

The End of the Law

Galatians 3:9-14

A. The danger inherent in adding law to faith in seeking justification **10-13**

1. Using the law to be justified before God inevitably leads to his curse

a. The second part of the argument for the good news about salvation

- 1) He argues first that justification *is* by faith, and now strengthens that by saying it is *not* by works
- 2) We stand with those who rely on faith in Christ's accomplished works to be blessed with Abraham
- 3) In contrast, all who rely on observing the law are under a curse because they have not kept the law
- 4) Paul is not arguing that faith is another way to justification, or even that it is the best way
- 5) He is saying that faith is the only way for God to count us as righteous; any other way leads to a curse
- 6) This is true not just for Gentiles, like the Galatians, who did not have the law, but for Jews also
- 7) Judaizers said becoming a Jew by keeping the law put one in better standing with God; it did not

b. Only perfect obedience is acceptable to God for justification

- 1) Sinful men make obedience that is pleasing to God easy by lowering standards to a manageable level
 - a) So long as a person does a little more good than evil in his life, they consider that good enough
 - b) Then they go on to define good in their own personal terms, those things they think are good
 - c) Paul though is talking about good as it is defined by God as written in the Book of the Law
- 2) Those that want to be justified by obeying the law will be cursed for that requires keeping all the law
 - a) This quote might have sounded good to Judaizers at first for they thought all the law should be kept
 - (1) They did not like the idea of picking and choosing portions of the law as those worth keeping
 - (2) 'Cursed is everyone who does not keep it all' sounded good for it included circumcision, etc
 - b) Seeking God's blessings by keeping all the law sounded good because they had not thought it thru
 - (1) Paul wanted the Galatians to think through the implications of just what that idea meant
 - (2) That little word 'all' (everything) found in the Bible most Jews used (LXX) was significant
 - (3) It meant those who took the legalistic route were obligated for keeping every law perfectly
 - (4) Failing to dot one 'i' or cross one 't' meant that everything was undone and God's curse fell
- 3) It seems that the rabbis and common Jews recognized the force of this sort of argument
 - a) While they may have boasted of the Law's superiority as a way to life, that is not what they trusted
 - b) When their relationship to God was called into question they pointed to their Abrahamic lineage
 - c) 'The average Jew believed whole-heartedly no circumcised son of Abraham would go to Gehenna'
 - d) Paul wanted the Galatians to be just as whole-heartedly sure that justification attained by keeping the law was possible only if they kept every single one of its demands, not just the 'big' ones
 - e) He trusted that anyone convicted of their sins by the Spirit would know this was impossible

2. This use of Abraham's example is supported by the prophet Habakkuk

a. Even the rabbis saw faith as an important element of justification

- 1) Paul turns again to the more positive side of his argument to focus on the role of faith in justification
- 2) He makes use of a verse considered by rabbis to be a summary principle of the OT law **Hab 2:4**
- 3) We may at times think OT quotations were random, but this would have struck a nerve with Judaizers
- 4) One of the verses their leaders would use pointed clearly to the fact no one is justified by the law

b. The prophet makes the grace nature of justification very plain

- 1) If they had paid attention to what Scripture said they would see the righteous are those who live by faith
- 2) Habakkuk had complained about the injustices of his society and wanted to know when God would act
 - a) Habakkuk feared the righteous would be swallowed up by the wicked who treated them unjustly
 - b) It is in the response, 'the just will live by his faith,' that the Lord says their salvation is by faith
- 3) The man who waits in trusting dependence on the Lord will find God supplies every need in life
 - a) It is not our hard work and disciplined effort that gains us the blessings of life God gives
 - b) It is not playing by the rules, knuckling down and pushing forward that leads to the good he offers
 - c) We are a blessed people delivered from evil when we wait on the Lord trusting his grace
 - d) This is true for every aspect of life, but especially so when it comes to being saved from sin

3. The reason that obedience to the law will never lead to justification
 - a. If it was not clear enough at this point Paul makes it so by stating explicitly his rationale
 - 1) The Galatians were being told they needed to add obedience to their faith for their justification
 - 2) Paul says in the bluntest of forms that faith and obedience are mutually exclusive ways to salvation
 - 3) If we insist that keeping the law is necessary for salvation, we must reject the notion it comes by faith
 - b. The starting point and the attitudes involved in these two approaches simply cannot be reconciled
 - 1) The law is all about *doing*: ‘The man who does these things will live by them’
 - 2) The law is not based on faith which begins with our inability and God’s gracious ability to provide
 - c. The law may provide insight into some specifics on how we can conduct ourselves so as to please God
 - 1) This is the heart’s desire of every person who has found that new life by faith in Christ
 - 2) The law can be helpful as a guide to godliness, but it cannot establish righteousness or perfect it
 - 3) There is no conflict between **Hab 2:4** and **Lev 18:5** so long as we keep this in mind
 4. How Christ’s death redeemed us from the curse that our sin deserves
 - a. If disobedience brings a curse, how does faith save us from it?
 - 1) How can faith substitute for obedience to God’s law so it serves in making us righteous in his sight?
 - a) The really important question is, It is faith in what or whom that God uses to declare us righteous
 - b) Faith is not believing what we want to believe that matters, but faith in what God has told us
 - 2) The glorious truth of God’s grace is that Christ redeemed us from his curse by becoming a curse for us
 - a) The curse on our sin is well-deserved, and cannot be ignored by God if he is to be just
 - b) Our Lord saved us by assuming the curse as our representative and enduring its just penalty
 - c) It would not be just to punish an innocent man for the sins of another unless
 - (1) the innocent man assumed responsibility as the sinners Representative and did so voluntarily
 - (2) This is akin to an officer assuming responsibility for his men’s actions tho he was not involved
 - d) The penalty for the sins of the elect was exacted as justice demanded by godliness thru their faith
 - b. Evidence that God’s curse on our sin has already been executed
 - 1) As terrible as death on a cross is, the real question is whether he was under God’s curse dying there
 - 2) Paul uses the testimony of Dt 21:23 that everyone who is hung on a tree (for a capital offense) is cursed
 - 3) Being hung on a tree did not make a person accursed, but was a sign he was cursed for his crimes
 - 4) To Jews a crucified Messiah was scandalous, a contradiction in terms; for Paul, the center of his gospel
 - 5) ‘God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so in him we might become the righteousness of God
 - 6) Having accepted the curse for lawbreaking, he ended forever any form of legalism for righteousness
 - 7) Thru faith in the perfect law-keeper, Jesus affords us the only chance of righteousness pleasing to God
- B. Abraham’s faith leads not just to justification, but also to blessings 9, 14**
1. It is the way to that fellowship with God known by the friend of God
 - a. To encourage the church to hold on to righteousness by faith alone he reminds them this is no new doctrine
 - b. By seeking righteousness through faith they take their stand with Abraham, the man of faith
 - c. As the Lord had blessed this man known as the friend of God for exercising this faith, so he would them
 - d. If some wanted to make law the path to righteousness, they would have to look elsewhere for an example
 - e. Whether moving from his family or waiting on a child at the age of ninety or offerings Isaac on an altar,
 - 1) all that he did was an expression of his trust that God was the One who could be trusted to do right
 - f. Abraham’s righteous obedience flowed from his trust in God; faith was the starting point for righteousness
 2. One goal of redemption is the enjoyment of God’s promised blessings
 - a. Stated negatively, redemption freed us from the curse of the law, but there is more to it than that
 - b. God’s purpose in redeeming us was so even those not physically descended from Abraham could be blessed
 - c. The law makes a distinction between Jews and Gentiles, but the promises to Abraham embraced Gentiles
 - d. The promises to Abraham were understandable only in terms of their fulfillment in Jesus, the Savior of the world (1 Jn 4:14), whose death expanded the people of God to include all nations and peoples
 - e. At the heart of this blessing is the promised Spirit whose work lies at the very heart of the new covenant
 - 1) He convicts us of sin, he grants us faith and repentance, he writes God’s law on our hearts
 - 2) He enlightens us so we can see our spiritual enemies and empowers us to stand against them
 - 3) It is the Spirit who cleanses us of our sin and assures us that we truly are God’s righteous people
 - 4) These blessings always have been the product not of man’s works, but of faith in God’s gracious work