

Galatians - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 5, Life-Works (6:10)

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" Gal. 6:10.

If aught could enhance the value of these lovely words, it would be the fact of their being found at the close of the Epistle to the Galatians. In the progress of this very remarkable writing, the inspired apostle cuts up by the roots the entire system of legal righteousness. He proves, in the most unanswerable way, that by works of law, of any sort, moral or ceremonial, no man can be justified in the sight of God. He declares that believers are not under law, in any way whatever, either for life, for justification, or for walk—that if we are under law, we must give up Christ; we must give up the Spirit of God; we must give up faith; we must give up the promises. In short, if we take up legal ground in any shape whatever, we must give up Christianity and lie under the actual curse of God.

We do not attempt to quote the passages, or to go into this side of the question at all, just now. We merely call the earnest attention of the christian reader to the golden words which stand at the head of this brief article—words which, we cannot but feel, come in with incomparable beauty and peculiar moral force at the close of an epistle in which all human righteousness is withered up and flung to the winds. It is always needful to take in both sides of a subject. We are all so terribly prone to one-sidedness, that it is morally healthful for us to have our hearts brought under the full action of all truth. It is alas! possible for grace itself to be abused; and we may sometimes forget that, while we are justified in the sight of God only by faith, yet our faith must be evidenced by works. We have, all of us, to bear in mind that while law-works are denounced and demolished, in the most unqualified manner, in manifold parts of holy scripture, yet that life-works are diligently and constantly maintained and insisted upon.

Yes, beloved christian reader, we have to bend our earnest attention to this. If we profess to have life, this life must express itself in something more tangible and forcible than mere words or empty lip profession. It is quite true that law cannot give life, and hence it cannot produce life-works. Not a single cluster of living fruit ever was, or ever will be, culled from the tree of legality. Law can only produce "dead works" from which we need to have the conscience purged just as much as from "wicked works."

All this is most true. It is demonstrated in the pages of inspiration beyond all possibility of question or demur. But then there must be life-works, or else there is no life. Of what possible use is it to profess to have eternal life; to talk about faith; to advocate the doctrines of grace, while, at the same time, the entire life, the whole practical career is marked by selfishness in every shape and form? "Whoso," says the blessed apostle John, "hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" So also the apostle James puts a very wholesome question to our hearts, "What cloth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked or destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

Here we have life-works insisted upon in a way which ought to speak home, in the most solemn and forcible way to our hearts. There is an appalling amount of empty profession—shallow, powerless, worthless talk in our midst. We have a wonderfully clear gospel—thanks be to God for it! We see very distinctly that salvation is by grace, through faith, not by works of righteousness, nor by works of law.

Blessedly true! But when people are saved, ought they not to live as such? Ought not the new life to come out in fruits? It must come out if it be in; and if it does not come out, it is not there. Mark what the apostle Paul says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." Here we have what we may call the upper side of this great practical question.

But there is another side to which every true, earnest Christian will delight to give his attention. The apostle goes on to say, "We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before prepared that we should walk in them."

Here we have the whole subject fully and clearly before us. God has created us to walk in a path of good works, and He has prepared the path of good works for us to walk in. It is all of God, from first to last, all through grace, and all by faith. Thanks and praise be to God that it is so! But, let us remember that it is utterly vain to talk about grace and faith, and eternal life, if the "good works" are not forthcoming. It is useless to boast of our high truth, our deep, varied, and extensive acquaintance with scripture, our correct position, our having come out from this, that, and the other, if our feet are not found treading that "path of good works which God hath before prepared" for us. God looks for reality. He is not satisfied with mere words of high profession. He says to us, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." He, blessed be His name, did not love us in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth; and He looks for a response from us—a response clear, full, and distinct—a response coming out in a life of good works—a life yielding mellow clusters of those "fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

Beloved christian reader, do you not consider it to be our bounden duty, to apply our hearts to this weighty subject? Ought we not diligently to seek to promote love and good works? And how can this be most effectually accomplished? Surely by walking in love ourselves, and faithfully treading the path of good works in our own private life. For ourselves, we confess we are thoroughly sick of hollow profession. High truth on the lips and low practice in daily life, is one of the crying evils of this our day. We talk of grace; but fail in common righteousness—fail in the plainest moral duties, in our daily private life. We boast of our "position" and our "standing;" but we are deplorably lax as to our condition and state.

May the Lord, in His infinite goodness, stir up all our hearts to more thorough earnestness in the pursuit of good works, so that we may more fully adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things!

Short Papers, Dead to the Law (2:19)

“ For I through law, am dead to law, that I might live to God”—(Gal. 2:19.) This is a weighty word, and much needed just now. The spiritual apprehension of the truth here set forth will preserve the soul from two errors which are very rife in the professing church, namely, legality, on the one hand, and licentiousness on the other. Were we to compare these two evils—were we compelled to choose between them, we should, undoubtedly, prefer the former. We should much rather see a man under the authority of the law of Moses, than one living in lawlessness and self-indulgence. Of course, we know that neither is right, and that Christianity gives us something quite different; but we have much more respect for a man who, seeing nothing beyond Moses, and regarding the law of Moses as the only divine standard by which his conduct is to be regulated, bows down, in a spirit of reverence to its authority—than for one who seeks to get rid of that law only that he may please himself. Thank God, the truth of the gospel gives us the divine remedy for both cases. But how? Does it teach us that the law is dead? Nay! What then? It teaches that the believer is dead. “I through law am dead to law.” And to what end? That I may please myself? That I may seek my own profit and pleasure? By no means; but “ that I may live to God.”

Here lies the grand and all-important truth—a truth lying at the very base of the entire christian system, and without which we can have no just sense of what Christianity is at all. So also, in Rom. 7 we read, “ Wherefore, my brethren, ye also have become dead to the law (not the law is dead) by the body of Christ, in order that ye may be to another (not to yourselves, but) even to him that was raised from the dead, that ye might bring forth fruit unto God.” (v. 4.) And again, “But now ye are delivered from the law, being dead to that wherein ye were held, that ye might serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter.” (v. 6.)¹ Mark, it is that we may serve, not that we may please ourselves. We have been delivered from the intolerable yoke of Moses, that we may wear the “ easy yoke of Christ,” and not that we may give a loose run to nature.

There is something perfectly shocking to a serious mind, in the thought of men appealing to certain principles of the gospel, in order to establish a plea for the indulgence of the flesh. They want to fling aside the authority of Moses, not that they may enjoy the authority of Christ, but merely to indulge self. But it is vain. It cannot be done with any shadow of truth, for it is never said in scripture that the law is dead or abrogated; but it is said, and urged repeatedly, that the believer is dead to the law, and dead to sin, in order that he may taste the sweetness of living unto God, of having his fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

We earnestly commend this weighty subject to the attention of the reader. He will find it fully unfolded in Rom. 4 and v., Gal. 3 and iv. A right understanding of it will solve a thousand difficulties, and answer a thousand questions; and, not only so, but deliver the soul from a vast mass of error and confusion. May God give His own word power over the heart and conscience!

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