

## Questions for God's foolish people

*Galatians Explained*

By Pastor Pieter Van Ruitenburg

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**Bible Text:** Galatians 3:1-3  
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### **Bethel Netherlands Reformed Congregation**

8920 Broadway Street  
Chilliwack, BC V2P 5W1

**Website:** [www.nrcchilliwack.org](http://www.nrcchilliwack.org)  
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Congregation, for every Sunday, for every sermon, ministers need to find a text. That's almost half of the work, to find a text that appeals that you see, "I love to preach on that." So also for this sermon, I was looking and I looked again at Galatians in chapter 3, and I did not plan to return so quickly to that Bible book yet but I started reading those first verses of chapter 3 and it was so fitting, so applicable, I would love to preach on that. But I was not convinced yet and I thought maybe something else. So I started looking over it again to find something to preach on not from Galatians again but I kept coming back to Galatians 3 and I feel kind of there's a spell on my heart. I just feel the urgency. I feel that's the word I have to preach about this morning.

So Galatians 3, the first three verses. Let us first read them.

1 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? 2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

So far.

Questions for God's foolish people. Do you see all the questions here? It's all questions, questions for God's foolish people. Foolish is two times in those verses. Foolish people asking questions. Why? Who has bewitched you? Four questions this morning. Was Christ not revealed, that's the last part of verse 1, "before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you." So again the first question: was Christ not revealed, evidently set forth before you crucified? Secondly, who has bewitched you, that's in verse 1B, "who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth." How is that possible? It has been so evidently set before you and then bewitched and not obeying the truth, how come? And three, did you receive the Spirit by the law, that's verse 2, "This only would I learn of you," please answer me, "Did you receive ye the Spirit? How did you receive the Spirit with the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" And in the fourth place, are you so foolish? So then we come back to the first words, "O foolish," and we see also in verse 3 that foolishness again, "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the

Spirit," he's talking about the beginning and "begun in the Spirit, are ye now," today, "made perfect by the flesh," really? So questions for God's foolish people: was Christ not revealed; who has bewitched you; did you receive the Spirit by the law; are ye so foolish?

Congregation, the Apostle Paul is writing to the Galatians, you know that, ethnic group in what's now Turkey, and he compares constantly how it's begun, how it was in the past, how blessed they were, and how things have changed overnight, things have changed for the worse and he addresses that to the congregation and he says, "You know, what happened? What has changed you? Why did you come to different conclusions? You have believed the Lord Jesus Christ, now you're adding, you're adding the food laws, and adding that you have to be circumcised, and you have to be Jewish." And in the previous chapters, he added also autobiographical pieces in there but now he comes to the main body of the epistle. He's going to explain to them his theological argument and he's doing that with some questions.

Before we go there, the Apostle Paul is very experiential here. He's not only saying, "Don't you remember what was written in the Bible," he also says and his emphasis is on, "Did you not experience, did you not experience something of those things in the past? How did you feel in those days? What happened in those days? Was Christ not evidently set before you, crucified among you? Do you remember how you received the Spirit? Do you remember having begun in the Spirit?" You see, he's pointing back and he says, "Remember." Is that not fitting for a preparatory service, we ask God's children to go back? What happened? How was that? How did the Lord open it up to you? How did the Lord give his Spirit? How did he make you alive? What did you see? What did you experience? What has changed, then? Have you forgotten?

Very experiential and apparently that was needed because, as we see two times in this piece, foolish, "O foolish Galatians." Is that not the reason why the Lord has instituted also the Lord's Supper, because of the foolishness, yes, the foolishness of his people falling back, leaving the path, the wrong patterns back again, in the workhouse again? The Lord knows his people. He knows how dumb, he knows how foolish his people are. He knows that they so easily are confused and he has to set them straight and rebuke them. So that's what appealed to me, right, and I felt, "Yes, I have to preach this for a preparatory sermon because so often God's children need to be corrected and the Lord wants them to only focus on that one sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross."

But let us start with the last part of verse 1, "before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you." You may say, "Well, can you simplify that?" Sure. What is to set something forth? To portray something, to make a picture of something, to make a poster of something, to make a billboard of something. Well, you know, sometimes in our area there are elections, right, elections for councils and mayors or for members of Parliament, and you can see all over town you see those signs, "Vote for," you see a name, sometimes a picture, and when you have seen those pictures and those names for a couple of weeks, you see them everywhere in town, you know that name. That name has been evidently set forth among you. It's known everywhere and if

you would mention it, they say, "Oh yeah, I remember that name," because that name is everywhere on the billboards, on the signs.

So with reverence the Apostle Paul says Jesus Christ has been evidently set before you. In Greek that is only one word, evidently set forth, *prographo*, written everywhere very clearly, very publicly, evidently set before you. So he is reminding the Galatians about his preaching years ago, that he preached among them the word of God, that he preached among them the only name given among men by whom we must be saved. He said, "You know, don't you remember that Christ was set forth and portrayed publicly, being crucified? Has that not been made clear among you?" You must remember. You must remember those sermons. You must remember those Bible chapters. You must remember those impressions. You must remember how Christ has revealed himself in the word and revealed himself in the sacraments, in baptism, in the Lord's Supper. All that I hear is the heart of the sermon, the heart of the truth, the heart of the Bible.

Evidently set before you. Don't we read that everywhere in the Bible? When the Lord Jesus talked to the two men of Emmaus, right, what did he do? He set evidently before them Jesus Christ and him crucified from the Bible and "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." The Lord Jesus did on the way to Emmaus, he spoke from the Bible about himself. And I read in Galatians 6 a few chapters later, "God forbid that I should glory, save," except, "in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." I read in Corinthians, "But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumblingblock and unto the Greeks foolishness." And in 1 Corinthians 2, "For I determined not to know any thing," not to know anything, "among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

So that's the background of the text, the Apostle Paul reminding the Galatians that the Lord Jesus Christ has been evidently set before them crucified among them, reminding them of what they have seen and heard in the past. Have you see that? Have you not seen it? Has he not been evidently set before you? Remember those days years ago, maybe a long time ago, the first time the Lord opened the scriptures and you saw him being portrayed so clearly and you looked upon him; he was set forth among you being crucified?

Well, the Lord revealed himself to the Galatians, revealed himself to us in the Bible. He revealed himself to Israel but what happened? Who has bewitched you? Second thought, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" The word "bewitched" is the only time we find it in the Bible, it's the only text in the Bible so it's hard to translate a word that only occurs once in the Bible. But it's used in the Greek world, in Greek old writings, so we know a little bit about it. It can be translated as hypnotized or being fascinated. And the Greeks had in their philosophy and religion, they had the idea of an evil eye in the sky, an evil eye that looked upon them and that was casting a spell over them, and then you had to look the other way. Think of a snake. A snake, I understand, sometimes is standing still, lifting itself up and looking at its prey until that prey freezes, is hypnotized, and that's the word used here.

So what happened, who has bewitched you because you are under the spell of something? You're freezing. There's a change. Who has bewitched you? You're so confused. Things have changed. You're freezing. You're looking in the wrong direction. You have to keep your eyes on him evidently set before you, crucified among you. You should not be under the spell of that snake of Satan. Satan loves to bewitch God's people. Satan loves it, to keep you under that spell and to confuse and to freeze them so that they cannot attend the Lord's Supper anymore, or to make them proud so they think they have more than they actually do. Like the Apostle Peter sometimes said, "I would never do that," and took a sword and being too courageous, that's also a consequence of that spell. And Satan is now using the theology of the Judaizers, right? He came from Jerusalem, remember, and they were adding to the gospel. They said, "Yes by Jesus, yes by salvation by Jesus Christ, yes by his crucifixion, yes grace through the Lord Jesus, no other way," but they added to that. It was Christ plus. Christ and something else. You can't say Christ only, Christ only, you have to have something, you have to show it and qualify, in a certain sense, and they were bewitched by Satan, bewitched by the people.

Bewitched in what sense? In this sense, "that ye should not obey the truth." What do you think that means, to obey the truth? You may be surprised. You say to obey the truth means that you are sound in doctrine, right? To obey the truth, the truth of the Bible, the whole truth, you have to be dogmatically sound, theologically pure. Well, that's not what it means here, not in the first sense anyway. Obedience is often used also for the law, right, to obey the law? The Lord says, "Do this," and you do that. That's not what it means either. They had been bewitched that they should not obey the truth. What truth? "The truth before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth" among them. The gospel.

They are so bewitched they don't believe in the gospel. To obey the truth here means to believe in the Lord Jesus because he is the truth and the life and the resurrection and everything. He is THE truth and sometimes in the Bible instead of the word "believing in the Lord Jesus Christ," we hear "obeying him," because that's the real obedience, the spiritual obedience to trust, to only trust in him, in the Savior who has given his life, who was crucified, who has been evidently set before them. Who has bewitched you to let you look the other way? You have been looking at him, you have seen him. He was evidently set before you, crucified among you, so why are you looking the other way, being bewitched by Satan, not obeying the truth set before you?

Remember that the lifting off of the burden that makes you pounds lighter when you saw for the first time the Lord Jesus Christ set before you in the preaching of the word? Oh, what relief, what peace, what joy in your heart because you kept your eyes on him, "Whosoever believeth on him." You saw that serpent on the cross, on that pole, and you looked upon him and that made all the difference. So who has bewitched you to now look away from him? Who has bewitched you that you don't keep looking at him and seeking your salvation only in the Lord Jesus Christ? Who has bewitched you? Who has been confusing you? I guess it is Satan. Satan always tries to mess it up and change it around.

Being bewitched. You know, people by nature are bewitched. Unconverted friends, you are bewitched by the world. The world is looking at you, hypnotizing you, bringing you under the spell of the world as if there was nothing more important. The Jewish people with all respect, Orthodox Jewish people under the spell of the law and they don't see it although Christ has been evidently set before them in the Old Testament as well. They have Isaiah 53 as well but they just don't see it. Bewitched, veil over their heads. So, you see, Christ has been evidently set before them, the cross has been preached all the time and everywhere, and at first they saw that, they were God's people, they still are God's people, but they are confused, foolish people of God.

Third question: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law? Verse 2, "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" That's the only thing I want to know, that's the most crucial question that reveals everything. This only. This only would I learn of you. How did that go when you received the Spirit? Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? How did it go, tell me?

Receiving the Spirit, what is that? Do some of God's people have the Spirit, others not? No, they all have. If you don't have the Spirit of God, you are not of God. When the Lord gives life to a soul, the Lord gives his Spirit, that regenerating Spirit. He begins to dwell in God's people because that major change of heart and mind, he gives those new faculties, he gives a new will, he makes them different people, he opens their eyes, they receive the Spirit.

Now compare this to Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." He is not talking about the time that Christian left the City of Destruction but he's talking about the time that he went through the door which is the crucial, the most crucial moment in "Pilgrim's Progress." That is that all decisive point before and after. And of course, from God's side, from God's side it started earlier but, you know, we only can see it from our side. That decisive point is that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and he had seen that light at the horizon, had seen that gate, but that's the most decisive moment to enter in through that gate.

So do you remember that? How did you enter into that gate? How did you get on the road? How did you get on that narrow pathway? By the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Well, you tell me and I'm listening to a child of God saying, "I came to my wit's end. I have been on a different path. I have researched different evidence to be saved and it all came to nothing, but then I came to that gate and someone led me through that gate and by God's grace I stepped through that gate, and that made all the difference. Then I said, 'Can I now leave that burden here?'"

Evidently set before you, "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" The works of the law is doing something, right? And the hearing is not a work. The works of the law and the hearing of faith, it's not the work of faith or the hearing of the law. No, it is the work of the law or the hearing of faith and this is the mark of grace, that you can be saved by the works of the law but simply by hearing about the only name given among men. The hearing, that hearing only and the hearing of faith.

The faith hearing, that hearing him with spiritual ears, the hearing of him of his invitation, the hearing of him of his calling, the hearing of him that he said, "It's sufficient. It's finished." The hearing about his death, the hearing about his resurrection, the hearing about his ascension, that hearing of him and that looking upon him. Or have you still mixed the works of the law with the hearing of faith? If you mix it, you're confused.

So the Lord teaches his people and he teaches his people again that it's not by the works of the law and not by the works of faith, not by the works at all but by the hearing of faith. The hearing. By hearing about the only name, the Lord Jesus Christ, by hearing about him and that did it. That hearing of him, that gave them that opening, that gave them that application. That was the application that gave them that hope, that gave them that joy, that gave them that freedom, that gave them that only comfort in life and death. That's what did it, the hearing of faith. "Who has bewitched you that you now try to mix the works again with the faith?"

So this only would I like to know from you, how did you receive the Spirit? By the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? If you have something of the law and you just qualify it because you studied the Bible and you did a few good things and you have some merits, you felt kind of good about your experiences and you grew a little and you said, "I have something, you know? I am someone. I'm converted." If that's your conversion, please do not attend the Lord's Supper. That's not how God's people learn it. They receive it not by the works of the law but by the hearing of faith, without doing anything, by doing nothing. "Him that worketh not but believeth in him that justify the ungodly."

But yet God's children, although they're saved by the hearing of the faith and led through that door, they can yet fall back under the spell of Satan, and that's why the Apostle Paul reminds them of the past. Think about it, about what happened in the past in your life. Not that the experiences are the basis but check it, search your heart, in the past have you seen him evidently set before you, the Lord Jesus Christ, and did you keep your eyes on him? Were you drawn to him? Did you receive the Spirit by the hearing of faith alone? And if so, who has bewitched you to change that? The Lord is still the same and he wants to confirm that at the Table, that it is only by the hearing of faith.

Are you so foolish? Fourth question. First we sing.

The fourth thought refers to the third verse, "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" So the Apostle Paul calls the Galatians foolish. Well, foolish has different meanings in the Bible, there are different words for it in the Bible. It does not mean morally foolish, it means you know better, you know better and you don't act according to what you are supposed to know. That's the foolishness we read about here. It's not smart. You know better. You have heard it. He has been evidently set before you. You have received the Spirit. And what in the world is happening? What now? You have begun in the Spirit and now you work with the flesh.

That's foolish and that foolishness, in this case, is the foolishness of God's people. There is also foolishness of unconverted people, right? Think of the foolish builder. He was building not on the rock but he was building on a slope, a sandy slope. You should first dig until you find a rock and then build your foundation on that, but if you build a house on a hill and you build on the loose gravel, on the loose soil, that's foolish. When the rain comes and the floods come, the house goes down in a slide and its fall was great. That's a foolish man who knows the law and knows the truth and does not act upon it, does not obey it, and that's the foolishness the Lord finds people in by nature. A lot of foolishness, the foolishness you have in a church for years and years and years and you know the truth so well and still the world and this life is bewitching you as if you have an eternity to live and there is no future hell and heaven, just intoxicated, under the spell of this life.

Let us change in God's people's hearts. Let us change. In that sense, they're not so bewitched anymore but they can yet fall back into a different type of bewitching, right? The Lord said to those two men of Emmaus, "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." Fools and slow of heart to believe, to believe all the prophets have spoken, to believe what was so evidently set before you, Christ crucified among you, it was everywhere to be seen and you were exposed to it, and then the Lord Jesus died and they were so confused because they were fools and slow of heart to believe. And the Lord knows that's his people still, so slow of heart, because they begin with the Spirit and the Lord begins and therefore their beginning is in the Spirit but are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Do you top it off by the flesh? Do you add something to it? Not taking away, that's wrong, to take something away from the gospel is wrong, but they're not taking anything away, they're adding to it. They say it's by the Lord Jesus Christ but also so-and-so and this and that.

So that is the flesh, that is the opposite of the Spirit, that is your own human effort, that is you doing something from the flesh. And at this time not the fragile flesh, all flesh is grass of the field flesh but in the sense of brittle and mortal, not flesh in the sense of sinful, "I am carnal flesh sold unto sin," not in that sense but flesh in the sense of doing something yourself and presenting something of yourself to the Lord. Adding. So by Jesus Christ, yes, and then plus. No. No plus. It's only him. You don't perfect it. You don't perfect it with the flesh. Are you so foolish really you think you can add something? That's offensive. Really you think that you can bring something and bribe the Lord and say, "Lord, it's by Christ only but here I have something in my pocket to give to you, to give to thee." That's the flesh. That's foolishness.

So the Lord knows the foolishness of his people, they like to add also the work of preparation and the Lord says, "No, I do the work." The work of the law is what the Lord Jesus Christ did so there's nothing else to be left to his people than the hearing of faith because the Lord Jesus worked himself and he worked hard, and he worked his entire life, and he worked the perfect life, and he did not fail in any possible way, shape or form. He was perfect and when he looked back again at his life, he could say, "It is finished."

He worked in his passive obedience and in his active obedience. What is that? What is passive obedience? It's an obedience in a circumstance you don't do anything yourself, you're passive, and the Lord Jesus was passive in many ways. He let the Lord do it. He let the people capture him. He let others crucify him. He let them do it. He let the Father do it. "Here I am to do thy will, O God." He was willing. He presented himself as a sacrifice, that is his passive obedience. But also active obedience. Think of the 10 Commandments, he obeyed them all. No flaws. He paid the price. He was the second Adam. He pleased his Father and his Father said several times, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear him." Hear him. The hearing of faith.

Oh, that Lord Jesus Christ qualified and he rose the third day because he pleased his Father and nothing can be added and we shouldn't even try to. It is not by the works of the law but by the hearing of faith. Are you so foolish?

So the Lord is inviting his people next week to come to the Table, having a church right, having being members of the congregation in good standing, not under censure, or from another Dutch or North American NRC if they have received permission of the consistories. But that's the ecclesiastical permission, we also need a divine right, and that divine right is what you hear here in this text, that you have received the Spirit by the hearing of faith. And then you are still foolish in yourself and God's children so often feel foolish, so often feel so dumb and so disqualified, the Lord knows that but he's inviting his people to come by the hearing of faith to the Table next time with all their foolishness and they may repent again and say, "Lord, how foolish I have been. I have begun in the Spirit but see what happened. Received the Spirit by the works of the law but, oh, that hearing of faith. May the Lord take away all the obstacles and hindrances and give free course to his word."

The Lord's Supper next week. Look at the text. It speaks about the beginning, having begun in the Spirit. In the week of preparation, write something down, think it through. How did it begin? Where did it lead you? Ask yourself the question, "Do I know what the difference is between the works of the law and the hearing of faith?" Ask yourself the question if you have seen him who has been evidently set before thee, crucified among you? And next week's Sunday, the Lord willing, at the Table he will be set before thee evidently, crucified among you and we hope that the people of God with all their foolishness yet may attend because of that hearing of faith. Amen.