

You Are Sons of God

Galatians 3:23-29

The Circumcision of Our Lord, January 1, 2012

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Before faith came you were shut up under the Law. You were shut up under the Law until the faith which was about to be revealed. Therefore the Law was your tutor to drive you to Christ.

At first blush it seems like faith is easier than the Law. The Law says that in order to be saved you have to do what the Law says. Faith says that in order to be saved you don't have to do anything. Jesus has already done everything for you. It sounds like faith is easier than the Law.

In this room and in rooms like it all over the world that is true. Faith is easier than the Law. But we don't spend most of our time in rooms like this one. We leave those doors. We get into our cars and drive home. Life must be lived. And while life is being lived there is something in the world which tells us that that the Law is really easier than faith.

First of all, it is simply unbelievable that we would not have to do anything in order to be saved. That is unbelievable. There is a little voice in our minds that tells us that surely we have to do something in order to be saved. Surely it cannot be that easy that Jesus has simply taken care of everything for us and that's it. We have to earn everything else in life. Surely we have to earn our salvation also.

Plus, when God tells you that your sins are forgiven, He is telling you, you don't have to do anything in order to be saved. Jesus has taken care of everything. You still have to go out of those doors unless you intend to spend the rest of your life in the sanctuary. When you go out of those doors what are you going to do with yourself. You still have to lead your life. You still have to make decisions every day. It would be easier if God did give us a little something to do in order to be saved. It would be useful to us because it would give us something to do with ourselves. It would give order to our lives. That is why many people who come to church every Sunday without missing will go to hell because they came here not to have their sins forgiven, but they came here because the Church provided them with rituals and ceremonies that allowed them to organize their life and its rhythms.

It is simply easier when God tells us what to do. At least that way we know what to do. At least that way we know what the deal is. "Just tell us what to do for you, Lord, and we will get it done!" In this way the Law is actually easier than faith. At least with the Law we know where we stand or at least we think we do. We are not sure about that faith. We have our doubts about it. And of course when you have your doubts about faith it means that you don't have any.

This is what the Pharisees thought. They thought to themselves, "What is the bare minimum that I need to do in order to inherit eternal life?" They sat down with the Law and figured it out. They figured that if they tithed to God and made sure that they did not commit adultery or murder and listened to their parents and made sure that they didn't walk too far on the Sabbath day that they would make it in. This drove the Lord up the wall. He called them hypocrites. He called them whitewashed tombs. He told them that they had strained out a gnat and swallowed a camel. He told them that they had spent their time paying attention to minor matters of the Law and ignored the important parts like justice, love and mercy. Well, that is because the Pharisees were doing what was easy. They were asking what the bare minimum was in order to be saved and they were doing that. Faith was impossible for them for faith says that it is all done and that would be too hard for a Pharisee.

Think about it people. How many times have you simply wished that I would prescribe some simple thing for you to do in order to be saved and you would go and do it and know that you were saved? How irritating it must be when I don't tell you what you need to do in order to be saved and just tell you that Jesus has taken care of it. Of course, if that irritates you it means that you don't believe. You don't have faith.

And some pastors will gladly tell you what to do. We pastors are a bossy bunch of people. We are taught at seminars and conferences what the best way to run a church is and we will be glad to tell you from the "experts" just what to do in order to make this church a great place. We will gladly tell you how to worship God so that He is pleased. And what's more with some of this worship we don't even care if we are saved by it. All we care about is whether or not more people will come to our church. We are going to hell for sure if we are not even worried about whether or not we are saved.

Let us take a simple example of how this goes wrong really fast. What if I were to tell you: Ok, you may only work five hours on a Sunday and you may do that only in the afternoon. Now aside from the fact that there is not one Bible passage in all of the Scriptures to back me up, I would bet a lot more money that Mit Romney would that you would not be able to keep that rule. I wouldn't even be able to keep that rule. What if I have a lot to do Sunday afternoon and I use up my five hours of work on Sunday afternoon and one of you calls me and says that your mother is dying in the hospital? What am I supposed to tell you? "Sorry I can't come in today. I've used up my five hours of work on Sunday. Your mother will have to die without me." That's insane! What if you are out in the field and you time yourself to make sure that you don't exceed the five hour time limit on Sunday afternoon. What happens when you get the last swaf through the field and you run out of time before that last swaf can be cut? Are you going to stop and go home or are you going to finish that last swaf? You are going to finish! But if I have told you that your salvation depends on it you are going to wonder if you are going to hell over it. Or you are going to say to yourself, "I am going to hell over this?"

What if I told you that you had to obey the speed limit in order to get into heaven? Folks there is not an easier commandment to keep. Obeying the speed limit is much easier than controlling your temper. It is easier than avoiding lust or greed. It is easier than all kinds of other rules. It is much easier than giving your life for the Lord. Obeying the speed limit is the easiest commandment in the world to keep. But I would be willing to venture a bet that if God were to make that the condition for inheriting everlasting life, hell would be a pretty full place.

Thus the Law is a tutor that drives us to Christ. It drives us to Christ because you cannot keep it.

For if you want to be saved by the Law none of the commandments that I have just mentioned need be kept. In fact if you want to be saved by the Law there is only one commandment that needs to be kept. It is simple: You shall have no other gods.

You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love and trust in God above all things. Just keep that one and you will be saved. Or as Jesus said it, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength." Just do that!

Now understand that God is that which is your highest good. If you make anything else your highest good that has become your God whether it is a person or an object. Gods come out of the woodwork when we are trying to make important decisions in our life.

For example when you are deciding how you are going to relate to your boyfriend or girlfriend, the principle that you use to make that series of decisions either comes from God or from some place else. If it comes from someplace else you have an idol and are guilty of idolatry. Typically when young people are relating to their boyfriend or girlfriend they make themselves and the boyfriend and girlfriend the

principal decision makers and therefore ignore God. This is especially true when they go to a pastor to get married and he requests according to the word of God that they not engage in fornication and when he requests that they discontinue cohabitating. Then money usually becomes an issue. Then they follow the dictates of their finances instead of the commandments of God. Therefore money becomes the couple's God. This is only one example. There are many.

When some one hurts someone else God has observed that no one really consults with him about how the conflict should be handled. Everyone seems to decide for themselves how the conflict will be handled. Typically both parties try to prove to each other and to everyone else that they are not the ones at fault. This is obviously false because everyone knows that when two human beings are in conflict there is plenty of fault to go around. Since neither one of them wants to confess their guilt as God would have them do in His grace and mercy, they argue and fight sometimes for very long periods of time. Alternatively they may simply not talk to each other for long periods of time. Do we not share the peace at Immanuel because we are uncomfortable shaking hands during church? Or do we fear with whom we might have to shake hands? It is interesting that it does not keep us from attending the Sacrament of the Altar together. We all want Jesus. We aren't really sure that we want all of the people of Jesus who are designated by Baptism. The problem is that Jesus always comes with His people. He is never alone. But we ignore all of that and go to Communion anyway.

Idols really come out of the woodwork when we are in trouble. It does not matter what kind of trouble you are in. Once you are in trouble the first person or thing that you turn to for help is your god. So when you are stressed and you turn to promiscuity or pornography or drink or work or drugs to hide from your anxiety those things have become your god. They are the idol that you worship. Recovering alcoholics are really good at pointing this out. I heard one say once, "I spent most of my life looking for God in the bottom of a bottle and I never found Him."

Some people expect their spouse to bring them happiness and to solve all of their problems. When they are stressed they turn to their spouse for solace. Their spouse has become their god. They worship their spouse by seeking help and aid from them instead of from God Himself. Some people have children thinking that children will bring them fulfillment and happiness. They expect their children to bring them these things and thus become dependent upon their children. It is a terrible thing. The children are dependent upon you not the other way around. But idolatry turns our relationships upside down.

So much for keeping that one commandment.

In this way the Law is a tutor. It drives us to Jesus. It drives us to Jesus because if we are expecting to be saved there is no one else who is going to help us but Jesus. We haven't even kept the first commandment, much less any of the others. If you are not going to keep the first commandment we may as well not even talk about refraining from taking His Name in vain or remembering His Sabbath Day or any of the others.

We have nothing. We bring nothing. We are nothing. We have made ourselves nothing. The only alternative we have is Jesus. The only choice that we have is Jesus. It is not like we can choose something else, unless you really like damnation.

A tutor watches over the child of the house as long as the child is a minor. When the child reaches his majority, he no longer needs the tutor. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Faith has come and since faith has come the Law is no longer necessary. The tutor has done his job. You have reached the majority. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ. You did not put on Christ the same way that you put on a decal or a sticker. You put on Christ in the same way you put on your pants or your shirt. He covers you. You can try sewing fig leaves together if you wish. Jesus works much better. He covers all of your nakedness. He covers all of your shame. You wear Him like you wear a new set of clothes. He makes you look good.

It is amazing how the same woman can look terrible if she is wearing shabby clothes and no make up. And the same woman with proper clothing and good hair styling and proper make up can look completely different. I probably shouldn't admit that I watch this, but on my day off if Christy and I are home in the morning I watch the ambush makeovers. They pick two women from the crowd that gathers outside of the NBC studios in New York. They typically pick women who have no make up on and women who have not worn make up in a long long time. They give these women a make over and sometimes you cannot really tell that it is the same woman.

Women understand this more than men do. We men are too busy in the weight room trying to reform our bodies to try and put on a decent shirt. Although there are some men who have a decent set of clothes that fit. Christy is still working on me.

Now that is what Jesus is like when you are baptized. You are a different person. You are him. You are not even the same person any more. You look like Him and after a while you start to act like Him. Anybody remember that old Lunny Toons cartoon where a hat truck releases all of these hats into the woods where Elmer Fudd is chasing Bugs Bunny? When a hat lands on their head they start to act like the person who would wear that hat. Jesus is like that. Wear Jesus long enough and you will begin to act like Him. It will be a rough start. There will be set backs. You won't get it right until eternity, but begin to get it right you will. You have put on Jesus.

Now Jesus is the Son of the Father. If you are wearing Jesus that means that you are a Son of the Father also. That is why in Christ there is neither Jew or Greek. In the Old Testament there were Jews and Greeks. The Jews were God's chosen people, the Greeks were not. In Baptism there is neither Jew nor Greek. As many of you as have been baptized, you have put on Christ. That means there is neither Jew nor Greek. There are no nationalities among those who are baptized. There are not white people and black people. There are not Hispanics and the rest of us. There are only sons of God.

There are no slaves and free people. I suppose this does not fit our day and age. Nevertheless even today there are social distinctions. There are those who are popular and famous. There are those who are ostracized and misunderstood. There are those who are privileged and wealthy. There are those who are unemployed and impoverished. There are those who have too much to eat and those who have too little. When it comes to being baptized however there are none of these things. There are only sons of God.

In fact there is neither male nor female in Baptism. This one is difficult. It is difficult because there is so much wrangling in our society over men and women. What are their proper relationships to each other? Such wrangling out in society has become wrangling in the Church. Some people embrace this verse with great gusto and some folks fear it.

There is no male and female in Christ Jesus. There are only sons of God. You put on Christ. Christ is the Son of God. Therefore you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

If you are a Son of God, you are therefore an heir. And if you are an heir of God, you inherit God's household. You inherit God's household. It is only right that you should inherit it. You are His

sons. Everything that God owns, you inherit. Everything that God has, it is yours. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

You are the seed of Abraham. God promised Abraham that he would inherit the Promised Land. God promised Abraham that he would have lots of descendents. God promised Abraham that his descendents would be a blessing to the other nations of the earth.

One might think that only the Jews would inherit these promises because only they are the children of Abraham. You would be wrong. You are born not of a natural descent. You were not born of the will of a man. You were born of God. You are sons of God. If you are sons of God you are heirs of God. If God makes a promise to Abraham and you are heirs of God, then that promise applies to you.

You are the descendents of Abraham, not by blood or by the will of a man, but by faith in Jesus Christ. You are descendents of Abraham by the baptism in which you put on Christ. You are a blessing to the other nations of the earth. You are a blessing to the other nations of the earth because you administer the Baptism that makes them sons of God and heirs of His household.

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus for as many of you as have been baptized, you have put on Christ.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.