

8. Two eternally separated ways

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Just about everyone expects to go to heaven after they die. Even atheists, if they are truly honest with themselves, would say that they don't want to go to hell where eternal torture and punishment waits for them. One of their ways to cope with the fear of hell is pretending that God, heaven, and hell just don't exist.

But the majority of people on earth think that they are good people so they deserve to go to heaven. If you ask them, "What does it take to get into heaven?" a typical answer would be "Being a good person." So if you follow up with another question, "How good is good enough? Maybe your idea of 'good' may not be good enough for God's standard or other people's standards?", they may not like you anymore.

According to the OT Mosaic Laws, you have to have a perfect life. Flawless obedience to God at all time; loving Him with every fiber of our being and loving others as ourselves; every thought, every motive, every word, and every action must be pure, holy, untainted by sin. Is any one of you qualified for this? I am so far away from being perfect that you need the Hubble Telescope to see me.

Then, someone among you who is thinking about what we've been studying in this Book would say, "Hey, we've been studying about the grace of God that would take us to heaven, not the Law. Besides, all believers of Christ are imperfect people and sinners and we still will go to heaven."

Yes, absolutely. But it still takes perfection to get into heaven. The qualification for entering heaven has never changed. Since no one but Jesus Christ has ever lived a perfect life, He is the only One who can grant that perfect life to sinners by giving His righteousness and holiness to the sinners like us and taking away our sins upon Himself.

A. THE CURSED LIFE OF THE LAW

Galatians 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

To some of you, these studies of grace vs. legalism seems redundant. You may think, "We know that we are saved by grace, not by observing the Law. So, why do we need to study this basics over and over? Can we not go into something more meaty?" I would answer it with two reasons:

1) The Book of Galatians is in the Bible and we cannot ignore this important Book if we are going to learn the entire Bible.

2) Many biblically grounded churches and believers started their spiritual journeys with the grace of God. But as they grow older in the Lord, their pride and elitism started to sip into their once-humble-hearts and started to think that they were saved because they were spiritual and better than others.

Don't ever think that this would not happen to us. The moment we start to forget about our miserable sinful past without Christ and how we were saved by the grace of God only, our spiritual defense wall is starting to erode to the attack of legalism and elitism which have no place in Jesus Christ.

Like the Judaizers, the believers of the Galatian churches started to think that they needed to obey the Law to be truly saved. But they forgot one very important thing that apostle Paul is reminding them of.

Keeping the Law means keeping the ENTIRE Law. He was quoting Deuteronomy 27:26:

Deuteronomy 27:26 'Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

This is what Moses spoke to the Israelites prior to their entering the Promised Land. Moses reminded the people that partial obedience is disobedience. They must obey God fully. If they were to break any of His laws, they would be "cursed" – condemned, judged, rejected – by Him, because that is the condition of the Law. God's Law is not a 'religious cafeteria buffet' where people can pick and choose.

Paul's point is that all people – Jews, Gentiles, everyone – who fail to keep the Law in its entirety live under the shadow of God's impending judgment.

James 2:10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

These legalists thought their pursuit of the Law was earning God's favor, but it was actually arousing His judgment. Since the Law does not justify, how then can we be made right with God? God had the perfect answer for us.

B. THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

Galatians 3:11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith."

The apostle was quoting a text from the Book of Habakkuk:

Habakkuk 2:4 "Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith."

God had just revealed to prophet Habakkuk that the southern kingdom of Judah – "the proud" was going to fall to the Babylonians. Habakkuk was initially stunned, but God reassured him that Babylon itself would not go unpunished. That cruel kingdom would triumph for a time by its strength, but God would have the ultimate triumph. And His people, those who trusted in Him no matter how bleak the circumstances, would be delivered by their sovereign God.

This verse is so important that the Holy Spirit inspired three New Testament Books – Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:38.

Paul is applying the same principle that was applicable in the realm of national deliverance is applicable in the area of spiritual deliverance which is individual salvation. Eternal life does not come to the "proud" – those seeking salvation by keeping the Law or thinking that they are good enough, but to the humble, those who recognize their need for a righteous substitute and put their trust in Christ.

C. CANNOT HAVE BOTH

Galatians 3:12 Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them."

Like Galatians, the majority of unbelievers would insist, "OK, Paul. You've made your point. Salvation is by faith in Christ. But can't being a good person – observing the OT Law for the Galatians – be at least part of the equation? What's wrong with mixing a self-righteousness with faith? After all, God is good and being good should be acceptable to Him."

I used this illustration previously, but I think that it is fitting so I will use it again: How about putting a tiny drop of cyanide somewhere in your scrumptious dinner? Would you eat that yummy dinner? Why not? Because they should not be together .

We cannot have legalism or self-righteousness and faith in Jesus Christ. They are mutually incompatible. Does it mean that good works have no place in the Christian life? Not at all. Good works are the outgrowth of new life in Christ as it is mentioned in Romans 6 and Ephesians 2, and James 1. But as far as justification is concerned, faith in Christ apart from works is the only way to God.

D. THE MESSIAH WHO TOOK OUR SINS UPON HIMSELF

Galatians 3:13-14 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Can you imagine a death row inmate who was condemned to be executed was suddenly replaced by the very judge himself so that the judge could die on behalf of the death row inmate and the inmate gets to be released with a complete pardon and a promise of no shred of paperwork that indicates him as a previous convict? Not a chance on this earth. But that is exactly what had happened to all the believers of Jesus Christ. We were that death row inmate.

The Greek word for 'redeemed' is "exagorazo". It means "to buy out of slavery." Jesus snatched us out of the enslaving curse of the Law; He rescued us from God's judgment against sin. How? He became a curse for us.

These Judaizers wanted to lead the Galatians back to the slavery where Christ died to set them free. It is no wonder apostle Paul was hopping upset with their stupidity and stubbornness.

Apostle Paul was quoting from Deuteronomy again:

Deuteronomy 21:23 his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.

In Old Testament times criminals were executed promptly by stoning by the public and then displayed on a stake or post to show God's divine rejection. When Christ was crucified, it was evidence He had come under the curse of God. The manner of His death was a great obstacle to faith for Jews until they realized the curse He bore was for them.

For one thing, legalism appeals to our pride as we learned. Our pride loves to be "religious" – to obey rules and regulations, to observe holy occasions, even to fast – and let others know about them. Certainly there is nothing wrong with obedience, fasting, or solemn times of spiritual worship, provided that the Holy Spirit does the motivating and the empowering.

The person who depends on religion can measure himself and compare himself with others. This is another fascination to legalism. But the true believer measures himself with Christ, not other Christians. There is no room for pride in the spiritual walk of the Christian who lives by grace; but the legalist constantly boasts about his achievements and his converts.

Yes, there is a fascination to the Law, but it is only bait that leads to a trap. Once the believer takes the bait, he finds himself in bondage. Far better to take God at His Word and rest on His grace. We were saved "by grace, through faith" and we must live "by grace, through faith." This is the way to blessing. The other way is the way to bondage.

E. APPLICATIONS

- 1) It is so easy to fall into spiritual pride and elitism that make us think that we have anything to do with being saved. Nothing.
- 2) We were saved by grace, through faith and we must live by grace, through faith.