

Romans Part 14 – Chapter 3:21-31

Sunday, June 4, 2022

With input from David Jeremiah, Barnes Commentary, Matthew Poole Commentary

Review: During our last lesson we made the distinction between four different atonement views. The two most prevalent are Christus Victor and Penal Substitution.

Penal Substitution dates to the Protestant Reformation and theologians like John Calvin, the Reformer who founded the Presbyterian church. Calvin describes a courtroom with God as angry judge eager to punish human sinners. "We could not escape the fearful judgment of God," Calvin explains, but God spares us death because "the guilt which made us liable to punishment was transferred to the head of the Son of God."

With Calvin, we are all "sinners [who] were obnoxious to the judgment of God," and "without Christ God is in a manner hostile to us, and has his arm raised for our destruction." In fact, Calvin adds, we should expect love only from Jesus ("we look to Christ alone for divine favor and paternal love"), and we can't expect love from God the Father, whose relationship to humanity is based in his righteous law. God is our enemy before Jesus dies, and his goal in the atonement is justice, not rescue.

Simplistically stated, The Judge is angry at all the bad things we've done and sentences us to death, but then Jesus steps in and says, "No, kill me instead." So, God kills Jesus, and then we don't have to die and go to hell.

Christus Victor (Christ the Victor) portrays God as a triumphant rescuer: Jesus redeems us from slavery, ransoms us from evil, revives, restores, and reconciles us. Jesus defeats our enemies — sin, death, and the devil — and reigns victorious over the growing kingdom of God.

But in *Christus Victor*, God loves us. Not just Jesus — *all* of God is love, *all* three persons of the Trinity. Our betrayal and captivity to evil is what makes reconciliation impossible before Jesus becomes human. And like Narnia's White Witch, it is the devil, not God, who wants us dead. Instead of an angry judge who won't compromise his law to save us, the earliest Christians saw God as a loving rescuer who is willing to sacrifice himself on our behalf even though we made ourselves his enemy. We celebrate how Jesus "set free the weak, and endowed His own handiwork with salvation, by destroying sin. For He is a most holy and merciful Lord, and loves the human race.

Romans 3:21-31

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Romans 4:1-8

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

⁷ “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;

⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

Now let's dissect:

Romans 3:27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by **the law of faith**.

What John Wesley said about faith?

“Salvation by faith is trust and confidence in the work of Jesus Christ to forgive us, reconcile us to God, and enable our growth in righteousness and true holiness.”

What is the Law of Faith? Paul answers it in the very next verse: “***One is justified by faith apart from the works of the law***”

A thought: If faith is a law, then we already know that laws are to be obeyed. We are not told to think about having faith. We are told to have faith – a commandment.

Three Pitfalls on the Path From Simple Faith to Abundant Faith – David Jeremiah

Over the years, I've identified three pitfalls that limit the spiritual growth of God's people and prevent them from experiencing His power. They are misunderstandings about the nature of salvation, works, and spiritual growth. Once these misunderstandings are corrected, believers can surge into the abundant life of faith found only in Christ (John 10:10).

1. Our faith is limited by our understanding of salvation.

The moment we truly receive Christ as Savior and Lord, we are instantly and eternally saved from the penalty of sin. From that time on, we're gradually saved from the power of sin as we grow in godliness.

Philippians 2:12 gives this instruction: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

Strong's Concordance describes the meaning of the original word for work out as to “effect by labor, achieve, work out, bring about.”¹ To the original audience, work out referred to those who worked in

the coal mines. They mined out of the ground what the Creator had already placed there and then brought those riches to light.

The Christian's role is to work out what God has worked in us by cultivating the characteristics of a godly life. Salvation from the penalty of sin is a gift. Like any other gift, it is up to us how we use it. We can leave it unopened, or we can unwrap its treasures with fear and trembling. When we demonstrate thankfulness for God's gift by working to be more like Him, we find freedom from the power of sin.

2. Our faith is limited by our understanding of works.

Good works do not save us, but they are an essential evidence of the salvation experience. James 2:17 states, "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." Think of it this way: if a doctor admonishes me to eat more carefully and exercise daily, I'm more likely to follow his advice after I spot him at the gym than if I catch him in a buffet line. Talk is cheap—our actions reveal our convictions.

Work may be a four-letter word, but it is a blessing. Even the angels work! They are "sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14), and they guard God's children (Psalm 34:7).

Before sin entered the world, God tasked Adam and Eve with filling the earth and subduing it (Genesis 1:28). He placed Adam in the Garden of Eden to "tend it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). Conducting business on behalf of the Most High King is a privilege, and it brings purpose to our lives.

Knowing that Christ has redeemed us should increase our zeal to do good works while we await His return. He has equipped us with gifts and resources so that we can accomplish His will. We tend to think of stewardship in terms of money, but our responsibility extends far beyond that. We are accountable for our time and our skills as well.

One day, Christ will judge each Christian's works (Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Enduring work will be rewarded; worthless works—those performed with impure motives—will be destroyed (1 Corinthians 3:14-15). And works performed to serve others demonstrate the presence of God's love in our hearts (1 John 3:16-17).

(Romans 13:8: Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for the one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the Law.)

God's grace is not a license for laziness; it should motivate us to please Him. Everything we consider a "good work" for God is best understood as an expression of stewardship. The father of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, said that a person is saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. When God's stewards experience saving faith, their faith produces good works for His glory. 3. Our faith is limited by our understanding of spiritual growth.

3. Our faith is limited by our understanding of spiritual growth.

We'd like to think that walking with the Lord means our problems will disappear. In John 16:33, Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation." Notice that He did not say "if you have tribulation"; He said we will have tribulation. Five different passages of Scripture encourage us not to "lose heart."

This passage is from Galatians: "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (6:9). Christians have as much trouble as anyone else. The difference is that God has given us the power to overcome our problems, and we experience peace through His promises.

Learning to live an exceptional life is a process that never ends, and it often begins in times of difficulty and chaos. Consider the example of Geoffrey Bull, a British missionary who was taken prisoner when the communists overtook China in 1949. During the first year, Geoffrey was confined to a solitary cell that wasn't much larger than a phone booth. Convinced Geoffrey was a British spy, the Chinese used all sorts of mental tortures to break him.

After more than three years, Geoffrey Bull was finally released to British authorities. He spent several months recuperating ... and then he returned to the mission field. Geoffrey understood his challenges in the context of eternity. He realized they were fertile opportunities for growth in his own life and served as a testimony to others. He knew God had never forsaken him.

We must not allow our circumstances or our emotional condition to drive our commitment level. Many of us don't pray because we don't feel like it. We don't read our Bibles because there are other things we'd rather be doing. In the words of R. C. Sproul,

"Many of us have become sensuous Christians, living by our feelings rather than through our understanding of the Word of God. Sensuous Christians cannot be moved to service, prayer, or study unless they "feel like it."

Romans 3:29-30:

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

Matthew Poole: "That it may not be thought that God is variable in the action of justifying sinners, but that it might be known that he is one, i.e. unchangeable, he shows, that both the circumcised Jews and uncircumcised Gentiles are justified by the same God in Christ, and by the same way and manner, by and through faith, with no more difference than there is between these two phrases, (**by faith** and **through faith**), which cannot be distinguished the one from the other.

Romans 3:31:

"Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law."

Do we then make void the law - Do we render it vain and useless; do we destroy its moral obligation; and do we prevent obedience to it, by the doctrine of justification by faith? This was an objection which would naturally be made; and which has thousands of times been since made, that the doctrine of justification by faith tends to licentiousness. The word "law" here, I understand as referring to the

moral law, and not merely to the Old Testament. This is evident from Romans 3:20-21, where the apostle shows that no man could be justified by deeds of law or by conformity with the moral law.

God forbid - By no means. Note that Romans 3:4 states “*Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? ⁴ By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,*

*“That you may be justified in your words,
and prevail when you are judged.”*

Barnes Commentary: This is an explicit denial of any such tendency.

Yea, we establish the law - That is, by the doctrine of justification by faith; by this scheme of treating people as righteous, the moral law is confirmed, its obligation is enforced, obedience to it is secured. This is done in the following manner:

(1) God showed respect to it, in being unwilling to pardon sinners without an atonement. He showed that it could not be violated with impunity; that he was resolved to fulfil its threatenings.

(2) Jesus Christ came to magnify it, and to make it honorable. He showed respect to it in his life; and he died to show that God was determined to inflict its penalty.

(3) the plan of justification by faith leads to an observance of the Law. The sinner sees the evil of transgression. He sees the respect which God has shown to the Law. He gives his heart to God, and yields himself to obey his Law. All the sentiments that arise from the conviction of sin; that flow from gratitude for mercies; that spring from love to God; all his views of the sacredness of the Law, prompt him to yield obedience to it. The fact that Christ endured such sufferings to show the evil of violating the Law, is one of the strongest motives prompting to obedience. We do not easily and readily repeat what overwhelms our best friends in calamity; and we are brought to hate what inflicted such woes on the Saviour's soul. The sentiment recorded by Watts is as true as it is beautiful:

"'Twas for my sins my dearest Lord.
Hung on the cursed tree.
And groan'd away his dying life,
For thee, my soul, for thee.
"O how I hate those lusts of mine.
That crucified my Lord;
Those sins that pierc'd and nail'd his flesh.
Fast to the fatal wood.

Romans 4:1-8

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. (notice how far Paul takes this, in this scenario if we earned our salvation we would “require” it from God since we earned it).

Paul tells Timothy about a sincere life of faith as opposed to the purpose of the law:

1 Timothy 1:5-11 *But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.*

But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.