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What is Genuine Belief?

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, we just want to again thank you for your gospel. We thank you for how precious it is. We just continue to pray this morning, Lord, as we look into your letter that was written to the Galatians, we understand how easy it is for this precious gospel to slip away and so we pray again for your grace, for your power, for your Holy Spirit's presence, Lord, as we again go into this book, would you give us the pleasure and the privilege of your presence so that we might not just read it and understand it but again make it a permanent part of our lives. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

This is Galatians 3, starting the beginning of the chapter, it says: O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by 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?

Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith -- just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"?

Well, we're at the third chapter of the book of Galatians and it opens with Paul and he's obviously upset and he's asking the Galatian church six questions. *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?* That's question number one. And we know from the previous two chapters exactly who it was who had bewitched them, and we know who his accomplices are. You see, we know that because we know the church is the most precious thing on earth to Christ because indeed Christ says -- God says: *Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.* And we know that because of that love, it gets extraordinary attention from the enemy of our souls. Jesus also told us in John 8 that the devil was not only a murderer but the father of lies whose native tongue was the lie itself, so he is the one who is bewitching the Galatians. His willing accomplices in this case were the Judaizers who were bringing the law lie known as "the gospel plus" to the Galatian church. They insisted that Jesus's death on the cross was absolutely necessary but it was not sufficient for salvation. And for that they taught that you had to additionally subscribe to all of the different Jewish rights and rituals including especially circumcision. And that was a flat out lie. Paul is writing the church because they have left the truth

and they've begun to buy the lie. And Paul goes on to say: *It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.* I mean Paul's not speaking to people who are far removed from the actual event of Christ's suffering like we are. I mean these are people, some of whom may have actually witnessed Christ's crucifixion.

And Paul says in his second question: *Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?* See, Paul is addressing genuine believers here and only genuine believers in Christ receive the Spirit of Christ. And so Paul is incredulous. I mean here are people who Paul is convinced are genuine believers and because they're genuine believers they had to have started out receiving the Spirit through faith and not through works of the law; that is they had to have started out just believing in Jesus, their Lord. Just believing that he died on the cross for them and by placing their faith in Jesus, they had been justified. God had applied the righteousness of Christ to their account and now they stood perfected before God not on the basis of their own righteousness but on Christ's. And because they were now made perfect by faith in Christ, they had received God's Holy Spirit who was now living within them, so how in the world could someone so incredibly blessed to have their sin debt paid in full by Christ, how in the world could they revert back to a system

where righteousness comes only by perfectly following this huge set of rules and regulations that no one is capable of following in the first place? Well, these were folks who started out simply believing the gospel and now they're marching wholesale into the slavery of rules and regulations defining their worth and value before God.

Paul's third question shows just how astonished he is. He says: *Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?* Paul is astounded and he's astounded that the Galatians are exchanging the slavery of rules and regulations for the freedom of having their sins paid for in full by Christ. *Did you suffer so many things in vain -- if indeed it was in vain?* That's question four, and it's rhetorical. You know, the translators argue as to whether or not this word translated "suffer" means to really suffer or just to experience something, and it doesn't much matter because again what Paul is amazed at here is that their experience of grace didn't seem to have any affect on tempering their desire to go back under the law. Paul's essentially asking them, he says, did all of these experiences of God's grace amount to nothing?

And finally in questions five and six, Paul wants to know if Christ who has given them the Spirit, works among them miraculously

through faith or by forcing them to once again perfectly adhere to a set of rules and regulations? Verse 5. He says: *Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law or by hearing with faith -- just as "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"?*

See, Paul knows exactly what he's doing. He's going right to the heart of Judaism and he uses Abraham, the father of the faith itself as his example of choosing rightly. See, these folks thought righteousness came by strictly adhering to all of the rules and the rights and the regulations, especially circumcision. And so Paul goes right back to the founder of Judaism, Abraham himself, and states categorically that Abraham's righteousness came not through adhering to rules and regulations but simply by believing. Verse 6: *Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"?* See, Paul was unequivocal in stating categorically who the real sons of Abraham are and it's not those who excelled in keeping all the rules and the rituals, like so many of the Jews thought. It was those who simply believed God and took him at his word. In verse 7 he says: *Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.* Let's just stop and think, stop and think what a gob smack that is to the Jews who are hearing this. I mean the lie that they were constantly falling back on was that their rights and rituals conferred on them some kind of

special status before God. I mean once again, rules, rights and rituals became the standard of value before God instead of simply believing. And God repeatedly insisted that this is a lie and the people repeatedly resisted that. In fact, they grew enraged at the thought that simple belief is what God viewed as righteousness itself. We see that in Jesus. You know, when Jesus first began his public ministry, he went to a congregation in his hometown in Nazareth and there he told the Jews who were assembled that God can and does miraculously intervene in the lives of non Jews who simply place their faith in him. This is what he said. He said: *"But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed but only Naaman the Syrian."* See, what Jesus is saying here, hey, you know there were lots and lots of Jewish widows who were struggling with the famine when God chose to bless this outsider, this widow, this non Jewish widow from Sidon. And he also said there were also lots of Israelites who had serious skin diseases that called for healing and yet God chose to heal a non Jew from Assyria, someone named Naaman. And the point being was your worthiness does not depend on who your parents and your grandparents are or on what kind of rules

and regulations you follow but on whether or not you simply believed. When Jesus said that, his fellow Jews erupted. *Luke 4:28* says: *When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of a hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away.*

You know, why this was such a big deal? I mean you know why? Who you are and what you did mattered so much to these people that they were willing to kill Jesus for simply declaring it. It's because we are always desperately trying to find a way to earn what God has freely given us as a gift. I mean the idea that your righteousness would come from faith and not works, that's antithetical to the way fallen human beings think. And this is what Paul is pounding on the Galatians for. He goes on to say: *And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."* So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. Paul is saying exactly what Jesus said. And Jesus's congregation tried to throw him off a cliff for saying it. That's how desperately we want to claim that we can earn heaven itself by who we are and by what we do. And what God is saying over and over again is if you go that route, you

better be prepared to be absolutely flawless, because perfection alone will be the standard by which you will be judged. This is what he says in *Galatians 3:10*: *For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them."* You want to get to heaven by who you are and what you do? Fine. Then do it all and do it all with absolute perfection because that's what the standard demands. I mean after all God is perfect and he can require nothing less than perfection itself.

And you know, this is not as far-fetched as it seems. In fact if you would ask your friends and your neighbors who are not believers, "How do you get to heaven?" I mean the vast majority are going to tell you, this is the ticket: Try your best. Give it your best shot. The only part they don't understand is the perfection part. That God's standard for earning heaven is absolutely unattainable by any human effort. You know, all of us think that God somehow marks on a curve. You know what a curve is. A curve is a scale that adapts itself to somebody's ability to do it. Human beings are convinced that God marks us morally on a curve, but he doesn't. I mean how many times have you heard someone say, "Well, I may not be the best but I'm not the worst." Or "I certainly hope that my good deeds are good enough" or "I'm

going to try my best to lead a moral life and leave the rest up to God." Well, the problem is is when you approach God that way, what you're actually doing is you are insisting that God judge you on your works, on your ability to do what the law or the ten commandments tells you to do. And the only passing grade for someone demanding to be judged that way is one hundred percent. It's got to be flawless perfection.

Now many of you have heard of this diagnostic test that you can use when you're chatting with your friends and neighbors about whether or not they understand about how God judges us, and you probably heard it before but it's worth repeating. I've used it many, many times. You know, you ask the person if you were to be hit by a truck this afternoon and you found yourself before the gates of heaven speaking with St. Peter -- I don't know why but it's always St. Peter and he's always standing before the pearly gates. He's got a clipboard, and he's asking a whole series of questions. Let me just state for the record, that's not the case. That's not the way this works. But just if you want to say to the folks he's got a clipboard and he's asking you, and he says to you, "Why do you think you are worthy to enter God's heaven? What would you say?" Well, there's only three answers that you can give. And number one is the one that almost everybody chooses, it's: "Look at my record." And this is where legions of folks who believe their good

works outweigh their bad works stake their eternal lives. My guess is the vast majority would invite such an examination insisting that relatively speaking they've been as good as the next person. But God doesn't judge on relative terms. His judgment is based on the absolute state of his own character and the requirement is absolute perfection. Well, the second answer is more appropriate but it's no less satisfying. It's somebody saying, "Well, I don't know, I wouldn't know what to say." Well, here's what God says. This is *Romans 3:19*. It says: *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.* You see, what God is saying is that when you realize that the standard that God is going to judge you and me by, when you realize it's one of flawless perfection and absolute adherence to the law at every single stage from infancy through to old age, that God's perfection demanded that we perfectly adhere to every one of his laws and that no one ever, except Jesus Christ, was ever able to do that, when you finally realize that, your mouth is going to be stopped. But by then it will be too late. Remember, you're already dead, you're talking to St. Peter outside the pearly gates. Well, the third answer is the only one that counts. It is to be able to say that your works would never, never make you worthy but that you placed

your faith in the worthiness of Jesus Christ. And it is by faith in his sacrifice on your behalf that you are made righteous enough for heaven.

You know, there have been many times when I've asked people, "What would you do if you got hit by a truck this afternoon and found yourself standing before God?" And it never fails, they either say "Look at my record" or "I wouldn't know what to say." There's only a tiny, tiny fraction of folks who would say: "Nothing to thy throne I bring; simply to thy cross I cling." Answers one and two are disastrous. And this is exactly what Paul is saying in *Galatians 3:11*. He says: *Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."* Paul repeats the fact that no one will ever be justified before God by the law because no one outside of Jesus Christ will ever be able to live up to the law's demands perfectly. And the only way we can ever stand righteous before God is to simply trust in what God has done. And look what Paul says God has done in *Galatians 3:13*. It says: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree."* You know, the Jews of Abraham's day had no idea what crucifixion even was, I mean, it had not even yet been invented. They did understand though the curse that was attributed to those who were executed. *Deuteronomy 21* says this:

"And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God." Jesus Christ became God's curse for us. You see, Jesus didn't go to the cross maintaining an identity separate from the sin that he was paying for. He didn't go to the cross nobly shouldering the burdens of our sin. He went to the cross and became our sin. The reason why he was under God's curse is because God looked down on his only begotten Son and he didn't see the flawless Son of God. Instead he saw the curse that his Son had become. God saw rape and murder and pornography and drug addiction and coveting and envy and gossip and any of a thousand other sins that his sheep were guilty of because Jesus had become sin itself. *2 Corinthians 5:21: For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* Paul connects Christ's sacrifice forward to us today but then he connects it backwards to Abraham. In verse 14 he says: *So that in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.* You see, Paul goes back to Abraham, to the father of the Jewish faith and the simple trust that he placed in God. God told him that he would bear a son even though he and Sarah were way, way beyond child-bearing age, I mean, Abraham was a hundred, Sarah was in her 90's, but Abraham was of the mindset that didn't

care what circumstance or biology seemed to dictate. He was going to trust God regardless. *Romans 4:19* says: *He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."* But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Now you may be thinking, this is altogether too easy. I mean I either work like crazy to observe all of these rules and regulations knowing that if I get one even the slightest bit wrong I am doomed, or I simply believe that the Bible's an accurate depiction of who God is and I put my trust in him. Is it really that simple? Well, the answer to that is yes and no. Yes, faith is that simple; and no, mere belief and genuine faith are not the same thing. You know, believing in small government and limited regulation may make you a Republican, but believing that Jesus is God and that he died on the cross doesn't make you a Christian.

There is a huge difference between "belief" and "faith". I mean the devil believes in Jesus. I mean he knows he is the Son of God, he knows that he died on the cross but his belief couldn't be further from the truth. His belief is no where near even related to faith. Even James acknowledges the difference when he says in *James 2:19: You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe -- and shudder!* Jesus knew full well what empty belief was. He knew what it was like to be surrounded by people who believed in him, who trusted in his name. These were people who had seen miracles, people who had actually been fed by the loaves and the fishes. These were people who believed and trusted in Jesus. They just didn't have faith. Listen to how Jesus puts it in *John 2:23*. He says: *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people.* See, Jesus knew exactly what the difference was between "belief" and "faith" and even though he was surrounded by people who believed in him, who even trusted in his name, he knew not to trust them.

So what is the difference between believing in someone or something and having saving faith? Again, let me go back to another very old illustration because I think it's helpful. A man watches a tightroper -- tightrope walker pushing a wheelbarrow on a high wire

across Niagara Falls, and he observes his skills and his ability and decides that he wants to promote this guy. And so he arranges a deal, he becomes his barker. So he's the one who's calling out to the passersby how incredible this tightrope walker's skills are, and he tells people that walking a tightrope for him is like walking down the sidewalk for you and me because he trusts in the tightrope walker. He believes in the tightrope walker. Now is there a difference between trusting and believing in the tightrope walker and genuine faith in the tightrope walker? Well, the tightrope walker decides that there's only one sure way to increase demand among all the people that are gathered to watch them, and he says to the barker, "Why don't you jump in the wheelbarrow and let me push you over?" This is the moment when the barker decides whether or not he has mere belief in the tightrope walker or genuine faith. Do you see the difference?

Genesis 15:6 says: *Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.* You see, Abraham had his moment when he had to decide whether he would place his ultimate trust in God. God told him to take his beloved son Isaac up to Mount Moriah and offer him up as a sacrifice. I think we all know the story. I mean Abraham takes Isaac, the son of promise, the one that God gave him and Sarah when they knew that they were way, way, way beyond child-bearing age and Abraham takes Isaac up the mountain convinced

that even if God has him sacrifice Isaac, he's going to give him back and resurrect him. And so he and Isaac go up the mountain with all the preparations necessary to offer the sacrifice except for the sacrifice. Genesis 22 says this: *And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.*

You know, people complain about what they see as God's cruelty in making Abraham go through such an extreme sacrifice. What they don't see is both Isaac and Abraham's absolute commitment to

trusting God no matter what he asked. See, faith was their default drive. I mean Isaac at this time was certainly old enough and sturdy enough to withstand Abraham any time he would try to do something against him. I mean Abraham was well over a hundred years old and he was not exactly in a position to overpower his son who would have been a teenager at the time. I mean, the picture here is one of absolute and complete trust on the part of both father and son. The son's willing to trust his father, the father's willing to trust God. And God was willing to put Abraham through all of this not for some sport or to satisfy some ego need on his part, but to grow Abraham in his faith. I mean God already knows the future. I mean he knew precisely what Abraham was going to do with regard to this extreme request of God. The only one who didn't yet know by experience what he would do was Abraham, and that's why he put him through the test. You see, Abraham went up that mountain trusting God in theory. He came back down that mountain having trusted him in practice. That's why God put him through it. And that's why Paul says this of Abraham, he says: *No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead*

Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

See, God says the righteousness that came by faith to Abraham is the very same righteousness that comes by faith to us. And what an astounding choice we have. I mean we can either attempt to live perfectly under the law, obey every single one of the ten commandments without ever coming up short, or we can simply place my faith and trust in the sacrifice that Christ has made on my behalf. Sounds like a no-brainer. But there's a catch. How do I know if I'm a person of genuine faith whose righteousness has come from Christ or whether or not I'm one of those hangers on, one of those groupies like Jesus contended with? They believed in Jesus. They trusted in Jesus. They thought he was going to be their meal ticket going forward. And Jesus' response to them was unequivocal. He said: *Many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people.* Jesus even ups the ante when he says in Matthew 7:21: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of*

lawlessness.'"

Do you realize how high the stakes are? You see, the evangelical church for years and years and years has bent over backwards telling folks, "Just ask Jesus into your heart and you're all set, you're saved." Do you see how easy it is for folks to confuse simple non saving belief such as the crowds had for Jesus with the life changing, born again righteousness producing faith such as Abraham had? Well doesn't the Bible say: *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead you'll be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

That's right from the Bible. You know, if I went to a homeless shelter and I started passing out \$20 bills to every single person who was willing to confess that Jesus is Lord, my guess is I'd get a lot of takers. Are they saved? You see in essence this is basically what the church has proclaimed for years. "Just raise your hands. Just come forward. Just say the sinner's prayer. You're all set." It's the second part of that verse that makes all the difference in the world. It says: *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* You see, it was a genuine heart belief that separated genuine believers from mere crowd followers in Jesus's day. It's what separated Abraham in his day

as well. It is the bedrock belief that no matter what happens, I have thrown my lot in with Jesus Christ and his kingdom. I am jumping into the wheelbarrow. I believe and I am prepared to act on that belief. This is not the same as simply agreeing that Jesus is God and that he lived a perfect life and that he died on the cross to pay the price of my sins. As James points out, the devil believes every one of those propositions and he shudders at all of them. Merely believing this saves no one. My greatest fear as a preacher, as somebody who's going to stand before God and give an account is that many evangelical Christians are simply going on mere belief thinking it's the same as saving faith, and it's not. And I would personally much rather have you fearing for your own salvation and the genuineness of your faith than confidently strolling into the presence of God only to hear him say, *"I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."* And it was the apostle Paul who said: *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? -- unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

So how do I know if Jesus is in me? How do I know if I believed not just with my mind but with my heart? Well, we started out this message with a series of questions that Paul asked of the Galatians. Let me ask some questions of us. First question is

very simple: Who do you love? Who do you love? I'm not saying who do you get an emotional response from, who gives you warm fuzzies, I'm asking you to ask yourself who do you love and also you could add this question to kind of further define it: What matters most to me in this life? Who do you think mattered most to Abraham? I mean when he held out that knife prepared to take the life of his beloved son, Abraham was demonstrating the genuine faith that is all in for God and his kingdom. And Abraham was by no means a perfect person, he sinned and he sinned sometimes greatly, and yet God is telling us he's pointing us to him as the chief example of faith that produces the righteousness necessary for God. And you know, if we look in the New Testament, we see very, very few examples of genuine faith, but one that stands out in particular is of a man who was hated by the Jews. He was a Roman centurion. And he approached Jesus telling him that his servant is paralyzed and suffering greatly. And Jesus said he's going to come and heal him. The centurion says in *Matthew 8:8*, he says: *"Lord, I'm not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am I man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes and another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."* When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, *"Truly I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith."* You see, the

centurion's faith caused him to act as if, as if Jesus and his kingdom were absolute truth and Jesus merely speaking that truth was all that was necessary for him. Another question: Is that how you see Jesus and his kingdom? Do you love him enough to trust him with the lives of your children like Abraham did? Do you trust him enough to need only a word from Jesus to know that your servant's been healed like the centurion? You see, Paul asked the Galatians six questions. Can you ask yourself three critical questions that apply to genuine faith? These are things that I want you to be thinking out a lot.

First, let me just ask for the second time: Who do I really, really love? I mean is Christ my habit? Is he my hobby? Or is he my passion? And second: What matters most to me in this life? Is it my comfort? Is it my career? Or is it my King? And third: Who have I thrown my lot in with? Is it the world or the kingdom of God? You see, these are critical questions that demand answers. And the answer to any question that comes from a place of non-saving belief like the crowds have, belief that was just in theory, never in practice, is not "no." No, the answer is, "whatever." It's indifference. It's the only thing that Jesus Christ called vomitus and it's the one thing that should keep us terrified but it never will if we have it. Again, it's indifference. "I'm good." "It's okay." Jesus said: *"Because you are lukewarm, I will spit*

you out of my mouth." See, the ones who Christ said he never knew never cared enough to even ask these questions in the first place. And that's one of the amazing things about this kind of transaction that takes place in your life. Those who are utterly lost could care less. These words go right over their heads, right in one ear and out the other. It makes no difference whatsoever what I'm saying. "Hey, man, that's good for you."

See, Paul is wrestling with the Galatian church because they have bought the lie of the gospel plus. I don't think that's our problem. We in the 21st century wrestle with the gospel minus. It's belief minus the commitment to believe what genuine faith consists of. *Galatians 3:13* says: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us -- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" -- so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

And so my fourth question is the most critical. And it's very simple, it's: Have you received the promised Spirit through faith? *Romans 10* says: *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.* My final question:

Does your heart believe the gospel? Let's pray.

Father, I just come before you this morning, I know this is difficult stuff, and I know numerous times when I really looked into the book of Galatians I said to myself, "Yikes, why did I ever do this?" There's a lot of bad news in this letter because this is a church that has lost its way. And Lord, I think there are many, many words that are here that are addressed to a church right here today that has lost its way. And Lord, I have no idea to whom you are directing these particular thoughts, but my prayer today is that if you are touching somebody who has never even given thought to whether or not his faith is real, who has never even wrestled with the idea of am I willing to jump into the wheelbarrow or not, I pray that you would give them no peace. Lord, I pray that you would give them just an unease that doesn't stop until they recognize the importance of faith that is genuine, being faith that comes from the heart. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.