

March 16, 2014
Community Baptist Church
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Galatians
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study Galatians 3:1-9.

1. Who bewitched the Galatians, and how did they do it?
2. Did Paul mean that the Christians in Galatia were actually in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified (v.1b)?
3. Describe the spiritual process that would be described in the word “perfected” (v.3).
4. How are modern Christians blessed like Abraham was?
5. What “gospel” did God preach to Abraham?

HOW COULD YOU DO THAT? Galatians 3:1-9

Jesus taught that the way to heaven goes through a very narrow gate, at which we must all leave all our baggage. The way to heaven proceeds along a narrow and difficult road. Sometimes that road is so narrow that it is difficult for us to keep our balance on it. It is easy to fall off the road of salvation by leaning too far toward the works side. In that case, we can become mixed up like the Galatian Christians were and begin to think that it is necessary to do and keep traditions in order to win salvation. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are saved by grace through faith, not through our own efforts.

So some folks react by leaning way over to the other side of the road. On that side of the road, folks conclude we need to “Let go and

let God.” That’s another way of saying “Don’t worry about it.” They conclude, “If God saved you, it’s all taken care of and you can live without regard to rules.” That attitude leads to antinomianism, which is to fall off the road on the other side.

Paul used Abraham as an example of a man who was justified by faith in God alone. Read the story of that man’s life and you will discover two obvious truths. One is that he believed God’s promises over and over again. He is characterized as believing God. So that the New Testament repeats many times that in response to Abraham’s faith God made him righteous. The second trait you see in Abraham’s life was that he desired to please God. Abe wasn’t the one who wanted to live in the worldliness of Sodom. That was Lot. Abraham pleased God because he was righteous. Did he make some dumb choices? Sure, just like we do. But, it is obvious that he desired to please God because he believed God. He is a good example for us to follow.

Remember How You Received the Spirit (vv.1-5).

Why did the Christians respond to false teaching the way they did? Paul is going to ask a very pointed question. “Didn’t you see Jesus crucified?” But, before we get that far, we need to consider a couple of other tough and direct statements. *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? (v.1a).*

Paul concluded that someone had bewitched the Christians in the Galatian churches. That must have been the case since they were responding so foolishly to a patently false teaching. The word foolish (*anoeitōs*) comes from the word *no-eo*, which means to direct one’s mind to a subject. Or we might translate the verb “to think.” Therefore, *anoeo* must mean not directing one’s mind or not being able to control one’s thinking. It means not being able to figure things out or the failure to perceive.

Paul was astonished that the Christians in the Galatian churches were not thinking clearly about the false teaching that had overtaken them. No doubt most of the people he addressed were bright and reasonable folks in their daily business dealings. But in this very important matter about their salvation, they were being very careless about what they chose to believe. Here is a vital reminder: God really

does expect His people to be thinking people. That is because if we exchange feelings for careful thinking, we will be prone to accept error just like those early Christians did. In an age when how one feels trumps what the truth states, false teaching will flourish like weeds. It spells guaranteed upheaval for the Church. That is not Christ's plan for the Church He is building. He gave spiritual gifts to the Church so that the Church can be built up in the truth. He gave evangelists and pastor/teachers *so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (Ephesians 4:14).*

The non-thinking attitude almost looked as though the Christians had been *bewitched*. Generally, this word speaks of getting the "evil eye" or describes someone speaking derogatorily about another. But here Paul seems to go back to the original idea behind the word – that of having an evil spell cast upon you through witchcraft. Paul knew full well that the Judaizers had brought an attractive, deceptive message. The idea of gaining salvation through personal efforts appeals to human pride. But of all people who should be protected against buying into such error, it ought to be us who have experienced the life-changing power of God's grace! The deception was so deceptive because the false teachers did not deny Christ's work of salvation. They just added to it the need for human works. When we add anything to Christ, we have denied Christ.

Apparently, the Christians forgot about their public affirmation. Paul reminded them that *it was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified (v.1b)*. Paul pointed out that the work of Jesus Christ was not kept secret or discussed in private groups. Paul himself displayed Jesus Christ crucified for the remission of sins as publicly as any advertisement for any grand event that came to town. He was so dynamic that typically when Paul came to preach in a town, the whole town was not only effected, but often ended up in an uproar. That he declared that Jesus of Nazareth had already been crucified, already paid the price for sin, was no secret.

That many people in the Galatian region had trusted the message of Christ crucified and had also publicly declared their faith in Christ was no secret. They had made clear statements about the crucifixion of Christ. They demonstrated that the crucifixion of Christ has continuing effects for eternity. It is the payment to cover out sins forever. It is the

power to give us victory over sin forever. To add something to that grand and central act of eternity is to truncate its effect.

Paul stated that all Christians in Galatia understood the work of the cross and understood the effect it already had on their fellow Christians. Then how in the name of common sense, Paul wondered, could they now decide to add something to Christ's finished work? It seemed quite simple to him that trying to add your own efforts to Christ's work just doesn't make sense!

Paul drove deeper into the argument challenging the Christians to think about their relationship with the Holy Spirit. Did you receive Him by doing works of the law? *Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith (v.2)?* The gift of the Holy Spirit is God's seal of authentic salvation. Paul argued to the Romans that if the Holy Spirit is not indwelling us, we are not God's children. *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him (Romans 8:9).* Christians have the Holy Spirit because God gives the Holy Spirit as the promise that He will complete salvation at the end of time. *In 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, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13-14).*

The indwelling Holy Spirit is such a critical truth for us because He gives witness to our spirit that we are God's children. *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16)*. Therefore, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit gives us confidence that we are born again. *By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit (1 John 4:13).*

So regarding this important work of the Holy Spirit, Paul wanted to know if those Christians thought that we receive the Holy Spirit by doing a particular work or by keeping a law. We can pose the questions to our own experience of salvation. Did the Holy Spirit come to indwell us because we were baptized? Did He come to indwell us because we spoke in tongues? Did He come to indwell us because we prayed and fasted? No! Christ gave Him in full at the moment of salvation when we expressed faith in Christ's finished work. At that

moment, we received all of the person of the Holy Spirit since we could not receive only part of a person.

Furthermore, Paul wondered, “Did you begin in the Spirit but proceed in the flesh?” *Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh (v.3)?* Okay, since we all agree that we received the entire person named Holy Spirit at the moment of faith, is it not utterly foolish to think that we can conform to Him in our own strength? Again this is the word *anoetos*, which means the Christians were not thinking. We all begin eternal life, the new life, in the power of the Holy Spirit who regenerates us.

Since that is true, how do we think we can grow in that pattern in our own strength and wisdom? The “fruit” of the Spirit stands in direct conflict with the “fruit” of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-24). In our own strength, we will always end up characterized by sexual immorality, impurity, enmity, strife, jealousy, drunkenness, and the like (5:19-21). Only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who is given to us at the moment of faith, are we able to demonstrate love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and such (5:22-23). Not only are these characteristics not achieved by our personal efforts, but they are found in the person who has crucified the flesh and works very diligently in the power of the Holy Spirit, depending wholly on the Holy Spirit. The works of the Spirit are evident in the discipline of the flesh. James argued, *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? (James 2:14). So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:17).* True growing in the Holy Spirit is evidenced by the fruit of Holy Spirit produced work.

Another important question from Paul is, “Did you suffer many things in vain?” *Did you suffer so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain? (v.4).* It is possible that the Christians in Galatia did experience a certain amount of persecution. When Paul and Barnabas brought the gospel to Galatia, they faced persecution. Jews in Antioch Pisidia drove them off (Acts 13:50). The mission team fled attempted stoning by Jews and Gentiles in Iconium (Acts 14:5). They didn’t move soon enough the next time as Paul was stoned nearly to death in Lystra (Acts 14:19). But in all those incidents, there is no indication that the believers in those cities suffered a like fate (though the Jews predisposed people against them, Acts 14:2). Nor is there any other mention of suffering in this letter.

Therefore, we must wonder if it isn’t likely that Paul had in mind the original meaning of the verb which is neutral. In that case he meant, did you experience all the evidences of the Holy Spirit in vain? Did God waste His expressions of grace on the Christians? That is what Paul wondered when he wrote the words, *If indeed it was in vain.* At the same time, the words give hope that the problem is salvageable.

Or, does Christ accomplish His blessings to you through your keeping the law? 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 (v.5)? The miracles can be of two kinds. It might refer to the confirming miracle signs the early Church experienced – like healing, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and prophecy. Or it might refer to God’s works in individual Christians such as the miracle of salvation, the spiritual gifts, even the fruit of the Spirit. Did those Christians somehow conjure up those unique, life-changing works themselves? Or are God’s miracles in our lives the result of faith?

These are still the questions we must answer. If indeed great change has overtaken your life because of salvation, were the changes due to your wisdom, work, and efforts at keeping the details of the law? What did you gain by keeping ceremonial traditions? Or did God do the miracle of salvation (and all the accompanying miracles) by His grace when you trusted Him?

Abraham Sets the Standard of Faith (vv.6-9).

Abraham believed God (v.6). Paul set Abraham as the example by writing, *Just as Abraham “believed God” (v.6a).* When did he believe? There are several examples of Abraham believing God. God told Abraham to leave Haran and his family, and Abraham believed God enough to move (Genesis 12:4-9). God told Abraham that He would give his posterity all the land he could see, and Abraham believed Him even though he didn’t have a son (Genesis 13:14-18). God promised Abraham that He was his shield and would reward him greatly – even giving him many sons to live in the land, and Abraham believed God (Genesis 15:1-21). God promised to give Abraham a son named Isaac and Abraham believed God (Genesis 17:15-21). God promised that the whole human race would be blessed through

Abraham, and Abraham believed God (Genesis 12:3). Abraham believed God would provide the “Lamb,” which He did (Genesis 22:8).

Because of this testimony, we are not surprised by God’s assessment of Abraham. We find twenty-six references in the New Testament epistles to Abraham’s faith or God’s work in him. In this book alone, there are eight references to Abraham and his faith.

What was the result of his faith? Paul wrote, *And it was counted to him as righteousness (v.6b)*. Because Abraham believed God, God put righteousness on Abraham’s account. Therefore, we should not be surprised to find several examples of righteous works recorded on Abraham’s behalf. He moved at God’s command. He interceded for Pharaoh. He rescued Lot. He paid tithe to Melchizedek. He interceded for Lot. He obeyed God in the attempt to sacrifice Isaac. He secured a wife for Isaac.

For which of those works did God impute righteousness to Abraham? None! Abraham did all of those things **because** he believed God. Abraham did not believe in “let go and let God” – a laissez-faire attitude toward sanctification. He believed that he should walk worthy of his calling (Ephesians 4:1). The Galatian Christians, unlike Abraham, began to think that they gained their righteous standing before God by doing works like circumcision. If we insist on walking that road, we are not sons of Abraham.

Conversely, Paul argued, those who have faith are like Abraham (vv.7-9). Believers are the sons of Abraham. *Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham (v.7)*. Many people claim to be sons of Abraham. Jews (the Pharisees in particular) in Jesus’ day who prided themselves in keeping hundreds of traditions fought arduously for the fact that they were Abraham’s children. *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?” (John 8:31-33)*. Jews in Paul’s day fought him for the right to be called sons of Abraham. Devout Jews still carry the title with pride. So do devout Muslims! All these people groups share the same deadly trait of thinking they can be saved by doing good works!

Jesus laid down the principle that uncovers all of these unbelieving false teachers. *“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he*

would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” . . . Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:56,58). So Paul had taught: *For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God (Romans 2:28-29)*. We are Abraham’s children when we trust God like Abraham trusted God.

This has been God’s plan from the beginning, which includes the thought that all nations are blessed in Abraham. *And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed” (v8)*. What does this verse mean by saying that God preached the gospel to Abraham? He did. In Genesis 12:3 God promised, *“I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3)*. The “Good News” (the gospel) is that God gives salvation from sin through faith. Abraham demonstrated that for us. Ultimately, through Abraham’s lineage, God brought the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. Therefore, Gentiles are saved just like Jews are saved by calling on the name of the Lord in faith.

Finally, Paul argued that believers are blessed with Abraham. *So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (v.9)*. Try to grasp the Bible picture of Abraham. When we speak of God blessing Abraham, most Americans have dollar signs flashing in their eyes. It is true that God did bless Abraham with many material blessings. But the focus of the Bible story about Abraham is that God called him, drew him, saved him, and kept all of the promises He made to him. The great story about Abraham is that he believed God and God made him righteous. All the rest is circumstantial. All the rest of Abraham’s testimony is the result of God-given righteousness through faith. The Abraham story is about a man who followed after God because of what God did to him.

God’s promise is that we who are of faith are also blessed the same way. God has called you, drawn you, saved you. God has put the righteousness of Christ on your account. You did not do anything, could not do anything to earn it. Now God, through the same kind of grace, continues to shape you and make you like that standard of Christ’s righteousness. We call this sanctification. We are not

“disciplining ourselves and bringing our flesh into subjection” (1 Cor. 9:27) because we hope we can win God’s approval. We are not “working out our own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12) in order to show God that we are really serious about wanting to escape hell and He owes us the ticket into heaven. We are diligent to show ourselves approved unto God (2 Tim. 2:15) because God has made us righteous. Like the Thessalonian believers, we do works of faith and labors of love because we have steadfast hope in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 1:3).

We must learn from this text to guard ourselves against becoming feeling oriented and non-thinking which will lead us to believe that we can do enough to earn our salvation. At the same time, we must guard against concluding that because Christ has given us Christ’s righteousness, we are now on a spiritual vacation, just cruising our way into heaven. Abraham did not leave us that kind of example. Abraham believed God, God made Him righteous, and, in response, Abraham sought to glorify God with his life.