

SONS OF ABRAHAM
PART 10

TEXT: GALATIANS 3:6-14

APRIL 25, 2010

REVIEW/INTRODUCTION:

Unlike many in our culture who think that the purpose of religion is to supply a list of rules (e.g., the Golden Rule) or principles that lead to a blessed life, Paul in Galatians 3:10 argues that Law leads to cursing. The Law only issues a sentence of condemnation rather than justification. It enslaves rather than frees.

Since following a set of laws doesn't lead to a blessed life, what does? In 3:10-14, Paul is answering the question, "How to Live a Blessed Life."

The Judaizers maintained that the path to a blessed life consisted in keeping a list of rules (i.e., the Mosaic Law). They held that the OT Scriptures taught that justification is partly by obedience to the Law and partly by faith. Paul takes up their very own argument from the OT Scriptures and turns it against them. He denounces man's doing "right" in order to put God in debt to him ("I obey/do therefore God loves me and blesses me.").

In 3:10-14, Paul sets forth 4 arguments based on the OT Scriptures (Lev., Deut., Hab.), which prove the impossibility of justification by works of the law.

I. THE OT SCRIPTURES TEACH THAT THE LAW ISSUES A SENTENCE OF CURSING RATHER THAN BLESSING (3:10).

Paul grounds his first argument on the authority of Scripture by quoting Deuteronomy 27:26, "for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

As a former Pharisee and expert in the Law, Paul picked up on the blessing/cursing pattern in the Mosaic Law and applies it to the situation in Galatia. In vv. 10-12, Paul sets forth the cursing from Mt. Ebal. In vv. 13-14, he sets forth the blessing from Mt. Gerizim.

By quoting Deuteronomy 27:26, Paul summarizes the major proposition in the voice of the law, which is, "Do this and live." Or, "Disobey and be cursed."

The Law requires every man to keep everything it commands and forbids, down to the minutest detail. If you do not, the very lack of this perfection is sin, and lays you open to the curse of the Law and cuts you off from life. God, as the just Judge, cannot pronounce anyone just and grant a right to life except on the basis of a perfect righteousness. But someone may protest and ask:

“But why can our good works not be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of it?” The answer is because the righteousness, which is able to stand before God’s judgment must be absolutely perfect and in complete agreement with the law of God.”

Even as believers, our best works in this life are imperfect and defiled with sin. Since then we are unable to bring our lives into perfect and complete agreement with God’s law, the law cannot bless us. All it can do now is shout from Mt. Ebal, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

Before we move on to Paul’s second argument, there are two underlying assumptions about fallen humanity that Paul makes in v. 10 that are important for us to consider. First, by quoting Deuteronomy 27:26, Paul assumes man’s total inability to keep the law.

LESSON:

A. MAN’S TOTAL INABILITY

To better understand man’s inability, it will be helpful to briefly examine Augustine’s classic concept of man’s nature. Augustine taught that before the Fall, Adam and Eve possessed both the ability to sin/disobey (*posse peccare*) and the ability not to sin/obey (*posse non-peccare*). Before the Fall, the God’s Law did not issue a curse because God gave Adam every faculty necessary to keep His law. There was no conflict in man’s heart because there was no sin.

However, during his “probation” Adam chose to exercise his ability to sin and thus plunged the race into utter ruin. After the Fall, man no longer possessed the ability not to sin/obey. As a result, Augustine taught man’s problem lies in the fact that he is unable to keep from sinning (*non-posse, non-peccare*).

The point of this in relation to Paul’s argument is this: Because of the Fall, man is no longer able to keep the Law. Man is unable to keep from sinning (i.e., breaking God’s Law).

If we were to state Deuteronomy 27:26 positively, it would read, “Blessed be everyone who abides by all things written in the Book of the Law and does them.”

But, because of the Fall, the law only issues a curse because man no longer has the power/ability to obey nor the desire to do so. Man is morally enslaved to his own disobedient and corrupt desires. Paul’s argument, then, presupposes that no one is able to perfectly abide by the Law and thus every man is pronounced cursed.

Jesus, in Matthew 19:16-17, stresses the same underlying premise as Paul in Galatians 3:10. In response to the Rich Young Ruler’s question, “¹⁶ Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”, Jesus replies, “¹⁷ If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”

Notice Jesus doesn't reply, "Believe and you shall be saved." Since the young man's question had to do with the Law and not the gospel, Jesus answers him according to the Law. He tells the young man if he desires to possess eternal life by doing he must perfectly keep the commandments.

The purpose of Christ's response is to beat down the pride of this young man's heart. By preaching the Law, Christ is seeking to get him to see the impossibility of keeping the Law and thus expose his absolute need of a Savior. And so Jesus, Himself, taught that man is incapable of obtaining a blessed life by doing.

Paul, in Romans 8:7-8 writes, "⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Man in his fallen state is unable to obey God's law precisely because he no longer desires to.

In Jeremiah 13:23, Jeremiah asks a rhetorical question that assumes a negative answer: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil." Jeremiah's question drives home the point that there is nothing man can do to change his sinful nature.

In Proverbs 20:9, Solomon asks, "Who can say, 'I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin'?"

"The law is a matter of performance, but a performance that is beyond human possibility." (Philip Ryken, *Galatians*, p. 110).

The purpose of the Law is not to make us good people so that God is in debt to us and we are deserving of His blessing. Rather, the Law shows us that we are bad people who are in debt to God and deserving of His cursing.

The law shows us that every faculty of our being has been affected by sin (i.e., that we are radically depraved). In Romans 3:10-18, Paul argues from the OT Scriptures how sin affects our "throat", "tongues", "lips", "mouth", "feet" and "eyes". In other words, the OT Scriptures clearly reveal how sin is all-pervasive. It is comprehensive in scope.

Sin is to human nature what a drop of poison is like in a glass of water. It is not that the whole glass of water is poison but rather that the whole glass of water has become poisoned. Just like poison in a glass of water, sin has diffused itself into every part of our being (i.e., our minds, will, emotions, imaginations, bodies, etc...). Sin affects not only what we do, but also what we approve and disapprove of (cf. Isa. 5:20; Rom 1:32). Because of the comprehensive scope of our sin, all of our good works and virtues are defiled (cf. Isa 64:6).

As a result of this radical depravity, the Bible says man is spiritually dead (Eph 2:1-5), blind to the glory of God in Christ (e.g. 2 Cor 4:4) and unable and unwilling to do anything that is pleasing to God (Rom. 8:7-8).

Man's inability, which is a result of his radical depravity, is why all men are incapable of perfect obedience to God's Law and therefore cursed and guilty in their standing before God.

This leads us to a second underlying premise that Paul is making in v. 10. By quoting Deuteronomy 27:26, Paul is revealing that we are all law-breakers.

B. MAN'S LAW BREAKING

The Bible doesn't depict man as a law-keeper but rather a law-breaker. The Scriptures do not set God forth as a promise keeper but rather a promise breaker. The only perfect law keeper and promise keeper in Scripture is Christ! God alone is faithful to His promises (cf. Ps. 100:5).

Man's law breaking raises the question, what is sin?

Listen to 1 John 3:4, "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness." The Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q.14 says, "Sin is any lack of conformity unto, or violation of God's law."

In his book, *The Christian View of Man*, J. Gresham Machen wrote,

"The most elementary thing about sin is that it is that which is contrary to God's law. You cannot believe in the existence of sin unless you believe in the existence of the law of God. The idea of sin and the idea of law go together..."

That being so, I ask you just to run through the Bible in your mind and consider how very pervasive in the Bible is the Bible's teaching about the law of God. We have already observed how clear that teaching is in the account which the Bible gives of the first sin of man. God said, "Ye shall not eat of the fruit of the tree". That was God's law; it was a definite command. Man disobeyed that command; man did what God told him not to do: and that was sin. But the law of God runs all through the Bible. It is not found just in this passage or that, but it is the background of everything that the Bible says regarding the relations between God and man," (pp. 184-185).

Part of the purpose of the law is to show us that we are law-breakers rather than law-keepers. If we just take a passing look through the Bible, we will see the pervasiveness of man's law breaking. For example,

2 Chronicles 6:36, "there is no one who does not sin..."

Ecclesiastes 7:20, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins."

Isaiah 53:6, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way...”

Romans 3:10, 12, “¹⁰ None is righteous, no, not one...¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

Romans 3:19-20, “¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”

I want to ask you an important question, “What do we need to be saved from?” Paul is arguing in Galatians 3:10 that we need to be saved from God. Because we are law-breakers, we are guilty and stand condemned (cursed) before God, who is the Law Giver. Because of our law breaking, the Bible says we are enemies of God. James 4:4 says, “...whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” This is why Paul says in Galatians 1:8-9, that all who turn from the gospel are accursed (i.e., eternally condemned).

Just like Adam and Eve, the last thing a law-breaker wants to do is stand fully exposed before God, who is the Law Giver and Just Judge.

But, the glory and good news of the gospel is that the One from whom we need to be saved (i.e., justified) is the very One who saves (i.e., justifies) us! When we place our faith in Christ alone, God justifies us and whereas we were His enemies we are now at peace. Paul declares, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” (Romans 5:1).

Through faith alone, God covers us with Jesus’ robes of righteousness, as the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of righteousness...(Isa. 63:10). Because we are cloaked in the righteousness of Christ, we are never again the target of God’s curse and judgment because Jesus isn’t!

In Romans 5:9-10, Paul proclaims, “⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” Through His death, God’s wrath was exhausted and through His life God’s righteousness is imputed!

It is only in the gospel that God’s blessing resides because as Isaiah 53:8 declares, “By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression (i.e., law breaking) of my people?”

Paul, then, first argues that it is totally useless to seek God's favor and acceptance by law keeping because (1) man is utterly incapable of keeping it and (2) man is a law-breaker rather than a law keeper.

REFLECTION:

As we reflect on Paul's teaching concerning the law, the questions before us are:

Do you want to escape the curse of the Law? Do you want to receive God's blessing and live? Do you want a blessed life?

Paul says the answer is not found in following a set of principles in order to try and earn and maintain God's favor (i.e., blessing). All who seek God's favor and acceptance through their performance have too high a view of themselves and their ability and too low a view of God and His Law.

R.C. Sproul writes,

“When we consider even for a moment the frightening dimension of the unbridled outpouring of God's wrath, we tremble in our souls. When we consider that we deserve to be consumed by His fury and realize that His fury has instead consumed Jesus in our place, when we recognize the greatness of the peril, we then are able to see the greatness of the salvation that He has bestowed upon us,”
(*Saved From What?*, p. 26).

And so Paul first argues that the answer to a blessed life is found in trusting Christ as He is freely given to you in the gospel. Listen to the following words spoken by the great Scottish preacher, John Colquhoun, in the 17th century,

“In its condemning power, the law is very different from the gospel. The law condemns, and cannot justify a sinner: the gospel justifies, and cannot condemn the sinner who believes in Jesus.

In the law, God appears in terrible threatenings of eternal death; in the gospel, He manifests Himself in gracious promises of life eternal.

In the former, He curses as on Mount Ebal; in the latter, He blesses as on Mount Gerizim. In the one, He speaks in thunder and with terrible majesty; in the other, with soft whispers or a still small voice (1 Kings 19:12).

By the trumpet of the law, He proclaims war with sinners; by the jubilee-trumpet of the gospel, He publishes peace, ‘peace on earth and good will toward men’ (Luke 2:14). The law is a sound of terror to convinced sinners; the gospel is a joyful sound, ‘good tidings of great joy.’

The former represents God as a God of wrath and vengeance; the latter as a God of love, grace, and mercy. The one presents Him to sinners as ‘as consuming fire’; the other exhibits the precious blood of the Lamb which quenches the fire of His righteous indignation so that it may not consume such sinners as believe. That presents to the view of the sinner a throne of judgment, this is a throne of grace.

Every sentence of condemnation in Scripture belongs to the law; every sentence of justification forms a part of the gospel. The law condemns a sinner for his first offense, but the gospel offers him the forgiveness of all his offenses.” (*A Treatise On The Law And The Gospel*, pp. 150-151)

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