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Commentary — From the Margins “*I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel*”

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Rom 1:16–20)

But it is Paul's gospel of which he is not ashamed:

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, ***according to my gospel***, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. (Rom 2:12–16 emphasis and double emphasis added)

The gospel—the good news—about which Paul is not ashamed has *all who sin without the law* (because they're not under the law either because they do not know Moses or because they are covered by the garment of grace, Christ Jesus' righteousness) *will perish without the law*. Sin is unbelief (Rom 14:23) that causes the person to transgress the law (1 John 3:4). And no person born of God will deliberately transgresses the law (*vv.* 6, 9); no one born of God would deliberately lie, deliberately commit adultery, deliberately transgress the Sabbath, deliberately have any God other than the Father, the God of Jesus and of His disciples (John 20:17).

Yet, Christians are defined by their collective transgression of the law ... those Christians who proudly and publicly proclaim that they are not ashamed of the

gospel have twisted Paul's gospel—that is the power of God for salvation—into permission to sin, to transgress the law, through separating faith [πίστεως] from belief [πίστις — from which πίστεως is derived] ... when faith is separated from faith/belief, then the Christian feels free to spurn Moses, about whom Jesus said, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe [πιστεύετε] his [Moses] writings, how will you believe [πιστεύσετε] my words?” And the answer to Jesus' question is, You won't! You will not believe Jesus' words. You will not hear His voice; for you are without faith. You, regardless of your excuses, are ashamed of Paul's gospel that has you and all like you perishing because you, even though you're not under the law, deliberately transgress the law while claiming to have spiritual understanding.

What else does Paul say in his gospel?

For we hold that one is justified by faith [πίστει — *belief*] apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith [πίστεως] and the uncircumcised through faith [πίστεως]. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith [πίστεως]? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. (Rom 3:28–31)

The law is upheld by belief, not by the works of hands or by the saying of prayers or laps around rosary beads. The law is upheld because both the outwardly circumcised and outwardly uncircumcised believe that the law is true, that the law reveals what has been concealed in the hearts of men [and women]. The law reveals, according to Paul, how badly sin/lawlessness deceives those who are merely humanly born, sold under sin (Rom 7:14) through being consigned to disobedience (Rom 11:32) from birth so that God, through a second birth, can have mercy on all.

The Christian—pastor or laity—who sins, who deliberately transgresses the law, has not been born of God, but is merely humanly born; hence this Christian cannot understand how badly deceived he or she has been by sin, for the Adversary deceives the whole world (Rev 12:9), not just Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and atheists. The Adversary has deceived all Christians—no exceptions—and he continues to deceive Christians even when one here and one there escapes sin by beginning to keep the commandments. As if they were wild sheep, the Adversary herds his escapees into a corral of words where one by one the escapees deny Christ in one or more of many ways, most of which come under the collective heading of the Sacred Names Heresy.

Was Paul deceived when he wrote his treatise to the holy ones at Rome? Certainly there were spiritual things that Paul did not understand: he says so, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom 7:15). Paul didn't realize that there would be a Second Passover liberation of Israel. Nor did Paul realize that Abraham had to take a second journey of faith; so when Paul writes,

For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed [Ἐπίστευσεν — *He believed*] God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” ...

We say that faith [πίστις— *belief*] was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith [πίστεως] while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith [πίστεως]. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith [πίστις — *belief*] is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith [πίστεως], in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith [πίστεως] of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed [ἐπίστευσεν — *he believed*], who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. (Rom 4:3, 9–17)

Salvation is through belief, the same sort of belief that Abraham had counted to him as righteousness, but Paul didn't address it is unknown whether he understood of nor—that God will test a person's belief, a person's faith, just as the Lord tested Abraham's belief:

After these things **God tested Abraham** and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. When they came to the place of

which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But *the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, **for now I know that you fear God**, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."* (Gen 22:1–12 emphasis and double emphasis added)

In what matter did Abraham/Abram have his belief of God counted to him as righteousness?

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And **he believed the LORD**, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:1–6 emphasis and double emphasis added)

In the very matter about which Abraham had his faith, his belief counted to him as righteous, Abraham was also tested by having to sacrifice his heir, the seed of promise. And Paul, certainly aware of this testing of Abraham, chooses to ignore the reality that a Christian's faith that is counted to the Christian as righteousness will be tested by the Lord.

James writes,

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith [πίστιν — *belief*] but does not have works? Can that faith [πίστις] save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith [πίστις] by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith [πίστιν] and I have works." Show me your faith [πίστις] apart from your works, and I will show you my faith [πίστιν] by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith [πίστις] apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith [πίστις] was active along with his works, and faith [πίστις] was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says,

"Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith [πίστεως] alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit [πνεύματος — *breath*] is dead, so also faith [πίστις — *belief*] apart from works is dead. (Jas 2:14–26)

Is a Christian “saved” before his or her belief/faith is tested as Abraham’s belief that was counted to him as righteousness was tested? This should be the question asked by today’s Christian pastors and teachers.

Well, is the Christian saved the moment he or she professes with his or her mouth that Jesus is Lord and believes in his or her heart that the Father raised Jesus from the dead? Is the Christian saved the moment he or she says the so-called *Sinner’s Prayer*? Or does this belief/faith that caused the person to profess Christ have to be tested by a second journey of faith, a journey analogous to Abraham’s journey to the land of Moriah?

Perhaps the better question is, Can a person’s faith that is counted to the person has righteousness save the person who remains an adulterer, a murderer, a liar, a thief, an idolater—or can a person who believes that Jesus is Lord continue as an idolater? And the answer was given by John: No! no one born of God can continue to actively transgress the commandments, and this includes the Sabbath commandment.

Faith is belief, and belief is by faith. And if a Christian truly believes God, the Christian will strive to walk as Jesus walked, meaning that the Christian will strive to keep the commandments. But keeping the commandments without belief that Jesus is Lord and that the Father raised Jesus from the dead is worthless.

Keeping the commandments has a value in and of itself. No marriage was every harmed by neither spouse committing adultery. No harm is done by the person who does no murder. No lie is told by the person who will not bear false witness. And so on. But spiritually, keeping the commandments—the reasonable expectation of all humankind according to Paul’s gospel—will not gain a person entrance into heaven ... not keeping the commandments, however, will keep a person out of heaven; for again, the person not under the law who sins (who transgresses the commandments) will perish without being under the law according to Paul’s gospel (Rom 2:12).

Ask yourself, as a Christian are you certain that you will go to heaven even though you actively practice transgressing the commandments? On what do you base this certainty? No Muslim is certain that he or she will go to heaven unless the Muslim dies in *jihad*, the struggle, and no Christian should be so foolish as to think that he or she will escape the lake of fire by openly flaunting his or her transgressions of the law.

The preaching of the gospel—Paul’s gospel—of which I’m not ashamed will have every intentional sinner under the law or not under the law perishing in the

lake of fire. Salvation is through belief, with this belief producing works, that of choosing to keep the commandments. Salvation isn't through perfection in keeping the law, but through the heartfelt desire to keep it, with the Christian acting on this desire out of love for the Father and the Son. Thus, the Christian who mocks Christ Jesus by the Christian choosing to walk as a Gentile, a person of this world, has already condemned him or herself to the lake of fire according to Paul's gospel.

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