The Subtle Nature of Righteousness by Works

There is popular saying, “God helps those who help themselves”. Do you believe it?

A serious question is, Do you really know your beliefs? The majority of our beliefs are in the unconscious memory, hard-wired into our programming from babyhood. What really is your deep seated belief regarding the doctrine of Righteousness by faith?

Today we will look at the subtle nature of righteousness by works. We will examine this in light of three phases of Paul’s life and ministry.

1. We will explore Paul’s experience as a Pharisee in the Jewish religion.
2. We will then see a tectonic shift in his experience as he became a christian.
3. We will then look at how subtle righteousness by works really is, creating serious challenges for even Paul.

We will begin with Paul before Agrippa. Notice his testimony of himself.

Acts 26: 4, 5

The most straitest sect. This is a double superlative. This emphasis was necessary to aptly represent Paul’s experience as a Pharisee. Notice Jesus’ projection of a Pharisee.

Luk 18:10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.
Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are,* extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

This was Saul before he became Paul. He continued speaking to Agrippa.

Acts 26: 9-11

But Paul was delivered! If God was able to rescued Saul the destroyer of the church and transformed him into Paul the greatest apostle ever, He is also able to deliver you and me from our sin and self-righteousness.

Let’s see Paul’s account of his transformation from a bigoted righteousness by works Pharisee to a champion for righteousness by faith and apostle of Jesus.

Philippians 3: 4-10

One point to consider here is that if you don’t know Christ, your identity with any organizational structure would account to nothing more than a means by which you would persecute others who you think present a threat to your organization.

If you don’t know Christ, all the zeal you have for God would be destructive and not productive to His cause.

If you don't know Christ, all the righteousness that you have will be filthy rags. All your right doing will be wrong behavior in God's sight.

Our primary consideration is that we know God as He is in Christ. The knowledge of God as revealed in Christ, is the knowledge that all those who are saved must have.

Hence, Paul's Idea of Salvation and his object of loyalty changed.

Rom 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:
Rom 5:2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

- If you do not have peace, then you are not living a life of justification.
- If you do not have peace, then you are not exercising faith in God's ability to save.
- If you do not have peace, then you have not found access into His grace.

Faith is believing God's word, expecting that word to do exactly what is say. This is the only way we can have peace, justification, and joy unspeakable. Paul continues…

Romans 10: 1-4

Rom 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
Rom 10:10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Paul is saying that salvation is as easy as believing God's word. Confessing with our mouth and believing in our heart the Lord Jesus Christ and we are saved. He says,

Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:
Eph 2:9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.
Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

The Subtle doctrine of Righteousness by Works again raises its ugly head.

Act 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said,* Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

These religious leaders wanted to ensure that things remain orderly in the church. They wanted purity in the Church to remained. They had a zeal for the sanctity of God's religious services. Therefore, they implemented safeguards. Not only faith in Jesus, but there is something more that has to be done. Circumcision and keeping the law of Moses. Paul chided with the Galatians over this said false Gospel.

Gal 1:6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:
Gal 1:7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

Gal 3:1 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

The brethren decided to hold a Conference on the issue of salvation.

Act 15:2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

Peter's testimony settled the issue, but James had a different idea.

Acts 15: 6-20

This was James' conclusion. God made no difference. James did. Two gospels came out of Acts 15, one for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. Besides, certain dietary laws were mandated to be observed. This conclusion influenced the Jews attitude to Gentiles at the same table. Notice what Peter said to Cornelius and his household.

Act 10:28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

In other words, God said that we should not discriminate against any because of their customs and practices, if there is no violation to the commandment of Love.

- How will we relate if we go to a home of a deceased person and they believe that the person dies and goes directly to heaven?
- How will we relate if a person comes to our church dressed according to the world?
- How will we relate if we are invited guests at a feast, given opportunity to speak to those in attendance and a big pig is on the table, ready to be consumed?

Now, we do not believe the typical feasts are mandated to be kept by God's people at this time. If a person teaches that those days should be kept, as a gospel imperative, this is called righteousness by works. On the other hand, if we preach that those days must not be kept, making that prohibition a gospel imperative, this is also righteousness by works. Paul says we must all be fully persuaded in our own minds.

Rom 14:5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike.* Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.
Rom 14:6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it.* He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he

giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

But he chided with the Galatians for reverting to keeping days.

Gal 4:8 Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.
Gal 4:9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?
Gal 4:10 Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

Paul's understand was that whether or not we circumcise, keep feast days, or any such thing, it does not in any way affect our salvation.

Galatians 5:1-6

We know that keeping Jewish feast days are not here or there. If we keep them for salvation we have fallen short of grace. But if we decide not to keep them to secure our salvation, we again have fallen short of grace. What about pagan feast days like Christmas, Easter, Valentine, etc.?

As long as we believe that any action contributes in any way to our salvation, it is called righteousness by Works. Even if the action is to desist from doing something that in itself is not good or bad, like circumcision.

Many reformers fell into this trap of the enemy and sought to forbid those things that God has not forbidden. Hence, they will eventually enjoin what God has not enjoined.

Ultimately, there is only one thing we must be sure to do. Solomon says,

Ecc 12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man.
Ecc 12:14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil.

1Co 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

Conclusion

1. Zeal does not constitute righteousness.
2. We have to count all thing lost for Christ.
3. Righteousness by works is so subtle that it can leak its way into our faith unwittingly as in the case of the early disciples.