

PAUL: THE SPIRITUAL ABOLITIONIST, PART II
NOT MAN'S GOSPEL!, PART 25

OCTOBER 4, 2009

TEXT: GALATIANS 2:11-21

REVIEW/INTRODUCTION:

Thus far in our study of Galatians 2:11-21, we have seen how:

- 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
 - 1. Justified
 - 2. Works of the Law

The issue at stake in justification couldn't be greater.

It addresses the most important question all men face: "I am unjust and God is just. How then can an unjust person survive the judgment of a holy and just God?"

This was the very issue that plagued Martin Luther. The controversy over justification didn't happen in abstract, academic halls of higher learning. Rather, it happened in real life by a man who was overcome with guilt before a holy God.

On a hot July day in 1505, when Martin Luther was returning to school, a bolt of lightning struck nearby and threw him to the ground. In great fear he cried out, "St. Anne help me! I will become a monk."

In Luther's time, entrance into the monastery was seen as the best way to accumulate merit to get into heaven. Thus, being afraid of offending a just and holy God, Luther went straight to the Erfurt Monastery, an Augustinian Monastery that was the most rigorous.

Upon arrival, he sought to go into Monkery as deeply as possible. For example:

He engaged in self-flagellation. He was a man of deeply committed prayer. He spent hours a day in prayer. He would pray 7 times a day. He regularly appealed to 21 saints, 3 for each day of the week.

He was taught that every sin in order to be forgiven was to be confessed. So, he rigorously engaged in the sacrament of penance. He practiced frequent, daily confession for as long as 6 hours on one occasion. To be sure he included everything, he would review his entire life.

In fact, he spent so much time confessing his sins, his fellow Monks accused him of trying to get out of the work of the monastery and his superiors told him to confess something significant!

Staupitz, Martin Luther's supervisor in the Monastery, once told Luther, "Look here...if you expect Christ to forgive you, come in with something to forgive- parricide, blasphemy, adultery- instead of all these peccadilloes (minor faults-J.F.)," (Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 41).

However, Luther's struggle was not over whether his sins were major or minor but whether he had confessed them all! He was afraid that his memory may have failed him and thus overlooked something. Even after six hours of confession, he would still think of something else that had eluded him. Thus, for Luther, it wasn't just man's behavior that was wrong and therefore needed to be confessed. Luther realized that the very nature of man is corrupt.

His intense struggle was over a misunderstanding of the phrase, "the righteousness of God." To Luther, this phrase meant the righteousness that God required of man by perfectly fulfilling the Law.

Luther was a student of the law. He applied his ability to exegete the law to the Scriptures. He knew that the greatest sin one can commit is to break the Great Commandment. Thus, nothing he could do could ever satisfy the demands of a just and holy God.

When he would examine his life in light of the Great Commandment, he realized that he didn't love God with all his heart or his neighbor for 5 minutes! Thus, no amount of confession, prayer, self-flagellation, pilgrimages, prayers to saints, etc... could bring him consolation and peace.

Note in his own words how he describes his performance-based life,

"For I myself was a learned doctor of theology and yet I never understood the Ten Commandments rightly. Yea, there were many highly celebrated doctors who did not know whether there were nine, ten or eleven commandments, and much less did we know the Gospel and Christ. But the only thing that was taught and advocated was: Invoke the Virgin Mary and other saints as your mediators and intercessors; fast often and pray much: make pilgrimages, enter cloisters and become monks, or pay for the saying of many masses and like works, and thus we imagined when we did these things we had merited heaven (Martin Luther,

Complete Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 3, "A Beautiful Sermon on the law and the Gospel," p. 191).

Looking for an effective cure for Luther's tormented spirit, Staupitz encouraged Luther to leave the Monastery and to study for his doctor's degree and undertake a career of preaching and teaching the Bible in the university. At first Luther was reluctant but he eventually left and in 1508 began teaching theology in the University of Wittenberg.

The turning point in his life (his Damascus Road experience) occurred in 1515 when he began his lectures in Romans.

While reading an obscure essay by Augustine on philosophical issues with respect to language, Luther came across a digression in the middle of the essay where Augustine treated the text in Romans 1:17 which reads, "the righteousness of God is revealed by faith."

Listen carefully to how Luther describes his breakthrough:

"I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the justice of God," because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by his faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven...

If you have a true faith that Christ is your Saviour, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This it is to behold God in faith that you should look upon his fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly but looks only on a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face. (Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand*, pp. 49-50).

Luther's conversion powerfully illustrates the vital truth of justification. This life-changing message became the cornerstone and battle cry of the Reformation.

The great liberating message of justification by faith alone apart from works of the law ran through Europe like a bolt of lightning and proved to thousands to be the power of God to salvation.

The Lord graciously brought Luther to understand that the “works of the law” cannot justify a man. Because of man’s fallen nature, perfect obedience to the law for the obtaining of life is impossible.

Even as believers, the best we do is not done without sin, which led Luther to say, “I have learned that even my repentance needs to be repented of.” The Good News, however, is that the legal method isn’t the final word.

Paul in Romans 8:3, writes “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh...”

God the Son humbled Himself and became a man. He kept the Law perfectly and paid the full penalty for sin on the cross because man, due to his fallen nature, could not. And, thus Paul says to Peter in Galatians 2:16, “...we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.”

Justification is by faith in Jesus Christ alone. The debate over whether faith alone justifies did not originate in the 16th century with Martin Luther. This debate stretches all the way back to the time of Paul in the 1st century.

V. 16 is a declaration of liberation and freedom over against the Judaizer’s false, enslaving conditional “gospel.” Paul’s thesis cut to the heart of the Judaizer’s false gospel.

In a sly, distortion of the truth of the gospel, the Judaizers insisted that faith alone was not a sufficient means for justification. Instead, they maintained that justification depended partly on grace, and partly on works.

Their so-called “gospel” (cf. Gal. 1:7) was a deadly mixture of the works of the law plus faith in Christ (i.e., Moses plus Christ equals justification). Acceptance with God, the Judaizers taught, is based upon a person’s holiness/personal merit. Thus, the Judaizers set out to establish their own righteousness by the diligent observance of religious duties (e.g., circumcision, keeping dietary laws and Jewish Feast Days, etc...).

Paul responds forcefully to this false gospel. He is quick to show that his gospel wasn’t a novel teaching (i.e., his gospel is not man’s gospel! cf., 1:11). He quotes Psalm 143 at the end of v. 16 to demonstrate that he didn’t make up this doctrine. Paul proves that the divine inspiration and authority of the OT upholds faith alone.

This brings us now to Paul’s third significant term in v. 16 (justified; works of the law)

LESSON:

3. FAITH IN CHRIST

The Heidelberg Catechism in Question 60 contains a very helpful statement regarding what the gospel teaches concerning how a man is righteous before God:

60. Q. How are you righteous before God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Although my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all God's commandments, have never kept any of them, and am still inclined to all evil, yet God, without any merit of my own, out of mere grace, imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ. He grants these to me as if I had never had nor committed any sin, and as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me, if only I accept this gift with a believing heart.

This is what the gospel teaches. Right at the start of the Christian life, before we have ever done anything or failed to do something, we possess the privilege of being right with God and it is all by faith alone.

Because faith is the sole means of justification, there are three questions we want to explore this morning:

What is faith? How does faith justify? How does faith define Christ?

1. WHAT IS FAITH?

A. FAITH IS A SELF-EMPTYING GRACE.

James Buchanan writes that faith directs “the sinner to look out of himself to Christ alone as his Saviour,- to relinquish all self-righteous confidence in anything that he has done, or can do,- and to cast himself entirely on the free grace of God and the finished work of the Redeemer,” (James Buchanan, *Justification*, p. 122).

Faith directs the sinner to trust and rest in Christ alone for acceptance with God, as He is freely offered in the gospel.

The gospel declares that the righteousness that could not be found in us is found nowhere else but by faith in another, namely Jesus Christ.

Saving faith rests in the fact that Jesus fully satisfied the just requirements of God's law by His perfect obedience.

Saving faith trusts in the fact that Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross alone exhausted the wrath and judgment of God against sin.

Saving faith has a firm confidence in Jesus' resurrection as the evidence that God the Father accepted Christ's suffering and death on the cross as a full payment for sin.

Because faith receives and rests upon Christ alone and looks to His righteousness as its only defense, it gives all glory to Christ and claims no credit for its own. The way to measure true faith is to note where the emphasis lies, self or Christ. In Galatians 6:12-13, Paul characterizes the Judaizers as those wanting "to make a good showing in the flesh..." and desiring "to have you [Galatians] circumcised that they may boast in your flesh."

Over against this self-exalting faith, Paul says that true saving faith repudiates all sense of self and boasts only in the cross! "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Since then we owe the blessing of justification entirely to God, we have no reason for boasting in ourselves. Paul, in Romans 4:2, says if our works (inherent righteousness) justified us, we would have something of which to boast/glorify in. But, when we are justified by faith (which gives nothing to God but only receives and rests) all glorying is excluded and Christ alone is exalted (cf. Gal. 1:5)!

B. FAITH IS A GIFT NOT A WORK.

Faith is a gift of grace that comes about through hearing the gospel (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 10:17).

“⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast,” (Eph. 2:8-9).

“faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).

Works consist of merit (“Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due,” Rom. 4:4) but faith consists of grace (“...justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” Rom. 3:24; see also Rom. 4:16).

In view of the fact that Paul repudiates one method (works/merit), there can only be one method left (faith/grace alone). Since we are justified by faith without works, faith must then not be a work that earns/merits our justification. If faith is not a work that earns justification, how does faith justify?

2. HOW DOES FAITH JUSTIFY?

Faith justifies not by *working* but by *receiving*, as Paul writes in Romans 4:5, “to the one who *does not work but believes* in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness..., (emphasis mine).” Note Paul’s contrast, “does not work but believes...”

The true office and mode of faith in justification is merely *instrumental*, which means faith receives, rests, and trusts in God's promises as declared in the gospel.

Note carefully Paul's language in v. 16, "we have believed in (lit. "into" εἰς) Christ..."

Saving faith most definitely includes intellectual assent to the facts of the gospel (e.g., Jesus's birth, life, death, resurrection, etc...). But, it includes more than just bare intellectual assent. Paul says here in v. 16 that faith is believing *into* Christ.

Faith, John Stott writes, is "an act of personal committal," a "running to Him for refuge and calling on Him for mercy," (*Galatians*, p. 62).

Again, the Heidelberg Catechism provides helpful insight when it asks:

21. Q. What is true faith?

A. True faith is a *sure knowledge* (intellectual assent to the facts of the gospel) whereby I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in His Word. At the same time it is a *firm confidence* (personal trust, "believing into") that not only to others, but also to me, God has granted forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation, out of mere grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits. This faith the Holy Spirit works in my heart by the gospel.

Faith lays hold of and appropriates Christ and His righteousness alone as the sole ground of one's righteous standing before God. Through the proclamation of the gospel, the Holy Spirit works in us and enables us to receive and rest upon Christ and His righteousness by faith alone. It is in this way that Paul argues a man is justified by faith.

3. HOW DOES FAITH DEFINE CHRIST?

Blinded by unbelief, Martin Luther saw Christ as a Judge who condemned rather than as a Savior who pardons. As a result of his unbelief, he was a man who had no peace!

True saving faith, however, defines Christ in a wholly different manner. The eye of justifying faith comes to behold Christ not as a judge, nor as a second Moses (i.e., lawgiver) but rather as a Savior for sinners.

Christ is not a lawgiver. He did not come to condemn but to save.

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him," (John 3:17).

"He is the Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world," (John 1:29).

Christ "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age..." (Gal. 1:4).

Saving faith looks to Christ and like Paul confesses, “all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory,” (2 Cor. 1:20).

This is how faith defines Christ. Faith sweetly allures the sinner to lay hold of and rest in Christ for justification.

Listen to Martin Luther,

“Hold this fast, and suffer not thyself to be drawn away by any means from this most sweet definition of Christ, which rejoiceth the very angels in heaven: that is to say, that Christ is no Moses, no lawgiver, no tyrant, but a mediator for sins, a free giver of grace, righteousness, and godly life...” (*Galatians*, p. 13, Kregel edition).

Learn this true definition of Christ on the basis of Paul’s words!

For, it is one thing to acknowledge it but quite another to trust and rest in it in when you are painfully aware of your sin and when your conscience accuses you and the enemy of your faith relentlessly condemns you.

Again, Luther writes,

“By adulterating the genuine definition of Christ with his poison he produces this effect, that although we believe that Christ is the Mediator, in fact our troubled conscience feels and judges that He is a tyrant and a tormentor. So satan deceives us, and we easily lose the pleasant sight of Christ, our High Priest and Mediator. Once this happens, we avoid Christ as though He were satan,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, p. 39).

The startling, good news of the gospel this morning is that if you are a sinner, you don’t have to avoid Christ! Come to him! He will not condemn you. He will not turn you away. He will save you!

James Buchanan notes that the good news of the gospel is that justification “is the present privilege of every believer, however weak his faith, and however imperfect his holiness,- for ‘being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...’” (*Justification*, p. 116)!

By faith alone we are justified- that is we receive the free pardon of sin and an assured right to eternal life. Our justification is a complete, final, and irreversible act of divine grace by the Heavenly Judge.

By it, we are translated immediately and forever from a state of wrath and condemnation to a state of favor and acceptance.

Whereas we were children of wrath (Eph. 2:1), we are now all sons of God through faith (Gal. 3:26), heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:29; 4:7)!

Whereas as God was our condemning Judge, He now stands eternally as our loving, Father.

And, accompanied with our justification are the immeasurable blessings of the assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Spirit, a living, confident hope, an increase of grace and perseverance to the end, wherein we will obtain an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading all of which results in the praise and glory and honor of our great Lord and Savior!

CONCLUSION:

And so, we must ask ourselves, "Do we believe this?"

Do you believe the truth of the gospel as Paul sets forth here in Galatians 2:16? Or, do you believe your troubled conscience, doubts or guilty feelings?

Jerry Bridges asks, "Do you believe that the sin you are so painfully and shamefully aware of now will never be counted against you," (*The Gospel for Real Life*, p. 71). Believe Christ to not be a condemner and Judge but rather a Savior and Redeemer.

Faith rejects all confidence in one's own righteousness and trusts and rests in Christ's perfect obedience, propitiation, redemption, satisfaction, resurrection and intercession. Christ is faith's only defense, plea and argument.

This is how faith defines Christ. Trust and rest in Him today!

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