

GOD'S CHILDREN MUST LIVE BY FAITH

GALATIANS 3:1-5

M.I. IN ORDER TO LIVE HEALTHY CHRISTIAN LIVES, WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT WE CAN ONLY PLEASE GOD BY EXERCISING OUR FAITH.

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We Were Saved By Faith.

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God's Children Must Live By Faith

Galatians 3:1-5

Most scholars think this begins a new section that ends at 4:31. Last time we were together, we saw that Paul argued against the legalists by using philosophical and theological arguments. In today's text, he is going to argue anecdotally using plain old common sense. The language and the arguments are simple and the Galatians could easily follow them by connecting them to their own life experiences.

As I have said before in our studies, I think that when we first become Christians, we understand that we must come to Christ in faith. We realize the futility of being righteous or acceptable to God on our own. At the time of our conversion, we recognize that only Jesus and His work on the cross makes us right with God.

However, somewhere along the way, we tend to forget about living in faith. We start to think that since we are growing as Christians, we somehow have come to earn and deserve God's love. We start to do things on the basis of our own strength, talents, and abilities. We recognize that we were saved by faith, but the Bible clearly says that God's children will live by faith.

If you're anything like me, we expect others to live by faith, but oftentimes we ourselves don't live by faith. Let me give you an example. You all remember the church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough. (How tough was it?)

I have to admit that since I was a rookie pastor, I sometimes contributed to their delinquency. I had one woman that came to church week after week after week telling me that her husband said he was going to kill her if she continued to come to church.

I would condescendingly respond, "Yes, yes my child. I will continue to pray for you and your husband. Have faith. The Lord will watch over you and protect you."

"Oh yes," she said, "He has kept me safe thus far, ... only ..."

A little impatient now I said, "Only what?"

"Well," she said, "now he is saying that if I keep coming to your church, he's going to kill you."

I said, "Maybe it's time for you to check out that little Baptist church on the other side of town."

I think that it's easy for us to tell others to live by faith, but somewhere along the way, I think most of us forget how to live by faith. When challenges to our faith appear, they often catch us off guard and leave us confused.

As we start to grow as Christians, we start to get better at keeping religious rules. We read our Bibles, we come to church, to prayer meeting, and all sorts of church functions. We stop going to places we used to and we stop hanging around with our pre-conversion crowd. We start to do many things on the basis of our gifts, talents, and abilities. And we start to feel pretty good about ourselves.

That sounds good, and some of it really is. However, we must never forget to live by faith. At the end of the day, no matter how good we think we were; we must to come before God in faith and acknowledge that He and He alone is the One Who makes up for all our lack. No matter how good we become, we are always still far short of God's righteous demands. Only Christ can make up the difference. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **IN ORDER TO LIVE HEALTHY CHRISTIAN LIVES, WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT WE CAN ONLY PLEASE GOD BY EXERCISING OUR FAITH.**

Even though I don't think we should imitate Paul in the way he argues, the sad thing is that I feel too comfortable in his type of arguing. He has told his opponents to go to hell, later he will tell them to castrate one another, and here he is going to ask a series of rhetorical questions he already knows the answers to. I am ashamed to say that I really feel at home with his use of sarcasm. I'm sure a lot of it comes from my Italian roots. In Italian circles, the person who talks the fastest, loudest, and most sarcastic, wins the argument. We stand around calling each other stupid. In my house, you could see Paul's method of arguing in this text often. For example, let's say I told Maribeth and Joe they probably shouldn't go out because the roads are slick. But because they're adults, they choose to go. The next day they may say, "Dad, last night we had an accident." Then my joy begins. I ask, "Did I tell you last night that the roads were slick and you shouldn't go out?" They answer yes. "Did you choose to go out anyway?" They answer yes. "So you made a conscious decision to take your car out in those icy conditions." They answer yes. "Then it was no accident. You chose to wreck your car, ... thank you very much," I say as I point my finger to the air, and then end it by saying, "Morons."

That is not a good parenting model and it is not good for families to problem solve like this. My model is a model of sin and defectiveness. Please don't imitate our method. Nevertheless, that's the way Paul argues in this passage.

I. HOW WERE YOU SAVED? (VS 1-2)

We Were Saved By Faith.

First of all he starts out by asking them how they were saved in verses 1-2. The answer of course is **WE WERE SAVED BY FAITH**. The more I read this passage, the more Italian it sounds. In verse one, Paul talks about the evil eye. I don't know how many cultures have this concept, but the Italians have this curse they put on one another called the evil eye. They kind of stare cockeyed at their victim. They close their fist, then stick out the index finger and the little finger (kind of like the heavy metal sign or the "hook 'em horns" sign), point it at their victim, rotate it back and forth saying, "Mal occhio! Mal occhio!") This is supposed to cast a spell on the person you are cursing. It can make them sterile or have all sorts of other effects. Oftentimes Italians wear the horn to ward off any evil eye spells cast their way. Also crude sexual gestures and crude sexual language can ward off the effects of getting the evil eye.

Paul had gone to the different cities in Galatia and preached the simple Gospel that we are saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. They believed and established churches. Now just a matter of months later, Jewish believers were trying to tell them that they would not be fully Christian unless they submitted to circumcision, Jewish dietary laws, and other ceremonial laws. They were now confused and actually started to buy into these lies.

Paul starts out verse 1 by saying, "You insane Galatians! Who has cast the evil eye spell on you?" The word "foolish" means without reason, without logic, or without knowledge. He is in essence saying, "Have you lost your minds? Are you in a trance? Have you all gone mad?"

Look how Paul goes on and plays on the evil eye concept. He says that he painted a verbal picture so clear that they could actually see Jesus on the cross. Look where it says that Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed. That word for portrayed in ancient Greek referred to a publicly posted placard. It was like our modern day billboards that you see along the highways. The Bible scholar William Barclay noted that when children went bad, their father would post one of these billboards stating that he was no longer responsible for their children's debts.

Paul is saying that Jesus on the cross was a billboard from God saying that He would be responsible for all our debts. If Paul would have had a DVD, he could have said, "I showed you the film The Passion of The Christ. You saw how Jesus was the whole answer to your sin and

your alienation from God. God's answer to sin is not doing religious stuff. God's complete and total answer to sin was Christ dying on the cross for you and for me. Jesus is the answer to all our problems in life not religion.

He called them bewitched, enchanted, mad, irrational, and insane. Now he is going to show how clouded their thinking is in verse 2. Here he gets a little more sarcastic. He says, "I would like to learn just one thing from you." In essence he is saying, "Inform me: enlighten me. How were you saved?" When Paul talks about receiving the Spirit, he is describing the salvation experience.

I would just like to take an aside here. After Peter declared Jesus to be the Promised Jewish Messiah, Jesus said this to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19 / NIV).

In Acts Jesus told the disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8 / NIV).

On the day of Pentecost, Jews received the Holy Spirit and began speaking in tongues, "They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:3-4 / NIV).

That was Jerusalem in Judea. Then on to Samaria where half-breed Jews lived. Philip went there to preach to the Samaritans. The Samaritans believed in the word. Peter and John went to Samaria. "Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:17).

And then on to the ends of the earth. In religious terms this would be the Gentiles of the world. God directed Peter to go to a Gentile named Cornelius. While Peter was in the middle of his presentation God interrupted him. "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, 'Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days" (Acts 10:44-48 / NIV).

Did you notice that Peter was there to unlock the door to receiving the Holy Spirit at each new people group. And did you notice that being saved is the way to receive the Holy Spirit. Further, it seems that when the people in Galatia received Paul's message and placed their faith in Jesus, they too received the Holy Spirit. And it appears that they probably manifested this by speaking in tongues or other miracles transpiring.

Here is the reason this is so important. Jews believed the message of Jesus and were saved. They received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. Half-breed Jews believed in Jesus, were saved, received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. Non-Jews believed in the Gospel, were saved, received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. The importance of this was that no one could doubt the sincerity or the salvation of any other group. They were all saved simply by placing their faith in the Gospel message and giving their lives to Christ.

Jews didn't receive salvation through keeping religious laws. Samaritans didn't receive salvation through keeping religious laws. In fact they were prohibited in participating in the religious worship in Jerusalem. And Gentiles didn't even know the religious laws of Judaism.

Look at verse 2 again. After Paul tells them to enlighten him, the next phrase literally reads, "By works of the law did you receive the Holy Spirit or by believing what you heard?" In other

words, half way through the phrase they would have to say no. "By works of the law did you receive the Holy Spirit?" The answer would be no. "Or by believing what you heard were you saved?" The answer would be yes, by believing what we have heard. That phrase "believing what you heard" is also interesting. In Greek it is simply two words, "hearing faithful." It could mean hearing that leads to faith. It could mean faithful hearing. There is not that much difference. The meaning is that they heard the message that Christ died for them. Their response was to place their faith in Jesus and what He had done for them on the cross.

This is a huge point we have to make. No one is ever saved by being a good person. In our culture, we tend to think that bad people go to hell and good people go to heaven. The problem with that assessment is not that it is incorrect so much that its evaluation of good is wrong. Good people go to heaven but none of us are good according to God's standards of righteousness. But the other part of the equation is wrong also. In fact, everyone that goes to heaven is bad. We are all evil. It is only the blood of Christ that gains us entrance to heaven. To forget that for even a minute can cause us confusion. The point is plain and simple. **WE WERE SAVED BY FAITH.**

II. HOW HAVE YOU BEEN GROWING? (VS 3-4)

We Live And Grow By Faith.

In verses 3-4 Paul asks the Galatians, "How have you been growing?" His point is this. Not only are we saved by faith **WE LIVE AND GROW BY FAITH.** Again he starts out this section, "Are you insane, have you lost your minds, are you all mad?" I want you to catch the flavor of this verse. I tried to think of this concept in English, but I couldn't come up with it. Here Paul is comparing the origin and the completion. In Greek they have the concepts to express this. The Greeks talk about the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Alpha is the first letter of their alphabet and Omega is the last letter. Here Paul uses the common word for origin or beginning and the common word for ending or completion. The phrase attaining your goal is one word in Greek. It means bringing something to completion, perfection, or its natural end. In other words, Paul is talking about the event in which they first became Christians and now their progress towards their completion, that time that they will become all that Christ has determined them to be. Our goal, our end, our final destination is to spend eternity with Christ in heaven. There we will be completely perfect. We will be like Christ. Let me throw out a few theological words that define the salvation process. The first part of salvation is referred to as justification. We have already defined this. This is a legal declaration on God's part. When we placed our faith in Christ and accepted His death on behalf of our sins, God declared us to be "Not Guilty." Our status was changed from enemies of God to children of God. As Christians, justification is in the past. In other words, the day we received Jesus into our hearts, we were saved, past tense.

The thing that becomes evident rather quickly is that even though we were saved, we are still a long way from being perfect. As we grow and mature in Christ, we refer to this stage of salvation as sanctification. In other words, we are in the process of being saved. We are being made more holy and perfect day by day.

However, this process will not be totally completed this side of the grave. When we die, when we see Jesus face to face, we will be made completely perfect in an instance. In this sense salvation will be in the future. We call this event glorification. So the salvation process consists of justification, sanctification, and glorification. We were saved, we are in the process of being saved. And we will be saved. The salvation process begins with justification. It will end with glorification. That is our goal as believers. Our goal is to become complete and perfect in

Christ. That will finally happen when we get to heaven. In the meantime, we are working at this goal.

Now here is Paul's point here. He has just proved to them that their entrance into this process took place by faith in Jesus. In other words, their new position in Christ had its origin in faith. The work was done by God's Holy Spirit.

Further, we know that the final stage of glorification will take place by God's Holy Spirit transforming us in heaven. If that's the case, then why should we think that our sanctification process, our growing and maturing in our salvation be any different? Look at the end of verse 3. The NIV and NLT use the phrase "by human effort." The NASB and the ESV use the phrase "by the flesh." Even though the NIV and NLT capture the meaning, they miss the parallel. Paul is saying, "After entering the salvation process by the Spirit, why are you now trying to be perfected by the flesh?" Spirit refers to the work of God or our efforts submitted to and empowered by God. Flesh refers to human effort apart from the empowerment of God.

We entered the kingdom of God through faith. We must journey through this life the same way, by faith. Just as God accomplished our justification by sending Jesus to redeem us, He has sent the Holy Spirit to live in us to sanctify us. That doesn't mean that we don't try to be holy or try to keep God's commands. It means that we must depend on God's Holy Spirit to guide the way and to empower us to grow, mature, and complete all the good works God has prepared in advance for us to do. And one day God will complete the good work He started in each one of us the day we became his children by faith. There should be no shift in our outlook. We were saved by God through faith. We are being saved by God through faith. We will be saved by God through faith. We must live by faith. There is no other way.

In verse 4 Paul will demonstrate the irrationality of a shift in theology. Here is what happens to most of us. We are like reformed drug addicts, reformed smokers, skinny ex-fat people, etc. We start reading our Bibles, going to church and prayer meetings, and start doing all sorts of holy things. As we find success in our spiritual pursuits, we forget that all the progress we have made is simply a result of God's grace and God's doing. We start to think that we are pretty good and we start to judge others who are not believers, or who are not enjoying as much spiritual growth and progress as we are. You see, a very easy test we can self-administer is to ask if we judge other people? If we do, then it is pretty safe to say that we have shifted our theology. Do we somehow think that we are better or more acceptable in God's sight? Do we think we are smarter? Do we think we are somehow more deserving of God's grace? You see, at some point, we all forget and somehow think that because we follow the rules, we are more acceptable or deserving.

Here is how insane that all is. The first phrase in verse 4 can be read in two ways. It could be read, "Have you experienced so much for nothing?" or it could be read, "Have you suffered so much for nothing?" Most modern translations use suffering. In the ancient world, persecution usually followed conversion to Christianity. Families would disinherit members who embraced Christianity. Many husbands divorced wives who became Christians. Many lost their jobs and money. It was not a popular thing to do. Besides, the normal growth process for Christians is not easy. Think about how much effort it takes to conquer sin in our lives. Think about the mental anguish we go through trying to defeat bad habits. If you are authentically growing as a Christian, you find out very quickly how painful it is. We have to make decisions that make us unpopular with those around us. It takes a lot of work. However, we always realize that every inch of ground we take for Christ, is only given to us by God's grace. To start thinking that we can grow and mature on our own is a bad shift in theology. It puts us back at odds with God. And yet, my guess is, if you are anything like me, ... if you were to take some serious time to examine your day, you'll discover that most of the time we operate unconscious of God and certainly not depending on God. It's a scary exercise to see how much of our day was spent doing things without depending on God. I'm hoping that you are at least a little better than I am because when trying to do things without thinking about God, I'm insane, I'm mad, I have

got to be out of my mind. Jesus said that without Him, we can do nothing. That's probably a good verse to commit to memory. In John 15:5 Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (NIV). Let's just review what Paul has been saying. We were saved by faith and in our new lives as believers **WE LIVE AND GROW BY FAITH.**

III. HOW HAS GOD BEEN WORKING? (VS 5)

God Does Everything In Our Lives By Faith.

In other words, Paul has hammered home the fact that our salvation from beginning to end has been, is, and will be God's work. The results of salvation belong to God alone. That's why in verse 5 he hammers home the concept by asking them, "How has God been working?" His point is this. **GOD DOES EVERYTHING IN OUR LIVES BY FAITH.** God's work is described in the first half of verse 5. First of all, let's put this in the context of the early Christian church. As we said before, it seems that as each new group of people entered the church, as an outward demonstration that they had indeed received salvation through faith, God manifested the indwelling of His Holy Spirit by the manifestation of tongues and other miracles. We don't know if every individual person received the gift of tongues but we do know that Paul, the other Apostles, and many other people in the church performed miracles and prophesied in the Name of Jesus. Paul's point was this. Every one that was saved and became a Christian, whether Jew or Gentile, Free or Slave, Male or Female, became a Christian as a supernatural act of grace by God. And there were no miracles and manifestations of God's Holy Spirit among them until after they became believers or at least came in contact with one of God's children.

I have been here at Devon for 17 years and I have seen God do many miraculous things among you and through you. If we were honest, we would always have to admit that whatever happened was clearly done by God. None of us could ever stand up and take the credit. Several people have asked me to write about our experience here at Devon Church. Since we are one of the only truly multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural churches that are functioning in a healthy manner, people often ask me how we did it. My response is always the same, "I don't have a clue as to how God did. I can't write about it because I don't know how it happened. Everything that we have tried to do has failed. Yet for some reason, God has built this community. I have no answer except to say that God did it." All of you know that many miraculous things have happened to us here, yet none of us can explain them except to say that God did it.

Now in the second half of verse 5 Paul describes God's method. To clinch his argument, Paul asks his congregations one more time, "Are you believers today, are you continuing to grow, and is God working miracles among you because you are good and following all sorts of religious ceremonies ... or ... are all these things happening because you are simply placing your faith and trust in Jesus? They would have to answer on all counts, "Because we are trusting Jesus; plus or minus nothing." And after they confess that, Paul would say, "Thank you. I rest my case." Look, if we were completely honest with ourselves, we would have to admit that **GOD DOES EVERYTHING IN OUR LIVES BY FAITH.**

Too many times in our lives, I think we forget that not only were we saved by grace through faith, but we are being saved and will be saved by grace through faith as well. **IN ORDER TO LIVE HEALTHY CHRISTIAN LIVES, WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT WE CAN ONLY PLEASE GOD BY EXERCISING OUR FAITH.**

Sometimes when I'm not doing so well in my spiritual walk, or if I become scared, confused, or discouraged, it doesn't take me long to identify the problem. It usually has to do with my trying

to be religious instead of living by faith. Dr. Bruce Waltke told this story that kind of describes my life when I try to live life under my own power and on the basis of my own righteousness.

"There was once a man trying to cross the frozen St. Lawrence River in Canada. Unsure of whether the ice would hold, the man first tested it by laying one hand on it. Then he got down on his knees, and gingerly began making his way across on all fours. When he got to the middle of the frozen river, where he trembled with fear, he heard a noise behind him. Looking back, he saw a team of horses pulling a carriage coming down the road toward the river. And upon reaching the river, it didn't stop, but bolted right onto the ice, and past him, ... while he sat there on all fours, turning a deep crimson red."

When I operate on the strength of my own talents, abilities, resources, and righteousness, I am as timid as the guy crawling on all fours. When I operate on the basis of faith in God's grace, I am as bold as the guy driving a team of horses over the ice. Where are you this morning? Let's remember that salvation is past, present, and future. And at every step of the way, we appropriate it by the grace of God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.