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MINISTRIES

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The Righteous Shall Live By Faith

Some suggest that Acts 13:39 implies that the law is done away with and only NOW can one be justified by faith. Let's look at this verse together, shall we?

Acts 13:39 (NKJV)

Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.

The ESV reads similarly....

Acts 13:39 (ESV)

and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the Law of Moses.

To set the stage for proper interpretation of this verse, there are two questions that should be asked.

The first question needing to be asked is "Could one EVER be justified by the law?"

And secondly, "Was faith ever required before Christ?"

Galatians 3:11

Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."

According to Paul, no one is justified before God by keeping the law. In support of this, Paul cites the Old Testament, which states, "The righteous shall live by faith."

More on that in a minute. But first, Paul states something similar in Romans.

Romans 1:17

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

“The righteous will live by faith.” Again, an Old Testament quote.

So, is the idea of the righteous living by faith a New Testament or Old Testament concept?

Some might be surprised to learn that these verses in Galatians and Romans are actually quoting from Habakkuk.

Habakkuk 2:4

“...“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, **but the righteous shall live by his faith**“

We know that everything Paul taught had to line up with the Old Testament.

How do we know that?

...even the Bereans tested him to the Scriptures.

Acts 17:11

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Not only that, but Paul also would have had to pass the Deuteronomy 13 test, which states that anyone who leads others away from obedience to God’s commandments is a false prophet. See our teaching, “[The Deuteronomy 13 Test](#)” for more information.

So, everything Paul said had to also be in agreement with how those in Old Testament would have lived.

So when he said...

Romans 3:28

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

...we understand that this also was the fact for those living in the Old Testament.

This is why Paul also said just a few verses later...

Romans 3:31

Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! **On the contrary, we uphold the law.**

Obedying God’s law NEVER justified anyone. However, living out the law plainly demonstrated one’s love and obedience towards the Father.

It has ALWAYS been about faith. Always. Let’s read Romans 1:17 again.

Romans 1:17

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith.

After looking at Romans 1:17, let's consider what the author of Hebrews says about the gospel:

Hebrews 4:2

For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

It must be noted that the author is referring to those that Moses led out of Egypt but who did not enter the Promised Land. And what gospel did we hear... that they also heard?

It was that ALL, Israelite and foreigner, could walk in His covenant. But as this verse in Hebrews says, they had to combine it with faith.

But why would that matter? This is the Old Testament we're talking about...

...Because faith without works is dead, as James said (James 2:14-26).

For additional context, let's review some verses just before what we read in Hebrews 4.

Hebrews 3:15-19

As it is said,

"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

For who were those **who heard and yet rebelled**? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who **sinned**, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were **disobedient**? So we see that they were unable to enter because of **unbelief**.

Did you see it?

The author of Hebrews is equating disobedience with unbelief.

It's interesting to note that just 7 Chapters later in Hebrews 11 we read about those righteous people who walked BY FAITH... in the OLD TESTAMENT. This particular chapter is often referred to as "The Hall of Faith".

Consider...

Hebrews 11:13

These all died in faith...

Were not these people walking in the Old Covenant? Yet they were living by faith. As Hebrews chapter 4:2 explicitly states, faith has always been required for salvation.

In addition to being cited in Galatians and Romans, Habakkuk 2:4 is also cited in Hebrews chapter 10.

It's a direct reference to the time of the antichrist. Starting with this quote from Habakkuk, let's read the verses that follow as well as continuing on into the "Hall of Faith" chapter.

Hebrews 10:37-11:2

For, "Yet a little while,
and the coming one will come and will not delay;
but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him."

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, **but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.** Now **faith** is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. **For by it the people of old received their commendation.**

How often has this verse been overlooked?

The righteous HAVE and WILL live by faith while pursuing God's perfect Law out of love and obedience.

In context and through some analysis, it appears Paul and Barnabus are addressing a certain group in Acts 13:39.

We find that Acts 13:39 is referencing the error of a particular doctrine found in the first century. Acts 13:39 is referencing those who were trying to be justified by the Law FOR their salvation.

There are several things that point to this.

For example, they were in Galatia...and the letter of the Galatians was all about not obeying the law of God for justification unto salvation. In fact, verse 43 seems to emphasize a message of grace (verses salvation via Moses - v. 39).

In this message Paul and Barnabus presented, we see that many of the Jews were riled up. After Paul left, it does appear that the Jews harboring a false idea of the means of salvation continued to put pressure on those in Galatia, leading to the letter to the Galatians later...and even the problem found in Acts 15, which also seemed to have originated in Galatia.

Acts 13:39 really leads into the debate found in Acts 15 and presents the same message, which teaches that one should not obey the law of God to justify salvation, but we obey the law of God as the evidence of our faith. For more on that, we would suggest our teaching "[Acts 15: Obedience or Legalism](#)."

The fact remains—as it always has—that no one could EVER be justified by the law. Only through faith in Christ, the Word of God, is one justified ... and that faith is evidenced by our obedience to that same word of God. The law of God, as written by Moses, could not free us from our sin. Grace through Messiah Yeshua in our faith is the only means to free us from sin. However, the law of God defines sin (1 John 3:4) and we should not want to sin, thus, we should still uphold the law in our faith. This of course, agrees with Paul, as Paul said:

Romans 3:31

Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! **On the contrary, we uphold the law.**

For more on this topic, we would recommend our teaching “[Justification](#).”

We hope you have enjoyed this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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