

RECEIVING THE SPIRIT BY HEARING WITH FAITH
Galatians 3:1-5

Have you ever put something somewhere that you thought would be a safe place for it only to forget where that safe place is? Have you ever spent a considerable amount of time putting together a grocery list, only to realize at the grocery store that you left it at home? Have you ever stood in the middle of a room you just walked into, only to wonder why you walked into that room in the first place? Does someone ever ask you what you did yesterday and you have ask yourself, “What did I do?”. We’ve all been there! We can be a very forgetful bunch of people.

The Lord knows how forgetful we are. It’s nothing new to Him. If you’ve read the Old Testament, you know God was always having the Israelites do certain things by which they would remember what He had done for them. Like when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, God stopped it from flowing so that they could cross on dry land, much like He did for them at the Red Sea. And after all Israel had crossed the river, but before He let the waters flow again, God told Joshua to take one man from each tribe, 12 men, and pick up a stone from the middle of the riverbed and bring it up on shore. And he has them stack these stones in a pile – a sort of monument. Why did God do that? Because He didn’t want them to forget the miracle that He performed there. Every time they saw that monument of strangely round river stones out of place, they would remember what God had done. It would remind but it would also inform others and the next generation. When their grandchildren would pass by it and ask, “Grandpa? What are these stones here for?” They would tell them of the mighty hand of God and how He stopped the Jordan River that day. We need to be reminded just as much as we need to be informed! That is, essentially, the same purpose of communion. Jesus said to do it in remembrance of Him. We’re remembering His sacrifice for our sins and remembering to walk in light of that. We remember that He is enough for us.

But because the Judaizers, the false Jewish teachers that infiltrated the church, the Galatian believers forgot that He was enough. The believers began to live under Law by being circumcised and observing different days and season and years from the Law, the Galatians forgot Christ was sufficient. The lie of the Judaizers was that if you want to be really saved and really spiritual, then you need to keep the Law, and the Galatians took the bait. And so Paul begins to reason with them from their past experience – he points them to their own past – saying, “Remember!”. Don’t forget where you came from. The past teaches us how to live in the present. That’s why studying history is important. By looking back, we learn from our own experiences and the experiences of others. That’s exactly what we’re doing by studying Galatians isn’t it? As a church, we’re looking back in time to a different church in a different time and learning from their mistakes. And before Paul has them learn from others like Abraham in verses 6-9, he first points them back to their own experience. It’s irrefutable and they get it. They can’t tell him they don’t know what he’s talking about.

He says, “...this is the only thing I want to find out from you,” – just one thing – one simple question. because **their own past experience of receiving the Spirit of God, before the Law, is enough proof in and of itself to get them back on track and fixate in their minds that justification came by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law.** Their past experience is enough. Paul proves that they were justified by faith before they were under the Law by asking several rhetorical questions – questions that aren’t meant to be answered because the answer is obvious but are dramatically designed to make a point in regards to their reception of the Spirit of God before the legalists came. His first question proves that they had indeed been fully convinced of the fact that Christ’s crucifixion was enough to pay for their sins.

I. THEY BELIEVED JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED FOR THEIR SINS. (V. 1)

“You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?” They got it. They saw it. They believed Jesus was enough, at one point. His sacrifice for them was clear and everything to them. When Paul preached, he knew nothing among them but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That was his message. He always shined the spotlight on the cross. He preached the work of Christ. That’s critical to our effectiveness as preachers and teachers. Always bring it back to the cross. Never preach a Christ-less message.¹

A. Don’t forget that Christ’s sacrificial work is our main teaching.

As preachers or teachers, and we’re all teachers of someone, Paul eludes to something here that is critical to our effectiveness and getting the message across: I might be putting a few words in Paul’s mouth but I think from this verse that we should not that teaching should help us see more than just reason. It should help us see visions.² Not mystical visions, but to visualize the things that are being discussed, to visualize the truths being talked about with a sanctified imagination.³ Pictures, parables and illustrations help truth sink in. Jesus is the Master at this. We all have His parables in our minds to teach us spiritual truths that are hard to explain but we get it because of the parable. Even in Ezekiel, Jesus gives that prophet object lessons for him to use to teach Israel.

As teachers, we want to help people SEE the truth. I like using ‘the Bridge Illustration’ when sharing the gospel because it helps people visualize Christ as their bridge to God. Even though the crucifixion took place years ago in a different country, Paul says Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified to them. The cross dominated his preaching⁴ so much they could visualize the crucifixion. He was publicly portrayed to them as crucified. Through his preaching, they saw Christ being mistreated and spit on. They saw Christ cut up with every crack of the whip. They saw the thorns digging into his scalp, the nails driven in with the hammer and attempting to rip through His hands and feet as He hung there. They saw the sun beating down on His body covered in dried blood and dirt. They saw Him gasping for air and crying out to the Father, “Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani!” “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Then they witnessed the sky grow dark, the earth quake, the tombs opened. They heard the thick, temple curtain that used to separate men from God, being ripped through from top to bottom like a piece of paper in the hands of God. They saw the cross through Paul’s preaching. They approved it was sufficient to pay for their sins. But then they forgot its sufficiency. This is a warning...

B. Don’t ever forget that Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient.

By reverting back to works, they were denying the sufficiency of the cross (2:21).

C. Don’t forget to remind others its sufficiency.

Paul does what any true friend would do who sees his fellow man going down a path of self-destruction and condemnation and he urges them to wake up using strong words. This reminds me of my brother’s boxer. My brother’s a Bass fisherman kind-of-guy he would always take his dog Bocephus with him fishing. The dog was like a cat, got hit by several vehicles and lived. But one time, on his way home from fishing (my brother’s driving his black little 2 door Toyota pickup with the dog in the passenger seat), and he notices the dog doing a jerking action with his head. And then my brother notices that there’s a fishing line coming out of the corner of his mouth. And the line is under his paw. And he’s trying to jerk the line out of his mouth. The trouble is, there’s a hook on the other end of the line that’s embedded in the dog’s stomach! He’s trying to jerk a hook out of his stomach! The dog had surgery and survived but it reminds me of what Paul is doing here, using the language that he’s using! He’s trying to jerk out a bad theological hook that they’ve gutted! And it’s going to hurt a little bit to get it out but those who are living under law and legalism need it! They need a firm, personal warning! That word foolish means unintelligent. He’s saying,

“What are you thinking?! Think about what these legalists are saying! They’re saying Jesus Christ’s sacrifice isn’t enough to pay for your sins! Was He or was He not enough to pay for your sins in full?!” The answer is obvious, but they’re under a spell! They’re bewitched! Legalism does that. It’s hard to see legalism in yourself.

Once people get sucked into religious legalism, it’s so hard to get them out – it’s like their minds have been seared by with a branding iron and that’s scriptural to say that. It scriptural to say there’s a veil that lies over the mind and heart under law (2 Cor. 3). There’s millions of people out there, who have gone to church or are going to church and doing religious things, who think they’re good to go, but they’re just deader than a doornail spiritually. They walk in blind and walk out blind. They walk in deaf and walk out deaf! They can’t see the truth. I know because I was one of them. I was reading one of John Bunyan’s books a couple days ago and he admitted he was one of them too. He could talk religion all day long, but when he met true believers talking about **new birth and new hearts, speaking as if joy made them speak**, he said **he began to shake** because he didn’t get it. He said it seemed as if **they’d found a new world!**⁵ And they did! Some of you know what that’s like.

I don’t want to talk about myself up here very much, but my testimony was just made for Galatians. I went to church for years thinking I was good to go because I’d been baptized as a baby and confirmed in high school! But I was deader than a doornail spiritually and lived in utter wickedness. I thought I was set to enter heaven even later when I was seeking for God, I thought I was something for reading my Bible and going to a Bible church, but whatever was said in church, just went right over my head or right through my ears. I could pick up a spiritual thing! 1 Corinthians 2:14 says the natural man, the man without God’s Spirit, can’t understand the things of God for they are foolishness to him. He just can’t get it. It takes God’s illuminating work of the Spirit to get it.

For me, that came through an honest preacher one night, along with the Spirit of God and the Word of God (specifically Matthew 7) for me to be born again. The preacher spoke a lot like Paul here. He was very convicting. He described two roads – the broad and the narrow – and he described how we can tell the difference between those on the narrow road (exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit) and those on the broad road (exhibiting the deeds of the flesh) – and I knew from his preaching that I wasn’t on the narrow road! **Let’s just say I really saw my sin that night.** I wept over my sinfulness that night. I cried for the first time in years. I saw my need for a Savior and cried out for Jesus to save me based upon His gracious sacrifice and after that moment, everything changed. I could see truth. I could hear truth. I could understand the world better, the Bible better. I could understand the sermons. I had joy and peace and assurance and victory like I’d never known before. I was born again by the Spirit of the Living God! It’s funny, but one of the first things I did, was texted my parents to tell them that I loved them and thanked them for raising me. They pry thought I was trying to butter them up for something but I really meant it! No one told me to do that. Honor your father and mother had just been written on my heart by the Spirit of God. I texted another family member, whom I hadn’t talked to in years, and told them that I loved them. I was so full of love! Love in the Spirit is a sign that we’re the real deal (Col. 1:8)! It was incredible. I went to church the following Sunday and told the guy who tried to do a Bible study with a dead man months before, that I was finally alive. I told him I was on a completely different level.

I rarely share my testimony that way because I think it sounds arrogant compared to a lot of testimonies. And I don’t want people thinking you have to have a dramatic conversion story – I don’t want people focused on having an experience but being focused on Christ. But when God says, “You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart,” He’s not kidding (Jer. 17:10). I’m so thankful for that John the Baptist preacher of a man. I needed his honesty and

convicting preaching to shake me out of my stupor. And the Galatians needed Paul to talk to them the way he is now. He did the same with Peter one chapter ago and it worked with him.

Paul's second question proves that...

II. **THEY RECEIVED THE SPIRIT BY HEARING WITH FAITH. (V. 2)**

“did you receive the Spirit of God by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?”

Now here's something you don't want to forget. They received the Holy Spirit of God the moment they believed while the listening to the message. And that's something to take home.

A. **We receive the Spirit by responding in faith to the message.**

It's not by works. If you study it out, you'll notice that there's always a connection between the Spirit of God and the Word of God. They heard the message and believed it and were baptized by the Spirit. One of best examples of this is in the book of Acts, chapter 10:43-48. (Be careful with Acts. Acts is transitional, with unique things being done by God to demonstrate He's with the Church and the apostles. Doctrine from Acts should line up with the epistles). But this passage says, “‘Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.’ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, ‘Surely no one can refuse water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?’ And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” So the Holy Spirit baptized them while they were simply listening to the message being preached. As soon as they believed, they were baptized by the Spirit. The light came on for Peter that day because he remembered Christ's words that, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit,” (Acts 11:16). They were baptized when they believed.

B. **The fact that we receive the Spirit by faith is proof of our justification by faith.**

Because the Spirit is only given to the justified. Paul says in Ephesians 1:13-14, “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.” So the Holy Spirit is like a seal or a stamp that no man can open. He's like a pledge, a deposit, or a down-payment on eternity for His children the moment they believe. And having been baptized now, we can then either be filled with the Spirit and walking in the Spirit or quench the Spirit by not making an effort to grow in the Lord or grieve the Spirit by disobedience.

C. **Faith comes by hearing the Word of God.**

Romans 10:14-17 reaffirms that faith comes by hearing. The pattern is preaching, hearing, then believing. D.L. Moody said, “I prayed for faith and thought that someday faith would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith did not seem to come. One day I read in the tenth chapter of Romans, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” I had up to this time closed my Bible and prayed for faith. I now opened my Bible and began to study, and faith has been growing ever since.”⁶ Faith comes and grows through the Word of God. The Spirit works through the Word. And Satan knows faith comes by hearing the Word of God and he'll do what he can to stop it from being propagated. Whenever I think of this topic I think of a story one **Friends of Israel missionary** told our class: You know, more Jews live in New York than in any other state and that was who they were trying to reach. He said they had an ‘evangelism van’ that they would

use to preach. You open up the back doors and there was a platform of some type and they stood on it and preached through a speaker system. He said they would drive the van to the Jewish area and park and open up the back doors of the van and as soon as they started preaching, the rabbis would call in a false emergency to 911 so that the responders would come with their distracting sirens blaring and drowning out the preaching. They didn't want anyone to hear the message preached. Makes sense. Anyway, the Galatians could look back and know that they received and were sealed by the Spirit of God when they believed the gospel message.

Paul's third main question reveals that...

III. **THEY HAD WALKED BY THE SPIRIT. (V. 3)**

"Are you so foolish? Are you now being perfected by the flesh?" They had experienced the supernatural, sanctifying work of the Spirit of God in them, transforming their minds and hearts toward love and purity and obedience, before the Law came. Now they set aside that beautiful supernatural work of God to go back to keeping a list of natural, external regulations as if the Law was more spiritual than the Spirit. The Law said things like, do not murder. Grace calls us much higher than that and says if you hate, you are murdering, and the Spirit writes that on our heart. The Law says don't commit adultery, but the grace shows us that lust is just the same and calls us to live above it by faith. We've died to that with Christ and are new, being empowered by the Spirit. We need to see that...

A. Sanctification requires God's grace and _____ just like salvation.

The idea is always out there and has always been out there, that we're saved by grace through faith and then to continue on we have to start living by Law, as if spiritual maturity is going to come through through our own through sheer willpower, pull yourself up by your bootstraps mentality or by keeping lists of rules or depriving yourself of certain things or chasing some sort of mystical experiences. In Colossians 2, Paul said don't let anyone take you captive with empty philosophy, legalism, Law, mystical teaching, and asceticism. That's not how you grow. It's a work of the Spirit of God. We have choices to make, certainly, but it's only because you've been freed by the Spirit. Whatever sin you're struggling with, you can't just overcome it on your own. It starts with acknowledging that you need God's help, God's Spirit to have victory. By faith you do that and you acknowledge who you are in Christ and that the old self is crucified and you're a new creation. Your new life is in Christ. We have decision to make but still, settle it in your minds that it's only by grace through faith that we're even able to have victory over the sin nature. It's certainly not just some self-effort. It's He who works in You to will and to do for His good pleasure. Apart from Him we can do nothing (Jn. 15:5). Philippians 1:6 says, "I am confident that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

I don't what it is, but for some reason, (maybe so that we learn to stop trusting in ourselves) so many of us, when we decide to start taking our faith seriously, we end up going through a Pharisaical stage in our life. *We understand that we're saved by grace through faith but then think we're going to hammer out this Christian life in our strength.* That's exactly what Satan wants us to do. Remember, Satan is going to do everything he can to get us to walk independently of God! That's been his lie since the beginning! "You can be your own God". We were made (designed) for a relationship with God. We were designed to live according to His Spirit. We can't even function properly without God in our lives. So why would we even try to live this Christian life without Him, in our own strength? We trust Him for our eternal destiny, why not sanctification? It's only by the Spirit of God that we keep His commands, and His commands are not burdensome. Ray Stedman wrote that believers don't have to be forced to stop doing certain sinful things. As we grow, we see, by the Spirit of God, that certain behaviors are inconsistent with the new life we've

been given. By the Spirit, we begin to see that certain things aren't profitable and aren't the normal outworking of a heart that's been made anew in Christ.⁷ So sanctification is a work of the Spirit.

Paul's next two questions continues to reveal even more folly on the part of Galatians.

IV. **THEY HAD EXPERIENCED LIFE CHANGING EVENTS FOR THEIR FAITH. (VV. 4-5)**

“Did you suffer so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain? Does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law or by hearing with faith?” I think he's talking about all of the suffering they had experienced for their faith and all of the miraculous signs and wonders they witnessed. When you read about all that they went through in Acts 13 and 14, you see both suffering and miracles.

A. **Suffering**

Because the gospel brings division and conviction and because of that, people don't like it. Persecutors follows the gospel like snowplows do the snow. They try to push it all out of the way, push the gospel out of the way, so they get back to living their life easier, without conviction. People hate the gospel message and those who believe it. It interferes with their lives and families. It called for change of mind, change of allegiances, change of behavior, change of gods. Because it called for a change of god, it was upsetting cultures and the economies. Idol-makers in Ephesus persecuted the apostles because it endangered their trade. Who wants to buy statues of gods they don't believe in? In Galatia, Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city and left for dead. The believers there were mistreated along with the apostles and the apostles had to encourage them to continue on in the faith, saying, “Through many tribulations [not thee Tribulation] we must enter the kingdom of God.” Paul's saying, look, did you go through all that persecution for nothing?

B. **Miracles**

Acts 14:3 says that when the apostles were planting churches there, they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was **testifying to the word of His grace**, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands. Referring to the Jews, Jesus said, “a wicked and adulterous generation asks for signs,” but even with that, the Lord was gracious enough to allow certain signs at that time to be done to prove to the Jews that He was with the Church and with the apostles. This is where Paul healed a man from Lystra who was lame in his feet from his mother's womb – a man who had never walked before. The people were so blown away by the miracle that they tried worshipping Paul and Barnabas as gods, calling them Zeus and Hermes, and trying to offer them sacrifices. God had done great things to testify NOT to the word of His Law, but to “the word of His grace.” And Paul's saying, “Were all of God's miracles and spiritual gifts in vain? Was His gift of the Spirit to you in vain?”

The Galatians remind me of that phrase in 2 Peter 1, where the believer who doesn't grow is considered blind and short-sighted, having forgotten their former purification from sins. They've lost the joy of their salvation! As far as trusting Christ as Savior and Lord, the Galatians started out well. They really believed and were really saved! But Pharisee Phil and Legalistic Larry come along and started adding matters of the Law to the gospel and there you have it – bondage. Choosing works over faith and Law over Spirit. The believers took the bait! They gutted that hook! And now Paul is painfully having to rip it out of them.

CONCLUSION:

If I could paraphrase this passage in a few words I would say: “**Get back to Christ.** Get back to Christ. He's enough. For salvation and sanctification. You received the Spirit of God by faith before these Judaizers

even came along and your reception of the Spirit of God is enough proof in and of itself to show you that you don't need to live under Law." This passage was really provoking for me because I've often taught that we don't rely on some mystical experience for salvation. We rely totally on Christ and our trust is in Him alone. But the experience of the receiving the Spirit, to Paul, is trustworthy and isn't in the same category as mysticism if it's the real deal, biblical experience. And as Bereans, we're a little afraid to show too much emotion and talk experience because we don't want to be accused of being charismatic, right? But today **you can't read this passage and ignore the fact that Paul has used their knowing reception of the Spirit of God in their lives as enough evidence in and of itself to prove that they had been justified by grace through faith in Christ the moment they believed.** The Spirit is proof of their justification. Upon their reception of the Spirit of God, they had a marked, before and after experience. Some folks come to Christ super early and have always believed, some without shedding a tear, some weep, and some shout for joy. But no matter what our testimony is, there should be a point in our lives that says, after this time, something changed in me. I've been changed and God's still changing me! You noticed the Spirit in you because you began to be convicted of things you never used to be convicted of or feel uneasy around certain places and people that you never used to feel uneasy around. You begin to hate sin. You begin to desire obedience to God and begin to desire to know His ways and His Word. Is that you? Does that describe you? Do you have the Spirit of God in you? You either do or you don't. You either believe or you don't.

Maybe you haven't experienced God's Spirit, but you've been going to church for the longest time. And you're like John Bunyan, longing for something real, authentic, God working in your life. You're like the rich young ruler. You've done all that there is to "do". You've kept the Law, you go to church, you tithe, maybe have been baptized, taken communion, prayed a prayer, walked an aisle. But still, you sense that something's dearly wrong. You've never had victory over sin, no joy, no peace, no patience, no kindness, no gentleness, no self-control. If you've *never* experienced those supernatural works of God, is it possible you've come at it all wrong from the beginning through works instead of trusting in Christ alone and to taking Him seriously? Is it time to do business with God? On the other hand, maybe you are saved but lately you've just been beat up and bruised by the world and circumstances. For that person, I think its critical to **remember the joy of your salvation! The joy of the Lord is our strength!** Worship Him! Spend time with Him and His Word for your faith to increase. But for everyone who believes, let's rejoice! We've got the Spirit of God! We've been justified! It's okay to show some natural emotions. They should flow from knowing you're a child of God! Love for people! Joy knowing you're forgiven! You're free of guilt and shame! Christ nailed the Law and our sin to the cross! You're a new person, a new creation! The old has passed away, new has come! Jesus said from your innermost being flows rivers of living water! Abundant life! What a miracle it is to have been born again by the Spirit of God!

¹ Charles Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students?.

² Warren Wiersbe, Preaching and Teaching with Imagination (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994), 37.

³ Ibid., 39.

⁴ R. Alan Cole, "The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians," Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 88.

⁵ John Bunyan, Grace Abounding (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Publishing, 2013), 34.

⁶ Paul Dwight Moody and Arthur Percy Fitt, *The Shorter Life of D. L. Moody, Volume I – His Life* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1900).

⁷ Ray Stedman, edited by Mark S. Mitchell, *The Power of His Presence* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Discovery House Publishers), 338.