This morning we return to our study from the book of Galatians. It was our privilege last week to have our former Senior Pastor, Tom Macy, preach. I want to encourage your attendance next Sunday when Ed Aulie, a good friend and missionary from Mexico will bring the message.

The text we’re considering is Galatians 3:1-5. It introduces the second major section of the book: Chapters 1 & 2 deal with TRUTH, chapters 3 & 4 with SALVATION, and 5 & 6 with LIFESTYLE.

3:1-5 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. 2 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? 4 Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? 5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? (This is the word of the Lord.)

In preparation for today’s sermon a variety of song lyrics flowed through my mind. One is from the song we sang prior to the message. The phrase reads: “To possess by faith what I could not earn.” That succinct statement harmonizes well with the overall message of Galatians. Similar thoughts are found in the first verse and chorus of the hymn “My Faith Has Found a Resting Place:” “My faith has found a resting place, not in device nor creed; I trust the Ever-living One, His wounds for me shall plead.

I need no other argument, I need no other plea; It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me.” At the conclusion of today’s service we’ll sing “In Christ Alone;” its beginning words are, “In Christ alone my hope is found.” Two additional phrases came to mind, both outside the realm of sacred music. One is a found in a song by Celine Dion; those lyrics state “don’t give up on your faith.” The other is actually the title of a song by Journey, “Don’t Stop Believing.”

Interestingly, that is the title I ended up using for today’s message. If you are familiar with that song you know that it was not written with today’s text in mind. So how is that title applicable to this portion of Scripture in Galatians?

2 Timothy 3:16 states, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” The words of Galatians were written for the primary purpose of correction. The focus of that correction is to draw those to whom Paul writes back from additions that false teachers were adding to the gospel. Because salvation is through faith alone, in Christ alone, Paul rightly insists that any contrary teaching is to be opposed; and in the case of his audience, abandoned! It is erroneous to stop believing, to give up on their faith and move to human effort as the basis of either salvation or sanctification.
Let’s investigate what Paul has on his mind in the first 5 verses of chapter 3 as he both seeks to correct, but also, I believe, to encourage the Galatians to continue in their faith.

Clouded Perception, Diverted Attention (1)

“You foolish Galatians!” When is the last time someone called you foolish? When is the last time you considered something you did foolish? When is the last time you considered something you said foolish? When is the last time you thought that what another said or did was foolish?

The term used here (and again in verse 3) raises the subject of dull or clouded perception. It speaks of a lack of or deficiency in understanding or judgment. Christ Himself used this word in speaking to two disciples in Luke 24, as He walked with these men in the latter portion of the day in which He had been resurrected. “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”

The term is certainly corrective, but not driven by a critical spirit and certainly not referring to mental deficiency. It expresses a genuine concern that conveys at least some level of rebuke.

“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” Who is it that has brought them into a place of confusion or delusion about the gospel? Who has diverted their attention away from the death of Christ as the sole basis of forgiveness of sin? Who has spoken to them with words intended to harm? Early in chapter 1 there were warnings against anyone who would preach a contrary gospel. As Paul wrote those words he would have had in mind those false teachers (plural) that have come to the various churches in Galatia. But in 3:1 “who” is singular – suggesting one source, or even more likely one individual. In the significant spiritual warfare occurring in the hearts and minds of people throughout the Galatian churches, the father of lies, the devil himself, can rightfully be viewed as the ultimate source of the heretical teaching! (See John 8:42-44; 1 Peter 5:8-9a) His message, conveyed through the false teachers, is bewitching! Bewitched “literally...means ‘to give someone the evil eye, to cast a spell over them, to fascinate in the (original) sense of holding someone spellbound by an irresistible power.’”

However, even with that being true and as serious as that is, Paul addresses his question pointedly to the Galatians: “Who has bewitched you?” They are the ones being addressed as foolish. He doesn’t want them to shift responsibility for their drift into heretical beliefs to someone else. They need to own what is happening in their hearts and minds and take corrective action.

Paul specifically wants them to recall their introduction to the gospel (see the final sentence in verse 1). The gospel had been “clearly” presented to them personally; they in some sense had been able to “see” it. The term here has at its root our word for “graphic.” Paul had carefully, extensively, and clearly explained it to them. (He did not have the luxury of video or PowerPoint!) The focus of the gospel he presented was the person of Christ, particularly His crucifixion. On the cross Christ died for their sin. In His death He bore God’s wrath against their sin. A response of humble faith in and acceptance of God’s forgiveness of sin had accomplished salvation in their life.

It’s as if Paul is asking the Galatians, “Are you seeing clearly? Can you recall what was clearly presented to you about Christ and His crucifixion? Has something else caught your eye? Get your focus back on Christ, and Him crucified! You’re foolish to drift from that foundation or think something must be added.”

Before we move into the subsequent verses, let me ask this question: Would there be an area in your life or my life where God could appropriately today call us foolish? Is there any way in which we have lost sight of the simplicity of the gospel? Are we doing something that we know is sinful yet we rationalize that action? Is there a specific command in Scripture that we are choosing to ignore? Perhaps we’re “coasting” in our faith, and not being disciplined in our spiritual nurture and growth. Or, like David, we’re living with unconfessed sin, believing it doesn’t matter to God. Regardless, the closing prayer of Psalm 139 provides an appropriate application for us. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24)

A Critical Contrast (2-3, 5)

As we return to Galatians 3, we’ll note that in verses 2, 3, and 5, Paul lays out a series of additional questions. Although there are multiple questions, Paul’s ultimate concern is singular. His initial phrase in verse 2 reveals this: “I would like to learn just one thing from you.” In the words of Timothy George, “If only this one question could be resolved, Paul thought, the whole trouble with the Judaizers (we could also call these individuals ‘legalists’) would soon be over. However, to answer this question the Galatians had to reflect theologically on the experience of the Spirit in their midst. This Paul led them to do by posing three contrasts for them to consider.”

3:2 Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?
3:3 After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?
3:5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

Eugene Peterson, in his commentary on Galatians, titles his notes on this passage “Free to Think.” That is a good summary of Paul’s intent here. He desires for the Galatians to think; to think clearly, to think well; to think through their own experience with the gospel; and to think about the implications of the gospel.

Let’s join in this thinking process today. As we do so, I invite us to first note the mention of the Holy Spirit. This is the first time that the Spirit of God is mentioned in the book of Galatians, and is spoken of in each question. I will limit my comments here as an expanded discussion of the Spirit’s role in the believer’s life will be encountered when we come to chapter 5. I will at least mention some of the various aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in regards to salvation. Consider these words from Titus 3:4-7. “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out
on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

In addition to that passage, additional aspects of the Holy Spirit’s work related broadly to the work of salvation include: 1) Convicting of sin, leading to repentance (John 16:8-11); 2) Baptizing the repentant sinner into the body of Christ at the moment of their belief (1 Corinthians 12:13); 3) Sealing the believer in Christ (Ephesians 1:13-14); 4) Bringing assurance of our relationship with Christ (John 14:16-17 & Romans 8:16); 5) Leading the believer in their daily life (Romans 8:14); 6) Assisting us when we pray (Romans 8:26); and 7) Producing righteous fruit in the believer’s life (Galatians 5:22-23).

Going back to Paul’s singular focus in Galatians 3, the question could be phrased in this way; “Does any of this occur in your life on the basis of human effort, or are all of these workings of the Spirit operative on the basis of God’s grace?”

Let’s return to the questions in verses 2, 3 & 5 and look at them from a time-line perspective. We’ll observe a sequential development. Verse 2 focuses on the time of initial placement of faith in Christ for salvation. It is that time at which the believing sinner is justified and the Spirit of God enters within. Verse 3 moves into the time subsequent to salvation. Although that could be viewed as an open-ended timeframe, I believe the emphasis is on the initial weeks and months following the decision to trust Christ for salvation. It should be a time of spiritual growth or development in one’s faith. Then in verse 5 the reference is to the present and ongoing work of God in the believers in the churches of Galatia.

The two primary theological terms applicable here are justification (verse 2) – which we’ve considered in previous sermons – and sanctification (verses 3 & 5). Justification (you may recall this definition which Pastor Mike gave) is as an act of God whereby he declares, on the basis of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, that the sinner who puts his faith in Jesus is “not guilty” and even “righteous.” Sanctification is that process where the believer in Christ learns and lives out the permeating realities of faith in Christ. This involves the dissipation of self-focused and sin-motivated living and the development of God-honoring, Christ-like characteristics or qualities, such as honesty, purity, patience, mercy, and love, to suggest a few. (For a broader discussion on sanctification I would encourage you to read such passages as Colossians 3, portions of Ephesians 1, 2 & 5, and Philippians 3.)

In relationship to these both of these term heresies have arisen: First, salvation or justification by legalism; second, sanctification by legalism. In the first instance the strongest push faced by those to whom Galatians is written was the repeated contention that unless someone is circumcised they cannot be saved. For example, here is what Acts 15:1 records, “Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.’” That is the heresy that Paul is refuting in verse 2. However, in verses 3 & 5, the attention shifts to a second heresy, that Christian growth and maturity results from keeping rules, doing good works, and observing religious rituals. In this second heresy salvation may not be in question, but true freedom in Christ and the joy of relationship with Christ are inhibited and at times stifled entirely. (Another way to state this is that one can be saved by faith, but they are sanctified by their works.)
Referring to this second heresy Charles Ryrie writes in *Balancing the Christian Life*: “…the **motive** is to exalt self and gain merit rather than to glorify God because of what He has done; and the **power** used to obey (the code) is that of the flesh, not that of the Holy Spirit.” (pg. 159)

In either situation, the Galatians are foolish if such teaching is accepted and embraced. It is essential that they see and understand the incredible contrast in messages that they have heard. That is the third lens through which we can look at the series of questions in verses 2, 3, & 5. What is laid out here is the contrast between “observing” the law – which conveys the concepts of labor, toil, and work drawn from human effort alone – and “believing” the truth of the gospel – which as Paul will later write in Ephesians 2 – “**it is by grace you have been saved through faith...**” Whether the heresy is justification by legalism or sanctification by legalism, both are in strong contrast with the gospel that Paul had presented to the Galatians. Whether the focus is on the foundation of their salvation or the perfection of that salvation there is a way of truth that has been presented, but there is now also a way of error that has been presented. The difference is stark: The basis of faith versus the basis of human effort; the work of the Holy Spirit versus the effort of the flesh. Having begun on the basis of faith how can it be conceived that they can shift to human effort to achieve, accomplish, or finish their spiritual development. The Message states it this way: “For only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts what was begun by God.”

The path of faith is just that; faith throughout. It is trust in Christ alone for forgiveness of sins. It is an ongoing life of faith.

Perhaps some are thinking at this point (or have been doing so for some time this morning) that the Scriptures do urge the believer to exertion and effort in their relationship with Christ. Yes, that is true. Philippians 2:12-13 and Colossians 1:28-29 are two clearly stated examples. The concern or balance that must be weighed is the motivation from which that effort is given. The false teaching that Paul seeks to counter states that human effort is the required basis upon which justification or sanctification occurs. Speaking specifically about sanctification, that is in contrast to the willing, humble, and dependent obedience and pursuit of spiritual disciplines driven by ongoing gratitude for the free gift of salvation.

The balance needed between effort and grace is well stated in Paul’s prayer in Colossians 1:9-14:

> 9For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 12giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
(See 2 Peter 1:5-9 as an additional example of the appropriate balance between faith and works. Or recall the sermon series from Hebrews, a book written so that people would not grow weary and lose heart.)

Jenny Swanson, one of our newer missionaries regularly communicates in the form of a weekly snippet. This is what she wrote one week ago.

“Rather than attend the large International Evangelical Church that I usually go to in Addis, I was invited to meet up with some missionary teachers from Bingham Academy. The six of us joined an Ethiopian preacher named Dundee (not Crocodile) to visit during the service of a small, brand-new Ethiopian evangelical church. The 35 or so congregants met together in a converted house, and together we had a wonderful time of fellowship and worship.

“Dundee offered a wonderful sermon about intimacy with Christ. After the sermon, four people prayed to accept Christ and to begin making that daily commitment to follow Jesus.”

I like that last phrase. It views acceptance of Christ as both an act of faith and as an introduction to an ongoing life of faith.

**Concern about Wasted Effort (4)**

You’ve likely noticed that we skipped verse 4 in our examination of this passage. It too is a question, “Have you suffered so much for nothing – if it really was for nothing?” As a question, it fits, at least in the sense of linguistic similarity, in this context. But at first glance it may appear to introduce a new subject. So I ask, what is Paul’s intent here?

Knowing the hostile environment in which these churches existed and in which these believers lived, I think the question in verse 4 is intended to come to the issue Paul addresses in Galatians 3 from a different perspective. In essence Paul is asking if all the opposition and pressure they have faced regarding the gospel and their faith has been in vain! Are things that intense, have they become so weary that they are willing to throw away their belief in salvation or sanctification through Christ alone? The phrasing of the questions suggests the Galatians are already headed down that path, yet also conveys “some hope that the situation is not yet irretrievable; (that) they may yet be regained for the truth of the gospel.” As they ponder this question is it possible that their memories will be stirred of that time of coming to trust Christ alone for salvation; that they will recall the joy and freedom they experienced as the Spirit of God entered their life; and have a renewed conviction of the truth restored in their hearts?

**Personal Application**

If I had to summarize all that was said this morning, I would desire that we leave with two basic truths affirmed in our hearts and minds.

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2 F. F. Bruce, “The Epistle to the Galatians: A commentary on the Greek text,” pg 147-153
First, to quote Charles Swindoll, “Salvation is simply a gift. It’s simple, but it wasn’t easy. It’s free, but it wasn’t cheap. It’s yours, but it isn’t automatic. You must receive it. When you do, it is yours forever.” (Growing Deep in the Christian Life, pg. 244)

This past week I reread the poetic section of A Gospel Primer for Christians by Milton Vincent. In the introduction to this work he writes, “This book is offered as a handy guide to help Christians experience the gospel more fully by preaching it to themselves each day.” In the ebb and flow of life, whether it is hectic or drab, that is a refreshing discipline. It reminds us of God’s grace, given solely but continually through faith in Christ. It draws my mind to grateful obedience rather than guilt-driven or fearful acquiescence.

Here’s a brief excerpt (pgs. 83, 84):

In saving, God also did justify me,
Accounting me righteous by His own decree,
Declaring me guiltless of all of my sin,
And bringing His wrath against me to an end.
This wrath Christ appeased in full brunt on the Tree,
When, bearing my sin, He endured it for me.
So now God relates to me only with grace,
The former wrath banished without any trace!
And each day I’m made a bit more as I should,
His grace using all things to render me good.
Yes, even in trials God’s grace abounds too
And does me the good He assigns it to do.

The second reminder is to rejoice in and embrace the work of the Holy Spirit in your life as a believer. It’s the Spirit’s power that is the God-honoring resource for living our faith daily, not our human effort. It is a crucial part of our faith journey as believers to learn more and more to walk in the Spirit. This will be examined in more detail in Galatians 5. For today, let’s just express our praise to God for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

If you need a launch point to direct your thoughts in this regard, I close with this explanation by J. I. Packer. “The Christian who (thus) walks in the Spirit will keep discovering that nothing in his life is as good as it should be; that he has never fought as hard as he might have done against the clogging restraints and contrary pulls of his own inbred perversity; that there is an element of motivational sin, at least, in his best works; that his daily living is streaked with defilements, so that he has to depend every moment on God’s pardoning mercy in Christ, or he would be lost; and that he needs to keep asking, in light of his own felt weakness and inconstancy of heart, that the Spirit will energize him to the end to maintain the inward struggle.” (Keep In Step with the Spirit, pg. 37)