

Three Sides of the Coin

I have in my hand a coin, a quarter--one coin with two sides. The one side we call "heads" and the other side we call "tails." Coins like this are often used in making decisions, where fairness is an issue. This afternoon, at the beginning of many football games the coin will be flipped to see which goal post will be defended by which team and which team will get to decide to begin the game on offense or defense. But I'm not particularly interested in that this morning; I just want to point out that the coin has two sides, one coin two sides, two sides but still one coin. With our modern coins we could take it further. Many U.S. coins today actually have three sides. If you turn the coin on edge and look closely you can see a different color in the middle. Our coins have a "heads" and a "tail" and a layer in the middle, so that we have one coin with three distinct parts. This might give us another way to explain Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit--one God in three distinct persons. It's not a perfect illustration, but it does show how one thing can have three expressions and still be one thing.

I want also to make a second application. It would not be wrong to say that in our coins today the part of our coins we call "heads" and the part that we call "tails" are held together by the undefined layer in the middle. We could also say that if somehow the weld that holds the heads and tails layers to the layer in the middle, the coin would fall apart and become useless. To be legal tender, and to work properly in vending machines, our coins need to be whole.

Now, it seems to me that something similar can be said about our life in Christ. First of all, There are always two foundational dimensions to our Christian lives. The one dimension is represented most clearly by Romans 8:28, which says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." As we live our lives in this world from day to day and night to night, God is at work. In Psalm 121:1-4 the Psalmist says, "My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip--he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." God is always working in absolutely everything and at all times, always watching over us, always working all things together for the good of those who love Him and for the salvation of those who don't love Him yet--because God is not willing that any perish but that all come to eternal life. God is always and

2

continually working for the good of His creation and for the good of every creature and for the good of every person. And, in Romans 8:29 we are told that God's unshakeable and unwavering goal for each of us and for all of us is that we will be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ, that we may become just like Jesus and live the life of Jesus in the midst of our world today.

One thing hard about this dimension is that much of it's working out is invisible to us, especially at the time it is happening. Once we know Christ and are open to be instructed by the Holy Spirit, we can look back over our lives and see now where God was obviously working in the past. And, we can thank and praise Him for what He has done. We can see His hand of protection there, His teaching us patience here, His providential care over there, and His comforting and strengthening Presence in that situation. We can sometimes get little glimpses of how the puzzling pieces of our lives have been designed to fit together to bring us to where we are now and closer to Christ. But in this dimension of our relationship with God, we definitely walk by faith--we simply experience life and trust that just outside our field of vision, God is there and God is working it all together for our good. Happy experiences and sad experiences, easy times and hard times, in our successes and in our failures, in our virtuous acts and in our sins, in our losses and in our gains, in the mundane and in the spectacular--in all things the hand of God is working out His good plan for our lives and for our future with Him.

I also like the promise that God makes to us in Philippians 1:6: Paul says, "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." God is working in our lives and He's not going to stop working in our lives until the good plan He has for our lives is complete. That's a good thing to remember, especially when we mess up and are tempted to be discouraged or to give up. **No matter what it feels like, whether we can see it or not, God is always working for our good.** This is the one side of the coin; let's call it "heads."

The second dimension to our Christian lives is that dimension in which we actively participate. Proverbs 16:3 says, "Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed." I Corinthians 10:31 says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." Colossians 3:17

3

says, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." I don't know about you but I like holding these two dimensions of our life with God together. I like to think of God working beyond what I can see, working in all things, to bring about the image of Christ in my life.

But I also appreciate the fact that He invites me to be a participant, to partner with Him, in pursuing a godly life. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." "Make every effort to be holy." Yes, God is working beyond our vision, weaving together all the experiences of our lives to make us holy, but that doesn't mean that we can lay around like spiritual couch potatoes just waiting for the process to work itself out. Not it all. And, if I am reading what I think I'm reading in these last few scriptures, we are called not just to be a little bit active, but very active and always and continually active in pursuing a godly life. The same phrase appears in Proverbs, I Corinthians, and in Colossians--"Whatever you do." Whatever you do." Whatever you do!" Commit it all to the Lord, do it all in the name of the Lord, do it all for the glory of God." Jesus models this for us and gives expression of this: In John 5:17 Jesus says, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." God the Father is working out the big plan up there, and I'm doing my part down here and now. Our **Father in heaven is always working for our good. And we, too, must work to cooperate with His plan.** This is the other side of the coin; let's call it "tails."

So what we end up with is a very full picture. God is working from above and beyond our vision to shape us into Christ's image and we are doing everything we can do to align ourselves with God's plan from below. And, when these two dimensions of our lives are working together toward the same end, something very powerful and life transforming takes place. The Holy Spirit whom we might consider the metal in the middle between God's unseen work from above and our visible work from below, binds it all together. The Holy Spirit applies what the Father is doing to us and helps us believe in God's unseen work. He also makes it possible for us to recognize some of that work after the fact. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit enables us to see opportunities for glorifying God in the day-to-day experiences of our lives and empowers us to take advantage of them.

Now I want to say something about our side of the equation and how we may actually do all we do for the glory of the Lord. I've been talking with a Christian friend from outside our church about his personal walk with the Lord. One of this man's great frustrations is trying to balance the various facets of his life in a way that gives God first priority. But, he feels torn. He has a business to run, a marriage and family to maintain, and a church to support. Besides that he also wants to maintain a daily devotional life and do Christian ministry beyond his local church. My friend feels compartmentalized and divided. As we have been talking together for a while now, I've been trying to help him see that his relationship with God and his desire to serve God and to walk close to God are not things he needs to do or should do apart from the rest of his life. Rather, his relationship with God is meant to permeate, influence, and be experienced in all facets of his experience.

Maybe some of us have the same hang-up. We think of God being with us when we come to church, practice our personal devotions at home, participate in Bible Study, or when we are doing some sort of Christian ministry. But, the rest of our lives we see differently. O, we may be aware that God is working invisibly in the other areas of our lives, and as we have seen He certainly is, but we don't see how we can participate in His works unless we are in church or doing something church-related. We make a distinction between the secular and spiritual side of our lives, living most of the time in the secular and only occasionally in the spiritual. We find ourselves complaining that we don't have enough time for God. But, in light of our Scripture verses from Proverbs, Corinthians, Colossians, and John, this is surely a bogus way of looking at it. We are not to compartmentalize our lives into secular and sacred pieces. We are to do all we do to the glory of God. We are to praise the Lord at all times. Pray without ceasing. Acknowledge the Lord in all we do. Commit all our plans to Him. We are to be 24-7 believers and 24-7 practitioners of our faith.

But what does that look like in practice? What does it mean to live for Jesus and to glorify God in places outside of church or outside our personal prayer closets? My friend runs his own business. He repairs machinery for others. He understands that being honest and doing a good job in a timely manner and asking a fair price for his labor are all ways to apply his faith to his work, but he still felt that something was missing. Nudged, I believe by the Holy Spirit, I asked him, "Do you ever think of your

customer while you are working on their equipment?" When he replied that this was not something he usually did, I encouraged him to think of the work he was doing for each customer as a ministry to that customer. I also encouraged him to pray while he was working, to pray blessing and salvation into the lives of his customers and their families. I suggested he pray and ask God to help him with his work, to see exactly what needed to be fixed and to show him the best and most efficient way to fix it. I encouraged him to look at the machinery itself and to ask God to show him how the internal workings of the machine might represent or symbolize some aspect of God's working in his life or in the world. The next time I see my friend I'm going to add to my suggestions that when he completes a project he can use that as an occasion to thank, praise, and worship the Lord. If my friend takes my suggestions to heart, I believe his every workday can become a worship experience equal to or even greater than his experience in church on Sundays. The same principle and attitude can be carried over into his marriage and life with his family.

Think this through in your own life. It doesn't really matter what secular work you find yourself doing. If you think about it and pray about it, there is a way to glorify God in your work. There is a way to glorify God in your time with your family. There is a way to make every moment holy.

I get a charge out of people who say that if they were to come into the church building the roof would fall in. I generally tell them about the iron railroad surplus trusses that hold up our roof. Sinners are safe at Fourth Street. It's been proven time and time again. But, this is a silly way to talk. Isaiah 66:1 says, "This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?" Acts 17:24 says, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands." The whole universe is God's cathedral, and each of our hearts is His temple. We are called to acknowledge the Lord at all times and in all places, and to invite Him in as Lord in all we do. God the Father is always working unseen for our good and we must work also as the Holy Spirit guides and empowers us.

The Fourth Street Church of God

4thstcog.com

2001 Fourth Street
Altoona, PA 16601
942-1007/946-4110

Sermon for September 25, 2011

Three Sides of the Coin

Romans 8:28-29; Colossians 3:12-17

Jon R. Neely, Pastor