

## *To God Be The Glory*

Sometimes I wonder how tough it is to have a job in the advertising business these days. Who wants to listen to a sales pitch? Some advertisers now resort to extreme measures. Several years ago two advertisers in Boston brought trouble to Bean Town. They put up electronic boxes wherever they could in the city, some on bridges, some on buildings, etc. These boxes were set up so that at a specific time all the boxes would turn on little light bulbs in the pattern of a cartoon character. The police, not knowing it was just an advertising campaign, thought the boxes might be IEDs (improvised explosive devices). The city shut down because people thought the worst: ‘terrorism!’ The two advertisers responsible were perpedalked in front of cameras. They acted like the whole thing was no big deal. They were just trying to get everyone to pay attention—which is really hard to do with so many advertisers calling out to us, “Look here! Buy this! Look here! You can’t live without this! Look here!” They’ve just got to get your attention if they are going to sell you their products and services.

Shshsh. Listen closely. Can you hear it? That’s the sound of the season. Lent is gently calling us to look. Lent says: “Look at Jesus. You can’t live without him, not truly live. He so wanted you to live that he died in your place. Look how much God loves you! No, Jesus is not trying to sell you something. Look: God wants to give you his blessings forever.” Today our Lord quietly encourages us through the apostle Paul: **LOOK OUT, LOOK IN, LOOK UP.**

**Look out for Tricks** (18-19). Paul says it this way: <sup>18</sup>*As I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.* The word ‘enemies’ might have you thinking of people who reject Christ as Savior. But Paul includes those who claim Christ as Savior and still live as enemies of the cross. In other words, somehow they stand against the truth that he paid the penalty for all sin.

How could Christians live as enemies of Christ? Well, some like to add various rules to the gospel. They might teach something like this: “Jesus saved you completely by his cross, but you still have to...” (such as “be circumcised,” see Phil 3:1-11). If someone teaches, “You have to,” ask them to show you where the Bible says so. God did give some “you have tos” for all people. These commands can be found in the New Testament. No problem. You’re a follower of Jesus. You’re completely clean of all sin because of him. Obey his commands right away with a happy heart. These commands for all people you already know: honor your parents, respect property rights, make time for God’s Word, and so forth. God gives us no choice about his ‘have to’s. But remember. What we do doesn’t induce God to save us (see Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 11:6). It’s the other way around. Jesus dying on the cross for us—this induces us to do the good things God commands with a happy, thankful heart. So when people claim that you have to do something in order to be saved, quote them this memory verse: *“It is by grace you have been saved*

*through faith, and this not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9). The gospel has no strings attached: full forgiveness for all sinners through Jesus' blood before you even get to do a have to.

I hope you are asking, "What about faith? You have to believe or else you can't be saved." And if you mean that no one is saved unless the Holy Spirit works faith in their heart, you're right. But, you see, many American Christians have been taught that faith is something we produce. So if someone means, "You have to produce your own faith so you can believe in Jesus," well, that's a trickster way of saying that you are saved by your own good works, that you helped Jesus save you, as if he did his part and now you've done your part, and that's why you're saved. Holding such a view makes a person an enemy of the cross of Christ. If we are saved by any work we do, then grace is no longer grace (see Romans 11:6). Look out for the phrase "you have to" in spiritual messages. You have eternal life as a gift from God through faith in Jesus. Jesus already did all the 'you have tos' necessary to save you.

But there's one more kind of enemy of the cross of Christ. You see, following Jesus is a bit like riding down a road in a car. On either side there is a ditch you can get stuck in. There's the "you have to do good works or else you aren't saved" ditch—we covered that ditch already.

And on the other side of the road the ditch sounds like this: "Since salvation is so sure and God is so nice, we don't have to do any good works. We don't really have to do what God commands." Almost no one wants to ignore all of God's commands, just the ones they have trouble with. In today's text Paul is pointing at people who are stuck in this second ditch. Paul teaches, "**Look out.** Don't be led astray by their tricks." "Ok, but how can we know whether we are being led astray?" Here's one way. Ask yourself, "What makes me happy?" Quietly to yourself, I'd like you to start making a list. I'll give you a ten-second pause. ... How long did your list get before you added the Lord or his Word? "Oh, that's right. God is supposed to be my highest priority, my greatest love, my most calming security. Let me quick add him to the list. At the top." Ok, so now let me challenge us with a hard question. Is God on our list because we know he's supposed to be there, or because at least sometimes he is our highest priority, greatest love, most calming security? I'm really pleased for you and the Lord if you can fear, love, and trust in God above all things all the time. The best I can do is "at least sometimes," and even then it happens only because the Lord enables me to do so as he feeds my faith on his Word and Sacraments. When I get away from God's Word for longer than a day, I am vulnerable to attack. And so are you. That's why I ask you to read your Bible daily. Let the Holy Spirit keep you from becoming an enemy of the cross of Christ for even a day.

Listen to the apostle Paul describe those who live as enemies of the cross of Christ and see for yourself whether these descriptions ever fit you, like they sometimes do me. <sup>19</sup>*Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.* Now I hope we never stray from our Savior so far that our destiny is destruction. But sometimes our god is our stomach in the sense that we give in to our sinful flesh's various 'appetites.' I hope we never glory in our shame by defiantly pushing back when someone tries to call us to account. But when we are getting greater joy from the things of this life than from our faith-connection to the Lord, we are in spiritual danger. It's okay to have hobbies, to get satisfaction from doing your job well, to love your children, to enjoy the good things of this life—all this is from God. ¿But is our mind on earthly things? Have we allowed ourselves to get engrossed in the things of this world? This makes it easy for Satan to draw us away from Jesus. Let me ask you this: what if God decides to take away someone you love or something like your electronic devices, hunting, your ability to walk or to see? Will you get angry at God? I've seen people walk away from God because they thought God was wrong to let their loved one die so young. I've seen people stop attending church altogether because they didn't like being told that it's a sin to let busyness squeeze worship out of their life week after week. **Look out for Tricks.**

“How can we keep from living as an enemy of the cross of Christ?” **Look in.** No, not into your own heart. That's where the world looks. Look in to the Word (17,1). The apostle writes: <sup>17</sup>*Join with others in following my example, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.* What sort of pattern did Paul give them? Sometimes Paul pointed people to the pattern of Abraham. Father Abraham is a good role model because he trusted in God's Word. Without delay he did whatever the Lord told him. He was even willing to sacrifice his son Isaac because the Lord told him to. What a gut-wrenching decision for Abraham! Luther sizes up the situation this way: “Abraham was actually tempted by God Himself, not concerning a woman, gold, silver, death, or life, but concerning a contradiction of Holy Scripture. Here God is clearly contradicting Himself; for how do these statements agree; ‘Through Isaac your offspring shall be counted’ (Gen 21:12), and ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love and sacrifice him’ (Gen 22:2)... God, who formerly seemed to be [Abraham's] best friend, now appears to have become an enemy or tyrant.” But what did Abraham do? He obeyed the Lord's recent command, and he trusted God's former promise. That's **Looking In** to God's Word! The season of Lent calls to us: “Come on, people of God! Trust and obey like Abraham!”

The Lord had taught Paul to trust and obey too. That's why Paul could write, *Join*

*with others in following my example.*

Which example? Paul would say, “Don’t become murderers like I was. God showed me mercy in Christ and sent me to spread the Word to the world. Imitate me now,” Paul is saying here. “Do what you have seen me do with the gospel.”

Look out for tricks. Look in to the Word. Now we’re ready to **Look up!** Look up to the Lord (20-21). He is awesome! He already brought us into his kingdom. But he’s got something even better for us. Paul explains: <sup>20</sup>*our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.* In this verse God has given us a way to test whether we are getting too caught up in this world: Are we eager for the Lord to return? If the final trumpet sounds this week, are you ready to drop whatever you’re doing and happily join the assembly before the throne of Jesus? I hope your answer is a quick and confident, “Yes.”

But if we formulate the question a little differently, we can get at the heart of it more deeply. If the Lord said to you, “I have decided that you will die tonight at sundown,” how would you handle it? Would you trust him to take care of your loved ones, and cheerfully turn your face toward heaven? It’s a good question to ask ourselves regularly so that we remember: our citizenship is in heaven; earth is only our temporary home. Someday we believers will go to be with our awesome Lord Jesus Christ,...

<sup>21</sup>...*who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.* These lowly bodies get sore and weak. Eventually they stop working. But the bigger problem is that our bodies are contaminated by the sin condition that got passed down to us, possibly through the genetic code. It’s good to fight every sinful tendency and outbreak. But soon enough there comes a point in every Christian’s life when it dawns on them, “I’m never going to be free of my sinful flesh.” And then they think of this Bible verse: “*Jesus will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*” And they realize, “I will be free of my sin condition. On the Last Day the Lord will extract my sinful flesh from my body like a malignant tumor. In heaven I’ll never sin again! My body will never hurt or get sick again. I’ll be just like Jesus—pure and holy.”

Oh, I’m looking forward to being with Jesus! While we’re waiting for him to return, what should we do? Look out for tricks. Look in to the Word. Fill your heart with it so that you can be good to everyone and invite them to become what we have become by God’s grace: followers of Jesus. Look up to the Lord. Then we can say with Paul: <sup>4:1</sup>*Therefore, my brothers and sisters in Christ, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!*