

Salvation—Justification: Faith (11th)

(In this podcast we are concluding the study of faith as a principle regarding the doctrine of justification.)

In previous podcasts we quoted William Jeyes Styles (1842-1914), a Strict and Particular Baptist in England, wherein he stated, *first* faith is to be regarded as a *principle* that is imparted by the Holy Spirit to every regenerated person, and *secondly* it is an *act* which arises from the existence of this principle and which characterizes the true children of God. On the other hand, men like Albert Barnes denied that faith is a principle. In short he said, “Faith is always an act of the mind. It is not a created essence which is placed within the mind. It is not a substance created independently of the soul, and placed within it by almighty power. It is not a *principle*, for the expression *a principle of faith* is as unmeaning as a principle of joy, or a principle of sorrow, or a principle of remorse. God promises; the man believes; and this is the whole of it.” Note that he said that faith “is not a created essence ... placed within the mind. It is not a substance created ... and placed within” the soul “by almighty power.” However, Ephesians 2:8 plainly says that faith is “the gift of God”; that is, the gift of the Almighty power of God. Barnes said that faith “is always an act of the mind. ... God promises; the man believes; and this is the whole of it.” Galatians 5:22 says that faith is a fruit of the Spirit of God. Furthermore, we quoted *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary*, William R. Newell, A. T. Robertson, and Robert Hawker from their comments on Romans 3:27 whereby they declared that faith is a principle. Many other men could be quoted showing that they too maintained that faith is a principle or law, but as stated in our previous podcast, I will quote from the writings of Israel Atkinson (1817-1881), an English Baptist, concerning the distinction between the law (or principle) of works and the law (or principle) of faith. He wrote rather extensively of this and we can only supply a sample from pages 10-15 of his rich book entitled *Faith* as printed in 1877. I apologize for the length of this quote, but I believe it is essential to aid in better understanding the difference between the two laws or principles and that our justification is a free gift from God without any condition on the part of man and that this free gift is the Person and work of Christ.

Paul, treating of the justification of a sinner by “the righteousness of God without the law,” says, “Where is boasting, then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith.” Rom. iii. 27. Here two laws are spoken of in direct and precise terms; and it may be observed that, according to one or the other of these laws, every known relation existing between the Creator and the creature, or the Divine Sovereign and the subject, has been established; and that according to one or the other of these, all affairs between a man and his Maker, in every connection between them, are conducted. Between God and man there exists no third law of living. If, then, these laws embrace matters of so high consideration, it will be obvious that to understand their nature, and to know in what provinces they are in force, are sciences of which no man ought to be ignorant, and in which the interpreter of Scripture, and teacher of religion, especially, should be thoroughly instructed.

Moreover, it should be observed that these two laws bear their designation in no figurative sense. Indeed, so far as we know, the term, law of works, has received no figurative interpretation; yet it is very questionable whether, generally, its meaning is correctly understood. But the term, law of faith has presented some difficulty to interpreters, and there is a considerable divergence of opinion about its meaning. Some seem to fix on belief as the sense to be understood, and explain the word “law” as a catachresis [the use of a word in a way that is not correct—JKB] employed in allusion to the law of works. Others prefer the doctrine of the gospel. But faith in this term is to be understood neither as the act of believing nor the doctrine of the

gospel, but simply, as it is put, a law. Paul is speaking of boasting being excluded in reference to a doctrine of the gospel by some law. Boasting is not excluded, according to what he here teaches, concerning this doctrine by the whole system, considered as doctrine, of which it forms a part; but by a certain law, the law of faith, which while permeating all the doctrines of the gospel, is distinct from them. Alford, expounding the place, with a rare and refreshing discrimination, says, "By what law (is it excluded? Is it by that) of works? No; but by the law (*norma*, the rule) of faith. The contrast is not between the law and the gospel, as two dispensations, but between the law of works and the law of faith, whether found under the law or gospel, or (if the case admitted) anywhere else."

These two laws are wholly diverse from and irreconcilably antagonistic to each other. Whereinsoever one is in force the other is utterly excluded. One person may be under both these laws in different respects at the same time, but he cannot be under the authority and guidance of both in relation to the same object. Neither of these laws stands for any particular code. Each of them embodies and represents a distinguished principle.

Between God and man the law of works will be the principle, according to which the duty of the creature to the Creator, or of the subject to the Sovereign, is to be discharged. On this matter the minds of men seem much confused. Many appear to have no other notion of the law of works than that it is the law of ten commandments recorded in the twentieth chapter of Exodus. It should be understood, if the repetition may be pardoned, that the law of works is not a commandment, nor a code of commandments which determines a duty, but the principle according to which the precepts and prohibitions enjoined are to be kept. That principle is, that a due is owed by the subject to the Sovereign, that this due is to be rendered by the discharge of a defined duty, and that when this is performed, a work is done by which, economically, a title is acquired to a reward of debt.

The nature of this law is precisely interpreted by the words of the Lord Jesus to the lawyer, "This do, and thou shalt live," Luke x. 27. ...

The law of faith, as this is established between the divine Sovereign and his subject, is just the principle according to which absolute favour is extended by the Lord of all, and is received by his servants; and this will be the mode of living in every relation of grace which may ever subsist between them. It simply represents, and embodies in itself, the principle of giving and receiving. In every case of a due from the giver and a duty from the receiver, this order of things cannot obtain; for, so to speak, were the gift a due, it would cease to be a gift, for it would be wanting of the requisite freeness to make it one; and were the receiving a duty, it would, in like manner, no longer be a free receiving. Therefore this law can have no place, and cannot be the mode of living between God and man, about any matter in any economy wherein the Sovereign claims a right, and the subject discharges a duty in obedience to a demand made on him. In every economy in which the law of faith is in force, there will be, indeed, divine claims advanced and enforced, and, consequently, duties to be discharged; but not in respect to the favours given and received according to this law.

Anything about which God claims a right, and man acknowledges a due, and for which man discharges a duty and God accepts an obedience, can never find a place under this order of things. Nothing but absolute favour, freely giving and freely receiving, can be known here. Whatever may be required economically, on the one hand in order to the giving, and on the other in order to the realization and enjoyment of anything given under the law of faith, grace must provide. Nothing can be suspended on any legal condition to be found in, or on any duty to be performed by, the persons to be advantaged by the establishment of this law of living between them and God. Under this law there is no promise of reward for obedience, nor threatening of penalty for disobedience. If a duty were imposed, and a reward were promised to obedience, and a penalty

threatened to disobedience, dutifulness must be vindicated and rewarded as a matter of right, and undutifulness must be condemned and punished as a matter of justice; but then, as must be evident, these are conditions that, in their very nature, are wholly opposed to, and utterly inconsistent with, the law of faith. Can any man want the perspicacity [shrewdness—JKB] to see that whereinsoever a legal right is claimed, and a due is acknowledged, and a duty is performed, and an obedience is accepted, in order to the enjoyment of any good [such as faith exercised as a means for justification—JKB], that, not the law of faith, but the law of works is in force? Can any man fail to see that whereinsoever the discharge of a duty is at all a factor of the enjoyment of any blessing, that this is a condition which must, in the very nature of things, wholly exclude grace and faith? Yet, axiomatic as the proposition is, that duty and faith respecting the same object exclude each other, few persons seem to apprehend this simple truth. Should this truth come to be universally understood, a veritable revolution in theological teaching and ministerial utterance must be the result to an almost equal extent. But the change would be a real reformation. May it come!

In sum, then, the law of works will be the governing principle, or mode of living, in some relation subsisting between God and man. The relation may be a natural one, as between the Creator and the creature; or it may be an economical one, as between the Sovereign and the subject. But whatever the relation may be wherein the law of works obtains, the essential elements of this governing principle will be a right claimed on God's part according to plain precept, and a due acknowledged on man's. In the event of a due obedience being rendered, a title to vindication and acceptance will be acquired; and in case of disobedience, a penalty of condemnation and punishment will be deserved. On the other hand, the law of faith, will be the governing principle established in some connection subsisting between the Sovereign and the subject, that originated and is continued from pure favour. All the advantages arising out of this relation will be free gifts, and everything belonging thereto will bear on it the impress of grace. While on the one hand the law of works knows of no grace; on the other hand, the law of faith knows of nothing else. While under that a claim is made; under this a promise is given. While where that holds sway, a duty is to be done; where this obtains, a gift is to be accepted. While under that, a dutiful subject will be vindicated; under this, a transgressor will be justified. While under the former, disobedience will be punished; under the latter, there is no precept to keep or to break, all being pure promise and grace; and, therefore, no vindication and acceptance is to be looked for on the ground of dutifulness, and no condemnation and punishment to be dreaded for disobedience.

Please allow me to say again that justification by faith is simply being justified by the sovereign grace of God as worked out in the Person and work of Christ. Our time has come to an end for today. Farewell.