

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON THIRTY-EIGHT)

“THE LAW IS NOT OF FAITH”

GALATIANS 3:9-12

(ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

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.”

11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”

12 But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”

We have stated in previous Lessons that in the first five verses of **Galatians** chapter 3, the Apostle Paul asks five questions of the Galatian believers for the purpose of appealing to their own spiritual experiences. He does so, in an effort to convince them of their error in departing from the Gospel of grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and embracing “another gospel,” a message of justification by works. The essence of Paul’s argument in the first 5 verses of the chapter, is that the new position of the Galatian believers is a contradiction of their own spiritual experiences, as well a contradiction of the Gospel.

In verses **6-9** Paul cites the spiritual experience of the Patriarch Abraham, the “Father of the faithful.” Paul appeals to the Old Testament as a witness, testifying that justification has always been by faith alone and not ever by works. He quotes from **Genesis 15:6**, “*Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.*” Abraham “believed” God, and his belief or faith, rather than his works, was the basis upon which he was declared righteous before God.

Paul is drawing a conclusion between Abraham’s justification and the justification of the Galatian believers. His conclusion is that Abraham’s experience of justification is an illustration of the manner in which every human being, in every age is saved. Paul is persuaded by Scripture that since Abraham, was justified by faith alone, it follows that every one of his “*offspring*” must be justified in the very same way! In other words, it is those who exercise the same faith that Abraham exercised who are his true followers. Thus the faith exercised by Abraham is declared by Paul to be the fundamental condition of acceptance with God for all human beings!

Paul describes Abraham as “*the man of faith.*” He does so in order to make it clear to his readers that the important thing about Abraham was the fact that he chose the **grace-faith** way of salvation rather than the **Law-works** way of depending on personal merit and good works. The phrase speaks of the fact that Abraham believed God. Those who exercise the same faith as Abraham, share with him in the same salvation which he received from God by faith.

In **Galatians 3:10-14**, Paul moves from the experience of the patriarch Abraham to the strict legal requirements of the Mosaic Law. His whole point is that salvation is not by **law-works** but by **grace-faith** in Jesus Christ alone. To work for salvation is to totally misunderstand the Biblical teaching on salvation.

In this section, Paul argues that self-effort to obtain right standing before God is a road to damnation, and he knew that road very well! Although he is primarily referring to the Mosaic Law, his argument is a general

reference to every activity of men and women to attain right standing before God by means of a strict observance of some external moral standard. It does not matter which external moral standard is adhered to, the essential truth is that fallen human beings cannot be justified or declared righteous or saved, as a result of their moral accomplishments.

In verse **10**, Paul quotes from **Deuteronomy 27:26**. *“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.”*”

Commenting on this verse, **Kenneth Wuest** writes the following:

“Instead of being blessed by their act of putting themselves under the law, men put themselves under a curse. The Judaizers maintained that their knowledge of the law entitled them to the blessings which were attached to the sons of Abraham. Our Lord said to representatives of this same system: *‘Ye are constantly searching the scriptures; and in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me. And ye will not come to Me that ye might have life’* (**John 5:39, 40**). This was the sin of Israel, **ignoring the righteousness of God, Christ, and going about to establish its own righteousness (Romans 10:1-4)**. Paul argues that on the contrary, Israel has by its attempt to be justified by the law, entailed the curse of the broken law, for no man could keep the law. This curse is not merely the wrath of God in the form of the final banishment of the sinner from His presence, with all the sorrow and misery which that includes, but represents also a present condition of alienation from God caused by a violation of His law.”

The word *“For”* at the beginning of the verse, connects this section with the preceding two. Both the Galatian believers and Abraham had been justified, or declared righteous, or saved, by faith alone **“FOR”** or because it was impossible for them to have experienced this blessing as

a result of legalistic works, since legalism always brings with it a curse!
“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse.”

This statement must have been a shock to the Galatian believers because the Judaizers had been teaching them that the pathway to divine blessing was by the works of the Law, when the truth was that these works of the Law were the exact opposite of blessing, being in fact the broad road to destruction. The Law demands obedience, and this means obedience in all things.

Having shattered the Judaizers’ confidence in their physical relation to Abraham, Paul now shatters their confidence in their method of attaining right standing before God, arguing that no individual can possibly keep the Law perfectly. How utterly illogical it would be for the Galatian believers to seek to gain divine acceptance by their futile human efforts, as advocated by the Judaizers! The **grace-faith** way of salvation brings blessing, while the **Law-works** way puts the individual who pursues it, under a curse! Paul solemnly emphasizes this truth in **Romans 10:1-4**. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

1 Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God on behalf of my fellow Israelites is for their salvation.

2 For I can testify that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not in line with the truth.

3 For ignoring the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking instead to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.

4 For Christ is the end of the law, with the result that there is righteousness for everyone who believes.

In verse **3**, Paul explains the root cause for the failure of the Gospel among the Jews. It was their ignorance of the righteousness of God and their substitution of a human righteousness. He says firstly, that they

ignore “*the righteousness that comes from God.*” The Jews should have known, based on the clear statements in the Old Testament, that God’s method of justification whereby He declares a person righteous, was not possible by works, but only by grace through faith in the Righteous One. But they refused to think about or pay attention to what had been so clearly revealed in Scripture. The word “*ignoring*” is in the **present tense**, which indicates that this has been the continual attitude of the Jews.

The noted Princeton theologian **Charles Hodge**, commenting on this passage writes that,

“The Jews’ great mistake was over the method of justification. Ignorance on this point implied ignorance of the character of God, of the requirements of the law, and of themselves. It was, therefore, and is and must always continue to be a crucial point. Those who err here, err fatally; and those who are right here cannot be wrong about other essential truths.”

But not only do they ignore the righteousness that comes from God, they also seek instead to “*establish their own righteousness.*” The word “*seeking*” is the translation of a Greek word which means, “to seek after, aim at, strive after.” The idea is of striving with everything within you. The Jews were, and still are, striving with everything within them to establish **their own** righteousness.

The phrase, “*their own*” is a translation of the Greek word **idios**: (**id’-ee-os**), which means, “pertaining to oneself, one’s own; what is one’s own as opposed to belonging to another.” The righteousness that the Jews desired was a righteousness that was in character their own, one achieved through their own efforts, and one that would glorify themselves. They did not desire a righteousness that was characterized by what God is in His glorious Person, and what He has done through the Person and work of His Son, and therefore a righteousness that glorifies

God. The Jews did not desire a righteousness that was handed to them as a gift for which they would feel obligated to thank God and Him alone.

Brothers and sisters, securing the righteousness of God by faith not only involves the discarding of all dependence upon self-effort for salvation, but also the total submission of the mind and heart to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. The Jews were not prepared to do either.

The **reality** of justification by faith is based on what God does for human beings, whereas the **impossibility** of justification by works is based on what human beings do for God. These two ways of seeking salvation proceed in opposite directions and ultimately lead to opposite destinies. One leads to Heaven, the other to Hell! Failure to perfectly keep the Law brings divine judgment and condemnation. One violation incurs the curse of God and damns the violator to eternal separation from God. The Law demands perfect obedience, but it has no power to give a nature which delights in it to keep it, nor can it bestow the power to fulfill its demands. The Law can give nothing to the sinner, but the curse.

In **Galatians 3:11**, Paul writes, *“Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”*

In verse **10**, Paul explains to his readers the futility of seeking to be justified by trying to keep the Law by quoting from **Deuteronomy 26:27**. By quoting the words of Moses, the Law giver, he shows that even Moses taught that unless one obeyed the Law perfectly he or she would be cursed. In verse **11**, he quotes **Habakkuk 2:4** to show that justification can only be by faith. Paul is constructing an iron-clad argument to prove from Scripture, that it is absolutely impossible for a person to be justified by works, but only by faith in Jesus Christ, and that this has **always** been the case! By quoting from the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk, Paul is arguing that not only were the Judaizers in error in the first century, but that they would also have been in error six hundred years before!

Brothers and sisters, what more proof do we need that the **Law-works** way of has never been the basis for salvation? Justification has never depended on works and it never will, for the Scripture says “*The righteous shall live **by faith.***”

Paul says, “*No one is justified before God by the law.*” Commenting on the words “*by the law*” **Kenneth Wuest** writes the following:

“We have here the locative of sphere. The man who does **not continue** in the sphere of the law is under the curse. And the man who attempts to **remain** in the sphere of the law by obeying it, is not justified in the sight of God, and for the reason that justification is by faith. The reason why obedience to the law cannot justify a sinner is that his obedience cannot pay for his sin. Only blood can pay for sin, for blood means outpoured death, and death is the wages of sin. God declares a believing sinner righteous on the basis of the fact that Christ has met the requirements of the law which we broke and Himself becomes our righteousness.

The word “*just*” [righteous] as describing man is used as a legal rather than an ethical term. **It refers to the man approved by God and accepted on the basis of faith, not to the man's character as exhibited by what he does.** The words “*shall live*” refer as the context indicates, not to the impartation of a new and divine life which produces a new experience, but to the act of God in justifying him. He lives in a new relationship to God, that of being accepted in the Beloved.”

On the phrase, “*shall live by faith,*” **Spurgeon** remarks as follows:

“The apostle quotes from the Old Testament, from **Habakkuk 2:4**, and thus confirms one inspired statement by another. Even the just are not justified by their own righteousness, but live by faith. It follows then most conclusively that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God. If the best of men find no justification coming to them through

their personal virtues, but stand accepted only by faith, how much more such imperfect beings, such frequent sinners as ourselves?"

Brothers and sisters, the person who places his or her entire confidence in God, trusting Him wholeheartedly, and accepting freely His gracious provision of salvation, is the one who alone will be justified, or declared righteous, or saved. It is he or she who alone *"shall live."* We must understand that God's method of making men good is through the goodness of another—the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not by him or her doing anything, but rather by him or her believing what Christ has done on his or her behalf!

In verse **12**, Paul writes, *"But the law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them.'"* In this verse, as He did in the two previous verses, Paul quotes from the Old Testament Scriptures. This time he quotes from **Leviticus 18:5**, *"The one who does them shall live by them."*

Some commentators believe that Paul's motivation for quoting from **Leviticus 18:5** is because he felt that some of the Galatian believers might be thinking that **both** faith in Christ and works of the Law were necessary for salvation. In other words, they would be thinking that both Paul and the Judaizers were correct. Paul's response to such a thought is "Absolutely not! The two ways are totally incompatible!"

David Guzik, in his commentary on this verse writes the following:

"Some might come back to Paul and say, 'Look, I'll do the best I can under the law and let faith cover the rest. God will look at my performance, my effort, and my good intentions and credit to me as righteousness. The important thing is that I am really trying.' Paul proved from the Old Testament itself that this simply isn't good enough. No; the paths of approval by the **law** and **faith** don't run together, because **the law is not of faith.**"

Kenneth Wuest comments on this verse as follows:

"The statement, *'The law is not of faith,'* means that the two principles of Law and of faith as a means of justification are mutually exclusive of one another. They are diametrically opposed to each other. Then Paul quotes **Leviticus 18:5**, *'The man that doeth them shall live in them.'* Light is thrown upon this statement by the apostle in **Romans 10:5** where he quotes this same passage from **Leviticus**, when he says, *'Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law.'* That means that there is a righteousness that a human being could accrue to himself by a perfect obedience to the law, a thing which a fallen sinful human being cannot do, but which a perfect sinless being could do. But that righteousness would be different from the righteousness which God imputes to the believing sinner. The former would be obtained by **works**, and would be a **human** righteousness. The latter is obtained by **faith** and is a **divine** righteousness. Under the legal enactments of the Mosaic law, this could be the futile attempt of a sinner to work out under law a righteousness which God could approve. Under grace, it is the act of a believing sinner accepting as a gift, a righteousness which God has approved, even the Lord Jesus Himself."

Brothers and sisters, even if a person was successful in keeping the whole Law, the righteousness that he or she would have would be inferior, because it would be his or her own. The Gospel on the other hand offers us a righteousness of God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As ways by which human beings attempt to obtain salvation the two simply do not mix. The **Law-works** way of justification means leaning on self. The **grace-faith** way of salvation means leaning on Christ. They are thoroughly antagonistic. In the matter of right standing with God, the choice is Faith **or** Law, not Faith **and** Law.

The **Law** will have **doers** that think they deserve to be saved Because of their **works**. The **Gospel** will have only **sinner**s, who know that they do not deserve to be saved and are therefore relying entirely on the **grace** of God through **faith** in Christ to save them. They have done working and

instead are trusting the One who did all the work that God required on their behalf!

During one of his evangelistic campaigns, **D. L. Moody** was approached by a man who had been to a number of the services and who, although convicted of his need for Christ, had kept on resisting the Holy Spirit. Now the last night had come. The service was over, the people were going home, the work crew was busy folding up the chairs and dismantling the platform, and Mr. Moody was preparing to leave. The man finally plucked up his courage. He came to the evangelist and blurted out, “Mr. Moody, what must I do to be saved?” Moody looked at him and said “I’m sorry, sir but you’re too late.” “Too late, Mr. Moody?” The man was desperate now. “Surely I’m not too late!” Moody replied “Yes, sir, you’re too late. As a matter of fact, you’re two thousand years too late if you want to **do** something to be saved. All the ‘doing’ has been done. But if you would like to accept Christ by faith as your personal Savior, you’re just in time. You can do that right here, right now.”

We will give **C.H. Spurgeon** the final word this evening:

“The justified man is not justified by the law, but by faith. He stands before God not in what he does, not even in what the Spirit enables him to do. His own prayers and tears...his own labors, his earnest... attempts to extend the kingdom of Christ—all tell for nothing in the matter of his justification. He hangs them all upon the cross of Christ and relies only upon the cross, looking in no manner whatever to anything that comes of himself.”