

SONS OF ABRAHAM
PART 9

Text: Galatians 3:6-14

April 18, 2010

REVIEW/INTRODUCTION:

In order to have a better understanding of Paul's arguments, we have spent the last several weeks examining the difference between the law and the gospel. Having explored the differences, we can now turn our attention to Paul's argument in Galatians 3:10-14.

Most people in our culture think that the purpose of religion is to supply a list of rules (e.g., the Golden Rule) or principles that help us be more loving, kind, patient, forgiving and blessed.

Let me give you 3 examples.

1. TRANSFORMATIONAL LIFE-COACHING GROUP SEMINAR

Here is the description of this seminar:

“In this 8-session life-coaching group, you will learn and experience practical, gospel-friendly principles for HOW to create more peace and happiness in your personal life and relationships.

I call these principles the Universal Laws of Life, and they are just that. And just like the Universal Laws that apply to the physical world such as gravity, which apply to everyone all the time, these Universal Laws also apply to everyone all the time.

Another way to think of them is the instruction manual for successful, happy living. Many wish we had received such a manual, but somehow many of us missed that day. These Universal Laws comprise that manual, teaching you the unseen principles of power for creating more happiness, peace and fulfillment in your life right now, day to day.”

2. LIVING KINDNESS: TEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A BLESSED LIFE

The following is a brief description of this book:

“These ten principles—generosity, effort, patience, ethics, simplicity and meditation, wisdom, truthfulness, steadfastness, equanimity (i.e., a healthy, balanced attitude), and lovingkindness—offer a universal path to spiritual growth and compassionate living kindness. They can also help us cope with the many challenges facing us today, both personally and as a community.”

3. HOW TO LIVE A BLESSED LIFE

Following is a brief description of the purpose of this book:

“Every human being should desire to live a blessed life - all we need to know is how. The unnamed man described in Psalm 112 is one who reflects the blessing of God across the spectrum of his life. In this special gift book, *(unnamed)* shows how we can be blessed in every area of our lives by applying the same principles.

Know the power of:

- Impact and influence
- Respect and credibility
- Generosity and blessing
- Righteousness and discretion
- Prosperity and success
- No worries
- Leaving a legacy”

Of these three examples, which do you think came from an Evangelical church? Perhaps all of them? Here is the order: Mormonism, Buddhism, Evangelical.

Tragically, the third example came from one of the most influential self-professing Evangelical churches in the world today. However, it is tragic that the “Evangelical” example is no different from the Mormon or Buddhist examples.

In the idolatrous pursuit to be “relevant and practical” Evangelical churches have actually become boring and irrelevant. The culture at large thinks, “Why do we need to go to church when we can get all the help we need from a life coach or Buddha’s ten guiding life principles for a blessed life. There is no difference.”

Michael Horton writes,

As true as a lot of the exhortations might be, the familiarity of law (things to do) can make us wonder why the message of our churches is all that different and why the Christian message is all that radical. Only the radical news concerning Jesus Christ can distract us from all the trivial pursuits and transform us from the inside out...It is no wonder that people become bored with church and assume that they can get along well enough in life without it (*The Gospel Driven Life*, pp. 22-23).

All three preceding examples reflect a non-Christian view of the law. In fact, they have more in common with the Judaizers than Paul, with legalism than the gospel. The Judaizers maintained that the path to a blessed life consisted in keeping a list of rules (i.e., Mosaic Law). The true Sons of Abraham, those who inherit the blessing promised to

Abraham's seed, are the physical descendants who keep the Law. These are the ones who are blessed.

Paul, however, argues that the true Sons of Abraham are not those of physical descent but rather of spiritual descent. Those who are blessed are the one who, like Abraham, trust in the promises of God.

The Law, Paul argues, has no power to curb or cure man's sinful tendencies and bring about a blessed life. The Law only issues a sentence of condemnation rather than justification. It leads to cursing rather than blessing. It enslaves rather than frees.

Misusing the law turns us inward upon ourselves always making our growth, our works, our obedience, our spiritual and moral well-being the focus. Legalistic preoccupation with the law makes us the main actor and our actions become the main plot in the story of redemption. Christ is then relegated to a supporting actor role whose actions become the subplot. Or, as Michael Horton has stated, "We, rather than Christ, become the headliner news item."

He writes,

We need to see God as the headliner again. It is not we who must find a supporting role for God in our personal and social campaigns for spiritual, moral and therapeutic well-being. We need to stop and listen to God's surprise announcement about what He has done to save sinners like us. The only thing that the church can provide to the world that is truly unique is the gospel. Only the gospel brings a new creation into this present age of sin and death, (The Gospel-Driven Life, p. 23).

Since following a set of laws, divine or human, doesn't lead to a blessed life, what does? How can a man hope to have a truly blessed life in which he comes into and remains in favor with God?

It is to this that Paul turns his attention in 3:10-14. We could in fact, title Galatians 3:10-14, "How to Live a Blessed Life." Paul directs his case straight at his opponents in a head on collision. He takes up their own argument and turns it against them.

For example, the Judaizers maintained that the OT Scriptures taught that justification (i.e., blessed) is partly by law and not faith alone. In response, in vv. 6-9 Paul set forth 3 arguments based on the OT Scriptures, which demonstrate that justification comes through faith alone.

Now, in Galatians 3:10-14, he will set forth 4 arguments based on the OT Scriptures (Lev., Deut., Hab.), which prove the impossibility of justification by works of the law.

As a former Pharisee trained in a Rabbinical understanding of the Law, Paul radically deviates from his former legalistic training and sets forth a Christian understanding of the

Law. His arguments and thinking are no doubt influenced by his encounter with the Risen Christ on the Damascus Road (Gal. 1:13-16). Therefore, to make it clearly understood that the law leads to cursing rather than blessing, Paul proves and declares this by appealing to the testimony of Scripture.

LESSON:

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.”

Verse 26 concludes a litany of 12 curses listed in Deuteronomy 27. Paul clearly states that all who rely on works of the law for justification, even in the slightest degree, are cursed rather than blessed.

Paul’s quoting of Deuteronomy 27:26 would have evoked in the mind of his Jewish opponents the imagery of the blessings and curses linked with the Mosaic Covenant in Deuteronomy 27-28. The scene depicted in Deuteronomy 27 is quite moving.

On the day Israel was to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land, God commanded Moses to divide the 12 tribes of Israel in half (cf. Joshua 8:30-35).

6 tribes would stand on Mt. Gerizim and 6 tribes would stand on Mt. Ebal in the form of an antiphonal choir. The Levites, in a loud voice, were instructed by God to recite the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience in the Law. The 6 tribes on Mt. Gerizim would respond and affirm the blessings by answering, “Amen!” And then the 6 tribes on Mt. Ebal would respond back by affirming the curses saying “Amen!”

As a former Pharisee and expert in the Law, Paul also understood this blessing/curse pattern. He picks up on it and applies it to the situation in Galatia. So, in vv. 10-12 we have the cursing, which is Mt. Ebal. In vv. 13-14, we have the blessing, which is Mt. Gerizim.

Paul’s concern in this context deals with how a sinful man cannot as well as can be in a saving relationship with a righteous God. In vv. 10-12, Paul deals with how a sinful man cannot be in a right relationship with God. In vv. 13-14, Paul deals with how a man can be in a right relationship with God.

Paul states from Deuteronomy 27:26 that a solemn curse is pronounced on every one that fails to keep all the commandments of the Law. The curses pronounced in the Law are God’s judgment against sinful humanity.

Modern man doesn't like to think of God as a God of judgment. "God is a God of love," it is said. "Surely he wouldn't condemn someone for a minor infraction." However, such a way of thinking misunderstands the Law.

Paul says that God, in His Law, requires total obedience and that the slightest measure of disobedience brings man under the awful penalties of His judgment. There is no mercy in the Law. There is no leniency, no clemency. God doesn't grade on a curve. Well-intentioned sincerity is not acceptable.

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." God requires perfect, continual obedience to His entire Law.

Everyone, Jew and Gentile, must abide by everything commanded in God's Law down to the last detail. In Matthew 5:18, Jesus is teaching on the righteousness required in God's Law. He declares, "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

An *iota* (ι) is the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet (the *yohd* [י] of the Hebrew alphabet is the smallest). The *dot* likely refers to a tiny extension on a Hebrew letter that was used to differentiate between Hebrew letters.

In other words, all who fail to do fulfill even the minutest detail of the Law will fall under the judgment of God.

God, as the just Judge, cannot pronounce anyone just and grant a right to life except on the basis of a perfect righteousness. In the matter of justification, our acts of obedience are never good enough to merit God's approval. The Heidelberg Catechism succinctly states:

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

A. 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.

Because we are destitute of the ability to keep the law perfectly in its entirety, the law cannot bless us. All that the law can do is place us under its eternal sentence of condemnation and shout to us from Mt. Ebal, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

Paul repeats this curse in Galatians 1:8-9, "⁸ even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed."

Contrary then to the Judaizer's assertion that men are blessed by coming under the law, Paul demonstrates from the law itself that the sentence of the law is condemnation not justification, cursing not blessing.

Note closely that the emphasis of Paul's words in v. 10 falls on those who rely on their performance of the law rather than Christ and His performance for their acceptance with God (cf. Gal. 2:16).

Those who trust in "the works of the law" are people who are seeking to be accepted by God based on what they do. They expect God to bless them (justify them) because of what they do.

This mindset, we have learned, is the natural default way the fallen heart thinks. Deep inside every fallen heart is the desire to be self-justified. Every time we are given a list of things to do, our ears perk up and our self-righteous hearts spring to their feet ready for action.

This is why Evangelicalism is flooded with a variety of books telling us how we can be blessed in every area of our lives if we just apply the right set of principles. This, Paul says, is a distortion of the law.

The ironic thing is that all who teach that works of the law, whether in a rigid and legalistic version (e.g., the Judaizers) or a pleasant and friendly version ("How to Live a Blessed Life"), lead to a blessed life distorts the law and curses people.

Do you want to know why people feel defeated and discouraged all the time as believers? The reason is because they are being cursed week after week by feeding on a continual diet of practical, relevant, soul-killing principles. A steady diet of law-based Christianity enslaves rather than frees!

Just like the Judaizers who insisted on obedience to the law for justification, in the same way anyone who urges obedience to a set of laws or rules for obtaining a blessed life actually invites people to fall under God's curse. Law-givers make slaves rather than sons (i.e., Sons of Abraham who are justified)!

Why?

Offering endless lists of spiritual principles and moral exhortations for obtaining God's blessing (i.e., justification) is in effect saying to people, "Do this and live." The allurements of law sounds so appealing to our flesh (Gal. 3:1). "Just tell me what to do!" is the cry of our fallen hearts. However, the other underlying premise of the law is never accounted for which is, "Disobey this and be cursed."

Simply stated, legalism equals condemnation.

Martin Luther notes, "...if the Law itself, given through Moses by a divine command, subjects those who are under it to a curse, much more will those laws and traditions do so which have been invented by human reason," (*Luther Works*, vol. 26, p. 248).

Thus, if anyone wants to escape the curse and live a blessed life, the answer is not to follow an endless set of rules in order to merit God's favor and acceptance (i.e., blessing). The answer is to have a constant, life-long, unremitting immersion in good news.

We must, like Abraham, trust in the promises of God. And Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 1:20 that ALL God's Promises find their YES in Christ!

Only Jesus accomplished total obedience to the Law for us. Faith, unlike works of the Law, looks only to the grace and righteousness (i.e., blessing) offered and granted through Christ.

Faith is, by its nature, a self-emptying grace. True justifying faith always looks away from self and self-accomplishment outward to Christ and His accomplishments. Paul writes,

⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

REFLECTION:

God didn't give us the Law to show us how we can be blessed in every area of our lives by applying the right set of principles. He didn't give us the Law so we could know the power of impact and influence, respect and credibility, generosity and blessing, righteousness and discretion, prosperity and success, a worry free life, or to leave a legacy.

He didn't give us the Law to enable us to live kindness nor did God give us the law to give us peace and happiness in our personal lives and relationships.

God didn't give the Law to make us good people but to show us how bad we really are. God didn't give the Law to show us how to earn our way but to show us that we cannot earn our way! God didn't give the Law to bless us but drive us out of ourselves and unto Christ alone, who stands at the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom. 10:4).

To escape the curse we must stop doing and start believing. We must follow in the footsteps of Abraham and believe the startling promises of God. Paul was telling the Galatians and us; "Stop trusting in your self-righteous, idolatrous works and start trusting Christ, who alone can present you righteous before God."

May the Lord grant us the grace to rest in Christ alone.

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