

SONS OF ABRAHAM
PART 11

TEXT: GALATIANS 3:10-14

MAY 2, 2010

REVIEW/INTRODUCTION:

In Galatians 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. Paul grounds his first argument on the authority of Scripture by quoting Deuteronomy 27:26.

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

The Law requires you 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.

So, Paul first argues that it is totally useless to seek God's favor and acceptance by law keeping because man is utterly incapable of doing so and he is a law-breaker not a law keeper.

This truth is clear from Scripture, which brings us to Paul's second argument.

LESSON:

- II. THE OT SCRIPTURES CLEARLY REVEAL THAT NO ONE IS JUSTIFIED BY WORKS OF THE LAW (v. 11).

The controlling question of Paul's argument is this, "Since the Law only leads to condemnation, how is one justified before God? How will God accept us? How do we come into His favor? What do the OT Scriptures teach?"

Paul says the answer from the OT scriptures is unmistakably clear. The word, "evident," comes from the Greek word, "δηλος," which means "clearly/easily known, evident, plain, clear as opposed to what is concealed or invisible" (cf. 1 Tim. 5:24-25).

The Scriptures set forth two entirely different possibilities: Justification is either by works of the law or through faith in Christ alone. Paul says the OT Scriptures are clear that the only possibility of justification is through faith in Christ alone (cf. 2:16; 3:6).

In 4:21 Paul asks the Galatians, "Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?" In a similar fashion Paul is asking in 3:11, "Have you not listened to the law? Don't you know that the Scripture teaches that unless a man completely satisfies

the requirements of the law, he will come under its curse? If you would have paid attention to the OT Scriptures you would see that they clearly teach that justification (the blessed life) does not come by relying on your works but through faith alone.”

In order to prove his point, Paul grounds his second argument on Habakkuk 2:4. There are several important lessons we learn from Paul by his reference to Habakkuk 2:4.

A. HABAKKUK 2:4 SHOWS THAT JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE IS A PERMANENT TRUTH.

By quoting Habakkuk 2:4, Paul teaches that God has always had one method of salvation from the very beginning (see F.F. Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 161). Man comes into God’s favor in every age, OT and NT, through faith alone.

People often struggle over the issue of how OT saints were saved, so I want to say a brief word about this. Paul says this issue is very clear. OT saints were saved through faith in Christ alone.

Paul just stated in Galatians 3:8 that God preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham. But, someone might ask, “How could Abraham have believed the gospel when the Son of God had not even become Incarnate yet? Jesus of Nazareth was not yet born?” How then could Abraham, or for that matter any other OT Saint, have been saved through faith in Christ?

It is true that Christ is not present in the OT in the same way as He is in the NT. We must be careful to guard the significance of the Incarnation. In the Incarnation, Jesus is the final revelation of God (cf. Heb. 1:1-4).

To be sure, the *object* of the OT saint’s faith was less definite than ours, seeing that we now have the full revelation of Christ. Notwithstanding, the *essence* of their faith was the same (i.e., faith in God’s promises to deliver from sin).

Abraham, as Paul has already argued, exemplified justification through faith alone by believing God’s promises. Later in Galatians 3:18, Paul argues, “For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.”

Though the *clarity* of the object of faith is different, there is no difference between the *character* of Abraham’s faith (i.e., OT Saints) and that of Christians. Abraham, like us was justified by faith alone. He was a justified sinner just like us.

Where then does Christ come in? In 2 Corinthians 1:20a, Paul writes, “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him...” Jesus, Paul says, is the ultimate substance of all God’s promises.

Since justification came by means of faith in God's promises and since Jesus is the ultimate substance of all God's promises, which OT saints trusted, it is therefore entirely right to say that they were saved through faith in Christ.

Paul then argues that it is clear that the OT Scriptures have always taught justification through faith alone.

B. HABAKKUK 2:4 HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE.

Habakkuk 2:4 is an important passage not only for the message of Habakkuk but also for the message of the Bible.

James Boice writes,

“Habakkuk 2:4 is the central revelation of this important and quite contemporary prophecy... This is a great text. It could even be called the great text of the Bible. To understand it is to understand the Christian gospel and the Christian life. It is so important that it is picked up by the New Testament writers, twice by Paul (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11) and once by the author of the Book of Hebrews (Heb. 10:38),” (*The Minor Prophets*, vol. 2, pp. 407-408).

In order to better understand Paul's argument in Galatians 3:11, let's briefly look at the context of Habakkuk 2:4.

In its original context, this verse is part of God's answer to the questions Habakkuk raises in chapter 1. Habakkuk was troubled by the sinfulness of Israel. But, he was even more troubled by the fact that God said He was going to use the Babylonians to punish Israel (Hab. 1:5-11). Habakkuk was confused at how God could use a sinful nation to punish a less sinful one (Hab. 1:12-17).

Habakkuk's bewilderment illustrates the age-old dilemma concerning God's justice: “God's eyes are too pure to look on evil. He is too just to tolerate even the slightest degree of wickedness in His presence. Since God is just, why does evil seem to go unpunished? How can wicked people get away with their wickedness? Is God doing right?”

Having expressed his confusion, in 2:1, like a soldier who enters his lookout tower to await a coming enemy, Habakkuk waits for God to answer him.

In vv. 2-20, God answers Habakkuk and reassures him that once He has justly punished Israel for their wickedness, He would then justly punish the Babylonians for their wickedness. Simply put, all sinners will be justly punished because there are none who are upright.

And so in vv. 6-20, through a series of 5 woes, God, through the prophet Habakkuk, details His coming judgment of the Babylonians. God exposes and condemns the

Babylonians prideful hearts and self-confidence (“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him...,” 2:4a).

Unlike Habakkuk who trusted in God, waiting for God’s answer, the Babylonians trusted in themselves and their accomplishments. They took pride in their power and self-sufficiency rather than in God. In 2:9, Habakkuk condemns Babylon for relying on their great treasures and wealth for protection. In brief, they were guilty of self-justification. Therefore, they are not counted righteous in God’s sight (their soul was not upright).

But, unlike the Babylonians, Habakkuk trusted God rather than his own reason in a time of crisis and uncertainty. So, whether a person trusts in his own reason or in his own accomplishments, both are reliance upon works and evidence of self-sufficiency and self-justification.

In 3:17-19, Habakkuk concludes his prophecy by expressing heartfelt, faith in God in a beautiful Psalm of faith. He rejoices in the Lord and declares:

“¹⁷ Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹ God, the Lord, is my strength; He makes my feet like the deer’s; He makes me tread on my high places.”

A justified heart is a humble heart. It turns away from pride and self-sufficiency and self-boasting and lives in dependence upon God alone. The Babylonians rejoiced in their own accomplishments for deliverance. However, Habakkuk took joy in God and His salvation. The Babylonians trusted in their own strength but Habakkuk gloried in God and His strength. The Babylonians sought sure footing for their lives in their conquests and great riches. But, just like the deer who had sure footing on steep mountainous slopes, Habakkuk’s faith in God grounded his life in the midst of perplexing and trying circumstances.

Pride is the natural, default tendency of the human heart and a monstrous evil. Ambition and pride characterized the Babylonians. By trusting in their accomplishments and self-sufficiency, they withdrew from the authority of their Creator and set themselves up in the place of God.

Legalism, then, is very much idolatry. In fact, Habakkuk pronounces judgment upon the Babylonians for the sin of idolatry (2:19). Because legalism is idolatry, it is a violation of the 1st Commandment, which requires reverence, trust, love and worship of God alone. Martin Luther wrote that a legalist establishes himself as both “creature and creator at the same time. Therefore no one can describe in words how horrible and dreadful a thing it is to seek righteousness apart from the blessing, in the Law and in works. For this is the abomination standing in the holy place (Matt. 24:15), which denies God and establishes a creature in the place of the Creator,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, p. 259).

Legalism is man's attempt to bless himself by his own works (i.e., to justify himself before God and set himself free from sin and death). Thus, whenever a person, like the Babylonians or Judaizers, trusts in himself rather than in Christ, he denies the righteousness, mercy and promises of God.

Whenever our focus shifts from Christ and His righteousness, which is outside of us to our works and self-righteousness, which is inside of us, for our acceptance before God, we deny Christ and all His blessings (cf. Gal. 2:21). We are guilty of establishing not the righteousness required in the Law but as Luther says "a mere figment and idol of the Law," (*Luther's Works, vol. 26, p. 254*).

The only just and right response of God to such idolatrous, self-righteous pride and self-worship is judgment. And so Like Habakkuk ("woe to you"), Paul announces God's judgment, "Cursed be everyone" that seeks to justify themselves on the basis of "doing" rather than "believing."

In the midst of all these pronouncements of judgment, God reveals how He wants man to live. Rather than living by works (self-reliance; Babylonians), God calls for men to live by faith (God-reliance; Habakkuk). Instead of trusting in themselves, the Babylonians should have trusted in God alone like Habakkuk. Thus, Habakkuk reveals that the only way to escape the just judgment of God is by faith rather than works.

The ones whom God declares righteous live by faith (i.e., in the same way as Abraham, Gal. 3:6). However, all who trust in themselves and their accomplishments remain unjust and under the divine judgment of God.

Paul clearly shows that all who rely on works of the law, like the Babylonians or unbelieving Israelites, are under a curse. And, all who like Habakkuk believe God are blessed (i.e., justified) and can have sure-footed confidence in their standing before God and live a blessed life even in the midst of trying circumstances, particularly in one's daily fight against sin.

This brings us to one final crucial insight that Paul makes in quoting Habakkuk 2:4.

C. HABAKKUK 2:4 REVEALS THAT JUSTIFICATION IS A DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY.

The Judaizers maintained that a truly blessed life consisted in living daily by a set of rules in addition to Jesus (e.g., Jesus plus circumcision and observance of Jewish Feast Days).

Faith, they asserted, may have been ok in getting started but it is not sufficient to continue moving on. If a person really desires to live a blessed life (be a Son of Abraham), he or she must keep the Law.

Paul challenged this false gospel and said that such a view only enslaves rather than frees. The justified believer doesn't begin with faith and then proceed to live his life on some other basis (cf. Gal. 3:3). Commenting on Habakkuk 2:4, James Boice notes, "It does not

say that the righteous shall draw on faith from time to time as faith is needed. It says, ‘the righteous will live [continuously] by his faith.’ That is, the righteous will operate on this principle twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year- so long as life lasts,” (*The Minor Prophets*, p. 411).

Habakkuk 2:4 reveals that justification is a doctrine to live by each and every day! Regrettably, few believers live as though justification is a permanent, abiding state and even fewer live with it as a present, daily reality.

Yet, if we want to live a holy life as blessed people, we must learn how to deal with our failures to obey God, which are many! When we fail, we are always tempted to handle our failures in the wrong way.

We are either tempted to fall into despair, “I can’t believe I did this again!” Or, we are tempted to look to something other than Jesus and the gospel to fight against our indwelling sin and to gain a sense of His favor and forgiveness.

But, Paul says in Galatians 3:11 and 2:20 that we must go back to the truth of the gospel again and again in our battle against indwelling sin. In 2:20, Paul reveals how the truth of justification was a present reality that he lived by every day of his life.

Unlike the Babylonians, Paul renounced all confidence in his performance or lack of performance and lived daily trusting in Jesus and His righteousness as the only basis for his right standing with God. The gospel is good news not only for our eternal future but also for the here and now.

Jerry Bridges writes,

“The good news doesn’t begin when we die. It certainly does address that issue, but it also tells us that there is good news for us now. We don’t have to feel guilt-ridden and insecure in our relationship with God. We don’t have to wonder if He likes us. We can begin each day with the deeply encouraging realization that I am accepted by God, not on the basis of my personal performance, but on the basis of the infinitely perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ,” (*The Gospel For Real Life*, pp. 16-17).

This is the good news of the gospel!

REFLECTION:

In His life, Jesus perfectly obeyed God’s law in our place. In His death, Jesus perfectly suffered God’s judgment in our place (i.e., the penalty/curse for our law-breaking). Jesus, then, not only paid our debt by dying but also secured our righteousness by living. Through faith alone, apart from the works of the law, we are not only no longer cursed but are also adopted as sons, heirs with Christ (Gal. 4:5-7)!

Paul's argument in v. 11 is quite simple. The OT Scriptures are unmistakably clear in the matter of justification. There is no need for extended debate with the Judaizers. Habakkuk clearly testifies that the righteous live by faith. If it is by faith then it cannot be by the Law, because the law is not of faith rather "The one who does them shall live by them," (v. 12).

But, the just man lives by trusting in Christ not only the initial moment he believes but also throughout each and every moment of his life. Thus, like Habakkuk, the justified sinner declares in grateful praise, "I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation."

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