

Danger!

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[0 : 00] So last Christmas, Rachel and I were debating whether to tell our son, RJ, the truth about Santa Claus. And for all the kids in the room, block your ears.

So Rachel was concerned that not doing so would be like lying. And besides, it might distract RJ from that other bearded bloke at Christmas, Jesus.

And I said, well, what's the harm? RJ will learn the truth in a few years anyway. And besides, we don't want him to go to kinder and tell all his classmates there's no such thing as Santa Claus and scare the life out of all of them.

And so we kept the truth to ourselves because really, what's the harm? For the record, Rachel insisted we come clean about the Easter bunny. So yeah, the bunny got it last year.

But what's the harm? What's the harm is a really popular attitude here in Australia, isn't it? It stops us taking things too seriously. So again, I've got an uncle, Uncle Lee, who has never let the truth get in the way of a good story.

[1 : 08] Now, all the cousins, we all know that he's telling fibs. But none of the cousins call him out on it because he's just spinning an Aussie yarn. And really, what's the harm?

It's tax time, isn't it? A few dodgy deductions here. A bit of non-declared income over there. A few hundred dollars back in your pocket is not going to cause a budget deficit, is it?

What's the harm? You see, surely we can have our cake and eat it too. Surely it's okay to have a little bit of this and a little bit of that. What's the harm?

And that is the attitude that Paul is addressing here in this bit of Galatians. Remember, Galatians were a mature church, but they got into a mess when it came to salvation.

They used to follow Paul's gospel, that salvation's by faith alone. But they were deceived by some false teachers who said, if you really want to be right with God, you also must be circumcised.

[2 : 11] After all, that's what all the heirs of Abraham did. And to the Galatians, a bit of Jesus here, a bit of Jewish law there. What's the harm? To us here in 2019, circumcision is a really trivial thing.

It's irrelevant in almost all circles. Why do we need a whole book of the Bible about such a trivial issue? It's only adding a few things to Jesus.

He's such a forgiving chap. What's the harm? And the answer is, what is underneath? You see, on the surface, it's a minor physical procedure.

But underneath, it's a symbol. It's a symbol of how to approach God. It's a symbol of a whole different sort of religion. A religion where our salvation is dependent on things we do, on our keeping of the law, on our human performance.

In the Galatians' eyes, what's the harm? But in God's eyes, they're saying that faith in Christ is not enough to save. They're effectively saying that the law of Moses really needs to perfect what Jesus could only begin on the cross.

[3 : 28] You see, to say you must do this to be saved is like saying Jesus' death on the cross was not enough on its own. God thinks there is a lot of harm in that.

What's more, what makes it even harder for us, is the attitude of what's the harm? That feels more like relaxed religion. It feels very sort of Aussie in that way.

It feels more open and less narrow. It feels more loving and less judgmental. It certainly feels more tolerant in today's day and age.

Tolerant is not how the Apostle Paul comes across in this letter. So, Galatians is him at his most prickly. Chapter 1, he says, In chapter 2, he rebukes publicly another apostle for leading people astray.

In chapter 3, And of course, this gem in chapter 5, verse 12. As for those agitators preaching circumcision, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves.

[4 : 49] Now, you would never believe that that was in the Bible if you didn't read it for yourself. You would never think Jesus' apostle could actually speak that way. So crass.

But I think even more explosive than that is verse 4. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ.

Can you imagine telling a church of mature Christians that if they keep going down that path, Jesus will be like an alien to them? That is, like a foreigner.

Imagine telling Christians that the way they're acting means that Jesus is like speaking another language or from a different culture altogether. That he is a stranger to them.

I think that's the most explosive. Don't dare ask Paul, What's the harm? Our passage today, it flows out of 5, verse 1.

[5 : 44] Have a look. 5, verse 1. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Paul's aim this morning is that we stand firm on the path of faith.

To help us stand firm, he gives us two warnings. A warning against practicing the religion of works and a warning against those preaching it. So, our passage today, Stand firm, two warnings.

Don't practice and beware those who preach. Let me read in verse 2. Mark my words. I, Paul, tell you. Now, before we go any further, I just want you to notice, three times in seven words only, three times in seven words, he's mentioned himself.

Mark my words. I, Paul, tell you. He's stamping his apostolic authority on whatever comes next. Mark my words. I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.

Again, I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised, that he's required to obey the whole law. You, who are trying to be justified by the law, have been alienated from Christ. You have fallen away from grace.

[6 : 57] The tone and the feel of this language is clearly a warning. Four warnings, in fact. That's verse 2.

That they're required to obey the whole law. That's verse 3. That they have been alienated from Christ and have fallen away from grace. That's verse 4. You see, the problem with adding a little bit of law is that it suggests we can approach God via two paths at once.

A little bit of faith, a little bit of works. Paul says you can't have it both ways. He warns that adding some works to Christ will be to lose him altogether.

And this is the reason why. Jesus will not share the salvation stage with anyone. Especially since it's him alone dying on the cross to make us right with God.

Do you remember in the book of Exodus, Israel was saved by God from Egypt. God performed wonderful signs and wonders.

[8 : 12] God alone parted the Red Sea to save them from the hand of Pharaoh. And as soon as they got over to the other side, they created a golden calf. And they said, Oh, golden calf, you saved us.

God alone saved them. Nothing else contributed on that day. Same on the cross with Jesus. To try and be justified by any other thing is to alienate ourselves from Christ.

You see, it's logically impossible to suggest or to say, to receive Christ by faith and say, I cannot save myself.

And then try and be justified by the law and claim that you can. To even have a little bit of law, however trivial, is to have it all. If you're in for a penny, you're in for a pound, says Paul.

And he's laced his passage with lots of sort of all or nothing type language. And it's a slide on the screen, please, Paul. And it's also the first table on your handout.

[9 : 18] So he says, You can have a little bit of circumcision, but then Christ is no value at all. Verse 2. A little bit of law, you're required to keep the whole law.

Verse 3. A little bit of yeast, works through the whole batch of dough. Verse 9. A little bit of circumcision, go the whole way. Verse 12. Even a little way down the path of works means we have wholly or entirely come off the path of faith.

Thanks, Paul. That's what verse 5 is doing. Have a look at verse 5. I've put verse 5 on your handout as another table. And what I did was I took verse 5 and then reproduced the exact opposite to show you either or.

So either through the flesh, we can eagerly work, eagerly work by keeping the whole law to earn righteousness with God or, verse 5, through the spirit, we can eagerly wait by faith, the righteousness we hope.

So either you can work for a right standing with God through your human flesh or you can wait for it to come by faith on that last day final.

[10 : 33] The answer is so obvious, says Paul. Verse 6, similar, another table on your handout. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision or uncircumcision has any value.

Again, an either or table on your handout. When it comes to salvation, either, you can leave it all up to Jesus. Hint, hint. which means all of our works, all of our good deeds don't have any value.

Or, we can try and top up what we think is missing on the cross. What we think Jesus didn't accomplish with some good deeds and religious laws and the like.

The answer is so obvious, says Paul. But here's the thing that I think is quite tricky for us. And especially tricky if you've got a sensitive conscience, which I think will be a lot of us in the room.

If you've got a sensitive conscience, it is very tempting to try and add some works to your salvation. Because we think that Jesus' death is not enough to deal with your sins.

[11 : 39] That you're too bad for Jesus. So we try and help him out by walking both paths at once. So, Jesus' death, yes, for the regular sins. And then I will do some good deeds to pay off the really dark things that I have done in my life.

I think that's a real temptation for a sensitive conscience. And while that may be well-intentioned, whether they know it or not, whether people mean it or not, the harm is, ultimately, we're saying that Christ crucified is not enough to save us.

Then he will be no value to us at all. That's why it's all or nothing. Paul says, if you add even a little bit that we offend Christ, we anger God, we say his work at Calvary was not enough.

And so he says, you've lost me. Salvation is by faith alone, in Christ alone, because of God's grace alone. That is the most Christian principle we've got.

And all of us would agree with that. But out there, that sounds very narrow, very exclusive. What's the harm sounds much more open-minded and tolerant.

[13 : 01] To say that salvation is either in Jesus or with angered God seems so narrow and dismissive of other worldviews. And of course, we shouldn't be so closed-minded in 2019.

Surely, all religions and worldviews are just different ways of saying the same thing. Surely. I was talking to someone really recently who said to me, well, I believe in forces and energies in the universe.

Vijay, you'd probably just call that Jesus. And everyone out there would say, well, that sounds okay. You're all on the same page. What's the harm? The thing is, though, Jesus is not some force.

It wasn't energies that died on the cross for my sins. Jesus is a person. His death is a loving act of grace from a personal God. To insist on a difference between Jesus and all other worldviews is to declare yourself intolerant in a cosmopolitan culture.

It's to invite persecution as Paul experienced in verse 11. It's to be narrow and dogmatic. And while that sounds bad, Paul says that's okay.

[14 : 17] He says stand firm. Because the real test, and this is the main event, the real test of a worldview is whether it makes us right with God.

Is whether it saves us from his judgment. Approaching him with a mix and match attitude, it might please people in the short term, of course, but remember Paul's warning.

Even a little bit of another path is to go all the way down. As Michelle said, even dipping your toe in a crocodile infested water is danger. Even if you're not fully getting wet.

Christ will be no value to us at all. Verse 2. Now you have to obey the whole law to save yourself. Verse 3. You'll be alienated from Christ and thus facing God's judgment alone.

Verse 4. Point 1. Beware of the religion of practicing works. Point 2. Beware of those who preach it. Let me read in verse 7.

[15 : 17] You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? Many times by many people the Christian life has been described as a race, a running race.

And if that's the case then Paul is definitely the coach. And so I want you to imagine that Paul is an athletics coach and he's found some people, he's encouraged them to be athletes and he's trained them for years and years to an Olympic level.

And his runners are in the, let's say, the Olympic final of some race and they're going really well. They're running a good race and they're heading for a podium finish. And then all of a sudden a rival coach from another country starts throwing hurdles and boxes and chairs at Paul's runners.

Can you imagine how angry Paul would be? Who did this? You were running a good race. Who cut in on you? He says, who hindered you from obeying the truth?

He wants the Galatians, he wants us to be aware of who these rival teachers are. He shows them their origin, verse 8. That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.

[16 : 25] See, false teachers are not from God despite what they claim. They're not from the one who calls you. He shows them the false teacher's origin. Sorry, their effect, verse 9.

A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough. You see, yeast and false teaching are very similar. See, false teaching spreads through a church the way yeast spreads through a whole batch of dough.

Like yeast, you only need a little bit of false teaching to have an effect over the whole batch. Our reading from Jeremiah, which Vera gave us, it showed how angry God is at false teaching.

It showed us the effect of false teaching. The passage showed how just a few teachers from Jerusalem were able to make the whole country of Israel godless.

That angered God. Godless died. The same thing is about to happen or is happening in Galatia. Paul cannot have that in his churches. Here is their end, verse 10.

[17 : 31] I'm confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty. Again, another reason not to be associated, to be aware who they are.

Do not go down with them in destruction, says Paul. In verse 11, we get to see one of their lies. They were lying about Paul endorsing circumcision, which obviously he never did.

Maybe they were trading on the fact that Paul used to be a super Jewish apostle. He says, verse 11, but brothers and sisters, if I'm still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?

In that case, the offense of the cross has been abolished. You see, Paul preaches the cross of Christ, they preach circumcision and the religion of works. In this series, we said that every other worldview other than Christianity is part of this religion of works.

It's very popular. Every other religion practices it because it says that ultimately, deep down, we are good enough to save ourselves by our works and our efforts.

[18 : 42] On the other hand, preaching Christ crucified offends human pride. It says that we're all sinners. It says that if we are alienated from Christ, we will be facing God's judgment alone.

You see, people hate preaching like that. They hate churches like that, like ours. Preaching Christ crucified, it's far too exclusive and narrow in this age of tolerance and what's the harm?

People love to have the best of both worlds. We hate being forced to choose either or. Surely it doesn't matter what people believe as long as they believe. Surely it doesn't matter what people have faith in as long as they've got faith.

What's the harm? You see, Paul's gospel won't allow Christians to mix and match aspects of our faith with other worldviews.

Of course other worldviews have wisdom about how to live well in the world. Of course they do. But remember the test is always can this make me right with God?

[19 : 52] Can this save me from his judgment? Paul's gospel pushes us to a definite choice. Either Christ crucified or the religion of works. You're on your own.

Have a go. The one impossibility is what the Galatians were attempting to mix and match. A little bit of faith a little bit of works. What's the harm?

They thought. Paul says mark my words. If you let yourselves be circumcised Christ will be no value to you at all because you're required to obey the whole law.

You're on your own. You're alienated from Christ. You have fallen away from grace. Mark my words is the warning of the apostle. For us here in this church at Holy Trinity we don't appear that is we don't appear to have the issue of false teaching presently.

We've got a pretty decent tradition of Bible teachers here. Andrew Price our senior pastor he gets nice and grumpy if it's less than faithful teaching which is actually quite a good thing to have.

[20 : 58] So for us I guess part of us being aware here is not falling into complacency. If it can happen to Galatia if false teaching can happen there it can happen to us as well.

There's that warning not to be complacent. One application will be to pray for Andrew. Price pray for me as well. Pray that we would be faithful Bible teachers that we would stick to the message of Christ crucified for you yourselves if you hear anything other than faithful Bible teaching break out your cricket bats and come and get us.

That would be correct. I think it's that serious isn't it? The letter is so stern. And here's the thing while we in this room may appear to be safe now you don't have to go too far past these doors to hear false teaching of a different gospel.

So these are some examples of what is or the harm that is preached 30 minutes from here. The point of telling you this is not so you'll go out on a witch hunt.

The point is just to make you aware so you stand firm so that we're not complacent. So 30 minutes from here you can hear that if you speak in tongues you are a second level Christian.

[22 : 19] That you've got another anointing of the Holy Spirit. That is false teaching. You can hear that God will always heal people and if he doesn't heal you the problem is with you.

That is false teaching. You can hear that God would never punish his son. That he would never judge because he's too loving for that. You can hear this one.

It's okay to invest everything in this world alone because this world is going to continue and Jesus will just take away the bad bits and so invest everything you can now in good things here.

You don't have to go too far past these doors to hear the awful prosperity gospel. That God wants to bless you to prosper you financially with health wealth and wisdom.

You don't have to go too far past these doors to be harmed by false teaching. By things that the Bible is really clear about. While it may seem we in this room are not in harm's way today, the warning would be not to take faithful godly teaching, a godly senior pastor, not to take that for granted, not to be complacent.

[23 : 40] I just want to finish with a word about moving churches. Lots of us here will move church. We won't stay here as long as we live.

Lots of us will do that for one reason or another. Can I strongly urge you to choose your next location if you have to move based on the church, not on the house or anything or the job, but on the church, not with the church as an afterthought.

church. Maybe there was a time in Melbourne when all you needed was a sign that said a Christian church and they would be a safe faithfully teaching place, but as I just showed you, that is not the case anymore, even or especially in Anglican circles.

Moving churches needs to be like you would move in a desert. In a desert, you have to move from water to water or you'll be just flat out dead. You have to move as a Christian from Bible teaching church to Bible teaching church or you will be just flat out dead, but you will absolutely be the product of the church you go to.

So please move from Bible teaching church to Bible teaching church. Here is some encouragement from our coach. Verse 10, I'm confident in the Lord that you will take no other view.

[25 : 03] So let's pray. Father God, thank you that you tell us the truth, that you lovingly warn us even if it feels strong.

Father, we declare that we are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. Please would we beware the religion of works of trying to earn our way to you.

Father, thank you that Jesus' blood is enough that on the cross it was indeed finished. Father, please protect Andrew Price, please protect me, please protect this congregation.

Please would we be feeding everyone with faithful Bible teaching. Please give everyone an instinct and a conviction and a reflex to demand the good stuff.

Father, please protect us in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.