

¹ *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.* Galatians 3:1 This chapter starts off with a harshness we rarely see in Paul's letters. It was like saying, "How can you be so stupid!" Tough love was needed to wake them from the pride of trying to add to what Christ had accomplished for them. It is the height of foolishness to try to finish what God has begun in us in our own strength! Was it our efforts that saved us or the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8,9ⁱ)? Did they one day understand that Jesus stood in for them taking the punishment their sins deserved so those sins would not be held against them (substitutionary atonement) and shortly after say to themselves, "I shall now obey the laws of Moses thereby save myself?" After teaching the Galatians the wonderful gospel of grace, Paul is dumbfounded that they are now trying to finish the work by obeying Jewish ritual laws.

Bewitched is only used here in Scripture. It is to fascinate someone with your speech. Some commentators relate it to "the evil eye," as if a spell was cast on them. In our passage Paul asks a series of questions, the first being "Who has bewitched you?" In this case it was to turn them away from grace alone, from trusting in the Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to remove *all* our sins to believing salvation is by works instead (Acts 15:1ⁱⁱ).

Paul told of the crucifixion so vividly it was as if they were there. It must have been a powerful sermon! One commentator thinks Paul was using his own body as an example. Todd Wilson writes, *As a result of his many trials and tribulations, he (Paul) has indeed been "crucified with Christ" (2:20). And in the flesh-and-blood of his very real suffering—the gash across his forehead, the welts on his arm, the black-and-blue around his eyes, the scars down his back—the Galatians see the crucified Christ publicly portrayed.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Preaching should always portray Christ crucified as the answer to our fallen condition (1 Corinthians 1:23^{iv}). It is there we see the love of God on display to such an extent that we cannot help but be drawn to respond in loving gratitude (John 12:32^v). Paul had certainly preached that way. How could they forget the merciful wonder of grace freely offered to those who do not deserve it? How can we forget?

I found A. MacLaren's warning from this passage worth quoting here. *Many men's Christianity trickles out without their knowing it. They are too busy to look after it, or even to notice its escape, and so, drop, drop, drop, slow and unnoticed through the leak, it slips until there is none left. But the real cause lies within. No outward temptation has any power to seduce, unless we choose to allow it. If I had not combustibles in my heart, it would do me no harm to put ever so fierce a light to it. But if I carry about a keg of gunpowder within me, I must not blame the match if there comes an explosion. It is because our hearts do not find in Jesus Christ all that they crave, that we are unfaithful and turn away from Him; and it is because our hearts are foolish and bad, that they do not find in Him all that they crave. **If we were as we should be, there would not be a desire in us that would not be met in our loving Lord, in His sweetness and grace.** And if there were not a desire in us that was not met in our loving Lord's sweetness and grace, then all these temptations might play upon us innocuously; we should walk through the fire and not be harmed. (See Daniel 3:27^{vi}.)*

Who had bewitched them with such a mesmerizing lie? It was the Judaizers (the believers in Jesus as Messiah but also in keeping the old covenant)! But the original

language is regarding the one bewitching them is singular. Paul may be saying that the old deceiver, the devil, is using these legalists from Jerusalem to try to stop their growth in grace.

Like the earthmen in C.S. Lewis' Prince Caspian, they were under the spell of the evil queen and begrudgingly laboring though they knew not why (1 Corinthians 1:23^{vii}; 2:2^{viii}). The evil queen was using them to build her kingdom in an attempt to take over Aslan's kingdom. They were laboring unseen in the darkness below. But once the power of the queen was shattered, they realized that they were freed from serving her and joyfully returned to what they were created to do.

That is a perfect parallel to what had happened to the Galatians. The enemy wants us to trust in works because he knows our actions will never save us and will distract us from the power of the cross. It is his attempt to claim those in God's kingdom. "Trust in yourself," he says. "God can see how faithful you are to obey the rituals. You are more consistent at it than other people in your fellowship. You don't need to die to yourself and slavishly serve others."

When we fall under that spell, we neglect the grace that is ours and end up a slave to the sin of pride and self-righteousness. Then we say, "Who needs the church! I can do it without having to deal with people. Besides, I can see where they are failing in so many areas. I can have fellowship with a few of my friends who agree with me on everything." And the downhill slide begins. Who has bewitched those who think this way? Sometimes it is their own heart. The old nature pleaded for more freedom, and they did not resist it but instead justified those pleas for a little more freedom from the Spirit's guidance and from the refining work that is done when we strive for unity with those who are as imperfect as ourselves (Galatians 6:3^{ix}).

² *Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?* Galatians 3:2 Paul's second question is very straight forward, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?" Paul appeals to their personal experience. There is some validity in the truth of what God has taken us through, though we cannot expect everyone to have the same experiences. God does teach us through the experiences He places in our paths.

Did they receive the Holy Spirit through obedience to the Law or hearing mixed with faith? Of course, it was the latter. It was the grace of God that convicted them when they heard the Word preached, and the same grace helped them trust in Christ (James 1:21^x). That faith received the forgiveness Christ merited for us on the cross which made them sanctified vessels so God could fill them with His Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38^{xi}). It was Jesus' sacrifice that sanctified them and us, not just for the moment we were filled, or the Holy Spirit would depart from us like He did in the Old Testament. The cross made everything different. We remain sanctified in God's eyes, and that is why the Holy Spirit remains in us (Ephesians 1:13^{xii}). That is grace. So why did they think the law would benefit them or bring them closer to God?

How were they bewitched? Perhaps it was the smooth rhetoric of the Judaizers, or their apparent rituals that seemed so spiritual. We should learn from this how easily the old nature would cling to religious actions rather than complete dependence on Jesus alone. That is a way for pride to slip in and seek honor from others for our supposed spirituality. Remember how Jesus told us to give in secret and not let others be aware when we are fasting (Matthew 6:3^{xiii}; 17,18^{xiv}).

If we want to receive the Spirit and have Him work in our lives, we must hear the Word with faith. Paul not only experienced this himself and saw the process in others, but he also saw it in the prophets' writings as well. Isaiah 66:2b ^{2b} *But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.* God's eyes are on the humble person who trembles at God's Word. That is the person who receives the Spirit by faith. When we disconnect the Spirit from the Word, we run the risk of the flesh deceiving us into thinking we are “super-spiritual,” which is self-deception.

For many years we had a swinging bridge to cross the creek on foot when floods covered our car bridge. The swinging bridge is like the Word of God. We can acknowledge it is true. We can see it is available to us. But it is of no use to us unless we step out in faith on it and cross over the raging creek below. The world and its allurements and temptations are like that raging creek. It can wash us away as floods washed away drivers who thought they were able to cross. I had to recognize the danger of underestimating the power of water. Then I had to put my faith in that swinging bridge, just as we must not only hear the Word of God but by faith step out and act on it.

³ *Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?* Galatians 3:3 The third question was, "Are you so foolish?" Couldn't they see what had been done for them? In my analogy they had crossed the swinging foot bridge, but now they want to trust their car will withstand the force of the water and try to drive back across the car bridge. That is just foolish. Not only will works get you nowhere, but you will be swept away in a flood of pride in how spiritual you are.

Question four asked them if after having begun by the Spirit, did they now think the flesh would perfect them? God poured out His Spirit on them when by faith they received God's message that Paul proclaimed. Did they think that now perfection could be reached by going back to the old covenant with its demand of complete obedience (James 2:10^{xv})? Would their best efforts now finish the work God started, or was their perfection dependent on Christ alone? Paul wrote in Philippians 1:6^{xvi} that *He* who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it. The completion of our sanctification is totally dependent on Jesus.

I have seen this in my own life and in others. We get frustrated with our slow spiritual growth so we think by doing certain works we will become more spiritual. Disciplines certainly help us grow, but they must develop from our love for God and a conviction that they are tools by which God helps us, not just to grit your teeth and do it by your own effort while ignoring the promptings of the Holy Spirit. If your Christian life is drudgery, we are probably going about the spiritual disciplines in the flesh. Jesus said His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30^{xvii}). Sure, sometimes He will ask us to do things we do not want to do, but He gives us peace in doing it. He will also lead us to times of refreshing and abundant joy (1 Peter 1:8^{xviii}).

The mundane things we must do in everyday life can be done to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31^{xix}). That is where the rubber really meets the road! Any of us can be excited and joyful leading someone to Christ, or sharing a Scripture, but what about doing a repetitive job in such a way as to glorify God? If we are so lit with the Holy Spirit, someone is going to ask us about our joy and there is our opportunity. Even just serving others with a smile and the love of Christ in our hearts can affect people in ways you will never know. Sincerity is often felt by those you serve. “Have a nice day!” can be a routine expression or a Spirit filled utterance. What if you asked your employer if you

can put a tract in every sales bag? Or you could have a contact card ready to give to someone who you noticed is hurting and let them know they can call you when you get off work. What a great opportunity to meet people to share Christ with them!

⁴ Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Galatians 6:4 Question five is, "Was so much of what they suffered and experienced in following Jesus by faith to this point in vain?" If works are required, the suffering to this point was in vain because the suffering came from their claim to being accepted by God through faith in Jesus (1 Thessalonians 1:6^{xx}). That is what made them different from the synagogue. They could have just converted to Judaism and not been rejected by the Jews.

Guilds knew the Jews did not sacrifice at the altars and that Rome had said they were an exception to that religious requirement. Christians at first were seen as a branch of Judaism, but as time passed, they were increasingly seen as an outlawed religion. Rome began to see Christians as pagans who made the gods angry. Part of the enticement of the law was that they could blend in and not be persecuted. Did they suffer persecution in vain because they could have just converted to Judaism and still believe in Jesus?

Pastor Todd Wilson points out the three "in vain" warnings Paul has made in this letter so far. *Three times in Galatians Paul has raised the specter of the absurd consequences of justification by works. In 2:2^{xxi} Paul raised the possibility that his missionary labors may have been in vain. In 2:21^{xxii} he raised the stakes and suggested that if righteousness could be gained through the law, then even Christ would have died in vain. Now here in 3:4 he queried the Galatians about whether the Spirit had not been given to them in vain. In effect, he was saying to them: "See where this kind of theology will lead you! If salvation is not the work of God from first to last, then the preaching of the gospel is vanity, the cross of Christ was a farce, and the gift of the Holy Spirit means nothing!"*

This is a similar issue to what some of us are studying in the book of Hebrews. Here in Galatians, it is Jesus plus the Jewish laws for salvation. In Hebrews it is to hide your faith in Christ by practicing the Jewish laws. But in both cases the motivation may have been to avoid persecution by making it unclear to others where their faith was placed. There is no getting around the fact that faith in Christ is offensive to worldly people and will result in persecution (2 Timothy 3:12^{xxiii}). Mankind just has too much pride to admit we can do nothing and need Someone to do what we cannot. Total reliance on Jesus is humbling. We like super-heroes who save us, but not from ourselves.

⁵ 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—Galatians 3:5 Question six asks, "Is the ongoing supply of the Spirit in them and miracles He does in their midst the results of the law or faith?" The same Spirit in them supplies fresh infilling by faith. The law had nothing to do with the Spirit working in their midst. **Mixing hearing with faith had been their daily renewal in the Spirit resulting in miracles.** They had not been circumcised then, so why did they need to now? If the Spirit is alive and working in us, why would we think some ritual act would be required to continue? The miracles Paul is referring to might include the transformation of their lives, healing, words of knowledge, supernatural protection, casting out demons and the like. If all this was taking place, why would they now think obeying the law was needed to please God? The verse is telling us that both the infilling of the Spirit and the daily supply of the Spirit had come through the Word mixed with faith and not by works.

Realize, then, that religious activities in themselves do not mediate the presence of the Spirit. We can engage in all sorts of church activities, but if the hearing of faith isn't undergirding it, then all we have is lots of activity. We may be busy, but we'll lack the empowering presence of the Spirit.

This insight ought to motivate us to give top priority to the Word of God in everything we do. If we desire the Spirit's presence, we must be Bible people; we need to be Word-driven in our approach to ministry and to life because God's presence comes as we respond to God's Word with faith.

God the Father loves to honor God the Son by supplying us with God the Spirit in response to our responsiveness to his Word. For as God says through the prophet Isaiah, "This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word" (Isaiah 66:2). God looks to the one who hears his Word with faith; God pours out his very presence into the life of just that kind of person.^{xxiv}

Inversely, we break our personal fellowship with the Spirit when we intentionally sin. Confession and returning to the cross restore that communion. It is not that the Holy Spirit left us, but that we turn off our line of communication when we sin. It is like a couple who quits speaking to each other because of an offense. If I tell the Spirit I don't want to hear from Him because I plan on sinning, He is not going to speak to me. He may make me uncomfortable, but until I confess and forsake that sin, I have shut down our communication.

The six questions Paul asks the Galatians and us are meant to make it clear that the new covenant does not rely on our participation in the old covenant. The Spirit working in and through us for the glory of God is in no way dependent on the laws of Moses. Grace has ushered in a wonderful relationship with God dependent only on what Jesus has done for us on the cross. That is the essence of the New Covenant! And instead of causing us to become lax about serving God, it fires us up in a new way, the way of gratitude and a relationship of love to serve God in the power of the Holy Spirit. We long to let Him lead us to green pastures of the Word and manifest His life in us as we interact with the settings in which He places us (Psalm 23:2^{xxv}; 139:16^{xxvi}). A choice is set before us: We can trust in ourselves and our religious routines, or we can trust in Jesus' grace, listening for the promptings of the Holy Spirit in us, and live a life of faith. The first way is vanity. The second is life everlasting!

Benediction from Galatians 1:4,5 and 6:20: To Him who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to Him be the glory forever and ever. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Questions:

- 1 Define bewitched. 2 Review MacLaren's quote.
- 3 Who ultimately bewitched them?
- 4 Review the Prince Caspian parallel.
- 5 Who receives the Spirit?
- 6 Review the bridge analogy.
- 7 What causes Christian drudgery?
- 8 How can every day actions glorify God?
- 9 Review the three "in vain" warnings.
- 10 How were they daily renewed and experiencing miracles?

ⁱ **Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

ⁱⁱ **Acts 15:1 (ESV)**

¹ But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

ⁱⁱⁱ Todd Wilson- Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living.

^{iv} **1 Corinthians 1:23 (ESV)**

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

^v **John 12:32 (ESV)**

³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

^{vi} **Daniel 3:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.

^{vii} **1 Corinthians 1:23 (ESV)**

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

^{viii} **1 Corinthians 2:2 (ESV)**

² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

^{ix} **Galatians 6:3 (ESV)**

³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

^x **James 1:21 (ESV)**

²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

^{xi} **Acts 2:38 (ESV)**

³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

^{xii} **Ephesians 1:13 (ESV)**

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

^{xiii} **Matthew 6:3 (ESV)**

³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

^{xiv} **Matthew 6:17-18 (ESV)**

¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

^{xv} **James 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

^{xvi} **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

^{xvii} **Matthew 11:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

^{xviii} **1 Peter 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,

^{xix} **1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)**

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

^{xx} **1 Thessalonians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

^{xxi} **Galatians 2:2 (ESV)**

² I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

^{xxii} **Galatians 2:21 (ESV)**

²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

^{xxiii} **2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)**

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

^{xxiv} Wilson, Tod, *Preaching the Word - Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*.

^{xxv} **Psalm 23:2 (ESV)**

² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

^{xxvi} **Psalm 139:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.