

Monday, October 26, 2020

SERIES: WE ARE FREE (A Study of Galatians)

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TITLE: Are You a Masterpiece or a Fool?

If God were to describe you in one word, what would that word be? Maybe you'd say "awesome" or "child." Maybe you've been reading Ephesians, so you'd say, "masterpiece." If you're a bit of a theologian, you may say "justified" or "positionally sanctified." If you are a follower of Christ, any of these would be an accurate description. But let me change up the question, and see if your answer sticks:

If God were to describe you based on your behavior, what would that word be? If God were to describe you based on how you live, what would that word be? Did that change your word? Would God call you a "masterpiece", or would He call you a "fool"?

Well, that's what we want to talk about today as we look into Galatians Chapter 3. Let me just summarize what Paul has said so far in the first two chapters:

In Chapter One, Paul has defended his Apostleship and the Gospel message he has been preaching from Christ. Paul has declared there is just one Gospel. Anyone who preaches another gospel should be cursed, because a false gospel is no gospel.

In Chapter Two, Paul records his time in Jerusalem with the Apostles. He was relieved to know that the Jerusalem Apostles affirmed his message. He is also thrilled to find out they too, have held fast to the Gospel, that is, until Peter began to be persuaded by some Judaizers. Paul confronts Peter directly and lovingly. Why? Because the Gospel message is clear, according to Galatians 2:16 (NLT), "Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law."

So Chapters 1 and 2, simply stated, say: there is one Gospel, and it sets us free. Now, let's pick it up in Galatians 3:1 (ESV):

"O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified."

So Paul begins by kind of slapping them across the face to make them open their eyes and focus! That's why he says, *Oh foolish Galatians* – you are acting like fools. He doesn't mean they are

stupid. The Galatians have not displayed a lack of knowledge. I'm sure some were incredibly intelligent, some in the middle, and some down below - yet Paul was not referring to their *mental* capacity, but rather, their *wisdom* capacity. You see, that's the difference between the wise person and the fool - those who act wisely, and those who act foolishly: **Knowledge is great, but wisdom knows how to live out that knowledge** - it's the willingness to live out that knowledge. And that was the issue here with the Galatians. They knew the Gospel. They heard the Gospel from Paul. However, as Paul said, they *have been bewitched*.

He put it this way: "Who has cast a spell on you to abandon the true Gospel? You were living as wise, but now you're living as fools. You know the truth, but you are living like it doesn't matter. Who has cast a spell upon you?" Again this is not actual witchcraft, though that was very real then, like it is now. But he's just trying to again awaken them from their foolish ways.

Paul says, "It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was crucified" - Not only that - "He was *publicly* portrayed as crucified". Now what Paul is not saying is that they were there when Jesus was crucified - they did not physically see his crucifixion. The words *publicly portrayed* comes from a Greek word, which describes a sign or a poster in a public location for citizens to read. It's like Paul is saying, "Look, you heard the Gospel message so plain and so clear, it was as if you walked by a giant billboard in the middle of town, that said, "Christ Crucified", and it had a picture of it. You saw it as plain as day." It's worth noting too, that when Paul uses the word "crucified", it's a perfect passive participle. What the heck does that mean? It means that the crucifixion was a historical fact, but it had continuing results.

This reminds me of 1 John 1:9 (NASB) which says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That's how we've memorized that verse, but a more literal translation is, "he is still righteous to keep on forgiving our sins."

Paul is saying, "Look. You're living like fools. You are turning your back on the Gospel, which says Jesus Christ died for our sins. You saw it - you heard it from me - as plain as day. And yet, you live like someone has put a spell on you to abandon your conviction. Christ's crucifixion is sufficient for all, and efficient enough for every sin you commit. You don't need to add anything to what Christ has done. Stop living like fools."

Paul continues in Galatians 3, verse 2 (ESV):

²Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

Paul just continues to correct them. And he does so now by asking a series of rhetorical questions. Remember, The Jews performed circumcision as a sign of the covenant. But the physical hacking away of the skin did not save them. No physical act could save anyone. It was a

sign - it was an outward expression of an inward reality - at least it was meant to be. So Paul is asking the Galatian Christians, “Look, what gets you saved? Your actions or God's actions through Jesus Christ? What caused the Holy Spirit to enter into you? Something you did or something that Christ did?” Again, this is rhetorical, because we know, as he did, that no one receives the Holy Spirit unless they are saved.

One commentator said, “the gift of the Holy Spirit is the believer’s most unmistakable evidence of God's favor, his greatest proof of Salvation and the guarantee of eternal glory.”

Romans 8:16 says “[the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God](#)”. In Romans 8:9 (NASB), Paul says, “[if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.](#)”

John wrote in First John, “[by this we know that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his Spirit](#)” (4:13, ESV).

The Holy Spirit is one evidence of our Salvation. But the Holy Spirit is also a down payment for a future reality. Ephesians 1:13b-14a (NASB) says, “[having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance.](#)” You see, the Holy Spirit can be thought of in some ways as an engagement ring. Our Salvation is secure. Our Salvation is guaranteed. And someday, as the bride of Christ - His church - we will one day participate in the marriage feast of the Lamb: Signed – Sealed - Delivered.

If you can't say it better than anyone else, then you may as well just quote them. Pastor John MacArthur said this about the Holy Spirit, “*The Holy Spirit is not the goal of the Christian life but is its source. He is not the product of faithful living but is the power behind it. A higher level of living does not bring the Holy Spirit; rather submission to the Holy Spirit, who already indwells the believer, includes a higher level of living*” John F. MacArthur Jr., *Galatians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 67.

It's not our behavior that brings us the Holy Spirit. It's not following the law that brings us the Holy Spirit. It is purely by grace through faith that we are saved, and when we are saved, we receive the Holy Spirit. But Paul's not done yet. Paul has another question for the Galatians: ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Vs. 3, ESV)

So again, Paul asks them, “Are you really that stupid? Are you really going to act like a fool? You know the truth. You know the Gospel message. You are saved by grace through faith - it is not of yourselves. So why would you go back to the old ways?” Paul said, “Look, you know that the works of the flesh - following the Law, trying to earn your Salvation - never worked before. You heard the Gospel message, you responded faithfully, and now you act like it isn't working.”

Before we cast too much judgment on the Galatians, we have to admit we do this all the time in all areas of life. Think about January New Year's resolutions. People want to turn around from

the way they've been going. Whether it's finances, physical health, relationships, the reality is people end up in a place that they don't want to be. They've been doing things in a certain way, day after day, getting the same result, and they're frustrated. So what do they do? They read a book on budgeting. They start a new diet. They go to counseling for a while. But then they slowly drift back into their old habits, even when it's working.

We do this in all areas of life, even in our spiritual journey and our walk with Christ. We say, “I believe that I am saved by grace. I cannot earn it. I tried that. I left a certain religion, because it was fruitless. There was no peace and there was no hope.” So they heard the Gospel, and they responded to the Gospel, but then they bring a little bit of their old religious ways with them. I think this is why we see a lot of people drifting from Protestantism into more regimented forms of Christianity. It's a familiar form of legalism. But what Paul is saying is, it never worked before - it'll never work. You must rest in God's grace. And because Paul knew the Galatians didn't get it, and because he likely knew we wouldn't get it, he asks yet one more question.

⁴Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— (Vs. 4-5)

The translation “suffer” here is probably misguided. A better word actually is “experience”. *Did you experience so many things in vain*, Paul asks? Sure, being a Christian does involve suffering and persecution, but Paul is saying, “Look, you've had the experience of Jesus Christ and His Salvation. You've experienced freedom from the Law. You've experienced freedom from slavery to sin, freedom from slavery to religion. You are free. You know it. You've tasted it. Was this all for nothing? How soon you forget.” And then, he says to remember the same God *who supplies the Spirit in you and the miracles* – which is the Greek word *dunamis*. “Did you get the Spirit and this *power* by your doing or by God's doing?” And obviously, the answer is on that billboard - it is Christ alone.

Today friend, you are free. **What was true of the Gospel then is true today, and will be true forever. We cannot be made free by our own doing. Our Salvation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of the power of the Spirit in us, comes freely by grace through faith.** There is nothing we can do to change that, so we should stop trying. Does this give us permission to slip back into our old ways? Never. What it allows us to do is live with confidence! Our Salvation is secure – live in a way that brings hope to those who are trapped by legalism. **We are free. Therefore, let's begin living free.**

N: Now, let's bring in Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. Arnie, what good is knowledge if you don't have wisdom?

A: Yeah. You know, that's a great question, Nat: What good *is* knowledge, if you don't have wisdom?

N: That's what I asked you.

A: I know - I'm giving it right back to you, son.

N: No, I mean, here's the thing. I think we can all identify that person in our life who has - I would just say - a technical capacity. They can be really smart. They can be really good at what they do, but they have no life skills, and that's what we're talking about here. I mean, you can have all the knowledge on Earth, but if you can't live, and you can't do it well, what's the purpose? And so that's the problem, is a lot of people continue to consume and gain information and knowledge, but they don't know how to put it into practice. They don't know how to live it out. I mean, look around us today. We live in a society that is inundated with information. They've got all the knowledge that they need, but they can't think their way out of a wet paper bag. They have no capacity for it. They don't know how to translate knowledge into wisdom. And I think that explains how we've gotten into the place that we are as a society. But I mean, I'm sure you've seen that in your time: people who are really smart, but they don't know how to live.

A: Oh yeah. I grew up with a kid who got the highest chemistry score ever to go into UCLA, and he got all the answers to the questions correct - nobody's ever gotten a hundred percent - and last I heard, he was a taxi cab driver. I mean, so yeah - it's just head knowledge. Although it is important to know that a lot of us assume, if a person has a lot of knowledge, they have wisdom. I think that's something we're in awe by - people with a lot of head knowledge.

N: You know, you and I've actually talked about this a fair amount. And in fact, the three of us have talked about this on the air and off the air - thinking about over the last nine months - all these people that we would look up to and respect that have fallen from their position of power. Because, again, they didn't have the wisdom to live out what they knew to be true. They had the knowledge, they taught the knowledge, they spoke the knowledge. However, when it came to leading themselves, the wisdom ran out, and that's where people ultimately fail. And that's the problem with just consuming knowledge, and not living out wisdom. But you know, when I think about those people, making those poor decisions - it just reminds me - the world's crazy right now. I mean, the world is nuts - crazy things are going on everywhere. But I'm curious, Cara, from your perspective, how does God's wisdom set us free from worry and anxiousness?

C: Well, He knows what's around the bend. And I just take so much comfort in that He's in control of everything - so His will's going to be done, regardless. You know, I've prayed for kids to beat cancer - things like that. And I went through a thing with prayer, where I was like, if my prayers can change God's mind, then what's going on isn't the best thing that's happening. But then I found out that actually I can't change God's mind. I take so much comfort in that, because whatever plan He's orchestrating is the best plan, and prayer is there for my will to align with His will. So you're aligning with His will - is how I figured that out. So all I have to do, is make sure that my life is aligned to the will of God, no matter what that looks like. Sometimes that doesn't feel good, but we know God's loving, and He's good, and His will is the best place to be in. So He knows what's around the bend.

N: Right, He does. And I think sometimes we overcomplicate God's will for our life. I remember once talking to a Bible teacher, and I said, "You know, I'm trying to understand God's

will. You know, what should I do in this scenario?” And he goes, “Nat, God doesn't really care if you take the red car or the blue car.” Now he goes, “He does care, if you can only afford a Chevy, but your other car’s a Mercedes price tag – that you're probably starting to get outside of, maybe God's best plan for your life.” But God's will is really quite simple. God's will is to glorify Him, by obeying Him and doing it out of the right heart. That's God's will. And so, when we remember that, all the many pieces that fall around us, we can let go, and not worry, and not be anxious, because as you're describing - God has the best in mind. He is in control and we can trust Him. And yet we know that God's knowledge impacts how we live. That's why it's so important to go back to the Bible - to daily get into God's Word; to daily engage in Scripture; to allow it to transform our lives, so we can live with wisdom. And Arnie, that's something that you're very passionate about: This whole notion of engaging Scripture and allowing it to transform our lives. And you've done some research on this, and how engaging Scripture does impact our lives. Can you talk about that just a little bit?

A: Sure. We looked at over a hundred spiritual practices, and the one thing that made the difference, the best predictor of where you are spiritually, is how you handle your Bible. And those people that engage the Bible four more times a week, their lives looked radically different. And you know, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure it out. If you feed yourself spiritually, you're going to grow. And if you don't, you just are not going to grow, or you're going to grow in the wrong direction, which is actually worse.

N: Exactly right. Yeah. We need to constantly be getting into God's Word – consuming - eating it - because at the end of the day, we are what we eat, and there is no better way to look, than that -reflective of who we are in Christ. And there's one way to do that - Get in God's Word.