



Time to Reflect

- In what ways can we see evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in someone's life?
- Can you think of any reasons to explain why legalism was and remains acceptable to people who profess Christian faith? How can we enjoy a relationship of love and life through faith in Christ?

Last week we saw how Paul defended the gospel message as he opposed Peter. This was a dramatic passage and it led us to reflect on the themes of justification and grace. This week we continue to see how Paul defended the gospel message and he did so by using personal and scriptural arguments. He narrowed his focus to the work of the Holy Spirit and the significance of God's grace, as opposed to the constraints of legalism and religious rule-keeping.

"The sixty verses that make up Galatians 3 and 4 are some of the strongest writing that Paul ever penned. But after all, he was in a battle! He was out to prove that salvation is by grace alone, and not by the works of the law."

(Warren Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians*, p67)

Specifics

- Our passage begins with a very pointed statement, **"You foolish Galatians"** (v1). Paul used direct and powerful language. The type of foolishness that he is referring to in this passage is that of a spiritual nature. We could, perhaps, use the phrase 'spiritual dullness.'
- Instead of pressing forward and embracing spiritual growth, the Galatians had drifted backwards since they had initially heard and accepted the gospel. This is why Paul asked a key question in (v1). **"Who has bewitched you?"** He reminded them of the truth that they had heard (v1) and he asked further questions of them in search of an answer as to why they had fallen into spiritual regression (v2-5).
- Warren Wiersbe reflects, **"It was obvious that these people had experienced something in their lives when Paul had first visited them, but the Judaizers had come along and convinced them that their experience was not complete. They needed something else, and that 'something else' was obedience to the law of Moses. These false teachers had bewitched them and turned them into fools.¹"**
- We can sense the desperation and pain of Paul in these opening verses. His heart was broken for the Galatians and he longed to seem them back on the right path. As such, he reminded them that they had experienced the grace of God and the freedom that it brings.
- In (v1) he challenged the Galatians to reflect, once again, on the cross of Jesus Christ. In doing so, he reminded them that this is the only place where salvation can be given and received.
- Paul also drew their attention to the work of the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, the Holy Spirit is mentioned eighteen times in Galatians. Wiersbe reminds us that **"The only real evidence of conversion is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer."²**

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians* (David C Cook, 2009), p68.

² Ibid, p69.

- It is important that we understand the work of the Holy Spirit in terms of salvation and Christian living. R.T. Kendall wrote an excellent book called *Holy Fire* and it focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- The Holy Spirit convicts us and reveals Christ to us (John 16:7-11). We can either resist the Spirit (Acts 7:51) or yield to the Spirit and trust Christ. Having repented, we are born of the Spirit (John 3:1-8). The Bible also teaches that we can be baptised by the Spirit (1st Corinthians 12:12-14) and sealed by the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14).
- We are called, as believers, to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16) and we are to avoid grieving the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) or quenching the Spirit (1st Thessalonians 5:19).
- The Galatians seem to have focused more on legalism than on life in the Spirit. Paul challenged them on this (v5). He effectively reminded them that they had started out in the Spirit and they didn't need to add to this. They were to walk in the Spirit and this would lead to growth in the Lord.
- Timothy Keller writes, "...the way the Spirit entered your life should be the way the Spirit advances in your life."³
- Paul also used scriptural arguments to counteract the claims of the Judaizers (v6-14). In this section he referenced six different Old Testament passages to prove that salvation is by faith in Christ.
- In doing so, Paul reminded the Galatians that Abraham was saved by faith (v6-7); salvation is for the Gentiles (v8-9); and salvation is by faith and not the law (v10-12).
- Reflecting on the breadth and depth of these verses, Wiersbe offers an insightful and practical summary. He contends, "The Judaizers wanted to seduce the Galatians into a religion of legal works, while Paul wanted them to enjoy a relationship of love and life by faith in Christ."⁴
- Having reflected on legalism and the bewitching message of the Judaizers we need to note two important points.
 1. Legalism appeals to the nature of the flesh. Wiersbe suggest, "The flesh loves to be 'religious' – to obey laws, to observe holy occasions, even to fast."⁵
 2. The flesh loves to boast about religious achievements – how long we prayed, how many times we went to church, how many hymns we can sing without looking at the book etc...
- Set against this, the final two verses in our passage (v13-14) offer a beautiful summary of Paul's overall argument. Put simply, there was no reason for the Galatians, and there is no reason for us, to go back to legalism. All we need is in Christ!
- (v13) is the gospel message in a nutshell. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was enough for us to experience God's eternal forgiveness. We cannot add to the cross and we should not take away from the cross. The work is complete and sufficient.
- We are called to turn to Christ and live by faith, in the power of the Holy Spirit (v14). As we conclude, Keller offers us a helpful reflection. "The way to progress as a Christian is continually to repent and up root these systems (works-righteousness) in the same way that we became Christians – by the vivid depiction (and re-depiction) of Christ's saving work for us, and the abandoning of self-trusting efforts to complete ourselves. We must go back again and again to the gospel of Christ crucified, so that our hearts are more deeply gripped by the reality of what He did and who we are in Him."⁶

³ Timothy Keller, *Galatians For You* (The Good Book Company, 2013), p68.

⁴ Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians*, p73.

⁵ Ibid, p75.

⁶ Keller, *Galatians For You*, p69.