

MBC – 5/29/2022 – Pastor Doug Thompson
 PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS – GOSPEL FREEDOM
“Don’t Be a Fool!”
 Galatians 3:1-5

Turn with me to Galatians 3 this morning – The churches in Galatia were under attack by false teachers who were persuading the Christians there that faith in Jesus Christ was not enough to save them, they needed to add works to grace. They needed to add Law to Gospel. And Paul is very disappointed in his spiritual children that they would follow after another Gospel, which is no Gospel. He wraps up chapter 2 by saying: “I do not nullify – I don’t cancel – the grace of God! For if righteousness were through the Law, then Christ died for no purpose!” That is the implication of adding any human effort to the Gospel: you forfeit God’s grace and you make Christ’s death unnecessary

So in chapter 3, he fires off a series of questions to get them to think – *think*: “What is it that saved you to begin with, and will empower you to walk as believers in Christ?” – and there are only two options – for those Galatians, and for you and I this morning: by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith. Let’s read it together, and see how upset Paul is—

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

(Pray - 1 Thessalonians 2:13 ¹³And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.)

I. The rebuke.

Now the first thing we have to deal with in this passage is Paul’s name-calling:

- “O foolish Galatians!”

The word for *foolish* here is not the word Paul uses in other places – moros – from which we get our word *moron*. This is even stronger. It means “brainless,” best English translation = stupid. My goodness, that sounds so mean. But in case we thought he was overreacting, he says it again in v.3: “Are you so foolish?”

A few weeks ago I did a message on how God’s children should be known for being gentle, patient, and gracious – and most of the passages we looked at were written by Paul himself. So is he contradicting himself here? That’s a good question.

My answer is: No. When the Gospel is at stake, eternal souls are at stake, and you can’t afford to mince words and tread lightly.

- In our age of wokeness – it’s inappropriate to use this kind of language. But wasn’t Paul blunt and honest when he rebuked Peter, publicly, and to his face about caving into the legalists at

Antioch? Can you imagine Peter responding. “Oh Paul, you’ve just set off so many emotional triggers with your micro-aggressions. I’m going to need some time to deal with this trauma. I need to find a safe space!”

No, you know what Peter probably said? “Well I had that coming. Everything you said was true, and that’s what matters. Thanks for setting me straight, brother!”

Paul told Timothy, “Timothy, your calling is to preach the word, in season, and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort!” But how many pastors today do that?

- If you find Paul’s words offensive it might be because you take spiritual things too lightly. This is serious stuff and serious stuff calls for strong words. Some of the Galatians had already abandoned the Gospel, and others were barely hanging on – trying to live their Christian lives in their own flesh, and failing miserably. If they were shocked at Paul calling them stupid, at least now they were listening.

And I hope you are listening this morning: God has very high expectations of His covenant children, both in how we *think* and how we *act*!

God’s expectations of His NC people are *way* higher than were His expectations of His OC people: Read the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus says, “Kingdom people don’t just have clean hands, they have pure hearts. They fight against even thinking hateful, or lustful, or covetous thoughts.” The standards are way higher for us because they lived in the age of promise, we live in the age of fulfillment – Christ has come! We have the indwelling HS and the NC Scriptures.

In Christ we have an incredibly high privilege and high call, and for that very reason – God holds us to a high accountability to understand and obey His Word.

In Hebrews, the author is showing how Christ is greater than Moses, greater than Joshua (because He gave His people rest), greater than Aaron, as our eternal High Priest. And he wants to go on and tell how Jesus is greater than Melchizedek – but he stops – and he must have thought to himself: “Some of these people don’t even know who I’m talking about when I bring up Melchizedek!” Do you know? So he gives his readers a rebuke—

- Hebrews 5:11–14 ¹¹About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹²For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

That is a loving rebuke. “You are still on spiritual baby food – which is fine for babies – but you should be out of your diapers by now and eating meat. And you are missing out on the good stuff because you aren’t growing up!” And these folks had only been believers for a few years, but *notice* – he says they should have been teachers by now – not going over the basics again. Paul rebuked the Corinthians—

- 1 Corinthians 3:1–2 ¹But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it.

And even now you are not yet ready. And they should have been. Jesus rebuked His disciples for the same thing—

- Mark 8:17–18 ¹⁷And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?”
- Mark 16:14 ¹⁴Afterward (after His resurrection) He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw Him after he had risen.
- And the most shocking – to our ears – is what Jesus said when He was walking with those two on the road to Emmaus: Luke 24:25 ²⁵And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”

Again, Jesus has high expectations of His people precisely because we are the recipients of such grace and mercy. Every child of God should be a diligent student of God’s Word. And when we are – excuse the terms – lazy, and thoughtless – and we don’t apply our minds to spiritual truth and behave accordingly – then we are acting *foolishly*. And that would make us – hello? – fools.

*So if Paul’s words here in Galatians, hurts your feelings, there is a solution: Don’t be a fool! And specifically in our passage for this morning: “Don’t foolishly think that having begun by the Spirit, you will now be perfected – sanctified – by your own flesh!” Let’s jump in—

II. Bewitched!

- Galatians 3:1 ¹O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?

The Living Translation says, “*Who has cast an evil spell on you?*” The word literally means “to give the evil eye!” Paul was astonished at how they could have wandered so far from the Gospel. He wondered if they were the victims of some demonic influence. And isn’t that always a possibility, since Satan is the Father of lies – and he is *always* seeking to de-throne Christ in our minds and hearts – and exalt our own fleshly efforts in place of His finished work. Always—

- 1 Timothy 4:1–3 ¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, (bewitched) ²through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, (now look at what they are peddling) ³who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created. . .

What is this? *Asceticism* – rules and regulations for self-denial – “Oh, if you really love Jesus, you will sacrifice the pleasures of marriage and meat and caffeine. . . if you want the deeper Christian life. . .” Paul says, “No, that is demonic, and departing from the faith.”

- Beloved, that is legalism! Law, not Gospel. And you might wonder “Who in their right mind would trade the grace and freedom of the Gospel for living by lists and rules?” Answer? A lot of people!

*Legalism is so seductive and attractive because it's easy: just follow the rules, do what you're told. You don't need to wrestle with difficult issues, or think through grey areas – heck, you don't need the Holy Spirit at all. I remember a gal who used to go to our church telling me that she didn't like to have to think. She said, "Can't you just tell us what to do?" Legalism solves that problem: "Here is the list, here are the rules. Do this and you're good with God."

- And legalism is attractive because it rewards your fleshly efforts with praise from your other legalist friends – and you avoid being judged as un-spiritual when you keep the rules. So many people are very attracted to that—
- You can go on the internet and read of families who have converted from Christianity to *Judaism* because it provides structure, security, traditions, and rules – exactly how the Judaizers appealed to the Christians in Galatia.

*So yes, you and I need to be on guard against the demonic appeal of legalism! Don't be bewitched!

And Paul explains why he was so astonished at their being seduced—

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

****Lift up Christ!***

"Crucified" is in the perfect tense: a past completed action with continuing results – isn't that true of Jesus' crucifixion? And that's the way Paul had preached Jesus' death – he brought it into the present tense. The verb for "publicly portrayed" was used of posting public announcements – like a poster or a billboard. I like the word "Placarded!" When he came to Galatia, Paul vividly, graphically set forth *Christ's crucifixion*. He made it visual and sensual: they could hear the ring of the hammers driving the nails into His hands and feet; they could see the blood pouring from His wounds and hear the groans of those three dying men.

And this was not some gimmick. Paul told the Corinthians—

- 1 Corinthians 1:23 ²³but we preach Christ crucified, (even though that message is) a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles. He said it again—
- 1 Corinthians 2:2 ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I.e., "Whatever else I teach and preach, this is always my most important message, because this is the Gospel"—
- 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 ¹Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ²and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

Beloved, the Gospel is the Good News that "*Christ died for our sins.*" Because it is Jesus' death that saves, not His good example, or His miracles, or even His wonderful teachings. It is Jesus' death that humbles us and leaves no room for any contribution on our part – amen?

- And it's Jesus death that brings a flood of comfort to guilty sinners—"How could God ever forgive me for what I've done?" Jesus died! "But I have hurt so many people!" Jesus died! "But I am so weak – what if I do it again?" Jesus died!

*I'm saying that we need to follow Paul's example here: When you have the opportunity to speak about Jesus, get to the cross as soon as you can and paint the picture, vividly! We spend too much time trying to get a response from people: "You need to believe, you need to believe," but that isn't the Gospel – that is the *response* to the Gospel.

*The cross is the Gospel, so do what Paul did and *set forth Jesus Christ as crucified*. Isn't that what Jesus meant when He said, "If I be 'lifted up' (on the cross), I will draw all men to Myself?" Our churches should be known for preaching Christ crucified. If you ever need to look for another church, you find one that preaches Christ crucified. And if you want to know the truth, our best attended service should be Good Friday instead of Christmas or Easter!

III. "How did you begin the Christian life?"

So Paul is astonished, just as he was at the beginning of his letter: "What has gotten into you people? Is this COVID brain fog or something? We preached Christ crucified to you! Jesus died for our sins! And it's like you never heard it. I want you to think this through"—

- Galatians 3:2 ²Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

I.e., "How did you *begin* the Christian life? How were you justified (and you all know what that means now) – and how did you receive the Holy Spirit? Was it by law-keeping, or by hearing with faith?"

- "People, think: you were saved when you *stopped* trying, and simply *trusted* Christ for your salvation!" It wasn't faith + works, it was *hearing + faith!*

And he says, "This is when you received the Holy Spirit." This is his first mention of the Holy Spirit, and he says that, salvation is synonymous with receiving the Holy Spirit. You get saved, you get the Holy Spirit. This is very important: Some of our brothers and sisters in Christ wrongly believe that a person is saved, and then, later, receives the Holy Spirit. This is from the doctrinal statement of the Assemblies of God churches—

- "All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the Baptism in the Holy Ghost and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian church. With it comes the endowment of power for life and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of ministry . . . this wonderful experience is distinct from and *subsequent to* the experience of the new birth."

That is *wrong* and it is a big deal because it divides Christ's church into the spiritual have's and have-not's. Have you ever been asked by a Pentecostal or charismatic friend, "So, have you been baptized in the Holy Spirit?" I.e., "Are you just a plain-vanilla Christian – or have you gotten the 'Holy Spirit turb-boost?'" Are you one of the higher-level Christians?

Beloved, that is such a destructive teaching: the Holy Spirit didn't come to divide the church, but to unite the church. Let me refresh your pneumatology here—

***Every Christian receives the gift and promise of the Holy Spirit, when they believe.**

Jesus promised this—

- John 7:37–39 ³⁷On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.
- John 14:16–17 ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells *with* you and will be *in* you.
- John 16:7 ⁷Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

OT believers did not have the indwelling HS, NC Christians do. When we come to Acts, the resurrected Jesus tells His disciples to wait until the Spirit comes, which happened in ch. 2 at Pentecost, and from that time on, this is the pattern—

- Acts 2:38 ³⁸And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and *you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*”
- Acts 5:32 ³²And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”
- Galatians 3:14 ¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus *the blessing of Abraham* might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive *the promised Spirit* through faith.
- Galatians 4:6 ⁶And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

Every Christian has the Holy Spirit – and yes, this is the same as Spirit baptism—

- 1 Corinthians 12:13 ¹³For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

All – not just some – *were*, past tense, when we believed – *baptized* into *one* body –There is no such thing as an un-Spirit-baptized believer. This is so certain that Paul can say—

- Romans 8:9 Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

Now back to Paul's question to the bewitched Galatians: "When did this happen – when were you saved, and received the Holy Spirit?—

- Ephesians 1:13–14 ¹³In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

When you hear the Gospel, with faith in Christ = you are saved, justified, and permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit. That leads to his second question—

III. "How will you *continue* your Christian life?"

- Galatians 3:3 ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (And he means, by going back to law-keeping in your own steam?)

The word perfected means "to bring to completion, to reach the goal," What is the goal? To be like Christ! To grow in your believing and behaving, to mature; to become in your practice what you already are in your position. Your beginning was "*by hearing with faith,*" now he is talking about your sanctification, and it is also "*by hearing with faith.*" He says—

- "You started out by faith, but then you fell for the lie that you will grow by a lot of rules and lists? I wonder, were my efforts in vain – I hope not! Did Jesus save you through faith, and then say, "Well, now you're on your own – meet you at the finish line?" Are you so foolish?" Beloved, the Christian life is "Hearing by faith, in reliance on the HS, from start to finish. It's the way you begin, and it is the way you continue."

*I heard someone say once that the Christian life is like this: "Moses and the Law point us to Jesus for salvation – then Jesus points us back to Moses and the Law for sanctification!" And many churches would nod and say, "That's right!" But Paul says right here, "No, that's wrong!" You start with Jesus and you stay with Jesus – "*For the law was given through Moses – grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*" (Jn.1:17).

So if we aren't to be perfected by the flesh and lawkeeping, how do we continue in the Christian life? How do we keep growing and get out of our diapers? He already told us, back in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me!"

Here it is. He is saying, "This is how you grow:"

1.) **Remember who you are.**

A new creature, created in Christ, in union with His life, death, and resurrection – I in Him, and He in me, one with my Lord and Savior, so much so that it's hard to tell where Jesus leaves off and I begin!" Do you see yourself like that? Is that truly your identity? A new person, not the same person, because the old you was crucified with Christ?

- There is a story that after Augustine was saved, he was walking down the street in his city when his ex-mistress saw him. She shouted out, “Augustine!” No response. She said, “Augustine! Augustine, it’s *me!*” He kept walking and said, “But it’s not me!”

2.) ***Remember how you live.***

“The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me!”

What does that mean? You keep looking, staring at the cross – because that’s where you see the only Person who ever died for you. And you keep believing that He did this because He loved you – enough to die for you. And you will be transformed! You will not live like your old self, but you will live like your new self. You will understand what Paul meant when he said—

- Romans 12:1 ¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God (you are staring at the cross and he one who loved you and delivered Himself up for you), to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

And when you are staring at the cross, these words will make perfect sense—

- Colossians 3:12–13 ²Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you (on that cross, where He said, “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they do), so you also must forgive.

And now do you get Paul’s frustration at Christians who trade this for legalistic, fleshly rules and lists? Beloved, you will only get this new identity and this new way to live, the same way you got saved to begin with, by “*hearing with faith—*”

- Drink in God’s Word, read it, study it, hear it, and then ask God “So what do I do about it? Father, is there sin I need to confess? Is there a promise I need to believe? Is there a command I need to obey? What does faith look like in the situation I am facing right now?”
- Colossians 3:16 ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
- Psalm 1:2–3 ²but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

“Hearing with faith.” And you do that until it’s hard to tell where Jesus leaves off and you begin! Don’t be foolish, if you began in the Spirit, don’t try to bring the Spirit’s work to completion in your flesh.

And let me close with this – I know some of you have been sitting there thinking, “when is he going to bring up Phil.1:6?” Well, I saved it for the end: This is the promise of God for all His children—

- Philippians 1:6 (NASB95) ⁶For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will *perfect* it (same word as in Gal.3:3) until the day of Christ Jesus.

What God started in you, He will bring to completion. "Twas grace, hath brought you safe thus far, and grace will lead you home!"

John Newton wrote those words. He told of a remarkable dream he had. In his dream he was in Naples harbour when a most glorious person came on board the ship and gave him a precious and beautiful jewel. Thanking him, and taking it from him, John Newton thought there could be no one more happy. But soon another person came on the deck and began to mock him, saying the jewel was no good, and urging him to throw it away. After a time Newton began to believe him and, taking the jewel, flung it into the sea. Immediately, he was filled with horror. The sky grew dark and the nearby volcano began to erupt. "Oh! what have I done?" he cried.

After a time the first glorious person came to him again, and asked him about the jewel he had kindly given him. With shame John Newton confessed he had thrown it away. What would happen now? But in his dream he saw the glorious person go over the side of the ship, right down beneath the water, and after a time return with the jewel. As he came back on the deck, Newton says, "I held out my hand for it, but he refused. 'No,' he said, 'the jewel is yours; it always will be yours; but I will keep it for you!'"

Prayer –

- John 6:39–40 ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."