

The Bewitching of the Saints



David Wilkerson February 20, 2017

“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?” (Galatians 3:1, KJV). If you’re a devoted servant of Jesus, there’s something you need to be absolutely sure of. It’s that Satan tries to bewitch everyone who sets his heart to go deeper with the Lord. The enemy of our souls is constantly setting demonic traps for all who are desperate to know more of Christ.

These traps Satan sets don’t have to do with gross sins, such as sensuality, drunkenness or covetousness. Instead, they’re very subtle. Paul describes the effect of these traps when he tells the Galatians, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (1:6). Paul is saying, in essence, “God called you to embrace the gospel of grace by Jesus Christ, and for a time you did. You lived believing and trusting you’re saved by grace alone and Christ’s finished work on the cross. But suddenly you’ve moved away from that gospel—and now you’re following another one. What happened to you? Who bewitched you?”

Paul then points out the source of their trouble: “There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ” (1:7). In other words, “Someone has turned you away from the truth. Their teaching sounds right and reasonable to you, but it has led you totally off course.”

Paul himself had founded the Galatian church. Many other early Christian leaders had preached there, including Timothy. Clearly, these Galatians weren’t spiritual novices. They were solidly grounded in the gospel of grace, having heard the truth preached in fullness and purity: “Before (your) eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth” (3:1).

Paul doesn’t mention a single word here about sensuality or gross sins. On the contrary, the Galatians were consumed with being pure and walking holy before the Lord. But Paul challenged their idea of holiness: “Are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (3:3). He said, “I know you’re seeking perfection, but how do you hope to achieve it? What kind of gospel will maintain your perfect standing in God’s eyes?”

“This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (3:2). Clearly the Galatians were baptized in the Holy Spirit, yet Paul bluntly calls them foolish and bewitched: “Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?...O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?” (3:3, 1).

The word for “foolish” here means unintelligent, misinformed. And the word for “bewitched” means to profess something false. So, who were the troublers in the Galatian church who perverted the true gospel they’d heard from Paul? Ironically, it was the religious people among them, devout Jews who’d been saved at Pentecost. These were sincere men who wanted to fulfill the law by walking in holiness. They claimed, “Yes, we’ve been saved by grace through faith. But now we have to maintain our gift of salvation. We do that by observing the laws God requires of us. Therefore, every man who wants to be saved must be circumcised. We have to prove ourselves worthy of this salvation.”

Paul knew this was a subtle trap laid by Satan. It was a devilish doctrine meant to destroy God's people by weakening the gospel of grace. So he told them, "Yes, you were converted the right way. But now you're trying to maintain your salvation by adding something of your flesh to the gospel. And it's perverting the grace of Jesus Christ."

Our flesh always wants to present something holy of its own before God.

Anyone who's serious about living for Jesus has been tempted by thoughts like these: "If only I prayed more. If only I were more diligent in studying God's Word. Doing these things would make me a powerhouse for the Lord." Yet the issue isn't our zeal—it's the means by which holiness is achieved. How does a Christian maintain a salvation given to him by grace? Does he do it by faith alone or also by works of his flesh?

Paul was warning the entire church, including his equals in calling and anointing: "Beware, brothers. You now stand on a battleground between two gospels: the gospel of grace, and the gospel of works of the flesh." The question remains for us today: Having begun in the Spirit, are we made perfect by the flesh?

First let me ask you: How were you saved? What did you do to cause your sins to be forgiven? Did you overcome a terrible sin that earned God's love? Did you present him with some sacrifice or a righteous work? What good thing did he see in you to be persuaded you were worthy of salvation, causing him to say, "This one deserves to be saved"?

You know that none of these things brought you salvation. Before you met Jesus, you were helpless, bound by sin, an enemy to the gospel. When Christ came to you, there wasn't one good thing in you that deserved eternal life. The only thing you did to be saved was repent; you took a step of faith by the measure of faith Jesus put in you. And when you responded to him in faith, he saved you. You were made new, brought out of darkness and into the light. It wasn't because of a single good deed or work of your flesh. You were transformed by faith alone.

The fact is we're not only saved by faith. We also live by faith—meaning, we maintain our position in Christ by faith alone. "The just [or justified] shall live by faith" (3:11). In other words, the same faith that saved you also keeps you.

Sadly, the longer we walk with God, the more tempted we are to rely on our flesh to try to please him. Because of our maturity and experience we're tempted to think we can overcome sin in our own strength. I've seen many longtime Christians, especially preachers, fall prey to this temptation. I asked the Lord, "Why are so many still in the wilderness of works? Why haven't they entered into your rest? Where is the growth, the victory, the overcoming of the world, the flesh and the devil instead of all this fear and despair?"

The root of our spiritual struggles goes much deeper than neglecting devotional practices.

Those who love Jesus do pray, do study his Word, do seek him continually. They don't have to be told to do these things. They realize they ought to enjoy Jesus, enter into his rest and delight in their walk with him. Yet something in our flesh constantly rises up, telling us we need to struggle valiantly to "get it right." We feel a building pressure to pray more, study more, serve others more. We think, "Only then will I be holy and pure in God's sight."

But our role in God's covenant of grace isn't to do more, more, more. It's to trust fully in what Jesus did for us at Calvary. He accomplished a full salvation for us, one that not only saves us but keeps us. And our claim to this full salvation comes not by anything we do but by faith.

God hasn't removed his love from you. When you're weak and struggling, he doesn't ask for more good works from you. He wants you to trust that he's already done everything needed to make you acceptable in his eyes. You don't have to strive more in prayer to be pleasing to him. You don't have to know more of his Word to have access to his throne. Jesus made you fully acceptable to God at the cross. He paid the total price for your reconciliation. And he provided full access to heaven for you. You can go to the Father at any time.

You must be convinced that the only way you're made holy is by believing in God's promises. "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness... So then they which be of faith are blessed with

faithful Abraham” (3:6, 9). This is the reason why so many Christians are plagued with guilt, fear and unrest. They haven’t rested in what Jesus has done. Instead, they still strive to please God by their flesh. They’re not living by faith, but by their uncertain feelings.

The Jewish converts in Galatia thought that shedding their own blood could add to the atoning power of Christ’s blood. May it never be! They had moved totally out of the liberty of faith and into the yoke of bondage to flesh. And they convinced the Gentile converts that the pain of circumcision would make them holy in God’s eyes—that all their physical agony would entitle them to claim, “Lord, see how badly I want to please you.” No, they missed it!

There’s only one way for us to win the battle over all that harasses us. We do it by believing and accepting this truth: “I’ve been reconciled to God, and I’m no longer under his wrath. Jesus has made peace with the Father for me.” Paul tells us, “It pleased the Father that in him [Christ] should all fullness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself” (Colossians 1:19-20).

To reconcile means to reestablish a relationship that’s been broken. It signifies a healed, restored friendship that once was alienated. Christ achieved this reconciliation for us at the cross. Through his atoning work, the Lord has declared to us, “I’ve taken the initiative to restore your broken relationship with me.”

“You, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled” (1:21). Paul is saying here, “You fell into compromise and were led away by the power of some wicked thing. At that point, in your mind, God became an enemy. You felt alienated from his love, thinking, ‘The Lord is mad at me now. How could a God of holiness not be angry when he sees what I’ve done?’”

This is what prevailing sin does in your mind: It convinces you God wants to judge you. It causes you to run from his presence and wallow in your sense of unworthiness, uncleanness and uselessness. Worst of all, it whispers that you must work your way back into God’s favor.

But the truth is your Lord never walked away from you. He never changed his mind about his plans for you. The same Holy Spirit who baptized you still lives in you. He doesn’t flit in and out of your life because of your struggles. According to Paul, God only asks one thing of you: “Continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard” (1:23).

The Lord himself has promised “to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight” (1:22). In other words, “I’ll do the work, not you.” All you need to do is believe you’re reconciled, to trust his forgiving grace and to accept his love and friendship toward you. Continuing in faith is your victory.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).

Tell me, when did you stop being a new creature in God’s sight? Was it when you did something to displease him? How did you go from being born again to being not born again? That simply can’t be if you still trust in him. Paul states emphatically, “God...hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ” (5:18). His work in your life remains!

God promises he’ll cause you to stand at the Judgment reconciled, holy and blameless. All you need to do is accept that promise. Believe in his love and friendship for you. Then you’ll know the deep, lasting reconciliation Jesus won for you. Hallelujah!

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