

“Gone Completely Crazy”

Galatians 3:1-9

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Galatians 3:1-14 *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?*

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? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? 4 Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 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? — 6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” 7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. 10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” 11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” 12 Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.” 13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.



This chapter of the book of Galatians is the theological and often denominational “high ground” of which has been fought over for centuries. Where you fall in this dispute will have everything to do with how you live out your faith, your life that follows, and even your very eternal destination. Therefore it would certainly behoove us to pay close attention, for this matter is of the highest priority. One must have clarity as to just what the *biblical* position is, and yes, what *Christ’s* position is, for the stakes are, *to say the very least*, very, very high! The battle ground in this chapter lies in the issues of faith and/or works, and how they relate to our standing before God.

Certainly there are extremist viewpoints: Some will take the position of the early church Gnostics, *today which can take the form of the extreme Calvinist*, who believe essentially that what is done in the flesh has nothing to do with God or our relationship with Him, and that our faith and our belief is wholly an esoteric and intellectual position. The battle cry for these folks is John 3:15, “*..whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life,*” and Roman 10:13, “*For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”*”

The other side of this war is those who would demand on some level, that a man or woman who call themselves a Christian must attain to some level of holy and righteous lifestyle. That a *real* Christian lives according to certain standards, habits, practices, and general lifestyle. For these folks, the individual who does not, is not really a Christian. Moreover, the one who fails to meet the “standard,” *whatever that might be*, is kicked out of the club until which time he or she is willing to acquiesce to the ‘bar’, and only then are they allowed conditionally back into the fraternity. These folks use the bullhorn to announce the likes of 1 Pet 1:16, “*Be holy as I am holy,*” and James 2:20 “*But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?*”

What’s even more troubling, is that most folks inexplicably fall somewhere in the vast desert between these two extremes, though they could never tell you why or how they arrived at their crucial theological position! Usually where we fall doesn’t really have anything to do with scripture, but rather what church we go to, what ‘denominational persuasion’ we were raised under, and where our ‘comfort realm’ lies. It is all about what “fits” for the faith/worldly life that we have chosen to live out.

Where we ultimately “come to rest” on this matter will have everything to do with how we see God and life.

Paul understood this profound fact, and therefore set out to clarify this doctrine, and he does so without fear, without reservation, without beholding to some denominational position.

What these two opposing groups *will* agree upon is that there is a chasm between man and God, and in that they are absolutely correct. *On one side*, we know that God is holy, sinless and perfect, and will only allow perfection to stand in His midst. *And on the other side* we have mankind, who is sinful, corrupt and without any heavenly redeeming quality. But how exactly to bridge that gap is where we start to divide.

The “do it or die” folks believe, on some level, that we need to *do* something to make ourselves spiritually righteous enough to enter that “holy-of-holies.” So they commit themselves to spiritual pushups, sit-ups, and weightlifting to condition themselves to stand in His presence. They mandate a plethora of rules and regulations, a bunch of “must-do’s” and a whole lot of “*don’t do’s*.” Stuff like “don’t eat this,” and “don’t drink that,” read “*this much*” of scripture and it must only be the Old King James Bible, and don’t watch that movie or that TV show.

I’m not saying these things cannot have a negative impact upon us...certainly eating or not eating certain things, or drinking or smoking a lot of others, and watching certain visual presentations do indeed have an effect upon a person. *But do they change our salvation standing before God?* It seems we in this church fellowship stand right in the firing line of these two groups, and they both are shooting at us as well as each other! The fact that we are innately joyous and they tend to be sour, tends to drive them crazy!

The *rules* folks say we are a bunch of despicable sinners because they have witnessed individuals standing out front of the church smoking a cigarette, and some even have been seen having a beer with a hotdog at the game, or standing in line at theatre to watch an R rated movie.

Ironically, there are some other folks that are standing on the *other* side that say we are a bunch a legalistic Pharisees because we preach holiness, sanctification, and baptism. *They* get angry because we have the promise of Covenant Membership and its necessary before you can enter into service or classes here, and then we actually expect you to show up when you said you would! More than anything they criticize us because we believe strongly in serving Jesus, His church and His kingdom!

You may claim that you “believe in Jesus” but truthfully I think a lot of the time you actually mean you “believe *of* Jesus.” Let me ask this: if I *believe* intellectually in the fact that Jesus existed and is the Son of God, *is that enough to be square with God?* Because the fact is *most* people believe that, even if they never go to church, and instead actually live out a blatantly immoral and self-centered life. James 2:19 tells us that even *demons* believe that Jesus existed and that He is the Son of God. So are *they* Christians too? Obviously there must be more to it than that then!

Indeed, how sad to run into folks every day that believe they are going to spend eternity in heaven because they believe that God exists and perhaps moreover He is who He says He is. Inevitably, they see themselves as essentially a “good” person, thus deserving of eternal redemption. However, we must realize there is a vast difference between believing *of* Jesus, and believing *in* Jesus!

Romans 1:17 tells us that the “just (or the righteous) shall *live* by faith.” Not *believe* in faith, but *live* by faith!

There seems to a great difference between these two paths. For those who want to try to be “good enough”...let me ask you this: *How good is ‘good enough?’* Because if we are measuring, then you wouldn’t want to miss the goal by an inch, would you? Here lies the *practical* problem with the “rules and regulations” path. *How much is enough?* With that very conundrum in mind, there forever is the inevitable tendency to attempt to ‘hedge your bet.’ Meaning a person will continually try to *do* more; *more* rules, *more* regulations, *more* effort, *more* self-works, in hopes that by some miracle they will clear the goal posts and make it into heavens eternity!

Paul herein takes on this issue with gusto: truly a “man on a mission.” He seemed to instinctively know that essentially everything was at stake with this one issue. It profoundly affects all the answers: *How is a man saved? Moreover how does he stay saved?*

Paul, in this chapter of Galatians, will argue the issue of salvation by faith. First from *experience*, then from *scripture*, and finally from *logic*. His position throughout chapter three is a firm stance against legalism: the belief that one can position himself before God by following rules, by his own doing.

3:1

Here in verse 1, Paul comes out of the gate swinging. Indeed this guy was no “seeker-friendly” pastor. He’s not patting them on the head and with friendly banter telling them all is going to be fine! In fact, his language is fairly harsh here... “*you dopes, who filled you with this nonsense?*” Or “*Who put this spell on you?*”

Clearly this issue was the “elephant in the room” there in Antioch, and Paul was going to deal with it, not simply pretend it wasn’t there. Man I hate that! I hate situations where we all pretend something is not there, or something is not happening that actually *IS* happening! Life is too short for that. Just **deal with it**. Drag it out into the light of day, throw it down on the ground, and ask “what is *this!*?”

We need to remember our timeline... Paul was just telling us about having to cuff up Peter for going all Pharisaical on the believers in Antioch. Peter was being “foolish” because he knew full well how he was saved and it wasn’t by jumping though any religious hoops to get ‘er done! So Paul asked these Galatians “Who filled you with this garbage?” Note: “*who?*” Paul wasn’t just dealing with false

teaching, but he was also addressing the false **teachers** when he asks *who* bewitched you. No doubt it was a bit factiously said, but when it came to these folks who knew better or *should have* known better, Jesus, Paul, and John the Baptist all minced no words.

Jesus: Mt 12:34 “*You brood of snakes!*” John 8:44 “*You are of your father the devil...*” Matt 23:14 “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.*”

John: Matt 3:7 “*You brood of snakes! he exclaimed. Who warned you to flee God’s coming judgment?*”

Paul: Acts 20:29 “*For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*”

This is not permission for you to go out and start calling folks names, but it can’t be ignored either. We have to acknowledge that according to Christ Himself, these are very bad people who aim to hurt you if they can!

Certainly I myself have seen this “bewitching” on many occasions. People who know better but apparently were overcome by their flesh, their emotions, their self-righteousness, and turn and bit the hand that fed them. In this too, we can only stand back and say “*What the devil has got into you? You act as if you are possessed or something!*” Their behavior makes no sense, any more than it did to Paul.

These folks, both then and now, were “bewitched” to “not believe the truth.” Ironically, they *used* to believe it. But something along the way got a hold of their mind, their senses, their passions, their *soul*, and made them...*well, crazy*. So let’s just acknowledge here that such a thing apparently IS indeed possible! That **should** make us all sit up and pay attention!

Paul is saying that these guys *used* to clearly understand what the cross meant. They used to grasp the fact that they, that *we*, were sinners, spiritual bums, and the act of the cross redeemed us though we were unworthy in any way, shape, or form for such salvation. The knowledge of that fact kept us humble, repentant, and submissive. But again, somewhere along the way, *somehow*, they forgot and allowed their pride, ...them *selves* to take front and center! Lord knows I have seen people throw decades away into the garbage...reputation, relationships, living example and standard, spiritual history...all of it gone!

We must acknowledge that for such to occur, we are admitting that we in truth never really died to ourselves! All those years we were in fact “still alive” in there. We **hid** our real selves but we never died to our selves. Our “salvation” experience was merely intellectual. It was a “mind” decision, never a *heart decision*. As 1John 2:19 tells us: “*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.*”

3:2

Since these folks were operating in the realm of the intellectual, Paul lovingly attempted to reason with them on their own turf. He lays out the facts, ones they acknowledged themselves at one time. He attempts to take them back to the beginning. However, both then as no doubt in our day, these folks will attempt to feign that they never had anything to do with what was built in the beginning.

They’ll say “*you’ve changed!*” Even though we continue as we always have; preaching the gospel, discipling the sheep, and serving the kingdom. They helped build it, and then pretended they were never part of it. So who indeed has changed?

Paul takes them back to the beginning: “*...when you came to God, were you received on the merits of your works? ...or were you brought into the fold rather because you believed in the fact that we were helpless and void of any good thing and any ability to render ourselves right before God?*”

Paul asks this question; “*Did you get the Holy Spirit because you cleaned yourself up?*” So...*you made yourself a pure vessel...you dealt with your sin...you disciplined yourself...you righted your situation before God and then went to God and said, ‘Hey God, here I am! I have it all together now. Come to me. I’m ready!’* Is that how it went down?

Or did you start off dirty and sinful and foul and unacceptable before God? And the Spirit of God inexplicably came to you in that condition and He transformed you, cleaned you up, forgave you, changed you, loved you, gifted you, empowered you?”

What seems to happen repeatedly, is that we *start out* in reality...with true and honest evaluational thinking, but after we get cleaned up a little, we start thinking that we actually had and have something to do with it. “*Ah, I’m here because I pray a lot, because I diligently read my Bible, because I’m in the School of Discipleship, or I’m a School of Ministry student.*” Did God do these things for you because you *are* something or you *did* something? Or did He redeem you simply because He loves you, and **He** did *everything* to make things right so you could stand in the Father’s presence?

We tend to confuse what is cause and what is effect. Am I blessed and made righteous because I obey? Or do I obey because I am blessed and made righteous? **Hear this:** the answer to that question cuts a sharp divide between those truly redeemed and those merely playing religion in hopes of having enough invested to tip the scales in their favor. The only problem is, according to the very Word of God, there *are no* scales, and to try such a road will end in hell. Plain and simple. Every time.

Jesus says, “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*” Not the other way around! Obedience never produces a love relationship. Only a *real* love relationship ever produces obedience. That’s why we often ultimately fail in our obedience to Him. Even after *years* of playing the game...

3:3

Again Paul seems to be aghast at what has occurred. He asks “Are you so foolish?” If they had actually been saved by faith, are they going to now complete the process through their efforts and works? If you have seen this occur in someone you know, it is hard to grasp where to begin disputing such nonsense. You just want to slap them or something, to try to wake them up! I can relate to Paul’s reaction, because any attempt to try to talk with them is a bizarre journey! So you just end up saying “Are you crazy?” The Living Bible renders Paul’s response as “*..have you gone completely crazy?*”

3:4

When the Galatians, ...really *all* the early church, ...first came to Christ, the cost was high. They were persecuted and attacked by those who hated the gospel of grace. Paul is asking these guys “*Was all of that for nothing? You fought the battle for grace, and are you now going to surrender to those who have always wanted to take it away from you?*” I have literally had that conversation!

Many of us went through similar experiences. Our decision to follow Christ cost us friends and family: *you were the religious nut*. And our decision to follow Him all the way, to live a disciple’s life cost us even more; *you’re a fanatic*, part of a cult! I ask you, what would it take to have you back down *now*?

Explain the things you have seen! Drunks made sober, addicts released, marriages healed, the jailed set free, depression turned to joy, the lonely have been embraced, and those without purpose now have direction. Why did God do all of that? Because we earned it? Because we *deserved* it? Or just because He loves us? Because of His grace?

What causes this surrender in people? Some do so out of lust for position, and worldly gain. These, like the prodigal son, decide they want their stuff *now*. Money now, spouse now, sex now, the world *now*.

Some just get *tired*. They opt for a version of “Jesus lite” and seek for an easier road than the road of trust and servitude...the “reasonable service” stuff that Paul talks about in the letter to the Corinthians.

Some just discover along the way that they simply don’t love Jesus as much as they thought they did. They want to go to heaven however, and of course escape hell, so they keep some religion, but lose the passion.

3:5

So the question remains: Do all of these miracles we see, the profound changes in people and our community of believers here, do they occur because of the things we do, or because He loves us? Is it because we deserve it, or because we *believe* it?

3:6

Abraham was counted righteous because He *believed*. He loved His God and His God loved Him. Abraham was a great man and He did great things. But none of it earned him one shred of position with his creator! God don’t pick guys like that. All the Bible is testimony of that fact, as well as this church.

You see, Abraham wasn’t *really* righteous. God just *counted* him righteous, just like He does for you and me. God called him when he was an uncircumcised, godless pagan. God likes to do that! Because you and I aren’t righteous either. Not now, not ever. But because He loves us, He counts us as so. ***Just because He loves us.***

3:7

Abraham was chosen by God before he knew anything about the rules and regulations of orthodox Judaism, before the temple sacrifices, and before he was circumcised. In fact, the first Jew was effectively just your average Arab. Pretty ironic huh? With none of these elements in place to make him “righteous” before God, he still was declared so because of one thing and one thing only: *his faith*. He was “declared righteous” simply because he believed **in** God! So while there are Jews by blood, we are Jews by spirit, because we too are “sons of Abraham” because of our faith.

The “ultra-dispensationalists” believe that the Old Testament, the gospels, and alot of the rest of the New Testament is not for us, but only for the Jews. Yet here is a simple passage that clearly says that we who believe by faith are the Sons of Abraham, so such an argument falls apart right here. Romans 2:28-29 adds clarity to this idea: *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.*

Those who believe otherwise simple are running away from the full weight and accountability of scripture. Either this is not true, and those of Jewish blood are still under all of the mosaic laws and regulations in order to be right with God, and the Gentiles just have to believe, effectively creating a two-fold approach to God, or we are **all** under the demands of the Law and the only way out is by the substitution of Christ and HIS righteousness. If the latter is true, then the whole of scripture, the Old Testament as well as the gospels, are for all of us, directed to us, and we are accountable to it, Jew or Gentile.

3:8-9

God would eventually bless all the nations through Abraham. So we too are blessed through him, *that man is declared righteous because of his faith*. All of this would no doubt be hard to argue against for the reader in Paul’s day. For Abraham was held, and *is held*, in the highest standing with all Jews. To come to a clear understanding that the “father of Jewish Nation” was not right with God *because he was a Jew*, (in the classic ‘works first’ sense), but rather he was a *real Jew* because *he was right with God*. Such would be hard to receive, but difficult to dispute according to scripture.

The bottom line for all of us, both the readers in Paul’s day, as well as us today is this: *is the WORD of God the bottom line?* Suddenly the door of their little elitist club was thrown wide open and all the non-Jew Gentiles were pushing through on the merits of *their* “main man” Jesus and simply because they believed in Him and had faith in Him!

This also shows that the ‘redemption through faith’ was not invented on the fly during the historical period of the New Testament, but rather it was clear even in Abraham’s day, for we are saved by faith today, and we were saved by faith when Abraham walked this earth too...