



## Galatians 3:1-6

### Bewitched

10/16/2022

We are going to Galatians 3 today.

Last week, Cody wrapped up chapter 2 by focusing on the main issue that was at the center of the controversy in the Galatian church: the doctrine of justification.

He said that justification is the act of **being declared righteous before God on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus, which happens to us when we believe.**

And this matters: How we are made right with God matters a lot. How do we get right standing with God, a guarantee of heaven and eternity with God, how do we get status as sons and daughters of God? How do we know we are approaching God in prayer who is ready to hear us as a Father and not reject us as a judge? This matters.

And the doctrine of justification says it is only because of what Jesus did on the cross that we are acceptable to God, and we receive his forgiveness, not by working for it, not by adding anything to what Jesus did, but by faith.

**And this is a scandalous doctrine that Christians believe:** that I can't make myself right with God, I can't add anything to what He did to make me right with Him, I can't earn my acceptance with God, that was all given to me for free.

**It seems too good to be true: nothing is free!** If someone calls you during dinner and says, "You have been chosen to receive a free vacation in Cancun - " you hang up. You don't believe it. There's always a catch. There's always fine print. There's no such thing as a free lunch, let alone free eternity in heaven for a sinner like me!

Moral, religious people spend their lives working very hard to get to heaven. And to hear that we can receive that kind of forgiveness for free, not by our works, seems way too cheap.

It seems cheap if we don't understand who Jesus is or what He went through on the cross. If we understand that He is God who walked among us, and that He went to the

cross to take on Himself the punishment we deserve so He could justly give us His pardon, then it doesn't seem cheap at all. It's only when you get a more accurate view of Jesus that this good news of the Gospel makes sense.

But just like the Galatians, we struggle to believe this. We think we can't possibly be accepted by God without doing more ourselves. We are always tempted to add more - there must be more requirements for us to be accepted by God - we must have to do something, we think.

And religious people especially drift away from the scandal of grace and toward legalism, thinking we can get forgiveness or acceptance from God at least in part because we earned it. We all have a default mode of Pharisee, we all drift where the Galatians were.

And it's a big deal when we do.

Why is it such a big deal?

Because legalism: a system of religion where we earn our acceptance before God:

- 1) Gives glory to us, not God - I can be the hero of my story.
- 2) It says the cross of Jesus is not enough. Imagine looking up at Jesus (seeing Jesus portrayed as crucified) and saying, "That's not enough."
- 3) It steals our hope - because if I earned my being right with God through my works, what stops me from losing it on a bad day?
- 4) It ruins our unity, setting up classes of Christians: Varsity and JV. Or defiled and clean. Superior and inferior.

And we're tempted to go there. **We are all tempted to deny the sufficiency of Jesus and to believe that our good works are part of what makes us acceptable to God.**

And you might say, "I don't - this isn't my struggle."

But this is all of our struggle - you'll probably be tempted with a form of the error of the Galatians today:

1) **In your guilt.** When you fail, when you sin, you will be tempted to think, not just that I need to make amends with people (which we do - we do try to fix what we've broken as much as we can, and if we aren't willing to do that we aren't really repentant.)

But you'll also be tempted to think I need to do something more to fix this with God.

I must have to do some good works to cleanse my conscience before I could ever be acceptable to God again. I need to fast more, or give more, or do a religious ritual of some sort. Or, as Cody said last week, I must "perform a certain amount of hours of religious community service to make up for what [I] did."

Instead of running back to the Father like the prodigal son, we are tempted to be Pharisees who try to earn our way into His grace, at least in part. To make ourselves good enough to be accepted by God.

2) You'll be tempted in your guilt. **But also in your righteousness.** You can, if you've performed better than people around you, think, "I am deserving of God's grace. I've earned his favor. I can expect his goodness in my life because I've been good enough."

"I went to church today, now God owes me a blessing." A big win over KC - I've been good.

There are really only two ways religious, legalistic people can feel about themselves. One is self-loathing because we didn't live up to the standards that we're supposed to live up to to be loved by God. God said don't lie and I lied so now he doesn't love me, there's no hope for me, I'm too sinful.

Or, we think we are living up to the standards (I give more, I serve more) and nobody else seems to be living up to the standards, so I'm better than them. God, I've been faithful enough, and now I deserve something from you. So now we're arrogant.

***"Whether the religious person ends up crushed and guilty or smug and superior really just depends on how high the standards are."* - Keller**

But it can become all about me keeping the standards to make God accept me.

3) **You'll be tempted with legalism in your disappointments.** "God, I've been good - why didn't you answer my prayers? I've been so obedient! I am worthy of your blessing. And

you didn't come through. You owed me something, God, and you failed me. I responded to you in obedience, I built my life on your ways. And what do I get in return? My life falls apart.

And because we thought our obedience got us status with God, and that those with status with God will always only experience good here, we can end up horribly disappointed with God. Because God didn't do what we thought he should do for someone as good as we are.

**4) You'll be tempted in your relationships** - when you believe you are more worthy than others, more acceptable to God than others, that others are beneath you, that other peoples' sins make them permanently defiled and permanently marked, but not you, you're good enough.

Or, you look around the room and think, "A lot of these people were probably better behaved than me this week. Look at them all smiley and sincere while we sing. Yeah, they can expect God's acceptance, not me. They can expect God to do good through them, but not me. They're worthy of God, but I'd have to work a lot harder to get there.

**5) You'll be tempted with this error when you believe your feelings determine your status with God.** For example, you might think, "I know I am a Christian because I feel like one."

So you think, "I am near to God because Jesus has died, plus I feel it." And if I don't feel it, then I am far from God.

So you believe "I am only near to God when I feel near to God, and if for some reason I don't feel it, I'm not near. So I am brought near to God by Jesus Christ's work on the cross, plus my feelings." I'm adding my work of feeling the right way to the finished work of Jesus.

**6) You might even be tempted to believe that there must be a higher form of the Christian life.** An error through history in the church has been the idea that you come to Jesus by grace through faith, but you have to do something totally different to become an elite Christian, or to enter in to the higher life, or deeper life. You have to have a mystical experience, see some unique vision, or achieve some spiritual attainment that is more than knowing Jesus.

But there is nothing more. There's nothing better than having Jesus, we can't improve upon that, there's nothing deeper than the Gospel, there's no greater experience than coming to know Him.

**But in any way that we take our works, our feelings, our contributions, and make them part of what makes us acceptable to God, we are being legalists, we are just like the Galatians, we are denying the sufficiency of Jesus, the doctrine of justification, we are denying that Jesus is enough.**

So, this is a long intro to say that Galatians is really relevant to us, people who, like us, are Pharisees by default. We are just like these Galatians, in need of the same message they were in need of.

And so Paul doesn't hold back. He goes after the heart of legalists like us by asking a number of hard-hitting questions that we can ask ourselves when we are tempted to think this way. So our text is Galatians 3:1-6.

**Galatians 3:1-6 “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— 6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?”**

Paul opens up this section in verse 1 by using some hard language - the kind that Jesus used with religious Pharisees, and he says “O foolish Galatians.”

**The Phillips translation renders this “O dear idiots of Galatia.”**

Which is not the way to endear yourself to an audience. If my sermon intro today were “Dear idiots of Grace Road,” you might be a bit turned off and hesitant to listen. But Paul, obviously is so frustrated with them. He went to great lengths to bring the message of Jesus to them, they embraced it with joy, and now they're turning from it. They're going right back to their own works as the grounds for their right standing with God - the false system of belief that robbed their joy and imparted fear and insecurity before, that was

remedied by the message of grace, and they're like a dog returning to its vomit. You idiots, he says. What are you doing?

And it's such a terrible error that he calls it being bewitched. It's like they had been put under a spell.

And he asks them the first of these six questions here:

### **1) Who has bewitched you?**

What witch has put you under a spell so strong that you'd deny Jesus in this way?

And their witches would cast spells on people, but also use mind-altering substances in their worship. In chapter 5 he tells them to avoid sorcery, and there he uses the greek word pharmakeia, where we get our word pharmacy. Which in their day didn't refer to helpful medicine but elicit drugs. So witchcraft and sorcery in their day involved elicit drug use.

So here they are turning back to the law and Paul says, "Who has cast a spell on you?"

We might ask, "What are you smoking?" It must be some strong stuff to get you to turn away from Jesus.

And he says:

**It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.**

He says "you saw Jesus portrayed as crucified." Now probably none of these Galatians actually saw the crucifixion of Jesus, they didn't have video, and Paul probably didn't do skits. So they really didn't see anything.

But when Paul came to them and preached the truth of Jesus, it was like they saw it. The Bible often uses other sensory words to describe our experience with God, "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8), "Behold [look at!] what manner of love the Father has given to us" (1 John 3:1).

And Paul says, in effect, “Remember when you believed, how real and amazing Jesus was!” Remember how real that was and how true the message of grace sounded, and how beautiful that looked to the eyes of faith.”

And now, to believe that something you have done makes you acceptable, or something you haven’t done makes you permanently unacceptable, you are smoking some powerful stuff to think that.

Spurgeon: "The cross is the school of orthodoxy."

Who has bewitched you?

And the second question we can ask ourselves when we fall into this way of thinking is:

**2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?**

**2) Did you receive the Spirit by obedience or by belief?**

There is an assumption here that all these Galatian Christians have received the Spirit. God’s Spirit coming to us is not a second experience that we get later when we’ve achieved something, but something that has happened to all Christians. The Spirit comes to dwell in us when we believe.

And he says, “Did that happen because you achieved, or because you believed?”

And the answer is, “because I believed.”

When you first heard someone tell you about Jesus and you put your faith in Him and the Spirit came into your life, that wasn’t after you had performed a bunch of rituals or improved your moral resume’, it happened when you believed.

So if God didn’t save you because of your works, why do you believe He is now un-saving you because of your works? If the Spirit didn’t come to you because you are worthy, why do you now believe He will leave you if you don’t make yourself worth enough?

When we strive for holiness in our own strength, we are saying something about how effective God’s Spirit is. If it’s our work at any point that wins or sustains our salvation, then God’s work is subordinate

to ours at some point, which then contradicts the whole thing. We are the sheep of His pasture, not the other way around.

So ask yourself, “who has bewitched you, did you receive the spirit by obedience or faith, and third:”

### **3 Are you so foolish?**

Sometimes, some hard language is necessary.

Sometimes spiritual sleepers need to be shocked awake. Sometimes, a harsh word is necessary to expose a terrible idea.

I try not to yell at home a lot. And I mostly don't - it's pretty rare that I really raise my voice and yell. Except when the Bills are playing, then it is essentially guaranteed that I will.

And most of the times I have yelled I've regretted it, I was lashing out in anger. But there are a few times when that has been necessary.

I remember a time when our daughter Lydia was little. We were sitting on the front porch of a little house some friends had rented at a campsite, and I watched her walking toward a road, not seeing a car that was coming around a bend. I was too far to run and get her, but I stood up and yelled, “Lydia, stop!” And she stopped right away, teared up, and - probably because she didn't usually get yelled at, it worked to possibly save her life.

And our normal use of language should be kind and measured and mild and humble. But occasionally, when someone is imbibing something that is deadly, when someone is destroying their life and not seeing it, when someone is turning from their savior to some other deadly hope, it's right to use a measured harsh word.

And sometimes, when the ideas running through our heads run contrary to grace, we need to ask ourselves, “Are you so foolish?” And if you are beginning to wander from the way of life, as Paul's friends are here, a friend who has established their love for you is helping you by getting in your face and calling you on it.

So - who has bewitched you, did you receive the Spirit by faith or works, are you so foolish, and now question 4:



### **3b Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?**

4) Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

This is what the Galatians were believing. They began the Christian life by faith, but to really finish it, to really complete it, they had to use their own human efforts (which never got them anywhere before) to get themselves across the finish line.

If you couldn't *start* without the Spirit's work, what makes you think you can *run* without the Spirit's work? If you cannot take the first step of the marathon without the Holy Spirit, why do you want to run the marathon without the Spirit?

And this word "being perfected by" is the greek word with the root "tetelestai", meaning it is finished, or it is completed.

**John 19:28-30 "28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."**

"It is finished" - the last words of Jesus - is "tetelestai."

Jesus died on the cross and said, "It is finished."

So Paul, in Galatians, is saying, "So you began in the Spirit, but now you are finishing it."

Your work, your effort is necessary to add to the effort of Jesus to make you ok with God?

Legalism looks at the cross of Jesus and says, "It isn't finished. It isn't enough. This needs me and my efforts to be complete."

And Paul says, "It's so dumb."

It's so foolish to believe you have sinned so far you can't be forgiven.

It's so dumb to believe that because your feelings aren't aligned with the truth that you are no longer a Christian.

It's so foolish to believe these other Christians are beneath you because their human efforts haven't done enough yet.

It's so foolish to believe that maybe because of the sins you've repented of that still there's some punishment from God waiting for you, because you weren't good enough. Now your kids won't turn out right, now you could never expect an answered prayer, because you just didn't finish the job.

Jesus finished the job!

Question 5:

#### **4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?**

##### **5) Did you suffer for nothing?**

You're going right back into the system of faith that you suffered to leave.

**Galatians 3:5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— 6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?**

So Paul asks, “When you first believed and the Spirit was doing amazing works among you, was that because you followed the law?”

The Galatians were beginning to think that they needed to be circumcised to be complete Christians. And so Paul asks, “When the Spirit came and started working among you, was that because you were circumcised?”

You weren't circumcised law-keepers then, and He worked to make you His. What makes you think you now need to move on to something more - some form of law-keeping, to convince the Spirit to stay with you? He didn't have a “you must be circumcised to be saved” policy then, what makes you think He just added that policy now?

##### **6) Does God work because of God or because of you?**

We'll deal with Abraham more next week.

## **Application of all of this:**

We live like Christians in the same way that we became Christians.  
There is nothing more than Christ.

### **Prayer of Confession**

*This Prayer is adapted from a prayer entitled "Trusting in Ourselves" on page 186 of the prayer book, Streams of Mercy by Barbara Duguid.*

Father,

We are as foolish as the Galatians. After receiving the pure gift of your grace, and acknowledging our dependence upon your Spirit, we find ourselves constantly returning to our own efforts to construct a goodness to boast about. Instead of depending wholly upon Christ, we trust in the rags of our own pretended righteousness. This is evident in the way in which we use every scrap of our own performance to raise ourselves above others, and in the delight we take in pointing out the weaknesses and sins of others. We trust in our good theology, our church attendance, our Bible studies, our witnessing--in anything and everything apart from Christ alone.

Jesus, thank you for your faithful holiness and humility. Although you graciously expose the emptiness of our claims to righteousness, you constantly invite us to come to you for rest, for peace, for hope, for strength, and for salvation. Thank you that you were crucified for us. Now we have received from you a righteousness that has nothing to do with our our church, or our performance, but is a free gift of your ransoming grace. All we have is you, and you are all we need.

Holy Spirit, raise us to new life in Christ so that we may fight against sin with all of the energy that you give us. We pray that Christ would live in and through us in ways that are visible to all; but let it be seen that any power that we have is a gift of God and not from ourselves. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

### **Assurance of Pardon**

**1 John 5:11-12 "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."**

### **Sermon Questions for Group Discussion:**

- 1) Paul treats legalism like it is a serious error. Why do you suppose that is?
- 2) Do we think of it as such a huge error?

- 3) In what ways do we fall into it?
- 4) Have you ever expected that there must be a more elite version of the Christian life that you could somehow enter in to? What did you think it would have taken to get there?
- 5) If we are not to try to add anything to the finished work of Christ for our justification, what should our striving for holiness look like?
- 6) How can remembering our conversion be helpful in our battle against legalism and its fruits?