

The Lord Admonishes Those Who Seek Eternal Life by Performing Rituals, John 5:39-46; the Rabbis' False Gospel; Paul's Scholastic Background

John 5:39 - "You search the Scriptures because in them you assume that you have eternal life [**by observing their rituals**]; and these same Scriptures testify about Me."

2. This quote is taken from the Lord's response to the Jews who were offended that he healed a sick man on the Sabbath. Jesus told the man to get up off the ground and carry his pallet with him which the newly cured man did. The reaction from the Jews was not amazement at the fact the man, critically ill for 39 years, had been healed but that he was carrying his pallet on the Sabbath. The oral law insisted that to heal or carry something around on a Sabbath constituted work and thus was not permitted. The Lord, who wrote the Law, insisted that legalism invented restraints for Sabbath activities that were not intended by the Law.
3. The religious leaders knew the Law by heart and studied its writings continuously but were drawn to ritual as a source of eternal life rather than the Personality that the Law and its rituals revealed. As a result they were blinded by religion and because of extreme legalism were more interested in killing the One who healed a person on a Sabbath (*see* 5:18) than having joy over the miracle.
4. In order to straighten this crowd out the Lord gives them some face-to-face criticism about their blind loyalty to oral traditions instead of recognizing Him as the One the Law would reveal to them should they open their eyes to the truth.

John 5:40 - "... but you are **unwilling** [οὐ θέλω, *ou thelō*: based on emotional desires from devotion to religious propaganda] because of your emotions to come to Me that you might keep on having eternal life.

v. 41 - "I do not seize honor from men;

v. 42 - "But I Jesus know you that you do not have love toward God in you [**negative volition at God consciousness**].

John 5:43 - "I have come representing My Father and you do not seize Me [**negative volition**]. If another Jew comes performing good works in his own name [**approbation lust**], you will receive him.

v. 44 - "How can you believe when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that comes from God only?

v. 45 - "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, in whom you have confidence [ἐλπίζω, *elpizō*: translated "hope" but refers to the trust the Jews placed in Moses' Law for eternal life].

v. 46 - "For if you believed Moses, which you do not, you would believe Me, for Moses wrote about Me.

v. 47 - "But if you do not believe his writings, and you do not, how will you believe My words?"

5. Kittel concludes his comments on the Jewish concept of "hope" with the following paragraph:

Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2:528-29:

Recognizing the situation, the Rabbis took different steps to try to overcome their uncertainty of salvation. Thus (Rabbi) Aqiba (ben Joseph) hazarded the statement that one can be certain of God's good-pleasure in prayer. A related view was that one may draw conclusions as to the eternal destiny of a man from the manner of his death. The main attempt to overcome the uncertainty, however, was the so-called "theology of suffering." This tries to interpret the suffering of the righteous as a discipline which gives them the opportunity partially or even totally to pay the penalty in this life for the guilt which would otherwise have to be paid after death. To the forefront is a desire to reduce the number of offences and thus to give increasing preponderance to merits, so that the just God will finally have no option but to justify and to grant access to the Garden of Eden, as He naturally desires.

This shows us the basis of the lack of assurance amongst the Rabbis, namely, that they could not break free from themselves. Hope arises when man learns to see that he can do nothing for his own salvation, but that God can do everything and that the aim of God is to lead man to salvation, not by the way of attainment, but by a gift *sola gratia* [grace alone].

6. The idea held by some Protestants and most Catholics that man through man's efforts can acquire or confirm whether or not he is saved, has eternal life, or will go to heaven when he dies finds its origins in the legalistic interpretations of the Mosaic Law by Jewish rabbis.
7. Consequently, these pitiful deathbed confessions of doubt and dread by renowned rabbis are now the fate of far too many who view themselves as Christians.
8. The New Testament concept of "hope," or *ἐλπίς*, *elpis*, is the same as that understood by the classical writers: the idea involves not only the present but also the past and the future. Thinking centered on the past is memory and that focused on the future is hope.
9. Paul possessed the most advanced education among the New Testament writers, Luke, the physician, a distant second. His understanding of the classical writings as well as his academic background is instructional:
 - 1) Adolf Deissmann, a German New Testament scholar who lived from 1866 to 1937, discovered in the late nineteenth century through the examination of Greek inscriptions and papyri the New Testament language to be popular, this is, Koine rather than classical. His book *St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History* contains this quote: "Paul is spiritually the great power of the apostolic age. The historian, surveying the beginnings of Christianity, sees Paul as first after Jesus."
 - 2) Paul was born in Tarsus, a Roman colony whose residents had the full rights afforded all citizens of the Empire.
 - 3) Tarsus was one of the great seats of culture. Strabo says that "Tarsus surpassed all other universities, such as Alexandria and Athens, in the study of philosophy and educational literature in general. Its great preeminence consists in this, that the men of learning here are all natives."
 - 4) A long list of distinguished men flourished at Tarsus in Greek learning: philosophers—of the Academy, of the Epicurean and Stoic schools—poets, grammarians, and physicians.
 - 5) As a Roman citizen, Paul was an aristocrat. His knowledge of the Empire gave him his grasp of the problems of Christianity in relation to the Roman system and used many of its legal and military terms to teach Church Age doctrines.
 - 6) In the field of literary training Paul knew the classical writings and quotes them in several passages:

Menander \ma-nan'-der\ (342-292 BC Athenian dramatist): *Thais*:

1 Corinthians 15:33 - Do not be deceived: *"Bad company corrupts good morals."*

Aratus \a-rāt'-us\ (315-245 Greek physician and poet): *Phaenomena*:

Acts 17:28- [**Paul at Athens before the Epicurean & Stoic philosophers**] For in him we live and move about and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, *"For we too are his offspring."*

Epimenides \ep-i-men'-a-dēz\ (6th century BC):

Titus 1:12 - One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, *"Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."*

Aeschylus \es'-ka-las\ (525-456 BC Greek dramatist), *Agamemnon* and *Prometheus Bound*, **Euripides** \ū-rip'-a-dēz\ (484-406 BC Greek playwright) *The Bacchantes*, and **Pindar** \pin'-dar\ 522-438 BC Greek lyric poet) *Pythians*:

Acts 26:14 - When we had all fallen to the ground I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me? You are hurting yourself by *"kicking against the goads."*

- 7) In addition to these direct references, Paul's epistles are sprinkled with classical words or phrases. An example found in:

2 Corinthians 9:8 - God is able to make all grace to abound to you for the purpose that at all times having all self-sufficiency [**αὐτάρκεια, autarkeia**:] in all things you may super abound in every good work.