

Galatians: Free in Christ

From Faith to Faith

Galatians 3:1-5

Faith is not only the beginning of the Christian life. It's the beginning, middle and end. Paul's enemies had no problem including faith in their religious system; they just wanted to add the works of the law to be truly right with God. Paul can't believe the Galatians are falling for it (v1). They received the Spirit, suffered, grew, and witnessed miracles all by faith (vv2-5). A trusting relationship in God alone is oxygen for soul, and without it we suffocate.

The Object of Faith

Complacency and pride are dangerous sins. It's entirely possible for true believers to be led into false doctrine and practice. Paul is surprised the Galatians are so easily led astray, and he takes action to snap them out of it (v1). Being churchy and around others with strong faith is not the same thing as being rooted in Christ ourselves. The word "foolish" could be rendered mindless, witless, or as J.B. Phillips translates it, "you dear idiots of Galatia." The Galatians started well but were drifting and needed Paul to call them stupid. We also need courageous Christians in our lives willing to speak. Paul clearly loves them but also expects them to return to what they know and have seen: Jesus Christ who was clearly portrayed among them as crucified (v1). Jesus was bill-boarded in front of them in the preached word. The issue is not faith *or* works; Paul has no problem telling them to "obey the truth". The issue is justification by faith alone, the only way to be right with God and therefore the only foundation to build works upon. The crucified Jesus lives with scars on His hands and feet, and to look at Him, forget, and try to add anything to His sacrifice is profoundly foolish. He is the object of our faith, the faith that justifies. To look away from Him is to turn to all sorts of whims, fads and otherwise good things distorted. Christian idolize missions, tongues, small groups, mercy ministry, liturgy, and the Westminster Confession (of Faith!). Christ and Him crucified must be the only center.

The Spirit of Faith

Paul says he only has one question, but after wondering if they could be so foolish, he gets on a roll and asks three more (vv2-5). Each rhetorical question demonstrates that the Spirit worked in their lives through faith and nothing else.

1. In the first place, did they receive the Spirit because finally they achieved the right amount of law-keeping? Is the Spirit like the bell at the top of the High Striker that rings top when you finally hit it hard enough (v2)? Or were you simply sinning as usual when God gave you ears to hear? Were they so foolish as to get this question wrong even as he asks it (v3)?
2. Having begun with the Spirit, did they make progress without Him (v3)? If you need a car to get from Seattle to Cle Elum, are you good on foot

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from Cle Elum to New York? We are justified by faith *and* sanctified by faith. We continue the same way we began.

3. Did they endure suffering for nothing (v4)? Was not *that* the Spirit's work, or are they willing to throw it away?
4. Did God do miracles among them because they kept the Sabbath and got circumcised? Or was it because they believed God could and trusted Him? We need to be careful to trust God to do what He says He will do, not what lame exegetes claim He will do (e.g. Mal. 3:10).

The Life of Faith

Someone said being saved by faith alone is a great doctrine to die by, but a bad one to live with. The fear is that without the higher life available to work, what will motivate people? Paul has shown that through faith the Galatians were alive in the Spirit, grew in holiness, made it through hardship and witnessed wonderful things. Two things happen when we walk by faith. First, by faith we receive the Spirit of adoption who causes us to call God our Father (Rom. 8:15). You don't become more of a son or daughter of your parents by doing good works. To think this way is to reveal you don't understand family. Children who do understand really can't over-give to their parents because what can equal life? But people who are trying to *really* become children of God through works will only perform until that status is attained. Works done from selfish ambition rather than gratitude have a ceiling, and one in a low, suffocating cave. The second thing faith does is get our eyes off ourselves and onto Christ. When this happens we work the way we should. It's impossible to live fully and still keep score of how we are doing because to do so is distracting from the task at hand. The man serving his wife with full attention can't be thinking, "Wow, look at me serving." Works righteousness is lame and unrighteous. The joy of self-forgetfulness is single-minded devotion, and it's a quality of life borne out of knowing and trusting God. It is the gift of faith.