

The Mark of a Fool

Text: Galatians 3.1–5

Theme: The grace by which we are saved is far superior to the works of the law.

Introduction — What happens when you lose sight of Christ

- painting by Henrik Leys called Women praying at a crucifix near St James in Antwerp
- painting done in exceedingly great detail
- folds in the fabric are shown as if you could feel them
- the rosary beads hanging from one woman's waist
- the flagstones on the floor and more
- only one thing missing from where these women have gathered to pray: Christ
- there is no cross, no Christ
- one art critic summarized it this way
- So what do we see? People from a past period, full of faith, reverent praying—but we do not see the object of faith, the crucified Christ

This was the problem of the Galatian churches

- they were losing sight of Christ and instead, focusing upon themselves
- for them, they had false teaching Judaizers who had come in & were trying to lead them astray
- Paul gets wind of this and writes this letter, at times nearly scathing, to correct them
- he has argued in his defense: he is truly an apostle of Christ
- therefore, his gospel is genuine
- he begins to argue for the truth of the gospel next
- justification—a right standing before God—is by faith alone, not by our efforts to obey the law
- and now, he transitions to explaining this glorious doctrine, this essential truth
- and he does this by asking five questions
- these questions are designed to show us that the grace by which we are saved is far superior to the works of the law

Let's hear the first question...

I. WHO? —v. 1

- “You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?”
- they were fools for succumbing to the temptation to add to the gospel
- considering circumcision and following ceremonial laws was foolishness

1. Scripture's use of the word “fool”

- one type is the simpleton, who is naive or whose thoughts are not shaped by God's Word
- the foolish are those who think & act like the world
- Paul is telling Galatians they are acting foolishly, not with biblical sense, which they should have had a good deal of by now
- in other words, Paul is telling them by listening and giving heed to these false teachers, they are forsaking what God has revealed to them

2. “Who has bewitched you?”

- it's as if these believers have lost their rational senses
- they are acting contrary to biblical revelation which Paul gave them
- they are seriously considering that a superstitious view of circumcision—practicing some religious ritual—would actually save them
- superstitious promises based upon superstitious acts have blinded them

- it's not just that they're gullible and have been taken in
- it's as if someone gave them a brain fog & they forgot what God taught them

3. The devil is in the details

- Now, we know, from the Word of God, that Satan lies behind all such attempts
- but Satan seldom comes directly to tempt us with some grievous error or sin
- more often, he seeks to bewitch us, beguiling and enthralling with some false teaching or some desire of our own flesh
- this is nothing new; we experience this all around us, even among us perhaps
- the notion that it is permissible in God's eyes to live together before marriage is one of the devil's most effective bewitching acts that tricks couples over and over and over to their detriment
- none of us are exempt because this is how temptation works
- whatever the sin, Satan is out to trick us
- when you feel the tug of a temptation to some sin, you should remember these words of Paul: O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?

Let's move to Paul's second question.

II. WHAT? — vv. 1-2

- they are acting contrary to the gospel by which they were brought initially to Christ
- Paul reminds them how God delivered them from guilt of sin
- the burden of an accusing conscience was gone
- the misery of trying to make themselves acceptable to God was no more
- preaching Christ crucified, proclaiming the gospel was all they needed to be set free
- sin & its burden, guilt, and bondage had been dealt with

1. Christ put before their eyes in the preaching of the Word

- publicly portrayed as crucified
- this kind of preaching is like painting with words
- and Paul reminds them what the gospel had done for them
- this is the power of preaching the cross
- it makes the listener see and feel the power of the cross of Christ
- Paul isn't talking about tingles running up & down your spine
- he isn't talking about some sensational depiction of crucifixion & its horrors
- no, he is talking about preaching the doctrine of the cross
- he is proclaiming the reality and effect of the substitutionary atonement of Christ
- there is no salvation apart from this truth
- any who deny the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ are deceived, lying if they teach it, and are not truly converted themselves
- this is the plain teaching of God's Word
- it is what I hope to always keep before you: Christ died in your place
- He took your penalty upon Himself
- the righteous for the unrighteous, the just for the unjust
- while we were still sinners, Christ died for us
- that is the gospel, the truth of Christ substitution for us
- and the Galatians were being tricked and deceived into believing something else
- oh, to each one of you: do not be taken in by false teaching
- hold up whatever gospel message you hear to the truth of the gospel presented here in this letter of Paul

- if it doesn't measure up, if it seeks to have you do something more than believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ, reject it, and repel it from your midst

2. Would you not love to have heard Paul in person preaching Christ crucified?

- it was earnest, passionate, clear, strong and compelling
- he put the beauty and glory of Christ before his hearers and they believed
- the sufficiency of Christ's life and death were laid out before them all
- that Christ is the only means of deliverance was so abundantly clear it grieves him to no end as he hears that they are contemplating anything else
- and so, he does it again, in these succinct words
- remember what God did to save you
- call to mind how I put Christ before you, beautiful and glorious, crucified but risen again
- do you want to nullify that? Do you want to go backwards, back to what never worked?
- are you really willing to say Christ is not sufficient?
- the Lord of all creation, the only begotten Son of God isn't enough?
- you are being tempted to think against God's Word
- if only they could have read what he wrote later to the Romans

• He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Romans 8:32 ESV

- the Judaizers are telling them that God did not give them all things in Jesus Christ
- something more is needed, something is missing in what Jesus did on the cross
- you need a ritual to make it all real
- you must follow a tradition to make you REALLY saved

3. Paul goes on to show what was wrong and what they were doing if they turned back

- "Let me ask you only this"
- he's like Columbo, the old TV detective: "Oh, by the way, I've got just one more question..."
- Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?
- literally, the wording could...should be: hearing **IN** faith
- they knew from their own experience
- as they heard the gospel preached, they responded in faith & repentance
- it is when they believed that they received God the Holy Spirit into their lives
- He didn't come by their attempted obedience to the law
- and the Spirit worked His power to change their hearts—giving them a new birth
- He opened their eyes and ears to the very truth from God Himself
- it is only by the Holy Spirit's work that you become a Christian
- do you remember when Nicodemus came to Jesus by night to ask him questions?

• Jesus told him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." John 3:5-8 ESV

- these Galatians, both Jewish and Gentile, had the Spirit of God working thru the preaching of the Word and they would never be the same again
- this is why it is such a tremendous waste if they go backwards to the law to save them
- they deny the Spirit's work, they deny Christ's all-sufficient work, they deny God

The third question is...

III. WHEN? — vv. 3

- in v. 3, Paul continues his argument by reminding them when all this began
- **Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Galatians 3:3 ESV**
- he reminds them that when they received the Holy Spirit, they received everything they needed for salvation
- The Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the triune God indwelling them, is the Spirit that brings and guarantees all the benefits of redemption
- you are regenerated—born again—by the Holy Spirit
- you are adopted into God’s family, made a brother along with Christ by the Spirit
- your justification comes because of the Holy Spirit’s work in you
- sanctification—the process of becoming holy—is the work of the Holy Spirit
- when you encounter trials, suffering and hardships, you persevere and endure because of the Holy Spirit
- any assurance you have that you are truly saved is because of the working of the Holy Spirit in your life
- the final glorification you and I will receive? Through the Spirit
- God’s Spirit, who indwells each who trust in Jesus, is the pledge and provider of all these glorious truths
- and it comes when you believe—“having begun by the Spirit...”
- and now Paul asks: are you now being perfected by the flesh?
- you’re saved by faith, but you think you have to do all the work after that?
- no, it is the Holy Spirit before, during, and after your conversion
- “He who began a good work in you...” that’s God the Holy Spirit
- and what will this same Spirit do? He will bring it to completion
- not you, not me, but the Holy Spirit of God
- our salvation, beginning, middle and end is all of God

Times marches on and so must we, to Question #4

IV. WHY? — v. 4

- **Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Galatians 3:4 ESV**
- Today’s English Version of the Bible actually translates the word “suffer” more accurately for us: “Did all your experience mean nothing at all?”
- you all heard me preach the gospel to you, Paul says
- you all had the same Spirit of God working upon your hearts to receive it
- you believed, repented of your sins and then began to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ
- did all of that which you experienced mean nothing
- why would you throw it all away?
- if you go back to the law as your means of salvation, all this is pointless
- why would you do this? Why would you be so foolish?
- you have now known joy and peace, forgiveness and freedom from guilt
- why would you turn your back on that, on Christ Himself?
- do this and you will lose it all, but why would you even consider doing that?
- stop and do not be fooled, tricked, bewitched, taken in by these false teachers

And finally, the fifth question...

V. HOW? — v. 5

- Paul wraps up his argument through his fifth question

• **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— Galatians 3:5 ESV**

- the answer is now so obvious that this is nearly a rhetorical question needing no verbal reply
- you received the Holy Spirit by faith
- you continue in the Spirit by faith
- your experience was one of faith
- this very same Spirit testifies with your spirit of the truth of these things
- all these things happened because you believed the gospel

Just a quick note here about the working of miracles Paul mentions

- in the book of Acts, when the Word is preached, it comes with power
- this was seen many times with wonderful signs and seals
- **So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. Acts 14:3 ESV**
- Paul reminds these Galatians that such happened among them when he preached the gospel
- God attested the reality of the truth of the gospel by granting signs and wonders and miracles
- this “new thing”—the gospel regarding Jesus Christ—was given God’s stamp of authenticity, authority, and power through such signs
- however, these great things were done by the apostles and these great signs ceased with the apostles
- one time, John Calvin, the great Reformer in Geneva, Switzerland was asked
- a Romanist taunted him that he did not have any miracles to confirm his teaching
- to which Calvin responded by saying that he did not need any
- his message was from the Bible and had already been confirmed by the miracles performed by the apostles
- this is what Paul claims: the Spirit confirmed his message
- and here, in this question in v. 5, he reminds them: do you remember?
- do you remember how you have received the Holy Spirit?
- did you receive Him by your working out of the law? By your grunted-out obedience?
- no! It was through the preaching of Christ, which you received by faith alone

Conclusion —

One of the great confessions of faith, the 1689 Baptist Confession says this

“...the principal acts of saving faith focus directly on Christ—accepting, receiving, and resting upon Him alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.”

- once saved: justified, adopted and sanctified, we are to depend upon Him and the Spirit that is in us for all our growth in grace
- the Spirit is working in you right now, as a Christian, applying the death of Jesus & His resurrection power to your life
- this is how you die to sin and become more like Christ
- this is all by grace through faith
- but it is not a passive faith: you don’t just sit there like a lump and merely believe
- no, you work out your salvation, as we’re told in Phil 2.12–13
- and you work it, live it, follow it, diligently keep Christ’s words because it is God, through His Holy Spirit work out His will in you

So, for all here who have believed by grace through faith

- don’t fall back upon some ritual, some tradition as the assurance that you are saved

- look to Christ and to Him only and always
- call out to God's Spirit, then, to keep working this out in your life every single day
- and if you have either fallen backward into that bewitchery or have never come to Christ for His salvation...come to Him today!