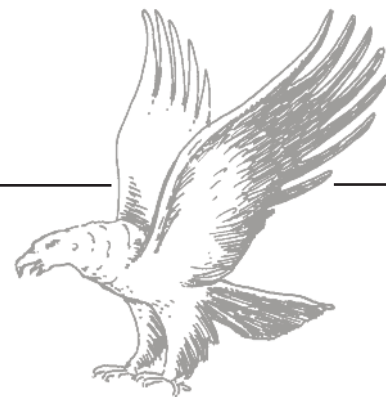


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



November 15, 2015

Under the Curse

One of the great ironies in the Bible is that those who are so confident of their obedience are usually in the deepest trouble, and don't even know it. Paul explains why.

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’ Yet the law is not of faith, but ‘the man who does them shall live by them’” (Gal. 3:10-12).

In this chapter Paul is contrasting two ways of approaching God. One is achievable, but the other is hopelessly futile and doomed to fail. If we're serious about serving God, we should take the time to understand what Paul is arguing here, and make sure we're on the right path.

Paul uses short-hand expressions to describe these two paths—“of faith” and “of the works of the law” (v. 2, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12). Brethren often interpret these as referring to *the law of Christ* and *the Law of Moses* respectively. So the message is, as long as we get our marching orders from Christ, not Moses, we can be confident we're doing it right.

That distinction is certainly valid, but that's not what Paul is arguing here. The contrast is not between *two laws*, but *two ways of approaching God's law*. Whether the law is from Moses or from Christ is immaterial to Paul's point.

Those who are “of the works of the law” look to their ability to obey God's law so impeccably that He will reward them for their effort. That approach, Paul insists, puts us in deep trouble. He quotes two Old Testament sources to make his case. The first (Deut. 27:26) places a curse on everyone who does not continue in ALL THINGS written in the law. The second (Lev. 18:5) promises life to the man who DOES the works of law. In both verses, the emphasis is on *personal performance*. We must either DO ALL THINGS written in the law—or else fall under the curse. No exceptions, no “close enoughs,” but absolute perfection. Of course, how many of us have achieved that level of performance? That's why Paul says, “no one is justified by the law in the sight of God.” Whether the law of Moses or the law of Christ, the principle is the same: if I'm

depending on my ability to “do all” to win God's favor, I'm doomed.

Those who are “of faith,” on the other hand, freely acknowledge their failures and cast themselves upon the mercy of God. The Old Testament passage Paul references to support that thesis (Hab. 2:4) is quoted three times in the New Testament (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). Curiously, the application in all three passages is not to the Law of Moses, but to the gospel of Christ. The true path to God is not based on how close I hit the target, but on how fully I surrender my heart and my life to Jesus Christ. (If that distinction doesn't make sense, you should spend more time reading Romans and Galatians.)

Later in this epistle, Paul summarized this principle using more blunt language: “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (5:4). Salvation by grace, *by definition*, means that we can do nothing to earn God's favor. If we ever start thinking that our goodness is the means of our justification, we are under God's curse.

— David King