

By Elder R. W. Cornelius

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Bible Study Lesson

A Defense of Justification by Faith from Experience. (Gal. 3:1-5)

Galatians 3:1-5 (ASV)

¹ O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified?

² This only would I learn from you. Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

³ Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?

⁴ Did ye suffer so many things in vain? if it be indeed in vain.

⁵ He therefore that supplieth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, *doeth he it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Galatians 3:1-5 (NLT2)

¹ Oh, foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? For the meaning of Jesus Christ's death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of his death on the cross.

² Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ.

³ How foolish can you be? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?

⁴ Have you experienced so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it?

⁵ I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ.

INTRODUCTION

Few things are more tragic or disappointing than a Christian who deserts the purity of the Gospel for a false form of Christianity that presumes to improve on the finished work of Christ. That is precisely where most false teachers who call themselves Christians aim at. This is what many believers in the

Galatian churches had done or were in danger of doing.... Why? Because of the confusion and the false teaching of the Judiazers!

Many, *then and now*, receive the gospel of salvation by grace and live for the Lord in humble faith, but *then* fall prey to some system of legalism and works righteousness that promises more, but produces much less.

The Apostle Paul had been used by the Lord to introduce the gospel of sovereign grace to the Galatians, first to bring them to the truth that salvation is received by faith in Christ's atoning work on the cross, plus nothing else.

Now, they were drifting away from the way of pure grace and was being affected by an inferior and impotent substitute.. The defecting believers had not lost their salvation, but they had lost the joy and freedom of it.. defecting and having returned to uncertainty and bondage of a self- imposed legalism. They were still in Christ and right positionally but were not practically living in conformity to the truth. They substituted a form of religion that had no power or joy instead of the fullness of life in Christ Jesus that they once enjoyed.

Why ?.. They allowed themselves to be deceived into thinking that Christianity was a matter of law rather than faith.

Satan never ceases his effort to destroy God's way of salvation and because God's way is by His grace working through man's faith, Satan's is the opposite, the way of man's own effort and work. From the time of Cain's first works-righteous offering of a grain instead of an animal sacrifice, unbelieving man has sought to make himself right with God through his own goodness and merit.

When Paul first came to Galatia, he marvelled at his gracious reception but then in **Galatians 1:6-7 (ASV)**

⁶ I marvel that ye are so quickly removing from him that called you in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel;

⁷ which is not another gospel only there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

Having received new life in Christ by faith, we find that many of the Galatians being weak and confused, had been persuaded to live out their new lives by the old ways of works.

The Apostle has been defending the gospel of grace from the very beginning of this epistle, but till now it has been done from the point of view of his own

experience and calling. These has been challenged as we have seen in the earlier chapters. So Paul begins by insisting that God rather than man has called him and given him his message. In speaking of his own experiences, however, Paul has methodically worked around by talking about the gospel itself, and he returns to the Galatians themselves and to the point at which the doctrine of justification through faith, bore down upon their own experiences.

In **Chapter 3: 1-5** Paul defends the doctrine of justification by faith from the standpoint of personal experience. In **3:1-5** Paul reminds us that a believer's experience of the Lord Jesus Christ, of the Holy Spirit and of God the Father is evidence of having been graciously made acceptable to God through personal faith in the perfect and complete work of Christ apart from any human supplements. In other words, God is qualified and Christ is sufficient to accomplish the Sovereign purpose. Justification is through faith, the saving faith that is the gift of God through Grace.

Although experience in itself is not entirely reliable evidence of spiritual reality, it is nevertheless a powerful witness when closely linked with and built upon scriptural truth. Because genuine **Christian experience** verifies the gospel of grace, the inspiration to Paul by the Holy Spirit to use **it** as an effective means of defending the doctrine of justification by faith is laid out in our text.

There are 3 points of argument that Paul uses in his teaching

- 1) **The Believer's Experience with Christ**
- 2) **The Believer's Experience with the Holy Spirit**
- 3) **The Believers Experience with the Father**

Let us look at our text.

1 The Believer's Experience with Christ .

(The Experience of the Galatians)

Galatians 3:1 (ASV)

O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified?

O foolish Galatians reflects a combination of anger and love mixed with surprise. Paul loved the Galatians and wanted them to be restored spiritually and theologically. To accomplish this Paul's harsh rebuke is an example of tough love. Notice that it is by the impersonal term "Galatians" rather than brothers or believers by which he has referred to them earlier. Paul was perplexed, and could hardly believe what the Galatians had done. Like many believers, both before and after them, had been victimized by Satan and induced to slip away from the basic truths by which they had been saved. The Galatians believers were especially **foolish** because they had been so carefully and fully taught., having been on many occasions over the years privileged to sit under the teaching of Paul himself. Paul not only addressed his readers by an impersonal name, he also characterized them in a very unflattering way as, **foolish**.

Foolish in the context, here. does not mean having any mental deficiency, but, it refers to mental laziness and carelessness. In calling the Galatians "foolish", he was not speaking of their intelligence.

The Galatians were not lacking in IQ, but in spiritual discernment. The believers in Galatia were like the disciples on the road to Emmaus whom the risen Christ characterized as "foolish" and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken (Luke 24:25). They simply failed to use their spiritual intelligence when faced with unscriptural, Gospel-destroying teaching of the Judiazers. They were not using their heads. Their problem was not mental but spiritual.

The Galatians had foolishly fallen into Judaistic legalism because they had stopped believing and applying the basic truths of the gospel that Paul had taught them and by which they had been saved. By sinful neglect of their divine resources, they compromised the gospel of grace. They followed their whims and impulse rather than God's revealed truth that men come to salvation and live out salvation only by faith in the Person and power of Jesus Christ. Christians who rely on self-oriented emotions instead of Scripture-oriented minds, are doomed **Ephesians 4:14 (KJV)**
.... to be, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine,

by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

Most cult members did not become involved because they were intellectually convinced that the doctrines of that cult were true but because the teachings and practices were appealing. ***Their minds were not persuaded; but their emotions were victimized.*** Paul pleaded with the Roman believers in **Romans 12:1-2 (KJV)**

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

The obedient Christian, experiences joy and satisfaction beyond measure, far exceeding that of superficial believers who constantly seek spiritual “highs” Life in Christ is not sterile and joyless. But true joy and happiness, satisfaction, and everything else is a by product of knowing and obeying God’s truth.

who did bewitch you

The Galatians were actually **bewitched** by the Judaizers.

Bewitched in our context means to charm or fascinate in a misleading way, as by flattery, false promises, or occultic power. It clearly suggest the use of feeling over fact... emotion over clear understanding of truth.

Paul was saying like” Who has tickled your fancy” What has gotten into you, *Paul knew the answer of rhetorical question*, “ Who could have dragged you away from the solid foundation of truth in which you were so well grounded.

Now..Bewitched can carry the idea of sorcery (Remember the ..*The Bewitched Show on TV*), but **that** is not the idea here. The Galatians were not victims of a magic spell, but *were misled pupils of teaching they should have instantly recognized as false.*

They were willing victims who succumbed to the flesh pleasing works righteousness of the Judaizers. Their message was that faith was not enough, that something was lacking that could be fulfilled by returning to the

ceremonies and requirements of the Old Covenant. One of the commentary writers said that “A supplemented Christ is.. a supplanted Christ.”

The Galatians own experience of salvation should have prevented their falling for the Judaizing falsehoods.

They had experienced the powerful, mindchanging truth of the gospel in the crucified Christ,

Galatians 3:1 (ASV)

... before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly ...set forth crucified?

Galatians 3:1 (NLT2)

For the meaning of Jesus Christ’s death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of his death on the cross.

Jesus was **Publicly portrayed**. They saw clearly the meaning of the cross. The gospel had come to them with full clarity and power of Christ’s sacrifice on their behalf and by faith they had believed and received it.

*Jesus was...**Set forth crucified**....*The heart of the gospel that Paul preached is and always must be Christ crucified. The tense of the verb refers to an act completed in the past but has continuing significance.

The empty cross (not a catholic crucifix) is the emblem of the finished substitutionary work of Jesus Christ that never ends. No ritual, ceremony, regulation or any other thing devised or accomplished by men can pick up where the cross leaves off, because the cross never leaves off. The cross is the emblem which stands for the continuing and eternal payment for all sin, and every sinner who puts his trust in the “message of the cross” is forever and continually being forgiven.

The cross keeps moving forth powerfully throughout history and it will stand forever as living proof that man cannot redeem themselves.

It is tragic that much religion that goes under the name of Christianity rejects the substitutionary work of Christ and replaces it with some form of works righteousness. Churches who go by the Lord’s name but rejects His righteousness in favor of man’s works of righteousness are guilty of a form of godliness that has absolutely no power.

Paul had proclaimed that justification is only by faith in Jesus Christ from the time he first set foot in Galatia.

2 The believer's Experience with the Holy spirit .

Galatians 3:2-4 (ASV)

² This only would I learn from you. Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

³ Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?

⁴ Did ye suffer so many things in vain? if it be indeed in vain.

Verse 2) This only would I learn from you

Though there were many things he could have put to them, yet he would only ask this one question, which, if rightly attended to, and honestly answered, must expose their folly, and put an end to the controversy.

Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

This question supposes they had actually received the Holy Spirit;

Now the apostle asks, whether they received this Spirit "**by the works of the law**"; meaning, either whether *they could imagine*, that they by their obedience to the law had merited and procured the Spirit of God; or whether they thought that the Spirit came to them, and into their hearts, through the doctrine of preaching of the law:

The gift of the Holy Spirit is the believers' most unmistakable evidence of God's favor, his greatest proof of salvation and the guarantee of eternal glory. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16) and then,

John wrote in **(1 John 4:13)** By this we know that we abide in him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

It is therefore ridiculous, *let us use Mike Tyson favorite word, ludicrous*; It is ludicrous to maintain, as some Christians do, that the full gift of the Holy Spirit comes through an additional work or experience. Well... beloved...A person who does not have the fullness of the Holy Spirit does not need a second blessing; he needs salvation. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is inseparable from the new birth. At no time before salvation can a person have

the indwelling Spirit and at no time after salvation can one, not have the Holy Spirit.

Paul also said to the Ephesians in (Eph 1:13-14)“Having believed in Christ, you were sealed in Him with the Hol spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance”

So, every believer in Galatia has received the Holy Spirit the moment they received Jesus Christ as Savior. Paul then leads them to sanity. How can you be duped by the Judiazers into thinking that He comes to you or will eventually come to you, **by your works of the Law?**

Like the Judiazers, many groups and movements today want to introduce special conditions or requirements that supposedly add blessings to the finished and perfect work of Christ; such as a greater fullness of the Spirit, speaking in tongues, or a more complete salvation. But all such things are forms of works righteousness, adding things that men can do... to what Christ has already done, and that only He could have done.

The NLT helps us in our understanding here:

Galatians 3:3 (NLT2)

³ How foolish can you be? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?

The Holy Spirit is not the goal of the Christian life..but.. its source. He is not the product of faithful living, but is the power behind it. So higher level of living , as some claim, does not bring the Holy Spirit; but rather submission to the Holy Spirit, includes a higher level of living.

Having Begun by the Spirit, Paul continues. **Are you now being perfected by the flesh?** How could you think that your weak, imperfect, still sinful **flesh** Could improve on what the divine Spirit of God has begun in you.

Verse 4.. continuing the thought of verse 3....

⁴ **Have you experienced so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it?**

NLT. Says that you have suffered (experienced) so much for The Good News.

— namely, persecution from Jews and from unbelieving fellow countrymen, incited by the Jews, at the time of your conversion.

Paul asked the Galatians, “ Are you going to let all the things you have suffered come to naught? He reminded them that they had paid a price for receiving the Gospel. Was it going to be in vain, without a purpose

3 The Believer’s Experience with the Father .

Paul continues with the questioning....

Galatians 3:5 (ASV)

⁵ He therefore that supplieth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Galatians 3:5 (NLT2)

⁵ I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ.

The third appeal to experience is with **God the Father. He.. who provides you with the Spirit and works of miracles among you. God is our provider.**

Just before His ascension Jesus commanded the disciples **Acts 1:4 ,**
“Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. Through the Son, the Father had promised to give “the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him”,

And when He, the Spirit of truth comes, **John 16:13**

¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard

In His superabundant generosity to His children, God provides his children with the Spirit and works miracles among them.

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 any man hope to enhance that out of his own insignificant human resources by some meritorious effort.

It is ludicrous.

In summary.

In this section Paul reminds the Galatians, that they did not receive the Spirit.. by.. the law ; That the Holy Spirit is evidence of conversion. It is important to see that the Gospel is true irrespective of the experiences of the Galatians or anyone else. Experience **will** corroborate the Gospel. The gospel is sufficient— experience confirms this.