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## Commentary — From the Margins *“Justified by Faith”*

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We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. (Gal 2:15–18)

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In saying, *if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor*, Paul implies that he tore down being a sinner, a son of disobedience, that he would be a sinner if he returned to his former ways when he was a Pharisee with tremendous zeal for God, even consenting to the murder of Stephen ... Jesus placed Paul in a position where Paul saw himself for what he was, a sinner fully engrossed in sin, despite having a strong desire to serve the Lord. In this way, Paul typifies those who would put disciples out of synagogues (and churches) and kill disciples while believing they are offering service to God (John 16:2). They will kill disciples because they have not known either the Father or the Son (v. 3); yet before being called, what was Paul's life about if not seeking to *Know the Lord*?

Paul knew firsthand that the works of the law justified no one; yet in saying, *by the works of the law no one will be justified*, he would seem to contradict what he wrote to the Romans when he said, “For it is not hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified” (Rom 2:13). So in Paul's discourses, the “works of the law” that justify no one do not negate disciples doing what the law requires; for Paul goes on to say,

For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision

is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. (Rom 2:25–29)

Doing those things that the law requires (i.e., keeping the precepts of the law) becomes the prerequisite for circumcision of the heart, which in turn is the prerequisite for entrance into the household of God. But a person is not justified by merely entering into the household upon which judgment has come (1 Pet 4:17). The uncircumcised person must now add to his or her faith that has this person keeping the precepts of the law the fruit of the spirit; for this person's faith that let the person escape "from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire" (2 Pet 1:4) must be supplemented by virtue (i.e., living without sin), with virtue being supplemented by knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love (vv. 5–6). Thus, circumcision of the heart comes when faith is supplemented by virtue. The uncircumcised person is then inwardly a Jew, with this son of God's praise coming from God, not other men or women.

To the Roman converts, Paul wrote that "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and *those whom he called he also justified*, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (8:28–30 emphasis added).

The works of the law can justify no one for it is the Father who justifies disciples that have been predestined *to be conformed* (sculpted) *to the image of Christ Jesus* ... not every person submits to being sculpted into the image of Christ; for Paul adds,

Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? (Rom 9:21–24)

The same lump is not humankind as too many Christians contend, but those human beings who have been called by God, with some being called to be vessels of honor and some for dishonor; for Jesus said in the parable of the wedding feast,

But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?" And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." *For many are called, but few are chosen.* (Matt 22:11–14 emphasis added)

The man without a wedding garment did not look like he was part of the wedding party; he looked different. He did not conform to the image of the

Bridegroom ... when the originally invited guests paid no attention to the king, or seized the servants of the king and treated them shamefully, the king retaliated by destroying the murderers and burning their city, an apt metaphor for what happened to Israel following the reign of King Solomon. The nation under Solomon was not found worthy of the “rest” into which the nation had entered; Israel under Solomon actively engaged in hypocrisy, professing to worship the Lord but setting up idols for Solomon’s many foreign wives. Thus, God disinherited the nation when he stripped all but one tribe from the house of David:

And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the Lord commanded. Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, “Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.” (1 Kings 11:9–13)

Instead of Israel being chosen, Jerusalem was chosen—the polis of Jerusalem replaced Israel as the promised inheritance; thus, Paul in Antioch in Pisidia, said, “And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he [the Lord] gave them [Israel] their land [the land of the seven nations] as an inheritance [for] about 450 years” (Acts 13:19–20) ... the translation of what Paul said into English is not well handled, for it has not been understood that Israel was reduced in size from all of Judea to the polis of Jerusalem because of Solomon’s rebellion against the Lord, which does not seem like rebellion to sons of disobedience. But when Solomon’s heart turned away from the Lord, Solomon rebelled against the Lord; for Solomon did not keep what the Lord commanded. Therefore, in the Lord giving all but one tribe of Israel to Jeroboam, a servant of Solomon, to rule, the Lord disinherited these tribes that would become lost in history, not that they were “really” lost. They became representations of disciples called by God to be sculpted into vessels of dishonor so that His wrath and His power might be known.

A deity that would disinherit entire tribes because of Solomon’s rebellion isn’t the God most Christians or Jews worship—and this is a true statement; for Christendom worships the Adversary who appears as an angel of light but who keeps Christians enchained to death through their lawlessness; for Christians do not supplement their faith with virtue, but contend that faith alone is sufficient for salvation. But if the Christian has been crucified with Christ, it is no longer the old self that lives but Christ in the Christian (Gal 2:20). And if Christ actually lives in this person, how is it that the life this Christian now lives in the flesh is that of a sinner, a person of the nations, and not that of the Son of God? Would Christ not then be found a servant of sin (v. 17)?

Paul asked *if we were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin?* He answers with a resounding, *Certainly not!* But in asking *if we were to be found sinners*, Paul implies that disciples are not to be found being sinners; for elsewhere, Paul writes, “What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness” (Rom 6:15–16) ... grace covers the situation of *if we be found to be sinners*, not willful sinning.

John wrote,

If we say we have fellowship with him [God] while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:6–10)

It isn't a matter of disciples *not being found sinners*, but a matter of confessing sins and ceasing to sin—ceasing to transgress the commandments—to the best of the disciple's ability.

Christ is not and will not be found a servant of sin; therefore, the Christian who makes a practice of sinning is not born of God—does not have the indwelling of Christ—but is a child of the Adversary (1 John 3:8–10). The spirit that dwells in this person is that of the Adversary; the words of this person are those of the Adversary; and when this person professes that Jesus is Lord, the *Jesus* of this person is not the Jesus whom Paul proclaimed ... Paul wrote to the saints at Corinth, “I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough” (2 Cor 11:3–4).

As Solomon by his disobedience condemned the tribes of Israel that were not innocent of wrongdoing, the teachers, pastors, and theologians of Christendom have condemned generations of disciples through their advocacy of sin; through their teaching that faith alone is sufficient for salvation; through their teaching that disciples are now under the new covenant when the Law has not been written on hearts or placed in minds and infant sons of God are still in need of a guardian. But endtime disciples composing the fellowships of these workers of iniquity are not innocent of wrongdoing, but have actively embraced sin so they can continue to have fellowship with this world, gaining for themselves its riches and the authority of the Adversary.

*Many are called but few are chosen, few are predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, few are justified as vessels for honored use*—Paul asks,

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have

mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. (Rom 9:14–18)

Is this the God most of Christendom worships? Or the God that rabbinical Judaism worships? No, He is not the God of most Christians or Jews. But He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God who sent the Logos into this world so that He would be made known to those whom He predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ ... Christianity in this era isn't for everyone; not everyone will be numbered among the firstfruits. Not even most of those called in this era will be chosen as firstfruits. Only a few of the many called will be chosen. Only a few will be justified and glorified. And it isn't by the works of the law that anyone will be justified; for if it were, then all who satisfied the requirements of the law would be glorified, but all are condemned by the law. No one would be glorified, what Paul knew all too well for he in his zeal to serve the Lord had condoned the stoning of Stephen. He personally was a murderer; yet he had been chosen by God to know the will of God, to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from His mouth (Acts 22:14) so that he could be a witness to everyone that the works of the law left a person floundering in darkness even though the reasonable expectation of the Lord was that disciples keep the precepts of the law.

There is no contradiction in saying that by the works of the law no one is justified and that by faith disciples are to keep the precepts of the law, being doers of the law and not hearers only. There is no injustice in God sculpting one disciple into a vessel for honored use and another disciple into a vessel of dishonor; for it is the disciple that determines whether he or she is “workable” clay, and determines what can be made from the disciple. But it isn't the disciple that makes him or herself into a vessel of honor or dishonor. It isn't the disciple that calls him or herself; it isn't the disciple that justifies him or herself; and it isn't the disciple that glorifies him or herself. All that the disciple does is submit to God, supplementing faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge so that the disciple's faith is made complete as Abraham's faith was made complete when he offered up Isaac (Jas 2:21–24). Disciples must offer up their fleshly bodies, living as uncircumcised Judeans in a world that is hostile to God.

It is the Adversary that brings accusations of unfairness against God for calling some disciples to be vessels for honored use and some for dishonor, not realizing that without knowledge being added to virtue (which the Adversary lacks), neither men nor angels comprehend that when the circumcised or uncircumcised person professes that Jesus is Lord and keeps the precepts of the law, being a doer of the law and not a hearer only, the person submits to God and is workable clay that will be sculpted into a vessel for honored use. There is no injustice in God sculpting the person who will not keep the precepts of the law into a vessel of wrath, endured for a season but slated for destruction. It was just as easy for the person to choose to keep the law as it was for the person to choose

not to keep the law on the day when “the promise of entering his rest” still stood (Heb 4:1).

Again, faith that will have the person escaping “from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Pet 1:4) is faith that will have the person keeping the precepts of the law, the means by which the person escapes the corruption of this world. But this faith must be supplemented by virtue, the practice of righteousness, the practice of not trying to subvert the precepts of the law but desiring to live by them when no one is looking, when no one cares, when it wouldn't seem to matter what the person does. The faith that lets the person escape condemnation is not complete until it is manifested in virtue. And only now—when the disciple by faith keeps the precepts of the law and lives as a Judean, walking as Jesus walked—can knowledge be added to virtue, and self-control added to knowledge, and steadfastness added to self-control, and godliness added to steadfastness (vv. 5–6). Godliness doesn't come with faith, or with knowledge, but after the person has practiced walking as Jesus walked. Godliness doesn't come to disciples that are still spiritual infants, crawling on hands and knees, unable to walk uprightly before God, let alone dress themselves in the garment of obedience. Godliness comes after disciples keeping the precepts of the law have knowledge, self-control and steadfastness, each magnifying the virtue these disciples added to their faith when they stood up and took their first toddling steps as sons of God walking as the man Jesus walked.

If righteousness came through the law, there would've been no need for the Logos to enter His creation as His only Son. But the law awakens sin or makes sin alive whereas it lay dead prior to the coming of the law (Rom 7:8) — and once made alive by the law, sin must be defeated by righteousness (i.e., obedience to the law); for the law has no power over the person who does not sin, or over the person whose sins are remembered no more. Hence, the law has no power over the person under the new covenant that will have the law written on this person's heart and placed within this person's mind, but this does not mean that all those under the new covenant will be saved. On the contrary, God will send a strong delusion, “so that they may believe what is false,” over disciples under the new covenant that do not believe the truth, with this strong delusion condemning these disciples (2 Thess 2:11–12) to the lake of fire.

If God condemns those disciples who do not believe the truth, then forgiveness of sin or remembering sins no more does not save disciples. The person who will be saved, who is foreknown by God and predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ, also believes God, with this belief expressed in the person desiring to keep the precepts of the law and outwardly keeping the commandments as a doer of the law. Of itself, believing God does not save the person but believing God is counted to the person as righteousness. When this belief is made complete by the person's works, the person is justified. Again, James wrote, “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way. For as the body [without breath—χωρὶς πνεύματος] is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead” (2:24–26).

A person's fleshly body without the activating software of "the old nature" is not a person even if the body is made to breathe via an iron lung. And the point James makes and that Peter makes and that Paul and John make is that faith sufficient to cause a person to profess that Jesus is Lord and believe that the Father has raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 10:9) is of itself dead until it is supplemented by this faith manifesting itself in obedience to God, even to offering up one's son if told to do so as Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac. For where does "the righteousness based on faith" (v. 6) say, "Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) 7 or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)" (vv. 6–8)? Is not Paul's *righteousness based on faith* found in the book of Deuteronomy? For Paul cites Moses:

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. (Deut 30:11–14)

The commandment or law that Moses gave the children of Israel that day was the Moab covenant (Deut 29:1), the spiritual second covenant that is ratified by a song as a better sacrifice than blood (Heb 9:23). And this commandment was not too hard to be kept even though it was never implemented prior to Christ.

It is lawless teachers of Israel—lawless Christian pastors and theologians—that use Paul's rebuke of the Galatians as justification to continue in the corruption of this world, living according to its sinful desires, walking as *the nations* walk ... Paul tells the churches in Galatia that he is astonished by how quickly these disciples deserted Christ and turned to a "different gospel" (Gal 1:6), a distorted gospel (v. 7), preached for the sake of making the Galatians disciples of these teachers of Israel. And what has changed in two millennia? Are not Christian theologians and pastors preaching a corrupted and distorted gospel for the sake of making disciples for their particular denomination? They do, don't they? Their end will therefore correspond to their deeds (2 Cor 11:15).

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