your flesh. Certainly persecution will arise if you refuse to relinquish the message of Jesus Christ crucified.

Remember this, those who persecute the bearers of that message are enemies of the cross, and they are enemies of your very soul. Any preacher who bears witness to a message that would take you away from Christ and Christ alone is NOT your friend. Do not be persuaded by the enemy of the cross. He is an enemy to your very soul as well.

How should you deal with people who are teetering on the edge of turning away? Do with them what Paul is doing in this letter. Appeal and reason and explain the truth. Encourage them and hope and pray. But do not let your hearts be discouraged. Continue to hold fast yourself and hold out hope for them. Keep your confidence where it belongs. Keep it in the Lord.

Conclusion

Well there you have it. A band of caution tape has been unfurled. It boldly warns: "Do Not Cross This Line." And we have seen why it is such a danger. If you do cross, you will be separated from the only one who can actually help you; you will be faked out by a forgery; and you will be persuaded by an enemy. All of these are reasons why actually you should take your stand with the Apostle Paul and warn others not to sink into the deadly mire of a works righteousness. Grace alone is found through faith alone in Christ alone.