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Sermon Notes

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Christians Perfected by the Spirit, Not by the Law

Galatians 3:1-5

Central Issue Justification by faith (Galatians 2:15-16)

Galatians 2:16 We 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.

Sanctification by also

Galatians 3:3 After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

Or... “perfected by the flesh...”

Salvation comes to us in STAGES

Sanctification CANNOT BE by unaided human effort... striving ON YOUR OWN to keep God’s moral law

The standard is PERFECTION:

Matthew 5:48 You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect!

God has begun a work of perfection in us... he cannot and will not abandon us now:

Philippians 1:6 He who began a good work in you will bring it to perfection in Christ Jesus!

Legalism sneaks in at every turn in the road... leading to DESPAIR on the one hand or ARROGANCE on the other

[Deuteronomy 1]

God means to finish our salvation the SAME WAY HE BEGAN IT... by faith in Christ crucified and resurrected... by the CONTINUOUS POWER OF THE SPIRIT

I. The Foolishness of Trying to Be Perfected by Law (vs. 1, 3)

A. Paul's Passionate Appeal: "O..."

^{ESV} Galatians 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?

1. The word "O" here shows the passion and power of Paul's feelings
2. But here, it's like the anguish Jesus felt when He wept over Jerusalem:

Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."

3. Paul is HEARTBROKEN that these churches he planted have abandoned the true gospel for a false one, and have turned their backs on the grace of God in Christ

B. The Foolishness of Choosing Works Over Grace

Galatians 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?

1. He marvels over their FOOLISHNESS... The "foolishness" here is not a lack of intelligence... Rather, it is a moral failure, a failure to use their God-given minds to understand the true gospel
2. Foolishness is a stubbornness based on hardness of heart and lack of faith
3. They were being FOOLS to exchange the truth of God for the lie of fleshly works

Luke 24:25-26 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

4. Jesus then patiently explained the resurrection from the Scripture
5. So also here, Paul doesn't just call them FOOLS, he reasons with them based on their experience and the Scripture

C. The "Bewitching" Appeal of False Teaching

1. In this statement, he says "Who has bewitched you??"
2. The word could also be translated "hypnotized"... it literally means to cast someone under an evil spell
3. Paul is not using it literally, but he is wondering how they could have fallen for the false gospel these Judaizers were preaching
4. It's like some mind-control cult... imagine going to some community where everyone had a glazed-over look in their eyes and they were speaking in a weird monotone... something has mesmerized these people
5. Both the word "foolish" and the word "bewitched" means the flaw is a MENTAL one, going to the HEART, remedied only by a scriptural and rational appeal
6. Here in these five verses, he's appealing to their FIRST EXPERIENCE with the gospel, when Paul first came there to preach
7. At that time, they received him gladly, and were willing to make even extreme sacrifices to care for him
8. Now... they are acting like they can't stand him or his message
9. So he says, "Let's go back to how it was when you first heard the gospel of Jesus Christ."

II. We Experienced Christ by Faith, Not Law (vs. 1)

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

A. How the Galatians First “Saw” Christ

1. Strong expression here: Jesus Christ was BEFORE THEIR EYES PUBLICLY PORTRAYED as crucified
2. Nowadays, the “Jesus Film” has made its rounds throughout many places in the world
3. But this did not exist in Paul’s day
4. The only way the Galatians “saw” the crucifixion of Christ was by the powerful preaching of the gospel that the Apostle Paul did in their hearing

1 Corinthians 2:2 I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

5. They “saw” with the “eyes of the heart”... that is BY FAITH
6. Faith is the eyesight of the soul
7. As they heard the proclamation of Christ crucified for our sins, it was so vivid and powerful that it was almost as though they were standing right there as the nails were driven into his hands and feet, into the wood... almost as if they could see the blood pouring down, hear Jesus’ cries

Matthew 27:46 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Luke 23:46 "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

John 19:30 "It is finished."

8. Paul at that time explained plainly and powerfully how Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross in our place as a substitute for our sins

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

9. Paul also explained that, if the Galatians repented of their sins and put their faith simply in Jesus, they would be forgiven of all their sins, adopted into the family of God, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit

10. This is what happened... a simple and powerful PUBLIC POTRAYAL of the death of Jesus Christ

B. The Public Portrayal of Christ Crucified... Day After Day, in Every Nation on Earth

1. This same PUBLIC POTRAYAL of Jesus through PREACHING of the CROSS is going on somewhere in the globe every single day of the year

2. God the Father is moving people by the Spirit to go boldly and share Christ crucified... to placard Him plainly in the eyes of lost people

3. This is the essence of the advance of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ

4. By simple hearing of the word, sinners are being rescued from Satan's evil kingdom

C. The Beginning of the Christian Life: Hearing the Gospel with Faith

1. "Hearing with faith" is the formula Paul uses here

2. The verbal message is proclaimed and the Lord opens the eyes of faith in the hearts of hearers

Romans 10:17 faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

D. Christ Crucified Proves the Total Inefficacy of Works of the Law

1. As we made plain last time, the cross of Jesus Christ is God's verdict on how effective the Law is for saving sinners

Galatians 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

2. For the Galatians to turn away from Christ crucified is to denigrate the message of the cross... to say there was something missing from it
3. The cross is God proclaiming to the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike: “YOU CAN’T SAVE YOURSELVES!!”

III. We Experienced the Spirit by Faith, Not Law (vs. 2-4)

Galatians 3:2-4 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? ³ Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? ⁴ Have you suffered so much for nothing-- if it really was for nothing?

A. Paul Appeals to Experience of the Spirit

1. Secondly, Paul reminds them of the incredible gift of the Holy Spirit that came into their lives at that time
2. He asks a dramatic rhetorical question: “I would like to learn just one thing from you...”
3. The gift of the Spirit DID NOT COME because they went out on probation and started obeying some laws and earning the right to the Holy Spirit
4. It was not given as a WAGE but as a GIFT OF GRACE
5. The gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit is never given as a wage but as a gift of grace

B. Signs and Wonders “Back Then”

1. Often in the apostolic era, the Father would confirm the message of the gospel by the outpouring of signs and wonders by the power of the Holy Spirit

Galatians 3:5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

Acts 14:3 Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time [in Iconium], speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

2. Especially, it was the GIFT OF TONGUES that displayed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit
 - a. In Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-4 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

- b. At Cornelius's house, the first Gentile convert

Acts 10:44-47 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."

- c. This is a PLAIN EXAMPLE of how the Holy Spirit was poured out on UNCIRCUMCISED GENTILES
 - d. When the Jewish Christians criticized Peter in the next chapter, he used the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to vindicate his actions
 - e. This is exactly the point Paul is making in Galatians 3... the gift of the Holy Spirit came by hearing with faith, not by any works of the Law

C. What Does it Mean to "Receive the Spirit"?

1. To "receive the Spirit" means to have the Third Person of the Trinity take up spiritual residence in your heart... to transform you from the inside out

John 14:16-17 I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

2. The Spirit fulfills the promise of radical transformation so that a genuine believer may love what Christ loves and hate what Christ hates, may desire what Christ desires, may choose what Christ would choose, may think like Christ thinks and feel what Christ feels

3. It is the direct fulfillment of the promise of the New Covenant made in Jeremiah and Ezekiel

Ezekiel 36:26-27 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

D. Not by Law, But by Hearing With Faith

1. Paul's clear assertion to these FOOLISH and BEWITCHED Galatians is that they received the gift of the Holy Spirit only by hearing the gospel and believing, just like Cornelius did
2. They did not earn the Spirit; He was given as a beautiful gift when they believed in Christ
3. The gift of the Spirit was not EARNED by their circumcision, or by their strictness in diet, or by fasting, or by giving money to the poor, or by extended times of prayer, or by any other works of piety

Galatians 3:2-4 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?

4. The Holy Spirit was not given as proof that they DID keep the Law, but as a powerful force to ENABLE them to keep the Law

E. The Work of the Spirit in the Life of the Believer

1. Regeneration

2. Cleansing from All Sin
3. Understanding of the Word
4. Transformation of the Heart
5. Conviction of Sin
6. Purification from Sin After Confession
7. Application of the Word to Specific Situations
8. Obedience to the Law Moment by Moment
9. Remembrance of the Word
10. Assurance of Salvation
11. Assistance in Prayer
12. Guidance in Service

F. Begun “By the Spirit,” We Cannot Be Perfected by the Law

^{ESV} Galatians 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

1. If the Spirit has begun to do all this in us, isn't it a clear indication we cannot do ANYTHING apart from Him??
2. For Paul, it is clear that there is a SALVATION JOURNEY YET TO TRAVEL
3. The destination is TOTAL PERFECTION in Christ...

Philippians 3:8-11 that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

4. FBC: we call this the “internal journey”... moment by moment, becoming more and more like Jesus Christ
5. But we cannot travel even a single step on our own, by our own independent obedience to the Law
6. The Judaizers were preaching a works-based religion which began by the Spirit but which was advanced by the flesh... meaning, by independent actions of Law-keeping without the Spirit

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

7. I will talk more in a moment about what it looks like to try to be PERFECTED by the flesh
8. What Paul is saying here is IT IS JUST AS IMPOSSIBLE TO MAKE A SINGLE STEP FORWARD IN SALVATION BY THE FLESH AS IT WAS TO BEGIN SALVATION BY THE FLESH
9. The Law did not save you, and the Law cannot sanctify you
10. The same way you began is the way you will make progress... by the Spirit!!!

G. Begun by the Spirit, Perfected Also by the Spirit

1. As you begin, so you will grow: by faith in Christ crucified and by the power of the Holy Spirit

Colossians 2:6-7 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

2. Having begun by the Spirit, they will now be perfected by the Spirit

H. Paul Fears they Suffered All This in Vain

Galatians 3:4 Have you suffered so much for nothing-- if it really was for nothing?

1 Thessalonians 2:14 For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews

1. Paul is concerned that they have received all these incredible experiences in vain... that they are not genuine Christians... only “stony ground hearers”
2. This was a constant concern for him... as he mentions later how he is anguish for them until Christ is formed in them; also he lists this as a major trial in his life:

2 Corinthians 11:28-29 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

3. But then he softens it saying:

“if indeed it was in vain!”

Later:

Galatians 4:19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you

IV. We Experienced the Father by Faith, Not Law (vs. 5)

Galatians 3:5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

A. All of this is from the Father

Ephesians 1:3-5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will

1. God the Father Sent Christ

1 John 4:14 we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

2. God the Father Gives the Spirit

Acts 1:4-5 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Galatians 4:6 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

B. BUT Did God Do Any of These Things Because We Obeyed the Law??

1. All of these things were lavish gifts of His grace

2. We were universally sinful... meriting nothing but death and hell

Romans 3:10-18 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

3. The Law did not JUSTIFY any of us... it only condemned us!!

Romans 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin

C. Our Relationship with God Cannot Be Established or Perfected by Law

1. It was not because of Law that God adopted the Galatians

2. And it was not because of Law that God "supplies" His Spirit

Galatians 3:5 Does God [SUPPLY] you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

3. The word refers to an abundant supply that flows from great generosity
4. The Father pours out His Spirit continually and abundantly NOT BY WORKS BUT BY GRACE
5. Just as we did not BEGIN our relationship with the Father by works, neither do we MAKE PROGRESS in our walk with the Father by works... but only by the faith in Christ and by the Spirit

V. Applications: Begun by the Spirit, Perfected by the Spirit

A. Begin NOW “Seeing” Christ Crucified by “Hearing with Faith”

1. From our text today, it is plain how the Christian life begins: by “hearing with faith”... Seeing Christ plainly and publicly portrayed before your very eyes as crucified

John Stott: “Before we can begin to see the cross as something done FOR us, we have to see it as something done BY us.”

2. Picture yourself GUILTY before God because of your transgressions of His holy Law
 - a. Because of your sins, not your good works, Christ took up the cross and carried it up to Golgotha
 - b. Because of your sins, not your good works, Christ was nailed to that cross
 - c. Because of your sins, not your good works, Christ cried out

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!”

- d. Because of your sins, not your good works, Christ’s blood poured out of His body
- e. Because of your sins, not your good works, Christ breathed His last and gave up His spirit

3. Picture Him now in your mind's eye... picture Him dead on that wooden cross, the whole land dark, the ground shaking... the wrath of God satisfied at last
4. Cry out to Him: "Save me, Lord! Save me! Do not give me what I truly deserve! I am unrighteous, guilty by the Law! Give me your perfect righteousness as a gift!"
5. Ask Him for the Spirit: "O Lord, pour out on me your Holy Spirit! Give me the evidence that I am a child of God!"

Romans 10:13 "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

B. Having Received Justification as a Gift, Forsake All Boasting Except in Him

1 Corinthians 1:31 as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Galatians 6:14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

C. Understand: Salvation is a Process

1. Paul talks about the goal of being perfected

^{ESV} Galatians 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

2. There is a JOURNEY before us of being gradually MADE PERFECT... conformed to Christ
3. That journey is made only by faith in Christ and by the power of the Spirit

D. Believers: Rest in Christ's Finished Work on the Cross AND Move Out Powerfully in Sanctification

E. What Does it Look Like to Seek Perfection by Law?

1. It means to rely on your own efforts to improve yourself

2. It means to rely on your own diagnosis of your sin problem
3. To rely on your own remedies to solve that problem
 - a. It means moral reformation... like secular self-help programs that enable alcoholics or drug addicts to “kick the habit”
 - b. It means striving and taking on sin patterns by self-effort
 - c. It means adding good things to your life and character... collecting good works and achievements like a scavenger hunt or “bucket list” of moral development
 - d. Abraham Maslow had a hierarchy of human needs... at the highest was “self-actualization”: fulfilling your potential and being all that you can be
4. All of this forgets the goal of progress in salvation: TOTAL CONFORMITY TO JESUS CHRIST
 - a. To love what He loves and hate what He hates
 - b. To desire what He desires
 - c. To choose what He would choose and reject what He would reject
 - d. To think His thoughts after His... to exercise the mind of Christ continually
 - e. To display the healthy emotional life of Christ... rejoicing when Christ would have rejoiced and mourning when Christ would have rejoiced
 - f. Then: to act in the body with perfect purity and perfect love displayed for God and others at every single moment!!!
5. To seek perfection by the Law is to look at all of this and think you have to do it to GAIN GOD’S FAVOR!!! To earn your place in the family...
6. And to do it ON YOUR OWN... by your own methods, your own definitions

7. Evidence of seeking to grow by the flesh is what you do when you sin
 - a. Do you feel like you have to do some good work to pay for the sin?
 - b. Do you feel like you have to earn your way back into the family of God
 - c. Do you feel like God is always ready to smack you until you bring Him some pile of good works like some pagan deity looking for his pound of flesh?
8. Conversely, being perfected by the Law is also exposed when you are doing well and you don't express thanks to God; instead you feel proud of your achievements
9. Despair on the one hand and Pride on the other are sure evidences that you are trying to be perfected by the Law
10. So also is a long list of rules and regulations you make for yourself that define what a holy life looks like... you look at the list: 1) have a 45 minute quiet time every morning; 2) witness to at least one person per day; 3) fast at least twice a week; 4) read through the Bible at least once a year; 5) memorize at least one verse per day; 6) never get angry at anyone; 7) attend church every week unless really sick; etc.
 - a. There's nothing wrong with setting goals... but the issue is the attitude behind it
 - b. There is no reliance on the Spirit; no looking to the cross of Christ to remind yourself what He did for you and who you are in Him

F. What Does it Look Like to Seek Perfection by the Spirit?

1. Start where the text does: with a continual look to the CROSS OF CHRIST
 - a. Remind yourself that you are crucified with Him and that you live in Him

- b. Tell yourself continually that Christ is your life... “Christ is my life”
- c. Remind yourself that all your sins are paid for completely by the blood of Christ
- d. Remind yourself that you are permanently adopted into the family of God...
- e. Remind yourself that in Christ you are seen to be PERFECT POSITIONALLY... 100% Lawkeeping, 100% obedient already

2. Now address yourself to your life by the Spirit

Romans 8:4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Ezekiel 36:27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

- a. Ask the Lord to enable you to keep the holy Law by the Spirit
 - b. Rely on the Spirit to LOVE THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART and to LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF
 - c. Understand that the standard of perfection in Christ is infinitely high and that indwelling sin is deeply powerful... be humble and expect a bitter struggle
 - d. Follow the Spirit step by step to put sin to death and to live openly righteous in Him
 - e. When temptation comes, pray and ask the Lord to strengthen you by the Spirit
 - f. When the temptation falls, immediately thank the Lord and give all credit to the Spirit for the victory
3. AIM FOR PERFECTION at every moment... but as a perfectly secure adopted child of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit