

Title: Taking aim at our Enemies

Text: Romans 8.1; Matthew 26.36-39

Theme: Drinking the cup, taking the blame

Series: Living the Cross-Centered Life – pt.5

Prop Stmt. By taking all my blame and paying for my sin, there is nothing left to condemn me.

Read Matthew 26.36-39; Romans 8.1

There are three common enemies to our sanctification that we all share.

1. Subjectivism, which means basing our view of God on our changing feelings and emotions.

My emotions can be an indicator of what I believe at the moment, but they are not a true gauge of reality and must be seen accordingly. I have to preach to myself the truth and make decisions based upon the unchanging standard of God's Word and not my shifting feelings. Feelings are God-given and are to be enjoyed and used for their God-given purpose, but these affections and emotions must be governed by God's truth. Emotions are part of what it means to be human. Enjoying and using our God-given emotions for their God-ordained purpose is part of what it means to live life as God intended for us to live. I will come back to this later on tonight.

We could paint broadly with our theological brushes and say that a number of churches with a more "charismatic" type of theology tend to fall into this category. One of the dangers of an emotionally driven theology is that the gospel can be viewed subjectively. In other words, it is only true if it moves me emotionally. Which can be extremely dangerous, because the flip side of that is, if I am moved emotionally, then it must be true. When this is the setting, people are easily manipulated. The cross for some is reduced to being the place where Christ took our sickness, so we don't have to be sick anymore. The cross was the place where Satan and all the bad things that happen to people were defeated, so we can claim prosperity, health, comfort and protection in the name of Jesus. The cross becomes a means to achieving what I feel I want out of life.

2. Legalism, which means basing our relationship with God on our own performance.

In a narrow and technical sense, legalism is the idea that I have to keep certain rules or maintain certain standards in order to earn, achieve, or merit the grace and forgiveness of God. In a broad sense, legalism is the idea that God loves me conditionally based upon my performance for that day. It also bleeds into my relationship with other people as I, assume that posture with others. I will conditionally relate only to people who meet the standards that I have created.

There is no performance that I can do that will cause God to love me more than He already does. But people tend to be performance driven, and we can learn that our

“value” in the eyes of some is based on how we perform according to their standard. Approval is a powerful tool since every one of us is vulnerable to the fear of man. You can use approval as a weapon to manipulate or to intimidate people. It is extremely effective, especially if you are in a place of influence or authority.

The fatal flaw is that people in this system tend to see God has the ultimate rule-enforcer whose main purpose is to punish those who do not measure up. In order to keep everyone on the right road, church is the place where we scrutinize each other’s performance and look for signs of failure and weaknesses and threaten to withhold approval or to pronounce censure on those who do not keep to the code. The problem with legalism is the code is man-made. Like the Pharisees, we add to the gospel our own code of what it means to be on the inside, to be in the “know.”

Legalism always has to have an enemy out there somewhere. Legalism is never satisfied because it can never rest. Legalism by definition is finding value and security in your performance, so you can never rest in Christ; you always have to be doing things in order to prove your worth to God and others. There is always more that you can do. People who are caught up in legalism do not relax. They are driven, but it is not by the gospel, but by fear. They are afraid that you will not approve and they communicate this same disapproval towards others. Since they can never rest, they will not let anyone else rest either.

Within the framework of Christianity (in which I do not include Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon) the Roman Catholic church is an obvious target since their entire system is built on performance as a means of grace. But, this religion of fear is by no means limited to Rome. Once again, painting with a broad theological brush, hyper-fundamentalist, separatist, rules-oriented, external standards of sanctification type churches within the Baptist, Pentecostal, Church of Christ, Nazarene and Reformed traditions are vulnerable to this. Many of them would swear up and down that they believe that salvation is by grace alone, but their system of sanctification says otherwise. Since Justification leads to Sanctification, what you believe has saved you, is also the truth that enables you to grow. If you develop a rules-driven means of growth, it will influence your own view of how you become a believer. Over time and without addressing it, the code becomes more important than anything else and keeping the code becomes the battle within the church and between people. That is why people tend to measure their spiritual levels based on external codes, which is driven by pride and the fear of man.

But, the code is not consistent. In one church, the wearing of robes by the choir is a sign of liberalism. For another, not wearing robes is a step toward modernism.

3. Condemnation, which means being more focused on our sin than on God’s grace.

Guilt is a powerful tool. We all live under its influence because we all have sin. Our hearts are idol producing factories. Every day is a war. The issue is not, do you have

guilt, the issue is; what do you do with it. One of the results that I am after, in taking you through this Sun PM series, is to help you preach the gospel to yourself every single day. I want you to learn all these songs so as you sing them you will preach to yourself. And tonight, there are two aspects of the cross event that I think rightfully appreciated helps us place these three enemies of our sanctification into the bombing target.

Good theology embraced by your heart is a great weapon against these three enemies of your sanctification. Good theology embraced by your heart is also like jet fuel for your worship engine.

Tonight, I want us to look at the Garden of Gethsemane and I want you to look closely with me at what was taking place. Christ is under extreme strain of soul. The language that the gospel writers use to describe the weight that he is under is as strong as humanly possible. Physically, we can see no reason for his torment. No one is hitting him. He is not being crushed with some material weight. Yet, he is sweating as it were, great drops of blood, or it is possible that the strain is so severe that he is in reality sweating drops of blood?

Why?

The battle is over the cup. Christ anticipated this. Look at Matthew 20.17-23. Christ knew that he had to drink the cup. He knew it was coming and in Mark's gospel he tells Peter James and John that, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." Mark says that "he began to be deeply distressed and troubled." Even though Christ knew this hour was coming and that he had come to earth for this hour, and he knew the joy that awaited, yet still, when Christ approaches the cup he is repulsed by what he sees. He recoils and asks the Father to take it away. Is there not another way? Then he goes back to find his disciples, and they are sound asleep. There is a sense when you read this that you find that Christ is already abandoned. He returns to pray and asks again for the Father to take the cup away. He goes back a second time to the disciples. Again, they are sound asleep. Now, Christ returns and for a third time he asks the Father to take away the cup, but in so doing as in his other two prayers, he always surrenders himself to the Father's will and trusts His plan by saying, nevertheless if this is the way, then, I will do it.

There is no other incident in the life of Christ where we see this level of intensity and anguish between the Son and the Father. What is in this cup or what does this cup represent that would produce such revulsion on the part of Christ? Why, in knowing that He came to the earth for this, does he seem to hesitate? Perhaps these OT texts can help us understand what this cup represents.

Ps. 75.8 – "In the hand of the LORD is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs."

Is. 51.17, 22 – "Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the

goblet that makes men stagger....See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again.”

Jer. 25.15-17, 27-29 - “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them. So, I took the cup from the LORD’s hand and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink it....Then tell them, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Drink, get drunk and vomit, and fall to rise no more because of the sword I will send among you.’ But if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, tell them, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: You must drink it! See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name, and will you indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am calling down a sword upon all who live on the earth, declares the LORD Almighty.”

Ez. 23.31-34 – “You have gone the way of your sister; so I will put her cup into your hand. This is what the Sovereign LORD says: You will drink your sister’s cup, a cup large and deep; it will bring scorn and derision, for it holds so much. You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of ruin and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria. You will drink it and drain it dry; and you will dash it to pieces and tear your breasts. I have spoken declares the Sovereign LORD.

I believe that this cup was the cup of God’s wrath against our sin. This cup represented the just and righteous and holy, and therefore the incredibly fierce, infinitely intense and violent anger that God has against our sin. God has demonstrated that He is an infinite God. His love is infinite, and so is His wrath. It is true that God loves to be known as a God who in wrath remembers mercy. He is a God, who is slow to anger, but He does get there, and when He does, it is terrifying. God flooded the entire world at one point, and rescued one family to demonstrate that His Word will not be mocked. God annihilated the peoples of Canaan, and then the Israelites, and then the Assyrians and Babylonians as fulfillments of His Word against people who live in defiance to Him. His wrath is severe.

There is one more passage that I would you to see: Revelation 14.10.

This book speaks of realities that stagger us and stretch our minds to the breaking point in their attempts to grasp how awesome the wrath of God is against sin and how that wrath is going to be poured out upon the inhabitants of this earth who defy God.

So, I believe that this cup represents 3 things.

- 1) It represents the wrath of God against sin.**
- 2) It therefore, represents the suffering that Christ will endure as the One who is the recipient of the wrath of God.**

- 3) **It now means that Christ, for the first time in his entire existence is going to be considered guilty before God. This is something that He has never, ever known. He has been the Son, now He will be treated as the enemy, the One abandoned.**

Now, let me make a theological point and explanation. **Galatians 3.13** says, **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”**

Romans 3.25 **“God put [Christ] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.”**

1 John 4.10 **“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”**

Propitiation is a great word. It speaks of the removal of God’s wrath by providing a substitute.

Remember how Jacob attempted to appease the perceived wrath of Esau? (explain)

The wrath of the Father was not just perceived, it was real. Christ did not appease Him by calming Him down with gifts, the wrath of the Father against our sin was poured out fully upon His own Son and it was completely absorbed by Christ. God exhausted his storehouse of wrath against our sin by using it up completely upon Christ. God wore out His wrath upon His Son, instead of upon us. Christ took that cup of wrath, that cup of suffering, so we could share in the cup of fellowship.

A word about subjectivism:

That hour in the garden seems to be as dark as any. I grant that there was never any doubt that Christ was going to take the cup, and of course He did. But, what we see in the garden is that this was not a mindless exercise that he simply gutted his way through. Christ fully entered into this. He was emotional. He was extremely emotional. He was as emotional as He has ever been in the garden. His soul is so troubled, he nearly dies! Christ is depressed because He feels the weight of all that is taking place. You can be depressed and not sin. The cares of this world and the battles of our hearts and the sins of others weigh us down. Depression is not always a sign of failure, or disbelief. Sometimes it is a sign of being human. Christ was human, but He was also God. And in this condition he shows us what to do with our emotions. He prays, He admits, He asks, and He obeys! He does not surrender what He knows to be true about the Father, to the intense feelings that He is under at the moment.

What that means is that you and I have a high priest who has fully entered in to our humanity. We have no basis to ever, ever, ever accuse God of not knowing or not caring about what we are going through in life. He knows more than we will ever know about

being under the crushing weight of sin. To accuse Him of not knowing, and not caring is to denigrate, nay, it is to mock Him in the garden.

My sin and the wrath of God against my sin was in that cup. When Christ took that, he took all that came with it, which is why there is such resolve on his part during the trial that followed. He was guilty. He was condemned to die. It was not a fair trial, but he did not protest. It was a mockery of justice, but He did not retaliate. He had accepted his role. Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice cry out among the crowd. I cried that day for his crucifixion as that crowd stood in our place and condemned him. Therefore, I bring nothing but guilt to the table.

The two things I want you to grasp are: the cup that Christ took and how truly and fully guilty we are which makes us liable for punishment.

These truths help us carpet bomb the enemies of legalism and condemnation.

The heart of legalism is pride. Pride is what drives the fear of man. The fear of man makes us approval junkies. We are so easily driven by that, and we figure it will work on others, so we manipulate our relationships with it. The garden, the cup and the cross destroy pride. I have nothing to bring to the table. I cannot impress God. I have nothing to impress you with. My only hope is the cross. The cross absolutely takes all of the wind out of my lungs if I am trying to blow my own sails. But on the other hand, the cross fills up my lungs with exhilarating oxygen of grace that enables me to sing with passion and live with hope and forgive and love and worship!

The heart of condemnation is ignorance and unbelief. Look at the cup, it is empty. He drank it all. There is nothing left for you to drink. If your heart is condemning you, if Satan is accusing you, there is probably some truth to it, but your heart and Satan will not tell you the entire story. The truth is, I am guilty, but I am also forgiven because Christ took all of my condemnation upon Himself and left nothing for me, which is why since He took all of the blame, He gets all of the glory.