

January 1, 2017
Circumcision and Name of Jesus
Galatians 3:23-29

There is a True/False question which is on the first test in my 8th grade confirmation class, and despite my teaching and despite your teaching as parents, I'd say that about half of my students get it wrong. The question? True or False; If we keep the Ten Commandments the best we can, we will go to heaven.

I'm betting some of you today might even get this wrong. The statement is false, false, false. Our trying to keep the commandments does absolutely zero toward salvation. It's 100% what Jesus has done! St. Paul writes just a few verses before today's reading, "*If righteousness were through the law, the Christ died for no purpose.*" Why do so many folks think otherwise? Well, just look at the season we're in.

"He's gonna find out who's naughty and nice." Be good, or don't get any presents. New Year's resolutions—I'm going to try and do better. I'm going to make myself better. Let's face it, according to the world this is how it works. If you do good, work hard, be nice, you get the reward. You get the praise for good grades, people like you, you end up with a decent job, happy home and lots of friends. If you do bad, slack off, and be a selfish jerk, you receive bad. You're berated by parents and teachers for underperforming, you don't prosper and you have no friends. Obey the law; life is good. Break the law; go to jail.

This is not how it is with God! Thank God this is not how it is with God because if it was we might as well all go home and party like it's 1999 because it's eat, drink and be merry because tomorrow we're damned. "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" We sin. If being good receives the reward, we're toast.

Today we mark the circumcision of Christ. This circumcision at eight days old is a requirement of the Torah; the instructions given to the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai along with the Ten Commandments, the tabernacle worship system and many more ceremonial and societal laws by which the Jews were to stand apart as God's chosen people. Christ was under this Law.

But Jesus Christ was without sin and thus was able to keep the law. He was able to be good, be righteous. He became a human being that He would live a perfect life under the law where we could not so that He could then give us His perfect life as a gift. This is what St. Paul is talking about when he writes, "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" You wear Jesus' keeping of the Law right like a coat.

And I'm sure some of you might be inwardly rolling your eyes thinking, "I know this Pastor. It's old hat." But do we really know this? I mean, our kids seem to struggle with it and where do they really learn from?—The example of parents, elders, friends and from the culture that surrounds them. The same can be said of well catechized Lutheran adults. Pretty much everything of the would says you should and you must do for yourself...and we listen.

It's an old trap for Christians. Jesus Christ had barely ascended to heaven following His victory over sin on the cross and His triumph over death by His resurrection when folks started trying to bring Christian obedience into the equation of salvation. Paul's entire letter to the Galatians is an exhortation of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone as the way of salvation. But folks were still dumping Paul and the true Gospel in favor of trying to save themselves by mean of the law.

It's a real temptation also. Let's face it, we like to feel good about ourselves. Accomplishing stuff makes us feel good, makes us proud. And in our self-centered sin we like to feel better than others. So we pick up the law—it may be the 10 Commandments, or maybe it the

rules of good citizenship, or good manners or etiquette, right political beliefs, true patriotism, or even proper tithing, volunteering and attendance at church, whatever—we find a law by which we can measure ourselves and consider ourselves good and we run with it. It allows me to think that's I'm doing okay, I'm pretty good...certainly better than most...and I'm pleased with myself so God is probably pleased with me too.

Wrong. That's never how the Law has worked and it certainly is not how things work in light of Christ's life, death and resurrection.

St. Paul writes, *“Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.”*

That whole sacrificial worship system given the Jews along with the Ten Commandments? It wasn't so that they could do all the rules right and therefore be righteous. It was so they would keep coming to Yahweh the one true God in faithful need, begging for forgiveness and receiving it in faith. The sacrifices they brought were a blood price, but a blood price looking forward to the promise of Messiah in faith. It all pointed to Christ.

“But now that faith has come (meaning the object of faith: Jesus Christ), we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”

What saves you is that God Almighty stands faithful to His promises of grace and mercy. What saves you is that Jesus Christ faithfully lived human faith in obedience and service to God, even unto death on a cross, and did it perfectly. What saves you is that the Holy Spirit has been faithful to you in pointing your soul to the saving Gospel Word of Jesus, Yeshua: The Lord Saves, Immanuel: God with us, and given you the gift of faith that you could believe. What saves you is God faithful to His promise that in some water and words *“Whoever believes and is*

baptized will be saved.” What saves you is God being faithful to His promise, “This is my body, this is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

It’s a one way ticket; God coming and saving you. The law, your obedience, is not in the equation.

Let me make this truth uncomfortably stark, just so nobody misunderstands. There exists today a man who fervently follows radical Islam and in his zeal has slaughtered men, women and children and made others slaves for his own pleasure. There exists today a man who is a deviant pervert who has made the lives of innocent children a horror. There exists out there a woman who without any remorse whatsoever makes a living by killing little babies still in the womb. Your life, when placed next to those of these people, ranks no better whatsoever before God.

Does that make you uncomfortable? I know it does me.

But for Christ. *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ...And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.*

By God’s faithfulness in Christ, your fallen life has been made holy, and despite your life you wear Christ and are a child of God most high. God does this. God’s law doesn’t. Man’s law doesn’t. You can’t. God does it to you in Christ.

Rejoice and give God all thanks and glory for His incredible faithfulness.

Amen.