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Galatians

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?
Galatians 3:1

To begin the new chapter, Paul now directly addresses the Galatians. He had been referring to the account with Peter to explicitly show them that they had fallen into the same error and deserved the same rebuke as Peter received. And this is exactly what he does. He directly challenges their thinking process with the words, "O foolish Galatians!"

Here he uses the word *anoétos*. This gives the idea of "not 'reasoning through' a matter (with proper logic)" (HELPS Word Studies). It is used by Jesus in this memorable passage from Luke -

"Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' ²⁷ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Luke 24:25-27

The people Jesus spoke to had heard the Scriptures their entire lives and yet they failed to make the connection concerning what had to occur. The information was right there in front of them, and yet they couldn't see what it was telling them.

Paul will convey the same idea to those in Galatia. It should be noted that he is referring to the moral judgment of the believing Galatians concerning Christ. He is not making a judgment call on the characteristics of the Galatian people in general. This rebuke is directed solely at those in the church.

He next questions them concerning their state with, "Who has bewitched you...?" The word he uses is unique to the NT, *baskainó*. It means to "give the evil eye to, fascinate, bewitch, overpower." They had been pursuing one course and they were stolen away from it by a bewitching power. Where they had pursued Christ, they now pursued a false path so that they would "not obey the truth."

In other words, if they have been bewitched to not obey the truth, then they were pursuing a lie. Whatever the false brethren had introduced was a counterfeit and could only lead to a sad end. Their message stood against the truth that Paul had presented to the Galatians which was that before their "eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified."

The term "before whose eyes" gives the sense of something which is openly and publicly displayed. It is as if a masterpiece were hung on an open street for any and all who passed by to see. Paul's description of the crucifixion of Christ was just as noted and prominent. It was the central tenet of his gospel proclamation and it is what all of true Christian theology is dependent upon. The reason for noting the crucifixion will be clearly seen in Paul's continued words of the epistle, but his motive for introducing it now is tied directly back to his exchange with Peter in the previous chapter -

"For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain." Galatians 2:19-21

If Christ's death was in fulfillment of the law, then the law is fulfilled and a new path has been set in redemptive history. The Galatians had been bewitched into believing that they were obligated to that very same obsolete law. If they were, then for them Christ's death was truly in vain. They had set aside His work in order to establish their own righteousness.

Life application: Stay far away from Judaizers, Hebrew Roots Movement teachers, and anyone else who would attempt to sway you to fall back under the Law of Moses. Should you pursue that path, it will demonstrate that Christ's death meant absolutely nothing to you. Don't follow this perverse, ungodly, and unholy path to destruction.

This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Galatians 3:2

Paul, questioning the utterly ridiculous nature of the Galatians turning to the law in order to please God, asks a simple question, beginning with the words, "This only I want to learn from you:..." In using the word "only" (in Greek *monon*), Paul is showing that nothing else is needed to determine the truth of the matter and to settle the question. Upon completion of his thought, there would be no more need for proofs of any kind to show how absurd their new path truly was.

And the question is, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" First, it is evident that they received the Holy Spirit in an outward, demonstrable way, just as other early believers did. They were given gifts which they used in accordance with the reception of the Spirit. Paul now confronts them directly by asking if those gifts (which were proofs of the Spirit) came "by works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

Paul knew the answer because it was he who was there, leading them to Christ. All he had done was to tell them the gospel. When they believed, they received. This is exactly what happened with Cornelius in the account in Acts 10 -

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. ⁴⁵ And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God." Acts 10:44-46

Like those with Cornelius, the Galatians had simply heard the word, had faith, and then received the Spirit. They had whatever food they ate that day in their belly - food which was unclean according to the Law of Moses. In fact, it may still have been on their breath at that time. They were uncircumcised in the flesh, something which excluded them from entry into the covenant community under the Law of Moses.

Further, they had never observed a Sabbath day and they had never made a sacrifice down in Jerusalem. Their clothes didn't meet the requirements of the law. On and on, through 613 commands within the Law of Moses, they failed to meet those standards. And yet, by mere faith in the work of Christ, they received the promise and were sealed with the Spirit.

The word for "hearing" here is *akoé*. It is "used of *inner (spiritual)* hearing that goes with receiving faith from God" (HELPS Word Studies). This is exactly what Paul wrote about in Romans -

"So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17

The Galatians had heard the word, they had believed what they heard, and they had received the Spirit. This "only" that Paul submitted for their consideration should be enough to get them (and thus us!) to think clearly and to realize that they were headed down the wrong path by now inserting the Law of Moses into their lives.

What is truly sad is that many today are presented with exactly this evidence as is recorded in the Bible (for example, the account of Cornelius), and yet they reject the simple, obvious nature of what is provided there for our understanding. In so doing, they continue down the road of apostasy and stand self-condemned because they fail to trust in Christ, and in Him alone, for their salvation. What a waste! What a twisting of the mind by wolves who creep in and refuse to be obedient to the Lord who reaches His hands out to them, asking for a simple act of faith.

Life application: Have faith in Christ and in Him alone to save you and to keep on saving you.

Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Galatians 3:3

Paul uses the same word here as in verse 3:1 - foolish. The Galatians, without thinking through or even considering the stupidity of their actions, were willing to follow these heretical Judaizers onto Apostasy Avenue as they headed for Heretic Highway. His words are intended to cut them off and redirect them to Right Doctrine Drive. They needed clarity of thought, and they needed to rationally consider what their actions meant.

And so he questions them in an attempt to get them to think through what they were doing. "Having begun in the Spirit" shows that these Gentiles had NEVER been under the Law of Moses. They started out completely separate from the people of Israel and the covenant promises and expectations that were outlined for them. But then came the message of Christ.

When the gospel was preached to them, they didn't suddenly get a crash course on how to observe the law, they were never circumcised, and they didn't give up on their afternoon pork roast. Instead, they believed the message of Christ and they received the Spirit. If the Spirit was given by the Lord, then how could the Galatians think that by adding in the law (which Christ fulfilled) they could now be

"made perfect by the flesh?" Adding in the law was not a step forward, but a step back.

Paul's use of the word for "being made perfect" shows the stupidity of this choice. It is in the middle or passive voice and so it is more literally rendered, "...having begun in the spirit are ye coming to completion in the flesh?" (Vincent's Word Studies). The words are filled with irony and they are intended to show the Galatians (and thus us!) the utterly absurd nature of expecting to be perfected based on the Law of Moses when it could never perfect anyone. Instead of arriving on Pleasing Parkway, they had been misdirected to Senseless Circle.

Not a single person in Israel's history was able to meet its expectations. Because of this, Christ needed to come and fulfill it on our behalf. For a person to reinsert the law then means that Christ's work means nothing to them. It is the ultimate slap in God's face. Those who would do this have attempted to reverse the order of what God intended. This is seen from Paul's hand in 1 Corinthians 15:46 -

"However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual."

Life application: It is the epitome of arrogance to assume that we can make ourselves more pleasing to God by observing aspects of the Law of Moses. Christ fulfilled it and so placing our faith in His work is the only thing that we can do in order to be pleasing to Him in this regard. Trust Christ, keep the observances and exhortations that you follow from the New Testament, and reject anyone who would tell you that it is right and proper to reinsert the Law of Moses, in part or in whole, in order to be in right standing with God.

Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain? Galatians 3:4

There is no record in the book of Acts concerning the suffering that is mentioned here, but Paul's words in this epistle form their own record and witness to it. He could not have written to the Galatians about their having suffered if they didn't, in fact, suffer. And so it is obvious that some sort of ills had befallen them after

their Christian conversion. The nature of this suffering can only be speculated upon, but several obvious possibilities are: 1) A loss of fellowship with family or friends; 2) A loss of employment; 3) Persecution by those who still held to whatever religion they had left behind; 4) Persecution from the Jews who detested the truth of the gospel found in Christ.

In these, or in any other ways, the Galatians had suffered directly from having received the gospel and then having turned away from their old ways of life. It should be noted that Paul ties his thought in with suffering and not in with their accomplishments. Their suffering was because of their faith in Christ, not because of their works. It is a connection to the constant theme of Paul in all of his writings; salvation by grace through faith. It is this by which they were granted the Spirit (as is noted in the previous two verses).

In a way of getting them to think this issue through, he asks them concerning this suffering, "Have you suffered so many things in vain?" He is asking them to think on the high cost they had already paid for calling on Christ. Was it simply a pointless moment in their existence? However, in hopes that they hadn't completely turned away, he qualifies his thought with, "...if indeed *it was* in vain." In other words, maybe their faith was still there but simply misdirected. The purpose of his letter is to determine the truth of the matter and then to redirect them if possible.

Life application: What have you given up for Christ? For some, the answer might be, "Not very much." But for others, a great deal was given up in order to pursue this new life. By turning to the Law of Moses for a right standing with God, everything that was lost or which resulted in suffering for Christ was in vain. Does Christ's cross have so little meaning to us that we would turn from it and to something that can never save?

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?*— Galatians 3:5

Paul, speaking to the Galatians directly, asks a question which is tied to the same logic as his words spoken to Peter in verse 2:16. He then continued with the same thought to the Galatians starting in verse 3:2.

And so he begins with, "Therefore..." In essence, "Based on these things, it is time to make a logical deduction from what we already know." In order to get them to think it through, he forms his words into a question, beginning with a known occurrence by saying, "He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you..." These words are a general repeat of what is stated in verse 3:2, in order that the answer to the question will be as plain and obvious as possible.

It was God who supplied the Spirit, and it is He who worked miracles among those in Galatia. To this, there should be no doubt in their mind. As this is so, Paul's following words, framed as a question, demand an answer. "...*does He do it by works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*"

Just as Peter was called out in the previous chapter for not thinking this issue through, the Galatians are now being called out as well. An answer is expected and it can only be the latter, "...by the hearing of faith." The Galatians were Gentiles. They never had the law. They went directly from being pagans without God, to being saved believers who had received the Spirit and who had witnessed the miracles without having done a single deed according to the law.

As a side note, the word for "miracles" is *dunamis*. It can mean either miracles, such as healings, tongues, or other demonstrations of power; or it can mean a miraculous working within an individual, changing their life through the power of the Spirit. The latter is probably what Paul is thinking of. Though they may have demonstrated outward gifts of the Spirit as other early believers did, there was a greater change in the Galatians, wrought by the Spirit, and this had come about entirely apart from any works of the law. Their lives had been changed so much that they were willing to suffer for the name of Christ (as seen in verse 3:4).

Life application: With the Bible recorded, we have its words which tell us that we are saved by grace through faith; we have its words which tell us that by deeds of the law, no flesh will be justified; and we have its words which tells us explicitly (and numerous times) that the law is finished, annulled, and set aside. Based on this, it must be that we are saved apart from the law. Further, reinserting the law, which was fulfilled in Christ, is to say to God, "I know better than You." Don't be that crazy! Stand on the finished work of Christ alone.