

CHRIST REPLACING THE LAW AS REVEALED IN GALATIANS

BY DAVID YOON

The truth concerning justification by faith ignited the Reformation and altered the course of history. Although Martin Luther initially discovered this revelation in Romans 1:17 (“The righteous shall have life and live by faith”), it was the Epistle to the Galatians that became his favorite book and the rallying cry of the Reformation. Luther regarded this Epistle with deep affection: “The Epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine [my wife]” (*Commentary* iii). Since the Reformation the truth regarding justification by faith alone has freed innumerable believers from the bondage of justification by works. Consequently, among Reformation scholars Galatians has been acclaimed as “the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation” (Tenney 15) as well as “the Magna Carta of Christian liberty” (Moody 118).

Although the truth concerning justification by faith is a steadfast foundation of God’s full salvation, a decided majority of believers regrettably fall short of realizing that they need to advance beyond this rudimentary matter (Heb. 6:1). The New Testament clearly teaches that God’s complete salvation in the life of His Son is “much more” than the judicial redemption accomplished by His death (Rom. 5:10); that is, God’s organic salvation far surpasses judicial redemption in both power and scope. Yet God’s full salvation is grossly neglected in the many commentaries on Galatians, which exalt justification by faith as the central theme of this Epistle. As George R. Brunk III observes,

Since the Reformation, the interpretation of Galatians has largely been dominated by mainline Protestant perspectives. The doctrine of justification by faith has been seen as the central and nearly exclusive theme...Until recent decades, even groups whose theological stance and emphases differ from the mainline Protestant genre have generally accepted this way of understanding the letter. (18)

For example, in the *Ryrie Study Bible*, Charles Caldwell Ryrie speaks of justification by faith as “the theme” of Galatians and asserts that Galatians is structured according to this theme: justification by faith is “defended” in chapters 1 and 2, “explained” in chapters 3 and 4, and “applied” in chapters 5 and 6 (1863-1864). In *Galatians: The Wondrous Grace of God*, John F. MacArthur similarly states that “the central theme of Galatians (like that of Romans) is justification by faith”; “Paul defends that doctrine (the heart of the gospel) both in its theological (chs. 3 and 4) and practical (chs. 5 and 6) ramifications” (3). Regrettably, these expositors’ preoccupation with justification by faith hinders them from seeing the focal point not only of this Epistle but also of the entire New Testament: the all-inclusive Christ, the centrality and universality of God’s economy (Col. 1:25-27; Eph. 3:8-11).

The apostle Paul was entrusted with the stewardship of the grace of God to “announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel and to enlighten all that