

Bewitched by Another Gospel

Galatians Series

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Bible Text: Galatians 3:1-9

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Here before us is another wonderful reminder of all the different ways that God in his mercy helps us in our weaknesses, how He comes to us and He pulls us out of holes that we have got ourselves jammed into. He comes to us and, over a long period of time, He helps us to break patterns that need to be broken, that have built up over time. He comes to us so often and He relieves us of all of our fears by giving us - sometimes even just a word of Scripture - to help us to be able to see our way. He takes often bitter, angry spirits, resentful hearts and He melts them and He turns them to forgiveness and love.

In chapter 3, Paul gives many examples and asks many searching questions to prove the wrongness of trusting in anything but the grace of Jesus Christ for our salvation and our sanctification.

Here He breaks a spell. He is desiring to come to the Galatians and to break a spell, a bewitchment, really. God, in His characteristic pattern, is a kind and heavenly Father who comes to relieve His people from their sins.

We find in this place what we have found so many times in this life: that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. His faithfulness is great.

And we find that this morning. We find a faithful God coming to His people in a time of need as they are falling into a whole which they have created for themselves. And what we find here is God coming to the Galatians and giving them a message that would help them to turn back to the childlike faith that they once had, to recognize again that it was faith that saved them as sinners. And it is faith that will transform them into the image of Christ. It is faith that will keep them from thinking that salvation was by the works of the law.

I will never forget a moment I had here in this church. We had had some meeting, some preaching or something, and we finished and a man came and said, "I am overwhelmed. I am totally overwhelmed. I don't know how I am going to do all of this."

And my immediate thought was, don't be overwhelmed. God is able. God will sanctify you by his Spirit. There is not a reason for any of us to be overwhelmed. Cast yourself on the grace of God. It is the grace of God that saved you and it is the grace of God that will sanctify you. God is able.

The steadfast love the Lord never ceases. His mercies are new every single morning. And so for us to be overwhelmed is to sort of stray, really, from the grace of God. So it is important that we call one another to the right state of consciousness and that is the consciousness of the grace of God and the ability of the Spirit of God to sanctify his people. Paul is making it very clear here that we are neither saved nor sanctified by the flesh.

But we have to admit that it is possible to be so bewitched that we would use the law wrongly and that we would be blind to the power of the resurrection. And that is exactly what Paul is attacking here, blindness to the right use of the law and blindness to the power of the resurrection and the work of the Holy Spirit that was unleashed by it. So this is the subject.

Now, these nine verses are very simple in their structure. They are very easy to outline. There are basically two parts. In verses one through five there are questions. There are five questions that the apostle Paul asks and these are questions of interrogation and they are designed to wake the Galatians up to the grace of God for their salvation and for their sanctification. They are pretty tough questions.

And then the second part which runs from verses six through nine is the furnishing of an example, the example of Abraham.

So there are five questions and then an example. That is how Paul is working here.

He gives, in his characteristic form, a wonderful way of teaching. He peppers us with questions by which he helps us to see what it looks like in a real person's life, a real person in history. I love the simplicity and the clarity of this passage because it is so helpful in the way that Paul has structured his argument.

And all of it is to say that works based salvation is not the way that God works. One of the things that I want us to recognize here is that in the midst of the questions and in the midst of the examples, the apostle Paul is putting his finger on a wrong view of God and a wrong view of life. He is exposing this wrong view of God that makes him one that forces his children to work for their salvation. God doesn't do that. God doesn't make his children work for their salvation. God gives it as a gift. That is the kind of God he is. That is the kind of God you serve. He doesn't make you work for your salvation. You do work out your salvation. You do obey for many reasons and some of them are actually revealed in this text.

We don't set aside obedience, but God is not the kind that makes His children work for pay. And that is a wonderful relief. I am praying that that relieves us today. You cannot

pay God back by being good or by performing any work of the law. So Paul makes many arguments against a view of God that makes Him a task master that requires work for pay. Got that? I think that is a really important thing here. Paul thrusts us upon the breast of Christ for everything and seeks to pry us free of outward appearances bereft of genuine childlike faith - like the faith of Abraham. And Paul works this throughout the book of Galatians, but you really see it here as well.

Now, what had happened to the Galatians is that they had exalted the importance of their works and they diminished the greatness of the grace of God. Those are the two things that they did. At the same time Paul not for a minute anywhere in the book of Galatians does he ever denigrate obedience to the law.

In fact, in the midst of talking about freedom from the law, he speaks of obedience to the law when he says, “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?”¹

He never takes obedience off the table ever for a second. But he does take it off the table as a work for salvation.

So that is kind of how it is structured.

Questions for the Bewitched

Now, let’s move in to these questions, these amazing questions for the bewitched.

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?”²

So here in this first verse we find that Paul is very stern. Do you notice his tone?

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?”³

These are very tough things that you might say. These are questions that are designed to unbewitch the bewitched, to pull them out of this terrible bondage that they have fallen into.

We need to understand that God is constantly stretching out His hands toward His people in mercy. He is constantly calling them to come. He is spreading out His hands in fatherly love. But here He seems to be recognizing that the Galatians, in a way, had become like wild beasts and they needed to be yanked back. They needed to be whipped back in a way. So he is whipping them, honestly. And, in his fatherly love, he will not allow them to go.

¹ Galatians 3:1.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

John Calvin comments on this with this observation,

"We see how God goeth about to win us by gentleness and fair means, till our naughtiness and stubbornness enforce him to deal roughly with us, because we suffer not ourselves to be handled so gently by his hand. For throughout the whole doctrine of the gospel, God doth as it were stretch out his arms to bring us in unto him and to receive us in his fatherly love: or rather (as he likeneth himself by Moses) he is as a Hen that spreadeth out her wings to gather her young chickens under them. You see that God of his infinite goodness allureth us to him, but we be like wild beasts, that will not suffer themselves to be guided by him. And therefore in respect of such our frowardness, he had need to use roughness, and to show us our unthankfulness, to the end we may learn to be ashamed of it."

The Church often needs words of comfort and consolation but sometimes it needs the opposite. Often the self image of the Church needs to be disturbed and it is the role of God's prophets and teachers to disturb the self image of the Church. And the apostle Paul is doing just that. He is bringing very disturbing language, "O foolish Galatians Who has bewitched you?"⁴

So the seriousness of his tone is very evident here. And it is so important that we find this voice in church life.

In Titus one verse nine, we learn that the roll of a leader in a church is to point things out that are going wrong. The leader of the church is to be "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict." That is what the apostle Paul is doing now. He is confronting and convicting those who contradict sound doctrine.

So he says, "O foolish Galatians!"⁵

Paul's choice of words here is amazing. *Foolish*. He is calling the people in a church foolish. And what does he mean? Well, the word often means mindless, not acting on knowledge, but emotions stirred up by other things than right thinking. They are just acting stupidly. Their brains are in a fog. That is what he is saying. You are not thinking clearly.

And then he says, "Who has bewitched you?"⁶

And here he is using language that comes out of occultism in many ways. It sort of pictures a person who is mesmerized. The pendulum is swinging back and forth and their eyeballs are fixed on it and they have lost a sense of what else is out there. There are zeroing in on one thing and they are not thinking rightly at all. They have lost the whole

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *ibid.*

picture by a mesmerizing, bewitching of tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock and they don't see what God has for them.

The issue, though, is obedience. Like I said before, Paul never throws the baby out with the bathwater. He does not throw obedience out with the grace of God. Never for a second.

“Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?”⁷

The problem was their disobedience. Their understanding of grace was wrong and their understanding of obedience was wrong. People think that legalism is obedience and that is not true. Legalism is thinking that you are saved by any work of the law, by any work of obedience. That is Legalism and that is disobedience to the truth of God.

Christianity is God calling his people to obey. But their obedience doesn't buy them anything with God. What buys anything with God is the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is what bought them their salvation. They didn't buy it themselves.

So here in Galatia faith has shifted from God and His sufficiency to man and his works.

He says later on in the letter in 5:4-9, “You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?”⁸

Now, he mentions a number of things just in this first verse. The first verse is really full of all kinds of really wonderful truths for us and I wish we could spend the whole time there. “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?”⁹

This is very important for us to understand: they had slipped away from a vision of the centrality of the cross and the crucifixion of Jesus. The cross and crucifixion of Christ had been clearly portrayed before their eyes through preaching. It had been preached to them and what Paul is saying is that the crucifixion should have been so real to you that you never should have slipped away from it. The crucifixion was portrayed among them through the preaching of the gospel. They didn't see it with their eyes. They didn't see it in a movie. It was preached to them. That is the way that God saves sinners. He uses the foolishness of preaching to portray the crucifixion of Christ, to help them see, to help people see their sins, how the suffering for their sins was laid upon Christ and Christ was the sacrifice for their sins.

So what Paul is saying is the crucified Christ was placarded before you. It was displayed vividly among you through the preaching of the gospel, but you turned aside from it. What we find here is that Christ has done everything necessary for salvation for sinners. And what Paul is saying here is that the Christian life begins the same way that it is lived

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Galatians 5:7.

⁹ Galatians 3:1.

and it ends the same way that it began. Do you get that? That is really what Paul is saying in a nutshell. The Christian life begins the same way that it is lived and it ends the same way that it began, all by grace. It began by grace. It is lived by an outpouring of the Spirit of God for your sanctification and it ends the same way. It is all by grace.

And so Paul asks five questions. Have you noticed already the nature of the questions? They are questions to which everybody says, “No, no, no, no.” That’s it. It is not like saying, “Who are the four main characters of the book of Esther? What is the feast of Purim?”

Now these are not questions like that where you have to think about that for one second. They are obvious questions. That is the character of the questions. Are they rhetorical questions? No, they are not rhetorical questions, but they are the kinds of questions like rhetorical questions in that you know the answer the second you hear it. The answer is absolutely no. You are not justified by a work of the law and you are not sanctified by the work of the law, not in a million years. They are not really very profound questions, but they are helpful questions to help us understand the grace of God.

Question #1: Who has bewitched you?

So the first question is: “Who has bewitched you?”¹⁰

So this is a question that asks who did it? There are people that helped them with their bewitchment. This is an appropriate question. Who is it that did it? Who is it that taught you something that was wrong? You need to understand that. You need to identify who it was and what it was and that is what Paul is doing.

“Who has bewitched you?”¹¹

Because false teachers had come in. They had crept in and they were trying to spy out people’s liberty. This sounds like what Paul already said in chapter one where he said, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.”¹²

And he said that there are people, some who have troubled you “to pervert the gospel of Christ.”¹³

But he says:

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Galatians 1:6.

¹³ Galatians 1:7.

before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.¹⁴

So Paul is sort of refreshing what he said in chapter one that there will be people who will preach another gospel. Let them be accursed. Who has bewitched you? Who are they? Who are the accursed ones that preached this thing? You need to know that.

So there is this implication that there are specific people who have bewitched. There is this hypnotizing teaching, the ball swinging back and forth that make the eyes glaze over and knowledge of the grace of God is lost. You are no longer, you are no longer left with a heart so full of gratitude and joy at your salvation. You are just worried about how you can't do this and you can't be that. But there is something greater and that is a sufficient Christ who paid for all of your sins and is sufficient for all of your sanctification.

So "Who has bewitched you?"¹⁵ That is the first question.

One final thought: I was having lunch with a friend who is a local pastor here in the area. We were talking about this verse. About it, he said: "The preaching should have been enough for these people, but it wasn't. The placarding of the crucifixion was all that God had provided, but they wanted something more. They wanted a work of the law. They wanted something else. They rejected the preached Word and they did not obey it even though it should have been enough to tell them that Christ was crucified and it was no longer they who lived, but Christ who lived in them."

Question #2 – Did you receive the Spirit by works?

Ok, then the second question in verse two. The second question has to do with receiving the Spirit.

"Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"¹⁶

How did you do that? So he says, "This only want to learn from you."¹⁷

Just one thing. Just one thing I want to know. And, honestly, this first question might be all that is needed although he has more. He says, "This one thing I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"¹⁸

Now, there are many wonderful things to contemplate here that I hope we can understand. One is that God pours out His Spirit on sinners who are undeserving. God pours His Spirit out upon sinners who are dead in their trespasses and sins by the hearing of faith, just like that. They hear it and God is so kind that they don't have to clean up

¹⁴ Galatians 1:8-9.

¹⁵ Galatians 3:1.

¹⁶ Galatians 3:2.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

their life. He will clean their life up, but they don't have to clean their life up. They have to hear by faith and trust Him that He is sovereign and he is deserving of all of their worship and He is worthy to receive their confession of sin.

And so God pours out his Spirit on sinners who are undeserving and it happens by the hearing of faith.

I think we should recognize how simple and how easy God has made salvation. It is really is very simple. There are not a lot of hoops to jump over, really. He has made it alarmingly simple by the hearing of faith. The ears hear and then something happens in the heart and there is faith. And that is it.

You know, this is very consistent with what we read all over Scripture.

Isaiah 53:1. Who has believed what we have heard?

Salvation begins when you believe what you have heard of the gospel.

Habakkuk 3:2 says, "O LORD, I have heard your speech and was afraid."¹⁹

So it comes with the hearing of fear and then turning to God. It is very simple.

Obadiah 1:1. We have heard tidings from the Lord.

Romans 10:14. "And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?"²⁰

Matthew 11:15. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"²¹

Here we find a God who has tidings of joy.

"And how shall they hear without a preacher?"²²

But here is the truth. God pours his Spirit out into those who hear and they have faith in their heart and he doesn't demand that their whole life gets cleaned up. They don't have to do a penance here or this or that. But they hear. Faith wells up in their souls and they are saved. It is a remarkable thing that God has done. Imagine how complex it would be if we had to clean up all of our idols before we were saved. Imagine that.

I was telling a brother just yesterday, "You know, here I am. I am in my mid 50s now and I continue to find new idols that I didn't know were there. I am so glad God did not wait until I was able to identify all my idols. He hasn't done that. He has been so kind to me. He took me as I was. He showed me many idols right away. He did. He showed me

¹⁹ Habakkuk 3:2.

²⁰ Romans 10:14.

²¹ Matthew 11:15.

²² Romans 10:14.

many sins and idols that I needed to turn away from. I needed to turn away from dead works. I needed to repent of my sins. But he never revealed all of it to me. I suspect that on the day that I die—some of you may witness this—on the day that I die, I will die with some idols. But the grace of God is the source of my salvation, not the works of the law. Now Paul would never say, “Therefore your idols don’t matter.” Paul never says that. But he does say that you were not saved because you recognized every idol that you had in your heart.

So it comes by the hearing of faith. And he is talking about the giving of the Spirit. The Spirit of God was poured out upon you when you were converted. That is what happened. When you have faith in Christ the Bible says that the Spirit of God is poured out in your heart and you now have a new resource that you never had before. You have another helper. Jesus said, “I will give you another helper, another just like me.” That is what Jesus meant. Jesus said that he was giving a helper that was like him.

He said to his disciples, “Behold, I am going away. But don’t fear. I am sending another helper, the Holy Spirit who will be with you forever.”

So what the apostle Paul is saying is that we received the Spirit apart from the works of the law. We were converted and He sent His Spirit into us anyway. Even though we were still messed up. Even though we still had many sins.

We are determining to read portions of George Mueller’s biography. In his book, George Mueller tells the story of his conversion. He tells the story of how he was trying to be sanctified by the works of the law, how he was trying to make resolutions. He was trying to look good on the outside. And then he was converted.

“I took the Lord’s supper twice a year. I had made strong resolutions, now at last to change the course of my life, for two reasons: first, because without it, I thought no parish would choose me as their pastor; and secondly, that without a considerable knowledge of divinity I should never get a good living....I had no sorrow of heart on account of offending God.”

“I determined to live differently in the future. Once more the Lord showed me what resolutions come to when made in mans strength.”

Here is what he says about his conversion. “I now no longer lived habitually in sin, though I was still often overcome and sometimes even by open sin though far less frequently than before and not without sorrow of heart. I read the Scriptures, prayed often, I loved the brethren, I went to church from right motives, and stood before Christ, though laughed at by my fellow students.”

I love the line that he writes here because it speaks of the moment of salvation. God does save sinners. They are not perfected in a day. But he still sends his Spirit into them. He still does. He takes his time to clean them out one year after another.

And it is a beautiful picture. But notice this. He didn't send the Holy Spirit because you fixed yourself. He sent the Holy Spirit in order to fix you. That is why. And he didn't wait. He sent it immediately. He sent the gift in order to cleanse, to bring health that was needed. And that is what the Spirit does.

The kindness of God is displayed here in that he would give help by the Holy Spirit before, long before you were worthy. And that is why the apostle Paul said to the Church in Ephesus in Ephesians chapter two verses four through nine:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace.²³

Why did he pour his Spirit out into sinners? To show the exceeding riches of his grace. It glorified God to pour His Spirit out upon sinners who don't deserve it. Why did he do that for you? Why did he pour out His Spirit upon you even though you still had 1000 things wrong? It glorifies him. He is trying to show the exceeding greatness of his mercy.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.²⁴

And so there we have it, that God pours out his grace upon sinners.

So the first question is: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law? Did you? No way. Everybody knows that. You received the Spirit long before you were accomplishing hardly any of the works of the law and that is a blessing.

Question #3 – Are you made perfect by the flesh?

And then there is the third question in verse three.

“Are you so foolish?”²⁵ Here we have that word again. “Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?”²⁶

So now is Paul saying that sanctification is not by works? Yes, that is exactly what he is saying. Sanctification doesn't happen by works. It happens by grace. Yes, God does use obedience to bring about sanctification, but it is a work of the Spirit. The Word of God is the voice of the Spirit of God working in the saint of God in order to sanctify him. That is what happens. But you are not sanctified by your perfections. You are not sanctified by works of the law. They are really result of works of the Spirit in your life.

²³ Ephesians 2:4-7.

²⁴ Ephesians 2:8-9.

²⁵ Galatian 3:3.

²⁶ Ibid.

Notice he says that, “Are you now being made perfect by the flesh?”²⁷

So there is this process that is spoken of here. This is progressive sanctification. Where there is the continual cleansing as a believer turns toward God, as a believer reads the Word of God and desires to obey it. There is a sanctification that takes place. But sanctification is not dependent upon the works of the law. It is dependent on faith.

And so he asks this question.

“Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit...”²⁸ because they began in the Spirit, but then they drifted off and they began to think that their law keeping was everything and it wasn’t everything. This is why the apostle Paul could say in 1 Corinthians chapter 15:10, “But by the grace of God I am what I am.”²⁹

So the giving of the Spirit according to the sovereign will of God determines our sanctification. And, yes, we can quench the Spirit. We can slow down our sanctification by quenching the Spirit of God in us, by rejecting the things that God has said to us. You quench the Spirit by disobeying God. And it has an effect on you.

So what we know, though, is that Paul was not impressed by the works of the flesh. And what the apostle Paul is attacking here is this inordinate view of the flesh that makes you and everyone else proud of how well you are doing and it is very deceptive.

One of the things that one of the men said in our Bible study on Tuesday is that outwardly the works done by a person might look the same in the believer and the unbeliever at the same time. The works of the law can be applied and they might look the same in the person who is doing them by faith and the other one who is doing them by the flesh.

So you can’t always tell, but God always knows. God knows if there is anyone in here who believes that they are being sanctified by the works of the law. God knows if any of you are proud of yourselves. God knows if any of you are proud of yourselves and are not very proud of others for their sanctification. God knows. God knows if you have exalted the works of the law or understood the hearing of faith.

So we have this whole tension of the outward and the inward.

Paul, then, is answering the question: What do I do to make myself righteous? Am I doing this as a work of the flesh or a work of faith? Is it a work of joyful submission to God or is it a work of obligation? This was the issue that Jesus was constantly dealing with the Pharisees. They looked at themselves as righteous and they believed that their righteousness was a direct result of their circumcision and their law keeping and all the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:10.

different things. The ceremonial law, the moral law, every law was what justified them in the sight of God. The apostle Paul is saying no.

“Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?”³⁰

The answer is easy: No. It doesn't happen that way. There is something more. It is a work of the Spirit through the hearing of faith.

Question #4 – Have you suffered in vain?

And then the fourth question. “Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?”³¹

So Paul is now talking about their experience in life. He is really asking them to consider what has happened in their life as a result of their conversion.

You remember the persecutions that the apostle suffered in the Galatian region. He was stoned. He was left for dead and walked right back into the city and was persecuted again. Acts chapter 13 and 14 really is a story of amazing fortitude and courage as it describes what happened when they were in this region.

The Judaizers came in. They stoned them and then they went away. Now the Judaizers are back. When many in Galatia were converted the Judaizers were back to persecute them again and they suffered for it. That is why he says, “Have you suffered so many things in vain?” You were converted and you suffered.

Why did they suffer? They suffered because they believed that Jesus Christ was crucified and rose again on the third day and that He was the sacrifice for their sins. That is why they were persecuted: because they believed in the death and the resurrection of Christ.

You say, “Well, that is an overreaction to persecute people for believing that.”

Well, this is the kind of world that we live in. People are persecuted for believing that.

And so they suffered because of the crucified Christ.

What happened to them? They suffered for it and then they backed off. Maybe they got tired of the suffering. Maybe they just wanted a little bit of relief. Maybe they just wanted to fit in a little bit more with the Judaizers. A lot of people wanted to fit in. Even Peter wanted to fit in. Even Barnabas wanted to fit in. It was a big temptation. And so they suffered and then they fell back and I think the apostle Paul is saying, “Hey, was this just a phase you were going through? Was this real? Did you really believe in the crucified Christ? Was this just something you were going through or did you really believe it?”

³⁰ Galatians 3:3.

³¹ Galatians 3:4.

And he is calling them back to that time. And what I think Paul is saying is, “Brother, you did believe it. You did, but you have fallen into the fear of man, just like Peter did, just like Barnabas did.”

I think Paul is actually affirming their faith in a way because then he says, “If indeed it was in vain?”³²

It is almost like he is saying, “Maybe it wasn’t. Maybe it was real. It was real, brother. Return. Believe in the crucified Christ. Your works are nothing. Let your joy again fill your heart that Christ was crucified for you and no longer do you live, but He lives in you and you live it by faith and you trust completely in all that He has done for you and you can rest in His work and leave your salvation as something that has been accomplished by Christ on the cross.”

I think Paul is really sort of encouraging them. It wasn’t in vain, was it? He really did believe. But they slipped, so he is using this strong rebuke to bringing them back.

Question #5 – Is the ministry of the Spirit and miracles by works?

And then the fifth question in verse five.

“Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”³³

Here he is amplifying verse two. Remember verse two, you know, the second question was: “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”³⁴

He said that in verse two. Now he says the same thing, but he adds something else. He adds miracles to the list. Did you receive miracles and the Spirit by the works of the law or by hearing of faith?

And, again, the answer is no. Every miraculous work of God happened by the Spirit of God, not because you were a good person. It happened by grace. God chooses when he is going to do his miracles. God chooses when he is going to pour out his Spirit upon undeserving sinners. He does it and it is not dependent on the works of the law.

If you think that the good things that have happened to you in life are because you are good, think again. Not true. The miracles that God will perform in and around you have nothing to do with your goodness.

³² Ibid.

³³ Galatians 3:5.

³⁴ Galatians 3:2.

You know, often people envy one another because they think that somehow because they did this they got that and it is not true. Paul is saying, "No, neither miracles nor the supply of the Spirit happens by the work of the law."

But it happens, again, by the hearing of faith. Isn't that amazing? You hear and you believe and God works. He does it by His own sovereignty.

So now we have just come through the first part here, these searching questions, these unbewitching questions that Paul gives, these really easy questions where the answer is, nope, nope, nope, nope, nope, five times. Five times no. No. All to prove one thing. That God does not save by the works of the law, but by the hearing of faith. If you don't believe that you are bewitched. It is a devilish idea to think otherwise.

The Example of Abraham

Ok, so now let's move into the second part of this where the example of Abraham is given. He gives a real life example, a person that we can study.

One of the wonderful things about this week for our family is that, in our reading of the Bible through in a year, we were reading the whole Abraham narrative. So we got to refresh all these things and we got to see Abraham in all of his glory and in all of his degradation because Abraham was not perfect. Yes, he did have faith. But he wasn't a perfect man and we got to see that again. We saw, really, the beautiful child like faith of Abraham where God says "Leave your country and go," and Abraham goes even though he doesn't even know where he is going. He is a man of faith. It was beautiful, child like faith.

So verses six through nine.

Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed."

So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.³⁵

So what was it that brought salvation to Abraham? Verse six. Verse six tells you how salvation was brought to Abraham and the way that salvation was brought to Abraham is the same way that salvation has been brought to all who are saved. It was brought by a legal transaction. And here we find, again, in this real life example that a person is saved by the hearing of faith.

³⁵ Galatians 3:6-9.

Abraham had a heart to believe and God granted him salvation. And into his heart flowed the riches of salvation. Abraham was not required to go through a two year program to understand the gospel before he was saved. He didn't have to line up a number of works before he was saved. God took him right where he was.

In explaining Abraham's salvation he actually uses an accounting term. He takes a word out of the daily activity of an accounting firm, *logizomai* (log-id'-zom-ahee), to explain how we are saved. It was accounted, meaning that something was put into Abraham's account. There was nothing in his account and then something was put in it. Some of you have nothing in your account. Imagine if millions of dollars just flowed instantaneously into your account. Wouldn't that be great? You could write checks and do all kind of things you can't do now. But your account is a picture of a bankrupt account, nothing in it at all.

And then, instantaneously the account is full, *logizomai* (log-id'-zom-ahee). It was accounted and riches are poured into an account. That is what salvation is. It was accounted. Funds were put in the bank. They were moved from Christ's account to your account.

“According to the riches of his grace.”³⁶

How rich is that? How big was it? Greater than any of your sins or mine. Greater than all the sins of the world. God's riches are greater than anyone's sins. No one has enough sins to dwarf God's riches. No one does. His grace is always greater than your sins. And that is what this word speaks of, that you have an account with nothing and then all of the sudden it is filled up with the grace of Jesus Christ. It is enough for your past. It is enough for your present. It is enough for all of eternity. It is enough for your sins tomorrow and the next day and the next day and the next day. It is the riches of his grace.

Sonship is granted

And then not only is an account made full, but a change of relational status takes place. You become something different than you were. You become a son, verse seven.

“Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.”³⁷

We will get to the doctrine of sonship later on. This is the beginning of it. This is the beginning, brother and sisters. It will be a very sweet time when we begin to talk about what it means to be a son, redeemed to be a son. That is not too far around the corner in Galatians.

But now the idea of sonship has been introduced. You are a son of Abraham. Your whole status in life has been changed. You have turned from a slave to a son. You have turned from someone who has no future to an heir, a co heir of Christ. Your whole status

³⁶ Ephesians 1:7.

³⁷ Galatians 3:7.

in life has changed. When you are converted to Jesus Christ you become a son of the living God. Everything is changed. Yes, you still have an earthly father and a son, but guess what? You have a Father. You have the Father of lights. You have the Father with whom there is now shadow of turning. You have almighty God as your Father.

And so by faith Abraham obeyed. When he was called to go to the place which he would receive as an inheritance, he went out not knowing where he was going. He had that child like faith.

We read in Genesis chapter 15 that God had Abraham out in the open air at night and he came to him in a vision and he said, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."³⁸

But Abraham said, "Lord, what will you give me? I have no sons. I have no children."

And God says, "Look, look up toward heaven and count the stars if you are able to number them."

And he said to him, So shall your descendants be. And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Then He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."³⁹

And so here we find that the gospel was preached to Abraham in anticipation of the justification of the Gentile and Abraham believed God before he had any works. Now notice this. This is very important to understand about Abraham's salvation and it is the point that Paul is trying to make all through this.

Abraham had his account filled up before he was circumcised. Abraham was saved before he had any works at all. No circumcision happened. No works happened before his salvation. And this is why the apostle Paul is saying, "Don't have any confidence in the flesh, because your salvation comes before your obedience."

Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that helpful? Wasn't that necessary for us? We could never have been saved if we had to do it by the works of the law. It was in God's great kindness toward sinners that He came to us on account of faith and not works.

And so Christ came to die for sinners. He gave everlasting life to those who did not do any good works. He loved us and gave Himself up for us. And then, in His working in us, He began to add evidences of our faith and the work of His grace. Evidences that he made us pass from death to life. The Spirit bears witness that we are the children of God. In this passage, there are two things. One is to banish doubts about your salvation. The other is to terrify you of how dangerous it is to begin to believe that your works make you

³⁸ Genesis 15:1.

³⁹ Genesis 15:5-7.

righteous by saying, “Oh, foolish Wake Forestinians, who has bewitched you? Have you lost the joy of your salvation? Have you forgotten how good God is? Have you forgotten how merciful he is? Have you lost touch with how merciful he was on the day of your salvation? Have you lost the happiness there is to know that you are free? Have you lost that? Has anyone bewitched you? Is it possible? Have I bewitched you? Has anyone bewitched us to think that our salvation would be by works of the law rather than by the hearing of faith?”

Do you see the amazing mercy of God in that?

So it is God’s plan to justify by faith.

What is the gospel? That is a long discussion, but he says that the gospel was preached to Abraham.

You know, it is a popular question. What is the gospel? This is one element of the gospel, that in you all the nations shall be blessed. That is part of the gospel, that God desires to bless the nations by hearing faith. That is the gospel.

So then they are blessed with believing Abraham.

Application:

Now, let’s turn to some application. We have just walked through a passage of Scripture that has defined for us a mistake, a bewitching. It is a devilish thing that can wash over the mind of a believer. And what we have really seen is that it is a man centered, it is a Spirit deprived, it is a foolishness producing kind of religion. That is what it is. That is all it is. And so what about today? What about today? Let’s begin with the Lord’s Day for this application.

God gave us a whole day to celebrate his rest. And we learn that the Sabbath is all about rest. We cease from our labors. We cease from trying to make our own way in the world. We stop making money. We stop buying and selling. That is what the Sabbath is for.

We know that there are a number of purposes for the Sabbath, but one of the purposes of the Sabbath is to remind you that you can rest, that you can rest in Christ. This is a day of rest from the bondage that you might feel in your heart regarding the works of the law. Yes, we should repent of our sins. Yes, we should obey the law. But we should be very careful that we can rest in Christ on this day.

So we can apply this in a very special way today because this is the Sabbath day. Let this be a day of rest, that God in Christ has done all of your work for you on the cross and it is finished. His work for your sins is finished.

Paul has given us five questions and I would like to give a couple of more that I think are

follow up questions in this matter. Are you more thrilled in your heart with the mercy of God than you are how far behind you are?

I ask that question because his commandments are not burdensome and God does desire his people to be free in this way.

Now, this doesn't mean that we set aside confession. In fact, in the communion service where we celebrate the death and the resurrection of Christ, part of it is self examination. So we are not setting aside self examination. But what God has done is he has allowed two things to exist together, self examination for obedience and freedom. He has actually called us to both, not one or the other. I would just say that it is a terrible misunderstanding to take either one of them away.

If you take away the self examination and the obedience, then you have been left with something that can't stand on its own. And if you take the other way, you have done the same. God gives us both.

But what Paul is attacking is the idea in our hearts that says that we are more acceptable to God by our works. And so the question is: Are you thrilled by the goodness of God or are you burdened? And if you are burdened, I just ask you to come before the Lord and ask Him to help you see the greatness of His mercy and His grace here today.

And then in this whole matter of bewitching, their bewitching made them blind to the use of the law and blind to the power of the resurrection.

And so I would just ask you this next question. Where are you in this? Have you unrighteously set aside obedience for grace? Or the other way around?

In a few minutes we are going to sing a song that has everything to do with the bewitching and the unbewitching questions that the Apostle Paul brings to us.

Not what my hands have done can save my guilty soul.
Not what my toiling flesh has borne can make my spirit whole.
Not what I feel or do can give me peace with God.
Not all my prayers and sighs and tears can bear my awful load.

But who can? The resurrected Christ who deals with His people on the basis of hearing faith. And that is the blessing of the faith of Abraham.

Will you pray with me?

Lord, I thank you for these words that you have given. They are very beautiful. They call up so many remembrances of your kindness. And I pray, Lord, that you will now use them in our hearts in Jesus' name. Amen.