

Galatians | The Grace Manifesto

The Only Thing I Want to Know (OR the Crux of the Matter)

3.1-14

6.30.19

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? ² This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the 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 So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

⁶ Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. ⁷ Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM." ¹¹ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." ¹² However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM." ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"-- ¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

We're looking at St Paul's Letter to the Galatians. We've called the series, Galatians: The Grace Manifesto because it's a declaration. Paul writes to a bunch of young churches in the first generation of Christians because these churches have strayed.

It's NOT that these straying Christians have become wicked or immoral or angry; this isn't really about bad behavior – it's NOT so much about FRUIT but much more about ROOT. It's about the TRUTH or the teaching/idea at the ROOT of Christianity.

If the root goes bad – the fruit will follow. If the unique teaching or doctrine (really a Person [1:6]!) if the unique Truth/Person of Christ is not the focus of a church then that church becomes just...religious... and (as we'll see) all kinds of bad stuff follows (5.19).

We've been seeing that Christianity is UNIQUE among all spiritual or religious approaches in that

it COMES DOWN: it's not a ladder we climb to God. It's not even a better ladder or the best ladder – it's NOT our climbing to God but God coming to us (4.4-6).

And this “grace-grid” (as we said last week) this way of looking at things is also the way to understand the Bible. St Paul's Bible was the Hebrew Bible (Genesis-Malachi) and Paul shows in this whole middle section (CHs 3-4) that people in (what we call) the Old Testament were NOT saved by their obedience or efforts but by grace received through faith.

So Galatians is a grid, an interpretive key to life and to the whole Bible – I read the Bible through the lens of Galatians (the lens of grace).

Today the question is: HOW DO WE MOVE AHEAD in the spiritual life? How do we make progress? Does it matter HOW we move along or just THAT we move along? Isn't the real issue that we IMPROVE OR does it matter HOW? Let's look at 1) What IS? 2) What WAS? 3) What NEXT?

Do you ever remember, when you were a child, one or both your parents entering a room where you were occupied and mom shouts, “What IS going on here?!” (It's not a question you want to hear!) OR maybe as a parent you have put that question.

That's our first point – “What IS going on here?” Paul asks that startling question SIX times in this first paragraph. It's a barrage of questions starting with, “Have you been hypnotized? Someone put a spell on you – who has bewitched you?” Paul is once again astonished!

Then, he appeals to their experience as if to say, “How do you understand this WAY – Christianity? How did you receive the Spirit? How did you GET God?” Notice that for Paul, the ultimate gift God can ever give to a person is Himself, His heart, His very presence, His SPIRIT...and how, you straying Galatians DID YOU get the Heart of Spirit of God?”

How would YOU answer that question? Is God with you? Has God shared Himself with you? Do you remember some time in your life when you were estranged from God... and came to see yourself as NOT right with God... BUT THEN, you were squared with God...He forgave you and embraced you and shared Himself with you? Has that been your experience?... And if SO...then how?

And all the Christians in those ancient churches... and all Christians even since will answer the same way: “Jesus Christ was publically portrayed as crucified... I saw Him as taking the stroke of justice that I deserved...and I simply received it as a gift.”

So you didn't earn it...work for it...shape up... qualify for it?

“Aw c'mon”...says the Christian...“I was reconciled to God BY GOD...grace came down... the Spirit

of God somehow mysteriously opened my eyes/heart and I saw that Jesus Christ was crucified for ME! Grace came down as a gift from God – I simply trusted.”

So IF that’s how you received God at the start... then HOW did you welcome Him in your life TODAY?

“Well...you know...the same way: I obeyed the principles of the Bible...just like you said...”

And Paul says, “Are you bewitched? Did you just hear what you said? How you first received forgiveness and the very Presence of God Himself (the Spirit) was by faith...right?”

“Oh, totally! We’re totally clear on THAT one, Paul: a person enters into right relationship with God by simply resting/trusting what Jesus did. Got it!”

“And you move ahead the same way”, says Paul

“Yeah...that’s what we said...we move ahead by obeying God’s commands.”

“Really?” says Paul, “You got the Spirit at first by simply trusting/resting/receiving but today you hope to get the Spirit and grace by conforming your life to Biblical principles... You’re in a trance! You’ve lost your minds...”

“Well, Paul, does it really matter?”

Paul says, “THIS IS THE ONLY THING I WANT TO KNOW...” as if to say, “Yes this matters...it matters supremely...it’s EVERYTHING...the bottom line!”

“Well, Paul... this really IS an eye-opener. We do admit that we first got forgiveness and the Spirit as a gift... but we just assumed that NOW it was up to us... You know: like it was with the people in the Bible.”

Then Paul says, “OK – if you want to look at the Bible then let’s go back to the start: how was Abraham, the Father of all BELIEVERS ...how did Abraham get right with God and how did HE move ahead?”

Then, quoting from Genesis 15... Paul shows, “Abraham BELIEVED God... and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” It’s not that Abraham actually WAS righteous but that God counted him to be righteous... God attributed to Abraham the moral perfection of Someone else – Abraham was saved by Jesus Christ just like you are... Abraham was saved by what Jesus Christ would do in the future – and YOU are saved by what Jesus Christ has done in the past.”

v. 8 says that God preached the gospel to Abraham saying that all nations would be blessed in

him... and this blessing that has now come to people (Jewish and Gentile) alike NOT BECAUSE ABRAHAM was so obedient to the Law (as we'll see next week – Abraham didn't even HAVE the Law!) but because Abraham simply trusted God and rested in God's promise...

And we, like Abraham, are made right with God and progress WITH God not by our efforts but by God's promise... received by trust...by rest...by faith.

People who think that because they conform to scriptural principles they will be righteous in God's sight...people who think that by being serious about God's commands...or by being authentic ...or by being strict with themselves or disciplined or serious in their obedience – that "God loves/blesses me because I live right!" – those people aren't blessed with Abraham... they're cursed.

Quoting Deuteronomy, Paul writes, "cursed is everyone who does not abide by ALL things written in the book of the law, to perform them." (v.10)

In other words – "If you expect to be blessed by God on the basis of your obedience then you'd better be perfectly obedient... OR you are under a curse as a Law-breaker!... AND NO ONE has ever kept ALL THE LAW PERFECTLY...no one...no one...no one...but One.

Only One Person deserves the blessing of the Law that comes ONLY to those who keep it without any deviation at all – and the Only One who did that (who kept the Law perfectly and deserved blessing) He, Jesus Christ, gives what He deserves to those who trust Him and FOR THEM, HE bears the curse:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us -- for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE " -- in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (13-14)

What IS the situation in those churches? It's people who once trusted in Jesus Christ ALONE to obey perfectly FOR them and to bear the curse THEY deserved but who are NOW trying to obey themselves into God's favor by law-keeping... and they are only welcoming the Curse into their lives.

What WAS it with Abraham and David and Ruth and and Jeremiah and Deborah – i.e. how were God's people before Christ made right with God? Paul's answer: by faith in God's promise that Christ fulfilled.

And finally (What IS? What WAS?) and last What NEXT? What does this say about YOUR spiritual life and the path of improvement or spiritual growth?

What's next for YOU?

I think every Christian asks that question and I think there's always someone standing by with a ready answer. Sometimes the answer is a kind of standard "evangelical" response – pray, read the Bible, unite with a church and tell others... practices often called the "means of grace"...and of course I think all those things are great!... BUT as one old Baptist preacher once told me, "The best of means is means at best..."

In other words – none of these things will help you if you are trusting in the practices themselves. Jesus Christ said (in His inaugural address – Matthew CH 6) that prayer, charitable giving and self-discipline, if THESE practices are engaged in order to impress people or to placate God...they will divert you FROM God.

OR we will tell people to stop their bad habits and to get serious in the pursuit of holy-living. And again, I'm certainly in favor of that... "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12.14) BUT here again, holiness that is not empowered by God's Spirit will lead either to honest frustration OR to a kind of Pharisaical pride... and witch-hunts.

But probably the most common path to spiritual progress both IN the church and outside the church is the serious pursuit of principles and self-discipline and here again – what could be wrong with people trying to live within their means or attend to their health or raise their children to be polite and hard-working...trying to become a good or godly person?

Again...we're in favor of all these things and whether it's called "Scriptural Principles" or "12 Rules for Life" or "the Tao" or "the Law" it's all great and these may even change your behavior and help you win friends and influence people.

But what Paul has in mind... and what... bewitched people so easily forget is that the way we started IS the way we progress... and as Kierkegaard said, "And this is one of the most crucial definitions for the whole of Christianity: that the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith." (*The Sickness Unto Death*, 1849) The main thing at the start of the Christian life and at every subsequent step –THE way we enter is THE way we move ahead and that is to believe. The righteous LIVE by faith.

We take it for granted... but we dare NOT! It's very foreign to us because we ALWAYS think it's about something we CAN and MUST do... "I'll get right ON that!" OR we see the difficulty of the thing and we fold...and walk away into some form of escape (i.e. into the sexy sins like addiction or isolation or despair). The righteous LIVE by faith.

Faith (said J. Gresham Machen) "consists not in doing something but in receiving something... it simply means that, abandoning the vain effort of earning one's way into God's presence, we accept the gift of salvation which Christ offers so full and free." And to repeat this first step again and again THIS is the way we step through the door AND the way we move ahead. The

righteous LIVE by faith.

Richard Lovelace: "It is an item of faith that we are children of God; there is plenty of evidence in us against it. The faith that surmounts this evidence and that is able to warm itself at the fire of God's love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of holiness. . . . We are not saved by the love we exercise, but by the love we trust." (*Dynamics of Spiritual Life*; 1979, p. 213) The righteous LIVE by faith.

Paul himself told the Romans, "I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome" (Rom 1:15). He said that to the CHURCH because the church needs the gospel EVERY DAY... just as much as those outside. Maybe if "THEY" saw "US" desperate for the Good News and daily depending on it maybe THEY would ask us the reason for our hope. (1 Peter 3.15)

Paul put it this way to the Colossians, "As you have received Christ Jesus as Lord so walk in Him" – we received Him by faith... but somehow we think we walk in Him by being good. It's the love we TRUST that saves us not the love we exercise!

The righteous LIVE by faith.

Well, what about love? Are we not called to love? Well, it's in this very letter, "the fruit of the Spirit is love"...But even now you see it's NOT the fruit of your self...the Fruit of the Spirit.

What's NEXT?...Look again and again at Christ who was publically portrayed to us as crucified. Sing about Him; gaze upon Him. Receive Him by repentant faith...repenting and believing (again & again).

It's indirect but it's the way we receive grace and the way we welcome the Spirit of Holiness and He actually changes the real me. The righteous LIVE by faith.