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Thinking Theologically Galatians 3:1-5

Brianna and I enjoy watching a television show called the little couple. The series is about Bill Klein and Jennifer Arnold, who both have dwarfism. Jen is (3'2") and Bill is (4 feet) tall. Jen and Bill are getting ready to celebrate their wedding anniversary on the show and they are going to renew their vows. Experiences are important. Life experiences are important.

Growing up my mom was a picture taker. It seemed that she always had a camera and she was always taking pictures. It bothered me at the time but looking back now I enjoy looking back through photo albums and looking at the pictures and thinking back through special times in my life. Experiences are important.

What is the most important thing a person can experience in this life? We're at church so that should be a big hint as to the answer? The most important thing a person can and must experience in this life is salvation. Salvation is the most important experience a person can have in this world. To experience salvation we have to understand what the Bible clearly teaches about it and we've been given a letter in the New Testament that helps us think through this most important experience. That letter is Galatians. Let me read a quick summary of Paul's letter to the Galatians:

“Justification by faith apart from works of the Law is the theme of this urgent and corrective book. The three major sections reveal three purposes for which Galatians was written: Chapters 1–2 were written to defend Paul's apostolic authority, because this establishes his gospel message. Chapters 3–4 were written to give a theological defense of the principle of justification by faith to refute the false teaching of justification by law. Chapters 5–6 were written to show that liberty from the Law does not mean lawlessness, as Paul's opponents evidently claimed. This epistle shows that the believer is no longer under the Law but is saved by faith alone. Galatians is the Christian's Declaration of Independence. The power of the Holy Spirit enables the Christian to enjoy freedom within the law of love.” So, Galatians is a letter that helps us understand salvation the right way and the difference that experience should have on the way we live each and every day.

The first two chapters are filled with Paul's experiences. His experience of being called by God to be an apostle. His experience with Peter, James, and John when he went up to Jerusalem and they offered him the right hand of fellowship,

signifying they were in agreement with his ministry to the Gentiles. Last week we finished looking at an experience he had when he had to confront the apostle Peter because Peter was not being straightforward with the people about the application of the gospel. Galatians 1-2 is filled with the spiritual experiences of the apostle Paul - experiences that validate his ministry as an apostle.

I don't know about you but sometimes I look at what other people seem to experience spiritually and I get a little bit jealous of their experiences. I read about the experiences of Paul and I'm a little bit jealous. I remember asking a pastor one time about his preparation time to preach and teach and he talked about how wonderful his time in the Word is and how it always leads him to worship and I could sort of picture this friend walking around his office with his hands in the air praising the Lord as he studies God's Word.

I tell people that to me, the most convicting parts of John MacArthur commentaries is the preface. The preface to all of his commentaries says the same thing, "It continues to be a rewarding divine communion for me to preach expositively through the New Testament. My goal is always to have deep fellowship with the Lord in the understanding of His Word, and out of that experience to explain to His people what a passage means. In the words of Nehemiah 8:8, I strive "to give the sense" of it so they may truly hear God speak and, in so doing, may respond to Him." So, evidently John MacArthur experiences deep personal communion with the Lord in his preparation time and out of that intimacy flows his messages.

Sadly, I can't always relate to those two experiences. I wish I could, but I can't. So often, lesson preparation for me is about getting the lesson or sermon finished on time, enough time to look it over at least once before I teach. I am envious of those who deeply commune with the Lord in their study and out of that deep communion they bring the Word of God to His people. I want to get there.

We may not be able to relate to certain people in some of their spiritual experiences, but we should all be able to relate to one another in two specific areas. What area is that? [We should all be able to relate to one another in the experience of salvation and the difference the Holy Spirit has made in our hearts and lives.](#) There are many different life situations in which God draws sinners to Christ. No two testimonies are exactly identical. Your story is your story. But there is only one way that God saves sinners. This morning I want to remind you how the Lord saved you and I want to show you the difference that experience should be making in the way you live your life each day. This morning we're going back to the basics.

Open your Bibles to Galatians 3:1-5. In Galatians 3:1-5 Paul moves from his own experience of salvation at the end of Galatians 2 to the Galatians experience of salvation in Galatians 3:1-5. Look at Galatians 3:1-5, “You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed *as* crucified? 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? 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? 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?”

The title for this lesson is thinking theologically. What’s the point of all the questions we just read? The point of these divinely inspired questions is to cause us to engage our minds concerning how we begin the Christian life and how we make progress in the Christian life - How we are both saved and sanctified.

This past week I got to help out with ABE. One night I was with the kids and I was listening to the teaching time and I was reading over the verses we were going through from Ephesians and as I took my time and worked through each word of the verses it was really incredible just to sit there with those kids and think back through what salvation is and how it works.

In Galatians 3:1-5, Paul begins a new section of this letter where he is defending the true message of salvation.

Let’s break these verses down into 2 points:

1. Paul’s Indictment Regarding Salvation - Galatians 3:1
2. Paul’s Interrogation Regarding Sanctification - Galatians 3:2-5

Paul begins chapter 3 with an indictment. In verse 1 he calls them foolish. Is it weird that an apostle would refer to a church as foolish? Why did he refer to them as foolish? Timothy George, “In calling the Galatians foolish or stupid, Paul was not casting aspersions on their intelligence. No one can read the Letter to the Galatians without realizing that Paul presupposed a high level of intellectual ability on the part of his readers. *The Galatians were not lacking in IQ but in spiritual discernment.*”

When Paul wrote this letter the Galatians were acting foolish because they were being led astray by a false gospel. Bewitched has the idea of fascination or casting a spell. It was as if someone had come in to these churches and cast a spiritual spell on these people. That is why he calls them foolish. F.F. Bruce, “Their new behavior was so strange, so completely at odds with the liberating message which

they had previously accepted, that it appeared as if someone had put a spell on them.

The bluntness of Paul's language as he begins chapter three should be understood against the backdrop of other ways he refers to them in this letter. In 1:11 he calls them brothers. He calls them children in 4:19. So, we need to understand his reference to them as foolish against the backdrop of the whole letter in terms of how Paul feels about these people. Paul's real concern is restoration. Paul loved the Galatians and wanted them to be restored to spiritual and theological soundness. To accomplish this, however, something more stern than mushy sentimentality was required. **Paul's harsh rebuke is an example of tough love.** He confronted the Galatians with their folly so that by this means he might win them back to the truth they were in danger of forsaking.

How do you help someone get back on track spiritually? Look with me over at John 21. I love John 21 because this is a chapter that shows Jesus restoring Peter after Peter denied the Lord and went back to his fishing business. Notice beginning in verse 15 how Jesus restores Peter. John 21:15-17, "So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep."

How many times did Peter deny the Lord? Three times. How many times did Jesus ask Peter if he loved Him? Three times. Jesus used questions to restore Peter, to get Peter back where he needed to be spiritually. Questions are good for restoring people spiritually because God gets to our hearts through our minds. Right thinking is always what leads to right living.

Look back at the end of Galatians 3:1. After asking the Galatians, who has bewitched you, who has cast a spell on you, notice where he takes them. Look at the end of verse 1, "Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified." Paul takes the Galatians back to the original message he gave them. The word *portrayed* means put up on a placard or to post publically. Portrayed is a word that means graphically. Paul graphically portrayed Christ and Him crucified. That was his main message. I Corinthians 15:3-4, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day

according to the Scriptures.” The message of the cross was the message Christ gave Paul to preach. It was his main message.

Because the death of Christ on the cross is central to our faith it would be good for us to spend a few minutes talking about crucifixion. In Paul’s day many people rejected the message of Christ crucified because of the way the culture viewed crucifixion. Crucifixion was a vulgar, common execution that the Roman imposed on notorious criminals, prisoners of war, and rebellious slaves. Its harsh brutality symbolized the supremacy of the Roman government over the victim. Gentiles viewed it as a sign of the victim’s defeat. To the Jews, crucifixion was even worse because they viewed it as a sign of God’s curse on the victim. Paul’s preaching of Jesus Christ and Him crucified cut deeply against the grain of his culture. Most of the Jews rejected the idea that the Messiah could be crucified and thus cursed and looked for signs instead. Gentiles rejected the notion that a crucified man could be the only Savior of the world and opted for eloquent rhetoric in its place.

To most of the people of Paul’s day it was preposterous to consider that the crucifixion of Christ was the focal point of the redemption of mankind. One man writes, “To believe that the one preexistent Son of the one true God, the mediator at creation and the redeemer of the world, had appeared in very recent times in out-of-the-way Galilee as a member of the obscure people of the Jews, and even worse, had died the death of a common criminal on the cross, could only be regarded as a sign of madness. The real gods of Greece and Rome could be distinguished from mortal men by the very fact that they were immortal – they had absolutely nothing in common with the... One who... Was bound in the most ignominious fashion and executed in a sinful way.”

Paul publicly portrayed a crucified Messiah in a day when it was very unpopular to do so. He understood his message cut against the grain of his culture, yet he was undeterred. Cultural expectations did not alter his God given responsibility as an apostle to preach the truth, nor did those expectations hinder the power of the gospel to save. Paul never altered his message even though it often turned his hearers away. Instead of signs, the Jews got a stumbling block. Instead of wisdom, the Gentiles got foolishness.

It would be good for us to remember Paul’s example in this area. Our message isn’t popular. I Corinthians 1:18 is still true today. I Corinthians 1:18, “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” The gospel message always divides - it is viewed by believers as the power of God and it is viewed by unbelievers as foolishness. That is true up until this very moment.

I agree with the author who wrote, “Christ crucified is not a seeker friendly message.” In Paul’s day it was considered an absurd obscenity to Gentiles and a scandalous oxymoron to the Jews. The gospel guaranteed offense. But that offensive message is the one thing God uses to save sinners. The word of the cross is the power of God to us who are being saved.

Think back with me to the time the message of Christ crucified really hit home to your heart for the first time. Let me read a verse that really helped me understand the meaning of the cross and what it accomplishes. 2 Corinthians 5:21, “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” God the Father made Him who knew no sin (Jesus is the only one who never sinned). God the Father made Christ to be sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

That is called the doctrine of substitution. John MacArthur explains it this way, “God the Father, using the principle of imputation, treated Christ as if He were a sinner though He was not, and had Him die as a substitute to pay the penalty for the sins of those who believe in Him. On the cross, He did not become a sinner (as some suggest), but remained as holy as ever. He was treated as if He were guilty of all the sins ever committed by all who would ever believe, though He committed none. The wrath of God was exhausted on Him and the just requirement of God’s law met for those for whom He died.” The good news of the gospel is that when Jesus died on the cross He took our place - He received what we deserved. He got our sin and when we trust in Him we receive His perfect righteousness. That’s the way sinners are saved.

I Peter 2:24-25, “and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.” Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross and by His wounds you were healed. Healed from what? Healed from the penalty and the power of sin. Wow! Amazing love, how can it be, that you My King would die for me; amazing love I know it’s true, and it’s my joy to honor you in all I do. Amen! I hope those lyrics reflect our hearts this morning. I hope God’s amazing love demonstrated at the cross still gets from your head to your heart.

I got to spend a little time with my dad recently and I was talking to him about a friend he golfs with. This guy, years ago, talked to my dad about his experience of coming to Christ in a dramatic way. I asked my dad who still golfs with this guy - Is he sticking with it? My dad, to be honest, didn’t really know for sure. He said, “I think so.” What if I was to ask one of your close friends who knew you had once made a profession of faith - Is he or is she sticking with it? What would they

say about you? Are you sticking with the Savior this morning? Or has something come into your life that is blocking your view of the cross? A sincere believer never gets over the cross. Galatians 6:14, “But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” I hope Paul’s attitude toward the cross is our attitude toward the cross this morning - That the work of Christ is the one thing we boast in because we are in awe that He would bear our sins in His body and give us His perfect righteousness.

In Galatians 3:2-5, Paul turns from an indictment over justification to an inquisition over sanctification. He moves from the righteousness of Christ we all need to be saved to the power of the Holy Spirit we all need to be sanctified. Look at Galatians 3:2-5.

2. Paul’s Interrogation Over Sanctification - Galatians 3:2-5

Let’s read these questions from verse 2-5 and then try and answer them to make sure we understand what should flow into our lives from trusting in Christ. Galatians 3:2-5, “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? 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? 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?”

These are some very important divinely inspired questions that really help us think right about the doctrine of sanctification - How those who trust in Christ receive the Spirit and how the Holy Spirit begins to transform our lives.

Let’s finish our time by working through these questions one by one. **The first question has to do with how a person receives the Holy Spirit.** Galatians 3:2, “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?” Paul takes them back to their original experience of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The answer is obvious if they’ll only use their minds the right way. Justification and the gift of the Holy Spirit are alike received through one and the same act of faith.

It really is incredible to think about who we receive when we trust in Christ. When we trust in Christ we receive the Holy Spirit into our lives. Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is God. When a person trusts in Christ, they receive the power of God into their lives through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. I agree with the man who wrote that there could be no higher privilege for mortal men

and women than the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit is received by faith in Christ and He really is the power source for the Christian life.

Notice we receive the Spirit. He is God's gift to all who place their faith in Christ. In a sermon on these verses Tim Keller wrote about an important part of the Christian life. He wrote, "I would say one of the great secrets of spiritual power for a Christian is to spend time getting to know the glory of what you have within you. A big part of spiritual growth through the Holy Spirit is just simply to come to grips with the knowledge of who you have, just the knowledge of what you have." A big part of spiritual growth is realizing you have the Holy Spirit. This is evidently something that believers forget. I Corinthians 6:19-20, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

Remember the context of I Corinthians 6:19-20 - some of the Corinthians were going back to their former sins. They were going back to lives marked by sexual immorality. How does Paul help them get back on track? He helps them by reminding them that their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. He wants them to remember the power they have and what is true about their bodies so they'll turn from living in sin back to lives that glorify God. Maybe some of you need to just spend some time this week reflecting on the power you've been given through faith in Christ. Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you." We have that power through faith in Christ.

Next question - Galatians 3:3, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" The Galatians, like all true Christians, received the Spirit when they trusted in Christ. They began their Christian career, with the supernatural power of the indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit. Paul is perplexed over the fact that they would turn from the supernatural power of the Spirit back to the flesh.

F.F. Bruce, "Flesh' here is not simply the body, in which circumcision is carried out, but human nature in its unregenerate weakness, relying on such inadequate resources as were available before the coming of faith, having no access as yet to the power of the Spirit." Let's talk for a few minutes about the difference between the flesh and the Spirit. Let's look quickly at two sections of Scripture - let's look at what Jesus said about the difference between the flesh and the spirit and let's look at what Paul said about the difference between the flesh and the spirit.

Let's start with Jesus in John 6:59-63. Jesus has just finished feeding the 5000 and proclaimed to the people that He is the bread of life. He talks about the need to eat His flesh and drink His blood (speaking metaphorically about the need to

become one with Him in salvation) and notice what he tells the disciples beginning in verse 59. Notice what Jesus says about the difference between the flesh and the Spirit in John 6:63 - One gives life and one profits nothing. The Holy Spirit gives life and the flesh profits nothing. That's what Jesus taught.

Now, let's see what Paul taught on this issue. Look over at Philippians 3:3, "for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." True believers place their confidence in the Spirit and put zero confidence in the flesh. These are two completely contradictory approaches. It is foolish to rely on yourself to live the Christian life when you have the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:3-4, "seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." It is through the receiving of the divine nature that we escape the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Let's look at the next question. Galatians 3:4, "Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?" Do you know what flows out the life of someone who trust in the flesh to live the Christian life? Vanity. It's all in vain. Suffer comes from a greek word that has do with experiencing something. "By turning to a works message, the Galatians were discounting the saving and sanctifying work that the Holy Spirit had exemplified in their lives."

I don't know about you, but I don't want to run the race of the Christian life in vain. I don't want to start the right way and then run the wrong way. Do you want your entire Christian life to be in vain? Our Christian life will only mean something if we learn to rely on the resources God has given us. He has given us all we need through His Spirit and through His Word. "The same Holy Spirit who regenerates our inner being from a dead sinner to a living saint continues His transforming work as we release our will to His and allow Him to live His life through us."

Are you releasing your will to the desires of the Holy Spirit revealed in Scripture? Who really controls your life - your will or God's will? Honestly, consider that for just a minute. Do you profess faith in Christ but live each day catering to the flesh? Do you profess faith in Christ and daily submit to Him through the power of the Spirit He has given you? Which way are you living? What's the current pattern of your life? It all goes back to your mind. Romans 8:5-6, "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace."

The final question is found in verse 5. Galatians 3:5, “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?” Notice the phrase **He who provides**. Earlier we read about receiving the Holy Spirit when we believe. That is really what being a Christian is all about.

As Paul asks the Corinthians in I Corinthians 4:7, “What do you have that you did not receive?” Charles Swindoll, “Our salvation, from beginning to end, is the work of the sovereign Father, through the mediating person and work of Jesus Christ, by the finishing work of the Holy Spirit. We are the recipients, the objects of His grace and mercy. Our responsibility? To receive this free gift by faith.”

In Galatians 5-6, Paul is going to address in a lot more detail the powerful ministry the Holy Spirit has in the life of the believer. He really does work miracles. What kind of miracles? Not signs and wonders like he did through the apostle’s to confirm the message. The Holy Spirit works to miraculously change our character. He takes people who are unloving and changes them into loving people. He takes people who are impatient and He makes them patient. He takes people who can’t control their passions and He makes them self controlled. The Holy Spirit works on our inner man in order to change our outer man into conformity with Christ.

Let me ask you something as we finish - Don’t you want the real thing when it comes to Christianity? How do you get the real thing? You get the real thing by relying on God’s provisions for salvation and sanctification. Jerry Bridges looks at the Christian life from the standpoint of bookends. When we’re born again we’re given two things by God - The righteousness of Christ as one bookend and the power of the Holy Spirit as the other bookend. Those two bookends hold our Christian lives together. We need the righteousness of Christ to be acceptable to a holy God and we need the power of the Holy Spirit to please Him in our daily lives.

Bridges writes, “When we become united to Christ by faith, God places a set of bookends on the bookshelf of our lives. One bookend is the righteousness of Christ; the other is the power of the Holy Spirit. Though they’re provided by God, it’s our responsibility to lean our books on them, relying on them to support, stabilize and secure all our books - everything we do.”

Let me ask you something - What do you rely on to glorify God in your daily life? Do you rely on the resources God has given you in the new birth or do you rely on something else? Do you lean on the bookends of the righteousness of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life or do you lean on your own

wisdom, strength and power? These are vital questions for you to honestly consider.

In Galatians 3:1-5, Paul moves from his experience of salvation to the Galatians own experience of salvation. I started this lesson with the little couple - the show Brianna and I like to watch on tv. They are getting ready to renew their marriage vows. In Ephesians 5:22-33 Paul writes about marriage and then he says that he is talking about Christ and the church. The church is mysteriously married to Christ. It's a spiritual union where we become one flesh with the Savior. Some of you are married to Christ, but you need to spend some time renewing your wedding vows. The Corinthians are an example of a people that forgot they were in union with Christ and that their body was the temple of the Holy Spirit and their forgetfulness was leading them back into sin. Don't forget how God saved you and don't forget the power God has given to sanctify you. Let's pray.