

SONS OF ABRAHAM
PART 13

TEXT: GALATIANS 3:10-14

MAY 30, 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.

- I. THE OT SCRIPTURES TEACH THAT THE LAW ISSUES A SENTENCE OF CURSING RATHER THAN BLESSING (3:10; CF. DEUT. 27:26).
- II. The OT Scriptures clearly reveal that no one is justified by works of the Law (v. 11; cf. Hab. 2:4).

LESSON:

- III. The OT Scriptures teach that the law and faith are wholly incompatible in regard to justification (v. 12; cf. Lev. 18:5).

To confirm his argument, Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5, which says, "You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD."

There are several important insights we can learn about justification from Paul's quotation of Leviticus 18:5.

First, by quoting Leviticus 18:5 Paul shows how the Law and faith operate on two totally different principles in regard to justification.

A. DIFFERENT PRINCIPLES

The phrase "shall live" occurs in both Habakkuk 2:4 (3:11) and Leviticus 18:5 (3:12; see Fung, *Galatians*, p. 145). By referring to this phrase, Paul presents two mutually exclusive principles for living one's life: law-driven or gospel-driven.

Leviticus 18:5 (v. 12) sets forth the law-driven principle, which teaches that the one who obeys ("does") the works of the Law shall live by them. Habakkuk 2:4 (v. 11) sets forth the gospel-driven principle, which teaches that the righteous man (i.e., justified) shall live by faith.

We learned from Paul's quotation of Habakkuk 2:4 that the justified man doesn't begin with faith and then proceed to live his life on some other basis. Rather, the justified man lives by faith in Christ twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year- so long as life lasts!

Every day, Paul renounced all confidence in his own performance (Phil. 3:8-9) and looked to Christ and His righteousness alone for assurance of his right standing with God and God's goodwill toward him (Gal. 2:20).

In contrast to this gospel-driven life, the Judaizers insisted on a law-driven life. They combined the law with the gospel in regard to justification. They taught that unless a person was circumcised and kept the Law of Moses, they could not be in a right standing relationship with God (cf. Acts 15:1-15). In other words, faith in Jesus was necessary but the Galatians own works of obedience were also required in order to truly entitle them to God's favor and goodwill.

The principle of a law-driven life applies to *doers*. The law-driven life is summed up in the Nike slogan, "Just do it." If you "just do it" (i.e., "Do this and live."), then you will be declared righteous before God and inherit eternal life. If you don't then you are unrighteous before God and eternally cursed.

The principle of a gospel-driven life applies to *believers*. The gospel-driven life is summed up in the slogan, "Just believe Him," (i.e., Live! Now, do this.).

Faith is not a work; it is not the condition for justification. Our act of faith does not justify us. Faith is a gift that rests and receives in another's works (i.e., Christ's obedience to the Law).

Faith is merely the instrument by which we lay hold on Christ's righteousness through which our debt, both of duty and punishment, is fully paid (see Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, p. 415).

Second, by quoting Leviticus 18:5, Paul shows how the Law and faith rest on different foundations in regard to justification.

B. DIFFERENT FOUNDATIONS

By contrasting two life principles of justification, a legal and evangelical, Paul reveals two totally different foundations for standing before God in judgment.

Note how Paul begins v. 12. He says, "the law is not of faith." This is simply a way of stating that the Law is based on works instead of faith for justification. Faith, however, rests on Christ and His works for justification. Both foundations are mutually incompatible in regard to justification.

The legal principle (law-driven) rests on one's obedience or perfect conformity to the Law. The evangelical principle (gospel-driven) rests on Christ's obedience or perfect conformity to the Law.

Both foundations demand a perfect righteousness. But, the legal foundation demands that a perfect righteousness reside in the person himself. The gospel-driven foundation demands that a perfect righteousness reside in Christ alone.

This then is the paramount question at issue in justification: Does our inherent righteousness (i.e., acts of obedience) constitute at least a part of the ground of our justification before God?

The Judaizers said yes. So, for example, if a person fulfilled the 242 positive commands and 365 prohibitions in the Law, such a person would be able to stand before God's judgment and demand to be justified on the basis of his performance. The only problem is no one can perfectly fulfill 1 let alone all 607 laws perfectly (see George, *Galatians*, p. 235).

Thus, Paul's answer to the question, "Does our inherent righteousness (i.e., acts of obedience) constitute at least a part of the ground of our justification before God?" is a resounding No!

Question 62 of the Heidelberg Catechism asks:

"But why can our good works not be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of it?"

Here is the response,

"Because the righteousness which can stand before God's judgment must be absolutely perfect and in complete agreement with the law of God, whereas even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin."

In Galatians 2:21, Paul declared, "if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose." Christ is all or nothing! Nothing we do, before or after coming to faith, serves as even a part of the ground of our justification before God. It is Christ's obedience, not ours, that is counted to us as perfect righteousness through faith alone.

Without His righteousness counted to us through faith alone, we could have no hope to stand before God. There are no amount of good works we can perform to ever leave us confident in our standing before God.

Listen to John Calvin,

"Now if we ask in what way the conscience can be made quiet before God, we shall find the only way to be that unmerited righteousness be conferred upon us as a gift of God...we profit nothing in discussing righteousness unless we establish a righteousness so steadfast that it can support our soul in the judgment of God...For no one can ever confidently trust in it [one's obedience-J.F.] because no one will ever come to be really convinced in his own mind that he has satisfied the law, as surely no one ever fully satisfies it through works..." (3.13.3).

Our entire acceptance with God lies outside of us. This is why we need to hear the Law and Gospel clearly preached on a regular basis.

Through the lawful preaching of the Law, the Holy Spirit brings conviction in order to make us aware of our radically depraved state and therefore seek more eagerly the forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ (cf. The Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 115).

Only the Law's strict, inflexible demands of perfection can shake us of our self-confidence and thereby cause us to look outward to Christ alone for our sole source of righteousness and acceptance before God.

The Reformer's properly referred to the righteousness of Christ as an "alien righteousness." The reason they did so is because it is not our righteousness but rather Christ's. It is an alien righteousness because it comes from outside of us; it does not generate or inhere from within us.

As Paul has already implied from v. 10, the only thing that we have to contribute to our justification is our law breaking (i.e., sin). In Romans 5:14, Paul calls Adam's eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree a "transgression" (i.e., to break the law or transgress, disobey).

In Hosea 6:7, Hosea says that Adam transgressed the covenant (i.e., he overstepped/broke God's legal covenant, command).

Herman Witsius wrote, "...the law of the covenant was trampled upon, when man, as if he had been his own lord and master in all things, did, in defiance of his Lord, lay hold on what was not his property, and throw off the yoke of obedience that was due to God," (*The Economy of the Covenants*, vol. 1, p. 135).

Adam was the head of mankind (the root of all mankind) so that when he fell (i.e., broke God's Law/covenant) all his descendants were regarded to have fallen with him (i.e., broke God's Law/covenant). Paul clearly affirms this in Romans 5:12, "just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."

This then is why the Law curses us, not because the Law is bad but because we have broken it. Our law breaking (i.e., sin) is all we have to offer to God. We do not inwardly/inherently possess a perfect righteousness, which is so steadfast that it can support our soul in the judgment of God.

Thus, Andrew Murray wrote, "As Adam's obedience made us sinners, the obedience of Christ makes us righteous. To the obedience of Christ we owe everything," (*School of Obedience*, p. 23).

Faith directs us to look outside of ourselves and rest upon Christ and His righteousness as the sole foundation of our pardoning sentence in the judgment of God. This is why faith is perfectly suited for a salvation that is based on grace rather than than works of the law (i.e., self-achieved/justified).

Third and finally, by quoting Leviticus 18:5, Paul shows how the Law and faith promise life through totally different means.

C. DIFFERENT PROMISES

As already pointed out, the phrase “shall live” occurs in both Hab. 2:4 (3:11) and Lev. 18:5 (3:12).

Both the law and the gospel promise life but the means by which it is obtained is totally opposed and completely incompatible.

The Law promises life on the condition of one’s own perfect obedience/doing. The gospel, however, promises life on the condition of the perfect obedience of Christ, which is received by faith alone.

The law promises life after obedience has been performed. The gospel promises life before and in order to obedience. The Law promises to bless those who keep it perfectly. The Gospel promises to bless those who trust in Christ only.

Jerry Bridges in his book, *The Disciplines of Grace*, notes how many believers think God’s blessings come to them by faith alone but they proceed to live as though His blessings are conditioned upon their behavior (e.g., “If I do certain things, then God will come through for me.”).

However, if God’s promises of blessings were dependant on our performance, they wouldn’t just be meager, they would be non-existent! Even our best works are imperfect and stained with sin. We have varying degrees of impure motives and daily failures in our performance.

Bridges writes,

“It is because we do not realize the utter depravity of the principle of sin that remains in us and stains everything we do, that we entertain any notion of earning God’s blessings through our obedience. And it is because we do not fully grasp the fact that Jesus paid the penalty for all our sins that we despair of God’s blessing when we have failed to live up to even our own desires to live a life that is pleasing to God,” (*Disciplines of Grace*, p. 18).

Paul is dispelling the false notion that so many believers think: “I am saved by grace but I earn or forfeit the promises of God’s blessings in my daily life by my performance/behavior.”

REFLECTION:

Paul is setting forth two completely different paths for life/justification (i.e., the way of faith and the way of works). He is once again drawing a clear distinction between the law and the gospel. By marking a total antithesis between law and gospel, Paul shows the impossibility of combining/reconciling the law and the gospel in the matter of justification.

His argument in v. 12 strikes at the heart of the Judaizer's false gospel, which maintained that obedience to the Law was necessary for justification. To mingle the law with the gospel, faith with works, in the matter of justification is to preach another gospel (Gal. 1:8-9) and trouble the souls of men (Gal. 1:7).

When the law and gospel are confused, the believer inevitably builds his confidence and assurance partly- if not wholly- on his own graces and performance, instead of grounding them wholly in the righteousness of Christ alone. As a result, the Christian is perpetually disquieted, anxious, depressed, despairing, guilt-laden, fearful and joyless. I recently received a letter illustrating this very truth.

Jim (alias) wrote,

"I just wanted to let you know how encouraged I have been with your message of God's grace vs. legalism. Growing up I was pumped full of legalistic viewpoints. I was taught that if music had over a certain number of beats per minute it invited the devil into the music and certainly couldn't be from God. I was taught that if you drank even a sip of alcohol you were definitely going to hell. It was constantly pounded into my head that rules came first and only if you followed those rules would you be worthy of God's grace. After growing up at, going through...a homeschool program from Bill Gothard where they encouraged you to only wear black, blue, and white, when you mentioned that's what the Amish believed it made me smile. And then going to University for college, I felt like I had been spiritually beaten down my whole life. It made me sick at ... when the staff there seem to continually put these man-made rules above God's message of grace. After my dad committed suicide my freshman year and...I was kicked out of ... my sophomore year, I had not lost my faith in God, but I felt spiritually immune to any teaching or any act of God that was going on around me. I knew there had to be something more than this legalistic view but I thought that I must be wrong if my pastors, teachers, and almost everyone that I looked up to around me held that view. I was driven to a point of spiritual despair and lost almost all interest in studying God's word or doing anything except just showing up to church on Sunday morning. Since going to Paramount I have felt my desire for the Lord slowly growing. I am encouraged beyond belief to know that I can seek after the Lord not for fear of breaking his rule, but for my desire to be held in His arms of grace..."

Your conscience, which acts as an inner witness and monitor of what you owe God, will continually accuse you every time you fail in your duty (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.8.1).

So, unless you come to understand the difference between the law and gospel, not only in theory but also in practice, you will not possess firm assurance and establish comfort in your soul in light of the sins you daily commit.

While the Law guides the believer in the Christian life, it must never be confused with the Gospel, as Paul says, “the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” The righteous, however, shall live by faith (Gal. 3:11)!

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