Galatians 3 (Part 1): 1-5 • Paul's Questions to the Galatians

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Galatians chapter 3, here we go. *"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—* (And that means putting faith to what you have heard) *[6] just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness?"" (ESV)*

Stop there. Stop there. Let's pray.

Thank You, Father. Thank You for giving us this time. Guide us, we pray, in Jesus' name, amen.

In just these first 5, 6; it's actually the first 5 verses of this chapter, Paul asks a series of questions that are meant to challenge the believers in Galatia as far as to think through what they've– what they're doing.

I remember when I was growing up, I hated when people confronted me with questions. Because usually it was something like, what do you think you're doing? Or, how about this one? What were you thinking? And of course, I wasn't. But, we don't like questions when we're being confronted because we tend to get defensive and they're asking things that we really don't want to think through and really answer the questions because we know we've done wrong, or at least we know– we have an idea of it.

And Paul is asking these questions. Again, to challenge them to think through– think it through. And that's why we ask questions of people when we're confronting them. Did you think this was going to go good? Or something like that? We want them to go back and go through their mind and think through and so forth.

Paul asks 6 questions actually, let me roll through them on the screen for you so you can just see them together.

1. Who has bewitched you?
2. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law or by hearing with faith?
3. Are you so foolish?
4. Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?
5. Did you suffer so many things in vain– if indeed it was in vain?
6. 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?

First he says, Who has bewitched you? He says, then, Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law or by hearing with faith? Thirdly, it says, Are you so foolish? And we'll talk about what that means; it's pretty interesting.

Fourthly, Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Fifthly, Did you suffer so many things in vain, if indeed that was the case? And then sixthly, he says, 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?

All very important questions. I want to roll them up again. And this time give you my version. I'm going to paraphrase the question a little bit too.

Who has bewitched you?

Who has invaded your heart and stolen your ability to think?

The first one is, Who has bewitched you? And by that, basically Paul means, Who has invaded your heart and stolen your ability to think? You know, the word bewitched is very interesting that he would use it. Let me put the definition up on the screen.

Oh, look at that. That's just a little joke. Because when most of us hear bewitched, that's what we think of. [Pastor Paul vocalizes theme song from TV show, Bewitched which ran from 1964-1972. Congregation laughs.] Oh shush.

It means to cast a spell on and gain control over someone. And that's why Paul is using the word. But interestingly enough, the word is used to describe pagan magic arts. Do you know that was a big thing back in Paul's day? We see different references in the Bible where there were magicians.

And they were more than just magicians who put on shows with like, pick a card, any card. These guys were actually using satanic power. Paul is making reference to that kind of weird, sort of like, What has come over you?

And what's also interesting is that the question, who has bewitched you? The word, who, in the Greek is singular, not plural. We know there were more than one individuals who came to preach to the Galatians wrong doctrine. But Paul only uses a singular who, which would of course lead us to suggest, or I guess to understand that he is suggesting that there is a singular who has been involved in literally grabbing hold of their mind and taking it captive to these sorts of thoughts. And that, of course, is Satan.

Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

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In other words, people are not the main issue here. It is all the things behind people. And he lists them there in that passage: *"rulers,... authorities,... cosmic powers,... spiritual forces of evil."* These are the things that are behind what we're dealing with and so forth.

1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

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And we also know that it was Peter who warned us to be sober minded, to be on our watch. Why? Because our *"adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."*

John 10:10 (ESV)

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

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And of course, Jesus warned us that *"the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy."* Right? And what better and more effective stealing could he do among the Galatians but to steal their faith in the sufficiency of what Jesus did on the cross?

And that was the issue. That's what the Jewish legalists came to challenge. What Jesus did on the cross wasn't enough. You've got to also keep the law. Okay? So he [Satan] was literally stealing their faith in the sufficiency of Christ. Right? And by the way, this is happening today, too, so don't think this is just a history lesson in what might be an issue.

But what's interesting about this question is that it causes us to grapple with the reality behind what Paul is talking about, and that is true, genuine, born again Christians having their hearts stolen away.

Because you see, a lot of us as Christians, we've settled into a comfortable doctrine that leads us to believe that we can't have our hearts stolen away. You know, we'll quote things like, nothing can separate you from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:39) Which is absolutely true. But to suggest that somehow that verse is a proof text against you and I ever being– having our heart or mind stolen away from devotion to Christ is just not biblical. Otherwise, Paul wouldn't be writing this letter.

He's writing this letter because he believes their hearts are being stolen away. And that's, I know that's not something we want to think about. But we've got to think about it because it is a reality.

I have found that when a non– an unbiblical group goes door to door, knocking on people's doors, inviting them to do Bible studies, and handing out information, they're really having some of their greatest effectiveness with

brand new Christians who don't yet have the foundation to be able to discern the deception and the lies that are being perpetrated across their– the threshold of their door. And because these people are talking all the right stuff: Jesus, God, Heaven, eternal life, Holy Spirit, and they hear all these things, and they're going, Yeah. But their hearts are being drawn away to a different gospel, a different truth. Right?

One of my favorite Biblical commentators was a guy who's with the Lord now. I can't wait to meet him in Heaven one day. His name was Harry Ironside. Incredible Bible teacher; wrote lots of stuff, and toward the end of his life he went blind. And yet he had memorized the Bible so thoroughly, he continued to teach effectively even after he was totally blind. He's one of my heroes. Anyway, he said this:

> It is quite possible for one to have been truly converted and to have begun with a clear, definite knowledge of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus and then because of failure to follow up or to study the Word and to pray over it, to then eventually come under the influence of some false system, some unscriptural line of teaching. And so often when people do come under such influence, they seem to be under a spell.
>
> **– H.A. Ironside**

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And it's very true. Harry Ironside saw it. I've seen it. You've, no doubt, you've seen it.

The second question that Paul asks is, did you receive the Holy Spirit by works of the law or just by the hearing with faith? Meaning, again, to hear the Word and to apply faith to it. Here's a paraphrase of that.

> Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law or by hearing with faith?
>
> Does a person receive God's Holy Spirit because of keeping rules, or because of believing God's Word?

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Does a person receive God's Holy Spirit because of keeping rules or because of believing God's Word?

And Paul asked the question simply to remind them of how they received the Holy Spirit. How do you get the Holy Spirit? If we're saying to people, hey, you really need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Here's what you need to do: run around the church 5 times [said with sarcasm].

No, I mean, it's not a matter of works. And that's what Paul is writing to remind them. He's reminding them of when he came to preach the gospel (emphasis on Paul's frustration): Guys, do you remember? I came and I preached Jesus and you believed it and God gave you His Holy Spirit.

Some of you might be wondering, Well how do I know if I've received the Holy Spirit? You know back in Paul's day they never asked that question. They never asked it because there was always…. There was such a belief in the empowering work of the Holy Spirit, which we've really gotten away from today in our Christian culture.

We embrace the coming of the Holy Spirit to give us a new birth. But the whole idea of the power of the Holy Spirit that comes along with that work of, when we're talking about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, guys, when you're baptized with the Holy Spirit, it's undeniable. It's like a bomb goes off in your heart. And we've gotten away from the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

You go to churches, you won't even hear it taught. Or if you do hear it taught, they'll say it was for a bygone era. Which is really sad. Because there's nothing in the Word of God that says it's for a bygone era. That's a conclusion that people are basing on extra Biblical [sources], what they believe to be facts.

It's really too bad. But, [if] you look in the New Testament, you find out when God's Holy Spirit moved upon people, they knew it. And I'm not suggesting to you that those things are necessary for salvation. In other words, if you don't do this, do this, do this, you're not really saved because…. No, I'm not saying that.

I'm just saying that they believed in the whole package of God's Holy Spirit and what He does in the life of a Believer. And we've parceled it out, unfortunately.

Paul is able to say to these people, Remember what happened? Remember the dynamic of God's Spirit when He impacted your life? And the supernatural things that you saw take place that are explainable by no other means? Did that

happen because you kept rules or did that happen because you put your faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross?

Well, if they're going to think back on it, and that's what he's asking them to do, think, think back. Remember with me, did I give you a whole bunch of rules and say, all right, here's five things you've got to do. You do all these things and God will give you His Spirit. Did I say that? No, I preached the gospel to you. I said, Jesus died on the cross for your sins. Do you believe it? They said, yes. Boom! God imparts His Holy Spirit! Right? And all the power and glory that comes along with it.

But this question that Paul asked them challenges another aspect of our humanity. Because he's asking them essentially, did you earn God's Holy Spirit, or did you receive the Spirit just by faith? That's what he's really asking.

And that speaks to an element of humanity that I don't know how many of us are really aware of, I'm guessing most of you are. And that is the idea that if I've earned something, it's worth more to me than something that's given to me freely. Now that may sound strange to you, but it's true. And we've seen it even around the church.

When we're putting on a marriage class or thing that's maybe going to go for a few weeks or something, we love to offer things for free. And for many years, we would do that. We would just assume whatever cost there was involved in offering that thing, we'd just say, Well, the church will pay for it and we're just going to offer it for free because we don't want to burden people. We know that a lot of people struggle with their income and so forth, so we just want to offer these things for free.

Well, you know what we learned over time? The more we offered for free, the less people believed it was worth something. And since they weren't as invested in it, they wouldn't necessarily feel obligated in their own heart to make their attendance regular. Isn't that strange?

And so then we said, okay, well let's start charging them for our costs. So, like we do our Art of Marriage series, for example. We say, okay, it's going to be $30, and that's going to pay for the food that we eat when we have dinner, and also your workbooks and stuff like that. Suddenly, people are invested, and when we are invested in something, we consider it of greater value. Okay? That's human nature, you guys.

Along comes the apostle Paul, talking to them about salvation. What do I need to do to earn it? You can't. Well, what do I, well, how do you get it? Faith. You mean it's free? Yep. Okay, that's all good and fine, and that's all, like, ooh, joyful news.

But then along come these Jewish legalists, who play right into their humanity by saying, oh no, no, no, no. Paul was wrong. This Jesus character– He's okay, but you've also got to keep the Law. And suddenly it's this sense of investment, like, oh, I've got to do something.

I've got to do these things. Right? And then I'll be saved. Now I have a sense of investment. Now I have a sense of yes. Do you see why– do you see why churches that preach something in addition to Jesus can actually become very popular? You would think– here's the weird part, you would think that the churches that are preaching nothing but free, God's grace, come and be saved, you would think they would be the biggest churches.

But you know what? Churches that put responsibility on people to earn their salvation are very popular because it speaks to something inside of us as humans to earn our way. Yes! Whatever it may be. I got baptized in water, now I'm saved. Or I go to church on this day of the week, and that shows that I am saved. Or I only wear these kind of clothes, or I do this, or I– we come up with all these things.

That's just what they were doing to the Galatians. But it speaks to us. It appeals to us. I like to think that I earned it. I earned it! You know, there's just something good about that, to say, I earned that. It moves me.

Anyway, isn't it interesting that our salvation runs contrary to our human nature? The receiving of it, the accepting of our salvation. God made a plan to save us for all of eternity that runs contrary to our human nature to want to earn it and say, Yeah, I did it.

And He comes along and He goes, no, all you can do is just– I, He says, I did it. I did all the work. There's nothing for you to do but, except– receive it. And like I said, when you come to terms with the weakness of your flesh, you tend to go, Whew! That's good news. That's why it's good news. But again, it's still contrary; still contrary.

I want to remind you of a statement Paul made at the end of the last chapter. I'll put it up on the screen so you can see it together.

Galatians 2:21 (ESV)

...if righteousness were through the Law, then Christ died for no purpose.

...if righteousness were through the Law, then Christ died for no purpose.

In other words, if there's still something left for you to earn, then Jesus didn't earn it for you. That's essentially what he's saying.

Are you so foolish?

Are you REALLY unable to understand?

Third question Paul asked was, Are you so foolish? And what he's really asking is, Are you REALLY unable to understand?

You have to understand that in the Greek, the word foolish means mentally deficient. If you called somebody a fool, if you said, You fool, you were saying… Yeah that. That's why it was a fairly serious thing to say to somebody. I don't think Paul's trying to offend them when he says to them, essentially, Are you guys mental? Because that's the modern translation.

But he is suggesting– he's asking for the reason for their lack of understanding because these are people who have been given the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is speaking to their hearts, but they're ignoring it and they're listening instead to these Jewish legalists who are saying, No, you've got to keep the law.

What are they doing? They're listening to human nature over the voice of the Spirit. Sound familiar? Should, because we do it all the time. As human beings, we will give greater credence to that, which appeals to our humanity, than that which is spoken to us, which is meant to appeal to the life of the Spirit and the wisdom of God. It just happens.

The lack of understanding is something he goes on to talk about in the very next question, which is number 4, where he says,

Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Are you so unreasonable that having started your walk with Christ in the Spirit, you are now actually thinking you can IMPROVE on that work using your own fleshly abilities?

Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected in the flesh?

And I'll paraphrase that saying, Are you so unreasonable that having started your walk with Christ in the Spirit, you're now actually thinking you can IMPROVE on that work using your own fleshly abilities?

And this is the question that seems to really baffle the apostle Paul the most because he was so convinced that he had nothing to offer from himself that might add to what God had already done. He was convinced of it. Listen to what he said in Romans, chapter 7.

Romans 7:18 (ESV)

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

He said, *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh.* He says, You know, *I have the desire to do what is right, but* I can't do it. I can't carry it out. *I don't have the ability to carry it out*. This was something Paul was thoroughly convinced about. I don't have the ability to carry out ultimate goodness.

So you see, Paul was the kind of man who could not be drawn away to a legalistic posture because legalism is what you've got to do to measure up. And Paul basically said in Romans, I don't measure up. There's nothing in my flesh that can measure up. You see? You get it? He was convinced of it.

The Galatians were being convinced that their flesh could measure up. And Paul's like, I don't get it. Are you? Do you really think that your flesh can do what God can't? Do you really think your flesh can improve on the work of God? You see? That's what he's asking them. They had just completely lost sight.

I love what he said to the church in Philippi. Check this out.

Philippians 3:3-4 (ESV)

For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more…

He says, *"For we are the circumcision,* (he says, these Jewish legalists are telling you to get circumcised, *we are the circumcision,* he says) *who worship* (how?) *by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus* (and look at this) *and put*

no confidence in the flesh— (he says) *though I myself have reasons for confidence in the flesh also.* (and) *If anyone else thinks he* (they have) *has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more…"*

Kind of an interesting attitude, isn't it? You think you have reasons to boast in your flesh? He says, *"I have more,"* but I don't, I put no confidence in my flesh. None. Do you get what he's saying Christians?

I don't have any confidence in what I can do to add to the work of God. I am not saved by my own work. I am not kept by my own work. I do not add to the work of God in my life by the powers of the flesh. The flesh just can't do it because our flesh is weak. Isn't that what Jesus said?

Matthew 26:41b (ESV)

"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

"The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is (what? it's) *weak."* Can't do it. If your salvation, or your life in Christ, after your salvation, carries any responsibility that it puts upon your flesh to make it happen, you're in deep trouble, because your flesh can't do it.

Then we come to question 5.

Did you suffer so many things in vain– if indeed it was in vain?

Has all your suffering as a follower of Christ been for nothing?

He [Paul] said, Did you suffer so many things in vain– if indeed it was in vain?

Paraphrased, Has all your suffering as a follower of Christ not benefited you in any way at all? You've got to understand what Paul means by this.

Paul believed that every single solitary bit of suffering that we endure as Believers is useful. He believed that it actually benefited your life. That's why he said that *"God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose."* (Romans 8:28). Right? He believed it.

I mean he believed it. Everything you– that happens to you as a Believer is going to benefit you in Christ as you trust in Him and continue to put your hope in Him. Paul is now saying are all those benefits that came the hard way for

nothing? All the things you learned, all the things you grew, all the maturity that you gained…. Is it now lost because you've decided to go another route? Don't suffer in vain.

Then the last question was,

> 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?
>
> Does God bestow His Holy Spirit and move miraculously among you because you keep God's Law, or because you hear and believe His Word?

Does He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, do so by works of the Law, meaning by you being a good person, or by hearing with faith?

And paraphrased, Does God bestow His Holy Spirit and move miraculously among you because you keep God's laws or because you hear and believe His Word?

And you'll notice we went on to read verse 6 when we were reading through the text because it was all part of one sentence. And Paul's going to begin to talk about Abraham, the man of faith, and we'll get into that next time. But the reason– you might notice this question here is very similar to the second question, because it essentially asks the most important question of all, which strikes at the very heart of the gospel.

Do you earn it, or do you get it by faith? And we've got to keep asking ourselves that, guys. Even, we who are saved, born again, we know that we're saved, not because we're good people. We know we're mess-ups. We know we don't deserve our salvation. We know that.

But that ability of the flesh to sneak in that idea, that if I don't tow the line, God's not going to be happy with me, and therefore, He's not going to listen to me, and then He's not going to answer my prayer. Those are huge.

I hear it in people's voices when they come and talk, and we're talking about, "hey, what do you need to pray about?"

"Well, I need to pray about, such and such, but I just– I don't, I don't feel like God's really listening to me."

Why don't you feel like God's listening to you?

“Well, lately, I just haven't really been walking with the Lord very closely.”

And I know what they're saying. They're saying, I'm not worthy. They're saying, I have no right to come to God and ask anything of Him because I haven't been towing the line.

And you know what they're telling me without telling me? I'm on a performance track. And I believe that my performance is tied to God's love for me and His attention that He gives to me. Whether He hears my prayers or not, I believe it's all tied to this performance element. And if I don't perform, He's not going to respond.

That's huge, you guys. Don't think that's isolated. That's huge. And it might even be in your mind without you knowing it. But, when people have really difficult seasons of life come upon them, they will sometimes talk about how, Man, if I just wish I knew what I did to bring all this on.

You get what's going on there? I'm on a performance track with God and I haven't been performing and so now things are falling apart. And I really can't go ask Him for help because, I mean, that's like robbing a grocery store and then going in afterwards and asking for a line of credit. You know? It's like, well, I can't ask them for a favor; I just robbed them blind.

And that's the way we feel about God. I haven't done what I'm supposed to be doing, so how can I go to God and ask for help? And you know what really messes us over? Is when we know when we've done something and we're dealing with the specific consequences of what we've done that we ourselves initiated, and then we have to go to God for help.

The vast majority of Christians won't do it. They won't go. You know what they'll say? Well, I got myself into this. I got to get myself out. Pfft. How's that working for you? Yeah. You know, that's an exercise in futility, you guys.

Understand something and understand it well: God's love for you does not waver by your inactivity or your mistakes. Right? Your mistakes don't change His love for you, nor His desire to give you the attention that you need. And when we come to God and just, we just say, Lord, me again, messed up, man…. Forgive me, Lord. That's what it takes to get that relationship restored again.

Lord, just, forgive me. I know that I haven't done what I ought to do. But I come to You, Lord, because I know that Your love for me is not predicated upon me being a good person or being a successful [air quotes] Christian. I know Your love for me will never change and– because You never change. And I know that I can always come before Your throne, the throne of grace, with boldness; even though in my heart, I'm ashamed.

I'm ashamed of what I've done or what I said, or something like that. But I know that even though I'm feeling this way, that doesn't change You and Your heart toward me. Because I know that Your love is not something I earn, and Your miraculous work in my life is not something I earn. It is a work of faith. It is a work BY faith. And that's what Paul is asking in this last question here.

Time to get off the performance track, you guys, and accept God's love for what it is: not tied to your performance. It's tied to His character and His character is going to love you no matter what. Sorry, you can't love your way– you can't sin your way out of His heart; can't mess up so much that He's going to say, okay, that's it. Boom, cutting you off. That's not how it works.

Come to God with boldness and know this: know that your life in Christ, in other words, what I'm talking about is the way you walk– your life in Christ every day; it's about putting your faith in Him. We don't just get saved by faith. You guys, we are kept by faith. Okay? Did you hear me?

We don't just get saved by faith. We're kept in our salvation by faith. It is by faith, from faith to faith. The Bible tells us so many Christians believed that salvation was free, but then I've got to grit my teeth and hang on to it, and I'm going to be the best Christian I can be. And they're just all tensed up, trying to perform. And you're dude, you're going to rupture a vessel, just chill a little bit here. God loves you. He loves you so much and He is able to keep you and protect you.

Isn't that what the Jude Doxology says? *"Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling, to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy. To Him be the glory"* (Jude 1:24-25). Right? Not to you. Not to me. Not to our ability. But *"to Him be the glory."* Amen?

6 very important questions.

I did that in the first service too, I don't know why I've got…. But always good questions for you and I to go back and say, alright Lord, am I on a performance track with You, or are we doing this thing by faith?