

Galatians 3:1-5

1 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! 2 The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? 4 Did you experience so much for nothing? — if it really was for nothing. 5 Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

Jesus changes the whole realm of the Hebrew religion from the old way to a new way. The old way is legalistic and physical; it is all about sin and punishment. The new way is of grace, love, and forgiveness. They are two totally different aspects of understanding God's nature. The Apostle Paul is familiar with both ways. The early Christian movement was connected to Judaism with a large number of Gentiles growing the problem developed from within the relationship of these two groups. The newer converts were non-Jewish and not grounded in the old way. The position of the old way was that the Gentile Christians must convert to Judaism in order to become a Christian. It is understandable that the Jewish background Christians have anguish over breaking away from their religious heritage. They insist that you observe the Jewish law of circumcision. We might not see a problem here but the Apostle Paul is an expert theologian, he knows that they are putting flesh at the center of their lives.

The letter to Galatians is Paul's view of the controversy between those that embrace Jesus and the new way and those that embrace Jesus on the conditions of maintaining heritage. The demands of the Jewish law are an unnecessary burden. His position has far-reaching consequences and is crucial for the survival of Christianity. He is faced with opponents that challenge his credentials because he is not an original apostle. The opinions and attitudes of maintaining Jewish tradition created tension and fighting over foundational tenants of our faith.

With the future of Christianity at stake the Apostle Paul focused on the cross. The crucified Christ is God's love. The cross is the center of Christian living. With the Apostle Paul it is always the cross and resurrection. The moralistic theology demands correct behavior as an everyday guide, surrender, discipline, and a good life is promised for obedience. The curse of the law is that it is about judging and condemning, not love. The way of God, as it is given to us through Jesus. The love of God does what man cannot do. Faith and trust is the expected response; it is more loyal and more obedient to the rules than someone that is following rules for blessing and to avoid punishment. God gets to the heart of humanity through Jesus and the cross. Such love deserves our love. The love of the Lord receives our love and faith as a response to divine love.

Galatians is Paul's declaration of a changed religious structure that does not need to depend on the old way which is dependent on men observing, condemning, and enforcing the rules. The new way is dependent on God, love, and grace. People are naturally sinful and sinful people cannot be holy. The way to please God is to trust in divine grace. This is not given by earning merit through obedience to law. God gave love through Christ as means to salvation. The way of God is love and the way to God is faith. So, the Apostle Paul hits hard and calls them foolish because he has to hit hard and get

the point across because it is so important. The fate of the religion of Jesus is at stake. He has to be tough. It is all about the Holy Spirit, not the law. You did not get the Holy Spirit by observing the law. You got the Holy Spirit by believing in Jesus.

The lesson is on righteousness and understanding that righteousness is not a matter of correct action. Nonbelievers can be good. It is a very important concept to understand. We all want to be right and please God and we know God is pleased or displeased by our actions. It is easy to slip up. The history of the Hebrews is that their experience as a nation has been rewarded and punished according to their behaviors. They have received God's favor due to righteousness. However, righteous is not defined by people but by God in the scriptures. Self-righteousness is defined by the individual. Jesus taught us that the righteousness of God is not a long list of virtues but the right attitude of the person. Righteous action is based on love not fear of punishment.

Paul explains his position by taking on Abraham as an example. All Jews can relate to Abraham. How Abraham became righteous is that he believed in God. He is not righteous because of his action. His action is due to his faith. Abraham pleased God not by works of the law, rules, and regulations, but by his faith. The descendants of Abraham receive God's blessing but must remain in faith. The ritual of circumcision is an action and it does not make one faithful; it is a response to faith. Action does not make one righteous. Action is a response to righteousness. God justifies the Gentiles (us) by faith. The Jews relied on the promise to Abraham as a special relationship with God with rules that must be followed or face punishment. The curse of the law is that it cannot do what love can do. With Jesus love is the main thing.