

**A DEFENCE OF THE
AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY
OF GALATIANS**

(LESSON THIRTY-THREE)

**“A PUBLIC PORTRAYAL OF CHRIST
CRUCIFIED”**

GALATIANS 3

(ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?

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—

6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?

7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

8 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.”

9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

10 For all who rely on 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.”

11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”

12 But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”

13 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”—

14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

15 To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified.

16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.

17 This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.

18 For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.

20 Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

21 Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.

22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Throughout most of the first two chapters of his letter to the Galatian believers, the Apostle Paul vigorously defends the divine origin of his apostolic ministry and message. He insists that both his ministry and his message were independent of any human being.

In chapters **3** and **4**, we have the **doctrinal portion** of the letter. In this section, Paul gives a Scriptural defense of the Gospel. He does so by addressing the Galatian believers themselves, using their example of inconsistent conduct to launch into an exposition of justification by faith. He reprimands them in the strongest language possible, for their unfaithfulness to the Gospel as a result of the corrupting influence of the Judaizers. He calls them “*foolish,*” and asks them who has “*bewitched*”

them. Paul views their defection from the authentic Gospel as not only spiritual treason, but foolishness also!

After initially embracing the truth of the Gospel that sinners are justified, or declared righteous, or saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, the Galatians had subsequently succumbed to the false, legalistic teaching of the Judaizers and adopted the position that circumcision and the works of the Law were also necessary for justification.

The essence of Paul's argument is that their new position is a contradiction of the Gospel. The reason for his astonishment at their folly is that Jesus Christ had been "*publicly portrayed as crucified.*" before their very eyes, through his preaching and teaching.

Brothers and sisters, the Gospel is not a general instruction about the Jesus of history, but rather, a specific proclamation of Jesus Christ as crucified. According to **John 19:30**, just before He breathed His last breath our Lord said, "*It is finished.*" The phrase is a translation of the Greek word, **tetelestai**, which means, "to bring to a close, to finish, to end." The work of Christ was completed on the Cross, and it is sufficient to "*save completely those who come to God through him.*" The Gospel is not good advice to men, but good news about Christ; it is not an invitation to us to do anything, but a declaration of what God has done; it is not a demand, but an offer. For a person to add his or her own works to the work of Christ is an offence to His finished work, as we saw when we considered chapter 2 and verse 21. There Paul writes, "*I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose*" (**English Standard Version**).

In verse 1 of chapter 3, Paul writes, "*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.*"

Kenneth Wuest explains that the phrase, "*O foolish Galatians,*" is, "An expression of surprise mingled with indignation."

This is the first time that Paul has addressed the Galatians personally since verse **11** of chapter **1**, and here he uses the impersonal name “*Galatians*” rather than the familiar term “*brethren*” which he had used earlier. This, along with the emotionally charged interjection “*O*” at the beginning of the verse, sets the tone for this section of his letter which is highly charged emotionally.

Paul describes them as being “*foolish*.” The word “foolish” is the translation of a Greek word which literally means, “not having a mind,” and thus describes a person who is without understanding. It describes one who demonstrates an unwillingness to use his or her mental faculties to understand. The word does not refer to a lack of intelligence as much as it refers to a mental laziness and carelessness.

Wuest, explains that the word,

“Denotes the stupidity that arises from deadness and impotence of intellect...The word is used with an ethical reference as the faculty of moral judgment. Thus the word indicates a failure to use one’s powers of perception, that failure being due to a moral defect. It is always true, as it was with the Galatians, that the act of a Christian who embraces false doctrine, is due to sin in his life.”

Arch Bishop **Richard Trench** states that the Greek word implies that there is always a moral failure lying behind the intellectual failure.

Paul had taught the Galatian believers the truth concerning the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel of grace, but they had failed to examine the teachings of the Judaizers in the light of these truths, with the result that they were being led out of truth and freedom into error and bondage. The Galatians were not lacking in intelligence but in obedience to the truth of the Gospel!

John MacArthur makes the following comment in respect of the Galatian believers:

“Those believers were especially foolish because they had been so carefully and fully taught, having been on many occasions over the

years privileged to sit under the teaching of Paul himself, whose very heartbeat was the gospel of God's grace."

The Judaizers had infiltrated the Galatian church and were undermining the very core of Christianity, namely, justification by faith alone in Christ alone. They were teaching that to be Christians, the Gentiles had to become Jewish proselytes and obey the Mosaic Law including circumcision. Paul was appalled that the Galatians would tolerate, much less embrace, such heresy. He called them "*foolish*," or people without understanding, reason, and thought. They had abandoned the very truth of the glorious Gospel they had been taught by one of the greatest teachers in the history of the church. The believers in Galatia were not stupid, they had simply failed to use their spiritual intelligence when faced by the unscriptural, Gospel-destroying, legalistic teaching of the Judaizers. In a word they had failed to use their heads!

Brothers and sisters, we would be acting just as foolishly as the Galatian believers if we were to attempt to live a supernatural life depending on our natural abilities and a strict observance of a set of rules and regulations. To do so would be to blunt the transforming power of grace and quench the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. As far as Paul was concerned, for a believer to return to the Law and negate the necessity of the death of Christ was to act as if he or she had been "*bewitched*."

The word "*bewitched*" is the translation of a Greek word which originally meant "to slander, to speak ill of one, to cause harm with unfavorable words." In the New Testament it came to have the meaning of subjecting a person to the influence of the occult. The thought was to put a spell on someone. The idea is of charming or fascinating persons in a misleading way, by flattery, false promises, or the occult. The word clearly suggests the use of feeling over fact, emotion over clear understanding of truth.

Spurgeon comments as follows: "The Galatians wanted to go back to circumcision and to the old sacrifices of the law. Paul calls it witchery, for in his day it was believed that men could cast an evil eye upon one

another and thus work evil upon their fellow men. It seemed to Paul to be something like that—as if the devil himself were in it and came and turned men away from Christ Jesus, to go back to trusting in the law and its obsolete ceremonies... 'Who has bewitched you?' he asks, as if anything that led a man to trust in his own works should be as much abhorred as the incantations of a witch...It is a dangerous state, it is a devilish snare...to be led to trust to frames, and feelings, and experiences, and doings, and prayings, or to anything else but Christ."

Although the Greek word can carry the idea of sorcery, that is not the idea in this verse. The Galatians were not victims of a magical spell. Rather, they had been misled by teaching that they should have readily recognized as false, because Paul had thoroughly and vividly and graphically proclaimed the crucified Christ to the Galatians. The Lord Jesus Christ had been "*publicly portrayed as crucified*" before them. And yet their eyes had been diverted from the Cross to the Law. They were without excuse.

The phrase "*publicly portrayed*" is a translation of the Greek word **prographó: (prog-raf'-o)**, which literally means, "to write for public reading, announced on a poster." The word was used to describe all public notices or proclamations and indicates a public announcement in which the validity of a particular fact or condition is proclaimed. It does not refer here to the act of painting the crucified Christ on a placard for public notice, but rather of posting a public announcement to the effect that He was crucified. In his proclamation of the Gospel in Galatia this is what Paul did, as it were. Paul does not mean that the Galatians literally saw the crucifixion of Jesus, or even that they had a spiritual vision of it. He means that the truth of our Lord's atoning work on the Cross as their substitutionary sacrifice had been laid out for them so clearly that they had a very clear understanding of its significance. They could see it.

The Galatians had heard the plainest possible preaching and teaching from Paul and his companions concerning the substitutionary death of Christ. Jesus Christ had been so clearly set forth before them that they had, as it were, seen Him as He hung on the Cross of Calvary. Yet, under

some “spell,” they had turned aside from the faith of Christ, to follow “*a different gospel*” which made the death of Christ of no efficacy whatsoever!

Interestingly, the word **prographó** is found in early secular documents where a father posted a proclamation that he would no longer be responsible for his son’s debts. In contrast to this, **our** Father has posted a proclamation called the Gospel, in which He promises to cancel the sin-debt of all who believe in His crucified Son, based entirely on the work of that Son!

The word “*crucified*” is in the **perfect tense** in the Greek, which speaks of a past completed action with ongoing effect or results. This clearly indicates that in speaking about the substitutionary death of Christ on the Cross, Paul is not speaking of the figure of a dead Christ on a crucifix, but of the risen, ascended Christ who had been crucified, who was alive, whose glorified body still bore the marks of the nails and the scars of the crown of thorns, and who is the living Saviour by virtue of His atoning work on the Cross.

Brothers and sisters, in **Ephesians 2:8**, Paul writes, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God*” (**English Standard Version**). **Richard C. Halverson**

Explains that Paul is not referring in this verse merely to justification or “initial” salvation. He is referring to the **total** work of God in the life of a believer. He is referring to justification, sanctification and glorification. He is referring to the past, the continuing present, and the future; the beginning, the end, and everything in between. **Halverson** says,

“Grace is as necessary for the continuity of the Christian life as it is for its conception and consummation. One has little difficulty in apprehending the fact that the new birth is a work of grace. There is nothing one can do to be born anew...Furthermore, there is little difficulty in understanding the resurrection of the body to be a work

of grace. It is quite obvious that man can do nothing to expedite this event. But when it comes to the interlude between regeneration and resurrection the inclination is to think of it as man on his own, or at least man doing his best with token help from God. It is at this point that the Christian is constantly in danger of developing a doctrine of works that will defeat the very thing he is desiring in his life."