

Text: Galatians 3.1-9
St Stephen's

May 27th, 2007
Sun

He Who Supplies the Spirit

After a **two week break** we are back with **our study of Galatians**, picking up with the **third chapter**. It is a great passage for **Pentecost Sunday**, the day we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit.

You remember that over the past weeks we have been watching the Apostle Paul **defend the gospel**. The Gospel is the good news that in Jesus, and supremely through his sacrificial death, God has reconciled the world to himself. Now, his forgiveness, his love, his presence, his hope are freely available to any and to all who come to trust in his son.

This is **the message that sets people free**. Because it isn't dependent on what we do, but on what he has done. This is the gospel that **takes the performance load off** our backs. It **unburdens**. It **lifts the guilt** and **heals the shame** of our broken lives. It sets us free!

The controversy has been mostly over the question of how are you set right with God. Paul's answer...

Not by my earning, but by Christ's giving.

Not by what I do, but by what he has done.

Not by self-improvement, but by self- surrender.

By faith in Jesus Christ

If you do your homework in comparative religions, you will find that every other world religion will say that salvation is **dependent on human effort**. We call this **the performance plan**. Keep the law, and you will be saved. Live a holy life and you will be saved. Pray always, give much, live right, love abundantly, and you will be saved. And there is nothing wrong with those things, **nothing wrong with the performance plan**. At least nothing wrong with the plan itself. **The wrong is in our performance**. We can't do it. We fail every time, every single time. When the demands of the performance plan intersect with fallen human nature, the result is **rebellion or pride or despair**, every time.

Only New Testament Christianity says **God will do it all, and give it to you**. It is the gospel of Jesus. There is **no other religion** in the history of the world that preaches that message. Not one. That is why Paul is so intense, so insistent about this gospel. Because it is **the centerpiece** of everything God does. It is **the engine** that pulls everything else along. If you add to it, or take from it, you **change it** into some variant of what the whole rest of the world has done forever – and failed. Some variant of the performance plan. Here is how John Stott says it...

The law requires works of human achievement; the gospel requires faith in Christ's achievement. The law makes demands and bids us obey; the gospel brings promises and bids us believe.

John Stott

As we turn to Chapter Three: Paul continues his argument... 3 Questions with Clear Answers

How Did You Get Started With God?

Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?

Galatians 3:2 (RSV)

They knew the answer! If you track all the conversion stories of the NT you see the same answer. It was by 'hearing with faith'. The moment people believe, their sins are forgiven. The moment they believe the Spirit is given. The moment they believe they are welcomed home. The moment they believe, eternal life starts. That is how they got started with God. And they knew it. The experience of forgiveness and the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon them was so overwhelming... they knew when it happened, and they knew the answer to Paul's question.

A comment on the phrase, "hearing with faith"

'Faith' has two meanings in common language.

The **first** is to mean that I **acknowledge something exists**. I 'believe' something is real – but it may or may not have any impact on my life. In this sense, someone can believe in Jesus,

but this faith will have no influence on my life.

The **second** is to add something else to my confidence that something is real, the element of **trust**, or **surrender**. When you believe like this you are saying, "I believe Jesus is real, and I believe he dies and rose again, and **I yield my life to him...**"

This is what Paul meant by 'hearing with faith', and God responds to this kind of faith with his forgiveness and his Spirit.

If you have not experienced the power and the presence of His Spirit, it may be that you have the first kind of faith, but not yet the second. It may be that you believe in Jesus like you believe in a tree or your house or your boss – that he is real – he actually lived and died and rose – but that you have not yet yielded your life to him. When you 'hear with faith', this kind of faith, God pours out his blessings, his Spirit, his life.

Let's think about Paul's point. Right here we think like this... "I know faith in Jesus is important to the start of my relationship with him, but don't I have to add in human effort to keep that relationship with him? Well, we will have much more to say about effort in the chapters to come, but here is Paul's first response to it...

How Do You Carry On With God?

Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?

Galatians 3:5 (RSV)

This is a different question, because the **tense of the verb is different**. The **first Q.** was about **how they got started with God**. But this question (look at the tense of the verb 'supply' – it is present tense) asks about how God **continues to supply** what they need to live this life. They knew the answer to this one as well! If you track all the Holy Spirit stories of the NT you see the same answer. Again, it was by 'hearing with faith'.

The book of Acts is full of these Holy Spirit stories. **In a hard place facing opposition to the gospel**, they would pray, and believe – and God would give. **In a desperate place facing human frailty**, they would remind themselves of God’s grace and God’s promises, and pray – and God would supply. **In a desert place facing human need**, they would cast themselves on their Father, and he would give what was needed for the hour. You need, you believe, you cast yourself on him, you ask, he gives. **It is simple, trusting, depending faith that opens the door.** That is the way it is in the Kingdom of Jesus. That is the way they ‘carried on’ with God.

Paul sums it all up with this question..

Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Galatians 3:3 (RSV)

Having started with the Spirit and having carried on by the Spirit – are you now going to go back to depending on yourself? On your power, your strength, your wisdom, your human capabilities? Do you really want to swap out God-reliance for self-reliance? This would be like an airline passenger getting on board the jet and flapping his arms to help the plane stay in the air!

Are you kidding? Are you a bunch of fools! Do you really want to do this? The answer is obvious.

How Did God Do This In Ancient Times?

Thus Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Galatians 3:6 (RSV)

Think for a moment about why Paul would raise the issue of Abraham’s faith. The **Legalists charged**: “This ‘gospel’ you preach is some new innovation of your own invention. God never acted like this before. It was always ‘faith + the law’.”

But Paul replies, ‘not so’. Before Moses was Abraham, and scripture is clear that God redeemed Abraham simply by faith, before he was circumcised, and hundreds of years before the law was given to Moses.

Illustration: my conversations with my brother about orthodoxy and evangelicalism. He had converted to old calendar Orthodoxy in his college years. He has been a monk for over 30 years, and a Bishop for the last couple of decades. I have a great deal of respect for him. During these years, we were having some serious discussions about Orthodoxy and evangelicalism. His charge: "Justification by faith" is some new innovation, dreamt up by the protestant reformers only 400 years ago. Our faith goes back to the first centuries after Christ." It made me think, and it drove me back to the scriptures, and to this very chapter from Galatians. It was one night during my engagement months to Becca when she read this chapter to me that it all became clear. **My reply:** "Justification by faith goes back some 4000 years, predating the new testament and most of the OT, to the life of Abraham. This is the way God has always saved people."

That is why I came into the Anglican Communion, because I believed God led me to a historic worldwide Communion that was rooted in the Gospel and the authority of Scripture. This is why, if the Episcopal church collapses, and I want to say this graciously and clearly, I could never go to Orthodoxy or the Catholic church. I would have to maintain my affiliation with the gospel believing portions of world Anglicanism. Because I must hold to the gospel, this good news about what he has done and what he does and what he gives to people who simply believe in Jesus, trust in Jesus yield to Jesus is the heart of the gospel.

I want to make one more comment about the gospel and faith. Look again at this verse.

'*Reckoned*' = means 'counted', 'added to your account'. When you trust in Jesus, righteousness is added to your account. It is his gift. These words and this phrase is the basis of a theological word, '*imputed*'. Paul Zahl (*Grace in Practice* p.119) says

'To impute means to ascribe qualities to someone that are not there intrinsically, to regard somebody as a person that he or she is not. Imputation calls bad things by a good name, and this is what grace does.'

This is what grace does, it gives you a new name. This is a very powerful thing. You become like your name. When you believe, God calls you forgiven. And you are. And you become forgiving. He calls you righteous. And you become righteous. He calls you Son, Daughter. And you begin to fit into the family. PZ continues, (p.120) "he calls the dammed, blessed; the weak, strong; the impotent, fruitful; the pathetic, confident; the ugly, beautiful. It is creative naming, which has the power of changing."

How Does God Do This Today?

Through faith God gives... his forgiveness and his Spirit

Through faith God supplies... his Spirit day by day

Through faith God names us with his grace names... forgiven, righteous, blessed, strong, fruitful, confident, beautiful...
and so by grace we become.

Why would anyone leave this gospel, add to it, or take from it?