

PAUL: THE SPIRITUAL ABOLITIONIST, PART II
NOT MAN'S GOSPEL!, PART 31

TEXT: GALATIANS 2:11-21

November 22, 2009

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:

- I. Paul Confronts Peter's Contradiction of the Truth of the Gospel (2:11-13).
- II. Paul Clarifies Peter's Contradiction of the Truth of the Gospel (2:14-21).
 - A. Paul's Question, v. 14
 - B. Paul's Thesis, vv. 15-16
 - C. Paul's Defense, vv. 17-21

In our study of Galatians 2:17-21, we have seen how the gospel does not lead us to be comfortable in our sin but rather to war against it.

Far from leading the believer to disregard the law and continue in sin, Paul offers 4 arguments in vv. 17-21 to show why a Christian who is justified is not given a license to sin but rather is motivated to live a life of grateful obedience unto God.

1. Christ doesn't promote sin, legalism does. vv. 17-18
2. To Live for God One Must die to the Law. v. 19
3. The love of Christ displayed in His life and death motivates the believer to live for God. v. 20
4. Legalism not Grace nullifies the purpose of the cross. v. 21

By way of review, we learned last week that v. 21 is the key verse of Galatians. V. 21 conveys the central thought of this letter. The Judaizers attempted to supplement the saving work of Christ by their own obedience to the law. They argued that Christ's death was important but not totally sufficient for man's justification. Paul utterly denies this and sets forth the utter sufficiency of Christ alone for one's justification.

Paul argues that Christ will do and be everything or nothing. Christ's saving work cannot be combined with human effort for one's right standing with God. There is no middle way. He is either totally sufficient or He isn't. Both ways cannot be mixed without destroying the gospel (i.e., rendering needless the atoning death of Christ).

So, at the heart of this letter lies the complete sufficiency of Christ for salvation. Legalism strips away the sufficiency of the atoning death of Christ on the cross. However, Paul and the apostles insisted that the cross resides at the heart of justification. Justification is by grace through faith in the redeeming work of Christ's atonement. Paul writes in Romans 3:24 that we are "justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..."

As we bring chapter 2 to a close, there are some important lessons that we need to consider before moving on.

CONCLUSION:

1. LEGALISM (JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS OF THE LAW) BREEDS PRIDE AND DENIGRATES THE GLORY OF CHRIST.

As we noted, v. 21 gets to the heart of Galatians by setting forth the total sufficiency of Christ alone for justification. In other words, Paul exalts Christ and denigrates self. But, legalism reverses this and exalts self and denigrates Christ.

Francis Turretin asks, "For if the righteousness and merit of Christ most fully suffice for our justification, why are human merits sewed on? Is not injury thus done to Christ and material given to man for glorying in himself with God?," (*Justification*, p. 20).

Legalism is a petri dish that cultivates pride, self-boasting and self-exaltation. This is why legalism, not the gospel, leads to a lawless life!

At the core of the Judaizer's false gospel, lay an innate pride and glorying in the inherent righteousness of man. The Judaizers gloried in their own righteousness rather than in the glory of Christ and His provision in the Cross.

Throughout Galatians, from beginning to end, Paul is intent on suppressing the pride of man and exalting the glory and sufficiency of Christ alone for one's justification. Consider the following:

From the beginning of his letter after offering a synopsis of the gospel, Paul breaks forth into a doxology and writes, "to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen," (1:5).

In 1:10, Paul denies that he was seeking the approval (praise) of men and trying to please men, which is exactly what the Judaizer's were doing!

In 1:24, Paul says that the work of Christ in His life led the churches of Judea to glorify God.

In 4:17, Paul says the false teachers praised the Galatians only to receive praise in return.

In 5:26, Paul writes to the Galatians, "Let us not become conceited..."

The word conceited means, ‘to be falsely proud’ as ‘to be proud when there is no reason to be proud’ or ‘to be proud even when there is nothing to be proud of’ (Louw & Nida); “eager for empty glory,” (Thayer).

In 6:3-4, Paul warns against possessing an over inflated ego. He says those who think of themselves to be something are truly self-deceived and that it leads to being unsympathetic towards others needs.

In 6:12-13, Paul writes that his opponents wanted to make a good showing in the flesh. The legalists forced the Galatians to be circumcised to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ and to have a reason to boast about how effective their proselytizing was.

The one common characteristic of fallen man is the desire for his own exaltation. Self-love, self-promotion, self-justification and self-exaltation are the driving desires of the fallen heart (cf. Gal. 4:17; 6:12-14).

The gospel according to man drives man to make much of man (Gal. 1:11; 4:17; 6:12-13). But, the gospel according to Christ compels man to make much of Christ (Gal. 6:14). Listen to Paul in 6:14, in comparison to his opponents, “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Paul’s true praise (the boast of his heart) rested solely in the cross of Christ. His words echo the heart of David in Psalm 34:1-3 when David declared,

“¹ I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
² My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. ³ Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together!”

The legalist’s heart doesn’t make its boast in the Lord but rather self. It is the justified heart that has been humbled by grace rather than the prideful heart that boasts in the Lord.

In Philippians 3:3-9, Paul says that he considers the self-righteous works he once trusted and boasted in as loss in light of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ and being credited with His righteousness. Paul worships “by the Spirit of God and glories in Christ Jesus and puts no confidence in the flesh...” (Philip. 3:3). Like David, Paul’s boast was in the Lord alone, which is the chief design of the gospel.

God has designed everything about the gospel for His own glory (cf. Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). Man owes the entire blessing of faith to God and therefore has no reason for glorying and boasting in himself (Eph. 2:8-9, “⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast...”)

If works justified a man, he would have something in which to glory. But when he is justified by grace through faith (which gives nothing to God but only receives) all glorying is excluded and Christ alone is praised.

2. JUSTIFICATION REQUIRES THE REMOVAL OF GUILT BY THE PAYMENT OF A RANSOM.

Why can't our works justify us before God?

Listen carefully to Francis Turretin,

“...it is impossible by a quality of finite virtue and worth (i.e. our works/inherent righteousness-J.F.) for an offense of infinite indignity (i.e. our sin/lawbreaking-J.F.) to be blotted out and compensated for,” (*Justification*, p. 21).

Christ died to pay the infinite price required by the law for our sin in order to justify us. He achieved something, which our works could never do. He is utterly sufficient for our justification because His person and works are of infinite virtue and worth.

Getting circumcised, refraining from certain kinds of food, observing special religious holy days, getting baptized, following the rules, acts of philanthropy, etc... (i.e. qualities of finite virtue) cannot blot out and compensate for the infinite indignity of our sin.

All of our works and righteousness are worthless in comparison to such an inestimable price. Martin Luther notes, “For I cannot buy with a pittance something that cost many thousands of golden talents,” (*Luther's Works*, vol. 26, p. 183).

Only the death of Christ could pay the required price for our sin because it was of infinite virtue and worth.

Note how the Scriptures speak of the infinite worth and value of Christ's substitutionary death:

“¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

“In him we have redemption (being freed through the payment of a ransom) through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace...,” (Eph. 1:7).

Christ “...gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:14)

Paul decries works of the law because they are of finite worth and value in comparison to the infinite value of Christ and His saving work. In 2:20, Paul says Christ is the one who gave Himself for sinners (see also 1:4). Thus, Paul sets forth the total sufficiency of the substitutionary atonement of Christ for justification because only His death could pay the infinite price required by the law for our sin.

3. THE GOSPEL EXPOSES THE HEINOUS OFFENCE OF LEGALISM.

Paul's language in vv. 20-21 is remarkable. How does Paul say we come to live by faith in Christ for our righteous standing before God? The answer: The love of Christ manifest in the giving of Himself for us on the cross!

No amount of personal merit, goodness, sincere effort or personal morality will move God to justify us. Paul attributes our justification solely to Christ's love and substitutionary death, therefore to free, unmerited grace (2:20). See here the astounding good news of the gospel!

Calvin commenting on Paul's words writes,

“No words can properly express what this means; for who can find language to declare the excellency of the Son of God? Yet he it is who gave himself as a price for our redemption. Atonement, cleansing, satisfaction, and all the benefits which we derive from the death of Christ, are here represented,” (John Calvin, *Galatians*, vol. XXI, p. 76).

Against the backdrop of such amazing love, the heinous offence of legalism is exposed. Again, Calvin notes, “...how dreadful is the ingratitude manifested in despising the grace of God, so invaluable in itself, and obtained at such a price,” (*Galatians*, p. 76)!

Martin Luther, commenting on v. 21 writes,

“I ask you what can be more wicked or a more horrible sin than to nullify the grace of God and to refuse to be justified by faith in Christ? It is bad enough, and more than bad enough, that we are wicked and are transgressors against all the Commandments of God. Yet over and above this we add the sin of sins when we smugly reject the grace of God and the forgiveness of sins being offered to us through Christ. Believe me, this blasphemy is greater and more horrible than anyone can express. Paul and the other apostles did not dwell on and denounce any sin more vehemently than the contempt of grace and the denial of Christ. Yet we commit this sin so very easily,” (*Luther's Works*, vol. 26, pp. 179-180).

What can be more horrible than to make the death of Christ useless in your life? Nothing! Yet, it is a common sin committed by all. Under the appearance of holiness, men constantly seek to commend themselves to God by their own works. John Stott writes,

“They think it noble to try to win their way to God and to heaven. But it is not noble; it is dreadfully ignoble. For, in effect, it is to deny both the nature of God and the mission of Christ. It is to refuse to let God be gracious. It is to tell Christ that He need not have bothered to die,” (John Stott, *Galatians*, p. 66).

Legalism (self-trust/self-righteousness) denigrates Christ because it proclaims both the grace of God and the death of Christ to be unnecessary. It undermines the sole sufficiency of Christ and His saving work. Thus, to suggest that Christ died to no purpose Martin Luther wrote “is to blaspheme Christ in the extreme, to spit in His face, to tread the Son of God underfoot, to profane the blood of the covenant...” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, p. 183).

4. THE GOSPEL IS THE ONLY SOURCE OF POWER FOR OBEDIENCE.

Paul insists that Christ died so that men might live for God by grace in spite of having broken God’s law. He commends the gospel as the only source of power for obedience. Jerry Bridges writes,

“There is a direct correlation between faith in the righteousness of Christ and zeal in the cause of Christ. The more a person counts as loss his own righteousness and lays hold by faith of the righteousness of Christ, the more he will be motivated to live and work for Christ. The same Christian activity can be either an expression of our own righteousness that we think earns favor with God, or it can be an expression of love and gratitude because we already have His favor through the righteousness of Christ,” (*The Gospel for Real Life*, p. 124).

5. THE GOSPEL IS THE ONLY ANTIDOTE AGAINST THE STRENGTH OF SIN.

The fruit of Christ’s merit for justification and the fruit of His power for sanctification go hand in hand together. The gospel not only brings freedom from the curse and condemnation of the law. It also brings freedom from the corruption and strength of sin. Augustus Toplady captured this truth in his hymn *Rock of Ages* when he wrote, “Be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.”

There is a two-fold struggle in every human heart.

First, there is the struggle against the merit and righteousness of Christ. The human heart loves self-righteousness and cannot tolerate being shut out.

Second, there is the struggle against the death of Christ for indwelling sin. The corruptions and lusts of the human heart war in us in order to maintain their strength and ruling power.

In Romans 7, which is a vital section of Scripture regarding the believer’s ongoing struggle with sin, Paul recounts his own personal struggle with sin. In his struggle, he directs believers back to the only source of hope in their daily battle, namely Christ (cf.

7:24-25). Thus, just as in Galatians 2:20, we again find Paul highlighting for every believer his or her continual need for the gospel.

Against both of these struggles the gospel, when effectually applied by faith, humbles our self-righteousness and subdues the ruling power of sin!

Ralph Erskine writes,

“Some have but a partial faith, relishing Christ only for freedom from the wrath of God, and not also for freedom from the power of sin: this is evidence of a rotten heart; for true believers prize Christ, not only as a Surety, for paying their debt, but also as a Root, for feeding them with the sap of spiritual life, as a root feeds the branches; and they relish Christ, not only as one that appeases God’s wrath, but one that purifies the soul from sin,” (“The Strength of Sin, How The Law Is So, Opened,” in *The Works of Ralph Erskine, vol. 5*, p. 511).

As we bring chapter 2 to a close, let us ask ourselves:

- Am I growing in an increasing vital awareness and understanding of justification?
- Does the truth of justification by faith alone grip and affect my daily life for holiness like it did for Paul?
- Do you live in a vital awareness that you are presently and permanently accepted by God and under His favor apart from your personal holiness and obedience?
- Do I nullify God’s grace by thinking that God’s blessings and favor are earned or forfeited by what I do or don’t do?
- Am I trusting in the life, death and resurrection of Christ as the sole basis for my standing with God?
- Or, do I nullify God’s grace by depending to a certain degree on my religious performance or personal goodness and morality?
- Do I prize Christ not only for my justification (freedom from condemnation) but also my sanctification (purification from corruption)?
- Am I trusting in the gospel not only for my acceptance before God but also for purity in my daily walk?
- Am I as eager for Christ to cleanse me from sin as I am thankful for His appeasing God’s wrath against my sin?

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