

**THE FOOLISHNESS OF LEGALISM**  
**PART 6**

TEXT: GALATIANS 3:1-5

January 10, 2010

**REVIEW/INTRODUCTION:**

In Galatians, Paul addresses and dispels the whole idea of performance based Christianity. We saw last week from 3:1-5 how he insists that we cannot begin the Christian life with the Spirit and then complete it with the flesh.

We are not made right with God by faith in the gospel and then proceed to maintain our relationship with God by our obedience (i.e., performance). From beginning, middle and end, gospel truth is that by which the Christian lives and grows from day to day.

Therefore, to keep the Galatians from living foolish, gospeless, performance-based Christian lives, Paul reminds them of three distinct experiences they had undergone that uphold the truth of justification by faith alone.

- I. THE GALATIANS EXPERIENCED THE PREACHING OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED. V. 1
- II. THE GALATIANS EXPERIENCED THE REGENERATING POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. VV. 2-4

Performance-based Christian living is foolish because it ignores and replaces the Cross of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit with the flesh. But, as we have learned, the Spirit magnifies Christ and leads us away from performance-based living.

The Spirit's chief work is to effectually persuade us to receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation as He is freely offered in the gospel not only at the beginning but throughout the entire course our Christian lives.

This leads us to a third experience Paul brings to the remembrance of the Galatians.

**LESSON:**

- III. THE GALATIANS EXPERIENCED THE FATHER'S ABUNDANT SUPPLY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S POWER. V. 5

There are several questions this passage of Scripture raises. We have already answered the first question from v. 2, which is: How is the Holy Spirit received (i.e., how does one become a Christian)?

In v. 2, Paul spoke of the Galatians *past experience* of the Holy Spirit (how they initially received the Holy Spirit). Paul reminds the Galatians that they did not receive the Holy Spirit by working for God. Rather, when Paul came preaching Christ crucified to them (v. 1) the Holy Spirit worked upon them! When Paul proclaimed the gospel, the Galatians received the Spirit by hearing with faith.

The next question that is raised is comes from verse 5, which is: What is the evidence that the Holy Spirit is present in your life?

Paul asks the Galatians: “How does God the Father supply the Spirit to you and work miracles among you? What is the cause? Does He do so by works of the Law or by hearing with faith?”

Once again the Galatians’ experience made the answer obvious. None of them had been circumcised. None had followed dietary laws. None observed Jewish feast days. And yet, they received the Holy Spirit when they heard and believed the gospel and experienced His mighty working power. Such a dynamic experience of the Holy Spirit in their midst was ongoing evidence that the Galatians had received the Holy Spirit by faith and not by their performance.

With this in mind, let’s now take a closer look at v. 5.

Whereas in v. 2, Paul was speaking of the Galatians’ *past experience* of the Holy Spirit, he is now is speaking of the Galatians’ *present experience* of the Holy Spirit (i.e., His continuing works of power among them).

He asks, “Does he (i.e., God the Father) who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith...”

Before proceeding, it is important to point out that v. 5 is not the only evidence Paul mentions in Galatians of the Spirit’s presence in our lives. For example, in Galatians 4:6, he writes of how God has granted to us the Spirit of His Son who enables us to cry out to God as our loving Father. In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul reveals how the Holy Spirit has been given to us to produce in us Godly character, which indicates the Spirit’s presence in our lives.

But, in Galatians 3:5, Paul points to the powerful working of the Holy Spirit as evidence of the Spirit’s presence in the Galatians’ lives.

To begin with, note the word, “*supplies*” in v. 5. In the Greek (ἐπιχορηγῶν), this participle strongly expresses the idea, “to supply abundantly,” (Burton, *Galatians*, p. 152). Paul uses the present tense to emphasize the idea of continually and liberally supplying the Spirit (Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, p. 388).

God the Father, Paul writes, is the one who continually and abundantly supplies the Holy Spirit among the Galatians (cf. 1 Thess. 4:8). The evidence of this abundant supply is the

Spirit's manifestations of miraculous power (Note both present active participles ἐπιχορηγῶν, ἐνεργῶν, cf. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, pp. 388-389).

God the Father, then, is not only responsible for their initial receiving of the Spirit (v. 2) but also for the ongoing work of the Spirit among them (v. 5). And just as in v. 2, Paul once again, attributes this ongoing work of the Spirit by faith alone apart from anything they had done or were doing.

Since the evidence of the abundant supply of the Spirit is manifestations of miraculous power, what does Paul mean by the phrase, "works miracles among you?"

The exact meaning of this phrase has been variously debated among Bible teachers. Wayne Grudem notes that the English word, miracles, "may not give a very close approximation to what Paul intended," (*Systematic Theology*, p. 1062). Gordon Fee writes, "This text shows that what Paul elsewhere calls 'signs and wonders' was also a regular and expected expression of their life in the Spirit. What we cannot know from this distance, of course, is all that Paul would have understood by the phrase, 'works miracles among you,'" (*God's Empowering Presence*, p. 389).

The word "miracles" comes from the Greek word, δύνναμις, which basically means power, ability or capability. It can be translated, "works of power," (see NASB footnote).

From the context, Paul had in mind what we commonly speak of as "charismatic manifestations of the Spirit," (Burton, *Galatians*, p. 151). Again, Fee notes, "...Paul is appealing once more to the visible and experiential nature of the Spirit in their midst as the ongoing evidence that life in the Spirit, predicated on faith in Christ Jesus, has no place at all for 'works of law,' (*God's Empowering Presence*, pp. 388-389).

We know from Paul's other letters that a variety of genuine "charismatic manifestations" were a regular and expected occurrence among his churches (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 14; 1 Thess. 5:19-22). What then are some examples from Scripture of these charismatic manifestations of God's power?

1. Remarkable and unusual answers to prayer (e.g., deliverance from physical danger such as the Apostles' and Peter's deliverance from prison, Acts 5:19-20; 12:6-11; for an extended discussion of these examples, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, "Miracles Chapter 17")
2. Powerful works of judgment on enemies of the gospel (Elymas the Magician who was struck blind, Acts 13:8-12)

It is important to note that when Elymas was miraculously struck blind, Luke reports that the proconsul believed (v. 12, "the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord."). The teaching of Scripture is clear that one of the significant purposes of miracles (manifestations of God's power) is to bring unbelievers to genuine faith. Wayne Grudem writes, "When miracles occur, they

give evidence that God is truly at work and so serve to advance the gospel...” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 360). This point is often overlooked and underemphasized. But, we need to be more open to this kind of “power evangelism” as it has been described (see John Wimber, *Power Evangelism*).

3. Divine discipline of sinning members within the church (Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1-11)
4. Exercising spiritual power over demonic opposition (Paul’s casting out of the evil spirit from the slave girl, Acts 16:18).

A further word regarding this point is necessary. The Kingdom of God breaks into the world now through the preaching of the gospel. This is what Jesus taught His disciples in Acts 1:7-8,

“<sup>7</sup> It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Paul speaks of the gospel as being, “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” When then gospel is proclaimed, the Kingdom of God breaks into and invades this present evil age (Gal. 1:4), which is the realm of satan (cf. Matt. 4:8-9; Eph. 2:2-3; 2 Cor. 4:4).

This powerful in breaking of the Kingdom through the proclamation of the gospel most definitely includes redemption, forgiveness of sins, regeneration, justification, our adoption as sons, etc... All of these spiritual blessings are evidence of the power of God working in our lives. In Ephesians 1:19, Paul piles up words for power in an attempt to express the immeasurable greatness of God’s power that is working toward believers! It takes nothing less than the power of God to raise us from the dead and make us alive (Eph. 2:1, 5)!

But here in Galatians 3:5, Paul unequivocally states that the Holy Spirit’s work also includes manifestations of power such as exorcisms, which are evidence that the devil and his army are in retreat before the advance of the King!

In Matt. 12:28, Jesus said, “if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” John, in 1 John 3:8 writes, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”

The power and authority of Christ excels all competing authorities, as Paul goes on to say in Ephesians 1:20-22a, God the Father has “<sup>20</sup> seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church...”

Thus, Jesus came not only preaching the gospel of the Kingdom but also demonstrating it through the power of the Holy Spirit working through Him (Matt. 12:28). God's power working through Him proved that He is the King and that God had come to claim what was rightfully His (cf. John Wimber & Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism*, p. 33). In His first coming, Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of God. Through His demonstrations of power (i.e., casting out demons), Jesus proved He is the King who exercises God's own power over Satan and his demonic forces.

Here in Galatians 3:5, Paul presupposes that manifestations of God's power through the Holy Spirit in the church, just as in Jesus' life, also gives evidence to the fact that God's Kingdom has come and begun to expand its beneficial results into people's lives (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 360).

5. Healings (1 Cor. 12, spiritual gifts of miracles/gifts of healings, see also the healing of Aeneas, Acts 9:35)

Paul uses similar language in 1 Corinthians 12 to speak of miraculous manifestations of God's power in the church. For example, in 1 Corinthians 12:10 Paul lists the spiritual gift of the "workings of miracles" (v. 10). In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul mentions "miracles/powers" as well as "gifts of healings," and in v. 29 he again refers to "miracles/powers" as gifts distributed to the church by the Holy Spirit.

It is interesting to note that Paul lists "miracles" as a separate gift from "gifts of healings" in v. 28. It seems, then, by "miracles" he has something else in mind other than healing. Thus, while all healings are miracles (i.e., manifestations of power) not all manifestations of power are limited to healings. However, just because the term "miracles" is not limited to healings it doesn't preclude it. The plural form of "miracles" (*δυνάμεις*) is used in both Galatians 3 and 1 Corinthians 12. The plural form indicates a variety of ways in which God's power is manifested. Thus, the variety of manifestations of power includes but is not limited to healing.

As previously mentioned, one of the purposes of healing is to give evidence of God truly at work and thus serve to advance the gospel. So, for example, when Aeneas the paralytic was healed, Luke writes, "all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord," (Acts 9:35).

Miracles of healing not only point to the reality of the Kingdom's arrival, but they also anticipate the consummation of the final Kingdom in which all disease, hunger, disorder, and death will be banished forever (Rev. 21:1-4).

From this brief survey, we conclude that the term "miracles" refers to a variety of ways in which God's power is manifested among His church in such a way that it arouses people's awe and wonder and bears witness to God and is beneficial to the church (1 Cor. 12:7; for a fuller discussion see: Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 355, 1062-1063).

Let's now come back to the point Paul is making in v. 5.

Part of his argument for upholding the truth of the gospel involves the fact that the Galatians not only *received* the Holy Spirit but were also *experiencing* His miraculous power in their midst (see Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, pp. 383-384).

In other words, not only the initial reception of the Spirit but also *the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit* among the Galatians gave certain evidence that they were indeed the true people of God (emphasis mine). Why is this important?

The Jews (and no doubt the Judaizers) boasted that they possessed the true marks of the people of God. The Judaizers boasted of being the true sons of Abraham by virtue of their ethnicity and religious observances (i.e., circumcision, following dietary laws, observing Jewish feast days, etc...).

John, in John 8:33, 39, sets forth the common boast of the Jews, "We are offspring of Abraham... Abraham is our father." Common sayings among the Jews included, "All Israel hath part in eternal life;" "Great is the virtue of circumcision- no circumcised person enters hell," (Eadie, *Galatians*, p. 227). Because of their physical descent from Abraham, the Jews of Jesus' and Paul's day believed that all spiritual blessings belonged exclusively to them (Eadie, *Galatians*, p. 227).

But, Paul states that the reception of the Holy Spirit (v. 2) and His ongoing miraculous power (v. 5) rather than circumcision serves as the "identity marker" of those who are truly the people of God (Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, p. 383). For Paul, life in the Spirit rather than life under the Law was certain evidence of belonging to God's people. Gordon Fee, commenting on the significance of Paul's description of the church as the Temple in 1 Corinthians 3 writes, "The gathered church is the place of God's own personal presence, by the Spirit. This is what marks off God's new people from 'all other people on the face of the earth' (Exod 33:16)," (Paul, *The Spirit and the People of God*, p. 19).

Concerning the "identity marker" of God's people, Paul in Romans 2:28-29 writes, "<sup>28</sup> For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God."

True Jewishness and genuine circumcision (identity markers of the people of God) are neither ethnic nor physical matters. Rather, true Jewishness and true circumcision are matters of the heart. This is why Paul in Galatians 6:15 writes, "For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."

In and of itself, circumcision or uncircumcision counts for nothing because neither state can do anything to improve or disprove our standing before God. The true "identity marker" of the Christian is the presence of the Spirit. What really counts, Paul says, is the inward transformation of the Holy Spirit, who regenerates the sinner into a whole new

person (cf. Gal. 3:2)! Everyone who is a new creation receives the full blessing, privileges and rights of sonship (Gal. 3:7-9, 14) and the Holy Spirit is the one who makes this possible (Gal. 3:14)!

Thus, we conclude, that the central role the Holy Spirit plays in the believer's life in both regeneration (v. 2) and empowerment (v. 5) is critical and must not be downplayed or dismissed.

Both the regenerating and empowering work of the Holy Spirit come by faith alone. Both works are the gracious confirming evidences (not the only evidence but nonetheless evidence) that we are the people of God and citizens of His Kingdom.

Paul's appeal to the Galatians is quite convincing. In summary, Paul has argued that it is foolish for a person who has:

1. Heard the clear preaching of Christ crucified (v. 1),
2. Received the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit by faith alone (v. 2),
3. And, experienced an abundant supply of the Holy Spirit and His miraculous power from their Heavenly Father by faith alone (v. 5),

to turn away from these gospel-based blessings and to be completed by the flesh.

As we reflect on Paul's appeal to the Galatians, I want to leave you with two implications to consider.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

1. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS NOT A REWARD TO BE MERITED BUT RATHER A GIFT TO BE RECEIVED BY FAITH ALONE.

The reception and experience of the Holy Spirit is not God the Father's reward for our performance.

The legal mind reasons, "Yes, you may have received the Spirit by faith but if you want the full blessing and privileges of the Spirit, then you must do certain things in order to truly experience Him."

The fallen human heart constantly seeks out some method in order to have a deep experience with God, "Just tell me what to do in order to get the Spirit." Books with titles such as *Three Steps to Living the Spirit-filled Life* abound in Christian bookstores (another widely-used study presents 5 steps!).

Some of the buzzwords used to speak of the keys to a "Spirit-filled Life" are "fully yielded," "wholly surrendered," or "baptized in the Spirit." It is taught that those who

“fully yield” to the Spirit will experience a “higher life/Spirit-filled life” while ordinary (“carnal”/sub-par) believers may be saved but they fail to experience the full blessing and gifts of the Spirit.

Such teaching of two categories of Christians (ordinary vs. Spirit-baptized) is spiritually crippling. It introduces performance-based living back into the believer’s relationship with God and leaves the gospel on the shelf. It results in believers walking around feeling guilty for not being “filled with the Spirit” and thus fully “pleasing to God.” In addition, two-class Christian teaching is damaging to the unity of the church. Wayne Grudem notes how such teaching contributes to a “we-they mentality” and fosters jealously, divisiveness and pride in the church (*Systematic Theology*, p. 777).

If the Spirit comes by works of the Law (e.g., being fully yielded/wholly surrendered), then we must do something to receive and experience the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, in this way, is the reward for our performance.

Paul, however, knew nothing of two-stage schemes of Christian living or two-class Christianity. F.F. Bruce writes, “The Spirit in Pauline teaching belongs to the foundation of the gospel; his reception does not mark a second and higher stage than justification. Both in John (7:39; 16:7; 20:22) and in Acts (1:8; 2:38) the gift of the Spirit is similarly the sequel and confirmation of Christ’s redemptive work,” (*Galatians*, p. 150).

In response to “two-class Christian” teaching, Wayne Grudem concludes,

“The major objection to this position is that the New Testament itself teaches no such two-level or two-class Christianity... It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the two-level or two-class view taught by all of these groups throughout history does not have a solid foundation in the New Testament itself,” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 777).

Paul didn’t set forth any “steps” for the Galatians to follow in order to receive or experience the Holy Spirit. Their reception and experience of the Spirit were based on grace through faith as much as their justification (cf. Gal. 2:16)!

The Holy Spirit belongs to the foundation of the gospel. Both His indwelling and empowering presence come by faith alone. The Spirit’s presence and work are not rewards for our performance. Paul makes it absolutely clear that God the Father abundantly supplies the Holy Spirit to those who believe the gospel. The gospel, not law-keeping, is the ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:8).

The only life that is totally surrendered, wholly yielded and fully pleasing to the Father is Christ’s. The Good News is that because we are united to Christ by faith, we are pleasing to God and filled with the Spirit. Of course, it is possible for a believer to grieve and quench the Holy Spirit by one’s sin and unbelief (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). Still, through union with Christ, every believer, not just the “fully surrendered class” possesses everything of Christ’s and receives the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9).

Thus, the reception and experience of the Holy Spirit is not a reward for preparing, sincerity, striving, yielding, or surrendering but rather a gift received by faith in Christ as He is offered freely in the gospel. The gospel is the “key” to the Spirit’s personal and empowering presence.

2. WE MUST GUARD AGAINST ALLOWING MIRACULOUS WORKS TAKING PRIORITY OVER THE GOSPEL MESSAGE.

Paul’s comment in 3:5 suggests that powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit were common occurrences among the Galatian believers. But the small number of such statements in Galatians as well as in his other letters in comparison to his numerous references to the gospel is telling.

Gordon Fee notes,

“If there are not more such statements in Paul, it is only because visible evidences of the Spirit’s presence were presuppositional for him and his churches; and he refused to appeal to them for the very reason that they might deflect from the essential message of the gospel of a crucified Messiah,” (*God’s Empowering Presence*, p. 384, footnote 56).

Because of our flesh’s default tendency toward legalism, there is always the danger of even good things (i.e., the miraculous work of the Spirit) taking priority over the gospel.

Regrettably, many times so much focus is placed on miracles that the message gets lost. If the message is lost, so are the miracles! However, the answer to abuse and misuse is not disuse. Nor, should we conclude, as some teach, that the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit was limited to the days of the Apostles. Those who deny the validity of the ongoing miraculous work of the Spirit today do so not on *exegetical* grounds but rather *experiential* grounds.

That such miraculous manifestations of the Spirit took place in the churches Paul planted was not the exception but rather the regular, expected occurrence. The difficulty that is presented to us in Galatians 3:5 is not what the passage is saying. If we take at face value what Paul is saying the meaning is not difficult. The difficulty lies with the implications of our present experience or lack thereof. Quite candidly, we need to be a lot more open to the charismatic manifestations of the Spirit.

Moreover, we need to guard against reading our lack of experiences with the Spirit back into Paul’s letters. We must also guard against having our understanding of the Spirit’s ongoing work tainted by a secular, materialist philosophy, which denies the reality of anything existing outside of the material world. For a materialist to acknowledge the reality of the supernatural (God) is to allow that at any moment the regularities of nature may be interrupted and that miracles may happen.

Thus, Gordon Fee notes,

“Our own experience of the church tends to cause us to be either unfamiliar or quite uncomfortable with such phenomena. We would prefer to believe that the Pauline churches were more like ours and less like the Pauline and Lukan documents suggest they really were. But the evidence in this case seems incontrovertible: the Spirit lay near the center of Pauline theology precisely because the experience of the Spirit in the life of the believer and the church was such a central feature of their experience and existence as believers,” (*God’s Empowering Presence*, p. 389).

There is certainly no reason to assume that the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit was limited to the apostles and early church. It is certainly true that when the apostles preached the gospel they also performed miracles that amazed people and gave confirmation to the gospel (cf. Acts 2:43; 3:6-10; 4:30; 8:6-8, 13).

However, Paul indicates here in Galatians 3:5 (and elsewhere) that miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit were also manifested in churches where no apostles were present. Galatians 3:5 (as well as passages such as 1 Corinthians 12, 14; 1 Thessalonians 5:19) suggests that miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit were and are to be regarded as common occurrences of the Spirit. We should still expect the miraculous work of the Spirit to give confirmation of the gospel and to continue throughout the church age (see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 359).

The solution to preventing abuses is to follow the example of Paul and live with a “gospel-balance” which assumes and believes that such miraculous power is to be a common experience for believers while refusing to allow anything to deflect from the essential message of the gospel.

We want the best of both worlds, the pure preaching of the gospel and the powerful, confirming manifestations of the Spirit. As citizens of God’s Kingdom, we must not only faithfully *declare* the Good News of the Kingdom, but we must also pray for and expect the Holy Spirit to *demonstrate* the power of the Kingdom!

Before we conclude, it is important to note that Paul never separated the *miraculous* work of the Spirit from His *ethical* work of moral transformation (Gal. 5:22-23). The same Spirit who was responsible for manifestations of power was also responsible for manifestations of love and holiness. Miracles and morality are the undivided work of the Spirit!

When the gospel of the Kingdom is proclaimed, good works and moral transformation are also the signs of the Kingdom. The people of God’s Kingdom are empowered by the Spirit to manifest the cluster of Christ-like qualities which Paul calls “the fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23, with love appearing first because it is the chief quality.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is the supreme blessing of the Kingdom of God and wherever He is present, love, joy, peace, and righteousness accompany him (Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 14:17).

As we consider Paul's argument to the Galatians, let this be our prayer: May our Heavenly Father abundantly supply us with His Spirit for the preaching of Christ crucified, His regenerating power, the ongoing manifestations of His power and the moral transformation of His people for the benefit of His church and the glory of His Name!

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