

Persevere by Faith

Galatians 3:1-9

Please turn in your Bible to **Galatians 3:1-9**:

“1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Does he who supplied the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? 7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 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.” 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” (English Standard Version)

Hear the Lord say to you through His Word, “**Persevere by Faith.**”

You may recall that Galatians was written in response to Satanic attacks on the Gospel coming from within the churches themselves. The apostle Paul warned the churches to beware of the Judaizers, a group that was gaining increasing influence in the churches and was proclaiming a false gospel. Who were the Judaizers? The Judaizers were Jews who claimed to be Christians; they claimed to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but they also claimed that Gentiles had to become like the Jews in order to be saved. The Judaizers argued that those who were not ethnically Jewish could not become Christians unless they kept the works of the law of Moses.

In chapter 1, Paul taught that the churches were buying into these false teachings, turning away from the grace of Christ to a different gospel, which is no good news at all (1:6). Paul says that the Judaizers perverted the gospel of Christ (1:7) and therefore were under the eternal condemnation of God (1:8, 9). In Galatians 2:4, Paul refers to the Judaizers as “false brethren,” which proves that despite their claims to the contrary, they were not brothers in Christ at all.

The Judaizers were **legalists**. They believed in and taught a false gospel based on faith plus works. They taught that faith alone was not sufficient for salvation. They taught that Gentiles had to be circumcised, observe Jewish dietary laws, and observe Jewish holy days and festivals in order to become true Christians. Like all false gospels, their plan of salvation was man-centered and works-centered.

Thus, Paul rebukes the Galatian Christians for their lack of discernment and for caving in to the sinful legalism of the Judaizers, beginning at verse 1:

Galatians 3:1 “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.”

It really is difficult to believe, but the very generation that lived to see Christ’s resurrection, the very generation that still was alive when the apostles were yet living on this earth, this very generation fell into serious theological error. Many fell into false teaching, many fell back into sinful living, and many denied the faith altogether. Of course, these were not truly saved, for they did not persevere by faith.

The apostle Paul, speaks as a loving father toward his spiritual children, admonishing and rebuking the Galatians for their waywardness, their disobedience to God. He says, “It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.” In the last verse of Galatians, chapter 2, Paul warned that the Judaizers were setting aside the need for God’s grace; they were nullifying the Gospel; they were exchanging the life-saving truth of the Gospel for a legalistic religion that leads to eternal damnation. “If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Gal. 2:21).

The crafty Judaizers were false brothers, they were Satan’s undercover agents sent into the churches to fool the Christians, to bewitch them. But the Lord cares for His chosen people. He does not abandon them. God sent the apostle Paul to call the Galatians and to call us back to covenant faithfulness, to live by faith, and to persevere by faith.

Throughout Galatians, Paul teaches that the one, true Gospel of God comes **by God’s grace alone** and is received **by faith alone in Christ alone**. The Gospel teaches that we are justified by faith alone, **apart from works, apart from** performing the works of the law.

In **Galatians 3:2-4**, Paul asks the Galatians: “Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?”

God justifies us by faith alone. In regeneration, we are born again from above, made a new creation in Christ by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. Any attempt to attain salvation by some good work is futile; it is foolishness.

In Galatians 2:16, which may be called the theme verse for the book of Galatians, Paul explains “that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be

justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”

Paul explains in Romans 10:17 that “faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Since we have received the Holy Spirit by faith alone, how foolish it would be now to seek to add to our justification by our own works. “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” God calls us to live by faith alone, to persevere in our faith in Christ, “being confident” that “He who has begun a good work in [us] will complete it until” the day when Jesus Christ returns” (Phil. 1:6).

The Judaizers were throwing the churches into confusion and trying to pervert the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:7). They denied the power of the Cross, by adding works to the pure Gospel of grace. The Judaizers claimed that to be a Christian, a man had to be circumcised in the flesh.

In response to this teaching, Paul warned in the harshest of language in **Philippians 3:2-3**: “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision [or “those mutilators of the flesh”]; 3 for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

The Judaizers also were seeking to convince the Galatian Christians that they had to observe the Jewish holy days and seasons and observe Jewish dietary laws. Yet, Paul said that for Christians to observe such holy days and seasons and dietary laws would nullify the Gospel of Christ. In fact, it would be cause to question whether they were even saved!

Galatians 4:9-11: “But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 **I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.**”

Paul adds more on this subject in **Colossians 2:16-23**: “16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or [Jewish] sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. [That is, since Christ has fulfilled all these things, don’t allow anyone to bind you to the observance of Old Testament dietary laws or holy days and festivals.] 18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels . . . **Verse 20** Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations -- 21 “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” 22 which all concern things which perish with the using -- **according to the commandments and doctrines of men? [that is, men have invented these things; they are not found in God’s Word]** 23 These things indeed have an

appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.”

Paul tells us in Galatians 3:3 that seeking to be perfected by keeping the law of Moses is nothing more than foolishness. It is futile.

What the Galatians need is also what we need. We need persevering faith, trusting in Christ’s merits alone as our only hope of eternal life.

The Hebrew Christians, like the Galatians, suffered for their faith. The writer of Hebrews calls us, like them, to persevere in our faith. **Hebrews 10:32-39**: “But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: 33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; 34 for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. 35 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 37 “For yet a little while, *And* He who is coming will come and will not tarry. 38 Now **the just shall live by faith**; But if *anyone* draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” 39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”

Friend, do not give up on God. Do not turn back to a life of sin. Do not attempt to perfect yourself through good works or outward displays of religion. Believe in Christ to the saving of your soul. And, then, do the good works that God has created you to do, out of a heart motivated by love and gratitude to God for what He has done in you. Christ will reward us for our good works, but only if they are done to His glory and according to His revealed will that we find in the Bible alone.

What is a good work? In order to be truly a “good work” before God, it must be commanded in His Word and performed for God’s glory alone. That is why an unbeliever cannot truly perform a good work. If anything is done for our own glory, our own self-advancement, or to build up our self-esteem, it is not a good work.

In **Matthew 6:2** Jesus said, “Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”

Matthew 6:5: “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”

Paul continues in Galatians 3:5: “Does he who supplied the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness?””

The apostle Paul, just like father Abraham, lived by faith alone. Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” What does the “it” signify? What was counted to Abraham as righteousness? Paul makes the answer clear in Romans 4:9, where he says, “. . . **faith** was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.”

Abraham’s **faith** in God and in the promises of God for salvation by a Redeemer is what saved him.

Galatians 3:7 “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.”

Who are the true children of Abraham? Is it those who are ethnically Jewish by birth? Indeed, there are ethnically Jewish believers whom God in His mercy and grace has redeemed. Yet, the majority of Abraham’s children are not ethnically Jewish but Gentile. Why? Because it is not ethnicity that makes a person a true son of Abraham; only faith in Christ makes a person a true son of Abraham.

Galatians 3:29 says, “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise” (NAS).

The Pharisees claimed to be the true children of Abraham. But Jesus made it clear beyond the shadow of a doubt that they were not. They were deeply mistaken; they were completely deceived by the deceiver of mankind, the Devil.

In John, chapter 8, beginning at verse 39, the Pharisees told Jesus, “Abraham is our Father.” Jesus responded to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this.” (39-40, NKJ) Jesus added, “You are doing the things your own father does.” “We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. “The only Father we have is God himself”. Jesus explained to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. 43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (41-44, NIV)

Do not be deceived! Religion cannot save you. Water baptism cannot save you. Church membership cannot save you. Good works cannot save you. **There is only ONE who can save you, and His name is Jesus Christ.** You must place

your trust in Him alone and His work alone for salvation. For only those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham.

Paul continues to explain in Galatians 3:8: “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.””

This verse flies in the face of traditional dispensationalism, which is a system of Biblical interpretation commonly found in many evangelical churches today. As reflected in the old *Scofield Reference Bible*, traditional dispensationalists claim that God has two very distinct peoples—the Jews of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament. And God works in very distinct ways in each dispensation or period of time. Yet, here in Galatians and later in Hebrews, the Bible teaches us that the Gospel of Christ is the **same** gospel that God preached to Abraham and to Moses. God has one everlasting covenant of grace. He has only one people, Jews and Gentiles from throughout the ages, who live by faith alone in the Messiah, Christ Jesus, alone. It is only “those who are of faith” who are the sons of Abraham.

Way back in Genesis, from the beginning, the Scripture foretold, although in shadowy, incomplete language, that “God would justify the Gentiles [the nations] by faith.” God preached the gospel to Abraham in Genesis, chapter 12, verse 3, where He said, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

And, again, in Genesis 18:18: “Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.”

After obeying God’s command to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, at Mount Moriah, God declared: “blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice. (Gen. 22:17-18).

Again, in Genesis 26:4: “And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”

And, in Genesis 28:14: “Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

In Galatians, chapter 3, verse 16, Paul clarifies that that seed is Christ: “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.”

Just as God preached the Gospel to Abraham, so we read in the book of Hebrews that He also preached that same Gospel to Moses.

Please turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 3:16-4:2:

“For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, *was it* not all who came out of Egypt, *led* by Moses? 17 Now with whom was He angry forty years? *Was it* not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. 4:1 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. 2 For indeed **the gospel was preached to us as well as to them**; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*.”

The writer to Hebrews tell us in **Hebrews 4:2** that the Gospel was preached to Moses and the Hebrews who came out of Egypt. But most of them lacked faith. This serves as a lesson to us. The Gospel will not profit us either, if we do not have faith, the faith of Abraham.

Galatians 3:9 “So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” (ESV)

Do you have saving faith, like the faith that Abraham, the man of faith, exhibited?

Do you believe that Jesus Christ was both God and man, that He lived a perfect life, was crucified unjustly, was buried, but that God raised Him from the dead on the third day, that He ascended up into heaven, and is now seated at God’s right hand, ruling and reigning over the universe, until He makes His enemies His footstool?

Do you believe that Christ will soon return to judge the living and the dead?

A day is coming in which Christ shall return as Judge. God is just, and therefore He must pour out His wrath and judgment and doom upon this world for its violence, its evil, its rebellion against Him. And, yet, God is merciful, He is loving. In wrath, He remembers mercy (Habakkuk 3:2).

God poured out His wrath upon His one and only Son on the Cross. Why? Surely not because He hated his Son. No, Christ willingly gave up His life for His chosen people, because He loved us so very much. If you have faith, true saving faith, Christ assures you, that you will be blessed along with Abraham.

But if you are not living according to God’s holy law, if you are not living for Christ and His kingdom, then you are a rebel. You do not know God’s grace. If that’s where you find yourself, then you need Christ’s salvation to free you; you need Christ’s salvation to liberate you from sin.

The hymn "Blessed Assurance" reflects the joy of the Christian who submits to God and lives for Christ:

"Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God;
born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

Perfect submission, perfect delight;
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above;
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love

Perfect submission, all is at rest;
I in my Savior am happy and blessed;
Watching and waiting, looking above;
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long."

May God grant us the grace to persevere by faith!