

Paul begins to get into the heart of why he wrote this epistle by pointing out how foolish it is to think that our sinful flesh can somehow assist or complete the work that the Holy Spirit has begun in us through faith. Once we have been born of the Spirit, it is the Holy Spirit that continues to work in our lives to help us to grow in our faith and learn more of what Christ did for us on the cross.

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1 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?

**“O foolish [unwise; without understanding] Galatians”** – As a follow up to his earlier expression of surprise that the Galatians would set aside the gospel of grace through faith in Christ (Gal. 1:6), Paul now describes them as being without understanding. Despite the truths that he has taught them, they have turned away from the grace of God and are now looking to their own works to please God.

**“who hath bewitched [to cast a spell] you, that ye should not obey the truth”** – The truth of the gospel was so evident that Paul suggests that it must have taken someone casting a spell on the Galatians in order to cause them to turn away from it. The Greek word for “bewitched” carries the idea of using flattery and false promises to convince someone that you are telling the truth. Paul is saying that someone must have truly made a convincing sales pitch in order to cause them to turn away from the truth of the gospel.

**“before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth [to portray openly], crucified among you”** – When Paul was with the Galatians, he taught them plainly that salvation was only available through faith in Christ, the One Who had been crucified for their sins. What flattering words could have been spoken to cause them to turn away from the truth that they had previously heard and believed?

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2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

**“This only would I learn of you”** – In order to point out the foolish mistake they are making, Paul asks them a rhetorical question designed to demonstrate that keeping the law cannot complete their salvation or keep them saved.

**“Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”** – Paul wants them to remember the day they received the Spirit of God through the new birth. He asks if the new birth occurred because they were keeping the Law of Moses or because they heard and believed the gospel through faith (**Rom. 10:17** “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*”). Obviously they received the Spirit through faith since they, as Gentiles, had no interest in keeping the law prior to hearing the gospel.

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3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

**“Are ye so foolish [unwise; without understanding]?”** – Since their salvation was a work of the Holy Spirit, Paul challenges them to reconsider the wisdom of attempting to mix works with the Spirit’s work.

**“having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect [to complete; to bring to the intended end] by the flesh?”** – Paul asks whether or not their flesh can complete what the Spirit has begun in them. Obviously, their sinful flesh, which was incapable of initiating their salvation, could not possibly finish the work that only the Spirit could have begun in them. After salvation, the Spirit continues to work in our lives, helping us to grow in faith and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God does not need our help and we are incapable of contributing to the Spirit’s work. Paul says that it is foolish to think that our sinful flesh can produce the righteousness that God desires in our life. Later in this epistle, Paul contrasts what the Spirit produces in our lives with the things that the flesh produces (Gal. 5:19-23). Rather than depending on it to please God, we should recognize that the flesh is contrary to the things of God and must be kept under the Spirit’s control (**Gal. 5:17** “*For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would*”; **Gal. 5:24** “*And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts*”).

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4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.

**“Have ye suffered [experienced] so many things in vain [without purpose]?”** – Paul then asks whether the things they have experienced as Christians (blessings, answered prayer, persecutions, etc.) was for nothing. Were they without meaning or purpose?

**“if it be yet in vain”** – These things that come from God, which are part of the Christian experience, indeed have no purpose if our flesh must complete our salvation. In reality, God allows these experiences in our lives to help us to grow in our faith and to enable us to keep our flesh under control (Gal. 5:24), instead of depending on our flesh to complete or maintain our salvation.

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5 He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

**“He therefore that ministereth [to supply; furnish] to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles [dunamis: power; strength] among you”** – This “He” can only be God Himself. Paul identifies God as being the One Who supplies the Holy Spirit to them as well as the One Who manifests Himself in their lives with miraculous, supernatural power. Salvation itself is a supernatural work, not to mention the answers to prayer and fact that the Holy Spirit teaches us and enables us to understand the things of God.

**“doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”** – After identifying God as the One Who works supernaturally among them, Paul asks if these things come from God through the keeping of the law or by faith in His word? The obvious answer to that question is that these things came from God through faith since that is the only way that we receive anything from God (**Matt. 13:58** “*And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief*”; **Heb. 11:6** “*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*”; **James 1:5-7** “*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord*”).

6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. 7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

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**“Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted [to calculate; to impute] to him for righteousness”** – To prove that we can only receive the blessings of God, beginning with salvation, through faith alone, Paul points to the patriarch of the Jews, Abraham, and quotes Gen. 15:6. The Greek word translated “accounted” is an accounting term and the idea is that God placed righteousness in the account of Abraham in response to his faith. God imputed righteousness to Abraham before the covenant of circumcision was established solely on the basis of his faith (Rom. 4:10).

**“Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham”** – The Jews believed that they alone, as his physical descendants, were the children of Abraham. However, Paul declares that Abraham was the father of all who follow his example of faith, including both Jews and Gentiles (**Romans 4:9-12** *“Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised”* – Abraham is not the father of the circumcision based on circumcision alone. Jews must go beyond merely being circumcised and exhibit the same faith that Abraham had in order to be saved. Abraham is not the father of Jews who are circumcised but do not have faith). Paul is emphasizing that it is faith that is essential, not the works of the law.

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8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

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Paul was not rewriting scriptural history or reinterpreting it to fit his ideas of what the gospel should be. He points out that scripture predicted that Gentiles would be saved by following Abraham’s example of faith and through Jesus Christ, the descendant of Abraham. Paul quotes God’s promise that all nations (Gentiles nations) would be blessed by Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). Although all nations are blessed through Christ, Abraham’s descendant, Paul is emphasizing here that all nations are blessed when they follow Abraham’s example of faith.

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9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

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Abraham is described as “faithful Abraham” (Abraham, who was full of faith). Paul says that just as Abraham is blessed because of his faith, so also will all who have the same faith in God. Abraham did not receive the blessings of God because of who he is but because of his faith. Thus, all who follow his example and exercise such faith will be blessed “with” (along with; the same as) him. Paul is continuing to make the point that it is through faith and not works (circumcision and keeping the law) that we receive salvation from God and that it is through faith that we keep and grow in our salvation.