

Sermons through

Romans

Do and Live?

Romans 10:5

With Study Questions

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For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, “*The man who does those things shall live by them*” (Romans 10:5).

Introduction

In the above passage, the Apostle Paul brings cites an Old Testament passage that had been twisted beyond recognition by the religious community of his day. There may be nothing worse than bad religion. And the worst religion is that which most closely resembles and recites the language of that which is true. I often myself conflicted regarding which is more dangerous—benign secular entertainment or heretical “Christian” entertainment.

In Paul’s great love and desire that his fellow Israelite **“be saved” (Romans 10:1)**, he addresses their effort to **“establish their own righteousness”** rather than submitting to **“righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3)**. There may not be a greater error in all of Scripture (fig leaves, towers and hand-maidens) than trying to help God save sinners. It is the central pursuit of all false religions to somehow establish through human effort a way to sufficiently impress God that He may feel inclined to open the gates of glory.

Paul will draw upon a flagship passage in the Old Covenant (Leviticus 18:5) that can easily be misunderstood to teach that very thing.

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An Isolated Verse

We must beware of those who would develop a theology from one isolated verse. I cringe at times when I walk into a church and see the verse they have chosen to highlight as thematic of their doctrine. Hebrews 13:8 **“Jesus Christ is the**

same yesterday and today and forever” is often used in churches embracing sign gifts, continued revelation and faith-healers. Not to be distracted here, but not a one of those churches sacrificed a lamb. That Jesus is immutable, it does not follow that His mode of operation with humanity is also immutable—some things look forward, some look back and some are accomplished.

Paul and Moses

What we must resist here is that Paul is contradicting Moses—as if Moses had one method of salvation and Paul (or Jesus) is offering another. The Westminster Confession, VII, 5, under the context of the covenant of grace, teaches:

This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old testament.

Moses (or Abraham or Adam after the fall for that matter) was not presented with a different way of salvation. So what do we make of a verse like this...especially since it is referenced in other passages as that which was violated resulting in God's fury (Ezekiel 20:21).

In recounting the exodus we read:

Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.

¹¹ And I gave them My statutes and showed them

My judgments, ‘which, *if* a man does, he shall live by them (Ezekiel 20:10, 11).

There we have yet another reference to Leviticus 18:5; a “do this and live” presentation. Yet they failed miserably.

Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments, ‘which, *if* a man does, he shall live by them’; and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them (Ezekiel 20:13).

We see “**if a man does, he shall live by them**” once again. The Ezekiel 21 passage (along with Nehemiah 9) unveils God’s patience against Israel’s stiff-necked rebellion. They despised God’s judgments, refused to walk in His statutes and profaned His Sabbaths, yet God would repeatedly withdraw His hand of judgment for His own name’s sake (Ezekiel 21:22).

God would eventually give them up to “**statutes that were not good and judgments by which they could not live**” (Ezekiel 21:25). One of the greatest judgments of God is to let man go where his own heart desires.

Perhaps the acme of their rebellion culminated in causing their “**firstborn to pass through the fire**” (Ezekiel 21:25; Jeremiah 32:35)—the sacrificing of their children on the grill of the false god, Molech¹. Ezekiel then records “**In this too your fathers have blasphemed Me, by being unfaithful to Me**” (Ezekiel 21:27).

The Do and Live Principle

Incorporated throughout this entire passage is numerous references to Leviticus 18:5—this *do and live* principle. Never once should we understand this to mean that Moses was presenting God’s covenant people with works righteousness—the

¹ *Moloch*. According to the rabbins, his statue was of brass, with a human form, but the head of an ox; it was hollow within, and heated from below, and the children to be sacrificed were cast into its arms;

idea that they could, by their mere obedience to the law of God, find approval in heaven.

Paul will soon pit that inclination against how **“the righteousness of faith” speaks (Romans 10:6)**. The righteousness of faith has something else entirely to say. But let us not miss the value of keeping the “do this and live” principle, and why this should be ever before us. Jesus did not hesitate to bring the full force of this into His discussions.

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading *of it?*” ²⁷ So he answered and said, “ ‘*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,*’ and ‘*your neighbor as yourself.*’ ” ²⁸ And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live” (Luke 10:25-28).

Unlike the account with the rich young ruler, we don’t see the inevitable conclusion that **“with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:23)**. First and perhaps most importantly, we must appreciate what this principle accomplishes in our redemption. Paul had earlier in this epistle taught:

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20).

Paul makes a similar point in his epistle to the Galatians:

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.*” ¹¹ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God *is* evident, for **“*the just shall live***

by faith.” ¹² **Yet the law is not of faith, but “*the man who does them shall live by them*” (Galatians 3:10-12).**

Verse 10 in the Greek essentially teaches that one must **“continue”** *emmenei*—to remain in at all times. And what one must remain in at all times is **“all things (*pasin tois*) written in the book of the law, to do them.”** It was from the folly of this thinking that Paul himself had to be delivered. In his testimony he conveyed that prior to faith he viewed himself **“concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Philippians 3:6)**. Paul continues his testimony regarding the law in Romans 7:

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” ⁸ **But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. ⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. ¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me (Romans 7:7-10).**

But Paul does not blame the law. He sets the guilt squarely upon his own sin:

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure (Romans 7:13).

We cannot overestimate that devastation that befalls the covenant community and the surrounding un-evangelized cultures

when the law of God is extracted from equation. **“In order that sin might be shown to be sin”** may very well be the chief end of the law. Apart from that the world will see no need for a Savior and the church will begin to view the Christ and His cross as a helpful yet dispensable element of the faith. Do this and live becomes a critical message.

Responding to ‘Do and Live’

How does one respond to a ‘do and live’ proposition? Do we tell ourselves this is merely hypothetical—after all, no one can actually do it? Does the New Covenant church exercise a collective exhale in relief that we are no longer under that oppressive Mosaic Covenant? Calvin gives a noteworthy assessment of the ministry of Moses:

That he might also instill into the minds of the people the love of righteousness, and implant in them the hatred of iniquity, promises and threatening were added; which proposed rewards to the just, and denounced dreadful punishments on sinners. It was now the duty of the people to consider in how many ways they drew curses on themselves, and how far they were from deserving anything at God’s hands by their works, that being thus led to despair as to their own righteousness, they might flee to the haven of divine goodness, and so to Christ himself. This was the end or design of the Mosaic dispensation.²

It is not difficult to find the promises and threatening in that Old Testament. It was often quite dramatic—plagues, earthquakes, enslavement, etc. The design of the threats, promises and afflictions were that the people might learn to love righteousness, hate iniquity, consider their own failures and flee to Christ.

The big question for this morning is, to what extent does the law—the ‘do this and live’ principle accomplish this today among

² Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed., Ro 10:5). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

the people of God? Are the promises, threatenings, blessings and afflictions for another age entirely? Or can today's church, you and I, expect that in some manner we might expect that what happened to Israel with their disregard for God's law can happen to us? Does the fact that we are not under a covenant of works mean that we should not expect affliction from God due to our slothfulness and/or rebellion against His law or blessings from obedience?

I think those who (as I certainly do) seek to protest that doctrine of justification by faith alone, prove too much when they view grace as something which removes God responding in displeasure to human rebellion—even of true believers. You'll notice how similar the Westminster divines are to Calvin's view of the ministry of Moses in their explanation of the value of the law for the believer. Westminster Confession of Faith 19, 6 explains:

6. Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives; so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin, together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of his obedience. It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin: and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof:³ although not as due to them by the law as a

³ The proof text for this portion is Leviticus 18:5.

covenant of works. So as, a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and, not under grace.

Think perhaps of a collective of doctors who are told that if they practice their craft with perfection all of their patients will live. So they study and practice and seek to perfect their skills. They are told that if they 'do this' their patients 'will live'. They begin to discover that if they ignore the medical journals and practice medicine in an undisciplined and sloppy way their patients remain sick and infirmed—disease spreads and their utter disregard for the disciplines of their profession brings reproach upon them.

Yet if they seek to walk faithfully and in accord with the statutes of their field, patients tend to live longer and feel better—disease is held at bay and they find favor among the sick who seek to enter their communities for help. They would not say 'do this and live' belongs to another dispensation. They would see evidence that 'do this and live' is legitimate.

Yet there remains a problem—their patients eventually die. These physicians have come to realize the limitations of their skills against human disease. This is not an argument against 'do this and live'. The greater the physician the clearer it becomes to him that the problem is not the medical journal; the problem is fallen humanity. This is a discovery that the rebels who follow **“statutes that were not good and judgments by which they could not live” (Ezekiel 21:25)** will never make. The fool will establish another goal or seek another answer.

But the wise man, through his efforts of obedience, will become acutely aware of his limitations and by the grace of God flee to the only Physician who can and will provide eternal healing.

Questions for Study

- 1 What is the worst religion? Explain (page 2).
- 2 What was the Apostle Paul's disposition toward his fellow Israelite? What was their great error (page 2)?
- 3 Why is it dangerous to develop an entire theology on one isolated verse (pages 2, 3)?
- 4 Did Paul contradict Moses? Explain (page 3).
- 5 Does the Old Covenant present grace of works/law? Explain (page 3)?
- 6 Was Moses encouraging his followers to seek to reach heaven by obeying the law or the 'do and live' principle (pages 4, 5)?
- 7 How does the law work toward our redemption (pages 4-6)?

- 8 How should we respond to the 'do and live' proposition (pages 6, 7)?
- 9 Discuss the promises, threatenings, blessings and afflictions associated with obedience or disobedience to the law. Does this mean we are still under the law (pages 7, 8)?
- 10 How far can obedience to the law take people (pages 8, 9)?