

Living By Faith

Study #6 Galatians 3:1-5

by Bob Burrridge ©2024

Living as a godly person here on earth during this time before eternal glory isn't easy.

In the first place, we're **not yet perfect or complete**.

Our fallen souls are **tempted to do** what we shouldn't do, and to **neglect** what we should do.

Second, we live in a world saturated by **distortions of what's right and true**. There are **bad examples** to follow.

It's filled with **theories** based on **bad information**, and generations of **excuse-making**.

We're **urged to run like lemmings after** what everybody else **values and does**.

There's a **battle** we need to fight not only against what's **around us**, but also against **what's in us**.

So how do we **get the victory?** or know we're **doing the right thing?**

God didn't redeem us, then leave us to figure it out by ourselves, or to win the battles on our own.

God gave us his written word. It was **recorded long ago** to **guide** us and to **comfort** us.

It was **preserved providentially** by the blood of martyrs so that it's **here for us today**.

It was **translated** into our language by scholars gifted by God, and **made available** for us to read, study, and learn.

God gave us a living Savior and the Holy Spirit.

They **help and empower** us to **live** by the *promises and principles* in that book we call the **Bible**.

He also *regenerates* his children, and gives them *faith* to **trust that word**.

But there are enemies of God's plan.

Satan struck us **first in Eden**, when we were all **made defective** by the fall into sin.

But once we're redeemed -- it doesn't mean the enemy's going to leave us alone.

Way back in the first century AD, there were some who **came to Galatia** to **derail the gospel** if they could.

But **God raised up the Apostle Paul** to **write this letter** to expose their attack.

God preserved that letter for us to read and study because the **basic principles** still apply **today**.

In chapter 3 of that letter Paul gets right to the issue:

Verse 1 begins with, "**O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? ...**"

Someone was deceiving them, luring them down the wrong path.

The word translated "*bewitched*" is *βασκαίνω* (bas-kaino).

It means to *draw someone to follow them* by **deceit** or by **impressing** them in some way.

These deceivers **weren't atheists** or **pagans**. They were **religious leaders, Judaizers**.

They claimed to be Christians, but were **diluting the Gospel** by **combining** it with a **confused view of God's law**.

The Judaizers misunderstood the purpose of the laws God gave Israel.

They **failed to see** how **God's law** always **pointed toward Christ**.

They wanted to ignore **the changes** brought about by the Savior's life and death.

From the time of **Abraham** to the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Circumcision was the **sign** of belonging to God's **covenant people**.

Only the **males** were circumcised to illustrate the **representative nature** of God's covenants.

The males **represented the families** they would one day lead.

But **after our Savior finished the work** God promised in Eden,

Baptism became the new sign of belonging to the Covenant People of God.

Both genders receive the sign, because **Jesus is now our representative** fulfilling the promise.

From the time of **Moses** to the resurrection of Jesus,

Passover was the **ultimate sacrifice**. It **represented** what the coming **Messiah** would do.

A lamb was slain in place of the death of the first-born son of each family back in Egypt.

After the work of our Savior, **the Lord's Supper** represented his **final sacrifice for sin**.

Jesus, the Lamb of God, was slain in place of the eternal death we each deserve.

To continue to require the **Passover** is a **denial** that it's purpose was **fulfilled in Christ**.

All the **ritual cleansings** in the Levitical laws were **set aside** when **real cleansing** took place.

Israel wasn't the exclusive Covenant Community any more.

Instead of marking out just the descendants of **Jacob**, non-Jews, **Gentiles**, are **included**.

But the Judaizers were **pressuring the Christians** in Galatia to **force Gentile converts** to **submit** to the now **fulfilled Jewish Ceremonial Laws**.

Paul asked the believers in Galatia to **explain why they were being taken in** by the **Judaizers**.

Galatians 3:1-5

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**--

The Galatians had **seen the power of Christ** in the lives of the **Apostles** and in their **own lives**. So Paul pointed out the **absolute foolishness of being deceived** by these **other teachings**.

The **life** they found in **Christ** *didn't come* by the **rituals**.

It came by the message they received by faith in **what God had been illustrating** in the rituals.

They learned that **Jesus** was **the sacrifice** all the **other sacrifices** pointed toward.

They received **the Holy Spirit** sent from **Jesus Christ** and **God the Father**.

This new life **wasn't** found in the **work** of the **priests** who served **before the Gospel** came to them.

This passage has been confused by some.

Confusion is one of the **primary tactics** of the **enemy** of God's plan.

The most common **targets of confusion** are these **two key ideas** of **law** and **faith**.

First, there's a lot of confusion about the law of God.

The word "**law**" is a very **general word** the way we use it in day-to-day conversations.

We pass **civil laws** to **punish crime** and **preserve public safety**.

These laws **apply general principles to specific situations**.

To keep our roads and pedestrians safe, we have **traffic laws**.

To protect our lives and possessions we have various **criminal and contract laws**.

Nations agree on certain **international laws** to protect their borders and security.

Sometimes we talk about the **law of gravity**, or **Newton's laws of motion**.

These are **mathematical descriptions** of how physical things behave.

They follow **rules built into creation**. As we confirm them we call them **laws**.

We also talk about **general principles** as if they were laws.

There's the **law of supply and demand** in economics, and various **laws of sociology**.

The **Bible** sometimes uses the word **law** in these **same basic ways**.

You have to **look at the context** in each case to see how the word's being used.

When it mentions **God's Laws**, it may be about **God's commandment's** or **principles at work** in his creation.

There are **general principles**: In **Romans 7:23** Paul mentions conflicting **laws** he found to be **at work in him**.

He's referring to the **lust of his body**, and the principles at work **in his mind**.

There he calls them both **laws**, or **principles** at odds with one another.

Earlier in the same chapter Paul tells how the **moral laws of God** exposed his sin.

As an **example**, he mentioned God's commandment against **coveting**.

These laws are the **moral behaviors** God says are **good**. The violation of them is **sin**.

Paul is **not** saying all these **laws** or **principles** have **stopped applying** to all humans.

These revealed **general principles** were **built into the universe** or into **human nature from the beginning**.

Sinful things in the Old Testament **weren't now becoming good**, and good things becoming bad.

He **can't mean** that **before the ten commandments** it was OK to **covet things God didn't give us**.

It **doesn't mean** that before Sinai the **other 9 Commandments** weren't in effect either.

It's **always been wrong** to worship other God's, to make images of God,

to use his name carelessly, to labor on the Creation Sabbath day,

to defy God appointed authority, to murder, commit adultery, steal, or lie.

Here in **Galatians 3** he's talking about the regulations of the *Levitical Codes* given to Israel at Sinai.

This is clear from **verse 17**.

There he says that **the law** he's talking about **didn't come until 430 years after Abraham**.

That was **when God gave the Levitical Regulations** to Israel after the Exodus.

The "*works of the law*" Paul's talking about performing the **rituals** given to Israel by Moses.

The ritual laws of the Priesthood were about how God *redeems us*, not moral principles.

Their purpose was to help Israel **anticipate** the coming **sacrifice of Jesus**.

They **pointed** to the **solution to the sin problem** the moral laws revealed in them.

And they made God's people **stand out as a holy nation** pre-figuring the special nature of Christ's church.

They were **never intended** to apply to **all people all the time**.

But the **Judaizers** wanted to **force Gentiles to keep the Levitical Codes** and rules of the Rabbis.

Secondly, Paul makes a *contrast* between these **works of law** and the "**hearing of faith**."

The word *faith* is the **normal word** often simply translated by the word *trust*. (πιστις)

When you have faith it's **always faith in something**. It has an *object* you trust **in**.

In this case the **object** of our trust should be *God's promises and revealed truth*.

Before Christ's birth, God redeemed believers by their **trust in the promise** of the *coming Savior*.

After his death, believers trust in **Christ's finished work** on the cross.

So in *every era* of history, **saving faith is trust in God's promise** that the **Messiah** removes sin.

We're redeemed by *his work*, never by our **own acts** or **accomplishments**.

We **don't need a priesthood** to do things **beyond** what **Christ has already done**.

We **don't have to worry** that you **haven't done enough** to get to heaven.

Jesus did it all for us -- that's the *gospel*.

So **now** we live by **faith in that finished work**.

We live as if we **really trust God** for **everything he says** in his word.

We **tell the truth** and **act kindly** because **God tells us** that it's **always best** --

and **by his grace** we **believe it** and **strive to obey** his loving counsel.

Biblical faith is a trust in the **things God made known** -- his *law* in that **general sense**.

His **moral law** exposes that we're **lost in sin without hope** -- except in the Savior.

And it shows us **how to then live thankfully** after God redeems us.

A study of the **ritual law** shows how **God's substitute would come** to pay the price of our sins.

But we **don't keep those ritual now** as if the Messiah hadn't yet come.

There's **no act of the church**, or **ritual** we can take part in, that **takes away our sins**.

It was **all accomplished in Jesus Christ** -- just as God had always **promised**.

There's a **wonderful blessing** in this implanted faith.

If our **confidence** that **what God said and did** is **true** - it **gives us a sure hope**.

As God's children, we **confidently trust** what **God says**, and therefore we want to **live by his promises**.

Trusting and obeying are the *results* of Grace. They aren't the *cause* of it.

When we trust in God's word about the substitute death of Jesus Christ for our sins,

we're given all the **comforts and assurances** God promises in his gracious Covenant.

Today the Judaizers are long gone, but the confusion is still with us.

The **fallen heart** still wants to believe that a person can **earn God's favor by his own efforts**.

That's the heart of Satan's strategy.

He wants to **confuse God's truth and promise**, just as the Judaizers did in old Galatia.

When you worry about doing enough to earn salvation, you **deny** the fact of your **fall into sin**.

The **Bible says** that when you fell in Adam, you **lost all desire and ability** to truly glorify God.

And it makes it clear that the **debt** is so great, **no one** is able to **pay it off**.

You also **deny** the *reason* **Jesus had to come to die** in your place.

If you could earn salvation, then the **suffering and death of the Savior**

was just a **frivolous object lesson** and **example of humility** -- nothing more.

These poisonous teachings contradict everything the Bible says.

People have always tried to **make up a religion** that *earns* God's forgiveness.

That's what Paul calls *false religion* -- a replacement for the *true gospel*.

- The **fallen heart** thinks that by doing **charitable things** it removes **guilt**.
- Some believe that by **simply partaking** of the **Sacraments** it magically take their sins away.
- Others think that their **decision** is what **convinces God** to save them.

In reality **all these** are *evidences* of **God's grace** at work. **They don't make it happen.**

Like the Judaizers of ancient times, these false ways **claim** to be *Christian*.

But they are it's **exact opposite**.

They **trust in human works** to make them righteous in God's eyes.

It's **not** by the **works of law** that we become Christians.

It's when the **promises of God** revealed in the law are **heard and trusted**, that the heart is **transformed**.

And that's a wonderful work of **Grace all by itself**.

While some **add obedience to the law** to **faith** in the Gospel,

others go to the **opposite extreme** and think you can **have faith** while **rejecting all of God's law**.

That's **not** what's **taught here** either.

Paul **isn't** telling the Galatians that all of **God's law is outdated** and has **expired**.

He **doesn't** promote **faith** as some **general optimism** that replaces God's **moral commandments**.

He's **not** saying that the **entire Old Testament only** has **value** to the Jews.

He's reminding them that **the Bible never taught salvation by the law**.

He points out that the **law shows what's right**, but that **you can't walk that path** because you're lost.

The **law exposes sin** and the rituals **point the way** to the **sacrifice of Jesus Christ**.

That's what it **always did**, and that's what God's law **still does**.

Without God's word exposing sin and **promising the Savior**, your **faith isn't in the right thing**.

The **faith** God's grace stirs in your heart is a **trust in all that God revealed**.

But that means you need to **really trust in what God says** in his word.

You **trust that** his way to **manage your home and family** is the **best** way for them.

You **trust that** his **moral principles** are the **only right guide** for your thoughts and entertainment.

You **trust** his **economic principles** for how you do your work, and manage your money.

You **trust** his organization of **the church** as the right way to worship and grow as a spiritual family.

And you **trust** his directions for your **personal life**.

You **make time** to seriously **pray** and study the **Scriptures**.

You **take worship seriously** at every level:

you worship him alone in **your thoughts** all through every day

you worship him as a **family**, and when you're called to worship in the **congregation**.

Real faith means **you have faith in God's promises as the only way your guilt can be forgiven**.

Satan wants you to think you need to **fix your guilt** by your **own good deeds and efforts**,

or by the efforts of **priests and rituals**.

Instead, you need to **trust completely** in the **work of Jesus Christ alone** to make you right with God.

Many of your friends and neighbors are **deceived** and **think they have to earn forgiveness**.

You have the **liberating gospel** that can **set them free** and **change their lives**.

You know enough to **point them to God's truth** and to **rescue them from false religion**.

Don't let them put their **eternal hope in lies** that advance Satan's agenda.

Be humbly persistent with them as you **live for Christ** and **explain** what he accomplished.

Sincerely **invite them to worship** with you, and to **grow** as part of your church family.

Pray for them, and **let them know you care** about them.

It's **not** by **cathedrals, rituals, rallies, or personal efforts** that anyone **enters the Kingdom of Christ**.

It's by a **humble but sincere trust** in the **finished work of the Savior**.

This is the foundation of real biblical Christianity.

It's **your job and calling** to be an **agent of God** on earth, an **agent of change** in the lives of others.

Trust in the promises of Scripture, and **live as if you really trust** what God says there.

There are a lot of **religious people trying real hard** to get right with God.

But they **don't really know God**, or **what he's promised** them.

They go to **church**, read the **Bible** now and then, try to **do good**, and they **pray**.

But the **good news**, the gospel, is that **though God requires perfection**,

Jesus Christ came to be perfect in our place.

Yet when the Holy Spirit moves us to **trust in this payment for sin** it *changes us inside*.

It **enables** believers to **do** what they **couldn't before** and to **really enjoy life**.

Even **through the hard times** they can **rest** in the **assurances of their Living Savior**.

Our church-going, Bible-reading, praying, and serving take on a **new and truly rewarding dimension**.

It's **not your effort** that brings the **victory over sin** and it's **depressive consequences**.

It's the **finished work of the Savior** that does all that.

Living God's way is the only method that works for living here in God's world.

It **begins by resting in the Savior's work of Grace**, rather than in any **rituals or rules** you keep.

The Gospel is truly liberating. **Don't neglect** this vital fact in your life.

Don't keep it a secret from people around you.

Don't be like the foolish Galatians who were so **easily deceived** by convincing popular teachings.

Put your **trust in God's promises** through Christ, and **bravely & consistently live as he tells you to**.

Note: Bible quotations are from the *English Standard Version* unless otherwise noted.

Galatians 3:1-8 ESV

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."

Greek

1. ὦ ἀνόητοι Γαλάται, τίς ὑμᾶς ἐβάσκανε τῇ ἀληθείᾳ μὴ πείθεσθε, οἷς κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη ἐν ὑμῖν ἐσταυρωμένος;
2. τοῦτο μόνον θέλω μαθεῖν ἀφ' ὑμῶν· ἐξ ἔργων νόμου τὸ Πνεῦμα ἐλάβετε ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως;
3. οὕτως ἀνόητοί ἐστε; ἐναρξάμενοι πνεύματι νῦν σαρκὶ ἐπιτελεῖσθε;
4. τοσαῦτα ἐπάθετε εἰκῆ; εἶ γε καὶ εἰκῆ.
5. ὁ οὖν ἐπιχορηγῶν ὑμῖν τὸ Πνεῦμα καὶ ἐνεργῶν δυνάμεις ἐν ὑμῖν, ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως;
6. καθὼς Ἀβραὰμ ἐπίστευσε τῷ Θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην.
7. Γινώσκετε ἄρα ὅτι οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, οὗτοί εἰσιν υἱοὶ Ἀβραάμ.
8. προϊδοῦσα δὲ ἡ γραφὴ ὅτι ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοῖ τὰ ἔθνη ὁ Θεὸς, προεηγγελίσατο τῷ Ἀβραάμ ὅτι ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.