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Faith Bible Church
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<http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

Personal Study of the Bible-72 **Galatians 3:1-5 – From Grace to Legalism/Pride?**

Read Galatians 3, keeping in mind Paul's theme of justification by faith alone apart from works of the Law as illustrated in the life of the Galatians (3:1-5), in the life of Abraham (6-9), and in the very purpose of the Law (10-29). After Paul vindicates the grace of God in recounting his call to the ministry in chapters one and two, he moves into the vindication of the grace of God in the lives of the Galatians in the first five verses of chapter three. Note how much time Paul spends on the need to understand the pure, unmerited grace of God throughout these first three chapters. Paul shows that God did *not* bless the Galatians by the works of the Law (3:1-5) and did *not* save Abraham by the works of the Law (3:6-9) since the Law did not even exist in Abraham's time. Furthermore, the Law's purpose was *never* to provide the means of salvation. Rather, it served as a tutor to show man his sinfulness and thus need for the unmerited grace of God (3:24).

In Galatians 3:1-5 Paul is livid! He is very upset that the Galatians had deserted grace for a works-salvation and works-spirituality way of life. He is rather shocked at their irrational defection and appeals to their former experience with God's marvelous grace. Paul taught the Galatians so much about the marvelous, matchless grace of God only to see them cast it aside for legalism. Legalism with all of its religionism has always been a problem and the greatest curse in the church throughout its history.

Legalism comes in many flavors and is something *every* believer must be very diligent against. The main characteristic of legalism is a sense of self-righteousness and pride, whether that self-righteousness and pride comes from a Roman Catholic because *he keeps* the sacraments, or from a Baptist because of *his ability to be a teetotaler*, or from a Pentecostal because of "*tongue-speaking*," or from a prideful Unitarian for his "*loving*" sanction of gay marriages and ministers, or even from self-righteous "doctrinal" believers *because* of doctrinal knowledge and lack of religiosity. Regardless of what it is, the instant one thinks he is righteous or special in the sight of God because of anything in him, he has entered into legalism. Legalism is not only a sin, it is a horrendous evil. No sin or evil is as loathsome, repugnant, nauseating, or putrid as legalism and religionism with its "spiritual" pride. What makes the sin of legalism so foul is that it is an insult to Christ, who He is and all that He has done (Gal. 2:21)—it is a *direct* insult to the Son of God, putting Him to open shame; read Hebrews 6:4-6.

Every believer must never forget that he is not only saved by the grace of God alone (Gal. 3:1-2), but that his spiritual growth (sanctification in truth) is not by his own works and efforts; it is *all* by the grace of God (3:3-5)—period! To forget this is to quickly move into pride and self-righteousness. In pride we always think of ourselves, our abilities, our achievements, and resources *in comparison* with others with the result that we look down on others as less

important and inferior to ourselves, whether this disdain is manifested by laughing at or mocking others or not.

We all struggle with pride to some degree. The only cure for pride is greater orientation to God's grace. There is no *real* solution to pride apart from the grace of God. There is no blessed "poverty of spirit" apart from a right relationship with God first and foremost. For example, one can realize he is prideful and thinking of himself more than others by talking too much and not allowing others to express themselves (I have certainly been guilty of this), and remain quiet. However, just because the person remains quiet does not mean that he has stopped thinking about himself. He could just be thinking of how quiet he is, rather than those around him. Pride is not about thinking too much or too little of yourself. Pride is thinking too much *about* yourself.

When one translates the spiritual life into a way of living that is thinking too much *about self*, a real "spiritual" monster is created. Pride is not only self-righteous, its basic modus operandi is 'I am going to do it my way.' It is not hard to see how easy pride can crop its ugly head even in our own doctrinal camp every time we do something our own way with an eye to confessing it later. This type of pride leads to antinomianism and licentiousness. It may not be like the pride of the religious Galatians, but it sure smacks of the pride of the licentious Corinthians. We need to be careful and not be self-righteous because we do not do all of the crazy things that the religious people do. For such an attitude is a religious attitude, just of a different color, an anti-religious religious self-righteousness.

As far as the Galatians, they had deserted grace for legalism. Consider the very strong language Christ uses for religious legalists and their legalistic disciples:

Matthew 23:15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a *son of hell* as yourselves.

I don't know if you have ever run into these "sons of hell," but they are a real challenge, be they Catholics, Baptists, or legalistic "doctrinal" people (legalistic about their licentiousness and antinomianism). Although the Galatians could not lose their salvation, by giving in to the religious legalists they had become sons of hell in their temporal lives. Imagine that, they all started clearly understanding the grace of the cross (3:1), and received the Holy Spirit the moment they believed in Christ (3:2), they were growing spiritually under the ministry of the Holy Spirit (3:3), they experienced the many wonderful things associated with grace blessings (3:4), and they lived in the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit by a life of faith (3:5)—that vertical, transcendent relationship. I must point out that there are translational errors in verses 4-5, the passage should read something like "Did you experience so many [marvelous] things in vain—if indeed in vain? So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works mightily in you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" In sum, there is nothing in the original Greek for "suffer" (vs. 4) or "miracles" (vs. 5).

Paul calls it like it is in Galatians 3:1-5. He uses a series of sarcastic rhetorical questions to demonstrate the foolishness of the Galatians in going from grace to legalism. These believers started out with a wonderful relationship with God based on grace and grace alone. Because of that they lived in the supernatural power and perspective of God required for the supernatural

spiritual life. But due to legalism, that has all changed. They are now into pride and legalism before God!

Pride is impossible when one is correctly oriented to God. That is why “poor in spirit” is the chief spiritual virtue that begins Christ’s beatitudes. I have much to say in our next Bible class on the problem of pride and the need for poverty of spirit to go anywhere in the plan of God. For now, let’s note a few words of wisdom from C.S. Lewis on pride:

There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people except Christians ever imagine that they are guilty themselves . . . There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others.

While no man is *completely* free from pride, may it never be that we, as believers of Faith Bible Church, ever become prideful regarding our lives before God and our church. We have been given so much privileges from God, starting with regeneration and then proceeding through growth in the doctrine truths, and recently advancement into the metaphysics of ‘Ehyeh and whole truth. We have so many wonderful believers in our church. We are so blessed in so many ways. However, let us never become complacent about remembering that all that we are and ever will be is courtesy of God and His Matchless, Marvelous Grace. Amen!

In ‘Ehyeh,

Pastor Don Hargrove