

Paul's Paradox (Part 2 of 2)

by Bill and Karen Bishop

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Galatians 2:16

(16) Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

The phrase "man is not justified by the works of the law" is often quoted to teach that God's Law has no place in the church today. However, is that really what Paul is saying? Let's look a little bit deeper. It is obvious that man in his human state is not going to be able to keep God's Law perfectly. Even to think we can sets us up for certain failure and guilt that will crush the spirit within us. Those who try to do so will invariably stumble:

Romans 9:31-32

(31) But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.

(32) Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;

That stumblingstone is Y'shua (Jesus). If we seek salvation through works of the Law APART from Y'shua, our salvation will vaporize. That is why no man can be justified simply by keeping the Law.

So what else does Paul have to say about God's Law? Paul upholds the law repeatedly in his epistles, saying things such as "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good." Then he explains a bit more about how the works of the law have a place in the life of the Believer:

Romans 7:12-14

(12) Wherefore **the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good**.

(13) Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

(14) For we know that **the law is spiritual**: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Paul acknowledges the difficulty of fully attaining to God's Law due to the sin nature we inherited when Adam and Eve fell. The book of Romans relates Paul's struggle with sin. In the midst of his struggle Paul shows us that the purpose of the law in our lives is to identify sin (Romans 7:7) After all, how can we seek forgiveness for that which we don't recognize as sin?

Romans 7:7

(7) What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

So - one minute, it looks as though Paul is saying we can disregard Father's Law today, and the next, he is upholding it and proclaiming its purpose. To the western mind that creates confusion. How is this confusion resolved?

The sin of mankind created a breach between God and man - a chasm that would prevent the restoration of man back to God. There was no way for mortal man to cross that chasm. Keeping the Law of God perfectly was the only chance he had, but his sin nature would most certainly keep that from happening. If he broke even one commandment one time, the penalty of spiritual death would hang over his head.

Romans 6:23

(23) For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Son of God took on flesh so He could cross that chasm for us. He kept God's Law to perfection and paid the penalty of death for humanity, building a bridge over that chasm so we can cross over it after Him. Only through faith in what He accomplished - by allowing Him to be our covering - can the Father see us as justified, opening up that path to restoration.

The book of Hebrews tells us that the first covenant was flawed because of weakness. The weakness was not of the Law, as God's Law is perfect (Psalms 19:7). God is perfect, and what He provided for us is perfect as well. What created the flaw in the effectiveness of the Law to restore us to the Father was the weakness of our human flesh due to the sin nature in the blood that courses through our veins. The renewed covenant allows for grace through the work of Y'shua to create a bridge over the chasm caused by sin. Only through Y'shua can our sins be forgiven so we can be in a

constant state of justification before God. When we come to trust in the atonement offered by Y'shua we are given the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and guide us through the restoration process that Y'shua opened up for us.

Simple belief is where faith begins - justification. That is when we are allowed to step onto the bridge. The bridge enables us to cross the chasm as we embrace the ways of Father and yield to the prompting of His Spirit. This is our sanctification – our walk of faith. Our faith merely BEGINS with belief.

James 2:14, 17-18

(14) What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? **can faith save him?**

(17) ... **faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.**

(18) Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

Our "works" are the fruit of the Spirit that the Spirit works through us as we adhere to Father's commands and yield to His Spirit within. This fruit is evidence of the maturing of our faith. The tree that doesn't bear fruit will be cut down and burned.

Matthew 3:10

(10) And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Paul resolutely links faith to obedience. The maturity of our faith through obedience to God's Law allows us to be seen in the image of Y'shua.

Romans 16:26

(26) But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, **according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:**

This "obedience of faith" establishes God's Law, even as Y'shua did through His obedience.

Romans 3:31

(31) **Do we then make void the law** through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

Far from disavowing the law, John backs up Paul's fuller picture by stating in Revelation that we must repent and do the FIRST works (Torah Law?), or our candlestick will be removed out of its place:

Revelation 2:5

(5) Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and **do the first works**; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

He then drives home the point that we will be judged according to our works; and he correlates that to keeping Father's commandments:

Revelation 20:12

(12) And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were **judged** out of those things which were written in the books, **according to their works**.

Revelation 22:14

(14) Blessed are **they that do his commandments**, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

We can't afford to let Paul's paradoxical language derail us. Paul is not in conflict with John. Their teachings support one another. The way Paul deals with God's law is to inform us that we cannot count on it alone to justify us, but we must receive Y'shua through faith, and then walk in God's ways to complete our sanctification. Those ways are Torah Law. In Paul's manner of relating things, he gives us the whole picture. We just need to adjust our mind's eye to see it. Much is at risk! May we heed Paul's words to the wise:

Philippians 2:12

(12) Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling**.

Notice that Paul didn't tell us to rest in our "salvation", but to work it out. Even he was concerned that he might be cast away at the judgment (1 Corinthians 9:27), showing the need to maintain observance of God's Law. Justification is an event, but salvation is a process. Our obedient walk of faith (sanctification) is a necessary part of that process. Y'shua said,

John 17:17

(17) **Sanctify** them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

Our salvation then awaits us at the end of our sanctification walk of faith.

1 Peter 1:9

(9) Receiving the **end of your faith**, even the **salvation of your souls**.