

Message #8

Galatians 3:1-5

I love something Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said about Paul: “Paul is not your handy companion man for modern man. . . . The Apostle Paul and the doctrine he proclaimed is very distasteful to modern man. It says, in effect, that man is justified, not by a human merit whatsoever, but by the merits of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (*Galatians 3:1-4*, p. 4). The average religious person does not like Paul. The Apostle Paul taught a “law free grace gospel.” The Apostle Paul taught a “law free grace salvation” and “law free grace sanctification.” Proud man does not like that message. What Paul does here is ask these Galatians to look back on their past and analyze whether or not what happened to them happened as a result of them trying to keep the Law or by pure grace.

Now most of you know my story. I invited Jesus Christ into my life on June 10, 1976. This is an event that occurred nearly 39 years ago. From the moment that happened, everything in my life changed. There were things I didn’t want to do anymore. There were places I didn’t want to go anymore. There was a radio career that I didn’t seem to want anymore.

Three years later we moved to Grand Rapids to pursue a theological education. I had no idea where that move would take us. I did not know that I would study Greek and Hebrew. I had no idea I would graduate and be asked to teach. I never dreamed I would be a pastor of a church in the Chicago area; in Pocatello, Idaho, and ultimately for nearly 14 years be here in Kalamazoo. I certainly never thought we would be on multiple radio stations teaching the Bible and I would have never dreamed that we would have a web site that has been downloaded by numbers heading toward one quarter of a million people.

But all of these things really have happened since trusting Christ in 1976.

Not one of these things has happened as a result of my attempt to keep the O.T. Law. Fact is I never gave the O.T. Law much thought at all.

Not one of these things has happened as a result of me trying to obey some denominational code of behavior. Actually I was raised in a legalistic denomination and I rebelled against it and in many ways still do.

Not one of these things has happened as a result of me following some church rule book.

Truth is I don’t follow man-made rule books because very often it doesn’t square with the Word.

Not one of these things has happened as a result of me being perfect because I am so far from being perfect, I make myself sick.

All of these things have happened by the pure grace of God and they all happened because back in 1976, I placed my faith in Jesus Christ. That is my story.

But my story is, in many ways, your story too. Oh the circumstances may be a little different, but the story is the same. As we look at this text, it was certainly the story of the people of the Galatian churches. **They apparently had forgotten that it was faith in Jesus Christ that changed their lives.** Their lives had not been changed by the O.T. Law. Their lives had not been changed by their commitment to Judaistic legalism or by following religious rules.

Their lives had been changed by Jesus Christ, and in this text that is exactly what Paul says:

YOUR OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF YOUR OWN TRANSFORMED LIFE PROVES THAT JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION IS BY FAITH ALONE APART FROM ANY WORKS.

We come now to a major theological section of the book of Galatians. Paul moves away from the personal historical data about his own life and switches gears to go deep into doctrinal matters pertaining to the grace of God. I do not believe most people understand how damning the Law is. **Paul will actually say in this chapter if you think your works and the Law will save you, you are cursed (3:10).**

What Paul does in these first five verses is to remind these Galatians of what happened to them in grace. This is the brilliance of Paul. By using them as an example, he gives a “classic defense” of justification by faith alone.

These are very powerful verses and there are two main thoughts that Paul develops:

THOUGHT #1 – Paul assesses the condition of the Galatians. **3:1**

Paul does not flatter these Galatians in any way. But before we analyze that, we need to observe from this verse that Jesus Christ had been publicly portrayed as crucified since day one.

Now we know historically that Jesus Christ was not crucified in the Galatian region, which is modern Turkey. He was crucified in Jerusalem, in Israel. None of these Galatians had actually visually seen Jesus Christ crucified.

The key to what Paul is saying is found in the verb “portrayed.” That verb means to portray something or to depict something by proclamation or writing. Paul had graphically spelled out the cross work of Jesus Christ both in his preaching and in his writings (i.e. I Cor. 2:2). In other words, Paul was not just preaching a message of what happened to Jesus historically, but what happened soteriologically. Paul preached Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Sanctifier.

Now the reason why he brings this point up is because ever since these Galatians had heard of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, they had heard that the only way they could be saved from their sins was by faith alone in Christ alone. Jesus Christ died on that cross as a sin offering for us in order to save us from our sins and Paul had carefully explained that.

We may assume from this verb “portray” that Paul had graphically described the events and the substitutionary nature of that crucifixion. Christ has been stripped, whipped, spit on, beard ripped from His face, mocked, thorns rammed into His head, nailed to a cross and hung between two thieves and then a sword thrust into His side. Paul taught these Galatians about the importance of what happened on “the old rugged cross.”

He graphically taught them the cross truth that “When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride.”

But these Galatians were forsaking the value of the cross work of Jesus Christ and were going back under the O.T. Law. So Paul says I will inform you of the reality of your condition:

Galatian Condition Reality #1 - You are foolish. 3:1a

Paul does not let these Galatians blame demons or Satan or even false religion. He puts all of the blame on them. He does not let them off the hook. People love to blame others for their problems. They love to blame the minister, or the board or a mate—**Paul says blame yourself because you are foolish.**

That word “foolish” is one that means you are without understanding and thought specifically as it relates to accurately grasping Scripture. The root of this word means to think systematically and carefully (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 303-304). What is interesting is that ancient Greek philosophers described the Galatians as being intelligent people. So this must have been a real slap in the face when Paul says you are foolish.

Paul says you have stopped thinking in a rational and systematic and Biblical way about the value of that cross work of Jesus Christ. You are allowing your emotions to carry you off into some emotional never-never land. **Biblical Christianity is not based on feelings, but concrete facts and those facts are appropriated by faith.** Those facts are found in the doctrines of Paul and these Galatians had lost their minds.

Before we move on let us make an observation. These Galatians had had some of the best teaching in the world. Paul had actually been to these churches and taught them grace. But it didn't take long for some legalistic teacher to move these people away from truth. It is possible to sit under fabulous teaching for a while, but then in a short time become foolish. If you do not take a stand for grace, you will drift along like a tumbling tumbleweed and be tossed to and fro by different winds of doctrine.

If you understand that cross work of Jesus Christ, you will never pursue the O.T. Law or legalism; but if you don't understand it, you can end up as foolish as the Galatians.

Galatian Condition Reality #2 - You are bewitched. 3:1b

The word “bewitched” refers to an evil and emotional captivation and fascination (*Ibid.*, p. 78). Satan captivates people's minds and emotions. The occult dominates feelings. Satan lures people to do what feels good, not what is good. People get swept away by their feelings.

If a person thinks anything but the cross work of Jesus Christ can make them right with a Holy God, or if one thinks that one may become really spiritual by keeping the O.T. Law, that person is foolish and bewitched.

We know Paul said in II Timothy that Satan keeps people from coming to a full knowledge of truth. That is what he does (II Tim. 2:25-26).

There is a satanic spiritual witchcraft and sorcery that is actively at work in many people in many churches. It is not the kind of sorcery that features cult members standing around a bonfire holding candles and chanting. It is a very religious and sophisticated type of membership in which people subtly present works and law into salvation and sanctification.

Teachers have the ability to bewitch people. **There is no question that people, who are in places that teach law, get completely captivated and dominated by those beliefs. These teachers are putting people under a bewitching curse (Gal. 3:10).**

Dr. Bruce Barton said that he believed that often it is poor leadership and lack of clear doctrinal teaching that is to blame for the people being bewitched (*Galatians*, p. 83). However, every believer has a responsibility to maintain a personal alertness. We need to be shrewd and wise, as sheep. We need to be able to discern sound doctrine.

Now we have a doctrine class in this church taught now by Mr. Kelly. You may think that doctrine class is just another Sunday school class and you can take it or leave it. In some respects that is true. We don't force people to go to that class. But let me tell you what really is at stake there. What is at stake is your grasp of sound doctrine on all of the major doctrines of Scripture. It is important to have this grasp so that you cannot be satanically bewitched. You need to be in that class.

If you believe something other than pure grace, Satan has you right where he wants you—foolish and bewitched.

THOUGHT #2 – Paul questions the doctrine of the Galatians. **3:2-5**

Now Paul asks four questions in order to prove that justification comes by faith and not by any works of the O.T. Law. Notice the importance given in this context of “hearing” the Word of God (3:2, 5). **True faith comes by hearing true grace teaching from the Scriptures.**

When you think through your own personal experiences, you will most likely come to the conclusion that I grew the most in my understanding of the grace of God when I was systematically taught the Scriptures and the doctrines.

Why is that? Faith comes by hearing the Word of God accurately taught. When you are not being seriously taught, your faith is not strengthened and you can believe things that are not sound.

Practical Question #1 - Did you receive the Holy Spirit by the works of the Law or by faith in Jesus Christ? **3:2**

I love something Dr. Thomas Constables said—"The answer to this single question should settle the whole debate?" (*Notes on Galatians*, p. 33). The Holy Spirit is mentioned nearly 20 times in Galatians because it is the Holy Spirit, not the O.T. Law that is so critical to grace salvation and sanctification (i.e. Rom. 8:9).

When Jesus was here on earth, He made a prediction that a new age would come in which any who would believe on Him would receive the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). No one would have to beg or plead for this or work for this, but all who believe would receive the Holy Spirit.

So Paul begins by asking the Galatians a simple question—how did you receive the Spirit of God—by your attempts to keep the Law or by faith in Jesus Christ? We get the Spirit the moment we believe in Jesus Christ, not by obedience to the O.T. Law. **In fact, those who stress the O.T. Law put no emphasis at all on the Holy Spirit.**

Practical Question #2 - Do you grow complete in your own spiritual life by works of the Law or by the hearing of the Word of God that produces faith? **3:3**

How does one become complete in the process of his or her faith? How do you develop? How do you mature as a child of God; by faith or by works of the Law?

Paul asks the question as to whether or not one blossoms in one's spiritual life by trying to keep the O.T. Law or by hearing the Word of God and by a dependency on the Spirit of God. How do you become sanctified? Do you blossom in your spiritual life by relying on the Spirit of God or by trying to keep the O.T. Law?

Paul says do you develop by a dependency on the Spirit of God or a dependency on your own flesh? The noun "flesh" refers to our old sin nature and flesh desires.

Most of the time the way it is supposed to work is that the spiritual life progresses from lesser to greater. However, in the case of the Galatians, their spirituality went from greater to lesser.

But here is the point; when a person experiences the grace of God in salvation and is born into the family of God, he does not have to add anything to that to gain a full salvation. There is nothing you can do in the "flesh" that will enhance the grace work of God. God has given us His Spirit and His Word and that is what we need for great cleansing growth. We do not need O.T. law or men's tradition or religious legalism.

Practical Question #3 - Have you suffered or sacrificed more when you were trying to keep the Law or since you have come to faith in Jesus Christ? **3:4**

Ever since Paul came to faith, he was verbally abused; he was run out of towns; he was stoned and he was jailed.

None of those things happened to him when he was dedicated to the O.T. Law. The moment you believe in Jesus Christ is the moment things can become a little tense.

When you believe on Jesus Christ, you will soon discover you are in war with your flesh, with the world and with the Devil.

Prior to me trusting Jesus Christ, I got along just fine with people of this world. I fit in with them. But the moment I trusted Christ that all changed.

Practical Question #4 - Does God miraculously operate by works of the Law or through the hearing of God's Word, which produces faith? **3:5**

When Paul, as an apostle, went into new areas, God let him perform miracles that proved he was, in fact, a man of God telling the truth of God. We know from Acts 14:1ff. that when Paul was in Galatia, he did do some "signs and wonders" apostolic miracles (14:3).

Paul says did I come preaching grace or did I come preaching law? Who did the miracles? Did the miracles I perform happen while I was preaching O.T. law or were they wrought when I was preaching grace by the power of the Spirit of God?

Probably there were different apostolic sign miracles displayed in Galatia. Perhaps one was tongues. For example, in Acts 14:11, we know that the people there spoke a "Lycaonian language." Paul would go into a new area and there was no way he could have known all of the languages of the people in those areas. God gave him a gift to be able to speak in various languages.

By the way, the Greek text literally reads "miracles in you." It is a tremendous miracle of God when a sinner is saved. That miracle is wrought by faith and not by works or law-keeping.

Now Paul's point is this—were these things done by God through keeping the Law or in the grace faith system? The answer is by grace and faith.

The most amazing things you will ever see God do for you will be when you are walking by faith and grace and not by trying to keep the O.T. Law.

This text forces us to ask some questions:

- 1) Have we been foolish and bewitched about our salvation or our spiritual life?
- 2) Do we believe we are saved or we enhance salvation by our works or the O.T. Law?
- 3) Do we believe that everything we have and are in our relationship with God is by grace through faith?

The Bible is clear:

"Jesus paid it all; All to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain; He washed it white as snow."