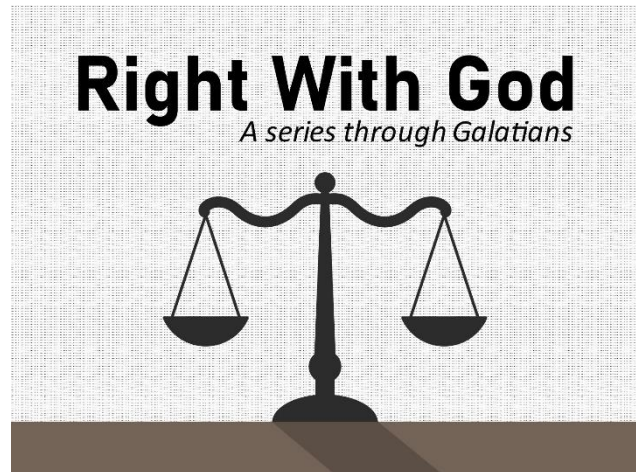




Part 4 – Justified by Faith Alone (1)

Galatians 2:11-21

Paul continues to present the evidence of his authority as an apostle of Jesus by his rebuke of his fellow apostle Peter. The reason for this public rebuke was Peter's hypocrisy of accepting and enjoying table fellowship with Gentile Christians until certain men from the Jerusalem church arrived in Antioch who disapproved of such fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Peter, bowing to their disapproval, broke off his fellowship with the Gentile Christians and thus tacitly agreed

with the Judaizers that the ceremonial laws which were abrogated in Christ were actually still in force. Such an act was tantamount to denying the gospel of justification by faith alone. Paul's rebuke of Peter demonstrates that the apostle's authority is not within themselves. They are under the authority of Jesus and his gospel.

The doctrinal heart of this passage is the concern of the epistle as a whole: Justification by faith alone. The ceremonial law (i.e. circumcision and the dietary regulations) has passed away with the finished work of Christ. To insist on continuing to practice these regulations as a condition of right standing with God obliterates the gospel entirely. Even obedience to the everlasting moral law of God (the 10 Commandments) cannot achieve or even augment one's justification before God. Right standing with God is entirely by grace alone through faith alone. Otherwise, there is no good news for sinners.

1. The scandal of Justification by Faith Alone

Vv. 11-14

- As we saw in the previous passage, Peter, along with the other apostles, had been preaching the same gospel as Paul had been preaching. It was a message of justification by grace alone through faith alone. Peter, an apostle whose ministry was focused primarily on taking the gospel to his fellow Jews had nevertheless formed a bond of fellowship with gentile Christians. In Antioch he shared table fellowship with them. This was part of the power of the gospel to unite both Jew and Gentile in Christ. Because the dietary laws and principle of ceremonial uncleanness had been abrogated by the finished work of Christ, there was now no longer a dividing wall of hostility between the two (Ephesians 2:14).
- There is little to no doubt that someone or more likely "someones" had been scandalized by the freedom Peter had embraced. We are told that "certain men" who "came from James" were the source of Peter's reversal. Presumably these Jewish Christians from the Jerusalem church (thus their connection to James) were scandalized by Peter's liberty from the ceremonial laws including his table fellowship with Gentile Christians. Rather than standing up to the pressure put upon him by the Judaizers, Peter succumbed and turned his back on his Gentile brothers.
- The doctrine of justification by faith alone is scandalous to anyone who holds to a religion of merit. Even to these Jewish Christians who would have affirmed that sinners are justified by faith. But they rejected that faith alone was the means. Rather, they believed that sinners were justified before God through a cooperative effort of both faith and works of the law. The same is true for the Roman Catholic Church. It is hard to believe that God would save sinners on the basis of grace alone working through faith alone.
- It is hard to receive and live by grace. To the legalist the doctrine of being justified by faith alone is a scandal because through it God insists on saving us without our help. For the libertine being justified by faith alone is a scandal because it insists on pointing out our need to be justified in the first place.

2. The promise of Justification by Faith Alone

Vv. 15-18

- Of verses 15-21 Thomas Schreiner writes: “We arrive at perhaps the most significant text in Galatians, in which Paul summarizes his gospel. Hence, this text functions as a hermeneutical key for the remainder of the letter.”¹

A) Righteousness is granted to sinners by faith alone (vv. 15-16)

- In verse 15 Paul is not seeking to diminish the Gentiles. Rather he is pointing out the fact that “even though” Jews were covenant insiders and not outsiders (“sinners”) like the Gentiles, they have always been taught that righteousness cannot be achieved by obedience to the law. Their own scriptures testify to this. Being a covenant insider does not mean that one is any less a sinner in need of God’s grace. Paul employs two key terms to advance this truth:
 - i. “Justified” – There is a legal or forensic character to the term “justify” (δικαίωω). The term is used 8 times in Galatians including 3 times in verse 16. It occurs 15 times in Romans and always indicates a legal transaction. This concept is derived from the Hebrew verb for justify (**qds**). The forensic character of “justify” is made clear in such passages as Romans 8:33: “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.” God’s justification of the elect is based upon his counting them as righteous (Rom. 3:28; 4:3-6, 8-11, 22-24; 9:8; Gal. 3:6). The righteousness which justifies sinners is not their own but is the “free gift” of God (Rom. 5:17). God justifies believers not on the basis of their acts of righteousness but on the basis of his own gift of righteousness imputed to them. That is, God credits or counts (λογίζομαι) sinners righteous by grace through faith alone.
 - ii. “Works of the law” – Paul uses this phrase 8 times in his epistles (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16 [3x]; 3:2, 5, 10). Each time Paul uses the phrase he does so in contrast to faith. Whether the Judaizers realized it or not, by insisting on circumcision and the dietary codes as necessary for being right with God, they were binding themselves to obey perfectly the entire body of God’s law both ceremonial and moral. Such an obedience is impossible for sinners and therefore holds no hope for salvation. So, sinners must be justified by God by grace alone through faith alone. No repenting sinner will be turned away. Every sinner who repents will be declared righteous by God.

B) Justification by faith alone does not promote sinful license (vv. 17-18)

- In verse 17 Paul addresses the objection raised by some of the Jewish Christians that the doctrine of justification by faith alone will only encourage sinful license. “If we are made right with God by grace through faith alone apart from works of the law then there is no motive for obedience,” they reasoned. In their minds it followed that if sinners are justified through faith alone, Christ is then “the servant of sin” (vs. 17). Paul dismisses such blasphemy with a resounding “No!” Indeed, the believer’s sanctification will be a major theme in this very epistle.

3. The Source of Justification by Faith Alone

Vv. 19-21

- Jesus Christ – his finished work and our union with him – is the source of justification by faith alone. We are justified through faith alone having been united to Christ in his death and resurrection. Justification by faith alone is not cold dogma but the vibrant fruit of union with Christ.

A) Believers have died in Christ

- Having been united to Christ, Paul’s former self – his sinful self – has died. That does not mean that he no longer sins or is no longer tempted to sin. Rather he has died to his former bondage to sin. Something new has risen to life in him; a new creation who rejoices to live for Christ.

B) Believers live by faith in Christ

- In verse 20 Paul uses the present tense verb “live” four times. His union with Christ has caused him, paradoxically, to no longer live but rather for Christ to live in him. Paul no longer lives by works of the law which can only lead to condemnation. Rather he lives by faith in Jesus, the only means by which he is made right with God.

¹ Thomas Schreiner, Galatians (ECNT) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) p. 151