

## BORN FREE

Living the Christian life is not a difficulty; it is an impossibility. Here's the paradox: *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"* (Philippians 4:13). If I attempt to live this life in my power I fail. *"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God"* (II Corinthians 3:5). We do not have the power and strength in ourselves, but through Christ there is more than ample power to live the Christian life. The churches in Galatia were having a problem. Judaizers were influencing, confusing and frustrating the Christians. They were making requirements other than faith alone to justify a person in the eyes of God. The Judaizers were saying that circumcision, keeping the law and strict observation of the Sabbath and Feast Days were requirements for salvation. The result was that the people were not hearing the clear, plain Gospel of Jesus Christ. The ramifications were that some were coming into the church unsaved -- to trust Jesus plus your own efforts is to defile the gospel and keep some from fully trusting in Christ alone for salvation. Others who were saved were no longer growing in grace by coming under the influence of this heresy. This was a problem in the early church and it still exists today. I would bring to your attention questions the apostle asked the Galatians: *"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"* (Galatians 3:1-3). From these questions come three affirming dogmatic statements of our faith, 1. The work of Christ on the cross was a finished work. We cannot add to it. 2. Spiritual regeneration, not the law, brings us into a righteous standing before God. 3. Christianity is not a hybrid of starting by grace and finishing by the flesh. It is all of grace from beginning to end.

Paul made a comparison in Galatians 4:22 and 23, *"For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise."* I want to bring to your attention that we are, by the Spirit of God, born free.

## **1. We are subjected.**

Galatians 5:1 and 2 declares that our own efforts will not save us. To attempt to get to heaven by circumcision or keeping the law will profit us nothing. We are not on the outside of the family of God, objectively looking in and seeing what we must do to enter into acceptance with God. We are subjectively already in the family by the grace of God, allowing His grace to work out what was already put into us by faith. *"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:13). We are commanded, *"...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"* (Philippians 2:12c). This is a horticulturist's term provoking us to nurture what has already been planted.

## **2. We are affected.**

"Affect" means to have an effect on something. To be affected is to be a recipient of a change that is a result or consequence of an action. Galatians 5:4 tells us that if we are depending on what we do to make ourselves saved or loved better by God, then Christ is become of no effect to us. Walter Marshall says, "By nature, you are completely addicted to a legal method of salvation. Even after you become a Christian by believing the Gospel, your heart is still addicted to salvation by works.... You find it hard to believe that you should get any blessing before you work for it." All of us have a temptation to save ourselves. *"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"* (II Corinthians 13:5). This verse was not to cast doubt in our minds, but to remind us that Christ is in us, otherwise we could end up with continuing reprobated minds that are alienated from God. J. C. Kromsigt said, "The good seed cannot flourish when it is repeatedly dug up for the purpose of examining its growth." Don't believe your doubts and doubt your beliefs; believe your beliefs and doubt your doubts. Like any good farmer, wait patiently for the seed to break forth into a fruit bearing plant.

## **3. We are infected.**

Galatians 5: 5 and 6 teaches us that the Holy Spirit is helping us wait on the Lord for the positional truth (that we are in Christ) to become practical application (by living a holy life). *"For we walk by faith, not by sight"* (II Corinthians 5:7). But remember: faith is driven by love. *"...Because the love of God is shed abroad in*

*our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us* (Romans 5:5b). *“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity”* (I Corinthians 13:13).

We who are saved are infected by the love of God, *“...for God is love”* (I John 4:8b). Hopefully, our influence with others will cause an epidemic of God’s love to break out in His church. Too many of God’s people live with a performance-based mentality. In other words, if I perform to a certain level, God will love me. I want to remind you that God’s love is unconditional, not earned. Paul Zahl calls this performance-based mentality “The Law of Capability.” He defines it thusly, “If I can do enough of the right things I will have established my value. Identity is the sum of my achievements, so if I can satisfy my boss, meet the needs of my spouse, and children and still pursue my dreams then I will be somebody. In Christian theology this is called justification by works. It assumes that my worth is measured by my performance. On the other side it conceals a ghastly fear: if I do not perform, I will be judged unworthy. To myself I will cease to exist.”

In 1981 an unusual thing happened; a movie called *Chariots of Fire* won the Oscar for the best movie of the year. The reason it was unusual is because one of the protagonists featured an actor playing Eric Liddell, the real life missionary who later died as a martyr. The story based on true facts also tells of another young man, Harold Abrahams. Both young men won gold medals in the 1924 Olympics. Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell came from two different worldviews. Abrahams felt rejection and sought to make others respect him by his performance. As Abrahams was preparing to race the 100-metre race, he said to Aubrey Montague, “And now in one hour's time, I will be out there again. I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor; 4 feet wide, with 10 lonely seconds to justify my whole existence. But will I?” Contrast the freedom of the Flying Scotsman, Eric Liddell. This young man was not able to compete in his best race, the 100-metre because he would have had to run in a heat on Sunday and this defied his conviction not to compete on the Lord’s Day. He was allowed to run in the 400-metre race instead, in which he was not a favorite to win. True to the facts, before Liddell began the race, he was handed a small piece of paper with a portion of Scripture from I Samuel 2:30, *“...for them that honour me I will honour.”* His mode of running was unorthodox. He ran with head back as though he were looking up to God. In the film Eric says to his sister, “I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure.” And these words are repeated as he won the gold. What a contrast! One man runs to prove his worth; another man runs to

glorify God who has made us everything we are by His grace. *"...Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus..."*(Hebrews 12:1b, 2a).

We are born free; let us live free!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.