

Justification By Faith #2
The Contrast Between a Law of Faith and a Law of Works
By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. Today, we continue our look at justification by faith

1. Last week, our attempt was simply to establish the fact that justification by faith is a biblical concept
2. We did that by looking at numerous passages from Paul's writings that say very clearly that we are justified by faith
3. Our resistance to the idea of this doctrine is mostly caused by the perceived mistakes of others, not by anything that the Bible teaches that counters the idea of our being justified by faith
4. In other words, it's a perfectly good, accurate, and proper statement to say that we are justified by faith

B. The big problem for us is that we hear "faith" and assume that the one saying it is using the Popular, modern definition of it, instead of the biblical definition

1. We need not to throw the baby out with the bathwater
2. Instead we need to learn what the Bible actually teaches on the subject

C. This morning, I want us to look at Paul's contrast between two different kinds of laws

1. One is a law of works, the other is a law of faith
2. One brings death, the other life
3. Generally, we do not do a very good job at making this distinction, but unless we do, it's highly likely that we will end up warping the truth about justification, and I do not think we really want to do that

D. Introductory scripture

Rom 3:21-28 -- But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. NASU

I. PAUL TAUGHT THE EXISTENCE OF TWO KINDS OF LAW

A. Understand, we're talking about two laws by which people seek to be made right with God

1. We're not talking about civil laws, or those created by political bodies
2. We're not talking about laws of nature, or other kinds of laws
3. We're talking specifically about a principle that may be expressed in specific systems of law, but we're more focused on the principle for this discussion

B. There are two basic, but very different ways, of seeking to be justified, or made right with God

1. One of those is a law of works
 - a. a law of works is a law based on the meritorious efforts of human beings
 - b. whenever Paul says we cannot be justified by "law," he has actually shortened the terminology; "law" (as a principle) usually refers to a law of works
2. The other is a law of faith
 - a. a law of faith is based on the meritorious efforts of someone other than self
 - b. whenever Paul says that we are justified by faith, he actually means that we are justified by a law of faith that involves belief in, and trust in, Jesus Christ
3. You need to understand the basic difference between the two laws
 - a. under a law of works
 - 1) man is the focus of attention
 - 2) the demand is on man for a level of behavior and achievement that can only be defined as "perfect"
 - 3) justification before God is based on man's performance
 - 4) the problem is the demand of such a law: total, 100% perfection
 - b. under a law of faith
 - 1) Christ is the focus of attention
 - 2) the demand is placed upon his behavior and achievement, and his is already defined as "perfect"
 - 3) justification before God is based on Christ's performance
 - 4) there is no problem with this law, since Jesus was completely sinless, and offered himself as a sin-sacrifice on our behalf

C. Christians need to understand this important distinction between the two kinds of law, works And faith

1. The reason is that modern Christians sometimes sound like we are more important to our justification than Jesus is
2. We are filled with talk about ourselves, about how well we have obeyed God's will, whether we "did things right," and other such language
3. We betray ourselves by being uncomfortable with, or even challenging the idea that Jesus died to save us from our sins, to make us right with God, and all we need to do is put our faith in him (the problem is not this statement, but our definitions and Unbiblical conclusions)

II. A MORE IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE CONTRAST BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS¹

A. Both works and faith are regarded as laws

Romans 3:27 -- Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. NASU

B. Both works and faith involve obedience

Romans 10:8-10 -- But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, in your mouth and in your heart" -- that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. NASU

C. The law of faith, however, excludes boasting

Romans 3:27 -- Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. NASU

D. The law of faith justified, but the law of works does not

Romans 3:27-28 -- Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. NASU

E. The law of faith brings peace, but the law of works brings wrath

Romans 5:1 -- Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, NASU

Romans 4:15 -- for the Law brings about wrath. . . . NASU

F. The law of faith asks the possible (obedience), but the law of works asks the impossible (flawless obedience)

Rom 10:5-9 -- For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness. But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: "DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, "WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?" (that is, to bring Christ down), or "WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, in your mouth and in your heart" -- that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; NASU

Gal 3:10-12 -- For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM." Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM." NASU

¹ See the commentary *Romans* by Jim McGuiggan

G. Life is brought by faith, but not by works

Gal 3:21-22 -- Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. NASU

H. Under a law of faith, we stand in God's grace, but under a law of works, we fall from grace

Rom 5:1-2 -- Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. NASU

Galatians 5:4 -- You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. NASU

III. WE HAVE A CLEAR CHOICE OF LAWS BY WHICH TO BE JUSTIFIED

A. You can choose a law of works

1. You can hope that you live up to the demands of the law, which is perfection
2. You can seek to stand before God based on your own goodness, your own achievement, your own level of performance
3. Should you choose to live by that law, you should at least know the expectation

B. You can choose a law of faith

1. You can hope in Christ who has already lived up to the demands of the law, and did so perfectly
2. You don't have to stand before God based on your own goodness, your own achievement, your own level of performance
3. Should you choose to live by this law, you should know that it is entirely within our ability – it's possible to be made right with God through faith in Christ

CONCLUSION

A. Are you a believer in Jesus Christ? Do you trust him to save you? Do you see his sacrifice On the cross as all you need to be saved?

1. If so, you're well on the road to living by faith
2. If not, then this is where you must begin

B. Are you a Christian frustrated by your inability to "get it right," or live perfectly

1. If so, let me remind you that you are to live by faith
2. You need reassurance that it is Jesus who saves, Jesus who forgives, Jesus who makes you right with God

C. Invitation