

Galatians 3:1-2 “Works of Law vs. Grace through Faith”

GAL 3:1-5 “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing - if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?”

This section of Scripture is clearly making a distinction between walking in the Spirit and walking in the flesh, and the results of each. Paul can't believe that these people who claim to be Christians, (and by the very definition of that designation, are spiritual people), are now practicing a fleshly approach to a spiritual life.

Paul begins this section by calling them foolish. By today's standard a remark which might be taken as insensitive or rude. But this is not a statement which is either rude or uncalled for. The context makes it clear that these people are not thinking properly and therefore are in danger of misrepresenting our Lord and Savior and His gospel, which could have eternal consequences for those with whom they shared this false gospel.

And by the way, the word foolish here is not used in a way which attacks their intelligence. This doesn't mean they were stupid. Keep in mind that it was the apostle Paul himself who first shared the gospel with these people. He had taken great care to convey the truth to them in a way that was quite powerful.

And he would have made sure that they understood and accepted the gospel based on the facts of Scripture and history. As John MacArthur points out, “the believers in Galatia... simply failed to use their spiritual intelligence when faced by the unscriptural, gospel-destroying teaching of the Judaizers. They were not using their heads.”

It would be one thing if they had never been taught the truth. It would be one thing if they had never been exposed to the dangers of false teachings, but Paul constantly warned them of such things,

and so to blatantly go against the truth is foolish for a variety of reasons.

Now, the word foolish here in the Greek often conveys the idea of “a wrong attitude of heart, a lack of judgment.” (J. MacArthur)

And in the case of these Galatians they had a wrong attitude of heart about the law of Moses as the Judaizers were teaching the necessity of it for their salvation. This was a huge lack of judgment.

Paul had used this same word when addressing Timothy in regards to being content with what the Lord provides, as opposed to seeking wealth as an end in itself. Again, this is a comparison between the flesh and the spirit.

1TI 6:8-9 “But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.”

Jesus addressed this attitude of the heart as he spoke to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection. He had been discussing the events of His own crucifixion with these two men and they only saw the tragedy of the event instead of trying to understand the spiritual implications which were clearly taught in Scripture.

LUK 24:25-27 “He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

The issue here is what is spiritual and how must we use the spiritual means to grow and mature and not get caught up in the fleshly approach to life to the degree where we even abandon the very foundation of our salvation, which is where these Galatians were going.

We have the choice to either be wise as we use the spiritual means to grow, or we can be foolish as we abandon those means in favor of the wisdom of this world. It’s our choice.

And by the way, what this does is to put the responsibility back in the laps of believers instead of shifting the blame to something or someone else. Most of us remember the phrase Flip Wilson made

popular back in the 70's on his television show when one of his characters would come out and say, "the devil made me do it."

The irony here is that someone might make the case for that very thing as Paul continues in this verse by saying, "Who has bewitched you?"

Remember the television show Bewitched which portrayed a housewife named Samantha who was anything but ordinary, and yet who wanted to live a regular life without the benefit of her special powers? Does this sound like we're doing a Promo for Nick at Night?

Anyway, Samantha would invariably end up using her powers to change events or actually make people do things they wouldn't normally do. And so, you'd have people doing things against their wills in her neighborhood.

But when Paul uses the term bewitched here he's not talking about someone being put into some sort of trance and forced to do something against their will. The word in the original Greek is a word which means to fascinate in a deceptive way with the intent of leading some astray.

And so, what this suggests is that these Galatians had both the intelligence and the spiritual where-withal to discern right from wrong, but like that cobra who becomes obsessed with the moving flute, these people had become fascinated with a teaching that took them off track.

And so, instead of walking their Christian lives in the truth of God's word they had become more motivated by feeling over fact. Now, there's nothing wrong with feelings. God gave us feelings, and as we'll see, Paul appeals to their feelings and emotions later in our text. But when it comes to the basis of salvation and the way in which we honor God in our salvation, feelings have a tendency to cloud our spiritual reasoning when they rule our lives.

This is what has happened to these Galatians. They have become bewitched or charmed by these Judaizers who evidently were very convincing. And instead of standing on the foundation of their faith, who is Christ, they have been convinced that it must be Christ plus the law.

And here's where Paul appeals to their logic, not their feelings at the end of verse one. "Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified." The NASB puts it this way.

“...before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.”

Now, is Paul saying that before their very eyes they literally saw Jesus Christ hung on the cross for their redemption some 17 to 18 years earlier? Were they actually there? No.

This is an expression which demonstrates how they had been given the truth of Christ so convincingly that in their mind's eyes they saw it for what it was; the absolute truth. In fact, the word used for portrayed, or publicly portrayed, is the Greek word *prographo*. The suffix *grapho* is where we get our English word *graphic*, something that can be clearly seen.

In fact, this was “a word used of posting important official notices on a placard in the marketplace or other public locations for the citizens to read. Jesus Christ had been figuratively placarded before the Galatians by Paul himself for everyone to see clearly.” (John MacArthur)

This is why Paul is amazed at their foolishness and makes the comment that you guys must be charmed or hypnotized because no one in their right mind goes after such blatant falsehood when you've got the truth, unless you're bewitched.

And so, this is really a slap in their face when he says this because they would never want to be accused that someone has fooled them into believing something against their will, or that their minds were so weak that they could be swayed by such falsehood.

But the truth of the matter is that none of us are exempt from succumbing to falsehoods. Because unless we are grounded in the truth and walk in that truth we are susceptible to being blown about by every wind of doctrine that comes down the pike.

It amazes me when I talk with people who claim to be Christians how absolutely absurd some of their beliefs are. There are people for example who have called our church and wouldn't come out because we weren't using the King James Version of the bible.

Many of these people actually believe that the KJV is the inspired English translation of the bible in the same way that the first transcripts were inspired when Paul originally wrote them under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, according to them, until 1611, or thereabouts, no one had an English bible which could be reliable. No one in the

English speaking world had a bible that could be considered the true word of God. It took the Holy Spirit almost 1600 years to finally inspire, in the same way He inspired Paul, an English bible for the world.

It's utter foolishness. And yet it is that kind of foolishness which will keep some people from coming out to one of our services to sit under the teaching of the word of God. I've run into other people who believe that unless our services are in someone's home we're not really a church. I've also had just the opposite view that unless we're meeting in a regular church building with a steeple, we're not really a church.

There is so much foolishness in the world today, and yet, unfortunately, the church has got a huge corner of the market on that foolishness, and they end up living their lives under a lie because they've become fascinated, or charmed, or bewitched with teachings that tickle their ears.

Of course it's bad enough when such teachings move people to do and say things which are not in accord with God's word, but when those teachings actually change the gospel of Jesus Christ, as it did in Galatia and other parts of the world, then it becomes the height of foolishness, because as Paul has said earlier, there is only one gospel. All others lead to death.

He says to these Galatians, that just as if Christ's life were put on a placard in the public square, or for our contemporary culture, just as if Christ's life was on video tape for all to see, you have seen it in the way we've delivered it to you because it is truth we can testify to.

And now, to substitute that for a false gospel is foolishness. But notice how Paul adds that Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. This was always central to Paul's message of our Redeemer. In fact, he actually identifies the gospel of Jesus Christ as the message of the cross.

1CO 1:18 "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

This message of the cross of Christ permeated every aspect of Paul's life.

1CO 2:2 "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

Why is the crucifixion of Christ so important in our text? Well, what is the alternative to being saved according to the Judaizers? Well, they would certainly not deny the death of Christ for our sins, but they then add the law as a means of attaining this salvation.

But if it takes the death of the Son of God to accomplish our salvation, how then does anything that involves our participation in obtaining this salvation add to our redemption? In other words, if this new life comes from God who is Spirit, and who then became flesh, as the Son of God took on humanity, being born of a woman, how does anything outside of God add to our salvation? Isn't God's effort alone sufficient?

That would be like saying that what makes the Microsoft Company so unique are the 6th graders of this school who happen to use their computers. No. What makes Microsoft unique is Bill Gates and his staff and their genius. Neither you or I, simply as consumers, make Microsoft unique. We might add to their popularity by voting with our money for their products, but we didn't create their products.

And so, to say that simply because we want to take credit for accomplishing what they accomplished, it doesn't make it so. And in the same way, simply because we want to add something to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and make it look as though we play a role in our own redemption, it doesn't make it so.

In fact, God will not share His glory with anyone, especially when it comes to His very Son being sent into this world to die for our sins. If His death on the cross was not sufficient, which means that if we need to add something to His death, then He died in vain.

That's what we saw last week in our text.

GAL 2:21 "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

In other words, if there is some law, or even all the law, that could be used to attain our righteousness, then what would be the point for Jesus coming to die in the first place, since we already had the means to get to heaven in our own hands, the law?

But if Christ did in fact die in our place, then what that tells us is that no part of law was sufficient for our salvation, and now to add it after the fact, or after Christ's death, is only to insult the Savior who chose to suffer crucifixion for our salvation.

And then Paul asks this question.

GAL 3:2 “I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?”

In other words, did you become a Christian by the Spirit, who led you to faith in Christ, or by trying to work your way to heaven through a set of rules?

Now, this is a very important question because it forces these Galatians to choose between two options, not a third which is what the Judaizers were proposing. Remember, they were not denying that Christ died on the cross for their sins, but they were adding the law as a requirement to their salvation.

And so, there could conceivably be three choices as it relates to how people think we can be saved: Just Christ; just the law, or just Christ and the law.

Paul is making it clear that there are only two choices for these Galatians. And put in that light if they choose the law, they have essentially denied Jesus Christ, and yet they call themselves Christians. A Christian is a believer in Christ, not a believer in Christ and the law.

So, what must they do? They must choose between the free gift of grace or the bondage of the law. You would think this would be a no brainer and yet there are groups today who still insist on adding the law to the grace of Christ.

The Seventh Day Adventist church is a classic example of this. The Seventh Day is the Jewish Sabbath, or our Saturday. They teach that anyone who worships the Lord on Sunday, or what has become to be known from Scripture as the Lord’s day, cannot be true Christians.

They add to that that to be truly saved one must adhere to the biblical dietary laws, and they would even go a step further by requiring their members to be vegetarians. To be a member of the Seventh Day Adventist church you are also required to tithe to their church.

And by required I mean just that. You would have to give a statement of what you make and they will check that against what you give, and you had better come up with the right amount if you expect to be a member in good standing.

If this isn't the height of Phariseeism, and the height of adding to the gospel, I don't know what is. If our salvation is not based entirely and solely on the finished work of Christ on the cross to pay our debt to the Father, then we have embraced a gospel which is false, and by definition, a false gospel which will condemn us.

GAL 1:8 "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!"

So back to our text.

GAL 3:2 "I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?"

There's a lot of talk today about receiving the Spirit as though it doesn't happen at conversion, the moment we believed. The word receive here in our text is the Greek word *lambano* which means to take, and infers to take by force.

And by this it infers that the Holy Spirit is the One taking or grabbing a hold of us. This is the same word Jesus used after His resurrection when He came to His disciples, who at this point had not been indwelt with the Holy Spirit.

JOH 20:20-22 "After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

They didn't receive a part of the Spirit, but the entire person of the Spirit. They possessed all of the Spirit, and the Spirit of God had taken them in the sense that He sealed them as His own possession. This is why we have the Scriptures telling us that He has sealed us for the day of redemption.

Paul points this out when writing to the Ephesians.

EPH 1:13-14 "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory."

This is God's way of saying that once you have been sealed in Christ by faith in Him you have automatically received the Holy Spirit who did that sealing. In fact, if you do not have the Spirit of God, then you are not a Christian.

ROM 8:9 "..... And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."

When do we receive the Spirit of God? The moment we believe. In that moment we receive the Spirit, we are sealed by the Spirit of God and we are declared to be a child of the living God, adopted into His forever family.

ROM 8:16 "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

Now, the debate has been, is there a subsequent blessing of the Spirit as He blesses us with power on high to be His servant? And the answer is yes. The filling of the Spirit is a lifelong seeking of ours so that we might be used by Him, willing to serve Him in the power of the Spirit. And God will be faithful to fill us to that end.

This is what Paul had in mind when he compared what it was to walk in the flesh as opposed to walking in the Spirit.

EPH 5:18 "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

And here the word filled infers to be filled up to overflowing continually. In other words, be filled by the means the Spirit uses to fill. Seeking the Lord for this filling; being in the word of God; spending time with the Lord in prayer; fellowshiping with the saints. To neglect the means the Spirit uses to fill us cuts off that spigot in one sense for this filling.

But as far as all believers having received the Spirit of God there can be no debate. Every believer has all of the Holy Spirit, not just a part. Now, what we do with the Spirit is another matter, but no one can say they need more of the Spirit. They have all the Spirit they will ever get.

The manifestation of the Spirit is what is being referred to when it comes to service for the Lord, in the power of the Spirit. That is the filling we should always seek.

And so, back to Paul's original question. "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?"

It's an either/or proposition. If they answer that they received the Spirit, or were indwelt with the Spirit, by observing the law, then they deny the work of the Spirit who points all people to Christ alone, not the law.

JOH 15:26 "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me."

JOH 16:13-14 "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."

If these Galatians, on the other hand, say they received the Spirit by believing what they heard regarding Christ and His redemption, then they have essentially admitted that what the Judaizers are teaching is bogus and they must cease and desist in promoting their false gospel.

Paul has argued that when it comes to our salvation it does make a difference what we believe about it. Where is the joy of our salvation if we play a part in earning it? How frustrating that would be. 'Well, I did a pretty good job today of keeping the law, but yesterday was tragic. I hope I am able to please the Father with my performance today.'

There is no pleasing God outside of perfection. And there is no one perfect except our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If you are in Christ you have already pleased the Father and you are now at peace with Him.

If you think your performance pleases the Father, then you will always be disappointed, because we will always come up short. This doesn't mean that we can't please our Father with our good works, but it's only as we are in Christ. It is Christ who has pleased the Father by taking our place at the cross.

We need to be about walking in the Spirit and not the flesh to show that we've been sealed for the day of redemption. We have received the Spirit and been sealed in Him because of our faith in Christ. Nothing else will do.

And doesn't that make it so much easier than having to jump through all of the man-made hoops to please God? Be true to the Lord. Walk in the faith and give glory to God that we have a place reserved for us in heaven, not by anything we could do to earn it, but because Jesus earned it on our behalf and gives us this free gift by faith alone.

Praise God!