

## Ignoring Experience

Galatians 3:1-5

- A. Paul was astonished and dismayed by their rejection of the gospel **1**
1. His words seem overly harsh, but were a rhetorical tool they knew
    - a. He spoke to them with a vocabulary they would understand, with a commonly used method of dispute
    - b. This whole section is loaded with techniques of argument used by teachers, preachers, writers of that day
    - c. This was not an angry tirade, but an attempt to as strongly as possible denounce Judaistic legalism
  2. He was beside himself at the willingness to listen to a different gospel
    - a. The untranslated 'O' with the address to 'foolish Galatians' is evidence of great emotional turmoil
      - 1) He is concerned, exasperated, puzzled by the willingness to hear those who preached a different gospel
      - 2) This word 'foolish' was used of those who were unwise or irrational, unable to make sound judgment
      - 3) He was grieved, in other words, at their 'failure to exercise even a modicum of spiritual discernment'
    - b. They had his God-given teaching and the Spirit, yet could not see the error in what was clearly false
      - 1) Jesus uses this same word to describe the two disciples from Emmaus he walked home with one day
      - 2) They were downcast and discouraged because their Lord had been crucified, and their hopes crushed
      - 3) They heard him speak of his resurrection, heard reports he was raised, and were walking with him
      - 4) Despite all this evidence, they still did not believe he was alive; Jesus responded with **Lk 24:25**
  3. His only explanation was the influence of evil spiritual forces at work
    - a. Their behavior was so strange for people saved by grace alone it seemed to him they were bewitched
      - 1) The Latin word for 'bewitched' is the one from which we derive our word 'fascinate'
      - 2) By means of skillful speech and persuasive argument these young believers were fascinated, charmed
      - 3) And we should not dismiss the obvious meaning of bewitched as involving evil spiritual powers
    - b. How easy it is to be captivated by false doctrine when we lose focus on Scripture as our sufficient authority
      - 1) We begin listening to human philosophies, which by their nature appeal to the sinful human mind
      - 2) We set their truth next to Scripture's as acceptable, then with ease their teaching is set above Scripture
      - 3) The human mind apart from divine revelation is described by Paul as futile and darkened
      - 4) This turn to human reason, especially when encouraged by evil spiritual influences, can be deadly
      - 5) The end result is that what starts as an interesting theory leads people to ignore God's truth altogether
  4. There was no way that they could claim ignorance as an excuse
    - a. One of sinners' favorite excuses for believing or doing the wrong thing is that they did not know better
    - b. The Galatians could not say that Paul's gospel message had only been passed on obscurely to only a few
    - c. They had all experienced Jesus Christ and the salvation he offered clearly portrayed before their very eyes
    - d. They had personally heard the simple message that faith in his work at the cross was the only way to God
    - e. It was incredible to Paul that anyone who had heard and believed this message would turn away from it,
      - 1) willingly exchanging God's free offer of standing before him justified for law keeping as the way
- B. He appeals to their own experience to expose their foolishness **2-5**
1. He asks four question meant to show that faith alone brought salvation
    - a. He doesn't argue intricate theology but points to their own experience of how they came to be saved
  2. Did you receive the Spirit by faith in Christ or by observing the law?
    - a. Did they not remember how they were justified in the first place?
      - 1) They 'heard' the message, and hearing involves obeying, but only for those who first trust God's grace
      - 2) Obedience did not open the door to fellowship with God; their own experience would have told them
      - 3) They had received the Spirit who made them holy by accepting the good news about Jesus by faith
      - 4) Obedience is a part of every saint's life, but it is so because of the indwelling Spirit we receive by faith
    - b. The indwelling Spirit was a preeminent sign they belonged to God
      - 1) When they accepted Christ as Savior they received his Spirit, which both OT and NT see as significant
      - 2) In **Joel 2:28-29** God promises the Spirit would be given in that age when he came to save his people
      - 3) Paul says in **2 Cor 1:22** the Spirit is placed in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come
      - 4) 'Receiving the Spirit is the most unmistakable evidence of God's favor and guarantee of eternal life'
      - 5) If they already have this greatest of gifts, what more could possibly be obtained by legalistic obedience

3. How can a sinner make perfect what God gave by grace thru faith?
  - a. The Spirit had provided them everything they needed for new life
    - 1) They began their Christian life with the Spirit, with his gifts of faith, repentance and power to obey
    - 2) They had found through his work rebirth, forgiveness of sin, joy, assurance of salvation and more
    - 3) They already knew all the fullness of fellowship with God thru the Spirit; what more could law add
  - b. What were they going to do in their sinful flesh to improve that?
    - 1) In light of this Paul asks them if they were now trying to attain their goal by 'human flesh,' *by flesh*
    - 2) That word points to the futility of legalism; it is pursued in man's weak and sinful of human nature
    - 3) To seek salvation on any basis other than the all-sufficient work of Christ is to do so in the flesh
    - 4) To try finishing what Christ began is to say he did not do enough to satisfy all the Father's demands
    - 5) Strict adherence to the law may instill pride for a while, but always ends in doubt, fear, bondage, defeat
    - 6) Let us remember Paul's words about finishing well in this life we began in faith **Phil 1:6**
    - 7) Faith will always be accompanied by works, but they cannot earn a salvation God offers freely
4. Was the suffering you endured for believing the gospel all in vain?
  - a. It would seem that, like Paul, they suffered for faith in Christ
    - 1) At Iconium Paul was driven from the city by threats, and at Lystra he was stoned and left for dead
    - 2) It would seem things did not improve much for believers there who 'suffered much' for their faith
    - 3) We know the Jews were involved in stirring up crowds against Paul, thus are likely culprits here too
    - 4) Belief in a salvation apart from works of the law made the church a target for zealous Jews
    - 5) Paul says, 'If circumcision and dietary laws are part of the gospel, you could have avoided suffering'
  - b. It is possible Paul is speaking of their more positive experiences
    - 1) The word translated 'suffering' can be translated 'experienced' as it is in the RSV
    - 2) This fits with the fact that Paul does not mention persecution before, and only alludes to it here
    - 3) Some conservative scholars accept this saying he is pointing to more positive experiences in the Spirit
    - 4) If so, the question is, How can you enjoy God's blessings by grace then say you must earn them
  - c. He has a hard time accepting what faith brought was pointless
    - 1) Whether the idea is of sufferings endured or blessings enjoyed, he cannot understand them
    - 2) Why did they turn their backs on a gospel that obviously had made such a great change in their lives
    - 3) The 'if' clause suggests Paul cannot believe their experience of the Spirit was really for nothing
    - 4) It was a comforting word that told them their situation was not one of inevitable decline
    - 5) They could still turn from their fascination with legalism and lean once again wholly on God's grace
    - 6) This example from Paul's ministry in churches shows us what discipline is supposed to be like
      - a) Correction and rebuke are not meant to tear people down, but rather to build them up in the faith
      - b) The truth that all they had experienced as believers might have been for nothing was a warning
      - c) It was not meant merely to frighten them, but to show where forsaking their faith would lead
5. Is God's power you continue to see yours by faith or obeying the law?
  - a. The grace they had seen was still evident, even in miraculous ways
    - 1) The grace they had enjoyed when born again was not the last of God's gracious blessings they enjoyed
    - 2) They had known the continuing experience of his power in miracles the Spirit worked among them
    - 3) Paul wanted to know if they thought those were earned by obedience or were given through grace
    - 4) He was confident that if they only thought about it they would see all they enjoyed was by grace
    - 5) All they had to do was compare what following the false teacher's produced and what the gospel did
  - b. The greatest miracle is not sight for the blind, but life for the dead
    - 1) We may at times feel we have missed out on the powerful witness of miracles performed in our midst
    - 2) Let us not forget that the greatest miracle is not giving sight to the blind or hearing to the deaf
    - 3) The greatest miracle is the permanent change of a man dead in his sins to a life of holiness
      - a) This change does not last merely until the moment of death, but through all of eternity afterwards
6. What upholds and encourages you? Faith or your good deeds?
  - a. We should be able to answer the kind of question that Paul was asking based on our own experience
  - b. Which of the blessings you enjoy do you feel were products of your faith and which products of your works
  - c. The answer to that question should settle forever whether it is grace or works that brings real assurance