

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

The Fork In The Road

Philippians 3:1-11

2008

Introduction

Quote: Robert Frost, author of The Road Less Traveled

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -- I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.”

Our study today presents us with a “fork in the road” that represents the most important decisions a human being can make as it relates to our spiritual journey:

1. Decide to not choose by abandoning the journey

Joke: Two men were driving to Disneyland when they came to a fork in the road.

The sign read: "Disneyland Left." So they turned around and went home.

2. Take the left fork that leads to a righteousness based on performance
3. Take the right fork that leads to a righteousness based on faith in Christ alone.

I Paul's Exhortation and Warning

- A. **Rejoice** in the Lord [Verse 1]

Rejoice = Chairō = “To be cheerful, calmly happy or well-off”

Phil 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

This is not a suggestion -- it is a command in the present imperative tense that means, “Keep on rejoicing!” As believers we have a duty, obligation, responsibility to maintain a lifestyle of joy and rejoicing!

Keep in mind that Paul suffered persecution, imprisonment and was sitting on death row! He rejoiced, not on account of his circumstances, but as an act of faith in God!

Application: We face the daily “fork in the road” as to how we respond to life

- We can cultivate a lifestyle of grumbling and complaining

Phil 2:14-16 “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life ...”

- We can cultivate a lifestyle of rejoicing

1 Thess 5:16-18 “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

1. It is not trouble to write again

Trouble = Okneros = “Irkesome or grievous”

2 Peter 1:12 “So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.”

2. It is a **safeguard** for you

Safeguard = Asphales = “Security, protection”

2 Peter 3:1 “Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.”

Paul changes his tone as he warns the Philippian saints concerning the Judaizers. They have persistently opposed him from city to city, inciting riots to disrupt his ministry, and doggedly lobbying for his arrest and death.

B. **Watch out** for dogs [Verse 2]

Watch out = Blepo = “To beware, perceive, take heed”

We’re not talking about cute little fluffy, pampered, shampooed, manicured lap dogs.

No! The dogs in Paul’s day, like dogs in many 3rd world countries, were snarling, vicious, unpredictable, diseased animals that traveled in packs -- feeding on the garbage, dead carcasses and rotten scraps that were the refuse of the city.

Isa 56:10-11 “Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough.”

Who is Paul calling dogs? Judaizers!

- They believed that Jesus was the Messiah . . . but only the Messiah of the Jews.
- Therefore the only way you could become a Christian was to first become a Jew. You had to convert to Judaism, be circumcised, and keep the OT Law.

Acts 15:1 “Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”

1. [Watch out for] Men who do evil

Do evil = Kakous ergatas = “Worker or teacher of evil”

They were tirelessly seeking to convert young believers to their views, to bring them back under the legalistic restrictions. And they meant well. But it goes to show that good intentions don’t always make a person innocent of great evil!

Matt 7:22-23 “Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

2. [Watch out for] Men who are mutilators of the flesh

Mutilators of the flesh = Katatome = “To cut up”

In these verses, we find Paul making a play on words by altering the prefix ...

1) He refers to true Christians as "**peritome**" (to cut around)- **3:3**

2) **But here he** calls the Judaizers "**katatome**" (to mutilation) - **3:2**

These Judaizers had so distorted the true meaning of circumcision that it had becoming nothing more than a useless cutting of the body.

Gal 5:12 “As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate [castrate] themselves!”

Application: The danger of faith “plus” anything

1. Faith plus the right church
2. Faith plus water baptism
3. Faith plus baptism of the Holy Spirit
4. Faith plus religious rituals
5. Faith plus the right translation of the Bible
6. Faith plus certain doctrines: Calvinism

C. **Remember** who we are: [Verse 3]

1. We are the circumcision

Circumcision = Peritome = “The cutting away of the male foreskin”

God’s covenant with Abram:

Gen 17:10-11 “This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.”

Rom 2:28-29 “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.”

2. We **worship** by the Spirit of God

Worship = Latreuo = “To render service to God”

Like Paul before his conversion, the Judaizers thought they were serving God!

Gal 4:17-18 “Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you [from us], so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good ...”

3. We glory in Christ Jesus

Glory = Kauchaomai = “To boast, vaunt, rejoice in”

Their joy was not found in their own righteousness, in glorying in Christ!!

Ps 105:1-4 “Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.”

4. We put no **confidence** in the flesh

Confidence = Peitho = “To be thoroughly convinced”

John 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him,

he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

II Paul's Fork in the Road

- A. His reasons to put confidence in the **flesh** [Verse 4-6]
Flesh = Sarx = “Human nature or abilities” [Paul's pedigree]

1. He was circumcised on the 8th day - Gen 17:12 Leviticus 12:3
2. He was from the people of Israel
 He was a direct descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 - a. The Arabs could boast of their descent from Abraham
 - b. The Edomites could boast of Isaac
 - c. But only the Jews could boast of being of the line of Jacob, AKA “Israel”.
 2 Cor 11:22 “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I.”

Illustration: Bumper stickers; “Local Grown”, “Respect the Locals!”

3. He was from the tribe of Benjamin
 Rom 11:1 “I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.”

The tribe of Benjamin had the distinction of:

- a. Being of the ancestry of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel
 - b. Being the only son of Jacob who was born in the Promised Land
 - c. Being the source of Israel's first king, Saul (1 Samuel 9:1-2)
 - d. Being the only tribe aligned itself with faithful Judah when Israel divided into two nations at the time of Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:21).
 - e. Being the tribe whose territory included the city of Jerusalem (Judges 1:21).
4. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews
 In Paul's day, many Jews were ashamed of their Jewishness and tried to live and act like Greeks in order to fit in and enjoy an easier life. But not Paul!!
 - a. In regard to the law – a **Pharisee**
 The Pharisees were an elite group within the Jewish nation of Israel known for their scrupulous devotion to the law of God. There were loyal, patriotic, devoted observers of the Mosaic Law.
 Though he doesn't mention it here, Paul was also a member of the Sanhedrin, which was made up of 70 of the most elite religious leaders of Israel.

 Acts 26:4-5 “The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem.

They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee.”

- b. As for **zeal**, persecuting the church

Zeal = Zelos = “Fervent, passionate, intensity”

Paul was not merely an intellectual opponent of perceived heresies against Judaism; he was also an aggressive “bare-knuckled” opponent of them.

Gal 1:13-14 “For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.”

- c. As for legalistic righteousness – **faultless**

Faultless = Amemptos = “Blameless, outwardly faultless”

Matt 5:20 “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Paul’s claim: “Been there, done that -- and better than you!”

- B. His reasons to put **no** confidence in the flesh [Verse 7-9]

1. He considered loss whatever was to his **profit**

The things Paul formerly considered “assets” he now regards as “liabilities” as far as salvation is concerned.

Application: Are there “profitable” things that are keeping you from Christ?

Luke 9:25 “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”

2. He considered **everything** loss

Loss = Zemia = “Detrimental or damaging”

- a. Compared to the surpassing greatness:

1. Of **knowing** Christ Jesus

Knowing = Gnosis = “Experiential knowledge”

Jer 9:23-24 “This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me ...”

2. Of knowing my Lord

Lord = Kurios = “Supreme in authority”

For Paul, knowing Christ was the ultimate good -- the ultimate “asset.”

Illustration: My relationship with Becky

Without intentional attention and care, my marriage to Becky can easily devolve into nothing more than a business partnership that focuses on our mutual love for ministry. But that's not why I married her!!

Christ did not die on the cross to obtain a partner in ministry. He died to purchase a Bride for Himself and to enjoy a love relationship!

Rev 2:4-5 "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."

Application: How does one grow in their knowledge of Jesus Christ?

Answer: Through the study of and obedience to God's Word

3. He considered all things lost as **rubbish**

The Greek word for "rubbish" [Skubalon] had one of two uses:

1. Excrement [KJV = "Dung"]
2. Table scraps that were fit only to be thrown to the dogs.

Paul may have had both in mind -- but certainly the second!

Application: Are you settling for scraps instead of reveling in Christ?a. That he might **gain** Christ

Gain = Kerdaino = "To win"

Ps 73:25 "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you."

What does it mean to "gain Christ"?

1. We gain a new relationship: Sons and daughters of God
2. We gain a new standing: Forgiven, loved, accepted and seated with Christ
3. We gain a new identity: Citizens of God's Kingdom
4. We gain a new power: The indwelling Holy Spirit to live the Christian life
5. We gain a new future: Eternal life on a redeemed earth; ruling & reigning

b. That he might be found **in** Him ["In Christ" -- 89 times in NT]

Illustration: Noah's Ark

Gen 7:23 "Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark."

2 Cor 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

4. He refused to pursue a righteousness of his own that comes from the **law**

- a. But a righteousness that is **through** faith
- b. But a righteousness that comes from God
- c. But a righteousness that is **by** faith

Righteousness = Dikaiousune = “Right standing before God [perfection]”

Rom 1:16-17 “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

III Paul’s Desires

- A. He wanted to **know** Christ [Verse 10]

Know = Gnosko = “To know personally vs. academically, theoretical or vicariously”

Ps 27:4 “One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.”

Application: How can a person know Christ?

- 1. By being reconciled to Him
- 2. By fellowshiping with Him (Word, prayer, worship)
- 3. By obeying Him

1 Jn 2:3 “We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.”

- 5. By serving Him

Matt 6:24 “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.”

- 1. The **power** of his resurrection

Power = Dunamis = “Miraculous or divine power”

- a. Power to resist temptation and sin
- b. Power to follow Christ
- c. Power to make disciples
- d. Power to serve and obey

Eph 1:18-20 “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms ...”

- 2. The fellowship of his **sufferings**

Sufferings = Pathema = “Affiliation, pain, hardship”

Like Job’s friends, the Jews wrongly assumed that suffering was the result of sin and was divine punishment (John 9:1-2).

The fact is, life is full of suffering -- many times for reasons we can't discern.

(You who love know that love suffers. If you're a parent, you already know this!)

Knowing Christ will inevitably involve us in what he is doing, and what he is doing is loving others, and that often involves suffering.

2 Cor 1:3-5 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows."

3. The privilege of becoming like Him in his death

Becoming like = Summorphizomai = "To be conformed to, to share the likeness of" Phil 3:17 "Join with others in following my example [summorphizomai], brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you."

Application: Discipleship

2 Tim 2:1-2 "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

B. He wanted to obtain to the **resurrection** from the dead [Verse 11]

By writing, "and so somehow", Paul is not doubting that he will be raised from the dead (Acts 26:7-8; Rom 6:5; 1 Cor 6:14). This Greek phrase simply expresses uncertainty as to the actual mechanics and timing of the resurrection from the dead -- not to the event itself.

Conclusion

For unbelievers:

- a. Admit your sin
- b. Believe that Jesus is the Messiah
- c. Confess Him as your Lord and King

For believers:

- a. Rejoice in the Lord! Thank Him for who He is and what He has done. Ask for grace to live a joyful and thankful life!
- b. Thank God that your righteous standing is based solely on Christ's finished work and not on anything you need to do.
- c. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a renewed intensity of desire to personally, deeply and experientially know Christ!

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