



Sunday Evening 27th Jan 2019 Sermon Notes
Galatians 3 1-14 'Faith Centred'

Foolish Choices

Any passage that starts by calling its readers 'foolish' is definitely worth our attention. Sometimes we make foolish choices – and that's the problem here in Galatians.

Paul is exasperated with them.

He had already said in chapter 1.3 that the Gospel is simple – 'Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins to rescue us, this was the will of the father so we could receive grace and peace with God. Gospel: we are loved, rescued, redeemed'

So simple and yet the Galatians were adding to it. In their case it was about adding in some of the extras that would have made sense to those who had come from a Jewish background: obedience to God's Old Testament rules, and following some of the old Jewish customs – Just a few add-ons you had to do to be saved - and Paul in response to these ideas in 3.1 says what! You foolish Galatians – who has bewitched you?

He's exasperated to see that they have moved away from the simplicity of the gospel: loved, rescued, redeemed. Exasperated to see they are adding aspects of the law to a gospel of grace. And so in today's reading Paul brings it down to two choices – do you believe you come to know God through faith or through observing the law. Which one is the gospel? Is it a gospel of faith or a gospel of works?

Overview of the passage

So let's take a fairly quick look at the arguments he makes and then I'm going to suggest 3 areas where I think we might need to keep vigilant if we are to avoid slipping into a gospel of works – a gospel you can earn. So let's start by looking at what he says.

Verse 2-5 onwards – Paul uses straightforward questions to unravel this false teaching that through obeying the law you can earn your salvation. He says:

'are you really telling me that you received the Spirit by following OT rules? That you somehow earned the indwelling of the presence of God because you were good boys and girls?'

'Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you follow the law? Have you somehow earned it? or is it in fact a gift you receive through faith?'

Verses 6-9 – he uses the example of Abraham to try to get through to them: his point is simple: Abraham could do nothing to make God's promise come true – the promise that all nations would be blessed through him. There was nothing he could do to earn it. He just had to have

faith and believe. It was God's gift. So why are you, the children of Abraham, the recipients of that promise of God thinking differently?

Verse 10 onwards – Paul declares 'the law can't save anyone. We all fail. None of us can achieve 100% obedience. We can't rescue ourselves by following the law – the 242 things you have to do and the 365 things you mustn't do outlined in the Old Testament – one little broken law at any point in your life would be all it took to lose your salvation. We would all be cursed Foolish Galatians do you not get it? Christ redeemed us from that curse of the law through the cross so we could live by faith. It cost him everything, so the gospel could be so simple.'

So Law or faith, works or grace? Galatians you have to choose.

Choices we face today

Paul's challenge to choose is as relevant today as it was then. We have to choose too – law or faith? works or grace? So where in 2019 might we slide into a gospel of works without really realizing it? I want to outline three ways, three dangers we need to avoid.

The first is the danger of **MORALISM**.

Salvation by good behaviour!

Historically the church has been full of societies and movements that tell people how to think and live cleanly. We are used to concepts like discipleship and holiness - we often focus on how to live right – I'm very comfortable with all that.

But if we are not careful, all this focus on our morals, or moral living can lead to a distortion of the gospel that subtly says our salvation is due to the work of the cross *and* our godly moral behaviour. That somehow being good helps guarantee our place with God.

Galatians in clear: we are justified by faith alone, saved by grace alone, and redeemed by Christ alone. Moralism produces people who are (potentially) better behaved. The Gospel of Christ transforms people into the adopted sons and daughters of God.

Moralism – an over-focus on how we live that obscures the simplicity of the gospel. Let's be vigilant.

Secondly, there's the danger of **ACTIVISM**

Salvation by keeping busy for God!

Now I am all for people working hard and being active by serving God in the church and the world – I am so grateful for everyone at HT who serves in a 100 different ways. But the moment we think we can earn God's approval more by increasing our busy-ness is the moment we need to pay attention.

It's subtle but an overemphasis on what we do *for* God can lead to a distortion of the gospel that subtly says our salvation is due to the work of the cross *and* all the jobs we do for him. That somehow being busy helps guarantee our place with God.

We do not become more righteous by attending church meetings or serving in lots of teams or even by getting 100% attendance in Sunday services. Of course it's important to come together as God's family and of course to serve together to see his kingdom come – but none of this activity influences our standing with God.

Activism – an over focus on what we do that obscures the simplicity of the gospel.
Let's be vigilant.

Thirdly there's the danger of **JUDGEMENTALISM**

Salvation determined by our list of requirements not God's!

You know when you meet someone else calling themselves a Christian who doesn't quite match up to our exacting standards. You will have heard people say:
'I can't believe they do that – they call themselves a Christian'

I wonder what's on our unspoken list that prevents someone from being a Christian in our mind? Can you see how subtle that is – our adding of requirements to the gospel.
Choose says Paul – is it a gospel of grace or a gospel of works.

Judgementalism – an over focus on what requirements we think are essential for someone to be a Christian that obscures the simplicity of the gospel.
Let's be vigilant.

Now don't misunderstand me – I'm not saying that Christianity is a free for all movement – do whatever you want, be a church full of people who live disgracefully and spurn the lifestyles God calls us to live. Go rob a bank, be unkind to people, steal smarties off small children and do all you can to damage the environment. That's not it at all as we'll see later in Galatians.

We follow God's rules, not because that saves us, but because we love God and trust that he knows the best ways for us to live.

'So what will it be?' says Paul 'Law or faith, works or grace?' Galatians you have to choose.

I choose Grace. I love this reminder in the passage of where we stand – we stand on grace by faith – our feet on the solid ground of the cross. Why would we want to stand elsewhere?