

PAUL: THE SPIRITUAL ABOLITIONIST, PART II
(NOT MAN'S GOSPEL!, PART 24)

TEXT: GALATIANS 2:11-21

September 20, 2009

REVIEW/INTRODUCTION:

- 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

There are three significant terms used by Paul in v. 16. All three terms are essential to understanding Galatians, essential to understanding the gospel and essential to the Christian faith and life. The three terms are:

1. Justified
2. Works of the law
3. Faith in Christ

We began last week by examining the meaning of the first term, *justified*.

1. Justified

In Psalm 76:7, Asaph captures the universal dilemma all men face when he asks God, "Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused?"

The answer of course is no one. No one is righteous. Therefore, no one is able to stand before God in His judgment. How then can anyone hope to stand before the judgment of God, obtain the forgiveness of sins and be declared righteous?

This is the problem justification addresses and answers. Thus, by *justified* we mean guilty and sinful man's acceptance with God- his being declared righteous in God's sight.

Upon justification, man is no longer the object of God's curse and condemnation, which is death. Rather, he now stands in God's blessing and favor, which is life! Still, the question remains: How is such a blessed state possible?

This brings us to the second term Paul uses in Galatians 2:16, "works of the law."

LESSON:

2. Works of the Law

In speaking of justification in v. 16, Paul notes two methods by which a man may be justified:

1. “works of the law” - the Judaizers
2. “faith in Christ”- Paul

“Works of the law” is the *legal method*, which entails righteousness inhering/residing in oneself by obedience to the law.

To some, it may come as a surprise to know that God in creation (in the Garden of Eden) ordained this legal method. However, as we will come to see it was forfeited by man’s disobedience.

Its terms were simple being clearly defined in the commands God gave directly to Adam, “You are free to eat from any tree only do not eat from one tree. If you do this, you will live. If you disobey, you will die,” (Gen. 2:16-17).

We see from Biblical revelation that man disobeyed (Gal. 3) and the rest, as they say, is history. Because of man’s rebellion, God’s law could no longer give life (i.e., “if you do this, you will live”) because it was weak, not in itself, but through the fallen state of man, as Paul writes, “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do...” (Rom. 8:3). The legal method of justification (i.e., works of the law) could no longer give life because righteousness cannot come by a law that is broken.

After the Fall, the law remained in place (both its promise of blessing for obedience- life and its threatening of cursing for disobedience- death). However, because of sin, the Law only serves after the Fall as a ministry of condemnation (cf. 2 Cor. 3:7, 9). If this legal method remained as the only method for justification, man would be left without any basis to stand before God’s judgment (cf. Ps. 76:7).

But the good news is that this was not God’s final word! God, in grace, spoke an unexpected word of promise (Gen. 3:15) and performed the first act of justification by substitution in the Bible (Gen. 3:21). Thus, He who initially revealed Himself as Creator, Lawgiver and Judge now revealed Himself as a gracious Redeemer and Justifier! God established another method of justification, which is based on grace through faith in Christ as declared in the gospel- *the evangelical method*.

The distinction between the legal method and the evangelical method is critical in understanding justification.

For as we just learned, God, as a Just Judge, cannot pronounce any man just and give him a right to life except on the ground of a perfect righteousness. Since perfect righteousness

hinges on perfect obedience to His law, justification is impossible apart from another method. The question we are exploring this morning is, “How does a man obtain this perfect righteousness?”

Paul begins in v. 16 by first answering the question negatively and thereby teaching us how a man cannot be justified. He writes three times, “a man is not justified by works of the law,” which as we just discovered is impossible because of the Fall.

Paul’s statement at once cut to the heart of the Judaizer’s false gospel, which maintained that obedience to the law was a prerequisite for a right standing with God. It also served to further expose Peter’s hypocrisy by reminding Peter that one’s moral striving/good works do not enter into the equation in justification.

Paul drives home the critical, fundamental truth of the gospel, namely, that Jew and Gentile alike are justified on the same ground, which is by faith in Christ alone apart from works of the law.

What then are the “works of the law?” Let’s begin with some general definition and then move into some particulars.

The term, “works” (note plural) refers to all of man’s acts of obedience. The term “law” refers to all the commandments given by God in the Mosaic Law.

We know that Paul is referring to more than simply the ceremonial aspects of the law such as circumcision, dietary laws, Jewish feast days, etc... because in Galatians 5:3 he states, “I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.”

When it comes to a legal method of justification, one cannot pick and choose which laws to keep or not to keep. The reason is because in order to justify a man, God requires a perfect righteousness. A man must give perfect obedience to ALL that God has commanded not just some.

In James 2:10, James refers to the law of God as a whole unit, “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”

Thus, writing of the legal method of justification, Paul states, “it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the (“whole”- J.F.) law who will be justified,” (Rom. 2:13; cf. Lev. 18:5).

Again, in Romans 10:5, Paul writes, “For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments (plural-J.F.) shall live by them.”

Then, in Galatians 3:10, 12, Paul observes, “¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things

written in the Book of the Law, and do them... ¹² the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”

The Judaizers believed they were justified not only by faith in Christ but also by acts of obedience to the law. They insisted that faith in Christ alone wasn't sufficient to bring a man or woman into acceptance with God. Thus, they sought to impose “works of the law” upon the Galatians.

Their “different gospel” was:

“Yes, believe in Christ but you must also do what the law requires and abstain from what it forbids. You must keep the 10 Commandments and you must also observe the ceremonial law. You must be circumcised. You must keep the dietary laws. If you do these things, you will be ‘righteous’ and God will accept you.”

This “different gospel” of the Judaizers is the default religion of man's fallen heart. Thus, in one brief phrase, Paul “strikes at the root of evil” (Buchanan, *Justification*, p. 72) and exposes the deep-seated error that is common in all men, Jew and Gentile alike. This universal, common error is:

Self-righteousness; self-sufficiency; self-justification; an opposition to total dependence on the grace of God.

John Stott noting this legal tendency in all men writes,

“It has been the religion of the ordinary man both before and since. It is the religion of the man-in-the-street today. Indeed, it is the fundamental principle of every religious and moral system in the world except New Testament Christianity. It is popular because it is flattering. It tells a man that if he will only pull his socks up a bit higher and try a bit harder, he will succeed in winning his own salvation. But it is a fearful delusion. It is the biggest lie of the biggest liar the world has ever known, the devil, whom Jesus called ‘the father of lies’ (Jn. 8:44),” (*Galatians*, p. 62).

Man is born into this world opposed to grace. Man, by virtue of his corrupt nature, relies on his general goodness and the “uprightness” of his moral conduct. Man trusts in his religious observances and outward forms and ceremonies as the grounds by which he obtains and keeps God's favor. Thus, in light of the Judaizer's “different gospel” we need to ask:

What does God command in the Law? What do “works of the law” look like?

Jesus provides a summary in Matthew 22:37-40, which can be paraphrased as:

Love God perfectly and love people perfectly.

A righteous person (i.e., one who perfectly keeps the works of the law) is one who perfectly loves God and his fellow man. A righteous person is a preeminently loving person.

What then does it look like to love God and people perfectly?

The 10 Commandments provide for us a snapshot of a righteous man who loves God and His fellow man perfectly in his thoughts, actions and desires. Before we examine one of the 10 commandments, we must keep in mind two important points when we are dealing with the Law.

1. THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT IS FORBIDDEN IS REQUIRED.

So, for example, we ask, “What is it that God forbids and requires in the 6th commandment?” God’s law addresses both sins of commission and omission (we will come back to this).

2. GOD’S LAW WAS NEVER INTENDED TO FOCUS SOLELY ON EXTERNAL BEHAVIOR.

In Romans 7:14, Paul says that God’s law is spiritual (Rom. 7:14) and was always intended to address matters of the heart not just actions.

One of the great mistakes men make in regard to the law is to overlook or underrate the spiritual meaning and extent of God’s law. God’s law requires perfect obedience and righteousness and everyone who breaks it is held guilty of all (cf. Jam. 2:10).

With these two points in mind about the law, let’s take a brief look the 6th Commandment, “You shall not murder.” First, what does God forbid in the 6th commandment?

God is forbidding us to dishonor, hate, injure, or murder our neighbor by our thoughts, words, or actions. He is forbidding all envy, hatred, anger, and desire for revenge (Road Rage!).

On the flip side, what is it that God requires in the 6th commandment?

God requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves. He requires us to show patience, establish peace, gentleness, mercy, and friendliness toward everyone. Moreover, as much as possible, God requires us to protect men from harm and to love and do good to our enemies.

With this in mind, we are now in a better position to understand Paul’s statement in Galatians 2:16, “we know that a person is not justified by works of the law...”

Why can’t the “works of the law” be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of it, as the Judaizers insisted?

There are two reasons:

1. ONLY PERFECT RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT IS IN TOTAL AGREEMENT WITH GOD'S ENTIRE LAW CAN PASS THE SCRUTINY OF GOD'S JUDGMENT.

Because of man's fallen nature, it is impossible to perfectly obey even one law, let alone the entire law (Rom. 8:3a)!

Who has lived a life free of all envy, hatred, anger, desire for revenge, holding of grudges, impatience, unkindness, etc... Who has ever perfectly exercised patience, peace, meekness, mercy and kindness toward their neighbor and perfectly loved their enemies?

2. THE FOUNDATION OF JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS OF THE LAW IS INHERENT RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Please listen carefully to the universal indictment and ruling of God, the Just Judge, concerning man's inherent righteousness:

“None is righteous, no, not one...,” (Rom. 3:10; Ps. 14:1-3; 143:2).

“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Rom. 3:23).

One can hear Paul's critics: Ok, Paul, this is what your so-called gospel teaches. But, we have the Old Testament scriptures. We know what the Law and the Prophets teach. Thus, to conclude his argument against, “works of the law” Paul quotes Psalm 143:2 at the end of v. 16, “because by works of the law no one (lit. “no flesh”) will be justified,” (Ps. 143:2, “no one living is righteous before you.”)

By quoting Psalm 143:2, Paul demonstrates that his doctrine of justification isn't made up- a novelty. He proves that his denunciation of justification by works of the law is grounded in the OT itself (i.e., the authority of Scripture).

Contrary to the Judaizers, the OT Scriptures didn't teach a different way of justification. Thus one Bible teacher notes, “...the teaching of the apostle on this point is a re-exposition in clearer form of a doctrine already taught by the Hebrew prophets,” (Burton, *Galatians*, p. 124).

Psalm 143 is a Psalm of confession for a lack of righteousness and a cry for deliverance from God.

It opens in v. 1 with David appealing to God's mercy, faithfulness and righteousness. David then asks God not to enter into judgment with him because he acknowledges a universal lack of righteousness on the part of man (v. 2).

David's acknowledgement in v. 2 is the reason why he begins by appealing to God's mercy, faithfulness and righteousness. In v. 2, he acknowledges the chief problem any man faces who seeks deliverance from God:

“God is righteous and man is unrighteous. How then, can God, the Judge, bring about deliverance for an unrighteous man who doesn't deserve it?”

The Psalm continues with David crying out to God for deliverance from the enemy for God's name's sake (v. 11, i.e., God's name's sake is His reputation for faithfulness to His promises!).

God has bound Himself to His promises. Hence, He is a debtor to His own faithfulness for their fulfillment. "...our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love..." (Neh. 9:32). This is our hope for deliverance! God's faithfulness to His promises in light of our constant unfaithfulness!

In terms of justification, who is man's greatest enemy? Ultimately, though few acknowledge this, wrath and judgment are God's response to law-breakers. Thus, by breaking God's law, God is man's greatest enemy (cf. Rom. 5:10). Thus, again, we see David appealing to God's faithfulness, steadfast love and righteousness (vv. 8, 11, 12).

The point is this: Paul understood that the context of Psalm 143 teaches the universal lack of righteousness in man, the inability of man to deliver himself from the enemy (chiefly God!) and escape God's judgment.

Man's lack of righteousness and God's deliverance comes only by trusting, (not working!) in God's mercy, faithfulness, righteousness and steadfast love.

CONCLUSION:

Paul's point is simple and penetrating:

In beginning with the negative aspect (i.e., justification is not by works of the law), Paul establishes how a man cannot be justified. He is seeking to impress upon our minds that God is perfectly righteous and therefore demands perfect righteousness.

He drives home the point that works of the law (i.e., our imperfect obedience to what God forbids and requires) will never make us acceptable in His sight. Only the perfect doers (i.e., perfectly righteous) will be justified. But, no one has ever perfectly kept God's law, thus justification is impossible from this method.

If we are honest and truly gaze into the mirror of the law (e.g., 6th Commandment) and examine our thoughts, desires, motives and imaginations, we must admit that we have never loved God or our fellow man perfectly. Everyone of us are guilty of murder a thousand times over.

This, then, is why Paul is adamant to insist at the end of v. 16 from the OT Scriptures, “by works of the law no one will be justified.” Both the OT as well as NT upholds the truth that no one has ever been justified by works of the law because no one living is righteous.

Justification has always been based on faith in the mercy, faithfulness, righteousness and steadfast love of Christ alone.

Therefore, by excluding man’s works as the ground of his justification, Paul establishes the fact that man needs a perfectly, righteous substitute (a righteousness that is outside of us). Man needs a Substitute and Savior who can satisfy God’s justice, absorb the punishment of God’s law (i.e., curses) and effectually reckon to us a perfect righteousness so that God can justify us.

J.I. Packer wonderfully sums it up like this,

“Justification is grounded on the sin-bearing work of the Lamb of God... Salvation in the Bible is by substitution and exchange: the imputing of men’s sins to Christ, and the imputing of Christ’s righteousness to sinners. By this means, the law, and the God whose law it is, are satisfied and the guilty are justly declared immune from punishment. Justice is done, and mercy is made triumphant in the doing of it,” (J.I. Packer, “Introductory Essay” in James Buchanan, *Justification*, p. xiii).

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