

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. ² I would like to learn just one thing from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? ³ Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? ⁴ Have you experienced [suffered] so much in vain – if it really was in vain? ⁵ So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? ⁶ So also Abraham 'believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

⁷ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. ⁸ Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' ⁹ So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Last week we looked at the criticism Paul made of Peter and James who seemed to be back tracking on the revelation that believers no longer needed to observe the whole Law of Moses. As most believers were Jews, they continued following the Law, and many expected Christians to do likewise, in the same way converts to Judaism had done for many years. Yet Peter was shown in his vision that he could eat unclean food (which represented the things that non-Jews ate, and that non-Jews received the gift of the Holy Spirit same as the first Jewish believers. Paul's mission was to the Gentiles as well as Jews and he never expected the Gentiles to follow the Jewish Law of Moses. The church agreed at a meeting in Jerusalem that Gentile believers in the Way need not be burdened with anything other than abstaining from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. That excluded the need to be circumcised and follow all the Jewish ceremonial law and customs. The moral law remained.

Paul also emphasised that observance of the Law was not enough to be justified, and that works alone would never make anyone righteous, because everyone broke some part of the Law at some time. Faith alone, belief in Jesus the Messiah would justify men: if this were not so, then Christ died in vain, as the sacrifice for us all.

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The word foolish is literally "unthinking". Paul doesn't pull his punches! He is so disappointed with them for going astray and being misled by Judaizers. Who has bewitched you, who has charmed you with false teaching, who has led you astray from the Truth? These same questions may well be asked of any Christians misled by present day heresies and by present day false teaching. We don't talk much of heresies these days – unlike those found in the early church where controversies over the nature of Christ abounded because people couldn't get their heads around Jesus being man and God at the same time. The heresy of the Judaizers was one of the first heresies condemned by the early church fathers: that good deeds and works (following the Law to the letter) contribute towards salvation. Today this remains the belief of some who claim to be Christians and believe that being saved by grace is not enough to earn a place in heaven.

Paul tells them that Christ, who was crucified for the sins of mankind, should have convinced them that a sacrifice was made once and for all, without the need for works and activities to gain forgiveness of sins.

The Galatians evidently received the Holy Spirit after hearing the Gospel from Paul, and received Him not by anything that they did, not by performing any rituals, not by doing good deeds to impress God and not by

obedience of all of the Law of Moses. Paul likes rhetorical questions and asks them to name one work they performed, one thing they did to receive the Holy Spirit or was it simply by believing what they heard? Receiving the Holy Spirit is a divine act and is not based on any human effort other than faith or belief. Furthermore this faith is given by God when the Gospel is heard. *Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ* (Romans 10:17). The wonderful thing about the message is that God in his grace and mercy is willing to save those who believe in Jesus. Believing in Jesus and accepting him as saviour is all that is needed. Paul now goes on the talk about the Holy Spirit who convicts sinners to repent, and then encourages, comforts and empowers believers.

³ *Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?* In contexts like this, the Greek word for *flesh* (*sarx*) refers to the sinful state of human beings, often presented as a power in opposition to the Spirit. Again Paul questions whether they are foolish and possibly dim witted not to understand the grace of God. Having received the Holy Spirit as a free gift, they are now trying to become better Christians by keeping the Law of Moses, which the apostles and all the Church decided was unnecessary. The Pharisees were condemned by Jesus for their efforts to show to everyone else how well they obeyed the Law of Moses while ignoring its key element: love. Paul preached that a life begun in the Spirit must continue in the Spirit, and not revert to the old ways that the Jews had before they were touched by the Holy Spirit. If we become lukewarm or even cold, following rituals often learnt as children seems easier than wanting to receive the Holy Spirit who might inspire us to do things we presently really don't want to do. God won't expect us to do anything he has not equipped us to do, as that won't bring glory to him and nor will it edify us.

⁴ *Have you experienced [suffered] so much in vain – if it really was in vain?* Again Paul asks a rhetorical question to which the answer is given. The Galatian Christians were being attacked by Jews living in Galatia because Jews had been converted and the Gentile converts were being attacked by the local population for leaving the religions of their ancestors. The early church believers suffered persecution because their faith was a new faith and there is always resistance to new things by many people who don't like change and feel threatened by change. By adopting the Jewish Law the Galatians would be losing the promise of forgiveness by the grace of God and losing salvation because works could never earn salvation or make anyone righteous in the eyes of God. Jesus told the rich young man who called him "good teacher" that no one is good (or justified as righteous) except God alone. Consequently after suffering persecution, and then deciding to appease the persecuting Jews by obeying the Law meant they had suffered in vain and could have avoided this suffering had they just stayed with Judaism (if they were Jews) or become converts to Judaism if they were Gentiles. Being Christians has resulted in suffering and Paul will go on to say it was not in vain.

⁵ *So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?*

God did miracles which the Galatians all saw and accepted as genuine. Paul is talking not just about the miracles done by him, but miracles done by the new Christians through the Holy Spirit. He asks did God do this because you believed or because you obeyed the Law? Obviously the Galatians knew it was through belief that Jesus could heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind, the ears of the deaf, and restore the lame. When Paul was in Galatia on his first missionary journey, he visited Pisidian Antioch, preaching in the synagogue. After his message when many accepted the Good News, some of the Jews stirred up the city against him and Barnabas (Acts 13). They were expelled from the city and so went on to Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14). In Iconium "Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders." In Lystra a lame man from birth was instantly healed. The people saw the miracles and heard

that they were done in the name of Jesus. Those who accepted the Good News were filled with the Holy Spirit and knew the reality of God.

As it's Pentecost Sunday today, we remember what happened in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit fell on the believers and three thousand were added to their numbers, we too know that without belief in Jesus we would not have been filled with the Holy Spirit. None of us can earn a place in heaven by trying to be good. We must believe in the Lord Jesus, that he died and rose again and is able to forgive our sins to be assured of salvation.

Back to the text ⁶ *So also Abraham 'believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.*
⁷ *Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.*

Abraham believed God and was justified because of his faith, not because of his works. If justification comes by faith, so also the gift of the Holy Spirit must come by faith. Paul mentions this later in this letter and elsewhere (Romans 11) that the believing Gentiles with faith in God are grafted into Israel and as such are the children of Abraham because of their faith.

⁸ *Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'* ⁹ *So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

All the Jews were proud to be children of Abraham and knew that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was the one and only true God. Abraham's descendants would be a blessing to all the nations. Paul knows that whatever God said in the Scriptures is true and eternal. The Scriptures were to Paul, and also are to us, as relevant to the present day as to the time God spoke his words recorded in them. What God says always remains and cannot be considered relevant only for the time it was spoken to men in the Bible. The promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham was made before the Law revealed to Moses, and the reason for that promise was the faith in God that Abraham had. Paul is saying to the Galatians that are justified by their faith in God, like Abraham. Faith results in salvation, not works.

Next week we'll look the righteous living by faith.