

“Bewitched”

(Galatians 3:1-5)

Introduction

➤ As we turn again to our study of the book of Galatians, it is important to remember that the biblical book of “Galatians” is actually a letter, written by the apostle Paul to “*the churches of Galatia*” (1:2) sometime in the middle of the first century. The Christians to whom Paul was writing were in the midst of a battle for the Gospel. They were being deceived by false teachers (false believers), known as Judaizers, who taught that a person could not be saved unless they adhered to Jewish laws and customs – especially that of circumcision (see 2:3, 12; 5:3, 6, 11; 6:12, 13, 15).

Consequently, Paul’s writing style is confrontational, powerful, blunt, biting and concise (only six fairly short, but extremely dense, chapters). With great faithfulness and conviction, the apostle Paul is defending the truth of the Gospel – that salvation is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone – calling out those who were seeking to distort the Gospel (proclaiming a “*different*” gospel; 1:6-7), and chiding Christians for being so easily deceived by (or accepting of) this false gospel (1:6; 3:1; 5:4, 7).

➤ The key, central, verse of the entire book of Galatians – the letter the apostle Paul wrote to “*the churches of Galatia*” (1:2) – is Galatians 2:16.

“... we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Galatians 2:16).

➤ In Galatians 3:1-5, we find Paul further explaining the Gospel, and defending it against those who were preaching/teaching a false gospel. Like war-pilot making another pass at his target, Paul is further elaborating on the means in which a person is truly saved.

I. Paul’s defense of the Gospel – salvation is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (3:1 - 4:11).

➤ The beginning of chapter three marks a major transition in Paul’s letter to the Galatians [keep in mind, the chapter and verse numbers were not part of Paul’s original letter; added in the 13th and 16th centuries respectively to help navigate through Scripture]. In the first two chapters, the apostle gave a defense of his apostolic authority, and defined the Gospel he preached (which was the same Gospel preached by the other apostles, who had learned it directly from Christ Jesus).

Beginning in chapter three (to chapter five verse 12), Paul defended and contended for the truth of the Gospel. Here, Paul confronted these Galatian Christians for their failure to believe the true Gospel and the ease/quickness with which they turned “*to a different gospel*” (1:6).

Gal 1:6-7 ~ “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – ⁷not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”

➤ What Paul had mentioned briefly before, he now (in chapter three) expressed in full vigor. Pulling no punches, he rebuked the Galatians for their lack of discernment and chastised them for their willingness to accept a false gospel. In this letter, Paul was attempting – in every way possible, from every angle – to show the Galatians the error of their ways; the serious error of believing a false gospel.

✓ **Illust:** “The sixty verses that make up Galatians 3 and 4 are some of the strongest writing that Paul ever penned. But after all, he was in a battle! He was out to prove that salvation is by grace alone, and not by work so the law. His opponents had used every possible means to try to capture the churches of Galatia, and Paul was not going to fight them halfheartedly. The apostle was no amateur when it came to debate, and in these two chapters he certainly proves his abilities. His logic is unassailable” (Warren W. Wiersbe; *Be Free*; [NT Commentary on Galatians]; p.67).

➤ In chapters three and four of Paul's letter to the Galatians, Paul composed a series of arguments – personal/experiential (3:1-5), scriptural (3:6-14), logical (3:15-29), historical (4:1-11), sentimental (4:12-18), allegorical (4:19-31) – to prove that what he had written previously (1:6-2:21). Namely, that the Galatians did not need to observe Jewish rituals and laws (e.g. circumcision) in order to be obtain or maintain salvation. For salvation is by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Paul was making an argument that is still important and relevant to us today. As Christians, we must continually, and faithfully, defend and declare the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For in every age, for every generation and society, there exists a prevalent attack against the Gospel – from both within the church and without.

Therefore, as Christians, we must know, believe, cherish, defend, display and proclaim the (true) Gospel. We must not mistakenly think that the Gospel is only important for unbelievers, or for new believers. As the saying goes, "Christians must preach the Gospel to themselves every day." We must always recognize that we are saved by God's grace alone (not by works). In addition, we must be continually reminded that our spiritual growth and perseverance are also the result of God's saving grace toward us in Christ. So, both our salvation and our sanctification are by God's grace – salvation by God's grace alone through faith alone, sanctification by God's grace through our obedience.

➤ In this passage, he appeals to their own personal Christian/conversion experience.

A. The defense from personal (conversion) experience (3:1-5):

Paul's first appeal to the Galatians was for them to think what it meant to be saved. He wanted them to remember their conversion experience – before they were duped into thinking that they could (in any way) earn, or be deserving of, salvation.

Gal 3:1-5 ~ "O 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 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?"

Seeking to awaken them from their self-righteous stupor, Paul – in rapid-fire succession – shells them with several probing questions (i.e. six questions in five verses). Each question is rhetorical, meaning that Paul is not expecting them to answer but expecting them to know the answer; which is meant to be obvious. This device is especially effective when making an argument through a written letter – since the recipient cannot directly respond, or engage in a dialogue with, the one asking the question. It is meant to compel the person to think. In this case, Paul is exhorting the Galatians to remember the origin and means of their salvation.

To accomplish this, Paul compels them to remember that salvation is – from first to last – a work of the Triune God – God the Son, God the Spirit, and God the Father. In this Holy Spirit inspired diatribe, Paul sought to jolt the Galatians memory of what God had done to save them. We too need to remember these truths, lest we be duped into thinking that we can earn (or be deserving of) God's salvation by our own righteousness or religious works.

I. Remember that God the Son (i.e. Jesus Christ) alone was crucified for our sins (vs. 1).

In verse one, we read Paul's exclamation: "*O foolish Galatians!*" (vs.1). Paul was not insulting their intelligence as much as he was rebuking their lack of discernment – how quickly, easily, they accepted a false gospel (Gal.1:6). The Greek word translated "foolish" (*anoētos*) does not mean "stupidity" (i.e. unintelligence) but (i.e. imprudence), not lacking in

intellect but lacking in wisdom (also in 3:3). But it is important to note that this word is not synonymous with ignorance. That is, it was not a lack of knowledge that led the Galatians to be deceived, carelessness – a failure to remember and faithfully to defend the true Gospel!

Jesus used this same word to the disciples on the road to Emmaus:

Luke 24:25-27 ~ “And he said to them, ‘O foolish [*anoētos*] ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

They should have known that Jesus was to die on the cross, and would rise again (for this was what was declared in the Old Testament). Like the Galatians, these disciples were not ignorant of the truth but failed to believe and remember the truth. While they were not stupid, they were acting as if they were.

In Galatians, Paul’s words may seem unnecessarily harsh, but we must recognize that he was deeply concerned for their salvation. The Galatians had been duped, bewitched, into thinking that they could obtain or maintain their salvation by their good works apart from Christ. It is important to note the preceding word “*O*” (vs.1; also in Lk.24:25, and in 1Tim.6:20 [as Tim mentioned in his incredibly timely and biblical sermon last Sunday; if you have not yet listened to that message I strongly encourage you to do so (from our church website)]. Though often overlooked in English, it is a word of significance in Greek as it denotes a strong and personal appeal. It underscores the passion undergirding Paul’s arguments – his righteous indignation and ardent concern over the Galatians departure from the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

First question: “Who has bewitched you?” (vs.1)

He asked, “*Who has bewitched you?*” (vs.1). Paul knew that the Galatians had been “*bewitched*” (*baskainō*), a word (used only here in the NT) that means to charm, or deceive. In extra-biblical literature, the word is used in regard to magic spells or sorcery. Here, Paul is using this word to illustrate that the Galatians have been deceived by those who were teaching that people must adhere to Jewish laws and customs (i.e. circumcision) in order to be saved. It was as if someone had cast a spell on them, as if they had been brainwashed. For they had been duped into thinking that faith in Christ was not sufficient enough for salvation.

✓ **Illust:** “‘O foolish Galatians,’ he cries. ‘I have brought you the true Gospel, and you received it with eagerness and gratitude. Now all of a sudden you drop the Gospel. What has got into you?’” (Martin Luther; *Luther’s Commentary on Galatians*; 3:1).

In an attempt to ‘snap them out of it’, Paul gave them this sobering reminder: “*It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified*” (vs.1) [note: some translations include this sentence as part of Paul’s first question – “You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?” (NASB)]. He is exhorting them to remember that horrible and shameful death that Jesus died – to which they were eyewitnesses, in effect, through their knowledge of crucifixion and the preaching of the apostle Paul. The point is that the crucifixion of Christ was not unknown to them. It was not a hidden or private event. For Jesus had been “*publicly portrayed*” (*prographō*; to write beforehand or display/declare publicly) “*as crucified*” (vs.1).

It is absolutely absurd (irrational/idiotic) to think that God would send His one and only Son to be crucified if we could simply be saved by (keeping/observing) works of the law. The Galatians knew well the horrors that Christ suffered on the cross, and they needed – desperately needed – to be reminded of the reasons for that horrific event. Jesus died on the cross in our place, for our sins (Is.53:4-6; 2Cor.5:21). To believe that salvation (in part or in

whole) can be obtained by righteous/religious works, is tantamount to rejecting the cross of Christ and being separated from Christ.

Gal 2:21 ~ “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”

Gal 5:2-4 ~ “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.”

Paul desperately wanted to break the Galatians free from ‘the spell’ they were under. He wanted to fixate their eyes back to the cross of Christ – to Jesus and Him crucified (see Gal.2:20; 5:24; 6:14; cf. 1Cor.2:2). The Galatians needed to be reminded, as do many today, that on the cross Jesus did everything necessary for salvation. Jesus is “the only and all-sufficient Savior.” That salvation is not by works, but by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

2. Remember that God the Spirit is received by faith alone (vs. 2-4).

The second reminder Paul gave was that God the Spirit is received by faith alone. This, like the previous point, was also something Paul knew that the Galatians knew – for Paul had personally preached it to them. To make this point, Paul posed four successive questions:

Gal 3:2-4 ~ “Let 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 so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain?”

These three verses contain four rhetorical questions (questions two thru five) – questions that need to be considered and answered, but answers ought to be self-evident.

Second question: “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” (vs.2)

The phrase, “*Let me ask you only this*” (vs.2) could also be translated, “The only thing I want to learn from you is this” (NET). Essentially, these questions are all variations (or extrapolations) of same question in verse two: “*Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?*” (vs.2).

The answer to this question is obvious. The Galatians knew that they did not receive the Spirit of God by religious works or adherence to the law. They knew that the Spirit was given to them by God because of their faith in Christ; that no one can warrant the indwelling, and sanctifying, Spirit of God by their own righteousness

Gal 3:13-14 ~ “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’ – ¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

Acts 2:38 ~ “And 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.’”

The Galatians knew, from their own conversion experience, that they had received the Spirit of God not by their works but through their faith. They knew that both salvation and the Spirit of God come by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

✓Illust: “The Holy Spirit is not the goal of the Christian life but is its source. He is not the product of faithful living but is the power behind it. A higher level of living does not bring the Holy Spirit; rather submission to the Holy Spirit, who already indwells the believer, includes a higher level of living” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians*; 3:2-4).

Unfortunately, many people today are falsely claiming to have received some portion or endowment of the Spirit by the religious works or experience. People want to claim some merit or method with which they received the Holy Spirit of God. But the Spirit of God cannot be earned. He is given, as God’s gracious gift, to those who receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Rom 8:7-8 ~ “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

John 15:4-5 ~ “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

Christians are not saved by good works, but unto good works (cf. Eph.2:8-10). Good works (righteous and obedient living) are the natural outpouring from the one who is truly saved (Jms.2:17). Likewise, no one receives the Spirit of God “*by works of the law*” but “*by hearing with faith*” (vs.2). The Galatians had heard the preaching/proclamation of the Gospel, and responded to it by receiving (through faith) Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Their salvation, and the regenerating and sanctifying work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, did not originate from religious works but through faith alone (see Tit.3:4-6).

Rom 10:17 ~ “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

Third question: “Are you so foolish?” (vs.3a)

Paul then asked, “*Are you so foolish?*” (vs.3). This is the question form of what Paul stated previously (“*O foolish Galatians!*”; vs.1 [the same word (*anoētos*) translated as “foolish” in both verses]). Once again, Paul is not trying to insult the Galatians, but awaken them from the legalistic/self-righteous spell they were under. He was desperately trying to show them the error of their ways, and to keep them from apostatizing (falling) away from the faith. He wanted them to not be deceived. He wanted them to think biblically and logically. He wanted them to truly understand how idiotic it is to believe that humans can be saved, and Spirit-filled, apart from God’s divine intervention and enablement. It is truly foolish to think that we can earn salvation, or receive the Spirit, by our own goodness or good works.

Fourth question: “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (vs.3b)

Furthermore, many people mistakenly believe that they are saved by faith alone but must work to secure that salvation by their works. This is the very thing Paul was driving at when he asked: “*Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*” (vs.3). The word “*perfected*” (*epiteleō*) could also be translated to complete or finish. In other words, “Do you seriously think what you received by faith you now need to keep by human effort?”

✓Illust: “John Stott summarizes [the Galatians’] theology as follows: ‘They did not deny that you must believe in Jesus for salvation, but they stressed that you must be circumcised and keep the law as well. In other words, you must let Moses finish what Christ has begun. Or rather, you yourself must finish by your obedience to the law what Christ has begun. You must add your works to the work of Christ. You must finish Christ’s unfinished work’” (Philip

This, I believe, is a common trap for many Christians. They first come to Christ knowing they cannot earn God's saving grace, but gradually are deceived – whether by false teaching, or pride (or both) – that they actually have earned or deserved (whether in part or in whole) God's salvation. We must be guarded against such a false gospel.

John 19:30 ~ “When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ [*teleō*] and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

Rom 10:4 ~ “For Christ is the end [*telos*] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

Heb 12:2 ~ “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter [*teleiōtēs*] of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Let me say this bluntly and plainly: Christ's work of salvation is neither unfinished nor imperfect!

Phil 1:6 ~ “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion [*epiteleō*; i.e. will perfect it] at the day of Jesus Christ.”

Heb 10:12-14 ~ “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴For by a single offering he has perfected [*teleiōō*] for all time those who are being sanctified.”

Heb 7:25 ~ “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost [*pantelēs*] those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

To believe that you (in your flesh, by your works) have to finish, perfect and/or complete God's saving and sanctifying work within you – apart from God – is the height of foolishness and arrogance. It is as nonsensical, and futile, as starting your car and then getting out to push it wherever you want to go. But it is even more sinister that that: it is to presume that we can, on our own, improve upon or progress in our spiritual condition – in any way or to any degree – apart from God. To be sure, God has commanded that we believe and trust in Him, and submit to His will, participating in His saving and sanctifying work in us (Jms.2:20-26). But God alone can complete (perfect) what God alone has begun.

Fifth question: “Did you suffer so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain?” (vs.4)

With yet another question, Paul was seeking to compel the Galatians to examine their Christian lives (see 1Cor.11:28; 2Cor.13:5). He asked, “*Did you suffer so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain?*” (vs.4). The word “suffer” (*paschō*) is used over 40 times in the New Testament and almost always in the negative context of suffering pain or loss. Paul may have been referring to some persecution the Galatians suffered when they first put their faith in Christ (although he does not specifically mention any such persecution). We know that persecution was prominent part of the Christian's life in Paul's day.

Gal 1:13 ~ “For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.”

Gal 5:11 ~ “But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.”

Gal 6:12 ~ “It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.”

2 Tim 3:12 ~ “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (Acts 14:22)

Paul may also have used the word “*suffer*” as a general description of all that the Galatians had “experienced” so far in their Christian lives. Such spiritual experiences should have convinced them that the Holy Spirit was working in their lives to bring about salvation and sanctification.

Any such experiences – whether persecution or spiritual growth – would indeed be “*in vain*” (*eikē*) if the Christian abandoned their faith to pursue self-righteousness or any work apart from Christ.

3. Remember that God the Father alone gives the Spirit and grants (enables) salvation (vs.5).

Salvation is a work of God – from first to last. God is the one who initially (sovereignly) enables a person to come to Christ (see Jn.12:39-40; Rom.8:7-8). God alone can awaken the one who is dead in sin (Eph.2:1), He alone can bring light to the one who’s heart is darkened by sin (Jn.8:12; 12:46; Eph.5:8), He alone can open the eyes of those who are blinded by Satan (2Cor.4:4), He alone can empower us to live godly lives that are pleasing to Him (Rom.5:6, 8:7-8). To further secure our understanding that God is sovereign over salvation, we find that God’s salvific work in those who believe occurred before they were even born – “*before the foundation of the world*” (Eph.1:4).

Paul highlighted these realities with another thought-provoking, rhetorical, question.

Sixth question: “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 . . .?” (vs.5)

Turning their attention to the specific work of God the Father, Paul asked: “*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*” (vs.5). The word “*supplies*” (*epichorēgeō*) means to give fully, abundantly and freely. What is it that God supplies so generously and graciously? It is “*the Spirit*” of God to all who truly believe.

God the Father also “*works miracles*” (*energeō dynamis*) in those who believe, enabling them to be saved and to live according to His will. This could also be a reference to the miracles performed by the apostles to authenticate their God-given message of the Gospel.

So, Paul again asked, “Did God save you because you kept the law or because you heard the Gospel and responded in faith?” Clearly, the latter is true.

✓Illust: “The good news of the Gospel is that even though we are lost and need sinners, if we know Christ, then we are and always will be justified. Justification is much more than a great doctrine to die with, although it certainly is that. Justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone is also a wonderful doctrine to live by” (Philip Graham Ryken; *Galatians*; p.92).

Conclusion

➤ One of the greatest hymns ever written is “Rock of Ages”, written by Augustus Montague Toplady (in 1776). This hymn beautifully and powerfully reflects the teaching we have just studied (Ga.3:1-5), and the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood, From Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure; Save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labor of my hands Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to the cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress; Helpless look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath, When mine eyes shall close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown, See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee.