

Parson to Person
(Galatians 3 – Part 1)
“Salvation—Apart from the Law”

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?—just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Therefore know that only those who are of the faith are sons of Abraham.” (Galatians 3:1–7).

The Knowledge of the Cross

Paul appealed to the Galatians' knowledge about Jesus and the work He accomplished on the cross when writing, *“Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified”* (vs. 1b). This statement was backed up by earlier exposure to the historical crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus—a fact the Galatians may have been exposed to as early as A.D. 34.

In A.D. 47–48 Paul went to Galatia and planted churches. Later he wrote the Galatian letter—about A.D. 49. Therefore, the Galatians may have known of Jesus and/or were exposed to the truth of His sacrificial death at Calvary for upward of 16 years.

An odd fact is the apparent absence of any Galatians on “The Day of Pentecost” (see Acts 2:9–11). All present for Pentecost that year heard the message of the cross as declared by Peter (see Acts 2:14–42). It is possible some Galatians were present—but details are

clearly omitted. However, of note is the fact that Galatia was surrounded by Jews who were present, and I mean surrounded, on nearly every side. Those from Cilicia were also unnamed (if present), but otherwise every adjacent border province is listed as having had persons from their regions in Jerusalem for that glorious day. Therefore, it would seem logical that the Galatians would have heard the Gospel from their surrounding neighbors.

The Judaizers—and the First Question

The Judaizers didn't show up in Galatia until about A.D. 48–49. Therefore, Paul was himself perplexed to see the frailty of the Galatian believers' understanding of the cross and sacrificial work of Jesus—a Gospel, as mentioned, they may have known for up to 16 years. Concerning this perplexity Paul used the expression *“bewitched,”* indicating some kind of spell had been cast upon the churches. He wrote, *“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth...?”* (vs. 1a).

The fact that salvation was and is by faith alone, as the result of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, in our place for our sins, should have been clear enough to allow for a spiritual revelation and working knowledge that faith in Jesus was enough to save apart from the deeds of the Law. However, a needed lesson to rescue the struggling Church from error required Paul's letter and stern rebuke.

The Galatians were not “under a spell” as such—but were being “deceived” into believing a lie.

You and Me

Herein we should be reminded that we are subject to error—if we do not know the truth and hold to it. We, like the Galatians, will be easy prey to false teachers and satanically inspired doctrines.

Believers today, just like those in the first century, need careful study of and adherence to the truth.

More Questions

Paul illustratively asked a follow-up question that appealed to history and logic in order to challenge the thinking of the Galatians. He wrote, *“This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”* (vs. 2). Logically they would recall that they were born again (justified and regenerated) prior to circumcision—or any other level of obedience to the Law. Therefore, they should have noticed that Law-keeping was non-essential to their salvific experience.

Paul added, *“Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?”* (vs. 3). Thus, continuing his logical argument.

The Galatians would be forced to recognize that they were saved apart from the Law. Therefore, they should have known that adding the Law to their post-salvation experience was also non-essential—and worse—it was an assault on the work of Christ. However, as is true for many believers today, they were taught that they were born again by faith but would be required to maintain their salvation through so-called sanctifying works. God forbid that they (we) should believe such a thing! Our sanctification was and is made perfect by faith—just as is justification and regeneration.

The Message of the Cross and its Offensiveness

Believers all over the world were and are persecuted for believing that Jesus is enough—and that the work He did at the cross was enough. When the Gospel is rightly proclaimed, it offends our human desire to take some credit for the salvation provided. Therefore, the appeal of the Law and Law-keeping is an easy

attraction. When human performance is embraced, persecution is more easily avoided, and creature comforts are deceptively accepted. For this reason, Paul asked yet another question: *“Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?”* (vs. 4).

The Galatians were suffering the afflictions inspired by the Judaizers. If they were to embrace the erroneous doctrinal concepts purported by the Judaizers, they may have been left alone. However, had they embraced those concepts they would have believed a false gospel. Moreover, had they embraced that false gospel—any false gospel—they would be in the firing line of Paul’s anathema. Let us remember: *“if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed”* (Galatians 1:8–9).

Preaching the true Gospel is offensive to the world, the flesh, and the devil... And no wonder, it’s true.

The Last Question—For the Moment

Paul, continuing his appeal to history and logic asked, *“Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”* (vs. 5). The answer became obvious. The promised Spirit birth was the result of the faith in Jesus—as illustrated above—not by keeping the Law. The Law kills but the Spirit gives life. Therefore, *“just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’”* (vs. 6), likewise all of us who believe, God declares righteous—by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, as declared in the Scriptures alone, for the glory of God alone!

I love you all,
Pastor Paul