

Faith, Torah, and Relationships

To begin I will make a few comments about Paul's changed understanding of faith and his changed view of the Torah. Paul says in Galatians 3:24 that we are justified through faith. And then, in Galatians 3:26 he says, "Through faith in Christ Jesus." This may seem sometimes like we are just repeating truths that we already know. But what Paul hopes to impress us with is that this has a significant effect on our daily life and our understanding of how we live. We are not justified and brought into a reconciled relationship with God on the basis of what we do and what we produce. Faith is not another form of works. That is a trap that some people fall into. They say, "Oh yes, I am not saved by works—who could be saved by works? All I have to do is conjure up a big measure of faith and then I will be saved." I am exaggerating a little, but we must understand that faith is in a different category than works altogether. We see this in Galatians and Romans.

We need to understand and return to the finished work of Christ. We are in a hopelessly lost situation and we cannot pull ourselves out by our own effort and say, "Here we are; okay, now I believe." We are even dependent on God's mercy for faith. It is not that we stand at the crossroads of the road to loss and damnation and the road to the kingdom of God and we decide we will go a particular way. Rather, according to Jesus' teaching and the apostolic letters, we are all in a train heading for damnation. We are all doomed because of the fall, because of the severity of our state. There is no getting out of that except to be saved, literally. "While we were yet enemies, Christ died for us." This work of Christ is established, communicated, and made effective for us. Therefore, we can live by that God-given faith by which we can appropriate the work of God. Thus faith, I would like to encourage you to understand, is not another pious form of works, but it is a gift of God by which we appropriate the deeds of Christ and are led into a godly life. Godliness in life—living according to the instructions and the laws of God—is the purpose of God's salvation as we worship the living God. But we must understand faith rightly. If we attempt to produce faith in our own strength, we will fall back into that which we need to stay away from. As you reflect on what it means to live by faith and not by works, as you reflect on the biblical understanding of faith, remember that it cannot degenerate into a pious form of works. Faith cannot be just a mental assent. To live by faith is to say, "Yes," to Jesus. It is to confess Jesus as Lord. Faith does have hands and feet; it is concrete. It applies to the reality of my human existence in my thinking, my doing, and my relationships. And it is always a gift from God. As you think about these things, always keep faith outside of the spectrum of works and self-generated effort. This necessity is emphasized in Ephesians 2:8-10. I would commend to you that you reflect on the truth that faith is a gift of God by which we appropriate the riches of that which we have received.

I now want to address briefly Paul's changed view of the Torah. It is amazing that you do not find an absolute abrogation of the law in Paul's teaching, though that would be understandable. It would have been easy for Paul to say that all of the teaching of Gamaliel and Palestinian Judaism is gone. You may have that impression as you read Philippians three—that Paul completely turns his back against the law and says, "That is all gone and finished." But he recognizes that the Mosaic Law of God is God's revelation. It is God's Word. So what do we do? How do we relate to the law? We can neither elevate faith to a pious form of works, nor can we fall back into saying, "We are saved by grace and kept by keeping the law." Somehow we must understand what the purpose of the law is. The way I would try to describe to you the purpose of the Mosaic Law, the specific instructions of God, is this: read the law understanding it as instructions on how we should live. See it as the declaration of God's purposes and intentions in your life. Pray that by God's provision, grace, and strength, you will be living more and more in His ways. We must not approach the law in the legalistic sense of that we must produce these things in our lives; rather, we must approach the law in a sense of dependency. "God will enable me by His spirit to live this out." This is a very complicated area. I have no doubt in my mind from Galatians

and Romans that there is a soteriological abrogation of the law—the law cannot bring us into a saved relationship with God. But there is an appreciation of the law as revelation of God's Word, and there is a purpose of the law in the Christian life in this declarative sense.

We will look at Paul's changed perspective on relationships. Paul lived in a particular cultural setting of slavery, particular relationship structures between man and woman in marriage, a particular structure between parents and children, etc. These relationships change based on the presence and authority of Christ. This is especially true for us in the western church in terms of gender relationships, because we are so confused and still searching. In the biblical view of marriage, as presented in Paul's letters, equality and distinctiveness between men and women are upheld. The theology of Paul does not deny the creation order. Some of our systems of thought in our age would deny the creation order. But Paul's theology also deals very clearly with the fall of that creation order. Therefore, the paradigm understanding of all things, including gender roles, is to be seen in the tripartite reference of creation, fall, and redemption. What is the created order? How did the fall affect that created order? And how is it to be redeemed in Christ? There you see that where the fall may have brought inequality between man and woman, there is absolutely no grounds to persist in inequality between man and woman in the Christian faith. There is absolute equality in terms of value and worth. Galatians 3:28 is a very important and central statement on this issue. I am appalled and amazed when I hear women say, "You know, this pastor is the first pastor who has really taken me seriously." We need to live out the Gospel with a true sense of equality, not just a condescending sense of, "Well, women must have a place somewhere." And women need to respect men as well. I can say that because I am really concerned that we all move toward the Gospel truth, which is equality in the sense of receiving the atonement of Christ. There is no distinction; it does not matter what ethnicity you are, what gender you are, or how much money you have. These things are absolutely not important. We all are the same in terms of receiving salvation.

However, some people deny that there is a creation distinction in terms of complementariness and distinctiveness. We find a wonderful truth in the pages of the epistles of Paul: there is difference in the sense of gender complementariness. We are created with a different disposition, a different purpose, and a different goal. We diminish the richness of God's creation and redemption if we simply say, "Equality at all costs and equality in all respects. There is no complementariness in terms of man and his purposes and woman and her purposes." I would say that we need to recover the complementariness and distinctiveness of man and woman. There is a distinction in function. Perhaps we can hold that better if we understand that there is such a distinction within the Godhead Himself. The Son does not say, "I am inferior because I am in submission to the Father." The Father does not say, "I am superior because the Son serves my purposes." Somehow the context of love, mutual service, and deep unity renders these concerns absurd. However, I understand that if there is an insistence upon distinctiveness without respect, love, and understanding of mutual worth, then we are in trouble. Then we would have the difficulties that we face today in so many quarters. Thus, I would say the system of relationships between men and women, set forth at creation, are either modified or completely abolished. This is similar to the issue of slavery, but not exactly the same. There are some who want to say to that the authority and submission of a master and slave are parallel to the authority and submission of a husband and wife, but I would certainly distinguish between slavery and marriage. I think there are some basic distinctions. As I have tried to present to you with regards to Philemon in particular, there is an anticipation of an overcoming of a basically and fundamentally unjust system. This is not true of marriage. Marriage—the headship of man and submission of woman—was instituted by God. It is not fundamentally flawed in the way slavery is.

Let me say a few concluding remarks concerning the effect of Paul's presentation of the Gospel, particularly in Romans, throughout the history of mankind. Many great men of the church—Augustine,

Luther, Wesley, Karl Bart, and others—once they appropriated this amazing truth about their own state and the righteousness of God revealed and the salvation God brought, that was the explosive content that brought forth revival and repentance in churches and whole societies. This is an enormously dynamic truth that has been entrusted into our hands. The Gospel as presented by Paul is closely connected with the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We see from the end of Acts and from the Pauline epistles how the Gospel of grace and God's wonderful unmerited favor is the basis for an amazing return and renewal. If that takes root in our hearts, the sky is the limit; not because we are so great, but because God is true to His Gospel. We hold this wonderful key of the Gospel in our hearts, and we see it lived out in our relationships. And God is very patient with our faults and all our faltering. But if God would just gain us again for the service of His Gospel and the advancement of His purposes along these simple but deep and profound lines, how much health would that be for us and for others around us! That is my desire and my prayer at the end of our time together: that the Gospel would take hold of our lives more and more so that we would live godly lives according to His ways.

Thank you very much.