

Galatians 2:15-21

Defining Terms

Recap discussion of justification

- A verdict of righteous and a deliverance in the form of resurrection – first and foremost in Jesus, who was condemned as a sinner but was vindicated and pronounced righteous by the Father who raised him from the dead. This event in the middle of history anticipates the great and final judgment and resurrection that awaits the end of history. We, when united Christ by faith, share in his death of condemnation and in his vindicating resurrection. This present verdict in our favor anticipates and assures our own resurrection on the last day.

Works of the Law ("ἔργων νόμου")

- An alternative account of justification
 - The previous discussion of righteousness takes for granted the Pauline answer to the question – by what means will God fulfill his promises to the fathers to bless the world through Abraham’s seed and establish a renewed creation where peace and righteousness reign? And how can we tell in the present who will inherit those promises on the last day?
- Throughout this passage and in the parallel passages in Romans, there exists an implicit opponent (in this case the Galatian teachers), who would argue that the means by which all of this will come to pass is through a faithful Israel bring the nations under the obedience of the Torah.
- That final state of righteousness – the promise of resurrection, the hope of life, the reverse of the curse – in short, the climax of the story, is to be brought about by the Torah.
 - Israel, remaining faithful to Torah
 - Gentiles, coming under the yoke of Torah
- It is faithfulness to Torah that constitutes one as an heir of the Abrahamic promises; this is what establishes and marks out the “righteous”

The Flesh and the Torah

- The problem of flesh (Gen 1-3)
 - Adam and Eve created as “flesh” in the sense of weak and limited, but by trusting in YHWH’s provision they could enjoy communion with him and life
 - With the eating of the forbidden fruit, they were exiled from the garden
 - No access back to communion without passing through death (sacrifice)
 - Death enters the world through Adam’s sin, and with the spread of death comes the spread of sin (Rom. 5:12-14).
 - Flesh has now become *mortal* flesh and *sinful* flesh
 - This is the state of humanity after the fall (Gen 3-11)
 - Living in the fear of death
 - Prizing procreation, genealogy, ancestry, or descent, attempting to achieve immortality through strength and “fleshly” displays of achievement in war, art, politics, and holiness, which are expressions of the aggressive self-protectiveness of the weak.
 - Ultimately, flesh is weak and it is out of the weakness that we get boastful displays of strength – “ambition, envy, narcissism, jealousy, rivalry, competitiveness, self-consciousness, guilt, and shame.”
 - The manifestations of sin and evil in the world can be seen as human attempts to compensate for being mortal flesh.
 - This fleshly power over individuals is also manifest in national and religious power. The divisions of peoples around ancestral bonds, flowing from the judgment of Babel and extending through history.

- Temple and Sacrifice – mediating access to YHWH, drawing near by the death of the animal, both emphasizing the distance from God yet also his closeness, and including a means of fellowship through meal and bearing the sin and impurity of the people.
- Torah was accommodated to a fleshly people, regulating their existence in such a way as to serve as an anti-flesh training ground and prepare the way for the Lord to recreate humanity.

Why Torah Can't Bring Righteousness (Rom. 7)

- Torah, given to a fleshly people, cannot itself overcome flesh. Torah is capable of condemning and killing a person, but incapable of killing the flesh alone. The law cannot overcome the flesh since it is itself a form of those basic fleshly elements.
 - While the Torah itself is spiritual, in a fleshly people it divides and kills
- Rather than overcoming flesh and condemning sin, Torah actually serves to provoke sin. In fact, even for the people as a whole we see that fleshly Israel turned Torah, which was meant to be a means of mediating access into a means of even greater exclusion.
- Rather than bringing life, Torah, when combined with the flesh, brings curse and death. The effect of the law combined with flesh actually serves to put up a road block inhibiting the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. This was its intended purpose.
- What does the law do? The law brings wrath, the law condemns, the law shuts up everyone under sin. What does the law not do? Overcome flesh and bring righteousness.
- Romans 8:3)

The Temporary Nature of the Law

- Why give the law at all if it blocks the promise?
 - The law provokes sin exposes it for what it is
 - The evil of sin, empowered by the flesh, is seen in its ability to turn the holy, righteous, and good law into an instrument of death.
 - This was the next phase in God's war against the flesh, but what was needed was something the law could not do – a release from sin, death, and flesh. This is only something God could do.