

Galatians 3:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

Analysis

And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. This verse states the fundamental incompatibility between Law and faith. 'The law is not of faith' (ho nomos ouk estin ek pisteōs, ὁ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως)—the Law does not operate on the faith-principle; it operates on a different principle entirely. The quote from Leviticus 18:5—'The man that doeth them shall live in them' (ho poiēsas auta zēsetai en autois, ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς)—reveals the Law's principle: *do* and live.

The participle 'doeth' (poiēsas, ποιήσας) is aorist, but the verb 'shall live' (zēsetai, ζήσεται) is future—the one who does the Law's commands will live. The Law promises life on condition of perfect obedience. This is the works-principle: life is earned by doing. Faith says 'believe and live' (v. 11); Law says 'do and live' (v. 12). These are mutually exclusive systems.

Paul's point: the Law cannot be fulfilled by faith because the Law demands works. The Law says nothing about believing; it says 'do.' Therefore, seeking justification through Law contradicts the faith-righteousness of verse 11. The tragedy: the Law's promise of life (Leviticus 18:5) is unattainable because no one perfectly 'does' the Law. Romans 10:5-13 develops this further—Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Historical Context

Leviticus 18:5 stands within the holiness code (Leviticus 17-26), commanding Israel to live by God's statutes and judgments as the basis for life in the Promised Land. Jewish interpretation saw this as the path to covenant blessing; Paul sees it as an unattainable standard that highlights the need for faith-righteousness. Romans 10:5 quotes this same verse, contrasting Law-righteousness (do and live) with faith-righteousness (believe and live). Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 21 also quotes Leviticus 18:5, lamenting Israel's failure to do the statutes—thus proving Paul's point: the Law's promise remains unfulfilled by works.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the Law's principle ('do and live') differ fundamentally from the gospel's principle ('believe and live')? Why are they incompatible?
2. What does it reveal about human nature that no one can fulfill Leviticus 18:5's promise of life through doing the Law?
3. In what ways might you be subtly operating on the 'do and live' principle in your relationship with God rather than 'believe and live'?

Interlinear Text

ὁ	δὲ	νόμος	οὐκ	ἔστιν	ἐκ	πίστεως	ἀλλ'	ὁ	ποιήσας
G3588	And	the law	not	is	of	faith	but	G3588	that doeth
	G1161	G3551	G3756	G2076	G1537	G4102	G235		G4160
αὐτοῖς	ἄνθρωπος	ζήσεται	ἐν	αὐτοῖς					
them	The man	shall live	in	them					
G846	G444	G2198	G1722	G846					

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 18:5 (Parallel theme): Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD.

Nehemiah 9:29 (Word): And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear.

Romans 4:14 (Faith): For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

Romans 4:16 (Faith): Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

Ezekiel 20:11 (Parallel theme): And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them.

Romans 11:6 (Parallel theme): And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

Matthew 19:17 (Word): And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

Ezekiel 20:13 (Parallel theme): But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments,

which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them.

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