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## Galatians 3:1-5      “Bewitched!”

Intro. Once again, our text addresses a common and significant problem. Many are misled by the deceptive appeal of a religion based on human works. Do you remember what Paul said in chapter 1, v.6? He said, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.” Now here in chapter 3, v.1 Paul says, “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth...” The word “bewitched” (*baskaino*) literally describes being fascinated or charmed by a magical spell, an evil eye, or by feigning praise. Paul is so surprised at their change, that he asks, “Hey, has someone cast a spell on you or something? Has someone put an evil eye on you to draw you away like this?” Years ago, we took Andrew to see the Jungle Book. If you have seen it, I'm sure you remember the big Python snake that could charm and hypnotize its victims with his eyes. Actually, the Galatians were not drawn away by a spell, but rather they were drawn away by the appealing words and threats of some false teachers. They had been induced to raise anchor from the rock of truth by which they had been saved to sail toward a fool's paradise. To Paul it was incredible that the Galatians were turning away from a Gospel of grace to a system of legal bondage. Even so, many today fall prey to some system of legalism and works righteousness that promises more, but produces much less. Others are lured away after some second blessing, or some religion that appeals to their physical senses.

Though false religious leaders share in the blame of leading religious turncoats astray (1:8-9), nevertheless, those who are led astray are also held responsible by God. Notice again that in v.1 Paul accused the Galatians of being “foolish.”<sup>1</sup> He repeats the same charge in v.3. The word literally refers to someone who is “not thinking.” Here it probably refers to mental laziness. Their discernment was clouded. Paul is not calling them “blockheads”, but he is just saying that they haven't been using their heads. Paul implies here that if they had used their heads, they would not have been drawn away by the false teachers. They were foolish indeed, for we do not usually drop the substance to get the shadow. A man does not ordinarily empty his pockets of gold in order to fill them with gravel. How foolish have you been? Have you been enticed to turn from Christ by the devil's bait, and chase after sin? Oh, there is pleasure in sin, but only for a season, and the end is only suffering and death. Have you been distracted by the deceitfulness of riches (Mt. 13:22; Mark 4:19), and other worldly pleasures? Have you been enticed by the attraction of certain TV preachers who preach a health and prosperity gospel? Don't be foolish, as the Galatians were!

Notice Paul's answer to such foolishness. He appeals to them and reasons with them to break the “spell” that these false teachers had upon them by obeying the truth. No doubt, Paul had given them the truth of the Gospel when he was with them. The problem was, they had failed to use the truth they had learned as a measuring rod to test the new teaching they were hearing. So Paul is saying here, “Can't you think things through and see that the claims of the Judaizers

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<sup>1</sup> This was not perceived as a personal insult, for the latitude for acceptable speech in debate was much greater then than it is today. Such “name calling” and heated rhetoric is found elsewhere in the New Testament, whether on the lips of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:7-10), Jesus (Matt. 23; Luke 24:25), James (James 4:1-12; 4:13-5:6), or Paul elsewhere (2 Cor. 10-13) – McNight, 136.

cannot possibly square with the gospel you have been taught?" Otherwise, we are doomed to be like those described in Eph. 4:14 who are "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting." So it is indeed vital that we learn the Word of God, and use it to test and measure all doctrine and conduct. But Paul does not just appeal to their mind and to doctrine. In this text of Scripture he appeals to their experiences with God. He reminds them of their experience with the power of the Cross. He reminds them of the time they received the Holy Spirit. He reminds them of their spiritual growth by the Spirit. And he reminds them of their experiences of seeing the power of God manifest in their midst. These experiences did not take place as a result of keeping the law, but as a result of a faith response to the message of the gospel of grace. So these experiences should provide incontrovertible evidence. Although experience in itself is not an entirely reliable evidence of spiritual truth, it is nevertheless a powerful apologetic when closely linked with and built on scriptural truth.

This morning I want you to be convinced that the Gospel of faith in God's gracious provision is the true Gospel, and the religion of human ritual and works is not. And once you are convinced, I call upon you to remain faithful to this Gospel, and to fully appropriate what God has provided for us by His grace.

So what experiences verify the gospel of grace?

## I. THE PERSONAL IMPACT OF THE CROSS CONFIRMS THE GOSPEL

Paul was surprised that the false teachers had lured the Galatians away, "before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified" (v.1). He reminds them that they had experienced the powerful, transforming truth of the gospel in the crucified Christ. In the Greek Paul emphasizes the word "crucified."<sup>2</sup> After all, there is no Christianity without the cross. Wherever Paul preached, his message focused on the cross. He told the Corinthians, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). And notice how vividly the truth of the cross was presented to the Galatians. The word translated "clearly portrayed" (*prographo*) means "to write publicly, to placard." It refers to public notices and proclamations posted usually in the market place. Paul is indicating here that his presentation of Christ to them had the clarity of an advertisement on a billboard on the busiest street in town. Paul's preaching of Christ crucified must have been a compelling, memorable experience. So clear and vivid had been the presentation of this Christ that they had formed a mental picture of Him, suffering and dying for sinners. Those who sat at Paul's feet perhaps followed with their imagination the movements of the Roman soldiers. They could almost hear the ringing of the hammer as it drove the nails into Jesus' hands and feet. They, having probably seen other men crucified, could feel His suffering. They may have been able to visualize the blood flowing from His thorn-pierced brow and wounded side.

Furthermore, there is no doubt but that Paul proclaimed the significance of the cross. The word "crucified" is in the perfect tense, indicating that the crucifixion was a historical fact that had continuing results. For example, over 25 years ago, I stood before a preacher and said, "I do." What happened at that marriage ceremony continues to have impact on my life today! Even so, what Christ did at Calvary still impacts people today. Christ suffered and died on the cross as a just payment for sin. He died in our place. As Isaiah 53:5 predicted, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him,

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<sup>2</sup> In this case, the word is emphasized by being placed last in the sentence.

and by His stripes we are healed.” They could imagine themselves standing at the foot of the cross and looking up, seeing Jesus look down to them and hearing Him say, “I did all this for you!” Now we can be forgiven. Now we can be right with God. What a powerful encounter!

Paul reminded them of their first experience of hearing such gospel preaching, and how their hearts were drawn to the Savior. Jesus said in John 12:32, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself.” Seeing Him crucified, the Galatians were convicted in their hearts, they forsook their paganism and idolatry and were born again into the kingdom of Christ. I remember my own experience with the power of the cross. The first time I remember being drawn to the Savior was when I watched a movie about Jesus back in the 60’s. I do not remember the name of the movie, but I remember my heart being touched by watching the suffering of Jesus on the cross. I knew enough to know that He did it for me, as well as for others. As a result, Jesus won my heart about 35 years ago. Likewise, it was the cross that fully won Paul’s heart. He wrote in chapter 2, v. 20, “...the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Many of you have seen Mel Gibson’s, *The Passion of the Christ*. He did in film what Paul says in the last of v.1, “before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified.” What an experience it was! Most of us cried when we saw what Jesus suffered for each of us. Our hearts were drawn to such a loving Savior, perhaps like never before.

Paul’s implicit question is, “How did they turn away from Christ to look at anything else?” The false teachers were minimizing the work of Christ, and emphasizing the importance of keeping Jewish law. Oh, they would have confessed that Christ died for sin, but they emphasized keeping Jewish law and denied the sufficiency of the cross. But as William Hendriksen has said, “A supplemented Christ is a supplanted Christ.” And by turning to legalism the Galatians were denying the absolute saving power of Christ and the cross. The fact is, no ritual, ceremony, regulation, or any other thing devised or accomplished by men can pick up where the cross leaves off.

Oh, Christian! When you find yourself wandering away from Christ, look again to Christ crucified. The way to defeat the enticements of sin and false religion is to keep our gaze fixed on Christ. Are you not still moved by the cross of Christ? You have to have a sin-hardened heart to resist the appeal of the crucified Christ. If you are backslidden, seek to restore your first-love with Christ (Rev. 2:1-7), when you first heard of His suffering and dying love for you! Oh yes, the appealing power of the cross confirms the gospel.

Then Paul appeals to another experience of every true believer:

## II. HOW WE RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT CONFIRMS THE GOSPEL

In v.2 Paul asks a rhetorical question,<sup>3</sup> “This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” Paul was a skilled debater. We know that this “one thing” was a piece of bait that, if taken, would be yanked on by Paul to pull them from the waters of “Judaizing Christianity.” If he gets them to answer this question honestly and properly, he knows they will have to abandon the Judaizers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Rhetorical questions are questions that are really not questions because their answers are obvious. The question is meant to engage the reader (or listener) in a way that forces the reader to arrive at the desired answer. It is the answer that matters, not the question. Such questions, followed by a pause, allow the listener to reflect on the answer and internalize it.– McNight, 144.

<sup>4</sup> McNight, 138.

Now what Paul describes here is the initial event of salvation, when a person believes in Jesus as Savior, and receives the Holy Spirit. He calls upon them to remember their conversion experience. Conversion is indeed a powerful experience for the true believer. Jesus calls it being born again (John 3:1-8). He also said we must be born “of the Spirit.” It is the Holy Spirit that creates new life within the believer’s heart. And so for Paul, receiving the Spirit is the identifying characteristic of the Christian. Later in Galatians 4:6 Paul says, “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” We know from Rom. 8:9 that every Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. When you are saved, the Holy Spirit of God also puts His seal upon you as His forever (Eph. 1:13-14); and He enters your life, to make your body His temple (I Cor. 6:19). Do you remember that when Peter preached the gospel to the Gentiles, it says in Acts 10:44-45, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished..., because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.” It is quite clear that the Galatians own experience of receiving the Holy Spirit was very memorable.

So Paul asked them, “Did the Holy Spirit enter your life because you obeyed laws and rituals, or because you believed the message about Christ and trusted in Him for your salvation?” The issue was how the experience took place and what triggered it. The answer is quite clear. They did not receive the Holy Spirit when they reached a certain point of goodness and obedience to the Law. And don’t think that you have to reform your life and achieve a certain level of obedience before you can become a Christian and receive the Spirit. No! The experience of millions of believers confirms the fact that a person receives the Holy Spirit and is born again based on “the hearing of faith.”<sup>5</sup> Later, Paul wrote in Romans 10:17 says, “So, then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” So what Paul is referring to here is the time that they heard the message of Christ and Him crucified, and they believed it and committed their lives to Christ in repentance and faith. It was at the point of faith that they experienced the Holy Spirit coming into their lives. That’s how anyone is saved! Receiving the Holy Spirit is not some experience subsequent to faith in Christ.

Now, before I move on, I must apply this argument to each individual. I ask you, “Can you remember a time when you received the Holy Spirit? Have you been born again? Are you indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Is there any evidence of the Spirit’s presence in your life? I can remember a crucial week of camp when I was a teenager that forever transformed my life. Prior to that week, I wanted to be a band director or professional musician. Prior to that week I only occasionally read my Bible, rarely prayed, and only attended church to be with friends, and because of family obligations. But after that week, all these things changed. I was filled with the Holy Spirit. I then devoted my life to praying, studying the Bible, and preaching it to others; I found Christian fellowship to be not only valuable but also foundational for growth and accountability; and I saw that all that mattered in life was to do what God had called me to do. I remember this experience as if it were yesterday. I still remember the miniature chapel where I prayed on my knees, looking through a window to a cross in the distance on a hill. The experience was powerful and helped shape my life.

If you acknowledge today that you are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit, I hope you can see from this text how you receive the Holy Spirit into your life. It is not by working your way to some level of spiritual achievement. It is simply by putting your faith in Jesus Christ, and surrendering your life to Him as Savior and Lord. Don’t try to live life on your own. Receive the

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<sup>5</sup> The word translated “hearing” (*akoes*) refers either to the act of hearing a message, or to the message that is heard. In essence Paul is asking if the Galatians were saved when they believed what they heard.

Spirit today!

The conclusion is clear: If they received the Spirit by faith, then they are wrong in attaching themselves now to the laws of the Judaizers. The debate is effectively over now. Paul could end his letter right here. But he adds another argument based on experience, and that is:

### III. HOW WE ARE TRANSFORMED BY THE SPIRIT CONFIRMS THE GOSPEL

Paul says in v.3, “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” “Having begun in the Spirit” refers to their conversion. That is only the beginning. So he also talks about “being made perfect.” That word (*epiteleō*) means “to bring to an end, accomplish, complete.” Paul said in Philippians 1:6, “...He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” You see, once you become a Christian, you need to grow in your faith, and become more and more like Jesus. Rom. 8:29 says that we are “predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...” That needs to be your goal in life. But the question is, “How do you become more like Christ? How do you experience the completion of the work that God began in us the day we were converted?”

Paul gives two possible answers. Some say we are perfected by the flesh. What Paul has in mind is “flesh” in the sense of a life that is not based solely on Christ's work and the power of the Holy Spirit. By the word “flesh” here, he refers to all that a person is as the product of natural birth apart from the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. The false teachers said you become perfected in the Christian life by obedience to all of the Law of Moses. You must become practicing Jews, beginning with circumcision. That is the way of the flesh, the way of legalism and self-effort. The problem was the Galatians were starting to depend upon self-effort in an attempt to obey an outward legalistic system of works. Legalism can take a different form today. It is simply a matter of finding out what the rules are for a particular church, denomination, or religion, and then trying your best to live by those rules. A Baptist legalist gets baptized, attends church regularly, doesn't drink alcohol, etc. A Moslem legalist prays 5 times a day, fasts during Ramadan, and so forth. A Catholic legalist is careful to receive all the sacraments. The problem is that anyone, even a non-Christian can, with enough determination and effort, obey external laws and observe rituals. A non-believer can even live an outwardly moral life. Paul did before he was a Christian. But none of those things, done by the efforts of the flesh, will make you a good Christian. So Paul is saying, “Are you so foolish as to think that you start out by the saving work of God, and then you perfect Christian living by the strength of the flesh? No! You do not live the Christian life just by gutsy effort. And if you have failed in your efforts to live the Christian life, it is probably because you are going about it the wrong way.

How then, do you become a “good Christian”? The answer is this: You continue in the Christian faith as you began: by reliance upon the Holy Spirit. In v.5 Paul says, “Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you..., does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” The word translated “supplies” (*epichoregeo*) means “to bestow liberally, to lavish.” It comes from a word (*choregeo*) that literally means to furnish the chorus or a Greek play at one's own expense. And so notice that God the Father supplies the Spirit to you. By giving you the Holy Spirit, He furnishes all that you need to live the Christian life! When a normal child is born, he has all that he needs for life; nothing need be added. It would be strange if the parents had to take the child to the doctor at one month to receive ears, at two months to receive toes, etc. Even so, when you were born again, God gave you all that you needed for life. You don't need to add anything. All you need to do is to appropriate what you have! Appropriate the power of the Spirit

of God who lives within you. Allow the Holy Spirit to help you read and understand the Bible. Serve God with the enabling gifts that the Spirit provides. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you. You don't need to add a system of rituals and laws! We will see later in Gal. 5:16 that we must "walk in the Spirit." The granting of the Spirit ushers in a new age, and ends the age of the law. Those who live in the Spirit are not under the law (5:18). Eph. 5:18 says that we must be filled with the Spirit, that is, controlled and empowered by the Spirit. So Christian, you don't need to seek out some new experience, some new teaching, some new method of Christian maturity. Appropriate what you have!

Again, as we have seen from v.1, the Holy Spirit is given the moment one truly believes in Christ. The Holy Spirit is not the goal of the Christian life but its source. He is not the product of faithful living but is the power behind it. He is the One that produces good works that are pleasing to God, because He is the source, not sinful flesh.

So Paul's argument is once again powerful. Trying to live the Christian life by the strength of the flesh, just trying to live by rules, is to walk on a road that is doomed to frustration and failure. The only ones who live the Christian life successfully are those who rely upon the Holy Spirit. These are the ones who bear the fruit of the Spirit, such as love, joy, and peace (Gal. 5:22). These are the ones who overcome the works of the flesh, such as "adultery, fornication, ... hatred, strife, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, ...envy, murders, and drunkenness..." (Gal. 5:19-21). Experience verifies this.

Now in v.5 Paul reaches a climax in his argument from experience. His fourth and final argument is this:

#### IV. THE EMPOWERING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT CONFIRMS THE GOSPEL

In v.5 Paul says, "Therefore He who ... works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" The word "miracles" (*dunamis*) literally means (works of) power. The Galatians were well aware of God's powerful workings in their midst. They had probably witnessed or experienced miracles of healing, prophetic utterances, and manifestations of people speaking in unknown tongues (cf. Acts 2-3; 8; 10; 18; 1 Cor. 12-14). This experience was therefore particularly memorable. Likewise, Paul's preaching in Corinth was "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:4). Paul could also be referring to miracles of transformation in the lives of the Galatians. They had experienced spiritual power over Satan, sin, the world, the flesh, and human weakness. This reminds me of Eph. 3:20, where Paul says that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us."

God continues to confirm the Gospel of grace by manifesting the power of the Holy Spirit today. Show me a church where the true gospel is preached, and unless the people are resisting the work of the Spirit, I will show you a church where the Holy Spirit is doing a work in the hearts and lives of the people. When we think of miracles, we like to hear about people be healed, or such as that. But the chorus of a beloved song says it well:

It took a miracle to put the stars in place.

It took a miracle to hang the world in space.

But when he saved my soul, cleansed and made me whole,

It took a miracle of love and grace.<sup>6</sup>

Yes, when the gospel of grace is proclaimed, people are born again, and the Spirit

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<sup>6</sup> John W. Peterson, *It Took a Miracle*, 1948 [Illus.#C-805].

produces His fruit in believers, such as love, joy, and peace. That is the way it has always been down through the years of church history. Only the churches that preached this gospel of grace experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the Great Awakening. There were two great awakenings in the history of our nation, when thousands of people came to Christ, the churches were filled, and joyful singing was raised to God in a chorus of praise. The bars lost business, and many closed. God's Spirit moved mightily. And He moved through the preaching and singing of the Gospel of grace. Those churches that practiced legalism and ritual did not experience a moving of the Spirit. The same thing is true today. Churches that emphasize ritual or legalistic works for salvation, or deemphasize the cross, are void of the Spirit. When I was 17, I left a church that was as dead as 4 in the morning, and I joined a church where souls were being saved, and the power of the Spirit was manifest in changing lives. Have you done so?

Conclusion: I know this gospel is true because I've seen what it has done in my own life and in the lives of countless others. There was an infidel in a public place ridiculing the miracles of the Bible. He said, "Whoever heard of Jesus turning water into wine?" A man known by all of the people said, "Sir, can I say something." He said, "Say on." He said, "Sir, I don't know much about the Bible and I don't know if Jesus turned the water into wine or not. But I'll tell you what, a few days ago Jesus saved me and if you will come out to my house tonight, I'll show you where Jesus changed wine into furniture and clothes and groceries." Oh listen friend, since Jesus can turn water into wine, He can turn a sinner into a saint. He can change a hell-bound sinner into a heaven-bound believer, not by works and self-effort, but by trusting in Christ as Savior, and by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's argument is convincing. True believers know by experience that conversion and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit all come about by faith in the good news of God's gracious provision. Jesus paid for your sin at the cross. God gives you the Holy Spirit in indwell you, transform you, and empower you. If you have not personally experienced these blessings in your own life, why not look to Jesus today, receive the Holy Spirit by faith, and allow God to begin His transforming work.

Sources: W.A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Galatians & Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968); John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Scot McKnight, *The NIV Application Commentary: Galatians* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 229-236; Curtis Vaughan, *Galatians: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon tape on this text dated 8/\_\_\_/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1975); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Galatians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1944, 1973). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).