



Let me start first by asking everyone a question: How do we live the Christian life? What are we supposed to do? How are we supposed to behave? Is there some sort of method or program that I need to sign up for?

When I became a Christian I had no idea what to do next. It was a crucial time in my life and in my understanding of what it meant to be a Christian. Thankfully I had a great church to plug into and some wonderful men to disciple me. But, when it came to spiritual matters, I was a blank slate and completely unaware of how to live this Christian life that I signed up for.

What Paul has been doing in the book of Galatians and what he continues to do here is to explain how to live the Christian life. He starts first by asking the Galatians to reflect back on how they became Christians. What we see first is the faithlessness of the Galatians.

The Faithlessness of the Galatians

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 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—” (Galatians 3:1–5).

Paul asked the Galatians five rhetorical questions about their faith. He asked them to remember what took place in their lives when they responded to the Good News of Jesus Christ. He wants them to really think about what is going on in their lives.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? (v.1)

Paul, the man of great compassion, first tells them that they are being idiots! That’s exactly what the word foolish means. Where is your common sense? You are not thinking right!

Who has “bewitched” you? That word literally means to be put under a spell. These false teachers have placed them under the spell of the law. This spell is blinding them to the fact that Paul has already taught them and wrote to them about the crucifixion of Jesus.

I love how Paul once again goes straight to the cross here. He points out that the crucifixion is at the center of the gospel. It

is where God showed his love and solved the problem of sin through the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul is saying, “You know about this, but are under a blinding spell, you can’t think straight, you are impaired.”

Let me ask you, Do you ever feel that some of your family members or friends are blinded from the Good News of Jesus Christ? You’ve shared your faith with them but you don’t feel like it is going anywhere? For whatever reasons they are not open to Jesus and in fact when you try to share your faith with them, they seem to just shut off? I’ve been in those situations many times.

For those of you who are **not** Christians here this morning, you need to understand that there is an enemy of your soul who is blinding you to the Good News of Jesus Christ. His mission in life is to thwart your understanding and response to Jesus Christ. In essence, you are under a blinding, numbing, spell. But, you are here this morning and God is at work in your life, drawing you to himself and breaking that spell.

For those of you who are discouraged at your attempts to share your faith with your loved ones, we need to understand that there is a spiritual battle going on that we do not see and we need to pray for God to “turn on the light” within them and break the spell that they are under.

Paul asks a second question, one that he restates twice.

Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? (v.2). 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? (v.5).

This is the key and most important question. He first points out the fact that upon their conversion to Christ they received the Holy Spirit. This is the first reference to the Holy Spirit in Galatians. Paul begins to lay out his answer to the question of how we are to live the Christian life.

He asks them about the role the Holy Spirit has played in their lives. Have you received the Spirit? Yes. Have you been experiencing his power through miracles and other ways? Yes. Did you do any of this on your own (“works of the law”) or was this done by “hearing with faith”? This is so important that he repeats it twice. Another way to translate this phrase is: “believing what you heard.” What was it that you heard from me? The gospel.

What is so important anyway about belief and faith? A good definition of faith is, “trusting in what you have reasoned to be true.” Gospel faith does not check our brains off at the door. Gospel faith is about trusting in what you have thought about and reasoned to be true. Gospel faith brings both conviction and life change.

The next question Paul asks is...

Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh? (v.3).

At the moment you became a Christian, were you given the Holy Spirit? Yes. What’s the deal then? You’ve started with a dependence and reliance on the Holy Spirit to enter and live the Christian life, but now you are trying to “perfect” or “finish” it by your own human effort. He asks the Dr. Phil question here, “How’s that working for you?”

Paul then asks one last question pointing out their faithlessness yet again.

Did you suffer (experience) so many things in vain? (v.4)

In your experience of suffering, what has been more helpful to you—the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and faith in Christ or your own human effort? When you suffer who do you call upon for help? Jesus or these false teachers?

After showing the Galatians their lack of faith and reminding them of their conversion to Christ, Paul gives them two examples of what that Christian life is supposed to look like. Paul points to the faithfulness of Abraham.

The Faithfulness of Abraham

“just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’? Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (verses 6–9).

What the false teachers were doing to the Galatians was using several Old Testament texts to support their claims for the gospel plus circumcision. Paul takes the same OT passages and gives them a gospel interpretation. He starts first by using Abraham as an example of gospel faith. First, let me give you some helpful background about the Jewish tradition concerning Abraham.

Jewish Tradition Concerning Abraham

Abraham was the patriarch of the Jewish faith. These false teachers were using Abraham as an example to reinforce their view that they were God’s chosen ones and that they were the legitimate sons of Abraham. In Genesis 15 we read of God’s covenant with Abraham. God made an agreement with Abraham

and blessed him so that all nations would be blessed through him. Then later in Genesis 17 we read about how God chose circumcision as a sign of his covenant with Abraham. These false teachers combined both the Abrahamic covenant with circumcision to essentially say: “Faith in Christ is important **but** it needs to be supplemented with the practice of circumcision.” Faith and works go hand in hand. Believe in Jesus Christ and get circumcised like Abraham. But Paul, being the brilliant theologian and debater, reminds them of their error.

Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness (v.6)

Yes, God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, but at that time Abraham had no idea how God was going to work. Abraham “believed God.” He completely trusted and relied on God. He was old and already a member of AARP. He had no male heir; he wasn’t even circumcised. It was **after** the covenant was made that God blessed him with a child and asked him to be circumcised. The result of Abraham’s faith was that it was “counted” or “credited” to him as righteousness.

After laying this out, Paul asks, Who are the true sons of Abraham? (v.7) Is it the circumcised? No. It’s those of faith! The Scriptures have always been preaching this gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ is first found in Genesis. This good news is for all people, not just spiritual elites. “All nations will be blessed,” even the Gentiles. All this is based on faith.

The next thing Paul does here is give the Galatians the ultimate example of genuine faith, the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ

“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ But the law is not of faith, rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (verses 10–14).

Paul presents two drastically different ways to live the Christian life: Under the curse of the law and under the blessing of faith.

The Curse of the Law (verses 10–12)

If you rely on “works of the law” then you are under the curse because it is impossible to obey all the law. For example, many of us work with Microsoft Word or Excel, but most people only use a fraction of the functions in Word or Excel. It is impossible to know all the features of those programs, unless you are the one that created it! That is basically what Paul is saying—it is

impossible to know and obey all the law. No one is made right (justified) by the law; it has always been by faith. The Christian life is meant to be lived by faith. How is this curse dealt with then? Paul's answer is the cross.

The Blessing of Faith (verses 13–14)

The question Paul is answering here is this: What did Jesus do on the cross? The problem is that we owed God a great debt, one that we could not pay back and we stood condemned before a holy God.

Jesus Christ redeemed us, he set us free, he bought us back, he paid our debts. We are now justified. All this happened on the cross. On the cross he became a curse. He not only bore the sins of the world but he became sin. *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Cor. 5:21). The curse that has been removed was the curse of sin and the curse of law observance. Why did God the Father allow this to happen? *“So that in Christ, the blessing of Abraham would come to all people through the Holy Spirit”* (v.14).

This all happens by faith. This is the ninth time the word “faith” is mentioned. I love Paul's theology because it is a theology of the cross, of the Spirit, of faith, and of being “in Christ.”

Conclusion

Let's go back to the question I posed at the start of my message: How do we live the Christian life? The answer is: We live the Christian life by faith in Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let me unpack this statement.

Our life in Christ began by faith. What Paul does in verses 1–5 is to remind the Galatians about how they came to know Jesus Christ. Was it by faith through the Holy Spirit or by self-righteousness and will power?

Like the Galatians there are times in our life where our faith is feeble. In times of struggle and doubt our faith can become tender and weak. The encouragement for us during these times is to reflect back on and remember how we first came to faith in Jesus Christ. How did Jesus get a hold of your life? What were the specific events? How did you see God at work during that time? Who played a vital role in your coming to faith? What did Jesus rescue you from? How significant was it when you first truly understood that Christ died for you? When your faith is weak, remember what Christ has done in your life. This will greatly encourage your faith.

Our life in Christ not only began by faith but it continues by faith. We are given the example of both Abraham and Jesus as men who lived by faith. Gospel faith is not just how you get into the Christian life, but it is how you are to live the Christian life. Life in Christ is **not** about mustering more faith to overcome or striving even harder to attain spiritual maturity. That is the law. As we live

the Christian life we do so by trusting in what we have reasoned to be true. We walk not by sight but by what? Faith! Faith in who God is and what he has done for us—his character and nature, his revealed Word, his promises. All these things are what help give us courageous faith, a faith that fights through adversity.

If your faith is weak this morning I would encourage you to dive into the character and nature of God. Read a book like J I Packer's *Knowing God*, that unpacks some of God's attributes. Read your Bible and highlight every promise of God that you come across. Study the Gospels and look at those passages that deal with faith. Get on your knees and cry out to God and ask him for courage in your trial and faith to take the next step.

Our life in Christ began by faith, it is lived by faith, and it is lived by the Spirit. I don't want to steal too much steam from Chapter 5 where Paul really tells us how to live life in the Spirit, so let me be brief here.

As we look at verses 10–14, Paul sets up two extremes: Curse and Blessing. You want to live the cursed life, no problem, go for it; relying on your own self-confidence is miserable. If you want to live the blessed life, that life is lived by the Spirit.

Our relationship with Christ is sustained and maintained by the Holy Spirit. What uniquely distinguishes God's people is not circumcision, but the Holy Spirit. Some of you are here this morning and you have not yet stepped over the line of faith, but you sense God at work here at CPC and in your own life. That is the Holy Spirit at work. Your choice today is curse or blessing.

For those of you who are Christians and you are not experiencing God's blessing in your life today, let me give you a few tips to help. Ask yourself this question: If the Holy Spirit left your life (which cannot happen if you are in Christ), would anything be different? Would you sense a loss of power to live the Christian life? Would you notice a change? The truth is, we can live much of the Christian life in our power, utilizing our talents and abilities to get by. When I've lived that way, it usually ends with exhaustion, fatigue, and lost passion for life.

End the day by looking back at the ways you saw God at work. Frequently ask yourself, What is God doing in my life today? Is he at work? Am I fully surrendered? Look for specific ways where you have relied on your own human effort to succeed, grow or mature and not the power of the Holy Spirit—praying about decisions, letting go of things that you cannot control. Look to God's word for support and strength and not to the things of this world. These are all ways that can help to live life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We live the Christian life by faith in Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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