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Finally, brethren

WHATEVER THINGS

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTUE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

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May Woman Speak in Church?

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

In most churches today women preach and in other ways take leadership roles forbidden to them in past generations. What does the Bible say on this subject?

The Scriptures direct all Christians, men and women, to sing in the public worship assembly (1 Corinthians 14:15, 23; Ephesians 5:18-19). When women do so, they both speak and teach in church (Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16).

But two passages limit the woman's role in the church. In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Paul commands: "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church." To Timothy the inspired apostle wrote, "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence" (1 Timothy 2:11-12).

The Scriptures, being truth (John 17:17), do not contradict each other. In both passages, Paul defines the kind of speaking he forbids by demanding its opposite. In the church, women must not speak in a manner that violates their submission to men (1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:11-12). Thus, since preachers must address the church "with all authority" (Titus 2:15), women cannot preach. Women may not participate equally with men in making decisions for the church. A woman cannot be a teacher over a class

containing men. in Bible classes, women should be careful not to violate their role of submission.

The inspired Scriptures are our standard, not the modern philosophy of gender equality.

Why Has There Been Such An Outcry By Brethren Against Isaiah 53:6c?

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Isaiah 53:6c reads "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." But notice these quotes by gospel preachers which directly contradict the wording of that verse:

- "It is said that Jesus took every sin of mankind into Himself on the cross ... I deny that any ... scripture says such a thing but to the contrary the scriptures deny it." (Maurice Barnett, "Gospel Truths," July 2010)
- "To the Calvinist that means ... they were put on Him ... Where is the passage that says that God put the sins of the world on Jesus?" (Gene Frost, sermon, March 2000)
- "God has never put sin on anyone" (Hugh Walton, 6-14-2017 email)
- "Jesus took our sins upon Himself ... It is plain Calvinism." (Jesse Jenkins, 2-21-2014 email)

How can we account for such blatant denials of the wording of Isaiah 53:6c by Christians? Sure, many in the past have denied the true meanings of various passages, but I can never recall brethren denying the actual wording of a verse such as they are doing now. None have ever gone this far to prop up their theory.

Here is what I think has happened. The Calvinist will say the wording of Isaiah 53:6c means the "guilt" of our sins were laid upon Jesus. Maurice Barnett and the like know that cannot be true, that you cannot rewrite history (who committed what sin). So my friend Barnett and company reject the wording of the verse outright. Instead of disavowing what the verse says, they should have rejected the Calvinists' addition of the word "guilt" to the verse. What our brother Barnett should have done is to say "the verse is true, but here is what the verse means." Instead his tactic has been to deny the actual wording of the verse - because he has evidently accepted the Calvinistic interpretation of the wording of the verse.

When a basketball referee literally charges (transfers, lays) the foul of Dan to/on Tom (accidentally), that doesn't mean Tom was guilty of the foul. It is impossible to change who committed a foul after the fact. Instead it means Tom took the penalty for Dan's foul. Likewise instead of teaching the guilt of our sins were transferred to Jesus (He remained a completely innocent lamb, 1 Peter 1:19), the context of Isaiah 53:6c shows the verse is saying the punishment for our sin was transferred to Jesus. Verse 5 (context) declares this understanding of verse 6 when it says "The punishment for our well-being was laid upon Him" (**NASB**).

So a lot of this controversy probably could have been avoided if brethren had just had confidence in the age old rule of letting context determine the meaning of a phrase. Instead many preaching brethren swallowed the Calvinistic interpretation of Isaiah 53:6c (contrary to context), and that mistaken acceptance of adding the word "guilt" to the text caused them to reject the verse outright. Sad but true?

- So You Want to Be a Preacher -

Preaching Is a Life of Facing Difficulties

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

I call as my first witness an early preacher - the apostle Paul. Paul. If you don't recall his difficulties, get your Bible and read Second Corinthians 11. I don't think I could round up 1,000 preachers whose combined experiences could add up to what Paul encountered. Thankfully, most of those who read this live in a nation where we have freedom, and where we are financially comfortable. That part about "financially comfortable" certainly was not true of an earlier generation of preachers.

My own forebears, both father and grandfather, faced financial hardships in preaching. My grandfather, J. D. Tant, farmed to provide for his family, and my grandmother Nanny looked after the farm while he was often gone in gospel meetings and debates. One on occasion he held a meeting the brethren deemed successful, and they invited him back the next year, but said they would have no money for his wages. He offered a solution. Some of the members raised hogs. Grandfather suggested that each one take a runt of the next litter, feed it the leftovers from the family dinner table, and he would take that at his pay. They got their pencils out and did some figuring before announcing they could not afford that. Grandfather's response was that if his preaching was not worth the slop from their tables, then there was no use in his coming back. (You need to read the biography J. D. Tant, Texas Preacher. It is a rich reading experience.)

I remember my father, Yater Tant, was preaching for a large church with 1,000 or so in attendance on Sunday. He was paid very little, which was partly due to a power struggle among the elders. We took in boarders, and eventually sold our car to pay the bills. Thankfully, we lived on the bus line, and were only a few blocks from the church building, so we could walk to services. My family has endured hardships along the way, such as living in a mouse-infested four room house with three children and my wife's sister, for whom I fixed a room in the attic.

Financial struggles are not the only difficulties. There are "brethren" difficulties. Many years ago while in New Mexico a local theater presented a live show featuring a "dance contest" with Chubby Checker, a popular rock-and-roll singer. I learned that one of our young teenagers was going to attend, and possibly would enter the contest. After our Ladies Bible class one morning, I took the newspaper clipping to the mother of the girl, and quietly asked her if she thought her daughter ought to attend. Mom commenced to scream and shout that I should leave her alone, and left the building in tears. The next night the two elders came to visit me and criticize my meddling in the affairs of that family. They opined that I was lucky her husband did not come and hit me. They instructed me to leave the members alone and teach the aliens while they would take care of the members. I replied that I was glad to hear that, as there was another particular family whose daughter was not behaving right, and they needed to talk to them. "Well, you preach about that from the pulpit. They know what's right. So what else do you want us to do?"

We invited M. Roy Stevens for a singing school. The elders asked me to select men for him to work with. About the third night of the meeting, the younger elder told me the older wanted to fire me—that night! Why? Because I had not asked him to lead singing yet! And so it goes.

How does one respond to such situations? You accept it as part of being a servant of Christ. You do not throw up your hands and quit, nor do you in anger retaliate. You sometimes bite your tongue, and you pray for your brethren. As Paul detailed the hardships he had encountered in his travels, he concluded by writing, "Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" (2 Corinthians 11:28-29). "Take brethren, for an example of suffering and of patience, the prophets who spake in the name of the Lord" (James 5:10).

Jesus' Role In Salvation

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

A few years ago, there was an article in the Nashville, Tennessee newspaper, "The Tennessean," where the role of Jesus in salvation was discussed among some of the Presbyterian denomination. One side said Jesus was the only way for one to obtain salvation while the other side contended there could be other ways to be saved. The simple way to resolve this problem is to go to the Bible and see what it teaches on this subject.

Notice the words spoken by John in his gospel, "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Is access to God the Father necessary for

one to be saved? Salvation is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). Is there another way one can come to the Father, who gives salvation to the lost? The Lord states no one can come to God unless it is through Him. That really should settle the matter. It is quite apparent the side arguing people can be saved without Christ rely on something other than the word of God.

One said, "I don't have the right to say that other people can't find God in other ways." The Lord has the right and He has spoken. We are to preach and teach only what we find written and revealed in His Holy Word. Peter said, "If any man speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God..." (1 Peter 4:11). Warnings are sounded throughout the Bible about adding to and taking from the word of God. The Scriptures plainly teach if one should be guilty of such, they would be condemned. The apostle Paul said, in writing to the churches of Galatia, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). Also notice Revelation 22:18-19 and Deuteronomy 4:2.

They mentioned in this article "the church's confession of faith" and placed it right along side the Bible. True followers of the Lord depend solely on His word for their guidance, not some creed book written by men. Listen to the words of our Lord while teaching His disciples, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). His word, not the doctrines of men, gives life, when obeyed (Matthew 7:21). He even revealed one's worship is vain or unacceptable when offered to God according to the commandments of men (Matthew 15:7-9).

This article went on to say, "In the end, neither side got its way at the General Assembly, the governing body of the Presbyterian Church (USA)..." How different from the church we read about in the Bible. The Lord's church has only one Head, which is Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:23). It has no earthly governing body, relying solely upon its Head for salvation and direction. It has only one creed book, if I might call it such, which is the Bible. This book "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Each local church belonging to the Lord, though scattered throughout the world, is autonomous (self-governing). Every congregation is subject only to its Head (Christ) and follows only the Bible for what it believes and practices. Each church is to have its own elders, deacons, preachers, and members (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; Ephesians 4:11-12).

Let me urge our Presbyterian friends, and others who are faced with same dilemma, to turn back to the word of God. It is only through Christ man can be saved (Acts 4:12). Follow Him and be only a Christian, not a Presbyterian, etc. Be a member of His church, which He built (Matthew 16:18). He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28) and is the Savior of that body or church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23). Subject yourself unto Him, not to some governing body of a man-made organization. It is the only way to please our God and to be assured of salvation when this life draws to a close. Heaven awaits the faithful.

The Value of One Eye

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

Jesus gave a radical solution to the problem of lust: "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (Matthew 5:29). While it may seem impossible to perform this type of surgery on ourselves, I am convinced we can see better with one eye and that we develop a better grip with one less hand (verse 30). Indeed, we are at our best when we have fewer "body" parts!

When Jesus uttered such fanatical instructions, He was referring to the importance of remaining sexually pure – "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (verses 27-28). This takes tremendous effort on our part as we live in a world that is plagued with carnal desire. Yet we should be so committed to avoiding adultery that we are willing to pluck out our right eye or cut off our

right hand. This is the same warning He gave when discussing the danger of misleading people in religion (see 18:6-9). In both cases, He is emphasizing the need to do without certain luxuries and advantages if possessing them results in continual temptation and yielding to sin. It is far better to live without those abilities than to retain them and live in a way that leads us to hell.

Obviously, Jesus is not saying we should literally remove physical body parts. That has no benefit in purifying our heart or strengthening our faith – the two main ingredients needed in having a righteous relationship with God (see Hebrews 10:22). His calling guides us down the path of righteousness, faith, love, obedience, and especially self-sacrifice like Jesus is describing. So, literally plucking out our right eye or cutting off our right hand will not do that for us since we can be just as wicked with our left eye and left hand. Instead, He is telling us to get rid of anything that is a constant source of temptation for us. For some, it may mean less time on the internet, avoiding certain books, or discontinuing sports. For others, it may mean avoiding particular people, deleting certain apps, or finding another job. It may be unfathomable for us to contemplate life without these “advantages,” but it is better to lose these luxuries than to hold on to them and continually sin and wind up in hell. “Therefore, put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness” (Colossians 3:5).

But here’s the deal: life is actually better without those “body” parts. In fact, it is quite liberating to remove spiritual hindrances and stumbling blocks. It frees us to pursue nobler and more enlightening activities and opens us up to more opportunities to serve. This does not mean we will never be tempted again, even with those particular sins, since such is “common to man” (1 Corinthians 10:13) and the devil “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). But it does mean we will not be enslaved to those desires and better prepared to resist their allurements. We will also discover the tremendous value of the path of escape and want to remain on it more often.

The benefits of this newfound commitment will significantly outweigh the sacrifices required of us. As we eliminate the apps from our phone (that are a constant thorn for us), or as we discontinue certain types of music, discard particular books from our library, or avoid certain individuals and places that are a bad influence on us, we purge our environment of the thoughts that trigger ungodly desires. It may seem like full-blown absurdity to live without those “benefits,” especially to those who continue to live with them, but that decision will literally free our mind from the shackles of sin and help us make better choices. We soon realize the value of relying more on God (in prayer) and less on ourselves (in pride). Plus, our Lord has a fascinating way of filling the void left by those eliminated luxuries. Our relationships with others will improve, from the home to the local church. Our thoughts will be more profound and more rewarding. And most importantly, we will have peace of mind more often. It will be just as God says:

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things...and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:8-9).

Hence, instead of begrudging what we must lose in committing to purity and holiness, let us anticipate the treasures to be gained in drawing closer to God. In a short period of time, we will discover how much clearer our vision becomes when we choose to live with only one eye.

The Humanity of Jesus Christ

DO YOU REALLY KNOW JESUS?

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

The teaching that Jesus will reign upon the earth for 1,000 years is part of the Premillennial doctrine common to many denominational churches in today's religious world. The teaching relies in large part on Revelation 20:1-7, which speaks of the devil being bound for 1,000 years, and the faithful of God living and reigning with Christ for the same period of time.

On the surface, one might wonder at the person who says there is not a literal 1,000 year reign. After all, the 1,000 year period is mentioned no less than six times in the first seven verses of Revelation 20. I don't contend that there is not a 1,000 year reign - the text is clear that there is. There are two things that I call into question:

1. that the 1,000 years should be understood as a literal timeframe, and
2. that the Christ will reign physically upon the earth.

The book of Revelation begins in this way:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants - things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John...
(Revelation 1:1)

John tells us that the content of the Revelation is "signified." We find a variety of colours, numbers, measurements, and other visual elements in the book. These images are not meant to be applied literally, they are figures, symbols, and signs. To apply a literal interpretations often results in nonsense or doctrines that are contrary to the rest of the Bible. The teaching that Jesus will reign on the earth for a literal 1,000 years is contrary to the rest of Scripture.

Thy Kingdom Come

Those who affirm a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ believe His kingdom is still in the future. What does the Bible say?

Jesus affirmed:

Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power. (Mark 9:1)

Jesus told His contemporaries that His kingdom would begin in their generation. This precludes a literal 1,000 year reign.

In Acts 2:30-36, Peter says Jesus now sits on his throne. This fulfills a messianic psalm which reads:

*The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'
The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of your enemies.* (Psalm 110:1-2)

Again, this reveals the kingdom began in the first century, and also reveals it to be a spiritual kingdom. Jesus reigns from heaven, not upon the earth. The Lord told Pilate His kingdom wasn't of this world (John 18:36).

Paul wrote:

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love... (Colossians 1:13)

We cannot be brought into a kingdom that doesn't yet exist. And yet Paul speaks in the present tense of the kingdom.

Returning To Earth?

Since the kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), it would seem odd for Jesus to come back to the earth to rule over it. And yet that is the contention of those who take the premillennial position. What does the Bible say? Will He set foot on the earth again?

The apostles watched as Jesus ascended to heaven in the clouds (Acts 1:9). Two angels told them::

This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11)

Several texts speak about Him coming on the clouds (Psalm 68:4; 104:3; Jeremiah 4:13; Daniel 7:13; Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Revelation 1:7), but where is the verse which states Jesus will again set foot on the earth? Notice 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17:

...the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Jesus will not set foot on the earth. He will come and take us to be with Him in heaven (John 14:2-3). This earth will be destroyed at that time (2 Peter 3).

Praying

Chuck Richardson | Lakeland, Florida, USA

Why do men pray, or more importantly, why do you pray? If answered correctly, you will be set on the path of the divine and discover confident assurance that God hears, cares, and answers without fail or imperfection. Our aim is to find the necessary element of praying so that we can practice perfect praying, and with each passing day become better communicators to and with God. We must with boldness approach the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16), therefore we need to know what to ask for.

Men pray to receive aid in time of need from a powerful God, in hopes that He will exercise that power in their favor. This is only effective when we know under what circumstance He will grant us His good favor. How do you know what gets His attention? You must strive to know Him, even if you're feeble in your pursuit because of ignorance. Have you ever wanted/needed a costly favor? Where did you seek it? That's right, you requested from the most likely person to give you that favor. Maybe Uncle Harry, you went to him because you were confident that he would help. This principle is true for personal and business relationships alike. If you need a loan for a house, you learn who is most likely to supply the loan, and if you need a personal loan you go to the family or friend that will provide that loan. You know who has the means to help because you know details about them.

We may know to go to God when we need a favor no man can supply, but do we go in desperation, seeking God only for the moment, not knowing whether it is something He will grant? Or do we go in desperation, not realizing He is ready to give much more than we ask, but because we don't pursue to know Him intimately, we fall short? We know even evil persons give liberally to those whom they love (Luke 11:9-13). Jesus told His disciples, "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22). Why do we not ask believing? When Jesus told His disciples, He would die and be raised the third day, it was said of them, "But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him" (Mark 9:32).

Understanding is the key to faith that is emboldened to ask, and understanding is the result of knowing what God will do for us. We learn of God through the Bible which holds His divine will. Notice what John records in this light:

"My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:18-22).

John also said:

"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have

the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1John 5:14-15).

So, we conclude that knowing Him, which means we know His will so that we don't ask amiss, we then can be confident that He will supply what we ask of Him.

Are you a confident prayer to God because you know Him? If you are, it's because you seek to know His will and if this be so, then He gives abundantly.

Faith and Works

PART 1 | ROMANS FOUR

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Two New Testament passages deal extensively with the subject of faith and works in salvation. In Romans chapter four the apostle Paul appeals to the example of Abraham's justification by faith, quoting Genesis 15:6 (verse 3), and concludes:

Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness (verses 4-5).

But James also quotes Genesis 15:6 (James 2:23) and deduces, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (verse 24). How can these two seemingly contradictory positions be harmonized? We will solve this problem by answering the question, **What is the relationship between faith and works in our justification?**

Faith - Romans Four

Remote Context

At first, the Lord's disciples, all Jews (Acts 2:5,41), thought the gospel was for Jews alone (Acts 11:19). But when the Lord sent the apostle Peter to preach to uncircumcised Gentiles (Acts 10:1 - 11:17), the brethren learned that salvation in Christ is for both Jew and Gentile (Acts 10:34-35; 11:18).

But this did not bring the controversy to an end. Many Jewish disciples thought the Gentiles who came to Christ had to become proselytized to Judaism to be saved. They demanded that Gentile Christians be circumcised as a sign of becoming Jews and keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:1,5). Had they been correct, sinless obedience would have been essential to justification. Those who attempt to be justified by the Mosaic law are under its curse:

*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'** (Galatians 3:10; quoting Deuteronomy 27:26, emphasis mine).*

The law could maintain spiritual life for one who kept it sinlessly. "The man who does them shall live by them" (Galatians 3:12; quoting Leviticus 18:5). But if he ever sinned in even one point, he was cursed. It was do, do, do, do, do all the law demands and never fail. This was because the Old Testament animal sacrifices were ultimately not sufficient to remove the guilt of sin (Hebrews 10:1-5). If the law were still in force, Christ could not be our High Priest, since He is of the tribe of Judah, whereas the Old Testament priests had to be of the tribe of Levi (Hebrews 7:12-14). Thus, He could not minister His blood for us, and we would be without a sacrifice that could remove the stain of sin. The one who tries to be justified by the law is thus under the inescapable curse. He has sinned (Romans 3:9-19, 23); the law can only show one his sin, not justify the sinner (Romans 3:20); and the sinner must cry in anguish, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24)

The Jews laid great stress on their fleshly descent from Abraham, to whom the Lord gave the promises (Genesis 12:1-7). John accused them of relying on their Abrahamic ancestry to refuse repentance (Luke 3:8). When Christ offered them freedom through truth, they indignantly replied, "We are Abraham's

descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will me made free?'" (John 8:31-33)

Immediate Context

Circumcision was a fleshly sign of covenant relationship with God (Genesis 17:13). The animal sacrifices of the law of Moses only offered a fleshly cleansing so the sin-defiled worshiper might come into the presence of the holy God, and its ordinances primarily pertained to the flesh (Hebrews 9:1-10). Paul shows that the Lord has replaced these fleshly requirements - Abrahamic descent, circumcision, carnal ordinances - with a covenant that pertains to the heart, the inner man, a spiritual relationship (Romans 2:28-29).

In the immediate preceding passage, Paul restated and expanded the theme of Romans: We are saved by faith apart from the law (Romans 3:20-31). The "law" is the "law of works" (Romans 3:27), i.e., a law which demands sinless obedience for justification, the Old Testament. "Faith" is "the law of faith" (Ibid), "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:3), the gospel (Romans 1:16).

Analysis of Passage

The apostle makes the strongest possible appeal to a Jew. How was Abraham, the father of the nation, the one the Lord gave the promises, justified? Was it by the flesh - physical relationship, circumcision, law of Moses? (Romans 4:1) If so, since this demands sinless obedience, he could boast of earning his salvation; but no one can so glory before the holy God (verse 2). Rather, the Scriptures testify Abraham was justified by faith (verse 3; quoting Genesis 15:6). Such justification is on the basis of the grace of God, undeserved favor (verse 4; cf. 3:21-26). On the other hand, justification by works would be earned, not a matter of grace (verse 4).

What kind of works does the apostle have in mind? The Bible mentions many kinds: good and evil (Titus 2:14; 2 Timothy 4:18), of God and of darkness (John 6:28-29; Romans 13:12), of Christ and of iniquity (Philippians 2:30; Matthew 7:23), of the Lord and of the flesh (1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 5:19), befitting repentance and wicked (Acts 26:20; Colossians 1:21), righteous and hypocritical (Acts 10:35; Matthew 23:3,5), perfect and dead (James 1:4; Hebrews 9:14), of faith and of the law (also called boastful and of righteousness, i.e., earned righteousness; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:9; Titus 3:5). Some of these works will cause us to be lost (Galatians 5:19-21), some will not save (Galatians 2:16), but some are essential to salvation (John 6:28-29; Philippians 2:12; Galatians 5:6).

Judgment will be on the basis of our works (Romans 2:5-10). How can this be if works have nothing to do with our salvation? The works of Romans four are the works of the law of Moses. The same is true of the works of Ephesians 2:9 - "not of works lest anyone should boast." These are boastful works, earned justification, sinless obedience.

The justification of Romans four (and Ephesians 2:8-10) is "to him who does not work" (Romans 4:5). If this includes every kind of works, even good works, then we should not do good works. We should never feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, take in the stranger, clothe the naked, or visit the prisoner. But Christians are "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10), and we will be condemned if we fail to do them (Matthew 25:31-46). Again, the works of Romans four are the works of the Old Testament.

The remainder of the chapter clinches the argument. David, the great hero of Israel, was justified by faith apart from sinless obedience to the law (verses 6-8; quoting Psalm 32:1-2). Abraham was justified by faith before he was circumcised, proving one can be righteous without circumcision (verses 9-12; cf. Genesis 15:6; 17:1-14,23-27). The Abrahamic promise predated the law and had nothing to do with the law, and Abraham himself was righteous though he never kept the Mosaic law. This proves we are justified by faith without the works of the Old Testament (verses 13-25).

Conclusion

We are not justified by the works of the law of Moses, works that demanded sinless obedience, were fleshly, and would earn salvation. Rather, we are saved by grace through faith as we by faith meet the divine conditions of pardon.

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