

Galatians 8 – From Start to Finish
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We are in a sermon series on the book of Galatians called Freedom Through Christ. The issue Paul addressed in Galatians was law vs. grace.

In the first part of Galatians Paul defends the gospel of grace against those who were attacking it. Then he moves into explaining the gospel of grace.

Two weeks ago I preached a sermon entitled Crucified with Christ. We took a deep dive into the truths of Galatians 2:20.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

When Jesus was crucified on the cross, God included us in His death. Our old man – the person we were before we were saved – is now dead.

This is more than having sins forgiven – this is having new life and identity in Christ.

Because we died with Christ – we have His resurrection life in us.

Because we died with Christ – we should no longer be slaves to sin.

So, we reckon ourselves dead, which means to no longer live for self.

To no longer trust in your good works for salvation.

Dying to self means you place no faith in yourself. Instead, you place all your faith in Christ. If it's up to us, we cannot make it! **Victory comes when we realize it is no longer I, but Christ!**

Today I'm preaching a message called From Start to Finish. Our text is Galatians 3:1-6 where Paul confronts the Galatians by asking them a series of questions.

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

These are pretty strong words. Imagine if I got up here and said, You foolish Grand Prairieans or Arlingtonians or Mansfieldites or Cedar Hill dwellers. You probably wouldn't like it.

But **the word foolish does not mean a lack of intelligence - it means a lack of wisdom!** It does not mean that someone cannot think. It means that they can think but they do not use the power to think in a way that keeps them from deception.

Foolish people know what the word of God says but choose to not believe it.

Foolish people think with the natural mind rather than with the mind of Christ!

Much of the book of Proverbs is dedicated to showing the difference between wisdom and foolishness. Here are 3 verses that are relevant to our teaching today.

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 12:15

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise.

Proverbs 28:26

He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.

The Galatian churches were foolish because they despised Paul's instruction, they were right in their own eyes and did not listen to Paul's counsel, and they trusted in themselves and their works for salvation rather than trusting in Christ alone.

Not only does Paul say that the Galatians are foolish, but he also asks, "Who has bewitched you?" **The question "Who has bewitched you" means who cast a spell on you to cause you to believe a lie?**

Paul said I clearly taught you that because Jesus died for you, you are made righteous – right with God. It's all of Christ, not of you! It all of grace, not of works! This was Paul's consistent message. In 1 Corinthians 2:2 he said:

I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

So, we know Paul clearly taught the Galatians that salvation and righteousness are received only by faith in Christ and Him crucified. But the Judaizers had bewitched the Galatians into believing that Christ and the cross were not enough for salvation, but they also had to keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. So Paul asks in verse 2:

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?

The obvious answer is you receive the Holy Spirit the same way you receive salvation: by faith, not by works. Then Paul asks in verse 3:

Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

Here Paul explains why he calls the Galatians foolish. He did so by revealing one of the fundamental differences between law and grace.

**Under law, we are blessed and grow spiritually by earning and deserving.
Under grace, we are blessed and grow spiritually by believing and receiving.**

The error of the Galatians was not traditional legalism which believes that you are saved by works, but they believed that salvation requires both faith and works. They believed that you start by faith but you finish by works. NO! NO! NO! A thousand times NO!

Salvation begins and is brought to completion by grace through faith.

That's why Paul said in Philippians 1:6

I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

It doesn't say, "God started the work but you must finish it."

It doesn't say, "What started by the Spirit must be completed by the flesh."

NO! Remember what I taught you. Dying to self includes crucifying any thought that you can save yourself or help God save you or add to what Jesus did on the cross!

Are you so foolish to believe that? Has Satan bewitched you into placing faith in yourself rather than Christ? Satan worked through the Judaizers to deceive the Galatians and he's doing the same thing today – deceiving people into believing that Jesus needs help to save them.

NO! What He began in you He will bring to completion!!! Can you dare to believe that today?

In human terms, thinking you can finish what Jesus started is like:

Telling an Olympic marathon runner that if they get the race started – you can finish it and win. Impossible!

Telling Ernest Hemingway that if he gets a book started – you can finish it. Impossible!

Telling Usher if he gets a song started – you can finish it. Impossible!

Telling Albert Einstein that if he gets started on the theory of relativity – you can finish figuring it out. Impossible!

I could go on and on but telling Jesus that you can finish what He started is infinitely more impossible than all of these put together. That's why we must do what Hebrews 12:2 says to do:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

It doesn't say fix your eyes on Jesus to be born again, but then fix your eyes on yourself to finish your faith! NO!

Jesus is the alpha and the omega! The beginning and the end! The author and finisher of our faith. The initiator and the completer of our salvation and our sanctification!

Yes, we must cooperate with Him. Yes, we are co-laborers with Him. But He is our salvation from start to finish. So, Paul asks in verse 4:

Have you suffered so much for nothing — if it really was for nothing?

Evidently, the Galatians had suffered for their faith. Many people in the New Testament did. Paul certainly did. In fact, when he originally went to Galatia, Acts 14:8-22 says:

8 In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed 10 and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

11 When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.

13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: 15 "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you."

Paul then preached a message on who God really is, but:

18 Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

19 Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.

20 But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

21 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,

22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

The Galatians knew Paul suffered for the cause of Christ. They saw the crowd turn from idolizing Paul to stoning him until they thought he was dead. But God raised him up and he preached and many were saved.

Then Paul and Barnabas went through the cities of Galatia strengthening them by telling them that believers go through hardships before entering the kingdom of heaven.

Many people seem to believe that having faith in Christ will prevent them from having any problems in life. No! Having faith in Christ will cause you some problems in life.

There will be people that don't like it when you follow Christ. There will be people who turn on you, slander you, and hurt you. Paul said this in 2 Timothy 3:10-14

You have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, 11 my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. 12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed.

Like Paul – I want to encourage you and strengthen you to remain true to the faith no matter what! I want to remind you what Peter said in 1 Peter 4:12-16

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

People have suffered for following Christ all throughout history. All the disciples except for John died painful deaths as martyrs. And people all over the world are suffering because of their faith today. That's why Paul asked the Galatians in verse 4:

Have you suffered so much for nothing — if it really was for nothing?

“Why did you go through that pain if it was for nothing?” Or was it really for nothing? Paul was believing for the Galatians to repent and turn back to truth. Then Paul asks in verse 5:

Does God give you His Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

Again, the obvious answer is that miracles are done by faith not works. We say we know that, but many of us have the same foolish thinking that the Galatians did – that we have to earn the right to do miracles by being more holy or more spiritual or more prayerful.

I want to remind you of Acts 3 where Peter and John healed a man who had been crippled from birth. This drew a big crowd who were astonished by this miracle. Acts 3:12 and 16 say:

12 When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"

16 By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see."

Notice how healing and miracles occur – not because of someone's own power or godliness. We sometimes put people God has used powerfully on a pedestal as if they have extra power or extra holiness – they don't. They just have faith in an all-powerful God.

So don't think that miracles are done by the holiest or most powerful people. Don't think that you need to be perfect and powerful to do miracles. As R. W. Shambach used to end all his radio broadcasts, "You don't have any trouble. All you need is faith in God." It is faith that moves the hand of God. That's why Paul says in Galatians 3:6

Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

The Galatian Christians had a works-based relationship with God because other they were deceived by the Judaizers who were born as Jews and who claimed Abraham as their spiritual ancestor. So, Paul turned that back on their heads by using Abraham as an example of being right with God by faith and not by faith plus works.

Ancient Rabbis admired Abraham's faith because they believed he was loved by God because he kept the law hundreds of years before it was given. So, when Paul brought up Abraham, it would have been a complete surprise to his opponents, who believed that Abraham proved their point.

The verse Paul is quoting here is Genesis 15:6, which is one of the clearest expressions in the Bible of the truth of salvation by grace, through faith alone. It is the gospel in the Old Testament and it is quoted 5 times in the New Testament – here in Galatians, in James 2, and 3 times in Romans 4.

For instance, Romans 4:1-3 says:

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about — but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Romans 4:9-10 shows that righteousness was accounted to Abraham not because he performed some work and certainly not because he was circumcised, because the covenant of circumcision had not yet been established. It was faith and faith alone that caused God to account Abraham as righteous. And it's the same for us: we are counted as righteous because of faith in what Jesus did for us on the cross.

By the way, the Bible does not say that that Abraham believed *in* God (although he did). Instead, it says that Abraham believed God. That means **it is possible to believe in God, yet not believe God.**

For instance, there are many people who only believe *in* God, in the sense that they believe He exists, but they do not trust God for salvation through the cross of Christ. By the way, the Bible basically says, "So you believe in God? Big deal." You can find that in James 2:19 which says:

You believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this — and they tremble in terror.

This kind of faith is just an intellectual agreement with facts. A lot of people say they believe in God. So what? Demons believe in God. Demons know the Bible is the word of God. Demons know that Jesus Christ is the son of God. In fact, a demon said to Jesus in Mark 1:24

We know who you are, you're the Holy One of God.

Demons believe Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world. Demons believe Jesus rose from the dead. They know all of that is true. They saw it with their own eyes. But they will never repent of sin and rebellion and they will never submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

And this world is full of people – and churches are full of people – who are 'believers' in name only. They say they believe in God, but they never place their faith in Jesus.

Listen – if your faith is only in your head – it will not save you. Faith must impact your heart and your life. Romans 10:8-10 says:

The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

We need more than just believing that there is a God – we need to place our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Since none of us can be good enough to accomplish perfect righteousness on our own, we must have God's righteousness credited to us by doing just what Abram did: Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness.

Salvation is all of grace through faith – from start to finish!!

Sanctification is all of grace through faith – from start to finish!!

Being conformed to the image of Christ takes the power of Christ – from start to finish!!

So place your faith in Jesus Christ for victory in life – from start to finish!