

**GALATIANS - SERMON 9**  
**GALATIANS 3:1-5 — THE WORK OF JESUS**  
Pastor Max Doner, Sovereign Grace Bible Church  
Lebanon, Oregon 25 January 1998

INTRODUCTION:

Read Galatians 3:1-5

Having reproved Peter for behavior which publically contradicted the gospel of grace, Paul now turns his attention and address to the Galatians. He begins to redress and reprove them for listening to heretical teaching. He takes the Galatians to task, holding them responsible for listening to and beginning to embrace false teaching. He directly rebukes them for their logical and theological inconsistency. He requires the Galatians to reason through the issues and to use simple common sense in trying to arrive at a determination regarding the teaching of the Judaizing false teachers.

The people of God are not to be mindless receptors of whatever is thrown at them. They are to reason and think with logical and theological questions. They are to examine the evidences and intelligently come to sound positions. Mental laziness is the first step towards embracing error. Those who will not think will not be able to discern the false from the true.

In this passage Paul poses five questions to the Galatians (one question per verse). In asking these questions he is challenging them to think. These are questions which they should have been asking themselves and their false teachers all along. If they had done so they would not have so easily fallen into false teaching.

OUTLINE:

- I FIRST, PAUL ASKS THE GALATIANS TO REFLECT UPON AND REMEMBER THEIR PREVIOUS TEACHING, V 1.
  - II SECOND & THIRD, PAUL ASKS THE GALATIANS TO REFLECT UPON THEIR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE, VV 2-3.
  - III FOURTH, PAUL ASKS THE GALATIANS TO REFLECT UPON THEIR PREVIOUS SUFFERING, V 4.
  - IV FIFTH, PAUL ASKS THE GALATIANS TO REFLECT UPON THEIR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH MIRACULOUS WORKS, V 5.
- I FIRST, PAUL ASKS THE GALATIANS TO REFLECT UPON AND REMEMBER THEIR PREVIOUS TEACHING, V 1.
- 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?*
- A The pastor's emotion:  
These words convey the strong emotional feelings found in Paul regarding the defection of the Galatian believers. No true minister of the gospel views with indifference the departure of his people from the truth. Such departures provoke profound sorrow, strong displeasure and anguish of mind. Defection from the Word of God, from sound doctrine, grieves the heart of the gospel minister, especially when the departure is the result of a negligent forgetfulness of what has been previously taught.
- B The Galatians' privileged instruction:

The Galatians had enjoyed and received a very clear presentation of the gospel of grace, the work and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is made evident in the clause - *before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified*.

- 1 This had been accomplished by the apostle's teaching. He had taught them well previously.
- 2 They had also had a clear presentation of sound doctrine, the portrayal of Christ's death and ministry to sinners, by their observance of and participation in the Lord's Supper.

The whole gospel of grace had been verbally described and visually portrayed before them by the instituted ordinance. Hence, Paul could well say that Christ crucified had been set *before their eyes*. The doctrine had been so clearly presented to them that it was as if they had been at Calvary and seen the events for themselves.

C Paul's first question:

In light of this background Paul asks *who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?*

There are two parties at fault in this process, the Galatians and the Judaizers.

- 1 The Galatians: Paul clearly holds the Galatians responsible by his appellation *O foolish Galatians!* The Galatians had permitted and allowed the clear presentation of the truth which they had received to slip away from them. The Scriptures often warn us of our propensity to permit the truth once learned to slip away from us.

Hebrews 2:1-4

*Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?*

In verse one the picture is that of a boat being allowed to drift away from her moorings. A boat not tethered to a sound and fixed mooring will inevitably drift away. A boat positioned near the dock but not secured to it will gradually drift farther and farther away from that dock. The point is that believers who will not remain steadfastly moored to the Word of God and to Jesus Christ alone, will, over time, gradually drift away from sound religion.

- 2 The Judaizers: Paul holds responsible also those who had *bewitched* the Galatians.

*bewitched* (ἐβήσκανε) means to enchant (malign or fascinate) or to delude. In history this term was represented in those who employed magical charms and incantations to accomplish their persuasions. Paul's point is that the delusion, the drifting from soundness is so strong as to seem as though a magical spell had been cast over you.

This verse, this question, Paul's emotion in it, and this word *bewitched* speak to the power of seduction that the ministers of Satan have and the cunning craftiness they employ. This is the danger to be found in false teachers. They are powerfully persuasive to the point of being seductive. [For this reason we must not only be careful of the men we give attention to in our studies and sermon reception, but also with respect to the books we read.]

The lesson for us to learn is that we must not be sinfully negligent in using our mental powers to the best of our ability. We must not be thoughtless, senseless, and foolish like the Galatians when we are presented with doctrinal teaching. We should stop to examine all that we receive.

1 Peter 1:13

*Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ...*

We must not only exercise our minds in the examination of all new teachings, but we must labor to reinforce those things which we have been taught.

Proverbs 3:1-4

*My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you. Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.*

The Galatians had forgotten the truth they had earlier received. They were endanger of losing the whole of it.

## II SECOND & THIRD, PAUL ASKS THE GALATIANS TO REFLECT UPON THEIR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE, vv 2-3.

### A Second question, v 2:

*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?*

Behind this question there lie presuppositions.

- 1 Paul clearly presupposes that the Galatians had previously received the Holy Spirit, *received ye the Spirit*. Therefore, he is under the conviction that his Galatian readers were genuinely saved people.
- 2 Paul presupposes that these Galatians were aware of when and how they received the Holy Spirit.

With these two assumptions (presuppositions) Paul can then ask if they had received the Spirit by law-keeping or by faith? The answer is made to be obvious (somewhat rhetorical). Paul was evidently confident that his readers were supremely aware that they had originally received the Spirit by faith and not by works. He does not wait for or supply the answer to this question because that answer should have been obvious to the reader.

The implication in this question is that since you received the Spirit by faith and not by works, is it not foolish now to give up faith in favor of works which have thus far supplied you with none of the benefits of the gospel? Why would you give up that truth which brought you the gift of salvation and the Spirit for a doctrine that did not bring such wonderful things to you? The logic is simple.

B Third question, v 3:

*Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?*

This is a development upon the same question. Is there not gross incongruity in your conduct? Are you going from that which brought the Spirit and salvation to that which could never bring such? The progress of the Galatian believers was not in the direction of advancement but rather degeneration.

The logic of Paul here is that if it is by faith alone that salvation is begun in us, then is it not also by faith that it is brought to full completion?

III FOURTH, PAUL ASKS THE GALATIANS TO REFLECT UPON THEIR PREVIOUS SUFFERING, v 4.

*Have you suffered so many things in vain; if indeed it was in vain?*

Evidently, when the Galatians had originally embraced the gospel of grace they became the subjects of persecution like Paul. Paul had warned of this tribulation when he addressed them earlier.

Acts 14:22

*. . . strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*

Paul was an example of sore tribulation and persecution for the sake of the gospel. It was while he was visiting the churches of Galatia that he was stoned.

This persecution came from the hands of Jews no less. The Jews recognized that if the Christian faith succeeded it would be the end of Judaism. If men recognized that salvation was by faith alone and not by works of the Mosaic law, then their religion would evaporate. Hence, they were vigorous in their persecution of the Christians.

Galatians 6:12

*As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.*

The Galatians had previously been so attached to the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone that they had suffered for it. Paul is now asking them to consider their former persecution for the truth. Was it in vain?

Paul is driving the Galatians to a logical conclusion. If they are now embracing the Judaizing doctrine, then by so doing they are calling their former persecutions needless and in vain.

#### IV FIFTH, PAUL ASKS THE GALATIANS TO REFLECT UPON THEIR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH MIRACLES, V 5.

*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?*

Pastor Doner does not agree with the assumption of our translators that the pronoun *He* refers to God. He prefers to understand the pronoun to refer to Paul himself. While Paul was among the Galatians he had performed miracles (Acts 13 & 14). Paul is asking the Galatians to remember the miraculous works that were performed among them. Were those works performed in conjunction with the doctrines of faith or works? Assuming that those miraculous works were designed as authenticating works upon the doctrine and messenger sent to them (Paul) what was the doctrine that was thereby authenticated?

Implied here is another question, have the Judaizers produced any authenticating miracles?

#### Conclusion:

In his attack against the false doctrine of the Judaizers, Paul first appeals to the personal experience of the Galatians with regard to the doctrine of salvation. This is the beginning of his attack. He will in the balance of this chapter make an appeal to Abraham's experience. He will examine the covenants and the law of Moses. From these sources Paul will prove that we are all children of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ plus nothing.

- 1 The lesson for us is to be on guard against relying upon our own works or merit with respect to our acceptance with God. It is true that God calls His people unto obedience, but that obedience is not the foundation of our acceptance with Him. Our acceptance is predicated solely and exclusively upon the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. All the benefits of salvation are received on the basis of faith. Hence, as the Word of God claims, *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.*

It is true that those who believe are to obey and that those who do believe do strive to obey. All of our obedience is not the ground of greater acceptance, but rather the mere effort to express our love for the Lord Jesus Christ. This must advise us against falling into a state of self-righteousness. To rely upon one's own performance with respect to acceptance with God will either lead to self-righteous pride or despair and despondency. When we fall into either of those places the Bible calls us *fools*.

- 2 We are to be thinking Christians. Time and again Christ would teach His disciples and yet they would misunderstand or misapply His words. Christ would chide them to remember things previously put to them. It is important for us to handle well and thoroughly the Word of God which is put to us. We are held accountable for keeping a hold of that which is given us. It will require continual study, review and exercise of the doctrinal instruction we have previously received.

Hymn # 424