

• *Paul's first confirmation of his teaching*

Paul has now given his basic statement of the gospel, plus the reasons why it does not lead to a loose way of living. We are righteous in status in God's eyes, says Paul, because Jesus is ours by our faith in him. Now Paul confirms and proves his teaching from many different angles. First of all he points to the experience of the Spirit. There had been a time when the Galatians had powerfully experienced the Holy Spirit. It happened not as Paul preached the law, but as he preached the Lord Jesus Christ.

• *Their experience of the Holy Spirit*

The Galatians' own spiritual experience proves the gospel- message. Have they forgotten what happened to them when they first dramatically came into the experience of salvation? Have they forgotten what happened in the weeks and months that followed? Any Christian who turns to Mosaic legislation for blessing has forgotten his own conversion, for no one ever receives salvation in any of its aspects (justification, sanctification, final reward) by putting themselves under the institutions of the law of Moses.

• *Not by the law*

1. Preaching of the cross

1. **Our experience of the gospel begins with the preaching of the cross.** He says, *'You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified'*.¹ When Paul went to Galatia he preached the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. He 'placarded' the cross before their eyes. It was like one of the gigantic advertisements you have by the roadside in many countries of the world. It was held up so high, so visibly, so clearly, that you could not miss it! This was the centre-piece of everything Paul said to them at that time. He said nothing at all about the Mosaic law. As they believed in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, they came to faith, and immediately they powerfully experienced the Holy Spirit. They knew that their sins were forgiven.

1 3:1

2. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit

2. **Our experience of the gospel is confirmed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.** As they believed in Jesus Christ and His death upon the cross for their sins, their salvation was 'sealed' by the Holy Spirit. *'I want to find out from you this one thing. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?'*¹ Paul is obviously referring not to the secret hidden work of the Spirit bringing us to faith, but to something conscious, something the Galatians will never forget. The Spirit was poured out on the Galatians. The event must have been something like that which happened in Acts 10. 'While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word ... the believers ... were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles . . . For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God'.² Paul's point is: how did this happen? Was Paul expounding the Mosaic law when suddenly they 'received the Spirit'? Was that how it happened? No! Not at all! Paul was preaching the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ (just like Peter in Acts 10:43!) when God moved in amazing blessing in their lives. We never truly experience the Spirit in any other way. God does not honour legalism by blessing it with the Holy Spirit. Never! So Paul goes on: *'Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?'*³

1 2:2

2 Acts 10:44-46

3 3:3

3. The foolishness of trusting in human effort

3. **It is foolishness to turn from trusting the Spirit to trusting Mosaic legislation – or any other set of regulations like it.** Paul's point here is not that there is no effort in Christian godliness. The translation that has 'Are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?' has missed the point. We do put a lot of effort into Christian godliness! Paul's point is that we do not do it by the Mosaic law. 'The flesh' does not refer to human effort. It refers to Mosaic legislation, or anything like it. We do put a lot of effort into Christian godliness – but we do so in the power of the Holy Spirit!

• **Spirit empowered effort**

• **The law is not for justification nor for sanctification**

• **Exhortations to Godliness are not “the law”**

• **Dependence on the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit**

4. Miracles by Jesus’ grace and nothing else

• **No other gospel**

There is something here which we must carefully notice. It is sometimes said that we do not need the Mosaic law for **justification**, but we do need it for **sanctification**. ‘As a means of justification it is dead, but as a guide to the life of obedience it is not’ – says one scholar.¹ But look at what Paul says! ‘*Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*’ Surely he is insisting that it is as much wrong for us to go back to the law for sanctification as it was for us to use it for justification. There is often a confusion between ‘the law’ and ‘exhortations to godliness’. We have died to the Mosaic system altogether! Even the ten commandments are too **low** for them to be a level of godliness. Jesus asks things of us that are **higher** than the ten commandments. But of course we have not ‘died’ to exhortations to godliness. We walk in the Holy Spirit, and we can be told how to do it! But this is not sanctification by the law. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones who said ‘sanctification by the Law is as impossible as was justification by the Law’ was much closer to the teaching of the apostle Paul.² This is Paul’s point here. It is foolishness to turn from trusting the Spirit to trusting Mosaic legislation, or any other set of regulations like it. We must instead live directly on the Lord Jesus Christ and walk in the Spirit. The exhortations of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, and the exhortations of the apostles, will tell us what the details are.

4. **The miracles of the Holy Spirit also depend on Jesus’ grace – and upon nothing else.** Paul asks them: ‘*Did you experience so many things for nothing – if indeed it really was for nothing? ^{□1} Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? ^{□2}* The supplies of the Spirit will cease if we turn to a ‘gospel’ of legalism. Satan is always wanting the church to move away from the gospel. It can happen very easily, but we are foolish if we allow it to happen. ‘You foolish Galatians!’ said Paul. They were foolish because they allowed Mosaic culture to come into their churches. They were gentiles, but they were listening to people who wanted to turn them into Jews. But we must not let the gospel be taken over by a kind of ‘cultural’ Christianity. When the Galatians were first saved a wave of blessing came into the churches. There were miracles and abundant supplies of the Spirit. God ‘sealed’ the gospel by an outpouring of blessing from above. But what kind of gospel does God ‘seal’ – without any trickery or anything being ‘worked up’? The only gospel that God truly and genuinely ‘seals’ is one of faith-plus-nothing in the-cross-of-Christ-plus-nothing. There is no other gospel.

□1 3:4
□2 3:5

Notes

1. C.K. Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation: A Study of... Galatians* (SPCK, 1985), p. 20.
2. D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Law: Its Functions and Its Limits* (Banner of Truth, 1973), p. 4.



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