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## The Gospel: Glorification by Faith

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We usually think of the gospel as the proclamation that God saves sinners who put their faith in him. But the “gospel” is actually the good *new* news that comes with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What is proclaimed in the gospels, Acts, and epistles is not that God saves sinners, but that the New Age has come. Thus, it is the “gospel of the kingdom,” the good news that the Kingdom of God has arrived in history.

God has been saving sinners through faith in Him all along, starting with Adam. When Luther wanted to argue against the Medieval Roman Catholic notion of salvation through faith + works, he need only have turned to Moses: “I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage: You shall have no other gods before Me.” Note what this says:

1. I have chosen you. I am your God, and you are Mine.
2. I have redeemed you from the realm of sin and death.
3. Put all your faith and trust in Me.

Now, that’s the “gospel” as we usually think of it. But it’s “old news.” In fact, it is the beginning of the “Law,” which has become inadequate now that the Gospel has come.

If that is so, then what is the Gospel that has come? Why does Paul need to write a bunch of letters explaining it, if in fact is it only a new statement of what has always been true? Why doesn’t Paul just refer to Exodus 20, the opening of the Decalogue, and be done with it?

The answer is found by looking back at Adam. Adam was put into the garden and told that he might eat of every tree save of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 2:17). He was also told that eventually every tree would be for him to eat of (1:29). Thus, someday he would eat of the Tree of

Knowledge. On that day, he would pass through another “death” experience, as he had already done when he went into a coma and Eve was taken from him (2:17, 21-22). He would experience some kind of resurrection, as he had awakened from his coma. He would enter into a new world, the world outside the Garden (and we know this because that is where God sent him after he wrongly seized the temporarily forbidden fruit; 3:22-24). In other words, if Adam had remained faithful and trusted God, he would have entered into a new and transfigured form of life. He would have been glorified.

Now, the various salvation events of the Former Scriptures, under the Law, did not take the people into this new resurrected and transfigured form of life. These saving events, like the Exodus from Egypt, only forgave sins and gave the people a new start within the original Adamic world situation. Each new event showed something more about the resurrected, transfigured, glorified life that was going to come, but none of them brought that new life. As Adam was “under Law” (the prohibition of the Tree of Knowledge on pain of death), so each new salvation event restored the people to being “under Law.” They were justified by faith, but they lived in the Adamic situation. They were not glorified. They did not emerge into the world, but stayed in the land, a land that expanded eventually to become the Oikumene, but was never the whole world.

In Jesus’ resurrection that glorious new world comes. Humanity finally reaches the great new stage of existence that Adam was supposed to reach but did not reach. The Gospel, thus, is not just a new publication of the old news that God saves sinners, but is something new: that God has glorified sinners in Christ.

“Those whom He justified, them He also glorified” (Rom. 8:30). Because they are convinced that our

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glorification is only in the future, when we receive our resurrection bodies, many commentators say that the past tense (aorist) of "glorified" here means only that it our glorification is certain because God has predestinated it. Or that Jesus' resurrection is in view. But it is our own glorification that is in view, and Paul says that it has already happened, or at least begun.

Notice how Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the Lord's glory, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." Unlike Moses, whose temporary glory was rendered inactive (3:13), we have moved into the Glory Age, and our glorification will not fade. It will rather increase, from glory to glory.

The Gospel is that God now not only justifies but also glorifies us by faith. This is the "much more" of Romans 5. Receiving glorification and all the new privileges of the New Creation is what Paul exhorts us to in Romans 8. We can and must step boldly into the New Glory Age because in Christ we have already been glorified. We must leave behind not only the old life of sin, but also the old life of grace in the childhood garden.

And this was controversial news. Many Jews accepted that Jesus had come to republish salvation once again, and that God through Jesus had once again put forth His salvation, but they were not ready to believe that He had brought a completely new world. For them, the work of Jesus just meant a new phase of the Law. God had done mighty works of salvation in the days of David, Elijah, and Zechariah, but each of these was still "under Law," still in the old era. (Even before the coming of the Law, God's mighty works of salvation through Noah and Abraham were still in the old Adamic era.) For these Jews, called Judaizers, this is all that Jesus had done. Jesus, for them, had brought in a new and even better phase of the Law, but they rejected the idea that in Jesus the Law and the Adamic world had been superseded by something better.

This is why Paul needed to write his letters. Paul's point is not that these Jews believed in justification by works, for they did not – at least they did not perceive that they did. Paul's point is that they were rejecting the radical and total nature of what Jesus had done. They were rejecting not justification by faith, but glorification by faith. As we shall see, this really meant rejecting justification also, though the Judaizers did not believe they had done so.

What about the Former Days believers? Weren't they also glorified by faith? Not during their lifetimes. The book of Hebrews shows that they had to wait for the coming of the New Age, in sheol, until they could receive glorification (Heb. 11:39-40). The book of Revelation makes the same point, as these saints remain "under the altar" until they are glorified with Jesus (Rev. 6:9-11; 20:4).

Now, saving faith has two prongs: trusting what God has done in the past and trusting Him for the future. Trusting Him for the future means trusting Him to take care of the present that is moving toward the future. It is because we trust Him that we obey Him. We don't obey him to save ourselves from our past sins, and we don't obey Him in order to bring about future glory. He gives us both salvation and glory as free gifts. We obey Him because we trust that He has good intentions toward us, good intentions for our future. We obey because we trust Him to take care of the seemingly-risky consequences of our obedience. Because we trust Him for the future, we can risk giving Him 10% of our income, risk obeying parents and employers and policemen, risk losing out on fun by remaining chaste, etc.

If we don't trust God for the future, then we don't really trust Him at all. Adam did not trust God for the future. He believed that God had deceived him and that by his own works he had to guaranteed his future by eating of the temporarily forbidden Tree.

We must understand false faith. False faith says that I trust that God has saved me by His work in the past, but I don't trust Him for the future and the present. False faith says that initial salvation is by faith, but that maintaining salvation and coming to future glory is by works. It is up to me to maintain the salvation that God has freely given me.

Refusing to trust God for the future will always mean clinging to the present, and since our familiar present comes to us from our past experiences, it means clinging to the past. We see this over and over again in redemptive history. Let's look at some key examples:

Abraham trusted God for the future. But Lot did not. Lot was happy to be saved by God, but he did not trust God's promises for the future. Delivered from Sodom, he refused to move back to live with Abraham. He wound up repeating the past, and found a new Sodom in the caves when his daughters seduced him.

The Israelites were happy to be saved from Egypt, but unlike Moses and Joshua, they did not trust God for the future. They would not fight the Canaanites. They wound up wanting to go back to Egypt. They also did not trust the new provisions God had made for them, especially the glorious Tabernacle and priesthood God had set up so that He could dwell in their midst. They wanted to go back to the old ways, when each man was his own priest (Num. 16).

Later, the Israelites again did not trust God for the future. God had said that eventually they would have a king, but only when He was ready (Dt. 17). They were not willing to wait, and demanded a king "by works" rather than waiting for one by faith (1 Sam. 8). Even when David came as king, they remained

suspicious of him, and many wanted to return to the earlier tribal ways.

When God said, "Trust Me. I know what I'm doing when I set Nebuchadnezzar in charge of the world. A great future awaits you"; they did not trust Him. They clung to living in old Jerusalem, and because they had no faith in God's promises, they made the Temple itself into an idol, crying "The Temple of the LORD! The Temple of the LORD!"

Now, in each of these cases, the people either did not trust God for the future, or did not trust what He had just done for them. They made an idol of the past, and sought to preserve the past by their own works. By doing so, they took their future into their own hands.

### **Jews, Judaizers, Catholics, & Protestants**

This business of trusting God for initial salvation while taking the future into our own hands by works is what Medieval Roman Catholicism really taught. They believed that God saved them completely apart from works by baptism, but that to guarantee future glory, they had to add good works to this initial and free salvation. And, in an important way, this was also the way the Judaizers in Paul's day thought, which is why the Reformers were right to draw an analogy between the two.

But let us go back to redemptive history. Each new saving work of God supersedes His previous work. That is why clinging to the past and rejecting the new work God has done is an act of faithlessness. When we get to the Gospel, we find two groups of people who cling to the past: the Jews and the Judaizers.

The Jews simply rejected Jesus and all that He had done. They believed that God had saved them in the past, a salvation received by faith alone. But they believed that they needed to maintain their salvation by works of the Law, so as to guarantee their future. They believed in glorification by works. They had made an idol of the Law, and by doing so had perverted its meaning and its content, adding new things to it and subtracting others. The resurrection of Jesus meant that God had done a new work of salvation, and that they had to move into this New Age. But if they did this, they would have to give up their prideful glorification by works.

These works were often not so much individual works of merit as they were corporate allegiance to the Law and the special place of Israel, but they were works nonetheless. The Reformers have been faulted for thinking that individual works of merit were the sin of the Jews, for projecting Roman Catholic errors back onto the Jews. Modern scholars have made a good case that "individual works of merit" was not part of Judaism at this period of history (though since people are people, we can hardly suppose that pride and merit-thinking were absent from the people of Jesus' day!).

But those who criticize the Reformers must admit that they were also right, because pride is pride and works are works, whether individual pride and works, or national pride and works. Fundamentally, the Reformers were right to see that the sin was the same. The Pharisees acted to keep themselves in the covenant, to maintain the status God had given them by grace, by means of their own works apart from faith. Jesus' condemnation of them in Matthew 23 makes this clear. They were hypocrites, seeking to maintain public status before men without true faith in God. If they had really trusted God for the future, they would have recognized the Future (Jesus Himself) when it came. If they had been keeping the Law in an attitude of faith, they would have served the Gentiles instead of lording it over them.

Jesus' message to them was that they could not glorify themselves by works. Their covenant-loyalty counted for nothing because it was done without faith. The proof of this was that they were unwilling to change covenants. If their loyalty had been to God, they would have followed God into the new covenant. But since they had made an idol of the covenant, of the Law, they rejected the offer of free glorification in Jesus Christ. The only future they were willing to accept was one that came on their terms, that they had helped bring about. Their pride would not let them accept a freely-given future.

The Judaizers were somewhat different. They were willing to see Jesus' resurrection as a new phase of redemptive history, but only as a new phase in the Adamic history they had been living in. We noted above that each new salvific work of God supersedes the previous one, and the Judaizers were willing to accept a new phase. But previously, each new phase had been within the context of the original Adamic world. They had been phases within the overall period of the Law. What the Judaizers rejected was the fact that this new phase of history, after the Resurrection of Jesus, superseded the whole Adamic/Law history.

The Judaizers wanted to keep the essential elements of the Adamic world: the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, a central sanctuary on the earth, the symbolism of animal sacrifices, a calendar governed by sun and moon, the mediatorial work of angels, and so forth. Like Moses, they said, Jesus had brought a new phase of history, but not *the* new phase of history.

Once again, it was national pride rather than "individual works of merit" that was the problem here: A truly new age would mean that it was no longer special to be a Jew.

Many of these people, of course, were just confused. Some of them were trusting what God had done in the immediate past (in Jesus), and were also trusting Him for their future glorification. They just did not understand how radical the new phase was. Others, however, were like the Jews. They accepted Jesus, in a sense, but continued to hold the future in

their own hands. They said, "If Jesus is a Jewish Messiah, fine. This is just a new phase of the Law, and being a Jew is still special. We'll accept the Gospel on these terms, our terms."

This is why Paul had to write his letters. He had to explain to these confused people just how radical and total Jesus' work of salvation really was. He had to argue that Jesus' resurrection was not just a new phase of Adamic history, but that it was the arrival of a new history; that in Jesus the New Age had come; that the Law and the Adamic Garden/Land/Oikumene world had been wholly superseded, not just partly superseded as in the past. Jesus had not been a Jewish Messiah, except as Israel had been the focussed manifestation of Adamic humanity; rather, Jesus was the New Adam, the Humanity Messiah. Jesus' resurrection as the wellspring of the New Humanity means that the Jew/Gentile distinction has evaporated as far as God is concerned. Anybody trying to maintain that the Jews are special is doing so out of works, not out of faith.

It takes time for people to accept something as radical as this, and over the course of Paul's ministry some people came to understand the fullness of Jesus' work, while others hardened in their rejection of what Paul was saying. Those who accepted what Paul said did so because they trusted God with the future, and were willing to move into this strange new world. Those who rejected Paul did so because they wanted the future under their own control, and thus were seeking glorification by works.

Which brings us back to the Gospel. Paul wrote, in essence, that Jesus' resurrection meant that glorification, the Future, had already come. The glorifying Spirit had been poured out. We are now glorified adopted sons of God, no longer slaves and children under angelic tutelage. It was no longer a matter of salvation being in the past and glorification being in the future. Now both have arrived, and the New Age is an age in which those whom God had justified He also already had glorified. Yes, there is still a future, but this future is only an outworking of glorification, not the arrival of glorification. It is an outworking of what it means to leave the Garden and live in a blessed new world, not the arrival of that new world.

Thus, the essence of Paul's arguments is not that we are saved by faith and not by works, but that the world and history have changed once and for all. It is no longer possible to say we are saved by God's work in the past and that we trust Him to bring in the glorious new age someday in the future, because the glorious new age has arrived. If we don't believe that, and trust it, then we are not trusting what God has done in the past, and we will not trust Him for the future either, so that we will fall back into our own works.

So, Paul argues facts, not psychology. He argues for the fact that the new age, the age of glorification,

has already come. For those living in the new age, justifying and saving faith means trusting in the God who has already brought that new age. Trusting only in the earlier works of God while rejecting His new and climactic work is not true faith. It converts those past works into idols. What was good in the past has now become an idol. The Law, which was good in the past, has now become an idol.

What is an idol? An idol is silent, and can only "tell" us what we already know. An idol is a human work, and it can only provoke more human works. When the Law is perverted into an idol, it becomes a system of works and merits. Just as the Jews made the Temple into an idol, so the Judaizers were making the Law into an idol. In both cases, the inevitable result was self-trust and self-salvation by works and merits.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we may say that the Gospel is indeed the truth that we are saved by faith and not by works. But we must also say that it is faith in what God has done in Jesus Christ, faith not only in God's justifying work in the past, but also in His glorifying work in the past. It is faith that the New Age of glorification has arrived. The Gospel, thus, is not just the general fact that God saves sinners who trust in Him, but that God has brought the new world to pass in Jesus Christ. This is the Gospel, the new good news, that is proclaimed in Acts and argued for in Paul.

The Gospel shows us that God has fulfilled every promise, that He is the God who controls the future completely, because He has done everything He said He would do. All that remains is the inevitable outworking of what He has already done, and much of that outworking is still in the future for us. As has always been the case, the psychology of saving faith means trusting God for the past and for the future. But the content of that faith has changed, for now we must trust in His past work of giving us glorification as well as salvation. As glorified people we must be bolder than ever in serving Him, for in Christ we have already died and been raised again; we have now already been adopted as sons, married as a bride, and given the fullness of the Spirit.

Thus, we obey and serve Him not just because our sins are forgiven, but because we have been given power and privilege as adults and co-rulers with Jesus. Our obedience comes not just from gratitude for sins forgiven, but also from joy in our glorification.

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