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Faith Without Works

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DEMANDS for a creative outlet in an age of standardized production have been responsible for a rash of "do-it-yourself" hobby crafts. Such self-reliance displays itself also in the religious area. St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians amply testifies, however, that the "do-it-yourself" cult is not a modern development.

The peculiar value of this epistle emerges precisely in the area of the church's concern for a more practical application of Christian doctrine to the Christian's daily living. But the Apostle's approach is paradoxical. Instead of suggesting, first of all, an emphasis on the practical, he pleads with the church to consider more seriously the doctrinal content of her faith. The epistle covers thoroughly the ground of "faith without works" and then proceeds to discuss "faith with works." This and the succeeding study aim to interpret these two complementary facets of St. Paul's presentation.

In view of the generous supply of commentaries on Galatians, we shall not present detailed exegetical notes, but instead paraphrase in the Apostle's own terms his logical development of the theme. In the light of his presentation we shall then attempt to evaluate some problems of current concern to the pastor in his cure of souls.

The problem faced by the Apostle is the desire of his new Gentile converts in Galatia to return to some of the ritual prescriptions of the Law of Moses as a means of assuring their salvation. The instigators of this movement, a Jewish-Christian element, insisted that in order to qualify as a true Christian one must also subscribe to circumcision and ceremonial ritual. Their concern was not only

dictated by nationalistic feelings, but by a fear that St. Paul's proclamation of liberty from the Law would destroy the Law as a rampart against the entangling vices of their pagan environment. St. Paul is well aware of the dangers inherent in a wrong approach to the Mosaic code and knows that a misunderstanding of the doctrine of sanctification will ultimately infect the doctrine of justification. In reply therefore to the claims of the Judaizers that faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ is not sufficient to establish and maintain a right relationship with God, the Apostle insists that the restoration of man to God is completely God's work and that a God-pleasing life is effected by the Gospel, not by the Law. From beginning to end man can claim no merit. All is of Christ.

PART I

A. Gal. 2:15-21

St. Paul begins his presentation by demonstrating the consequences to which a false commingling of faith with works must ultimately lead. The argument is intimately connected with Saint Paul's report of an interview with Peter, Gal. 2:11ff. This pillar of the church had realized the temporary purpose of the Mosaic ceremonial legislation (Acts 10 and 11) and had displayed his freedom in the presence of his Gentile friends, but when members of the Jerusalem church had come to see him, he separated himself from the Gentiles and created the impression that he considered the Mosaic ceremonies a necessary feature in the new Christian experience. Paul countered this duplicity of Peter's by asking him how he could for a time dispense with the ceremonies and then compel the Gentiles to adopt what Peter himself had discarded. Then he proceeds in v. 15ff.: we are by nature Jews and not sinners "of the Gentiles," that is, we are folk who have had a norm which the Gentiles were not privileged to possess.¹ Yet inasmuch as we know that one cannot gain a favorable verdict before God on the basis of our conformity to the Law, but only through faith in Jesus Christ, we — we, who are not sinners "of the Gentiles" — embraced Jesus Christ in faith and thereby demonstrated that we despaired of finding righteousness through the

¹ On the term ἀμαρτωλός see *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. G. Kittel (Stuttgart, 1949), I, 332.

Law. The reason for this decision, says the Apostle, is perfectly obvious, for the possibility of establishing a right relationship with God on the basis of a legal criterion² is negated by our very nature, the fact that we are "flesh," σάρξ³ (v. 16). Our total helplessness prompted us to turn to Christ.

The Apostle has begun his argument on common ground. The fact that we have turned to Christ for salvation is evident, he says. Now he proceeds to the inevitable consequences that result from a false mingling of faith with works. He asks: what if while we are seeking to be justified by Christ, we also, we Jews who were not in the class of sinners in the sense I have described, find ourselves in a condition like theirs? Would you fault the Christ for that? Could the Christ possibly be the fomenter of sin?⁴ God forbid! (V. 17.) But that is exactly what happens if I build up the things I have destroyed. For if I bring back the Law as a cri-

² The word "criterion" as used in this paper means the basis on which, or the standard according to which, the individual aims either to acquire, advance, or determine a right relationship with God. In a general sense it is also used to indicate man's efforts to determine for himself a meaningful existence, as in the case of the person who disclaims all interest in religious matters. Thus the Law is used as a criterion of a right relationship with God when man attempts to claim righteousness for himself on the basis of his own imagined conformity with the demands of the Law. The atonement of Christ or the Gospel can also be said to be a criterion if thereby it is understood that man is to accept by faith the fact that through the merits of Christ God declares the sinner just.

³ See Paul Althaus, *Der Brief an die Römer in Das Neue Testament Deutsch* (Göttingen, 1949), pp. 73 ff., for a fine summary discussion of the terms "flesh" and "spirit" in Paul's writings. See also Ernest Burton's *Spirit, Soul, and Flesh* (Chicago, 1918). The very attempt to be justified by the works of the Law indicates that a right relationship with God does not exist, and the attempt to establish it by Law is itself an expression of "fleshliness." Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (Göttingen, 1949), expresses the Apostle's argument succinctly and well: "Der Mensch als solcher lebt aber — und es ist der Jude, den er vor Augen hat — aus den Gesetzeswerken. So lässt sich schlieszen, dasz die Menschheit aus diesen nicht gerechtfertigt wird" (p. 58).

⁴ J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London, 1910), p. 116, suggests the following interpretation for v. 17: "Thus to be justified in Christ, it was necessary to sink to the level of Gentiles, to become 'sinners' in fact. But are we not thus making Christ a minister of sin?" So Schlier, p. 59. Such an interpretation, however, fails to note that the question at issue is not whether the Law or Christ can save. This is already settled. The Judaizers will readily acknowledge that Christ is necessary, and therefore they admit that the Law is inadequate (2:16), even though in this passage the Judaizers are not addressed. What remains to be settled is whether the Law may not be necessary as an additional factor. The Apostle therefore poses the problem suggested by such an approach.

terion of righteousness, I make myself a transgressor. And this is the reason: by turning to Christ for salvation I have already admitted that the Law is inadequate. But now, by turning back to the Law, I must also admit the inadequacy of Christ. I am in a hopeless dilemma. Neither Christ nor the Law can save me. As a result, I am in no better condition than the Gentiles.

But at the same time I establish myself a transgressor in another way. By rebuilding the things I have destroyed, I deprive myself of that source of life which would spell the opposite of transgression, namely, Christ. For by renouncing the Law as a criterion of righteousness and accepting the atonement of Jesus Christ, I became a corpse as far as the Law is concerned. Now I recognize the claims of God on me and live for Him in a way I could not live as long as I employed the Law as a criterion of righteousness. My renunciation of the Law means that I am crucified with Christ. I acknowledge Him as the sole means of restoring me to fellowship with God. Thus I recognize no other need to establish a right relationship with God. I no longer know any distance between me and God. My ego that asserted itself, and which the Law evoked, is dead. In its place is Christ. He is the operating power in my life, and He is that only because I have renounced all confidence in Law. But since He can only come into my life if I renounce all confidence in Law as a criterion of righteousness, it follows that if I rebuild the Law and consider it the source of a right relationship with God, then I establish myself a transgressor, for I cease to live by faith in the Son of God, my only Hope of life. And when I cease to live by faith in Him, then I am no longer dead to the Law. But when I am not dead to the Law, I am not alive to God. Then I am not crucified with Christ. Then Christ cannot live in me. Then I frustrate God's objective in saving me, namely, that I might truly live a righteous life. Then Christ has died in vain. If Christ is not sufficient throughout, then Christ is completely inefficient. Thus you see, says the Apostle, that our very acknowledgment of Jesus the Christ as the criterion of righteousness proves that faith dare not be mixed with works, and that restoration of the Law as a criterion of a right relationship with God in any degree whatsoever spells disaster. Jesus is either the Savior of the total man, totally, or He is not the Christ.

B. 3:1-18

From the basic fact that the Christ is recognized as necessary for the establishment of a right relationship with God, the Apostle moves on to his second major point, that the promises of God cannot be negated. The Galatians have received the Spirit in a remarkable fashion (3:2, 5). But how did the Spirit come? Via Law or via faith? The answer is obvious, replies the Apostle. But since the Spirit has demonstrated Himself on the basis of faith, it is the height of folly to turn back and rely on the flesh, that is, to confidence in attainments based on conformity with a legal criterion.

At this point we must delay the Apostle's argument for a moment in order to appreciate the deftness of his presentation. Beginning with chapter 3, the Apostle proceeds to amplify what he has introduced in 2:15-21. The basic question disturbing the Galatians is: how can we Christians live God-pleasing lives if we eliminate the Law as our criterion? The Judaizers contend that such an apparently antinomian view will lead to moral chaos. The Apostle has countered that not the renunciation of Law as a criterion but a reverting to Law as a means of righteousness will produce an antinomian life. But this point remains to be proved. His discussion of the new life of the Christian in 2:19-21 has suggested the role of the Spirit (3:2). A Spirit-produced life versus a Law-produced life is the basic issue. The Galatians may agree that Christ is necessary, but does that mean that the Law ceases to be relevant as a criterion of fellowship with God? Is not the answer really Christ plus Law? The Apostle answers in the negative. The Spirit will produce a moral life such as Law could never produce. But how does the Spirit come? The Apostle's answer is, by faith. And faith suggests Father Abraham. Thus the Apostle proceeds to analyze the problem from a pre-Mosaic standpoint.

We now continue with the Apostle's argument, 3:6ff. He says: your receipt of the Spirit did not depend on the performance of the works of the Law any more than it did in the case of Abraham. You have believed as he believed, and you have received what he received — the righteousness of God. The criterion of his relationship with God was not conformity to legal requirements but the

content of his faith. Now it goes without saying, says the Apostle, that all who have their new existence as a result of faith are the real sons of Abraham (v. 7). This means that those who share his faith also share a definite relationship with him. Nor is this idle conjecture. The Scripture definitely establishes this fact, for it says that God, long before He carried out His plans, had announced to Abraham that in him all the nations of the earth should be blessed. If it is by faith that the Gentiles have become participants in the Messianic blessings, then it is on the basis of God's original plan that they have become so, not on the basis of conformity to a legal criterion. It was God's intention long before the Mosaic Law that righteousness should be by faith.

Now what about the Jews after God gave the Law through Moses? It might appear that the Jews have priority over the Gentiles because of the Law and that the Law is the real instrument of salvation. But this is not the case, says the Apostle. As many as rely on the Law are not under a promise but under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide in all the things written in the book of the Law to do them" (3:10). A curse rests on anyone who attempts to depend on the performance of the Law for favor with God. Actually there is no point in pursuing the discussion further, for it is clear from the case of Abraham, not to speak of Hab. 2:4, that the "just shall live by faith." Now the Law cannot possibly be expressed in terms of faith. Law and faith are mutually exclusive, for the Law lays emphasis on the deed. But if a person could live in terms of Law, there would be no reason for the Scripture to say that a man shall live by faith (v. 12). Man, then, cannot be saved by any criteria related to Law. Without faith man is under a curse. Faith, however, means that this curse has been removed, and the remover of the curse is Christ. He has brought us out from under the curse of the Law, for He was made a curse in our place. And this fact is as well established as the fact of the curse, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree" (3:13; cp. Deut. 21:23). But Christ was accursed precisely for this reason, that the Gentiles might benefit from the blessing promised to Abraham. This blessing includes the promise of the Spirit as an active power (cp. 3:5), and faith is the means whereby we receive the Spirit.

At this point the Judaizers might object that St. Paul has not taken Jewish history seriously. He proceeds, therefore, to strengthen his case with an illustration. No one disannuls or adds to a testament that has been duly ratified. The promises were made to Abraham and to his "seed" (3:16). The Scripture does not say "seeds," as if many were meant, but it has one seed in mind, Christ. We have already demonstrated that faith projects a new relationship not only between Abraham and God but between Abraham and those who share his faith. The heart and center of that faith is Christ, as documented by the Holy Spirit, who comes through the preaching of that faith. It is in relationship with Christ that all who believe in Christ are related to Abraham. A testament coming 430 years later cannot nullify the earlier testament. If that were the case, then the inheritance would be gained on the basis of conformity to the Law and the promise would no longer apply. It is either one or the other, not both. But the fact is that God gave the inheritance to Abraham by promise. In other words the promise made to Abraham establishes the fact that righteousness is by faith, not by works.

C. 3:19-25

The Apostle has suggested by the emphatic position of ὁ θεός in 3:18 that a definite problem is indicated by the fact that God made both a promise, to be received by faith, and a Law 430 years later. By discussing the pre-Mosaic era, however, the Apostle has paved the way for a treatment of the real purpose of the Law. Whereas the Judaizers appear to be of the opinion that the Law supplements the promise made to Abraham, St. Paul points out that the purpose of the Law was not to establish a criterion of righteousness or to assist in promoting a God-pleasing life primarily but to reveal what was really inside man. It was added for the sake of transgression (3:19). The Law prompted sin to come out into the open. It made sin surface, so that in *sins* the self-assertive desire of man, the will of man to be God, the longing of man to be the arbiter of his own destiny, the striving of man to establish his own criterion of righteousness, might be ruthlessly revealed.⁵

⁵ According to Paul, the primary function of the Mosaic ordinances is to multiply transgression. The clearest expression of this concept is found in Rom. 7:5 ff., the explanation in vv. 13 ff. An analogous thought is expressed in 11:32.

The Apostle goes on to develop his thought concerning the sin-awakening function of the Law by considering the method God used in delivering His Law. He says that the Law was imposed through angels in the hands of a mediator. In distinction from the promises made to Abraham directly by God, the Law was given secondhand, yet not without glory, for it was communicated through angels. The angels, however, are not the real mediators of the Law. This function was reserved for Moses. But between whom does Moses act as intermediary? Man, as recipient of the Law, is certainly a party in the transaction. But an intermediary implies more than one party. The other party must be God, not the angels who are representative of the Divine Majesty.

However, if God gave both a promise and the Law, and these two are contradictory, must we then assume a contradiction in God? ⁶ This conclusion is manifestly absurd, says the Apostle. The error must lie in our own misconception of the purpose in the giving of the Law. Another conclusion must be reached than that righteousness is by the Law. For if that were the case, and a Law could be given which could produce righteousness, righteousness would be by the Law. In that event there would have been no reason for a promise. Therefore righteousness cannot be by Law, and the Law cannot be interpreted as a device to ratify the promises.

What then is the function of the Law? The answer is that the Scripture has shut up everything under sin (3:22). Through the Law, God has given eloquent testimony that man is unable to secure his own righteousness by conformity with any criteria of his own choice. Through the Law, God pronounces judgment on

Rom. 3:20 is related to this concept. Note also 1:24. The sin-awakening power of the Law is not to be accounted for, however, by the activity of "cosmic forces," as Schlier suggests, *ibid.*, p. 122 (cp. pp. 133 ff.), for the problem of the relation between the promise and the Law is due to the fact that God is behind both, cp. Rom. 11:33.

⁶ For representative interpretations of this passage see H. A. W. Meyer, *Epistle to the Galatians*, transl. from the 5th ed. of the German by G. H. Venable (New York, 1884), pp. 133—148. Schlier, pp. 109—120, identifies the Law given through the mediator as "das Elementargesetz des Kosmos" and not as the Law of the one God. See above, n. 5, and the criticism of Beyer-Althaus in *Der Brief an die Galater in Das Neue Testament Deutsch* (Göttingen, 1949), p. 29.

man's basic inability to achieve a right relationship with his Creator on any other basis than faith in Christ. This does not mean that man through the Law always recognizes his moral failure and need of God for salvation. On the contrary, man's behavior under Law bears out the fact that man is determined to establish his own righteousness. Therefore the time of faith (v. 23), the time when the full content of the promise was revealed in Christ, is the decisive moment. When God gave the Law, He had the Christ in mind (cp. 3:19: "till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made"). The promise made to Abraham pledged salvation to all believers in Israel. But Israel was never to forget that it was the person and work of the Christ to come that guaranteed this salvation. Lest she lose her forward look and underestimate her need, God multiplied sin through the Law so that the need of the fulfillment of the promise would be clearly documented. Thus the climax of man's sinfulness, the crucifixion of the Christ, not only brings the promise to fulfillment, but at the same time confronts all men with the inadequacy of their own criteria. Through the proclamation of the *kerygma*, God approaches the world with its sin laid bare as never before and proclaims liberty to the captives. Thus the Law, rather than serving as a means of expressing the life of God, acted as a warden, like a "schoolmaster."⁷ In brief, the very function of Law indicates that works cannot be employed as a criterion of righteousness.

D. 3:26—4:11

The discussion of the function of Law also provides opportunity for the Apostle to proceed to the positive aspect of the Christian's birthright in Christ, apart from Law, exclusively through faith. Now that faith has come, now that the content of the promise has been revealed, that is, Christ, we are no longer under a "schoolmaster." You are all the sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

⁷ A "pedagogical" function of the Law in the sense of awakening a consciousness of guilt and directing the sinner to rely on the mercies of God in Christ is not to be documented by this passage, cp. Schlier, pp. 121ff., nor is its curbing function treated here. The argument is one of contrast. In order to treat the question of sonship apart from the Law, the Apostle first brings out the contrary, slavery under the Law. This is the central idea, and the imagery is chosen accordingly. The negative function of the Law versus the positive function of the Gospel.

This relationship does not come about through circumcision, but by Baptism, for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. But the Christ is the content of the promise, and the promise is before the Law. Hence the Law does not establish right relationships with God. Therefore there is no difference among men. There is no such thing as Jew or Greek, male or female, as far as the Gospel is concerned. For the criterion is not conformity with the Law but acceptance of a promise. In Christ Jesus you are all one. But if you are of Christ, then you are heirs of Abraham, that is, the real Seed of Abraham, for the promise made to Abraham is centered in Christ.

After introducing the subject of sonship with God the Apostle proceeds to bring his findings in direct contact with the problem of the Galatians. What about the Christian's relation to the Law? Is he to return to it and bind himself with its directives? What does sonship really mean?

The Apostle continues with the thought of the Law as a confining force and points out that until an heir comes into his inheritance, that heir is no better than a slave. So also mankind before the advent of the Christ was enslaved to the elements of the world.⁸ That is, the expression of man's religious life was directed by external ordinances. External criteria, which often degenerated into materialistic concepts of worship, hampered a free expression of the soul of man, which only the Spirit of God can give. But when God's purpose in history found its proper occasion, God dispatched His Son. The sending of the Son was unique. He was born of a woman. He became identified with the fortunes of the human race. But even though He was the Son of God, He was

⁸ The precise signification of the term στοιχεῖον is difficult to determine. "Elemental spirits" (RSV) may be implied (see Moulton-Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London, 1952), as the demonic source of the human attempt to achieve righteousness via Law, but it is more likely that the Apostle in this passage as well as in Gal. 4:9 and in Col. 2:8, 20 wishes to contrast the norms according to which a Christian may tend to conform his life, namely, those of literal ordinances or the free action of the Spirit-motivated life. In Col. 2:8 this especially appears to be the case for the κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου appositionally picks up the κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων and builds a more universal contrast with the Christian's experience in Christ. As in Gal. 4:10, so in Col. 2:16 the Apostle makes his own identification of the στοιχεῖα.

subject to the Law. Thus He shares not only our nature but also our history (Schlier).

The fact, however, that the Son of God is born under the Law suggests a contradiction in terms, for the Apostle has just declared that being under Law is opposed to sonship.⁹ What is the solution? Christ is brought under the Law in order to rescue those who were under the Law. These include not only those who were under Moses but all who were living without the Spirit of God functioning in their lives; for the opposite of life under the Spirit of God is life under Law. And what is God's objective in putting Christ under the Law? That we might receive the adoption of sons. That is why, says the Apostle, you have received the Spirit of God. Because you are sons, God has sent you His Spirit. The sacrificial act of Christ, who was made under the Law, makes us sons. Sonship with God is an objective fact. Christ's atonement is my guarantee, assures the Apostle, that I am a son of God. But it is only by faith that this sonship becomes a reality for me and I cry, "Abba, Father." In other words, it is only by faith in Christ Jesus that I can cease to be under the Law. It is only in Him that the Law ceases to be my "schoolmaster." Sonship in Christ, then, affirms the proposition that righteousness is by "faith without works." A return to the Law destroys this new relationship with God (4:8-11). It cannot effect the relationship, for that is already effected by Christ.

E. 4:21-31

After a personal appeal in 4:12-20, the Apostle concludes his argument on faith without works. He asks the readers to listen finally to what the Law actually says.¹⁰ To bring out his point the Apostle employs illustrative language, making use of the point he made by introducing Abraham. It is written, he proceeds, that Abraham had two sons. One was of a free woman, the other of a bondwoman. The one born of a bondwoman, Ishmael, was born "according to the flesh" (4:21). That is, Abraham attempted

⁹ This problem is suggested in Matt. 17:24-27. Note the freedom with which Jesus carries out the assignment from the Father.

¹⁰ This appears to be the force of Paul's argument, since the "allegory" itself is not the Law, except in an extended sense. In the light of the revelation in Christ the true function of the Law is discerned.

to take matters into his own hands and bring the promise to fulfillment. Isaac, however, was born contrary to human expectation through the gracious intervention of God. Now these are the two points at issue — human wisdom versus divine wisdom, Law versus faith, and these two persons help illustrate the difference between human initiative and divine initiative. Human initiative, or salvation by works of Law, as expressed in the ordinances of Moses delivered from Mount Sinai, corresponds to Hagar. She has her counterpart in the earthly Jerusalem or all who attempt to use Law as a criterion of righteousness. They are enslaved. The free woman, Sarah, corresponds to the free Jerusalem, to those who renounce all their own criteria in favor of Christ. This Jerusalem is free, because she has her birthright from above. Now, you who believe in the promises made through Isaac are children of the free woman. He was pursued by Ishmael. But note what the Scripture says: Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman. Therefore, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free. We need not be concerned about the demands of the Law as regards the establishment of a right relationship with God. The Law does not make us the children of God. Faith in Jesus Christ, without works, makes us His children.

In summarizing Paul's argumentation in Galatians 2—4, we are impressed with its compression and order. The rapidity with which his thoughts seek utterance is matched only by his tactful mastery of the data. He begins with a proposition that is beyond dispute. The Christian Jews as well as Christian Gentiles have acknowledged the insufficiency of Law as a criterion of righteousness by their acceptance of the Christ. He then proceeds to demonstrate that mixing faith with works of the Law actually frustrates the ultimate objective of achieving a truly God-pleasing life. Thus he expresses the heart of the problem and rejects the easy solution of the Judaizers.

The question remains, however, whether faith in Christ is really the answer. To solve this problem the Apostle proceeds to take up the activity of God prior to the issuance of the Mosaic Law. On the basis of the promise made to Abraham, St. Paul demonstrates that Christ is the central factor in Abraham's faith, and

that all who share this faith of Abraham share with him the same criterion of righteousness, the atonement of Jesus Christ. Thus he has shown that turning to Christ for salvation in the face of the inadequacy of the Law is in accordance with God's own intention. By discussing the pre-Law intention of God, the Apostle paves the way for an analysis of the function of the Law. Not only does it not serve as a criterion of righteousness, but on the contrary it promotes sin. Rather than give man freedom it hems him in, confines him, acts as a warden, as a tyrant.

By this analysis the Apostle has achieved a two-fold purpose. He has taken the props out from under all who wish to depend on Law as a criterion of righteousness. At the same time he establishes the background against which he will point out the real significance of what it means to be saved by faith in Jesus Christ, without works. He then proceeds to exploit the full significance of Christ's atoning work. The Christ secures for man the opposite of what the Law produces. Through Jesus Christ we have sonship with God, not the slavery which goes with Law. The Law, rather than assisting Christ and His work, is that from which Christ liberates us. It could only promote sin, but Christ frees us from this condition. Thus the Apostle has skillfully arrived full circle. The question at the beginning was this: Will not the proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ without the works of the Law lead to moral chaos? The Apostle has demonstrated that the reverse is the case. The Law is unable to assist in the attainment of a God-pleasing life. Christ is the only answer, for rather than promote sin, like the Law, Jesus Christ liberates from that which is responsible for transgressions. It remains only for the Apostle to discuss how the Christian's faith now reveals itself in action.

PART II

It is of primary importance to note the distinctive characteristic of Paul's term *Law*. The usual distinction of Law and Gospel in theological parlance may tend to obscure the full meaning of Saint Paul's treatment of Law. If Law is defined as the contrary of the Gospel, then it is clear that Law in this sense comprises not only specific ordinances and legal requirements but also the pronouncement of God's wrath on man because of his sin. According to the

Apostle, the Law of ordinances as such does not reveal sin, but rather the Law prompts sin to reveal itself in sins, as he states in Rom. 7:13, "that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." The extent of man's guilt in sin is a matter of revelation, and it can only be brought out through a correct interpretation of the function of Law within God's total plan in history. An absolute presentation of Law in the sense of a legal criterion will ultimately promote lawlessness as in the case of the publicans and sinners or self-righteousness as in the case of the scribes and Pharisees. In brief, the contraries, Law and Gospel, are a valid description of the data submitted by the Biblical writers regarding man involved in sin under the wrath of God as opposed to God's gracious intervention in his behalf through the atonement of Christ. But since the term *Law* is also used in its narrower signification of the specific requirements as expressed in the Ten Commandments, there is a danger that the preacher may think he is presenting Law in its full force, whereas, without realizing it, he may be restricting it to its sin-awakening function, as defined in Gal. 3:23ff. Instead of securing a conviction of guilt, he may be merely promoting further sins. The Law, as man in the flesh understands it, is not the same as Law understood by the man in Christ. Hence St. Paul's emphasis on εἰς πίστιν and εἰς Χριστόν in 3:23, 24.¹¹ Only in the light of God's purposes in Christ does the Law of the letter emerge as a full contrary to the Gospel.

"Law," then, as described by the Apostle, first of all means a criterion according to which a man aims to judge his relationship with God. In this sense any man, whether Jew or Gentile, is under Law, no matter what the criterion is, as long as this criterion is opposed to the criterion of the Gospel, faith in the atoning merits of Jesus Christ. Faith without works means the rejection of all other criteria except that of Christ's atoning work. Faith with works means the commingling of human criteria with God's revealed criterion, Christ. In the light of these definitions we may now proceed with the evaluation of contemporary problems in the light of Paul's basic propositions.

¹¹ The prepositional phrases bring out the objective *God* had in mind: that when Christ came, mankind should be confronted with its total moral failure and have proclaimed to it the atonement in Christ.

A

The first area of application is suggested by the emphasis placed on circumcision by the Galatian Christians. The basic error of the Galatians was not their desire to be circumcised, but their feeling that submission to the mere ritual of circumcision would effect a closer relationship with God.¹² A similar peril threatens the Christian today, even though circumcision is a dead issue.

The debate on contemporary versus traditional church architecture may indicate a legalistic approach to the Christian faith. It appears that in some instances the essence of worship is made dangerously dependent on the relative "correctness" or "churchliness" of church structures, or that certain liturgical formulae are deemed necessary to secure a valid communication between the worshiper and his God. Similarly the question whether it is "right" to use the individual Communion cups or the common cup has provoked much discussion.

Denominational differences have likewise contributed to a subtle type of ritualism. Instead of finding in Christ Jesus his one and only criterion of salvation, a church member may be tempted to believe that his affiliation with a particular denominational group is his criterion of salvation. This impression may be intensified by rules and regulations that attempt unevangelically to govern his attitudes and relations with members of other denominations and deprive the Christian of following the genuine dictates of the Spirit.

More serious, however, is the belief that attendance at public worship is in itself a meritorious work or that the extent of one's fellowship with God is measured by the mere number of times one attends the Lord's Supper annually. The minister, therefore, must be careful lest his exhortations to improvement in the use of the means of grace lead to smugness and complacency. He must point out that the Sacraments, like attendance on the Word, are

¹² Circumcision is morally neutral, but when it is made a criterion of a right relationship with God, then it runs counter to the Gospel, which declares that in Christ Jesus God has declared His one criterion of redemption. St. Paul's attitude toward circumcision is illustrated in the cases of Titus and Timothy. In the case of Titus, Paul demonstrated his freedom from the Law by insisting that Titus remain uncircumcised (Gal. 2:31); in the case of Timothy, by having him circumcised (Acts 16:3). In the former instance theological principles dictated policy; in the latter case, missionary interests.

the opposite of legal prescriptions because through them is conveyed the merit of Jesus Christ. The Word and the Sacraments are the devices chosen by God to channel His grace. It is not the mere performance or ritual, but faith which believes the promises accompanying the visible elements, as in the Lord's Supper and Holy Baptism, that secures the benefit. But faith also obtains liberty from the Law. Therefore faith is kept separate from Law when the Sacraments are exploited to their fullest extent and the Christian is taught that through them he secures release from the bondage to the Law and freedom for the new life in the Spirit. Such an approach will preserve the Christian from the tendency to view even these grace-conveying media as criteria alongside the atonement of Christ.

Inasmuch as the Sacraments are the means employed by the Spirit to dispense the atonement, those who reject Baptism and the Lord's Supper on the ground that the Gospel liberates from rituals and ceremonies are actually helping to put man back under the Law, for they take away from the sinner the very means by which God aims to establish liberty from the Law. The same applies to anyone who empties the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper of their grace-conveying power by treating them as mere symbols of the Christian's experience in Christ. Thereby in a very subtle fashion he puts the Christian back under the Law, for then the individual must be left to his own resources, or at best be deprived of the full power of the grace of God in his total life. Such emasculation of the Sacraments may help account for a legalistic approach, in varying degrees, to the practical life of the Christian.

On the other hand, the multiplication of rites or sacraments, in the sense of grace-conveying media not ordained by God, means that Christians are put back under the Law, for it is tacitly implied that the God-ordained means are not sufficient. But when the divine sufficiency is denied, man is put back under Law, for the criteria of man are set up alongside the criterion of God.

B

Secondly, faith without works is violated when Christianity is conceived as a code of ethics. The problem is especially acute today because the influence of Christianity has so permeated society

that its fruits are easily mistaken for its roots. Thus the Sermon on the Mount may be referred to as the ideal ethical expression. What is not always understood is that the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount cannot be divorced from the Person who uttered them. Only by association with Jesus through His messianic mission as atoning Savior does the ethic of the mount become a real possibility. His atoning work, not His ethical prescriptions, is the criterion. Only he who finds forgiveness in Him will be able to forgive. Only he who has experienced the Savior's love will be able to love.¹³ In other words, what Jesus says has meaning because of what He does. He is the guarantee of the exceeding righteousness which He proclaims. Therefore "blessed are the poor." An ethic of Jesus without the atonement of Jesus Christ is a chimera. It may be called Christianity, but not in the language of the NT.

But even when the atonement of Christ is recognized, the Ten Commandments and the ethical standards and precepts of the NT, including those of the Sermon on the Mount, may wrongfully be employed as a criterion next to Christ. For example, a Christian may ask whether it is all right to gamble. The pastor is apt to then refer the questioner to the Seventh Commandment without relating the Christian's problem to his new experience in Christ. What is the result? The Christian leaves with a resolution not to gamble. But what is his motivation? Not Christ, but a legal requirement. He is a slave, under the law. But what is worse, he has been encouraged to set up a criterion other than Christ, and to harbor a feeling of self-satisfaction because he is conforming with a legal requirement. Something of Christ's total atonement has been edged out.

In preaching, the same danger is present when one fails to connect the Christian's practical life with his experience of Christ's atonement. This happens when the Law as a directive for the Christian's life is presented in such a way that his faith in Christ's atonement is divorced from the production of the fruits of the Spirit and the practical areas of the Christian's life are treated as an appendage to the Christian faith.

¹³ Cp. Matt. 5:44, 45; 6:14, 15 with Luke 7:47.

The conviction against which the Apostle warns is even more evident in perorations patterned along the following lines: Beloved, is the desire to follow Christ the driving passion in your life? Does it give you peace and joy to know that through Christ you belong to God? Are you willing to deny yourself for the Master? Are you willing now to take up the battle against your flesh as never before? Do you want to see that His Word is spread with post haste throughout the world, so that He might draw more people to Himself? Are you one of those who takes this Word of God seriously yourself? Are you ready to have it make a difference in your life, in the way you live, in the way you treat your fellow man, in the way you use the things of this world? And are you prepared to make sacrifices for your Lord? Then, *then*, you have eternal life — the world is yours, heaven and eternity is yours, and you have the peace which passes all understanding and which will keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

The ethical prescriptions, it will be noted, at first sight appear to follow the presentation of the Gospel facts, but they are not addressed to the Christian as one who, by virtue of his new life in Christ, can produce the fruits of faith. The individual who hears such an exhortation cannot fail to leave with the impression that he contributes something to the total salvation process.

This emphasis on the practical aspects of the Christian religion may even lead a preacher to treat the doctrinal aspects of the Christian faith with homiletical impatience. He may think that his congregation knows well the basic doctrines and that his primary task is to present a practical message, without realizing that the very absence of the fruits of faith is an indication that the congregation does not yet know the doctrines it confesses. Consequently he may fail to connect the weighty doctrinal affirmations concerning our Lord's descent into hell, His resurrection, ascension, and parousia with the Christian's anticipated walk in the Spirit. The result is a subtle type of legalism which may display itself in applications like this: Since the Jews who were under the Law were commanded to give tithes, we who have been freed from the Law ought at least to begin where they left off. The proper procedure is outlined by the Apostle in Galatians 5, but the treatment thereof must be deferred to our next study in this series.

C

The question of a Christian ethic suggests the problem of infused grace. The Roman Catholic doctrine of *gratia infusa* is true to the extent that the atonement of Christ is the means whereby God makes contact with man and establishes His residence within him. St. Paul puts it this way: we receive the Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ, and now the Spirit produces His fruit in the Christian. But the Roman Catholic conception makes the sanctification of the individual a criterion according to which the Christian's relationship with God may be quantitatively measured, but in that event the Christian's criterion is not Christ but a *process* initiated by Christ. To hasten the process a multitude of precepts and various penitential disciplines must be followed, and thus the Christian is put back under the Law, for conformity with these criteria constitutes the ultimate standard of righteousness.¹⁴ The conception of Paul is far superior, for he points out that the sanctification of the Christian is not a criterion of his relationship with God, but the result of His complete and total restoration to God. In other words, at every stage in his life the Christian is a saint, not because of what he produces, but because he renounces all his own criteria and relies solely on the merits of Jesus Christ. Out of that faith, and out of such faith alone, can the sanctified life issue. Thus the presentation of faith without works, rather than vitiating the sanctification of the Christian, actually promotes it as no other presentation can do, for there is no greater hindrance to the sanctified life than the establishment of a criterion other than Christ. For life under the Law is opposed to the life that is of faith.

D

The analysis of the Apostle Paul further suggests the consideration that faith without works is violated when the new life of the Christian or the ability to determine the exact moment of conversion is made the criterion of a right relationship with God. The

¹⁴ Heinrich Karpp, in *Probleme Altchristlicher Anthropologie* (Gütersloh: 1950), points out how soteriology very easily is adapted to particular anthropological views. In the case of Tertullian, he writes, "da die Verlorenheit keine völlige ist, braucht auch die Erlösung keine völlige zu sein," p. 87. See Adolph Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Tübingen: 1909), I, 496ff.

classical expression is found in Calvin's *Institutes*, "Faith consists in a knowledge of Christ. Christ cannot be known without the sanctification of His Spirit. Consequently, faith is absolutely inseparable from a pious affection."¹⁵ The conclusion is plausible, since faith that is not productive of good works is no faith at all, but the second premise implies more than the Apostle's argument would warrant. The Apostle would agree that Christ cannot be known without the operation of the Spirit who leads man to a renunciation of all his own criteria to accept the criterion of Christ's atonement, but he would not agree that the *result* of the newly established relationship, that is, the invasion of the Spirit with His fruits, is the cause of knowing Christ rightly.

Calvin's interpretation stems from the desire to avoid the intellectualization of faith, but his solution is really an attempt to account intellectually for his doctrine of eternal reprobation. The negative side of this rationalization is observable in his assertion that the curbing function of the Law is designed to keep the elect from losing all consciousness of God before they are confronted with the Gospel.¹⁶

The originating point of his position is the attempt to distinguish the believer from the unbeliever pragmatically. The distinction is then made a criterion for the individual himself, and on the basis of this criterion, the production of the fruits of the Spirit, the individual is prompted to evaluate his relationship with God. Actually it is no longer the Spirit that is the criterion, but the achievements of the Christian and his own feelings. But any criterion, even if it is allegedly one that consists of the results of Christ's atonement, if it is brought in alongside the single criterion of the atonement of Jesus Christ, brings the individual back under Law.

But a final test of our interpretation of the Apostle's argument remains. How can this doctrine of faith without works lead to anything else but antinomianism? If faith in Jesus Christ without the works of the Law, without any prior moral improvement, or even any insistence on moral betterment, is made the criterion of

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. John Allen (Philadelphia, 1936), I, 605 (Bk. III, Ch. 2).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 388 (Bk. II, Ch. 7).

a right relationship with God, will the individual not be prompted to say: "All I must do is believe; it doesn't matter how I live"? In the first place, the mere fact that libertinists inside the historical church have made this claim does not invalidate the criterion. In the second place, a prejudice is already created against the validity of the criterion by a "loading" of the objection, and by the assumption that a criterion of faith without works *necessarily* involves antinomianism. On the contrary, the antinomian life that roots its behavior in a claim of complete deliverance from the Law by virtue of the sole merits of Christ condemns itself as failing utterly to understand the meaning of faith. For antinomianism is actually nomism in its worst form. The antinomian sets up a criterion other than Christ, namely, his own ability to express his freedom from the Law and any moral demands. Thus rather than proving the invalidity of faith without works and justification by faith alone, antinomianism condemns its own misunderstanding of *sola gratia*.

It might be alleged, however, that the antinomian's misunderstanding is due to inadequacy of the formulation and that perhaps what the Apostle says is not "Faith without works" but "Faith that is rooted in love." The Apostle must speak for himself. He has defined the problem of man as an attempt to effect a right relationship with God through his own criteria. He has demonstrated that man is totally incapable of establishing a right relationship. Man even misuses Law to satisfy his pretensions. But the effect is that the Law immerses him still further in rebellion against the Almighty. Thus the problem of man is twofold: he stands guilty before God, and he stands morally helpless before Him. This twofold problem God meets with the atonement of Jesus Christ, who is the criterion of man's relationship with God. This criterion is offered to man in the message of the Gospel. What is offered here is a release from guilt and a release from the bondage of sin. But God does not offer this criterion merely to the assent of the intellect. When man's response is only intellectual, he alone is at fault. He does not accept the Gospel call, for he still abides by his own criteria — in this case his intellect pronounces judgment on the revelations of religion. No, God imparts the criterion only to the man who renounces all his own criteria, to the man who

admits that he is in no position whatsoever to dictate the terms of what does and what does not constitute a right relationship with God. He who renounces all his own criteria, he who admits his guilt, he who confesses his sin, as well as his sins, and is led by the Spirit of God to rely entirely on the atonement of Christ, receives as a free gift, without any previous moral improvement, without any conditions regarding future behavior, the pardon for his guilt and the release from the bondage to sin.

He who does not seek pardon nor release from that bondage still lives by his own criteria. Such a one must be hammered with the wrath of God until he sees the darkness within his soul and the gulf between him and God unbridgable except by the atonement of the Son of God. But he who seeks the pardon and the release from that bondage, when he joyfully embraces the Gospel truth, precisely because he knows that all other criteria lead to hell, will now be able to produce for God, because he lives by the faith of the Son of God. Tragic it is if this release from the bondage to sin be presented as something offered to man whereby he can *begin* the journey to God. But the fact that this error is sometimes made must not permit the unique apostolic presentation to suffer, for by emphasizing the freedom from sin as an objective element in the Savior's atonement, the curator of souls does not misinterpret the apostolic witness. For he is not putting into the article of justification what properly belongs in the article of sanctification. Such confusion would be the case if the fruits of that freedom from sin were made the criterion of a right relationship with God. But the freedom from sin is an objective reality secured by Christ Himself. It is there for the taking, and it belongs with the release from guilt. Thus there is no ground for the reproach that *sola gratia* leads to antinomianism. On the contrary, the Apostolic doctrine alone provides the sole basis for a life rich in good works. Faith without works is the basic proposition for a faith with works.

E

The Apostle's argument, finally, is extremely useful in dealing with the problem of confronting the contemporary man who disclaims all interest in religious matters.

For him the leavening influence of Christianity has become the criterion of his relationship with God, though he may disregard utterly the thought that God has any claims on him because he fails to recognize his creatureliness. Contributing factors are the material achievements of a highly mechanized era and scientific discoveries which appear to depersonalize the universe. The Mosaic code as well as historical Christianity may be viewed by him as sociological curiosities. To attempt to elicit a consciousness of sin through a declaration of the moral code may meet with ridicule and the suggestion that the man without Christ lives just as well as the Christian, if not better.¹⁷ The solution to this problem lies in St. Paul's approach to the Galatian heresy. Modern man has established his own criterion of salvation—material or emotional success. He seeks security in that criterion which is himself. The validity of this criterion must be critically examined. The anxieties and fears to which he is prone must be laid bare. The symptoms of his problem must be painstakingly exposed. The wrath of God must be declared against all life that is lived in self-dependence. The colossal egotism of the "successful" must be seen against the backdrop of eternal Judgment, when God will judge the secrets of men's hearts by that Man whom He has ordained (Acts 17:31). God's revelation in Christ must be declared the definitive act of God in history. Only in the face of that divine self-revelation is it at all possible to demolish the last citadel of self. Only then is the way opened for faith with works.

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¹⁷ It is worthy of note that in the sermons recorded in Acts the attempt to secure a conviction of sins is not made on the basis of a comparison of the hearer's life with the demands of individual Mosaic ordinances. In Acts 14 and 17, two examples of St. Paul's approach to an heathen audience, there is no mention of Law as a legal code. The brevity of the sermons as recorded may, however, be partially responsible for this apparent omission. Acts 24:25 emphasizes that the future Judgment played a leading role in Paul's presentation of "Law." Rom. 2:17ff., in a literary context, comes closest to employing the Mosaic Law as a device to reveal sin. In the sermons of Peter (Acts 2:14ff. and 3:12ff.) repentance is preached, but the sin of Israel consists in their refusal to accept the leadership of God. The weakness of the Mosaic code, as far as securing a real conviction of sin is concerned, is apparent from Luke 18:1ff. In the face of the witness of the Commandments, the young man confidently affirms, "All these I have observed from my youth" (v. 21). The answer of Jesus demonstrates the approach used by the Apostle Paul. The young man must renounce all his own criteria.