

**Galatians 3:1-9, 23-29**  
**12 May 13**

*Paul continues his full-throated defense of a law-free Gospel as gift, not requirement.*

Wow. I can't think of any other place in Scripture that comes even close to the direct, emotional appeal that we just heard. Let me put this into modern speech. And let me do what we almost never do with Scripture: read it with the emotion that is behind it. "You crazy Galatians! Did someone put a hex on you? Have you taken leave of your senses? Let me put this question to you: How did your new life begin? Was it by working your heads off to please God? Or was it by responding to God's Message to you?"

<sup>5-6</sup> Answer this question: Does the God who lavishly provides you with his own presence, his Holy Spirit, working things in your lives you could never do for yourselves, does he do these things because of your strenuous moral striving *or* because you trust him to do them in you?"

Like I said, wow. Twice Paul calls the people in this church that he himself started foolish. As in crazy, bewitched, hexed, out of their right minds. No false flattery here.

There seems to be no match for the intensity of a church fight. Except maybe in politics, which is even worse. The dynamics behind these words are all too familiar to way too many of us. More often than not church fights today are about things God doesn't really care about. Therefore those fights end up being about who has more power or control. At least Paul was upset about something that was important. The issue at hand is one that no longer concerns us. But the dynamics behind that issue are still at play.

To wit: Like sheep without a shepherd, we go astray pretty easily. Yes, we do in fact have a shepherd, but it seems we hear the voices of others over his. One example: How much time do we put in a week listening to FOX news or MSNBC or one of a dozen radio shows all trying to spin the news their way and stoke our anger so that we keep tuning in, boosting their ratings? Contrast their words, their tone of voice, their character assassinations with the voice of the Good Shepherd. I find that I cannot be spiritually right when I'm worked up about the evils of the Tea Party or the President. Is there some equivalent in your life, a voice that is clearly unlike that of the Good Shepherd, to which you find yourself listening? Perhaps a voice in the media or at work or a voice from the past that plays in your head. O, foolish Galatians! Who has led you astray?

In this case, what led the foolish Galatians astray was not a political voice or the voice of some advertizer or guru of the month, but a religious voice. A religious voice from within their own community. Sincere, caring people who just wanted to make sure they got everything right. Plus, they had Scripture on their side. We're talking about that debate that nearly tore the early Church apart, the debate about whether one had to keep the Jewish law, the Jewish way of living, in order to be a follower of the Jew, Jesus.

Yes, faith is paramount, but is it really enough? Faith is so elusive. How do you know you believe strongly enough or rightly enough? Why not follow these rules religiously, just to be sure? We human beings are bewitched by rules and drawn away from God's Gospel goodness.

We just want to nail everything down by one rule, one formula or another. We look for secret meanings hidden in Scripture. We make up new doctrines about a rapture. We devise formulas like, "You must accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and savior," even though that phrase is found nowhere in the Bible.

We do all that for good reasons, but the result is always the same. we are drawn away from God's Gospel goodness. Every place I have been I have run into people who aren't sure they believe strongly enough or rightly enough or don't believe they are good enough. And it tears them up and destroys lives.

So once again, here's the truth from Scripture. We are saved by grace as a gift of God's Gospel goodness. You can look it up in Ephesians chapter 2. Jesus put it this way: "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to *give* you the kingdom."

Want to know what your true status is before God? It's right here in front of us. We are heirs. "for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. 27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

Want something to hold onto? Hold onto that. Hold onto the promise of God. So forget about all the formulas; forget even about how strongly you believe. Hang onto the promise of God; hang onto God's Gospel goodness. And then go out and act like who you are, a child of God who has been clothed with Christ.