

GALATIANS: THE ONE TRUE GOSPEL



WEEK 10 BEWITCHED! YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER... GALATIANS 3:1-5

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2014

Galatians 3:1-5 – Bewitched! You Should Know Better...

The Text

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

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

Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?

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...?

Introduction

- Paul is enraged by the Judaizers' infiltration of the Galatian churches.
 - He has reminded them of his apostolic authority and exclusivity of the gospel.
 - He has also supported his claim that the gospel he preaches is God's gospel.
 - The lengthy defense for his apostleship has concluded (Galatians 1:10-2:21).
 - Paul now turns his attention to defending the gospel theologically against the Judaizers (Galatians 3:1-4:11).
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Principal Proposition

Don't play around with the gospel. Justification is through faith in Jesus Christ... period.

Literary Context

- A. Paul's Gospel is God's Gospel (1:11-2:21)
 - B. Paul's Explanation of the Gospel (3:1-4:11)
 - 1. **The Experience of the Galatians (3:1-5)**
 - 2. The Example of Abraham (3:6-9)
 - 3. The Curse of the Law (3:10-14)
 - 4. The Law and the Abrahamic Covenant (3:15-4:11)
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Literary Structure

The Experience of the Galatians

With the Son

Exhibit A (v. 1)

With the Holy Spirit

Enquiry (v. 2)

Examination (v. 3)

Experience (v. 4)

With the Father

Exasperation (v. 5)

Interpretive Comments

Experience with the Son

Exhibit A

v. 1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

➤ “O foolish Galatians!”

- Paul is not calling his readers stupid. Rather, he is shocked by their lack of obedience (Luke 24:25; Titus 3:3).
- John MacArthur believes this exclamation “reflects a combination of anger and love mixed with surprise.”

- Paul does not address them personally as brothers like he does in Galatians 1:11. This formal rebuke is an abrupt wake-up call.

➤ “Who has bewitched you?”

- The verb “bewitched” literally means “to exert an evil influence through the eye.”¹
- The NET Bible says, “Who has cast a spell on you?” while the HCSB says, “Who has hypnotized you?”



- Paul is not endorsing magic, but employing popular jargon to make his point.

➤ “It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.”

- The term “publicly portrayed” was commonly used for written proclamations and the posting of public notices
- Paul is not saying that he acted out skits, but that the significance of the cross was vividly shared in his preaching.
- *It is as if a spell has been uttered over the Galatians because they no longer see the significance of the cross of Christ. Their fascination with circumcision and the law deprives the cross of its significance. (Schreiner)*
- Ultimately, the Judaizers’ influence faded away. Are there movements within the church today that threaten to charm believers away from the significance of Christ’s sacrifice?

Experience with the Holy Spirit

Enquiry

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

¹ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature aka BDAG* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 171.

- “Let me ask you only this:”
 - To help the Galatians think things through, Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions.

- “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?”
 - Paul begins by harkening back to their conversion experience.
 - The Spirit is the sign that someone has been converted (1 Corinthians 2:12).
 - The phrase “hearing with faith” has been interpreted a number of ways. It may be understood as:
 1. Hearing with trust
 2. The message heard that demanded faith
 3. The message that enables faith
 4. The message of the faith (Christian message)
 5. The hearing of the faith (Christian message)
 - The NET Bible makes an interpretive call by saying, “Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?”
 - Which interpretation of the phrase “hearing with faith” is most likely being used here in Galatians 3:2?
 - It is likely that Paul puts the emphasis on *hearing* in order to contrast the two activities: doing and hearing.



Examination

- v. 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?
- “Are you so foolish?”
 - Paul’s questions may be rhetorical, but they are not subtle.

 - “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

- Paul is possibly referring to attempts at keeping the law without the Spirit (Romans 7:7-8:17) or attempts to gain favor with God by cutting the flesh in circumcision (Philippians 3:2, 3). In either case, he is warning his readers against the idea of earning salvation through some work.
- *The false teachers were not giving advice about progress in the Christian life, for their view, as in Judaism was that circumcision was required for entrance into the people of God. Therefore, the Judaizers argued that those uncircumcised were not a part of the covenant enacted by the Lord (Genesis 17:9-14; Leviticus 12:3). (Schreiner)*
- Paul is saying, “Surely, you must know that the Christian life ends the way it begins!” Both justification and sanctification are the result of faith.
- How does sanctification resulting from faith differ from our ability to do good works in the flesh? What are some practical examples?

Experience

v. 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?

➤ “Did you suffer so many things in vain—“

- The word “suffer” could accurately be translated “experience.” Many commentators prefer this meaning because it fits the immediate context and suffering is not a theme of Galatians.

➤ “if indeed it was in vain?”

- Paul does not pronounce their suffering as being in vain, but leaves them with a condition. **If** they renounced the true gospel with the Judaizers, their suffering as young Christians would be worthless.
- Here he lightens up a little. After swinging hard at an error or failure, he often softens his tone (Galatians 4:9-14, 20; 5:2-10).
- Paul’s desire is to see them repent and finish the race they began to the end.



Experience with the Father

Exasperation

v. 5 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...?

➤ “Does He who supplies the Spirit to you”

- The Father promised to give us the Holy Spirit through His Son (Luke 11:13).
- Those who truly belong to Christ have received the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9).
- Some believe the use of the present participle is evidence for the ongoing charismatic works of the Spirit. However, that is not the point Paul is trying to make here.

➤ “and works miracles among you”

- The word here for “miracles” refers to inherent power or ability.
- Paul is either referring to miraculous events that were occurring in their congregations or the spiritual power every believer receives from the Spirit to overcome sin.

➤ “do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith...?”

- Paul summarizes his rhetorical inquiries by repeating verse 2.
- By now, the Galatians should have a pretty good idea where Paul stands on the issue (Galatians 2:16).

Summary

Paul’s argument is itself powerful: If a person has received eternal salvation through trust in the crucified Christ, received the fullness of the Holy Spirit the same moment he believed, and has the Father’s Spirit-endowed power working within him, how could he hope to enhance that out of his own insignificant human resources by some meritorious effort? (MacArthur)

Discussion Questions

- Are there movements within the church today that threaten to charm believers away from the significance of Christ's sacrifice? (pg. 4)
 - Which interpretation of the phrase "hearing with faith" is most likely being used in Galatians 3:2? (pg. 5)
 - How does sanctification resulting from faith differ from our ability to do good works in the flesh? What are some practical examples? (pg. 6)
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Concise Prayers

- Lord, thank you for saving us. In all of our foolishness, may we never lose sight of the cross. (v. 1)
- We cannot save ourselves, but you have given us your Holy Spirit. (v. 2)
- By His power and strength, we are able to persevere to the end. Increase our faith and perfect us in truth! (v. 3)
- Our journey is not in vain. Your indwelling Spirit empowers us to the end. (v. 4)
- We are declared righteous by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. (v. 5)

