

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

*See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. I call heaven and earth to witness that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life.*

Moses' ministry was drawing to a close. The people of Israel are just east of the Jordan, preparing to enter the promised land. Moses knows this is his last opportunity to impress upon them the will and truth of God. So with a moving earnestness, he delivers to them this address that places before them two different paths. Each path has two very different endings.

Now, there are a couple of important things to take note of in this address. First, notice to whom Moses is talking. He is not putting out some great altar call to an unconverted people. He is speaking to the people of God. Not only that, he is speaking to the new generation, the one God preserved after the first generation refused to follow God into the promised land and therefore died in the wilderness on account of their own wickedness. These people grew up being led by Moses and, through him, knew YHWH, the God of Israel. They spent their lives following the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Their lives were organized around the tabernacle, which was the very presence of God among them. So when Moses places a choice before them, he reminds them who they *are*: the people of God. Therefore, the choice is between remaining the people of God or turning from being the people of God.

Next, notice the stark difference in the choice that Moses gives. He sets before them a binary: life or death, good or evil, blessing or curse. There is no in-between. There is no overlap. There is no compromise. Either you are one or the other. You cannot be both. You cannot love the Lord and walk in His ways and obey His commandments while also turning to serve other gods. And just when you might be tempted to think to yourself, "Self, I call myself a Christian, so obviously, I have chosen life and do not need to be concerned," Jesus comes in to ruin your day.

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgement.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. ... You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Of course, Jesus could go on, but does He need to? Who isn't convicted by these few words? Whole sermons could be preached on these few verses alone, much less all the ways we seek to justify ourselves about abortion, suicide, euthanasia, abuse, violence, racism, promiscuity, pornography, homosexuality, cohabitation, unfaithfulness, divorce, and on and on and on.

Try as we might in justifying or excusing, Jesus makes abundantly clear that these and similar things are NOT walking in the way of the Lord. And if they are not walking in the way of the Lord, then they are not good and do not partake in life and blessing. Instead, they are evil and partake in death and curse. To justify and excuse and to participate in these thoughts and activities makes you liable, as Jesus says, to the hell of fire. We are not to take them lightly. We are not to treat our sins as if they don't matter. Jesus says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

Now some argue that we mustn't take Jesus at His word here. For if we do, they argue, there would be a whole lot of eyeless and handless people walking around. And yet we know that though we may make our eyes or hands instruments of sin, they aren't its source. Even if we did tear out our eyes or cut off our hands, it wouldn't prevent us from sinning. Our trouble isn't in the members of our body. It is in our very being.

So, what are we to do? To answer that question we need to bring Paul into the mix. He writes to the Corinthians, “I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants of Christ.” Notice what Paul says here. The Corinthians are caught up in sin, and Paul spends much of the letter chastising them for it, but nevertheless, he calls them brothers. He could not address them as spiritual people, even though they are *behaving* very much as people of the flesh. Even so, they are still spiritual people because they are of Christ. That is why Paul can urge them to “grow up.” He calls them to *mature* in the faith so that they no longer *behave* as if they were people of the flesh. Because the truth of the matter is that they could not, by their own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit had come to them and made them to be the people of God.

The Holy Spirit came to us as well. And the Holy Spirit didn’t lob off any body part to deal with our sin and make us holy. Rather, the Holy Spirit drowned us in the water of our Baptism. He killed the old sinful self, and from that water, He raised a new man, a spiritual man. And He gives your new man the power to repent, to turn from yourself and all of your idols, to put away all of your justifications and excuses, and to return to Christ and walk in His ways. For this is whom He re-created you to be. You no longer belong to the world, so do not walk in the way of the world. Do not speak as they do. Do not think as they do. Do not set your hearts on the things they set their hearts upon. Do not seek the comforts of your own flesh, but seek the will and way of God. Cling to His testimonies, fixing your eyes upon His commandments. Praise what is upright, just, and true.

Therefore, Paul tells you just as he told the Corinthians to grow up and mature in the faith. It doesn’t matter if, in Christ, you are an infant, an adolescent, or an adult. On this side of eternity, there is still always growth that you can undergo. This happens by moving from drinking the milk to chewing the meat of His Word, digging into God’s Word through individual devotion and corporate study, and wrestling with how God’s Word defines you, not the other way around. And when you find yourself out of accord with God’s Word, with His will and His ways, remember those beatitudes: blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And repent. Turn back. Because as the people of God, Moses still sets before you today life and death, good and evil, blessing and curse. By the power of the Spirit, choose life!

Amen.