

PAUL: THE SPIRITUAL ABOLITIONIST, PART II
NOT MAN'S GOSPEL!, PART 28

TEXT: GALATIANS 2:11-21

October 25, 2009

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:

- 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 QUESTIONS, v. 14
 - B. PAUL'S THESIS, vv. 15-16
 - C. PAUL'S DEFENSE, 17-21

In the 17th century, a Scottish preacher named Ralph Erskine preached a message on Galatians 2:19 entitled, "Law-Death, Gospel-Life."

In it, he responds to the false charge of license and writes,

"Here is a mark that may well find out a Pharisaic generation; they suspect the doctrine of Christ, and his righteousness, as if it were a doctrine tending to licentiousness, and opposition to the law, a sign they never felt the power of the gospel upon their hearts, otherwise they would feel the revelation of the righteousness of Christ, from faith to faith, to be the power of God to their salvation; they would find, that never are they so much disposed to holy duties, as when they are under the influences of the Spirit of faith, discovering the glory of Christ, and his righteousness, to them. But an ignorant generation, that knows not the power and virtue of the gospel, still suspects it as contrary to the law: this was the false charge against Christ of old, and against Stephen, Acts vi. 18, and against Paul, from which therefore he many times vindicates himself..." (*The Works of Ralph Erskine, vol. 6, pp. 70-71*).

Such was the case with Paul here in Galatians.

As we learned last week, it is the "freeness" in Paul's gospel that opened the door for his opponents to charge him with license, (i.e., "Justification is free. God loves me unconditionally, therefore, He doesn't care what I do.").

Paul denounces works so strongly his opponents (i.e., Judaizers) twisted his teaching to mean that works (obedience to the Law) have no place at all in the believer's life. They

charged that his gospel of grace encouraged men and women to disregard the law and continue in sin.

Therefore, in response to his critics, Paul offers 4 arguments in vv. 17-21 to show why a Christian who is justified is not given a license to sin but rather is motivated to live a life of grateful obedience to God.

Paul's first argument in vv. 17-18, is:

1. Christ Doesn't Promote Sin, Legalism Does (vv. 17-18).

Paul shows that the ironic truth is that the one who tries to establish righteousness by their law-keeping is in actuality the one who is guilty of law-breaking. All that legalistic law-keeping can do is stir up sin our hearts (Rom. 7:5, 8-9). In verse 18, Paul reveals the improper use of the law (i.e., legalism leads to license!). Thus, Paul's first argument is that justification by faith doesn't lead to disobedience but rather legalism does!

If legalistic, law keeping leads to breaking the law; what is the proper use and purpose of the law? This brings us to Paul's second argument, as to why justification by faith doesn't lead to license (i.e., lawlessness/law-breaking) but rather true obedience.

LESSON:

In v. 19, Paul argues:

2. TO LIVE FOR GOD ONE MUST DIE TO THE LAW. V. 19

Or, we may put it like this: Justification by faith empowers the believer to obey the Law of God.

Keep in mind the context. Paul is responding to the Judaizers who charged him with license.

In v. 18, Paul defined who the true "sinner" is. The true "sinner" (i.e., one who transgresses/breaks the law) is the one who builds the law into a ladder in order to climb his or her way to heaven by means of morality and good works. Paul says this is how one truly breaks God's law.

Since this is true, note carefully Paul's follow up argument in v. 19. Paul emphatically states in v. 19 that he is not a transgressor because he died to the law. In other words, he cannot break the law if he is dead to the law (cf. Rom. 7:1-6). The law had done its work by carrying out its death penalty. Thus, once the law had done its work, it had no further claim on him. The law no longer had jurisdiction over his life.

But, as long as a man is alive to the law (i.e., trying to earn God's favor by works of law), the law has full jurisdiction over him and Paul says he is a transgressor (v. 18) and cannot live to God (v. 19).

The Judaizers taught that unless the Galatians were alive to the law (i.e., lived according to the law), they could not live to God (i.e., they are dead to God, out of His favor, unrighteous).

But, contrary to the Judaizers, Paul argues that legalism doesn't enable a person to live for God it prevents it! Paul says to the Galatians, "Unless you are dead to the law (i.e., trusting in Jesus alone for justification), you cannot live to God," (i.e., you are dead to God, out of His favor, unrighteous).

Thus, in v. 18, Paul reveals the improper use of God's law. Paul argued that the legalist is the one who misuses God's law and therefore breaks God's law. Now, in v. 19 Paul shows the proper use of God's law. We can summarize Paul's point as:

- The law doesn't empower a man to keep the law. Rather, it kills him and points him to his need of Savior.
- Justification by faith empowers a man to keep the law of God.

For the remainder of our time we want to answer two questions raised by v. 19:

- What does Paul mean when he says by the law he died to the law?
- What is the purpose of dying to the law?

A. THE NATURE OF DYING TO THE LAW

First, what does Paul mean when he says by the law he died to the law? Romans 7 serves as an expanded commentary on Galatians 2:19. So, to get a better understanding of what Paul is saying in Galatians 2:19 turn over to Romans 7.

In Romans 7:9, Paul writes, "I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died."

Paul grew up in a Jewish home. He was taught the law by Gamaliel and became a strict Pharisee. Obviously then when he says he was "alive apart from the law" he doesn't mean that he didn't have the law or not know about it or fail to understand that the law required obedience.

What then does he mean when he says he was alive apart from the law?

If any man could have been justified by strict obedience to the law, it was Paul (cf. Philip. 3:4b-6)!

When Paul was alive apart from the law, he viewed his outward observance of law as “blameless.” Paul took comfort in his duties rather than Christ. This is true of all who are alive to the law as a means of justification, they take rest and comfort in their duties rather than in Christ. As soon as they experience conviction of sin, all who are alive to the law flee to their duty for comfort. The man, however, who is dead to the law, though the law convicts him, he is not comforted by his duty but rather by Christ.

So, I think what Paul means when he says he was “alive apart from the law” is that as a legalist, he never truly understood the holiness, spirituality and extent of the law.

Legalists have an exceedingly low view of God’s law. Like Paul, legalists view outward conformity to a set of rules as righteousness and it is in this that they find their comfort. Thus, they fail to understand the true purpose of the law.

This is the basic problem with human nature apart from grace. To be alive to the law is to be ignorant of what the law really demands. It is to be caught up in self, self-righteousness and self-justification.

All who are alive to the law, (e.g., Paul), mistakenly think they are living for God, that they are right with God because of what they do or don’t do. This was Paul’s problem.

Going back to Philippians 3, when Paul was a Pharisee, he believed he was pleasing to God. He considered himself “blameless” (i.e., he was not aware of any real problem or struggle, everything seemed perfectly fine to him). However, in actuality, he was breaking the law (v. 18, he was a transgressor).

He possessed a superficial understanding of the law and its exacting requirements of perfect righteousness (Matt. 5:48), which is perfect love to God and people (Matt. 22:37-40). This is still the problem with people today.

Men possess a superficial understanding of the law and thus a superficial understanding of sin. For example, they look at the 10 Commandments only in external, superficial terms and conclude: “I don’t worship statues carved out of wood. I haven’t killed anyone. I haven’t robbed a bank. I haven’t committed adultery. I consistently have a “quiet time.” I read good theology books. Therefore, I am a good person.”

Martyn Lloyd Jones writes, “...there is nothing more misleading than to estimate sinfulness or our spiritual condition in terms of actions only,” (*Romans 7*, p. 145).

Legalism prevents a man from seeing that the law’s requirements extend to all of his thoughts, affections, desires, motives, words, inclinations, imagination as well as actions. The greatest hindrance to a man’s justification is not his immorality but rather his morality!

This was Paul’s problem. He didn’t possess a true understanding of the law and thus a true understanding of his sin. Being alive to the law, he thought he was doing well. When

he was alive to the law, he was preoccupied with self. He considered himself to be a good and righteous person, a true law keeper.

But, something changed.

Go back to Romans 7:9, “when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.” Galatians 2:19, “For through the law I died to the law...”

As a Pharisee (think legalist!), Paul thought of sin only in terms of external behavior. As long as he kept the rules, he was righteous, not guilty of breaking God’s law. But, he says, when the commandment came (i.e., the 10th commandment, “You shall not covet,”) it killed him.

Why? The reason is because the 10th commandment doesn’t address merely external behavior but rather a condition of the heart! In other words, the moment the illumination of the spiritual character of the 10th Commandment came in Paul says he died.

The exceedingly broad, spiritual requirements of God’s law began pressing on his conscience. As a result, he began to experience true conviction of sin.

By its exacting standards of perfection, the Law showed Paul (and us!) his inability to obtain a righteous standing with God. Through the law, Paul began to understand what a great sinner he was.

He came under the conviction of guilt and sin (Rom. 3:20). He began to understand the holiness of God. He began to see the spiritual character of the law. He began to see how exceedingly broad God’s law is in that it extended beyond his behavior to all of his thoughts, desires, motives, affections, etc... He began to see how utterly incapable he was of keeping the law’s demands for righteousness.

He found himself helpless, without strength, void of any righteousness, without any power or life in him and so he died. This is what the law does, it kills!

Martyn Lloyd Jones writes,

“The moment this illumination came in as to the Law and its spiritual character and its prohibitions, especially of coveting, that is what happened. He began to experience the terrible power of sin creating within him ‘all manner of covetousness’, and it knocked him down. He realized that he was an utter weakling- he who had been boasting of himself as being superior to all his contemporaries and so superior to them in his knowledge of the Law. He now saw that he had nothing at all, and that his righteousness was nothing but ‘dung’ and dross and refuse. He had been going about to establish his own righteousness, but when faced with the righteousness of God he found that he possessed nothing. That, he tell us, is what he realized about himself when the commandment really ‘came’ to him and found him and laid him low. He could not move; in a spiritual

and moral sense, he was lying helpless on his back, as he had done in a physical sense on the road to Damascus. He was absolutely without strength,” (*Romans 7*, p. 141).

The law, therefore, makes us see that there is no hope of life in our attempts to keep it (Gal. 3:21). The law reveals to us our sin and condemns us for it and leaves us without hope or remedy for a cure. The law served its normative purpose in Paul’s life, which was to kill his self-confidence and self-righteousness and attempts at self-justification. The law by its severity forces us from itself. In this way, through the law Paul died to the law as a means of justification.

In serving as a severe disciplinarian, the law pointed Paul (and us!) to another means of justification, namely faith in Christ alone (Gal. 3:24). William Hendriksen writes, “It [i.e., the Law-J.F.] had scourged him until, by the marvelous grace of God, he had found Christ (because Christ had first sought and found him!) and peace in him,” (*Galatians*, p. 102).

Ralph Erskine notes, “...to be DEAD to the law, is by means of the law, to be led to Christ for justification, by faith in him, without the deeds of the law...” (The Works of Ralph Erskine, “Law-Death, Gospel-Life, p. 29).

Not only for the unjustified but also for the justified, the law, throughout our lives the law makes us increasingly aware of our sinful nature and thereby to seek more eagerly the forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ alone.

This brings us to our second question:

B. THE PURPOSE OF DYING TO THE LAW

What is the purpose of dying to the law? Note the purpose clause in v. 19, “For through the law I died to the law, *so that I might live to God*,” (emphasis mine). “So that” indicates the purpose for Paul dying to the law, which is, “I might live to God.”

Contrary to his critics, his death to the law didn’t lead to lawlessness! This phrase has an ethical sense to it (obedience/pursuit of holiness/sanctification). It sums up Paul’s understanding of salvation and the Christian life (Betz, *Galatians*, p. 122).

The phrase, “so that I might live to God,” has a negative and positive meaning.

Negatively, it means no longer living for self and self-glory.

Positively, it means living according to God’s law and thus God’s glory. It means to live as God wants us to live (Hendriksen, *Galatians*, p. 102).

The boast of a justified heart is no longer self-achievements (Gal. 6:13) but rather Christ and His achievements (Gal. 6:14)!

The faith that justifies leads to an absolute renunciation of all self-dependence, self-effort, self-confidence, self-promotion and self-satisfaction. James Buchanan writing on the nature of true justifying faith points out that it

“receives and rests upon Christ alone, -because it apprehends and appropriates His righteousness as its only plea,- because it implies an absolute renunciation of all self-dependence, and consists in an entire and cordial reliance on Christ as ‘the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,’- as ‘the propitiation for our sins through faith in His blood,’- and as ‘the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth in His name,’” (*The Doctrine of Justification*, p. 132).

Christ and His righteousness not self and self-righteousness become the saving view of a justified heart!

Ralph Erskine writes,

“The man that is dead to the law, he hath got a soul-humbling sight, and saving view of the glory of Christ’s righteousness, that made him quit with all his legal rags as loss and dung...The legalist is a stranger to such saving views of the glory of Christ, and His righteousness: having never got the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ...” (“Law-Death, Gospel-Life,” p. 70).

All who are alive to God by justification has the glory of God as the chief end of his or her life.

Again, Erskine writes,

“How shall I know if the glory of God be the chief end in my life obedience?...If the glory of God be the chief end of your life, then you will have a continual conflict with Self, and see how to get self-ends mortified. O! I see Self creeping in upon me...how shall I get this enemy killed? Here the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these two are contrary the one to the other. The believer finds a war here against Self, as his greatest enemy; and it is his joy, and the triumph of his heart, when gets Self dashed to the ground, and debased; when the loftiness thereof is brought down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in him,” (“Law-Death, Gospel-Life,” pp. 73-74).

Dying to the law in order to live to God is simply a way to state that obedience is the justified man’s way of walking towards heaven (Ralph Erskine, “Law-Death, Gospel-Life, p. 62).

The justified heart, Paul says, lives according to God’s law because this is what honors and glorifies God. Moreover, the justified heart hates sin and self because by it God is dishonored.

Justification is no legal fiction. Paul clearly reveals that sanctification is the inseparable and inevitable fruit of justification.

Even though justification involves a judicial change in the believer's relation to God and not a change in his or her moral or spiritual character, Paul argues that this moral change always accompanies and flows from it.

Paul insists that those who turn the doctrine of justification into an opportunity for license distort the purpose of justification, which is to live for God and His glory!

Consequently, release from the law (i.e., death to the law) is not lawlessness but rather its purpose is so that the believer might truly live for God!

While Paul was alive to the law he thought he was living for God but in actuality he was living for himself! He was consumed with self, which led him to break the law rather than keep it. Legalism made Paul a zealous persecutor of the church instead of lover of Christ and His church (cf. Gal. 1:13-14; Philip. 3:6). Clearly, legalism, not Christ and the gospel, prevented him from living a life of unreserved devotion to God.

And so we see that Paul is arguing that justification, not legalism, motivates a person to live a sanctified life! The gospel is not a doctrine of license but rather of obedience and holiness. Dying to the law, in respect to justification, is a doctrine according to godliness. In fact, it is the very means of holiness- it is the true driving force (gospel-driven) for living unto God!

The justified heart, Ralph Erskine writes, finds the gospel to be "the hottest fire in the world, to melt one's heart for sin; and the strongest cord in the world, to bind him to duty, while the love of God is shed abroad upon him," ("Law-Death, Gospel-Life," p. 72).

CONCLUSION:

As we reflect on Paul's statement here in v. 19, I want to leave you with two final thoughts.

1. TAKE HEART IF YOU FEEL UTTERLY HOPELESS ABOUT YOUR SPIRITUAL CONDITION BEFORE GOD.

Has the law come to you in its exacting, spiritual character? The purpose of the law is to kill you. It is to make you feel dead, to expose your sin and self-righteousness and make you aware of your spiritual barrenness.

But, as long as you are alive to the law (i.e., seeking to establish your own righteousness), you cannot live unto God; you have no righteous standing before Him. You cannot pursue a life of holiness and obedience.

Have you felt the law's exacting demands of righteousness pressing against your conscience? Have you come to realize that your thoughts, desires and imaginations are as important to God as your actions/behavior?

If so, take heart, for as Martyn Lloyd Jones wrote, "There is no more hopeless state to be in than to fail to realize that you are a sinner, a hopeless sinner... The first sign of spiritual life is to feel that you are dead! 'When the commandment came sin revived and I died.' Thank God; the moment a man is 'dead' there is a possibility of his being resurrected," (*Romans 7*, p. 145).

Second, let us ever keep before us the central point of Paul:

2. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE IS THE ROOT OF ALL TRUE OBEDIENCE TO GOD.

Paul's statement in 2:19 further exposes the utter failure of legalism and points to the great hope of the gospel.

What the law, in all of its forms, is powerless to do (i.e., motivate a man to live a life of godliness), the grace of God given in the gospel is fully capable.

Listen to Titus 2:11-14,

"¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

Justification by faith is hardly a way for a man to free himself from the requirements of God's law. Rather, Paul says it is the true means by which a man is empowered to obey them!

Walter Marshall writes,

"The nature of true obedience to the law absolutely requires you to understand His favor, if you really are going to obey the law. Remember, your great call is to love the Lord God with all your heart... When you consider what real love for God is, you can easily see that you cannot love God in this way if you think you are under the continual secret suspicion that He is really your enemy! You cannot love God if you secretly think He condemns and hates you. This kind of slavish fear will compel you to some hypocritical obedience- such as what Pharaoh did when he let the Israelites go against His will. However, you will never truly love God if you are compelled only by fear. Your love for God must be drawn out by your understanding of God's love and goodness towards you- just as John testifies in 1 John 4:18-19: 'There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear,

because fear consists of torment; The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love Him, because He first loved us.' You simply cannot love God unless you know and understand how much He loves you," (*The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, p. 31).

This is the blessing and result of being justified by faith in Christ: knowing that your sins are forgiven, that a perfect righteousness has been credited to you and thus you are fully reconciled to God, who is now your loving Father rather than your divine Judge!

This startling truth, Paul says, empowers you to live unto God. Justification by faith alone is the hottest fire to melt your sin and the strongest cord to bind your heart to obey God's law!

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