

6 - Galatians – Add Nothing to the Gospel – 3-21-10

Acts 13:1-3

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

So, Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church in Antioch to begin their mission. The churches of Galatia were the main churches that they planted on that first trip. (Acts 13 & 14) Sometime after the churches were planted, word got back to Paul the believers were being troubled by some people, most likely from Jerusalem. In fact, it's clear this and from Paul's other letters that there was a person or a group of people who followed him around trying to undermine his ministry to the gentiles by adding to the gospel that he preached.

So, after hearing of the damage being done to the churches in Galatia, Paul fires off this letter. What would you say was his attitude while writing it? He was ticked off!

Now, in reading this letter we need to realize that it's a three-party letter. There are:

- Paul, the father of the Galatian church who is writing the letter
- The Galatians believers of whom there were a few who were Jewish. But most would have been gentiles. Many of those were God fearers.
- The trouble makers who Paul has in mind and whose false teachings Paul directly addresses. Paul calls them agitators. They are the ones who have stirred up trouble among the people by putting burdens on them that the gospel does not require.

What then is the main point, the big picture in this letter? According to reformation theology, the main point is justification by faith alone. That truth, of course, is absolutely affirmed in this letter.

Gal 2:15-16

We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

We *are* justified by faith and not by doing the law. But that's not the main point of this letter. Why? The agitators agreed with Paul on that point! They didn't come to the Galatians to tell them that they had to work their way into the kingdom. The issue was not entrance requirements. The issue was once in what then is required. The issue was not

about getting in. The issue was once in how does one then progress in their experience of completion.

The issue was, now that we are members of the family of God by the new covenant, is any aspect of the old covenant still demanded. Is life that we have now in Christ completely under the authority of the new covenant or are their still parts of the old (i.e. the law) that must be adhered to and kept.

There are three specific issues relating to the old covenant mentioned in this letter that the agitators were trying to put on the Galatian Christians.

- 1) Circumcision
- 2) Keeping days and feasts, especially Sabbath.
- 3) Food regulations.

The agitators told the gentile Galatians that they had to be circumcised to be part of God's family. Paul said no! It's not that circumcision was bad. It just could not be required. This was a huge stumbling block for the God fearers.

Paul's argument in this letter is that adding any of the old covenant regulations to the gospel and the new covenant experience actually robs one of their experience of the new and of the grace of God.

So then the key to properly understanding Galatians is the first few verses of chapter 3:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort? Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by your observing the law, or by your believing what you heard? So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

The agitators were trying to add law and works of the flesh to the Christian experience. Paul said emphatically, no! We begin by faith in the Holy Spirit. We continue by faith in the Spirit. We will finish by faith in the Spirit.

Adding anything to the following the Holy Spirit in faith amounts to witchcraft, manipulation, and control. Paul says there is no place in the gospel or the life of God's new covenant people for witchcraft, manipulation or control.

The Holy Spirit does not control. He leads, equips, enables and empowers us to live the amazing life of God that we have been given.