

A STUDY IN GALATIANS
Part 9 – “O, Foolish Galatians”
Galatians 3:1-6

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The study in Galatians began with the Apostle Paul defending his apostolic authority in the first two chapters. He used an appeal to historical fact showing his apostleship was independent of that of the Jerusalem apostles declaring that they had fully recognized him in this role. Additionally he further stated that he had confronted Peter concerning his inconsistent behavior. *After he asserts his authority and right to preach the Gospel he is ready to establish the truth of his Gospel.* The essence of this truth is that justification comes through faith in Jesus Christ and the works of the law have nothing to do with it. He will do this in three ways: by means of doctrinal argument (3:1-4:1); by personal entreaty (4:12-20); and, through allegorical interpretation (4:21-31). We will look at all of them in time. However, today we will begin the first of the doctrinal argument.

TAKE YOUR BIBLES...

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 the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? So again I ask does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” (Galatians 3:1-6 NIV).

Paul’s declaration is very strong. Simply put, to stop walking by faith and begin to walk by works is foolish! The wise course of action is always to depend upon the provision and promises of the God of grace. It is so foolish that those doing it are acting as if they are under some evil spell, as if they had been bewitched. At least this was the reaction of the Apostle Paul. Even though they had received salvation by faith in Christ, they were now attempting to perfect their Christian life through their own misguided efforts.

HE ASKS FIVE QUESTIONS:

FIRST, “WHO HAS BEWITCHED YOU?” (v. 1)

1. Paul begins this section with a declaration of both condemnation and pity, *You foolish Galatians!* The word translated “foolish” suggests that the readers were acting unreasonably. They were failing to use their mental powers and abilities. Moffatt in his translation uses the word “senseless.” The NEB translates it as “stupid.” The suggestion is that anyone with any spiritual perception ought to be able see the impossibility of legal efforts to save a man.
2. Their action was so difficult to logically explain he simply asks who had put them under a spell, *Who has bewitched you?* It calls to mind the work of a sorcerer putting “the evil eye” on their victim. Paul did not actually believe they were under some spell, but he would not

hesitate to say they were deceived and blinded. Their minds were confused and befuddled. He would ultimately say the source of this was the devil.

NOTE: The next phrase is very important to understand. Paul declares that they had seen Jesus and understood the Gospel very clearly. He was “clearly portrayed” to them. A better translation is that Jesus was “publically placarded” to them. It was as if the message had been written on a billboard for them to see. They could not have missed it. It was clear! He also indicates the content of the billboard by using the word “crucified.” The content was the redemptive act of Christ on the Cross. I like what Hunter says about the work of Christ: “The Cross is not a mere past fact, but a present reality, daily felt by men.”

SECOND, “HOW DID YOU RECEIVE CHRIST?” (v. 2)

Paul is beside himself. He says, “Just tell me one thing.” Then he asks them how did they receive Christ, by the law or by the hearing of faith? How they received the gift of the Holy Spirit is important. The presence of the Holy Spirit as a gift in their lives is the supreme evidence of divine favor. When a man receives the presence of God in his life, God commits Himself completely to that man.

NOTE: There are only two possibilities. Either they received it through faith or works. It cannot be both. He asserts that it was wholly a work of Christ. In no way could they claim to have merited this precious gift by their works, even though they might have been works performed in obedience to some law of God. This passage reflects a truth stated many times in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit dwelling in a life is the ultimate evidence of the favor of God. That person has been saved. The Holy Spirit bears witness with the spirit of man so that we may be certain of our relationship with God. This gift is only given when we acknowledge that we have no claim upon God, we have done nothing to deserve the goodness of God, and we cling to the work of Christ as our only hope of eternal life. **THE ONLY PEOPLE IN THIS LIFE WHO HAVE A LEGITIMATE REASON FOR ASSURANCE OF SALVATION ARE THOSE WHO KNOW THAT SALVATION IS SOLELY THROUGH FAITH.** If salvation is given on the basis of works to any degree, there can never be any real assurance of salvation.

THIRD, “HOW DO YOU CONTINUE IN CHRIST?” (v. 3)

The NASB translates this verse as “*Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*” The first phrase, “are you so foolish,” is written in very bold language. It is Paul’s way of expressing how passionate he was about this issue. He felt deeply about the change in the Galatians lives. What they were doing simply didn’t make any sense at all!

He can’t imagine how they began in the Spirit and now they have begun to live in the flesh. Already he has reminded them that their whole Christian life found its beginning in the day in which they placed their faith in Christ, and God graciously bestowed upon them the gift of the Holy Spirit; yet, now they have turned to something far different. The Apostle Paul uses the word “perfected.” It means to be “completed.” It is much more than just coming to an end. It means to consummate.

THIS HAS FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS FOR US TODAY. Just as we were saved, so shall we be sanctified. Ultimately it is not what we do that makes us mature in Christ. It is who we place our faith in, Jesus or man.

Suppose I ask you the question, “How does a man become a mature Christian?” Would you list Bible study, memorization of Scripture, prayer, witnessing, separation from the world, or service in ministry? Those ARE good things, but even the most careful of observation of these things won’t produce anything more than the most repulsive of Pharisees. In fact, the Pharisees that Jesus condemned so often did most of these things with consistent discipline. The simple truth of Scripture is that we cannot make ourselves a good Christian by any work of the flesh. It is wholly and completely a work of the Holy Spirit. We will see the apostle say this clearly in a subsequent chapter as he writes:

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (Galatians 5:16-26 NIV).

The Holy Spirit works in us as we trust in Christ. I know this sounds like I am saying we merely sit back and do nothing, but again, it is not about doing FIRST; it is about being then doing.

FOURTH, “DID YOU SUFFER IN VAIN?” (v. 4)

This question is an appeal for his readers to recognize the absurdity of having suffered so much for nothing. It has a deeper meaning than physical suffering, though that is a part of it. Paul is concerned with their spiritual suffering. GO BACK TO THE PASSAGE WE JUST LOOKED AT. When you compare the life in the Spirit with the life in the flesh, there really is no comparison!

FIFTH, “HOW DOES GOD WORK IN YOU?” (v. 5)

The word “work” in the NIV really should be translated “minister.” It implies the generosity of God. The idea is of giving, to supply generously, or to lavish upon the recipient. When God gives himself to us, he does so fully, with great generosity.

It has been a long time since I have been to Galveston. Last weekend as I went to my family reunion, I couldn’t be so close and not visit some of the old “haunts” of my childhood. A part of that pilgrimage was a drive down Seawall Boulevard along the beach in Galveston. It is amazing how much has changed and yet stayed the same. Some of the buildings were still there, though renovated. And, there were new buildings added. The wind was blowing in from the gulf pretty high that day and the waves were

high. It reminded me of the consistency of God in providing for us. It was Memorial Day when we took our little tour down memory lane and there were lots of people there. Many were enjoying the surf. Yet, they did nothing to make it! They simply got in it! THERE YOU HAVE IT! God provides and we participate because we trust his provision!